

RESPONSE TO CHARGE TWO

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In this paper I respond to the charge regarding my view of the Law. The charge is divided into five sections: the charge itself, the proof texts allegedly showing that my teaching on the Law is contrary to Scripture, quotations from the secondary standards allegedly showing that my teaching is contrary to the Westminster Standards, a section setting forth the seriousness of the offense (i.e., that my teaching is a violation of the system of doctrine), and the two specifications with a number of quotes from my sermons and papers. I have used this five-point structure as the outline for this paper. I have also added a sixth section as an appendix (excerpts of some sermons I preached on Paul's view of the Law) to enable the presbytery to come to a better understanding of my view of the Law.

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A. THE CHARGE

The Presbytery of Southern California of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church charges you, the Rev. C. Lee Irons, with violating your ordination vows by teaching, contrary to the Scriptures and the Westminster Standards, that the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as the standard of holy living.

It is true that I teach that "the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as the standard of holy living." My reason for taking this position is, in a nutshell:

- 1) There is a close relationship between the Decalogue and the Mosaic covenant as a whole. The Decalogue is called "the tablets of the covenant." The Decalogue is not the same thing as the eternal moral will of God, but the Decalogue contains a summary of the moral will of God enshrined in a particular covenantal form suited to Israel's probation in the land of Canaan.
- 2) The Mosaic covenant is a typological republication of the covenant of works. The works-principle that informs the Mosaic covenant as a whole is evident in the Decalogue itself (the fourth commandment proves this; see also the sanctions attached to the second, third, and fifth commandments).
- 3) Since New Testament believers have been delivered from the Mosaic Law as a covenant of works (as WLC # 97 teaches), the Decalogue per se cannot be the rule of life for the New Testament believer.
- 4) One might be tempted to argue that the Decalogue can be defanged of the works aspect and made the rule of life for the believer. But this is not what Paul does. He states that we have died to the Law in order that we might be married to Another, to him who was raised from the dead (Romans 7:1-6). Jesus Christ is the only law-giver of the New Testament church, and he has given us the two great commandments (love for God and love for neighbor), neither of which were part of the Decalogue. Therefore, the moral will of God (as handed to us and renewed by Christ) is binding on New Testament believers.

However, I do not agree that this teaching is contrary to the Scriptures or the Westminster Standards, and therefore I deny the substance of the charge, namely, that I am guilty of violating my ordination vows by teaching what is contrary to the Scriptures or the Westminster Standards. In section B, I address the charge that my teaching is contrary to the Scriptures; and in sections C and D, the charge that it is contrary to the Westminster Standards.

B. THE PROOF TEXTS

In this section, I am going to show that my teaching is not contrary to the Scripture passages cited in the charge.

Psalm 1:1-2

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

If this proof text is to support the charge, "the law of the LORD" in verse 2 must be a reference to the Decalogue. But this is not at all clear. For example, in 1 Chronicles 22, David prays that his son Solomon will have discretion and understanding, so that he might keep "the law of the LORD" (verse 12). In the following verse the law of the LORD is defined as "the statutes and the ordinances which the LORD commanded Moses concerning Israel" (verse 13). Not only is the "law of the LORD" not restricted to the Decalogue, in some instances the context specifically includes regulations concerning sacrifices. E.g.:

2 Chronicles 31:3 [Hezekiah] also appointed the king's portion of his goods for the burnt offerings, namely, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths and for the new moons and for the fixed festivals, as it is written in *the law of the LORD*.

The phrase "the law of the LORD" (*torat Yahweh*) occurs 21 times in the Hebrew Bible, and in every instance it refers to the entire Mosaic Law, not just the Decalogue. Since it is an Old Testament text, Psalm 1 cannot decide the question of what "law" New Testament believers are bound by. Although the Old Testament is profitable for ethical instruction (2 Tim. 3:16-17), it cannot be appealed to *directly* (that is, apart from its fulfillment in Christ as set forth in the New Testament) for the purpose of determining the ethical norms that bind the new covenant community today. Were we to interpret Psalm 1:1-2 as directly binding, then it would demand that New Testament believers are obligated to delight in and observe, not only the Decalogue, but the *entire* Mosaic Law. But since the New Testament clearly teaches that believers are not bound by the entire Mosaic Law, we can safely assume that the New Testament does not permit such a direct application of Psalm 1.

What significance does Psalm 1:1-2 have for New Testament believers? It reminds us that the only truly blessed man was the Lord Jesus Christ who was born under the Mosaic Law, delighted in it and perfectly kept it in our place. Those who are united to Christ by faith are thereby blessed because of his perfect Law-keeping. And as evidence of the genuineness of their faith, New Testament believers delight to do the will of the Lord Jesus as revealed in the New Testament.

Jeremiah 31:33-34

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant occurs in the context of Jeremiah 30-31, a section of Jeremiah called "the Book of Consolation," in contrast with the preceding chapters which have primarily focused on the approaching doom and captivity of the apostate people of God. The Book of Consolation is set apart from the rest of the book by the introductory command to Jeremiah to write these words in a book (Jer. 30:1-2). The Book of Consolation is followed by chapter 32, in which the theme of the future restoration of Israel is confirmed. The LORD instructs Jeremiah to purchase a field in Anathoth, even as the Babylonian army was besieging Jerusalem (32:2), as a sign that, in the future restoration, houses and lands and fields and vineyards would be purchased again in the land (32:15). The prophecy of the new covenant must be interpreted in the context of Jeremiah 30-32 as a whole. When we do so, it becomes apparent that the promises in this section must be interpreted in terms of a two-stage or two-level fulfillment. The first-level fulfillment is the literal restoration of Israel to the land after the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. The following statements concerning the literal restoration of the city of Jerusalem and the temple on Mount Zion, were initially fulfilled in the post-exilic period:

30:3 "For behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah." The LORD says, "I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it." ... 31:38 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the city will be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. 39 The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. 40 And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever."¹

The first-level fulfillment of many of these statements was fairly literal. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel the exiles returned from captivity and the temple was rebuilt (Ezra 2:2; 3:8; 5:2; 6:15). But it is clear that the first-level fulfillment does not exhaust everything promised. When we come to the New Testament, we learn that there is a second-level fulfillment in Christ. Many of the literal details (e.g., the boundaries of the perimeter of the city) no longer function in an earthly manner but must be understood as types that are fulfilled in Christ and his church. The literal land and the physical temple have been superseded by that to which they pointed. The temple is replaced by Christ himself, and all who are united to him by the Spirit are being built upon Christ into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:19-22). The church is "the holy city," the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a bride prepared for her husband (Rev. 21:2).

It is important to point out that these two fulfillments are not equal. The second-level fulfillment involves a dramatic escalation and advance upon the first-level fulfillment. The first-level fulfillment is merely a repetition and re-establishment of the typological situation that existed in Israel prior to the exile. In fact, the temple of Zerubbabel was inferior to Solomon's. The second-level fulfillment, by contrast, brings the earthly, typological situation to an end and replaces it with the antitype – the reality to which the type pointed now accomplished finally and permanently in Christ (Col. 2:17).

As an illustration of the relevance of two-level fulfillment to the interpretation of the prophecy of the new covenant, consider the opening words of the prophecy: "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (verse 31). This was fulfilled literally on the first level during the post-exilic period, when Nehemiah led the people in a corporate confession of sin and covenant renewal ceremony (Neh. 9-10). This "new covenant" was made only with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. But in the second level fulfillment – *the* new covenant in Christ's blood – the covenant was not limited to the Jews. The Gentiles have also been included, so that when we read the words "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," we do not interpret those words literally, but we understand that they actually refer, in their second-level fulfillment, to the New Testament church composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

Classical dispensationalists, who do not understand the concept of typology inherent in two-level fulfillment, argue that there are actually two new covenants: one with Israel, and one with the church. Jeremiah 31:31-34 is referring to the new covenant made with Israel. Passages in the New Testament that speak of a new covenant with the church are actually referring to a separate and distinct covenant. We can only avoid the error of dispensationalism if we recognize that the fulfillment of the prophecy of the new covenant occurred in two stages or levels. Meredith Kline makes this very point in his critique of dispensationalism:

Covenantal hermeneutics properly perceives the prototypical, provisional, passing nature of the first level kingdom and the antitypal, perfective, permanent nature of the second level kingdom. Dispensationalists, failing to see that the first level kingdom becomes obsolete and gets replaced by the antitype in the messianic age, continue the obsolete order on indefinitely into the new age

¹ "The sequence of landmarks in these verses suggests a movement counterclockwise around the city ... Thus the whole outline of the city of Jerusalem at this period encloses an area that will become 'holy' to Yahweh." William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 199-200.

... Dispensationalism's virtual rejection of the typological identity of the first level kingdom finds expression in their literalistic misinterpretation of prophecies that depict the second level kingdom in the typological idiom of the first level model.²

Notice Kline's reference to what he calls "typological idiom." Typological idiom occurs when the prophets depict the second-level kingdom using language taken from the first-level kingdom. One of the major errors of dispensationalism is that it fails to grasp the type-antitype relationship between the two levels, and thus it interprets the language of the prophetic literature literally. Covenant theology, by contrast, recognizes that the first-level language is prophetic or typological idiom, so that when we come to the second-level fulfillment in Christ, we are not surprised to find first-level language fulfilled in surprising ways.

The hermeneutical principle of prophetic or typological idiom must be applied to other aspects of the Jeremiah 31 prophecy besides the identification of the parties of the new covenant. In particular, it applies to the reference to the writing of God's Law upon the hearts of his people. In order to see this, we need to examine the prophecy of the new covenant as a whole. The prophecy can be outlined as follows:

- A. I will make a new covenant (v. 31)
- B. Not like the covenant that I made at Sinai, which covenant they broke (v. 32)
- C. But this is the covenant that I will make, involving two main benefits:
 - (1) I will write my Law on their heart ... They will all know me (vv. 33-34a)
 - (2) I will forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more (v. 34b)

The initial A-statement is the declaration that God is going to make "a new covenant." Whether this covenant is "new" in the sense of being a re-establishment of the same Mosaic covenant, or in the sense of being new in character and quality is immediately apparent in the rest of the passage. For the LORD states in B that this covenant will *not* be like the covenant that was enacted with Israel "in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt." In what way will this covenant be unlike that original covenant? "Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers ... My covenant which they broke, and I abhorred them."³ In other words, the new covenant will be superior to the original covenant in that it will not be breakable. The new covenant will not be broken by the unfaithfulness of God's people, resulting in God's abhorring them and rejecting them. The fact that the newness of the new covenant consists in this feature of irrevocability is made clear a few verses later: "Thus says the LORD, 'If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done'" (verse 37). The new covenant is superior to the original covenant at Sinai because it will secure a permanent relationship between the LORD and his people that can never be broken – unlike the original covenant which was broken and which led to Israel being "cast off ... for all that they had done." Confirming this interpretation, in the following chapter the new covenant is referred to as "an everlasting covenant" in which the LORD "will not turn away from them, to do them good" (32:40). Jeremiah locates the superiority and newness of the new covenant in its unbreakable or irrevocable character.

The third and final section of the prophecy (vv. 33-34) sets forth the two primary benefits of the new covenant. These two benefits are the ground of the new covenant's irrevocable quality. The first benefit is set forth in verse 33: the LORD will write his Law upon their hearts. And because it is written on

² Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), pp. 347-48.

³ The Masoretic text reads, "although I was a husband to them" (*baalti*). But the LXX reads, "and I did not care for them," which presupposes another Hebrew word, different only by one letter (*gaalti*, "I abhorred them"). I follow the LXX here because it seems to make more sense in context, and because the inspired author of Hebrews follows and thus authorizes the LXX text at this point (cf. Heb. 8:9). The verb "to abhor" is used in Leviticus 26 in reference to the curses of the covenant that would come upon Israel if they failed to remain faithful to the covenant. "My soul shall abhor you" (Lev. 26:30). This statement is actually the climax of the prophecy, which concludes with the exile and the land enjoying its sabbaths (Lev. 26:31-35) – precisely the usage in Jer. 31:32.

the heart, rather than on external tablets of stone, there will be no need for instruction in the new covenant, but they shall all know the LORD, from the least of them to the greatest of them (v. 34a). In addition to the internalization of God's will, the new covenant will be founded upon a plenary forgiveness in which the LORD will no longer remember the sins and apostasies of his people which led to the former covenant being broken and to God's casting off his people in abhorrence (v. 34b). In terms of the second-level fulfillment in Christ, these two benefits correspond to the twin benefits of union with Christ: sanctification (internalization of God's will) and justification (no more remembrance of sins).

We come then to the question raised by the citation of this proof text in the charge. Does this text teach that in the new covenant, sanctification will be effected by God's writing the Decalogue ("My Law") upon the hearts of God's people? In view of our earlier discussion, there are several arguments that would suggest a negative answer to that question.

First, in the immediate context of Jeremiah's position in redemptive history, when the LORD promises, "I will put My Law within them and on their heart I will write it," Jeremiah and his audience would have understood this as a promise to write the entire Mosaic Law upon the heart of Israel and Judah. No reduction of the demands of the Mosaic Law to a shorter list (e.g., the Decalogue only) is envisioned here. When we look at the first-level fulfillment of the promise at the time of Ezra, it was not merely the Decalogue that the exiles bound themselves to keep. Nehemiah informs us that when the leaders of Israel and the entire people ratified the covenant, they "took on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes" (Neh. 10:29). The next couple of verses go on to describe what was involved in observing "all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes." It included the prohibition against intermarriage with non-Jews (v. 30), observance of the Sabbath as a holy day, as well as the seventh year sabbath rest for the land and the cancellation of debts (v. 31), the payment of the yearly temple tax (v. 32), grain offerings, burnt offerings, sin offerings, the sabbaths, the new moon, and the three annual festivals (v. 33), and the bringing of the firstfruits and the firstborn to the temple annually, as well as other tithes and contributions for the maintenance of the priesthood (vv. 34-39).

Second, it is clear that the first-level fulfillment in the time of Nehemiah does not exhaust the promise of the new covenant. Indeed, it hardly lives up to the prophecy's central concern, viz., the irrevocable nature of the new covenant. For when Nehemiah and the people of Israel renewed the covenant, they "took on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law," thus placing themselves in effect back under a conditional covenant of works with blessings and curses. Similar language of "taking upon oneself a curse and an oath" was used at the ratification of the original covenant (cp. Deut. 29:10-15). How could the prophecy of the new covenant be fulfilled as long as it involved the re-establishment of the very same covenant that the LORD made with Israel at Sinai? For that covenant was by its very nature a conditional, breakable covenant grounded in a works principle with respect to Israel's probation in the land. Therefore, any literal interpretation of the Jeremiah 31:33 which interprets the writing of God's Law on the hearts of his people as merely the re-enactment of the same Law that God gave at Sinai undercuts the vital thrust of the prophecy of the new covenant. The first-level fulfillment falls short, by its very nature, of the second-level fulfillment to which the prophecy ultimately points.

Therefore, third, when we turn to the New Testament's inspired commentary on Jeremiah 31 we find that the writing of God's Law upon the heart is interpreted as typological idiom for something that far surpasses the weak and beggarly first-level fulfillment. When Paul describes the second-level fulfillment in Christ, he specifically states that the will of God is now being inscribed and internalized by means of "the Spirit of the living God, *not* on tablets of stone [the Decalogue] but on tablets of human hearts ... *not* of the letter but of the Spirit."

2 Corinthians 3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? 2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink

but with the Spirit of the living God, *not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts*. 4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate as servants of *a new covenant*, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 But if the ministry of death, *in letters engraved on stones*, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? ... 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Paul's pointed references to "tablets of stone" (v. 3) and "in letters engraved on stones" (v. 7), clearly points to the Decalogue, for only the ten commandments were written on tablets of stone (cp. Deut. 4:13; 5:22). Furthermore, it is clear that Paul is making reference to Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant since he specifically refers to himself as a minister or servant of "a new covenant" (v. 6). The key point is that Paul does not interpret the statement in Jeremiah, "I will put My Law within them and on their heart I will write it" literally. He specifically contrasts "the letter" (i.e., the Decalogue) with "the Spirit." "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The ministry of the old covenant, Paul says, was a ministry of death and condemnation, in letters engraved on stones. By contrast, the ministry of the new covenant is the ministry of the Spirit. Paul therefore interprets the language of Jeremiah's prophecy not literally, but according to its second-level significance, as a reference to the Spirit's sanctifying work, a work that is nothing less than being transformed from glory to glory into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 18). Another crucial passage in which Paul comments on Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant is Romans 7:1-6. This passage is closely related to 2 Corinthians 3 because it contains the same letter-Spirit contrast (v. 6). After establishing that the death of a husband frees the wife to enter into a new marriage, Paul makes the application to the believer's freedom from the Law through Christ's death:

4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, *so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter*.

As in 2 Corinthians 3, the letter-Spirit contrast is a contrast between the old covenant ("oldness") and the new covenant ("newness").⁴ Paul does not teach that the newness of the new covenant consists in the fact that the believer is bound to the same Mosaic Law that was given to Israel, only that he is given greater empowerment and enablement to keep it. No, Paul teaches that the newness of the new covenant consists in the establishment, by virtue of union with Christ and by his Spirit, of an entirely new way of serving God. This is not to say that the new way of serving God is lawless or that it results in a way of life that has no relationship to the obedience demanded in the Law. For when Paul concludes his discussion of the Law in the following chapter (Romans 8), he makes clear that the new way of serving God in the Spirit results in the fulfillment in us of the righteousness that the Law required all along:

Romans 8:3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 *so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*.

This profoundly significant affirmation that "the righteous requirement of the Law" is being "fulfilled in us" by the Spirit is the second-level reality of what Jeremiah only saw from afar and predicted

⁴ In Romans 7:6 "oldness" is *palaiotes* (cp. "the old covenant" [*palaias diatheke*], 2 Cor. 3:14) and "newness" is *kainotes* (cp. "the new covenant" [*kaine diatheke*], 2 Cor. 3:6).

in the language of first-level, typological idiom ("I will write My Law on their heart"). In light of Paul's inspired "translation," this proof text does not teach that the Decalogue is the standard of holy living for New Testament believers.

Ezekiel 36:26-28

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. 28 You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

Since I have spent so much time on the Jeremiah 31 passage, we can deal with the parallel text in Ezekiel more quickly. As we saw in Jeremiah, the surrounding context is significant since it shows that the first-level fulfillment of the prophecy pertains to Israel's literal restoration to the land. "I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into this land ... You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers ... I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt" (Ezek. 36:24, 28, 33). This is confirmed by noting that the following chapter is the well-known vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37), which describes the restoration of Israel in the first-level fulfillment (as Ezek. 37:15-23 explicitly states). In the second-level fulfillment, Ezekiel 37 is really typological idiom for the formation of the church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, via the resurrection of Christ and our co-resurrection with him in the Spirit, as Paul teaches in Ephesians 2:1-22.

Therefore, when we read in Ezekiel 36:27 that the LORD will put his Spirit within his people and cause them to walk in his statutes and to observe his ordinances, we immediately recognize that, like the reference to "My Law" in Jeremiah 31:33, this is typological idiom. In its first-level fulfillment there is no restriction of these terms to the Decalogue. The statutes and the ordinances are almost never used in the Old Testament to refer to the Decalogue but to the totality of the Mosaic Law (see, for example, Lev. 26:46). But in its second-level fulfillment, the Spirit has been poured out upon the church at Pentecost, and now the new covenant people of God are being progressively sanctified into the image of Christ and they express that transformation by greater conformity to "the statutes and ordinances" that Christ has given the church through his apostles.

Matthew 5:17-19

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

This is one of the most significant texts in the New Testament for understanding the role of the Mosaic Law in the life of the new covenant church. Its theological importance cannot be overestimated. There are two separate exegetical questions that have to be addressed in order to determine the validity of this proof text in relation to the charge.

(1) What is it that Jesus came "to fulfill/confirm"?

The first question that we must address is "What is it that Jesus came to fulfill/confirm?" For the moment we won't decide whether Jesus came "to fulfill" the Law or "to confirm" it. We simply want to know what this "Law" is that Jesus came to perform this action upon, however that action might be

conceived. Although there are some difficult exegetical questions at this point, we can be confident that the it was not the Decalogue alone that Jesus came to perform this action upon.

There are several terms and phrases used here that might be interpreted by the presbytery as referring to the Decalogue. In verses 17 and 18 there is one reference each to "the Law" (*nomos*). Neither reference, however, can be restricted to the Decalogue. *Nomos* in the New Testament most frequently refers to the Mosaic Law in its entirety, or to the Pentateuch. There are few, if any, real examples where *nomos* refers to the moral subset of the Mosaic Law, much less to the Decalogue itself. Such a usage is particularly unlikely in this context, since the word occurs in conjunction with other terms. For example, when *nomos* occurs in a phrase like, "the Law or the Prophets" or "the Law and the Prophets," it usually refers to the entire Mosaic Law, as originally set forth by Moses in the Pentateuch and subsequently renewed and preached by the Prophets. Another important contextual indicator here is the statement, "not the smallest letter or stroke [one jot or one tittle – KJV] shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (v. 18). So far is Jesus from attempting to restrict his remarks to a subset of the Mosaic Law, he seems to be making every effort to ensure that we will understand him as affirming that the entire Mosaic Law in exhaustive detail must remain in effect "until all is accomplished."

The other phrase that might be regarded as a reference to the Decalogue is the statement in verse 19 in which Jesus says, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of *these commandments* ... shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." What does "these commandments" refer to? Does it refer back to the previous two verses, to the Mosaic Law in its entirety, every jot and tittle? Or does it refer forward to the commandments that Jesus will set forth in the subsequent context ("You have heard that it was said ... but I say unto you ...")? If we prefer the backward reference, then "these commandments" refers to every single commandment found in the Mosaic Law. However, this interpretation is unlikely since it would seem to contradict the clear teaching of the New Testament that God's people are no longer obligated to observe significant portions of the Mosaic Law (e.g., circumcision, the food laws, etc.). The only way the backward reference can be sustained would be to argue that verse 19 is a temporary command addressed to the disciples prior to the resurrection (akin to the command in Matthew 23:3). This does not seem right, since it does not fit well in this context, which is a programmatic, theological statement of the stance of Christ toward the Mosaic Law. This leads us, then, to opt for a forward reference. "These commandments" would be the commandments of Jesus, some of which are re-statements of specific Mosaic precepts, and some of which go beyond what Moses taught. I prefer this interpretation. In any case, whether one takes the backward or the forward view, "these commandments" cannot be a reference to the Decalogue per se.

None of the various words and phrases in Matthew 5:17-19 are referring to the Decalogue. If the action Jesus came to perform upon "the Law" was the action of confirming it, then he has confirmed the *entire* Mosaic Law as still binding on the new covenant church, which cannot be the case since that would contradict the plain teaching of the New Testament elsewhere. On the other hand, if Jesus came "to fulfill" the Mosaic Law, he came to perform this action on the *entire* Mosaic Law, including the Decalogue. There is no hint in the text that Christ's fulfillment was restricted only to the civil and ceremonial law, as if the Decalogue were exempt from the interpretive transformation effected by this Christological fulfillment.

(2) Does *plerosai* mean "to fulfill" or "to confirm"?

All the major English versions translate *plerosai* "to fulfill." This translation is supported by all of the standard Greek lexicons. For example, the standard New Testament lexicon, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG) lists six meanings for *pleroo*, but "confirm" is not one of them.⁵

⁵ The six meanings of *pleroo* listed in BDAG are: (1) to make full, fill; (2) to complete a period of time, fill (up), complete; (3) to bring to completion that which was already begun, complete, finish; (4) to bring to a designed end, fulfill; (5) to bring to completion an activity in which one has been involved from its beginning, complete, finish; (6) complete a number. BDAG places Matt. 5:17 under meaning (4).

However, Greg Bahnsen makes a plausible case for the translation "to confirm" that we must consider at this point. He argues that the meaning of *plerosai* in this text must be ascertained by noting the antithesis that Jesus makes: "Do not think that I came *katalusai* [to abolish] the Law or the Prophets; I did not come *katalusai* [to abolish] but *plerosai*." Bahnsen appeals to the strong adversative *alla* ("but") that intervenes between the two verbs. Bahnsen quotes the Greek grammar by Blass, Debrunner, and Funk who state that *alla* is not a general contrast but denotes "that which is directly contrary." Bahnsen reasons, "Consequently, the meaning of *plerosai* will be directly contrary to that of *katalusai*." What is the direct opposite of *katalusai* (to abolish)? To confirm.⁶

The flaw in this reasoning is that Bahnsen has taken *one* of the meanings of *alla* (directly contrary) and made it the *only* meaning. According to Smyth's *Greek Grammar* (the standard grammar that we used in the Classics Department at UCLA), *alla* has many uses and meanings: it "marks opposition, contrast, protest, difference, objection, or limitation; and is thus used both where one notion entirely excludes another *and where two notions are not mutually exclusive*."⁷ One common use of *alla* is to make a contrast of the form: "not this, but rather that." The "this" and the "that" are typically contrasted with one another when *alla* is used in this manner, but they are not necessarily "directly contrary" to one another or mutually exclusive, as Smyth notes.

For example, in Matthew 7:21, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but [*alla*] he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." The contrast is between "he who says" and "he who does." It is clear that Jesus is placing these two types of individuals in a strongly adversative contrast with one another. It is not *this* one who will enter the kingdom ("he who says" [*ho legon*]), but *that* one who will enter ("he who does" [*ho poion*]). However, it would not be valid to reason: since the strong adversative *alla* is used here, we can deduce that *ho legon* must be the direct opposite of *ho poion*; therefore, the verb *lego* in Greek must mean "to not do something, to be inactive." The fallacy of such reasoning should be apparent.

Thus when Jesus says, "I did not come to abolish but to fulfill," it is incorrect to argue that these two verbs must denote mutually exclusive or directly opposite ideas. Jesus is clearly saying that he did not come to abolish. He came to do something else instead (*alla*). But what he did instead need not be defined as the exact opposite of abolishing (i.e., confirming). For there are other things that Jesus might have done to the Law besides confirming it that could still be contrasted with abolishing it. Douglas Moo points out that we must not overlook

the manifestly eschatological and salvation-historical dimensions of the term "fulfill" (*pleroo*) in Matthew. Matthew uses it fifteen times ... ten of these occurring in the introductions to Matthew's distinctive "formula quotations" (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9) ... Particularly suggestive of Matthew's viewpoint is 11:13, in which Jesus declares that "all the Prophets and the Law *prophesied* until John" ... In Matthew's bold perspective, all parts of the Old Testament "prophesy" about Jesus and the age of salvation. Thus, as Jesus "fulfills" Old Testament prophecies by doing what they predicted and "fulfills" Old Testament history by reenacting its events, so he "fulfills" the Old Testament law by making demands to which the law pointed forward. Jesus rejects any notion that his claim to dictate God's will to his followers

⁶ Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984), p. 65. On pp. 67-70 Bahnsen also cites a number of instances of *pleroo* in the LXX and the New Testament that he thinks demonstrate that "confirm" is one of the possible meanings of the word. However, Vern Poythress has answered each of these examples in detail. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Brentwood, TN: Wogramuth & Hyatt, 1991), Appendix C: "Does the Greek Word *Pleroo* Sometimes Mean 'Confirm'?" (pp. 363-77).

⁷ Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920, 1956, 1984), §2775. BDAG, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (3rd edition) lists five main meanings/uses of *alla*. Liddell and Scott list even more.

involves a radical departure from the law or from its intentions. Rather, he is claiming that his teaching brings the eschatological fullness of God's will to which the Mosaic law looked forward.⁸

Christ came to fulfill the Law, that is, to place his authoritative ethical teaching in the place of the Mosaic Law ("You have heard that it was said ... but *I* say unto you"), as the ultimate revelation of the will of God. This implies continuity between his teaching and that of Moses, but not identity. The Mosaic Law pointed ahead to the eschatological revelation of God's will in the person and work of Christ, but it did so in an incomplete and provisional manner, since the Mosaic Law functioned to govern the life of theocratic Israel in a typological republication of the covenant of works relating to temporal blessings and curses in the land of Canaan. Via the incarnation of the Son of God, the righteousness to which the Mosaic Law bore witness in a provisional way, has now been revealed in its eschatologically ultimate form in Christ himself and his authoritative teaching. "For he taught them as one having authority."

Luke 10:26-28

And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 28 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE."

This passage occurs in the introduction to the parable of the Good Samaritan. In verse 25 we are told that a lawyer stood up and, trying to put Jesus to the test, asked him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replies, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" The lawyer replied by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Jesus responded, "You have answered correctly," and then Jesus adds, quoting Leviticus 18:5, "Do this and you will live." The lawyer, wanting to justify himself, then retorted, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, demonstrating that the real question is not who is your neighbor, but what kind of person is able to fulfill the love command of Leviticus 19:18. It is not those who think they are orthodox and righteous (as symbolized by the priest and the Levite), but those who know that they are not righteous (as symbolized by the Samaritan, who would have been regarded as a heretic by most Jews of the time). Only the poor in spirit, who recognize their inability to keep God's Law, are able to sympathize with and have compassion upon others who are needy, thus fulfilling the law of love enunciated in Leviticus 19:18.

Nothing is stated or implied in this text to the effect that the Decalogue is binding on New Testament believers. Neither Deuteronomy 6:5 nor Leviticus 19:18 is part of the Decalogue. If anything, this passage is a proof text for the view I hold – namely, that the New Testament believer's ethical obligations are now summarized in the teaching of Jesus concerning the two great commandments, with special emphasis on the demand of love for one's neighbor.

Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14

Romans 13:8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

⁸ Moo, in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 351-52. Emphasis mine.

Galatians 5:14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

I have chosen to take these two texts together since they are virtually identical in terms of thought and language. In both, Paul states that the entire Law is fulfilled or summed up in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In both, he does not quote this statement using the normal conventions for Scriptural citations (e.g., "as it is written"). Instead, he says that the entire Law is summed up "in this saying" or "in one word." The significance that I draw from this is that, while Paul certainly was aware that this statement is found in Scripture (Leviticus 19:18), he quotes it not as a Mosaic commandment, but as a well-known saying of Jesus. Paul alludes to the traditions about Jesus elsewhere in his writings, and even quotes Jesus himself on a number of occasions (e.g., Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 11:24-25; 1 Tim. 5:18). As Moo states, "Paul cites [Leviticus 19:18] ... not as an Old Testament commandment, but as an Old Testament commandment already transformed into the demand of Christ."⁹

It is also significant, I believe, that Paul says the Law is "fulfilled" by means of love. He says this three times: "He who loves his neighbor has *fulfilled* the Law" (Rom. 13:8); "Love is the *fulfillment* of the Law" (Rom. 13:10); and finally "The whole Law is *fulfilled* in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14). In other words, Paul seems to be urging Christians to focus on loving others, to go out and work hard at loving people just as Jesus taught and as he modeled for us. If you do that, Paul is saying, then you will have fulfilled "the entire Law" (Gal. 5:14). Even though you weren't going out and trying to observe the specific commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet" – and whatever other commandments there may be – if you have been focused on loving people, then you will have satisfied the righteous requirements of the Mosaic Law. Of course, Paul would not deny that these "other commandments" are important and valuable, since he himself quotes the fifth commandment, for example, in his exhortation to children (Eph. 6:1-3). So Paul isn't saying that the other commandments are totally irrelevant and "all you need is love." But he is suggesting that the love command, as taught and exemplified by Jesus, ought to be the central and overriding concern of our moral pursuits, for it is only by pursuing love, not the Law, that one can truly fulfill the Law.

1 Corinthians 7:19; Revelation 14:12

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.

Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

I have taken these two proof texts together because they both refer to "the commandments of God." What does "the commandments of God" refer to? This phrase occurs infrequently in the New Testament (the only other NT occurrence is Rev. 12:17). The phrase "the commandments of the LORD" occurs about 16 times in the Old Testament, but there it clearly refers to the entire Mosaic Law, not the Decalogue. In its New Testament usage, it is clear that it has a very different meaning than in the Old, since Paul specifically states that "circumcision is nothing ... what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God." Since circumcision is excluded, "the commandments of God" cannot be referring to the Mosaic Law. Therefore, it is more likely that the New Testament usage of this phrase is distinctive new covenant phraseology referring to the commandments of Jesus Christ himself, as mediated by the apostles.

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep *My commandments*" (John 14:15; cp. 14:21; 15:10, 12). Before his ascension into heaven Jesus reminded the apostles of their responsibility to make disciples of all the nations, "teaching them to observe *all that I commanded you*" (Matt. 28:20). The epistles of John are

⁹ Moo, p. 360.

full of references to the commandments of Jesus. In one passage he even refers to the commandments of Jesus as *God's* commandments (1 John 3:21-24). Paul was also a recipient of direct revelation from the risen Christ and was therefore able to pass on the commandments of Christ to the church. He told the Corinthians: "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are *the Lord's commandment*" (1 Cor. 14:37). Paul exhorted the Thessalonian Christians to abstain from sexual immorality, "For you know what *commandments* we gave you *by the authority of the Lord Jesus*" (1 Thess. 4:2ff).

The references to "the commandments of God" in 1 Cor. 7:19 and Rev. 12:17; 14:12 are difficult to interpret, since they are brief and unexplained. But there is strong evidence that the phrase does not refer to the Mosaic Law as a whole (since circumcision is excluded), and there is no evidence that it refers to the Decalogue per se. In light of the references quoted above, "the commandments of God" probably refers to the commandments of Jesus mediated to the church by the apostles.

Ephesians 6:1-3

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.

At first glance it might seem that Paul merely quotes the fifth commandment, without adding any Christological interpretation. But notice that Paul does not appeal to the Law in and of itself, but to the Law as it is fulfilled in Christ. "Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*, for this is right." The parent-child relationship is now grounded in union with Christ. Paul is saying, "Children, you need to believe that you are in union with Christ, and you need to believe that your union with Christ affects the way that you relate to your parents."

Many commentators ignore that phrase, "in the Lord," and as a result misinterpret Paul's appeal to the promise of long life in the land in verse 3. They interpret this promise literally as a general promise that obedient children are hereby promised an extended and prosperous life. Charles Hodge, for example, is typical of many commentators. He argues that Paul specifically removed the last part of the commandment, "the land *which the LORD your God is giving you*," in order to universalize the promise to all obedient children, not just to those who happen to live in Tel Aviv. But is it true that all obedient children are in fact given long life and prosperity? Hodge deals with this objection by claiming that Eph. 6:3 sets forth "a general purpose of God, and makes known what will be the usual course of his providence." Appealing to Proverbs 10:4 ("The hand of the diligent makes rich"), he argues that "diligence, as a general rule, does secure riches; and obedient children, as a general rule, are prosperous and happy."¹⁰

Whatever truth there may be to the observation that as a general rule obedient children are prosperous and happy, this cannot be what Paul has in mind, because it undercuts the specifically Christological orientation of the exhortation to children to "obey your parents in the Lord." If the promise is a generic statement like those found in the book of Proverbs, that obedient children tend to live long and happier lives, then it's true for non-Christian children as well. They too may experience this general course of divine providence according to the principles of common grace. But Paul commands the children to do this "in the Lord," and therefore he is describing the kind of behavior and the kind of promises that are specific only to those whose existence is grounded in Christ. He is not inculcating abstract moral principles that apply to all children, whether they are children of believers or of unbelievers, whether they are covenant children or not. In fact, each of the three relationships in the immediate context is marked by language that establishes the duties contemplated on the ground of union with Christ: "wives be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (5:22); "slaves, be obedient to your masters ... as slaves of Christ"

¹⁰ Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (1856; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), p. 264.

(6:5-7). These commands require and presuppose the existence of faith in Christ. Thus, it would be utterly inappropriate to find Paul suddenly reverting to a common grace ethic in his discussion of the parent-child relationship.

What, then, are we to make of Paul's appeal to the promise of long life in the land? If it's not to be taken literally, what are we to do with it? If we have been paying attention to what Paul has been saying in his Epistle to the Ephesians to this point, we will have already been alerted to the fact that for Paul the promise that God gave to Israel in the old covenant of life in the land of Canaan was a type and shadow that pointed beyond itself to the ultimate spiritual blessings that we possess in Christ. At the very beginning of the epistle, Paul tells us exactly what the land meant: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). This reference to the blessing is an echo of Genesis 12, the passage where God first promised to Abraham that he would have the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, that he would make him a great nation, and that he would give him every blessing in the land. Paul therefore interprets the Abrahamic blessing as a type that is now fulfilled in Christ. This is why Paul adds the additional phrases, "every *spiritual* blessing in the *heavenly* places *in Christ*." This interpretation of the land in terms of its second-level significance is repeated in his subsequent references to "the inheritance" that we have obtained in Christ (see Eph. 1:11, 14, 18; 5:5).

Hodge would have us believe that the same apostle who has consistently interpreted the land spiritually in terms of the believer's inheritance in Christ throughout Ephesians 1 through 5, would suddenly revert to a literal interpretation of the land in Ephesians 6. But Paul's direct quotation of the Law, with its language of living long in the land, must not throw us off. Paul uses this old covenant language, not in its literal earthly meaning, but in terms of its ultimate significance. He properly sees in the promise of long life in the land a reference to the ultimate spiritual blessings guaranteed to the elect in the new covenant. When we translate the typological idiom, Paul is saying that children who obey their parents in the Lord will enjoy eternal life in heaven.

Now this raises a serious problem. If the typological idiom is translated correctly, we are confronted with the fact that Paul appears to be placing Christian children under the works principle. He seems to be teaching that by keeping the fifth commandment, that is, by performing one of the works commanded by the Law, Christian children will inherit eternal life. How can this be? This is the same apostle who in Ephesians 2 said that "it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, *not* as a result of works."

To answer this question we must look at Ephesians 6:4. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." In this verse Paul transforms the fifth commandment from a work of the Law into an act of faith. He does so by his reference, at the end of the verse, to "the discipline and instruction *of the Lord*." At first you might think that the discipline and instruction of the Lord refers to the fact that parents should discipline and instruct their children concerning the Lord, about the truths of Christ and his death for us on the cross. But this is not what Paul means. Instead, this is the instruction of the Lord himself. It is the instruction that Jesus himself is giving through the parents. "The Lord [is] seen as the ultimate instructor who works through the father ... the father mediates the Lord's instruction" to the children.¹¹ Children who submit in faith to parental instruction, receiving it as the covenant nurture and instruction of Christ himself, are saving their souls and will live eternally in heaven. The obedience that Paul has in mind in verse 1 is not merely obedience to every command that a parent might issue – "Johnny, go clean up your room!" – but obedience in the sense of an overall attitude of responsiveness to the covenant nurture and instruction of the parents. Such an attitude of trust and faith in the parents, is the seed out of which saving faith in Christ himself will grow.

¹¹ Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 569-70. This interpretation assumes that *tou kuriou* ("of the Lord") is to be taken as a subjective genitive.

So we must ask: Does Paul's citation of the fifth commandment in Ephesians 6:1-3 support the view that the Decalogue per se is the standard of holy living for New Testament believers? If the above exegesis is correct, it does not. As Douglas Moo points out:

This is one example ... of the way in which "the law of Christ" incorporates within its teachings from the Mosaic Law. It should also be noted ... that Paul significantly changes the promise attached to this commandment, reflecting the transformation the commandment undergoes in being taken up within the law of Christ.¹²

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This verse says nothing, explicitly or implicitly, concerning the role of the Decalogue in the life of the New Testament believer. This verse is a benedictory prayer for the Thessalonian Christians that they would be sanctified entirely, and that God would preserve their spirit and soul and body without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I affirm the doctrines of progressive sanctification and the infallible preservation of the elect.

The only way this verse could conceivably have any relevance to the charge would be to presuppose that sanctification *only* occurs through the Law. But it cannot be shown from the New Testament that the Law is a means of sanctification. Paul denies that the Law has any power to sanctify. The Law only arouses sin and produces death (Rom. 7:5, 7-11, 13). Paul applauds the Galatians for beginning the Christian life well, by faith in the crucified Lord. But having begun in the Spirit, he warns them not to turn to the works of the Law, since that would be to attempt to be perfected by the flesh:

Galatians 3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Hebrews 8:6-10

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. 8 For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; 9 NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. 10 FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

After quoting the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the new covenant, the author of Hebrews then adds an insightful commentary in verse 13: "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first

¹² Moo, p. 370.

obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." This shows that the author's purpose in quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34 is to demonstrate something about the first covenant, namely, that the first covenant is "obsolete," "growing old," and "ready to disappear." The author of Hebrews derives this far-reaching conclusion from the fact that the LORD promised to make "a new covenant." The author reasons, "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete" (NIV).

Immediately after making this profoundly important theological statement concerning the obsolescence of the first covenant, the author of Hebrews goes on to describe some of the elements that characterized the first covenant. Notice the repetition of the phrase "the first covenant," which provides a verbal linkage between Hebrew 8:13 and 9:1:

Hebrews 9:1 Now even *the first covenant* had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. 2 For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. 3 Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, 4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and *the tablets of the covenant* [*hai plakes tes diathekes*]; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

In Hebrews 8:13, we are told that the first covenant has been made obsolete by the inauguration of a new covenant. A few verses later, in 9:4, we are reminded that one of the most important aspects of the first covenant was that it had an earthly sanctuary, and that in the Holy of Holies of that sanctuary there was the ark of the covenant, and within the ark was placed "the tablets of the covenant." The Greek phrase used by the author of Hebrews is taken from the LXX (Deut. 9:9; 1 Kings 8:9). Furthermore, as the following text makes clear, "the tablets of the covenant" are the same thing as the ten commandments:

Exodus 34:28 [LXX] And Moses was there before the Lord forty days, and forty nights; he did not eat bread, and he did not drink water; and he wrote these words upon the tablets of the covenant [*hai plakes tes diathekes*], the ten commandments [*tous deka logous*].

Notice that the LXX phrase for "the ten commandments" is *tous deka logous*, which is where we get the word Decalogue in English. Notice as well, that this phrase is in grammatical apposition to the preceding phrase, "the tablets of the covenant." The tablets of the covenant and the Decalogue are one and the same.

Therefore, returning to Hebrews 8 and 9, when the author of Hebrews states that "the first covenant" has been made obsolete by the inauguration of a new covenant, and when he goes on to state that at the very heart of the first covenant stood the ark of the covenant, within which were placed "the tablets of the covenant" (i.e., the Decalogue), we have no option but to conclude that, for the author of Hebrews, the Decalogue has also been made obsolete along with the first covenant of which it was an integral part.

How does this harmonize with the statement in Hebrews 8:10, quoting from Jeremiah 31:33: "And I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts"? The author of Hebrews does not comment specifically on this part of the prophecy of the new covenant. His concern is with the newness of the new covenant, and the fact that this new covenant makes the first covenant obsolete. But with respect to the specific promise of the writing the Law on the heart, the author of Hebrews is silent. It is interesting to note, however, that he cites this promise in its LXX form, which translates the Hebrew word *torah* (singular) as *nomous* (plural). According to Wescott, there are no parallel examples of this in the LXX where the plural form is used to translate *torah*. Wescott considers this "remarkable" and suggests that the plural form "may have been chosen to dissociate the general idea of divine 'instruction'

from the special Mosaic code with which it had been identified."¹³ Therefore, Hebrews 8:10 offers no proof of the thesis that the Decalogue is the standard of holy living for the New Testament believer.

James 2:8-11

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Before examining the references to the law in verses 9-11, we must begin with the reference to "the royal law" in verse 8. In Greek the phrase is *nomos basilikos*. What does *basilikos* mean? It is closely related to the word *basileus* (king) and therefore means "pertaining to the king." It is used, for example, in Acts 12:20-21 (twice) in reference to king Herod. Thus, it is likely that James is referring to the love command as the law of our King, that is, the law of Christ. Another nuance that points in the same direction is the near reference in verse 5 to the kingdom: "Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom (*basileia*) which He promised to those who love Him?" James would have certainly known that both "the kingdom of God" and the love command were central themes in the teaching of Jesus, and therefore his reference to the love command as "the royal law" may have the nuance that the love command is the central demand of the kingdom, a demand made central by the King himself.

James 2:8 is in perfect harmony with the teaching of Paul and the rest of the New Testament: "If you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well." James is saying that the law of love is itself "in accordance with the Scripture" (Leviticus 19:18). On the one hand, James recognizes that Christ derived that law from the Old Testament, so that there is continuity between the law of Christ and the law of Moses. On the other hand, he identifies the law of love as, for Christians, a law promulgated by our King. *Christians obey this command, not as a Mosaic ordinance, but as a command that Christ elevated from its obscurity in Leviticus and made central to his kingdom ethic.* And like Paul, James affirms that if you are fulfilling this royal law, then you are doing well (cp. Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14).

But what about the rest of the paragraph, verses 9-11? Here, James seems to be talking about the Mosaic Law, since he quotes two of the ten commandments (the seventh and the sixth). In verse 8, James said that if you are fulfilling the royal law, you are doing well. Then in verse 9 he adds, "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." Partiality is illustrated earlier in the passage as the sin of showing favoritism to the rich man who visits the congregation, but treating the shabbily dressed man with contempt (James 2:1-7). Thus, if you show partiality, you are no longer fulfilling the royal law. And in that case, "you are convicted by the Law as transgressors." By which law is one convicted as a transgressor? The royal law? or the Mosaic Law? It seems that James has now shifted to the Mosaic Law. He makes this shift because he wants to show how sinful partiality is. It is nothing less than "making distinctions among yourselves, and becoming judges with evil motives" (verse 4). It is to judge others according to a fleshly standard of judgment, rather than according to the divine perspective stated in verse 5: "Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom He has promised to those who love Him?"

To show partiality, then, is to judge falsely, to judge according to human judgment. And when one does that, one is now convicted by the covenant of works (as expressed in the Mosaic Law). The covenant of works says, "Whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all"

¹³ Brooke Foss Wescott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 223.

(v. 10). In verse 11, James illustrates this works principle by pointing out that all of the commandments were given by the same Law-giver: "He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not commit murder.'" You can't pick and choose. Rejection of one commandment is rejection of all the commandments, since it is rejection of the Law-giver himself. Therefore, James points out, "If you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become *a transgressor of the Law*." The phrase in Greek is *parabates nomou*, the same phrase that Paul uses twice in Romans 2:25, 27 in the context of his argument that, according to the standard of the covenant of works, all men are convicted and found to be guilty in the sight of God.

In verses 12 and 13, after having shown the inexorable demands of the Law in verses 9-11, James returns to the law of Christ, which he now refers to as "the law of liberty": "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; [but] mercy triumphs over judgment." As long as you are showing partiality, you are speaking and acting in such a way that you are liable to be judged by the Law. Therefore, he says, "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty," that is, live by the same law of liberty by which you hope to be judged. Since you are one who is hoping to receive mercy and not judgment at the day of reckoning, live in accordance with the royal law of love, not in accordance with the Law that judges without mercy.

This proof text does not teach that the Decalogue is the standard of holy living for the New Testament church. As Douglas Moo states: "For James ... the Mosaic Law is applicable to Christians only as part of the larger phenomenon of 'the law of Christ,' 'the royal law.'"¹⁴

1 John 3:4

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

The word translated "lawlessness" is *anomia* in Greek. According to BDAG it can have two meanings: (1) the "state or condition of being disposed to what is lawless, lawlessness" or (2) "the product of a lawless disposition, a lawless deed." In other words, *anomia* can refer to a general state or condition of lawlessness, or it can refer to a specific lawless deed. I assume that the presbytery holds that the second usage is in view here and interprets John as giving a definition of sin: sin is a lawless deed, a violation of the Mosaic Law.

First, it is unlikely that John would define sin as the transgression of the Mosaic Law. John repeatedly defines the obedience required of the church as the keeping of the commandments of Jesus, with special emphasis on "the new commandment" of Christ-like love (1 John 2:7-11; 3:1-23; 4:7—5:3). Raymond Brown asks, "Can we seriously suppose that the author hoped to have a stress on the Law accepted as true Johannine tradition?"¹⁵ Nowhere in the Johannine writings does John place the observance of the Law upon the church. John plainly preaches that "the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Second, Paul uses the term *anomia* to describe the iniquity of the Gentile Christians at Rome before they came to Christ. "Just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to *lawlessness*, resulting in further *lawlessness* ..." (Rom. 6:19). Yet earlier in Romans, Paul stated that the Gentiles "sinned without the Law" (Rom. 2:12) and that they "do not have the Law" (Rom. 2:14). Therefore the use of *anomia* to describe the iniquity of the Gentiles suggests that the "lawlessness" inherent in *anomia* is not necessarily defined as transgression of the Mosaic Law.

¹⁴ Moo, p. 375.

¹⁵ Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1982), p. 399.

When John says, "Sin is lawlessness," he is probably using the term *anomia* as descriptive of the state or condition of being disposed to what is lawless, of living as if one had no obligation to any moral standards (the first meaning cited in BDAG).

Conclusion

In the proof texts cited in the charge, there are many references to "the Law," and in some cases specific commandments from the Decalogue are cited. But none of these texts state that the Decalogue per se is binding on New Testament believers as the standard of holy living. If a specific Mosaic commandment is cited as binding, it is binding only as a command that has been taken up within the law of Christ.

C. THE SECONDARY STANDARDS

Tension in the Standards

Although WCF XIX:2 can be cited in support of the thesis that the Decalogue equals the moral law and as such is the standard of holy living for the New Testament believer, the Standards also contain teaching that stands in tension with this. The Larger and Shorter Catechisms, for example, provide a more nuanced statement of the relationship between the moral law and the Decalogue: "the moral law is *summarily comprehended* in the ten commandments" (WSC # 41; WLC # 98). There is a high concentration of moral will in the Decalogue. In my view, it's somewhere in the neighborhood of 90% moral. But there are also elements in the Decalogue that are unique to the old covenantal circumstances of Israel (e.g., the preamble, as well as the particular form of the fourth and fifth commandments). This is one reason why I have fewer scruples with the Larger Catechism than I do with chapter XIX.

Not only does the Larger Catechism stand in tension with chapter XIX, but the Confession's own treatment of the Sabbath later in chapter XXI stands in tension with XIX:2. Consider the following argument.

- 1) The Standards define the Decalogue as the ten commandments, "which were delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai ... and are recorded in the 20th chapter of Exodus" (WLC # 98).
- 2) The fourth commandment of the Decalogue, *as delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai and as recorded in the 20th chapter of Exodus*, requires that the seventh day be kept holy as the day of Sabbath rest.
- 3) If the Standards taught that the Decalogue, *as delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai and recorded in the 20th chapter of Exodus*, is binding as the standard of holy living for Christians in the new covenant, then they would also teach that the Sabbath must be observed by Christians on the *last* day of the week.
- 4) But the Standards do not so teach. On the contrary, the Standards teach that the sabbath, "from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was *changed* into the first day of the week" (WCF XXI:7).
- 5) Therefore, the Standards do not teach that the Decalogue, *as delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai and recorded in the 20th chapter of Exodus*, continues to have binding authority over the Christian.

Notice the tension in the Confession. WCF XIX:2 teaches that the Decalogue is "a perfect rule of righteousness," an unchanging standard. But XXI:7 teaches that the fourth commandment has been "changed" in light of the epochal, redemptive-historical, covenantal change effected by the cross and the resurrection. If the Decalogue has been changed, logically it cannot be an unchanging perfect rule of righteousness.

What chapter XIX intends to affirm is that *the moral law* (not the Decalogue per se) continues to have binding authority over the new covenant believer. *If you strip away the details and the imperfect formulations of chapter XIX, what the Confession is really getting at – the primary burden and thrust of that chapter taken as a whole – is to affirm the doctrine that there is an unchanging moral standard governing human behavior that is binding on all men, both believers and unbelievers. And that is a doctrinal affirmation that I am in wholehearted agreement with.* As I've said, my preferred label is "the moral will of God," just to make it clear that we're not equating it with the Decalogue. When it comes to the substantive issue itself, I agree with the doctrine of the moral law as an eternal standard of righteousness, rooted in God's unchanging nature, and binding on all men. The Standards refer to that doctrine using the linguistic label "the moral law." I refer to that very same doctrine using the linguistic label, "the moral will of God."

Given the tensions within the Standards on this difficult issue, and given my agreement with the substantive theological affirmation of the Standards concerning the moral law, how can it be a chargeable offense to deny that the moral law and the Decalogue are identical?

The Portions of the Standards Cited in the Charge

At this point I am going to go through all of the portions of the Standards cited in support of the charge. Although there are places where I would prefer slightly different language, I am in agreement with the theological affirmations of the Standards cited here.

WCF XIX:1. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience...

I agree wholeheartedly with this statement. The doctrine of the pre-fall covenant of works with Adam is one of the central tenets of Reformed covenant theology. It holds a major place in my thinking, following as I do the teaching of Professor Meredith G. Kline who has spent a great deal of his academic career defending the doctrine of the covenant of works against those whose denial of the doctrine has led to distorted understandings of the work of Christ as the second Adam. In 2000 I contributed an article to a festschrift for Meredith Kline. In that article I defended the Westminster Confession's dual covenant theology (covenant of works, covenant of grace) against its modern day critics. In the context of that defense, I wrote the following statements, with which I still agree:

Kline's insight is not altogether new ... The Confession speaks of the eternal moral law, which reflects "the holy nature and will of God," as a covenant of works (WCF XIX.1-3; WLC # 93, 95). Furthermore, the Confession, when dealing with the *imago Dei*, states that Adam and Eve had "the law of God written in their hearts" (WCF IV.2), thus strongly suggesting that man was constituted in a covenantal relationship with God as he was created.¹⁶

¹⁶ Lee Irons, "Redefining Merit," in *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, eds. Howard Griffith and John R. Muether (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), p. 266.

In a sermon¹⁷ on Shorter Catechism question # 40 (What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience? A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law), I said:

This idea of the holistic revelation of God's will is fundamentally a covenantal revelation. The *covenant* that God revealed to Adam in the garden, with its stipulations and commands, was that *moral law* that God revealed to Adam in the garden. Man, since the fall, continues to be under a covenant of works unless by grace the elect are called out of that covenant into the covenant of grace in the last Adam. And therefore all mankind is obligated by the commandments that God revealed to Adam in the garden. In Romans 2:14-15, Paul says that although the Gentiles do not have the written law, they have "the work of the law" written upon their heart. That phrase "the work of the law" means the function of the law, the things the law itself requires even if they don't have the specific words and the revelation of the explicit commands. They still have the work of the law written upon their heart by means of conscience. Man's conscience is the voice of God within. It is an aspect of general revelation. God has revealed his will not only in his Word, but he has also revealed his will through general revelation, that is, through the revelation that God has given us in terms of our own conscience.

WCF XIX:2. This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments...

See "F. Appendix" below, "Married to Another, Part III: The Function of the Law in Redemptive History" (pp. 54-56), in which I explain my concerns with WCF XIX:2.

WCF XIX:3. ...this law, commonly called moral...

The phrase, "commonly called moral" is significant. It shows that the divines recognized that the ten commandments are often referred to as "the moral law," but that that terminology is not inspired and is only a convention commonly employed by orthodox theologians. It would be strange if the presbytery determined that this language is a test of orthodoxy.

WCF XIX:5. The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

This paragraph is arguably the most important theological affirmation in chapter XIX, and it is one with which I am in complete agreement. The moral will of God forever binds all – both believers and unbelievers – to the obedience thereof, and it does so not only in regard to the substantial obedience it requires ("the matter") but also with respect to the authority of God the Creator, upon whose nature that moral will is founded. Christ in the gospel does not dissolve man's obligation to the moral will of God in the slightest, but rather strengthens that obligation. Since the demands of the moral will come to all believers from the hands of their Redeemer, those demands are now placed on the highest conceivable level of ethical obligation and moral authority.

WCF XIX:6. Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned ...

The opening sentence is one that I find to be quite congenial: "True believers be not under the law as a covenant of works." One should not think that the divines are merely saying, "True believers be not under the law *when misconstrued as* a covenant of works." For the divines recognized that the moral

¹⁷ Lee Irons, "The Duty God Requires," Shorter Catechism # 39-40, preached April 25, 1999. From January of 1998 to February of 2000 (a little over two years), I preached through the entire Shorter Catechism.

law was a covenant of works in its original form as given to Adam (see XIX:1 above). As I will argue below, there is evidence that many of the divines also recognized that the Mosaic Law was a subservient covenant of works that republished the works principle on the typological level of Israel's retention of the land. Thus, I agree with this statement, that true believers are not under the moral will of God as given in either its Adamic or Mosaic form, since both were covenants of works.

... yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly ...

I agree that the new covenant enshrinement of the moral law, viz. the law of Christ (the only form of the moral law that is not a covenant of works) is of great use to believers, in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly.

... It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and, not under grace.

This is a difficult section, since it seems capable of being interpreted in various ways. On the face of it, this section seems to imply that Christ has not borne the entire curse of the Law in our place (as if there were a remainder for us to bear in the form of "afflictions in this life") and that Christ has not merited all the blessings of the Law by keeping it in our place (as if some blessings must be obtained by our own obedience). This interpretation is so plainly contradicted by the teaching of the New Testament that I have a hard time believing this is what the divines meant. Paul teaches that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and every blessing is freely bestowed *in the Beloved* (Eph. 1:3, 6).

Another possible interpretation of this section is to take the reference to the threatenings and promises of the law, as a reference to the temporal and earthly curses and blessings of the Mosaic Law, as if hardship, distress, famine, nakedness, peril and sword (Deut. 28:15-44) will come upon us if we are disobedient, while peace and prosperity (Deut. 28:1-14) will come upon us if we are obedient. But this interpretation is also contradicted by the teaching of the New Testament. Paul asks, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:35-37). In the new covenant age, the sufferings of believers have been transformed from signs of divine judgment into evidences of our union with Christ, for we must suffer with him in order to glorified with him (Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:7-18; Col. 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13).

How then should we interpret the last half of WCF XIX:6? I see two separate things being affirmed here. First, the Confession wants us to see that even though New Testament believers are free from the Law as a covenant of works, yet the covenant of works still retains a valuable teaching function. When we read the threatenings for disobedience and the promises for obedience given in Genesis 2 or Leviticus 26 or Deuteronomy 28, there are many valuable spiritual lessons for us. The threatenings of the covenant of works remind us what our sins deserve, and the promises of the covenant of works show us what obedience receives God's approbation. This teaching function of the Mosaic covenantal sanctions is ultimately Christological, for the curses of the Law show us what Christ had to bear in our place and the blessings show us what Christ has merited in our place. This interpretation of WCF XIX:6 is supported by WLC # 95 ("the moral law is of use to all men ... to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and of the perfection of his obedience")

and WLC # 97 ("it is of special use, to show them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good").¹⁸

Second, the Confession also reminds us that in the new covenant believers can expect to enjoy God's Fatherly discipline. I agree with this important teaching, but I scruple over the way in which the divines seem to find this teaching in the threatenings of the Law. It is true that the divines do not equate such discipline with the threatenings of the Law, since they refer to the "afflictions, in this life, [that] they may expect for [their sins], although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law." However, I do not think that the Lord's discipline is in any way related to the Mosaic covenant. The author of Hebrews says it is part of God's gracious discipline toward *sons*, given to correct our faults and to promote our sanctification (Heb. 12:5-11). The curse of the old covenant did not correct in order to promote sanctification. Instead the covenant breaker died without mercy (Heb. 10:28; Deut. 13:6-11). Paul says that all who are under the Law are under a curse, that the Law is not based on faith (Gal. 3:10-12), and that it brings about wrath (Rom. 4:15). God's Fatherly discipline, by contrast, is pure blessing. Although it may not seem joyful at the time, he disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness (Heb. 12:10). In the same manner, I accept the Confession's teaching that believers can expect blessings upon the performance of obedience – blessings such as those enumerated in WLC # 83: enjoyment of the sense of God's love, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The Confession wisely adds, "although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works." But, again, I do not regard such blessings as analogous to the Mosaic blessings conditioned upon Israel's obedience.

To summarize: I agree with the theological affirmations that the divines are trying to make in WCF XIX:6, but I am not comfortable with the way they attempt to ground those affirmations exegetically in the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Law. The temporal blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 have to do with the works principle that governed Israel's probation in the land, and are therefore theologically distinct from the spiritual blessings (including Fatherly discipline) that come to those who are *beyond probation* by virtue of the perfect Law-keeping of Christ.

WCF XIX:7. Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.

I agree. The moral will of God is not contrary to the grace of the gospel. The Spirit of Christ subdues and enables our wills to do, freely and cheerfully, that which the will of God revealed in the New Testament, requires us to do.

WCF XX:1. The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in...their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers under the law. But, under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected...

I am in agreement with this statement. The liberty that is common to both old covenant and new covenant believers includes deliverance from the curse of the Adamic covenant of works, and being given a childlike love in yielding obedience to the moral will of God. The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers "under the new testament" is "further enlarged" than the liberty that the old covenant saints enjoyed. This further enlargement includes the freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law. I would add

¹⁸ Cp. WCF VIII:4 (Christ the Mediator "was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it"); WCF XI:3 ("Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf"); and WLC # 39 ("It was requisite that the Mediator should be man, that he might ... perform obedience to the law").

that it also includes freedom from the subservient covenant of works set before the Israelites in the temporal blessings and curses of the Mosaic Law.

WSC 14: Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

WLC 24: Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature.

The Shorter Catechism's definition of sin is ambiguous. Does "the law of God" refer to the Mosaic Law or to the moral law? If it refers to the Mosaic Law, what do we do with Paul's teaching in Romans 5:13 that sin was in the world prior to the giving of the Law? Or with Paul's teaching in Romans 2:12 that the Gentiles "sinned apart from the Law"? Romans 2:12 and 5:13 make it evident that sin cannot be defined in every case as any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the Mosaic Law. Therefore, sin must be the violation of the covenant that one is under. Paul's doctrine of the covenant of works established with Adam before the fall is of great use here. That covenant is a *nomos*-like arrangement and it is still in effect in terms of its ability to define and condemn sin. In view of these considerations, it might be more proper to say that "sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the covenant of works (whether in its Adamic or Mosaic form)." The Larger Catechism comes closer to this definition when it defines sin as "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, *any* law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature." I would have said, "... any law of God, given *as a covenant of works* to the reasonable creature."

WSC 39-81 (esp. 40-42) and WLC 91-148 (esp. 91-98) must be understood to teach that the moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, still has commanding authority over the believer.

The implication of the above is that I deny "that the moral law ... still has commanding authority over the believer." But this is not the case. A month after preaching "Is the Law Abolished?" I preached a sermon in which I made some follow-up statements by way of clarification. This sermon is not included in the documents of charge # 2 but it is relevant at this point:

Paul has already stated in Ephesians 2:15 that Christ abolished in his flesh the Law with its commandments and regulations. Now of course we have to understand that by "the Law" there Paul is referring to the Mosaic Law, the Mosaic covenant, with its regulations and commandments. That Mosaic covenant has been rendered inoperative for the new covenant people of God. And therefore Paul cannot very well now say, "Let's go back to that covenant. Let's go back to that code to find out how we may live." Jesus has rendered inoperative the Law in his flesh. Now this does not mean that the requirements of the moral law have been abolished, for the moral law itself is holy and just and good. The moral law simply requires that we love God with our whole heart and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. That moral law was established at creation by virtue of the fact that man was made in the image of God. The very definition of man's identity is that he is made in God's image, and therefore he must reflect that image, and he reflects that image by loving God. And if he is to love God he must also love his neighbor who is made in that same image. The requirements of the moral law are still in effect. They cannot be changed any more than God's nature can be changed.¹⁹

I also agree with the statement that the moral law is summarized in the ten commandments (as taught in WSC # 41 and WLC # 98). I stated this in my sermon series on the ten commandments:

Question # 41 of the Shorter Catechism is fairly simple. It asks the question, Where is the moral law found in a summary form? And the answer, It is found in a summary form in the ten commandments – although there are other summaries as well in Scripture. For example, there is the summary that was given by Jesus himself. In fact, the Catechism deals with that in question #

¹⁹ Lee Irons, "Walk Worthy of the Calling," a sermon on Ephesians 4:1, preached March 4, 2001.

42, when it refers to the teaching of Christ that the two greatest commandments are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. So there are various summaries of the moral law to be found in Scripture. The ten commandments, however, is the summary that we are going to be looking at as we go through the Shorter Catechism.²⁰

In "Three Covenantal Enshrinements of the Moral Will of God" I also affirmed my agreement with the Catechisms' understanding of Decalogue as a summary of the moral law when I wrote: "Not everything in the Decalogue is moral, but in it the moral will of God is 'summarily comprehended,' yet in a form that is appropriate to Israel's theocratic status on probation in the land of Canaan."

The charge also cites the detailed exposition of the ten commandments given in both the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as evidence that my view of the Law is contrary to the Confession. But it is important to observe that the divines do not exegete the ten commandments merely in their Mosaic form. As the proof texts for their exposition of the ten commandments show, the divines properly brought to bear the New Testament teaching and let its teaching inform the application of each commandment in the new covenant. Again, the fourth commandment is the outstanding proof of this. If the divines believed that the Decalogue per se has commanding authority over the believer, they would have taught that Christians have an obligation to observe the Sabbath on the seventh day. In reality the divines are expounding the law of Christ, using the ten commandments as a catechetical device for organizing the New Testament's ethical teaching under convenient headings. With this understanding of what they were doing, in 1999 I preached for 21 weeks on the Shorter Catechism's exposition of the ten commandments (# 39-81). In a sermon introducing the series, I said:

The ten commandments continue to be authoritatively binding on the new covenant church, but only insofar as they have been fulfilled in Christ ... So how does this all work out in practice in terms of each of the ten commandments? Well, that's what we're going to deal with next, when we go through each of the ten commandments in the Shorter Catechism over the next few months. I'm going to attempt to show you how each commandment has to be filtered through the prism of Christological fulfillment, and only then can we apply it to ourselves today. This is the Law of Christ.²¹

The fact that the charge cites the Catechisms' exposition of the ten commandments (WSC # 39-81; WLC # 91-148) suggests that my teaching on the Law is out of accord with these important portions of our secondary standards. But this is belied by the fact that I have preached through the Shorter Catechism's exposition of the ten commandments to the spiritual edification of the congregation at Redeemer Chapel.

WLC 93: The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding everyone to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man: promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.

I am in wholehearted agreement with this precise formulation. It is identical to what I refer to as "the first covenantal enshrinement of the moral will of God" (i.e., the covenant of works with Adam). If the moral law were defined this way in the Confession, I would have fewer scruples with WCF XIX. Notice that the Confession begins with a similar definition in WCF XIX:1, but then in paragraph two the moral law is reissued at Sinai merely as "a perfect rule of righteousness," rather than as a covenant of works as stated here in WLC # 93. There is a palpable tension between WCF XIX:2 (the moral law defined as an a-covenantal "perfect rule of righteousness") and WLC # 93 (the moral law defined as a covenant of works).

²⁰ Lee Irons, "YAHWEH's Ten Words," Shorter Catechism # 41, preached May 2, 1999.

²¹ Lee Irons, "The Law: A Redemptive Historical Approach, Part II," Introduction to Shorter Catechism #38-81, preached April 18, 1999.

WLC 95: The moral law is of use to all men, to inform them of the holy nature and will of God, and of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly; to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives; to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and of the perfection of his obedience.

I am in total agreement with this statement. The second covenantal enshrinement of the moral will of God (i.e., the covenant of works with Israel) is of use to inform the people of God (of all ages) of the holy nature and will of God. It also convinces us of our disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of our nature, hearts, and lives. It humbles us with the sense of our sin and misery, and thereby helps us to a clearer sight of the need that we have of Christ and of the perfection of his obedience. The first covenantal enshrinement of the moral will of God also has these uses in a secondary manner. But the second covenantal enshrinement was expressly given to accomplish these purposes, since it was given after the fall to shut up Israel under sin and to be a disciplinarian (*paidagogos*) until the Seed would come (Gal. 3:19-25).

WLC 97: Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned; yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to show them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good; and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience.

This is a glorious Christ-centered formulation, and is to my mind the best statement in the Standards regarding the third use of the law (i.e., the use of the law as a standard for holy living). Having established the truth that we are "delivered from the law as a covenant of works," the divines go on to state that we are now "bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in [our] stead." *Note: we are "bound to Christ," not to the Mosaic Law.* Our continuing obligation to obedience to the moral will of God is now mediated to us through Christ. This Christocentric qualification is placed before the concluding statement: "and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience." By means of the logical placement of "bound to Christ" prior to this statement concerning the moral law "as the rule of their obedience," the Larger Catechism teaches the view I hold that new covenant believers are bound to "the law of Christ." *This is the heart of my whole teaching on the Law.*

WLC 99: For the right understanding of the ten commandments, these rules are to be observed:

1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.

The first rule for understanding the ten commandments may not be technically true of the Mosaic Law or the Decalogue, but it is certainly true of the moral will of God by which Adam was bound under the pre-fall covenant of works. The post-fall republication of the covenant of works with Israel is not an actual covenant of works (e.g., it did not offer *eternal* life upon condition of obedience, but long life in the land), and therefore some of these statements are not entirely applicable ("utmost perfection of every duty ... least degree of every sin").

2. That it is spiritual, and so reaches the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.

3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments.

4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.

5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; What he commands, is always our duty; and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.

6. That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto.

I agree with rules two through six in full. I would like to quote from a sermon in which I made similar points.²²

These ten commandments are not to be understood merely in their external demand. There are some who say that when you read these ten commandments, you should just read them literally and take the exact language that it says there, and that's all that it's talking about. So when it says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," nothing deeper is implied behind that commandment, nothing that gets to the heart, nothing that gets to the motives and the heart aspects of chastity and purity and so on. That's not the case. The teaching of Christ, that he who looks at woman [to lust after her] has committed adultery in his heart already, that teaching is already implied here within the seventh commandment. And yet, although it's implied, it's only found in a shadowy form, and it's not until we come to Christ the new Moses of the new covenant community who is revealing his will from, not Mount Sinai, but from the mountain upon which he gathered his disciples together – it is only there that we find the complete and final exposition of the will of God ...

The second rule for interpreting the commandments is that the negative includes the positive, and the positive includes the negative. For example, if it says that you shall not murder (a negative statement), then it also implies that we have an obligation to promote the well-being and the life of others.

The third principle is the principle of synecdoche [cp. rule six of WLC # 99]. Synecdoche is a fancy term for the idea that when you have a reference to something specific, it also includes other examples within that category ... When the ten commandments say, for example, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor, a literalist would look at that and say, "Well, it's talking about a judicial setting when you're under oath and you're bearing witness in some kind of a court room case, and so therefore there's nothing wrong with lying outside of court. It's only in court that it matters." That's not understanding this principle of synecdoche. Each of these commandments takes only one example of a broader category, and so each commandment has other implications as well that have to be brought out.

The fourth rule for interpreting the ten commandments is we must understand the ten commandments in light of the New Testament.

7. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavor that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.

8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them; and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them.

I agree with rules 7 and 8 as long as "according to the duty of our places" is interpreted in a manner consistent with the 1788 American Revision of the Westminster Standards with respect to the doctrine of the civil magistrate.

²² Lee Irons, "YAHWEH's Ten Words," Shorter Catechism # 41, preached May 2, 1999.

D. A VIOLATION OF THE SYSTEM OF DOCTRINE?

This is an offense serious enough to warrant a trial in that it not only disturbs the peace, purity and unity of the church, but violates the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures as set forth in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms (BD, III.7.b. para.2; cf. XXIII.8(2) and (6), second and sixth ordination vows).

Do my views "constitute a violation of the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures as that system of doctrine is set forth in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms"? In this section I will set forth compelling evidence that my view of the Law was held by many of the Westminster divines and was regarded as an orthodox view acceptable within the framework of the Standards.

Warfield said that the architectonic principle of the Westminster Confession is its federal or covenant theology.²³ By federal or covenant theology he meant the dual covenant theology of the Standards, in which the two key covenants are the pre-fall covenant of works (*foedus operum*) and the post-fall covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*). This scheme is taught explicitly in chapter VII of the Confession, but it is found implicitly throughout the Confession and Catechisms. In particular, this two-covenant system forms an important background to the Confession's treatment of the Mosaic Law. This can be seen, for example, by comparing chapter VII, "Of God's Covenant with Man," with chapter XIX, "Of the Law of God." Both chapters begin with the *foedus operum* made with Adam before the fall:

WCF VII:2 The first covenant made with man was a *covenant of works*, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

WCF XIX:1 God gave to Adam a law, as a *covenant of works*, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

Having established the primeval covenant relationship between God and Adam, both chapters immediately make reference to the fall, and the way in which the fall necessitates significant changes. After the fall, the Lord was pleased to make a second covenant commonly called the covenant of grace (WCF VII:3), and the law continues as a perfect rule of righteousness, although not as a covenant of works (WCF XIX:2, 6). Clearly, the divines' dual covenant theology played a significant role in shaping their doctrine of the law of God.

What is usually not recognized, however, is that covenant theology was still in a state of development at the time that the Westminster Confession and Catechisms were written (1646-48). At this stage in the development of covenant theology there was widespread agreement concerning these two covenants, of works and of grace, but there was less agreement and clarity concerning the various stages and administrations of the covenant of grace. In other words, it was not clear how the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants were to be related to the overarching two-covenant scheme. The two-covenant scheme is a theological system built up from the biblical teaching concerning the two Adams (Romans 5:12-21). The successive biblical covenants, on the other hand, can be immediately read off the pages of Scripture. How do these covenants fit into the theological rubric of federal theology?

Of these biblical covenants, *the Mosaic covenant* occasioned the most debate. As a result of intramural discussion among Reformed theologians all committed to the same federal system, numerous interpretations arose in the early seventeenth century. What were the different views of the Mosaic covenant among Reformed theologians at this time?

²³ B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work*, vol. VI in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), p. 56.

Samuel Bolton on Reformed Views of the Mosaic Law

To answer this question, we must examine the contemporary testimony of one Westminster divine, Samuel Bolton (1606-54).²⁴ In 1645, Bolton published a book titled *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, right at the time that the Assembly was meeting. It was printed with the imprimatur of John Downname, the Puritan "licenser of the press," appointed by Parliament. Bolton wrote this volume in light of the antinomian controversy of the time. In the dedication he wrote:

It contains chiefly some friendly discussion of some opinions which have been maintained against the law of God, and in it I have endeavoured to uphold the law so as to show that it does not take from the liberties of grace, and to establish grace so that the law is not made void, and so that believers are not set free from any duty they owe to God or man.²⁵

This volume is extremely helpful because in it Bolton maps out the views commonly held by orthodox theologians concerning the Mosaic covenant. Bolton states that there were four views of the Mosaic covenant common in his day. Advocates of all four views held to the basic dual federal theology of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Where the four positions differed was in their analysis of the nature of the Mosaic covenant in terms of the two categories of covenants (of works and of grace). Should the Mosaic covenant be classified as a covenant of works, or as a covenant of grace?

The *first* view Bolton describes is the view that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works. Bolton's arguments against this view indicate that it was conceived as an actual covenant of works by which the Jews were offered life and salvation on the basis of works. Bolton critiques this view ably:

If the law were a covenant of works, then the Jews were under a different covenant from us, and so none were saved ... The law was utterly unserviceable and unsuitable to this end, to give life and salvation ... It could never suit with God's heart to sinners to give a covenant of works after the fall; because man could do nothing; he was dead and powerless ... Such a covenant God could not make with man after man's fall, for man could not meet the least of its terms or perform the meanest of its conditions (pp. 92-93).²⁶

It is hard to believe that any divines actually held this view.²⁷ It may have been listed merely for the sake of logical completeness.

The *second* view held by divines in Bolton's day was that the Mosaic covenant was a *tertium quid*, a mixed or middle covenant consisting of both works and grace. Bolton again critiques this view:

If by a third covenant is meant a middle covenant, consisting partly of works, and partly of grace, under which the Jews were placed, and by which they were saved, I utterly deny any such covenant. For there was no such covenant ever made with fallen man, neither can there be any

²⁴ Bolton was nominated to the Westminster Assembly, but he did not attend until later. Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), p. 546.

²⁵ From the "Publisher's Introduction." *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (Edinburgh: the Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), pp. 9-10.

²⁶ Quotes and page numbers taken from the Banner of Truth "Puritan Paperbacks" edition (1994). The section in which Bolton deals with the various views of the Mosaic covenant is found on pp. 88-101.

²⁷ This view seems quite similar to that of dispensationalist theologian Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952). "When the Law was proposed, the children of Israel deliberately forsook their position under the grace of God ... and placed themselves under the Law ... In place of the eagles' wings by which they were carried unto God, they confidently chose a covenant of works when they said, 'All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.' They were called upon to face a concrete choice between the mercy of God which had followed them, and a new and hopeless covenant of works. They fell from grace." Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, pp. 162-63.

middle course between works and grace. The apostle says plainly, "If of works, then is it no more grace" (Rom. 11:6). If man had been required to do anything to help in the procuring of life, though never so small, and if the Gospel had provided all the rest, yet it would still have been a covenant of works, and utterly inconsistent with the covenant of grace. For, as Augustine says, "Grace can no way be called grace, if not every way grace" (pp. 93-94).

After critiquing and dismissing the first two views, Bolton goes on to expound the two remaining views as both being within the bounds of orthodoxy.

The *third* view is that the Mosaic covenant was neither a covenant of works nor a covenant of grace, but a temporary covenant made with the Jews by way of subserviency to the covenant of grace in Christ, a covenant of preparation, to make way for the advancement of the covenant of grace.

Bolton is referring here to a Reformed tradition on the Mosaic covenant that many may be unfamiliar with. The primary text in which this tradition is expounded is Edward Fisher's *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645). This volume was later republished with extensive explanatory notes by Thomas Boston in 1718, thus igniting the Marrow controversy in the Church of Scotland.²⁸ Bolton describes the Marrow view of the Mosaic covenant as follows:

If it be neither a covenant of works, nor a covenant of grace, then must it of necessity be a third kind of covenant: and it must needs be such a covenant as does not stand in opposition to grace, nor is inconsistent with the covenant of grace, for if this be not so, then God will have contradicted Himself, overthrown His own purpose, and repented of His own promise which He had given before. Hence it is called a subservient covenant. It was given by way of subserviency to the Gospel and a fuller revelation of the covenant of grace; it was temporary, and had respect to Canaan and God's blessing there, if and as Israel obeyed. It had no relation to heaven, for that was promised by another covenant which God made before He entered upon the subservient covenant. This is the opinion which I myself desire modestly to propound, for I have not been convinced that it is injurious to holiness or disagreeable to the mind of God in Scripture (p. 99).

Bolton references Deuteronomy 28 – the blessings on Mount Gerizim and the curses on Mount Ebal. "Blessings in the possession of Canaan were promised to obedience, and curses and miseries to those who broke the covenant" (p. 95). Why is it called a subservient covenant? Because it was added "to this end, that God might thus encourage their hearts in the expectation of the Messiah to come" (p. 95). Thus, "though it stood upon opposite terms to the covenant of grace, [it] served the purposes of the covenant of grace subserviently" (p. 112). Even though it is not an actual covenant of works, the subservient Mosaic covenant shares certain important features in common with the pre-fall covenant of works: both covenants have the condition annexed, "Do this and live," and in both the promise is fundamentally the same – life (eternal life in Paradise for Adam, and long life in Canaan for Israel). This is fairly close to Professor Meredith G. Kline's interpretation of the Mosaic covenant. If there is any difference, it would be that Kline more clearly articulates the distinction between the works principle as it operated at the typological layer, and the grace principle as it operated within the underlying substratum of the Abrahamic covenant.²⁹

²⁸ David Lachman states that *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* "was a work of popular divinity which largely reflected the orthodox Reformed thought of its time." The defenders of this volume (called "the Marrow men") were "more in harmony with the Reformed orthodoxy of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and, on balance, with the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms." The opponents of the *Marrow*, by contrast, "reflected the legalizing tendencies of late seventeenth-century developments in Reformed theology, rather than Reformed thought as a whole." "The Marrow Controversy," in *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (IVP, 1993), p. 547.

²⁹ "At the same time, Paul affirmed that the Mosaic covenant did not annul the promise arrangement given earlier to Abraham (Gal 3:17). The explanation for this is that the old covenant order was composed of two strata and the works principle enunciated in Leviticus 18:5, and elsewhere in the law, applied only to one of these, a secondary stratum. There was a foundational stratum having to do with the personal attainment of the eternal kingdom of salvation and this underlying stratum, continuous with all preceding and succeeding administrations of the Lord's

I embrace the subservient covenant view as clarified by Kline. This understanding of the Mosaic covenant plays a critical role in my view of the Decalogue. For if the Mosaic covenant involves a works principle with regard to Israel's probation in the land, and if the Decalogue is merely a compendium of the Mosaic covenant in summary form, then the Decalogue *cannot* be the believer's rule of life in the new covenant. To place ourselves under the Decalogue would be to place ourselves under a covenant of works, a ministry of condemnation, curse, and death. (See the four points on page 2 above).

Finally, Bolton describes a *fourth* view, held by "the majority of our holy and most learned divines," that although the Mosaic covenant is the same in substance as the covenant under which we stand in the gospel, yet it was "a covenant of grace more legally dispensed."

It differed not in substance from the covenant of grace, but in degree, say some divines, in the economy and external administration of it, say others ... The [old] covenant was more obscurely administered, shadowed, darkened with shadows; the [new covenant] was administered more perspicuously and clearly. The one was more onerous and burdensome, the other more easy and delightful. The one through the legal means of its administration gendered to bondage, the other to son-like freedom ... Hence, as Alsted tells us, the new and old covenants, the covenants of law and Gospel, are both of them really covenants of grace, only differing in their administrations ... virtually the same covenant (pp. 99-100).

This view employed the scholastic distinction between *form* and *substance*. One element of our freedom as new covenant believers, is that we are delivered from this rigorous outward administration (or form) that seems to bring condemnation and curse upon us. Bolton goes on to describe this fourth view in a way that comes quite close to view three in terms of its recognition of a works-aspect in the Mosaic economy. This is Bolton's description of the fourth view:

Though the law was given with merciful purposes ... yet it seems to reach man as though it were the repetition of another covenant of works under which man stands. Or rather, the covenant of grace under the Old Testament seems to be so presented as if it were still a covenant of works to man (p. 101).

Now you might expect, from the order of his presentation, that Bolton would classify himself as a proponent of the fourth view. But he actually found the third view to be most agreeable "to the mind of God in Scripture." And he gives a rather powerful argument for preferring it over the fourth view. Although he has argued strongly that the Mosaic Law cannot be an actual covenant of works by which the Israelites would be eternally justified or eternally condemned ...

it could not be a covenant of grace either. For our divines in general reckon this to be one part of our freedom in Christ, that we are freed from the law as a covenant, and if the law were a covenant of grace, only more legally dispensed and administered after a more legal manner, it might seem better to say that we are freed from this aspect of it rather than to say we are freed from it as a covenant. *Therefore, if they say we are freed from it as a covenant, it cannot possibly be held to be the covenant of grace* (pp. 98-99).

Covenant of Grace with the church, was informed by the principle of grace ... Because the Abrahamic covenant of promise found continuity in the Mosaic order at this underlying level, it was not abrogated by the latter. The works principle in the Mosaic order was confined to the typological sphere of the provisional earthly kingdom which was superimposed as a secondary overlay on the foundational stratum." Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, p. 321.

Since Bolton was nominated to the Assembly and his treatise was approved by Parliament, it is safe to say that he was regarded by his contemporaries as an orthodox Reformed theologian. Furthermore, he gives us his own testimony that although the fourth view was held by the majority, yet both the third and fourth view were considered orthodox. Given this testimony, published right at the time of the Assembly, it would appear that the divines refrained from deciding the question and determined to allow confessional "elbow room" for both.

In the current American theological scene, where we have to deal with dispensationalism's radical separation of Israel and the church, those of us who speak of the discontinuities between the old and new covenants in terms of a law-gospel contrast are sometimes accused of being crypto-dispensationalists, and thus our Reformed orthodoxy is held in question. But according to Bolton's testimony, those seventeenth century divines like himself who taught that the Mosaic covenant was a subservient, typological covenant of works were accepted as orthodox men. And even those who held the fourth view taught that the Mosaic covenant was an administration of the covenant of grace "presented as if it were still a covenant of works." Remember, Bolton says this was the majority view! If these men made statements like that today, I suspect that they too would be accused of having dispensational leanings.

But such a charge would be invalid because *all* orthodox Reformed theologians, including proponents of the subservient covenant view, rejected the view that the Mosaic covenant was an actual covenant of works. They rejected this view because, like Lewis Sperry Chafer's dispensational view of the Mosaic covenant, it subverts the soteriological unity of the covenant of grace in all epochs after the fall.

The Law "As a Covenant of Works"

This divided state of theological opinion was not resolved at the Westminster Assembly. Instead, the Confession is worded in such a way as to accommodate both the third and the fourth view. Nevertheless, there was general agreement that the Law-Gospel contrast is covenantal in nature. Bolton states this explicitly: "Our divines in general reckon this to be one part of our freedom in Christ, that we are freed from *the law as a covenant*" (p. 98). Notice that this phrase "the law as a covenant" is precisely what we find in the Westminster Standards. Bolton's commentary therefore helps us to resolve a very important question with regard to the proper interpretation of the Standards when they assert that the regenerate have been delivered from the law as a covenant of works.

The following are the key selections from the Confession and Larger Catechism, where the concept of the law as a covenant of works is employed, along with the original proof texts. The proof texts shed important light on the meaning of the phrase, since they are quite frequently taken from Paul's teaching in which he speaks of the *Mosaic* law as a covenant of works.

WCF XIX:1 God gave to Adam *a law, as a covenant of works*, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it. (1)

(1) **Rom. 10:5** For Moses describeth *the righteousness which is of the law*, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. **Gal. 3:10, 12** For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things* which are written in the book of the law to do them ... 12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that *doeth them shall live in them*. [Also Gen. 1:26-27; 2:17. Rom. 2:14-15. Rom. 5:12, 19. Eccl. 7:29. Job 28:28.]

WCF XIX:6: *Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, (2) to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin; together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of His obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin; and *the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works: so as a man's doing good, and refraining from evil because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law, and not under grace.**

(2) **Rom. 6:14** For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. **Gal. 2:16** Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. **Gal. 3:13** Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree. **Gal. 4:4-5** But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. **Acts 13:39** And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. **Rom. 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

WLC # 97 What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate? A. *Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, (3) so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned; yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to show them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good; and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience.*

(3) **Rom. 6:14** For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. **Rom. 7:4, 6** Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are *become dead to the law* by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God ... 6 But *now we are delivered from the law*, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. **Gal. 4:4-5** But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

In keeping with their sensitivity to covenantal issues, the Westminster Standards use the phrase "law, as a covenant of works" four times, indicating an awareness of the fact that the Decalogue cannot be understood apart from God's covenant with Israel. The Mosaic Law was thus understood to be in some sense a covenant of works that included blessings and curses. It is from this aspect of the Law that the new covenant believer has been delivered by virtue of Christ's "fulfilling the Law, and enduring the curse thereof in our stead" (WLC # 97).

In view of the two positions that we know were represented at the Assembly, such language may have been crafted to be intentionally ambiguous so that both groups could subscribe to it according to their

own sense. Both groups held that there was a sense in which the Mosaic Law was a covenant of works – either a subservient covenant relating to temporal blessings and curses, or as to the legal rigor of the Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace. Therefore, both would have affirmed that New Testament believers have been delivered from "the law as a covenant of works."

One Covenant of Grace Under Various Dispensations

But what about the Confession's statement, "There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations" (WCF VII:6)? Doesn't this fly in the face of any idea that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works? My immediate response is that we must not allow the statement of WCF VII:6 to suppress the explicit teaching of the Standards elsewhere concerning the believer's deliverance from "the law as a covenant of works" (WCF XIX:6; WLC # 97). Logically such statements presuppose, as Bolton argued, that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works in some sense.

But let us examine the statement in VII:6 in context. In chapter VII, the divines assert that the covenant of grace "was differently administered in the time of *the law*, and in the time of *the gospel*" (VII:5). The divines then explain what those differences are in paragraphs 5 and 6, using the key phrases, "under the law" to refer to the historical epoch prior to Christ, and "under the gospel" to refer to the new covenant age. In this section, the divines focus on the underlying Christological and soteriological unity of both administrations. Under the law, saving faith in the Messiah was possible by means of the "promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances ... all foreshadowing Christ to come." Under the gospel, "Christ the *substance* was exhibited," so that the covenant of grace "is held forth in more fulness, evidence and spiritual efficacy" under the new covenant. In support of the affirmation that the "substance" of the types and shadows was Christ himself, the divines cite Colossians 2:17: "Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." All along Christ was the substance to which the types and ceremonies of the law had been pointing. Now, in the new covenant, Christ the substance has been "exhibited" in the fullness of time.

It is in this context that the divines then conclude with the above-quoted dictum, "There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in *substance*, but one and the same under various dispensations." The covenant of grace in the time of the law, and the covenant of grace in the time of the gospel, are not two covenants of grace differing in substance, because Christ, who is the substance, was "foreshadowed" under the old dispensation and "exhibited" under the new. Therefore, they cannot be "two covenants of grace differing in substance," because the substance, which is Christ, is "one and the same." The Marrow tradition is in total and wholehearted agreement with this statement, which is ultimately rooted in Christology – the irreducible datum that there is only *one* Mediator.

Significantly, this is the topic of the next chapter, "Of Christ the Mediator," which links back to the preceding discussion in WCF VII:5-6 when it states:

WCF VIII:6 Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof, were communicated unto the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein He was revealed and signified to be the Seed of the woman, which should bruise the serpent's head, and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world being yesterday and today the same, and for ever

Since the Marrow tradition agrees with the statement, "there are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same" Any remaining differences lie only in the last clause of the statement "... *under various dispensations*." But that is a fairly ambiguous statement that

could be interpreted in many different ways. The term "dispensation" itself is an interesting word-choice, as opposed to the term "administration" employed earlier.

Furthermore, notice that in the immediate context, the divines have not been afraid to speak of the old covenant and the new using the antithetical labels, "the law" and "the gospel." Recall: "This covenant was differently administered in the time of *the law*, and in the time of *the gospel*: under *the law*, it was administered by promises ... Under *the gospel*, when Christ the substance was exhibited ..." (WCF VII:5-6). Notice that these labels appear again in chapter XX, "Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience." In this paragraph the divines explore the thorny question of the continuities and discontinuities in the subjective experience of salvation from the old covenant to the new – a topic already broached in WCF VII:6 when the new covenant administration of the covenant of grace was characterized as exhibiting Christ "in more fulness, evidence and spiritual efficacy." Here, in WCF XX, the divines take a similar approach. The differences are a matter of degree, not essence:

WCF XX:1 The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers *under the Gospel*, consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers *under the law*; but, *under the new testament*, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish Church was subjected, and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers *under the law* did ordinarily partake of.

The old testament saints, while soteriologically one with those of the new, experienced that common salvation in a covenantal context characterized to some degree by bondage, whereas new covenant believers have a greater subjective experience of assurance and liberty in Christ. It is true that WCF XX:1 refrains from stating that "under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged in their freedom from the Mosaic Law as a subservient covenant of works." But had such a statement been included, it would have excluded the brethren who held the fourth view of the Mosaic Law. In its present form, both groups could subscribe to this statement.

Such considerations lead me to conclude that the "one covenant of grace under various dispensations" formula in WCF VII:6 should not be interpreted as if it were consistent with only one view of the Mosaic covenant. As Mark Karlberg has pointed out,

The Westminster Standards reaffirm its commitment to the traditional Reformed understanding of the similarities and differences between the Old (Mosaic) Covenant and the New Covenant. The *Confession* concludes with the statement: "There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations" (7.6; cf., *Larger Catechism* Q. A. 33-35) ... The *Westminster Confession* has left the door open to a diverse range of interpretation in giving detailed expression to the law-character of the Mosaic Covenant of Grace.³⁰

The Third Use of the Law

It is difficult to deny that the covenant theology of the Standards had a significant impact on the formulation of the doctrine of the law in the Standards. We have seen that it informed the Standards' conception of the Mosaic law which is viewed, one way or other, as having a "covenant of works" aspect to

³⁰ Mark Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), p. 39.

it. What I now want to examine is how these debates over the nature of the Mosaic covenant gave birth to two orthodox formulations of the third use of the law. The more traditional-minded Reformed brethren, who held to Bolton's fourth view of the Mosaic covenant, were comfortable speaking of the Decalogue as the believer's rule of life, since they regarded it as essentially part of the covenant of grace. The other Reformed brethren, belonging to what I have called the Marrow tradition of the Law, had trouble with this, since they regarded the Decalogue as an essential part of the Mosaic covenant of works as a whole. Therefore, they developed a unique understanding of the third use of the Law to go along with their understanding of the Mosaic covenant.

Bolton informs us that ...

It is one of the great disputes these days, whether this moral law is abrogated, or, in the words of the query, whether believers are freed from the moral law. All agree that we are freed from the curses and maledictions, from the indictments and accusations, from the compelling and irritations, and other particulars which we named before. But the question is, to put it in plain terms: Are believers freed from obedience to the moral law, that is, from the moral law as a rule of obedience? (pp. 56-57).

Bolton then lists the three main views at the time: the antinomian view, and two orthodox views – one traditional, the other from the Marrow tradition. These two orthodox views correspond to the third and fourth view of the Mosaic covenant:

(1) The antinomian view: "Some there are who positively or peremptorily affirm that we are freed from the law as a rule, and are not, since Christ came, tied to the obedience of it" (p. 57).

(2) Orthodox view A: "Others say that it still remains in force as a rule of obedience, though abolished in other respects ... We are still under the conduct and commands of the law, say these Christians, though not under its curses and penalties" (p. 57).

(3) Orthodox view B: "Again, others say, that we are freed from the law, as given by Moses, and are only tied to the obedience of it, as it is given in Christ" (p. 57).

Those who held the fourth view of the Mosaic covenant (i.e., that it was a covenant of grace more legally administered) said that the law "remains in force as a rule of obedience" (orthodox view A). Those who held the Marrow view of the Mosaic covenant, we are not surprised to discover, held that we "are only tied to the obedience of it, as it is given in Christ" (orthodox view B). This indirect view of the law's authority for the new covenant Christian, flows logically from their view that the Mosaic covenant is a subservient covenant of works. For if the Decalogue is part of the Mosaic covenant, indeed standing at the very heart of that covenant, and if the Mosaic covenant is a subservient covenant of works, then we have been delivered from the covenant of works in Christ. Since it is part of the Mosaic covenant of works, the Decalogue *cannot* be the form of the moral law that binds the believer in Christ.

Bolton himself holds to the "from the hand of Christ" view:

This again shows the rigour of the law, that it enforced itself upon the conscience with threats and with terror; but now the Gospel comes otherwise, with beseechings and with love. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God" (Rom. 12:1) ... The law urges obedience upon pain of eternal death (Deut. 27:14-16; Gal. 3:10), and enforces its demands by terror, but the Gospel by sweetness and love; all terror is gone. The book of the law was placed between the cherubim and under the mercy-seat, to tell us that, under the Gospel, every law comes now to the saints from the mercy-seat ... We look not to Sinai, the hill of bondage, but to Sion, the mountain of grace (pp. 43, 58).

We are freed from the law, as given by Moses, and are only tied to the obedience of it, as it is given in Christ: and though ... we are subject to those commands and that law which Moses gave, yet not as he gave it, but as Christ renews it, and as it comes out of His hand and from His authority: "A new commandment I give you, that ye love one another" (John 13:34) (p. 57).

Bolton's view of the third use of the law (the moral law as the standard of holy living for the New Testament believer) is identical to my own. "We are freed from the law, as given by Moses, and are only tied to the obedience of it, as it is given in Christ." We are subject to the moral will of God as issued by the glorious Mediator of the new covenant, "out of His hand and from His authority."

Immediately after setting forth this view of the third use, Bolton makes a statement that is of the utmost importance in relation to the question of whether my views are a violation of the system of doctrine:

I shall not much quarrel with this. Acknowledge the moral law as a rule of obedience and Christian walking, and there will be no falling out, whether you take it as promulgated by Moses, or as handed to you and renewed by Christ ... This, I conceive, is the concurrent opinion of all divines (pp. 57-58).

In other words, Bolton's testimony demonstrates that while the orthodox rejected the antinomian option, they recognized the legitimacy of views two and three (orthodox A and B) as both being within the bounds of the system of doctrine.

Although Bolton's book was published the same year as *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, it seems that Marrow ideas were already in the air. Note the similarity of Fisher's language:

[S]eeing that you are now in Christ, beware that you receive not the ten commandments at the hand of God out of Christ, nor yet at the hands of Moses, but only at the hands of Christ; and so shall you be sure to receive them as the law of Christ.³¹

Thomas Boston comments at this point:

The receiving of the ten commandments at the hands of Christ, is here opposed, (1) To receiving them at the hands of God out of Christ. (2) To receiving them at the hands of Moses, namely, as our Lawgiver ... The first is a receiving them immediately from God, without a Mediator; and so receiving them as the law of works ... The former manner of receiving them is not agreeable to the state of real believers, since they never were, nor are given in that manner to believers in Christ ... The latter is not agreeable to the state of New Testament believers, since the true Mediator is come ... However, the not receiving of Moses as the lawgiver of the christian church, carries no prejudice to the honour of that faithful servant.³²

John Colquhoun (1748-1827) was a Scottish minister influenced by the Marrow tradition.³³ He takes up this theme of the law as delivered from the hands of Christ as well:

³¹ Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity with notes by Thomas Boston* (1645; repr., Edmonton, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991), pp. 173-75.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³³ Colquhoun was "a popular and influential evangelical preacher, whose sermons and writings reflect in great measure those of the Marrow brethren ... In advising the many students of divinity who frequented his ministry, he declined to recommend *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, as the General Assembly had condemned it. But Boston's notes to the *Marrow* were not so condemned, and these he warmly recommended." *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, p. 196.

This law issues to true Christians from Christ, the glorious Mediator of the New Covenant, and from God their Creator, Proprietor, Benefactor, and covenant God. It proceeds immediately from Jesus Christ, the blessed Mediator between God and men. It is taken in under the covenant of grace, and, in the hand of Christ, the Mediator of that covenant, it is given to all who believe in Him, and who are justified by faith, as the only rule of their obedience. The Apostle Paul accordingly calls it 'the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2).³⁴

Conclusion

According to Bolton, there were at least four views among Reformed divines at the time of the Assembly over the nature of the Mosaic covenant. Two were considered to be orthodox. The majority of orthodox divines held that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of grace administered in the form of a covenant of works. There was a second, equally orthodox group of divines, who held that the Mosaic covenant was a subservient covenant of works pertaining to the temporal blessings and curses in the land of Canaan. In keeping with this "subservient covenant" view, the second group of divines went on to argue that the Law is not given to the new covenant people of God as promulgated by Moses, but as renewed and handed to us by Christ. Both groups were able to adopt the Confession, since the divines did not decide the question in favor of one view over the other but chose language that could be interpreted in either sense.

Without the historical background provided by Bolton, it would be easy to read the Confession with blinders and to miss the ways in which the Marrow tradition on the Law is not only permitted by the Confession, but in some areas has even left its mark upon the Confession's language. Although the Marrow tradition was never confessionally enshrined as the *only* orthodox view, it is consistent with the Confession's system of doctrine. Bolton's contemporary testimony concerning the various views held by orthodox divines in his day, sheds light on the Confession's character as a consensus document embracing more than one strand of Reformed orthodoxy.³⁵

E. THE SPECIFICATIONS

There are two specifications in support of the charge, and under each specification a number of statements from my sermons and from papers on my website are quoted. In many cases, important qualifying statements in the immediate context are left out. I have taken each quote and placed it in its immediate context. The portions highlighted in **bold** represent the excerpts cited by the presbytery. After each quote I offer a brief comment to show the impact of placing each quote in context. On a couple of occasions, I have also quoted other statements made by me in sermons not cited in the charge.

Specification 1

That you have, on numerous occasions, publicly called into question the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding the moral law.

³⁴ John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* (1819; repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), pp. 26-27.

³⁵ "Nothing could be more wrong-headed in approaching the Confession than to adopt the hermeneutical principle that it is open to one, exclusive, narrowly delimited interpretation in each of its statements. For the Confession is a self-consciously consensus document, containing theological accommodations expressed to encompass differing views within generic Calvinism – even on issues about which individual Divines might feel strongly." Sinclair Ferguson, "An Assembly of Theonomists? The Teaching of the Westminster Divines on the Law of God" in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, eds. William S. Barker and Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 346. Cp. J. V. Fesko, "The Days of Creation and Confession Subscription in the OPC," *WTJ* 63 (2001) 235-49.

Notice that this specification is stated in unqualified terms. It alleges that I have publicly called into question "the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding the moral law." The implication is that I reject the *entire* teaching of the Standards regarding the moral law. But as I have shown above, I agree with the substantive teaching of the Standards concerning God's moral will for mankind, binding on both believers and unbelievers. I acknowledge that I have called into question some of the Confession's formulations, its manner of stating certain aspects of the doctrine of the moral law, and some of the exegesis used in support of that doctrine. But I have not called into question *everything* the Confession and Catechisms teach concerning the moral law.

Specification 1.a (from my handout, "Three Covenantal Enshrinements of the Moral Will of God")

God's eternal moral will. **The will of God that is rooted in God's unchanging nature and in man's created nature as God's image. Traditionally this has been labeled "the moral law." The drawback of the traditional label is that it is then equated with the Decalogue. This can be seen, for example, in the first two paragraphs of chapter 19 of the Westminster Confession. Paragraph one says that the moral law was given to Adam in the garden. Paragraph two then asserts, "This law" (referring back to the law given to Adam) "after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments." This formulation effectively places the Decalogue in the garden, thus transforming the Decalogue into a creation ordinance, an expression of the timeless moral will of God binding all men in all ages. The authors of the Westminster Confession apparently ignored Paul's teaching that the Mosaic Law is binding only on Jews (Rom. 2:12) and given chronologically after the fall (Rom. 5:13). Furthermore, having stated that the Decalogue is "a perfect rule of righteousness," the Westminster divines contradict themselves and teach that the Sabbath day has changed to the first day of the week after the resurrection of Christ.** These considerations demand that we make a distinction between the Law (Decalogue) and God's eternal moral will, rather than conflating them in one concept, "moral law." The "moral" part of "moral law" contains a valid insight – there is such a thing as God's moral will. The "law" part of "moral law" contains a valid insight – the Mosaic Law was a summary of God's moral will given to Israel in a form appropriate to Israel's covenant and Israel's theocratic status in the land. But when these two insights are combined into one "moral law," the simple Christian reading Rom. 2:12 and 5:13 will conclude either (1) that the moral law is not binding on Gentiles and did not exist prior to Sinai, or (2) that he simply can't understand his Bible

Comment: Although I question the usefulness of "the traditional label" ("the moral law"), I say that it contains two valid insights: there is such a thing as God's moral will, and the Mosaic Law was a summary of God's moral will given to Israel. My reason for questioning the traditional label is that it creates an apparent contradiction between Scripture (Rom. 2:12; 5:13) and the Confession (XIX:2). I do not want people to conclude that the moral law is not binding on Gentiles, nor do I want them to think that the Confession and the Scriptures are contradictory. Specification 1.a shows that I have not called into question the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding the moral law. In fact I have suggested ways to improve the teaching of the Standards regarding the moral law in order to safeguard and protect that doctrine from being misunderstood by the simple Christian who is comparing the Confession with Scripture.

Specification 1.b (from my paper, "Married to Another")

In my opinion, the traditional three-fold division of the Mosaic Law, as a method of determining what is still binding and what is not, is fundamentally flawed and needs major

revision. The covenantal unity of the Law is such that it is simply impossible to go through the Mosaic Law, commandment by commandment, and then decide which of the three "bins" each commandment belongs in. The Decalogue especially cannot be treated as if it were raw moral law, with no uniquely covenantal and typological elements. The sanctions of the covenant of works are interwoven into the very fabric of the Decalogue. So close is the relationship that the Decalogue is sometimes called "the covenant" (e.g., "So 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" [Deut. 4:13]).

However, the traditional division does capture a valid insight that can be rescued and reformulated along biblical theological lines. Meredith G. Kline is right to speak of the stipulations of the Mosaic Law as having both moral and typological aspects. This is different from saying that the specific stipulations can be classified into moral or typological categories. It recognizes that the whole Law contains both a moral dimension reflecting a fundamental ethical core founded on God's holy nature and man's creation in the image of God, and a typological dimension that pointed ahead to the kingly ("civil law") and priestly ("ceremonial law") offices of Christ.

Comment: Although I state that, in my opinion, the three-fold division is flawed, there are two qualifications. First, the three-fold division "as a method of determining what is still binding and what is not" is flawed. The fact that there are different types of laws in the Mosaic covenant (some are moral precepts founded on God's nature; others not) is not the issue. The issue is whether the three-fold division is a legitimate method of determining what Mosaic precepts remain binding today. The second qualification is found in the paragraph beginning: "However, the traditional division does capture a valid insight that can be rescued and reformulated." In presenting Kline's suggested reformulation, I acknowledge that "the whole Law contains ... a moral dimension reflecting a fundamental ethical core founded on God's holy nature and man's creation in the image of God." Therefore, specification 1.b does not support the claim that I have called into question the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding the moral law. It only shows that I have called into question the usefulness of the three-fold division of the Mosaic Law as a means of determining what is still binding.

Specification 1.c (from my paper, "Married to Another")

So the three-fold division of the Law is wrongheaded, but its fundamental concern to maintain that large swaths of the Mosaic Law reflect the moral will of God founded on God's righteous nature and man's identity as the image of God is valid. This moral will, however, must not be equated with the Decalogue, nor can it be defanged into a list of bare non-covenantal commands - "the moral law not as covenant of works." The core ethic of the Law is a covenant of works, to which the believer has died in Christ, and which Christ has fulfilled.

Comment: No context is needed for this quote, since the very first sentence demonstrates that I have not called into question the teaching of the Confession regarding the moral law. I have in fact said that the Confession's "fundamental concern ... is valid."

Specification 1.d (from my paper, "Married to Another")

I am concerned about our Reformed teaching on the Law, because our systematics must be conditioned by biblical theology, that is, by the covenantal, eschatological, and redemptive historical thrust of Scripture. The New Testament does not divide the Mosaic Law into three categories (moral, ceremonial, and civil) and three uses (*usus politicus*, *usus elencticus*, and *usus normativus*). Not all scholastic distinctions and categories are bad, but in this case they have taken us further and further away from Scripture. There is a major gap between the abstract, systematic approach of the Reformed tradition, and the redemptive-historical, Christocentric approach to the Law of Jesus and the apostles. The New Testament

consistently refers to the Law as a unit, and deals with it as a unit in light of the interpretive transformation effected by Christ's own teaching, and (most importantly) by his death and resurrection.

Comment: Some may interpret my statements here as a rejection of systematic theology and scholastic distinctions in favor of biblical theology. But that would be a mistake. I state that "our systematics must be conditioned by biblical theology," and that "not all scholastic distinctions and categories are bad." My concern is not to throw out systematic theology but to recognize that there is such a thing as the progress of doctrine, and that such progress occurs as we continually attempt to conform our systematic formulations more closely to the teaching of Scripture. In a paper on my website titled, "Biblical and Systematic Theology: A Digest of Reformed Opinion on Their Proper Relationship," I defended the traditional order of doing theology as set forth by Warfield: first exegesis, then biblical theology, then systematic theology. I argued that systematic theology is a legitimate enterprise and must not be pitted against biblical theology:

I am not entirely comfortable with Gaffin's closing suggestion that we discontinue the term "systematic theology." But his concern is a valid one: biblical theology is already systematic to such a degree that the distinction between the two may be artificial. I think a better way of putting the matter is this. Both exegesis and systematic theology must be redemptive-historically regulated.³⁶

Specification 1.e (from my paper, "Married to Another")

Are we preaching our system or the living and active Word of Christ? These questions have significant practical implications. I believe that the third use of the Law in the Reformed tradition can easily drift toward legalism. The Reformed tradition on the Law is not legalistic in the hard sense of asserting that we are justified by the Law. But I wonder if it sufficiently guards against the idea that we are sanctified by the Law.

Comment: Notice that the quote leaves out the next two sentences which contain a very important qualification of what I mean by "can easily drift toward legalism." Legalism can be defined in two different ways: the hard sense of asserting that we are justified by the Law, or the soft sense of teaching that we are sanctified by the Law. I recognize that the Reformed tradition is not legalistic in the hard sense, but I express doubts about whether "it sufficiently guards against" legalism in the soft sense.³⁷

Specification 1.f (from my paper, "The Sabbath as an Eschatological Sign of the Covenant")

If the exegesis presented in this paper is correct, the statement that the Sabbath is "a positive, moral and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages" is not Scriptural. I am of the opinion that the Confession ought to be revised to bring it into line with the Scriptural teaching that the Sabbath is an eschatological sign for the covenant community.

The statement that "it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God" (WCF XXI:7) is true. But the observance of a weekly day of rest is not the

³⁶ The link is www.upper-register.com/other_studies/bt_st.html. In February, 2000, Dr. Gaffin replied to my criticism and acknowledged that he had overstated himself. His reply is appended at the end of that paper. He also wisely highlights the importance of interaction with the church's theological tradition.

³⁷ Richard N. Longenecker distinguishes between *legalism* and *nomism*. Legalism is the soteriological position that salvation comes by keeping the Law. Nomism is the insistence on a lifestyle regulated by the Mosaic Law. See his commentary on Galatians in the Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), pp. 86, 149-50, 176-77, 206-7. "Christians may live conscious of being 'justified by faith' apart from legalism, but without being conscious of living 'in Christ'; consequently, they often revert to some form of a nomistic lifestyle" (p. 159).

same thing as the requirement to set aside time for the worship of God. A weekly day of rest may coincide with the appointed worship of the covenant community, but the Sabbath *per se* is an eschatological sign containing an express promise of rest to those who are given the sign (Heb. 4:9).

I have no problem with the second half of the above paragraph: "which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian sabbath." That is a very balanced and biblical statement it seems to me.

Comment: My criticism of WCF XXI:7 is narrowly focused. I have scruples with one clause in it ("a positive, moral and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages"), but the substance of the paragraph as a whole I find to be "very balanced and biblical."

Specification 1.g (from my paper, "The Sabbath as an Eschatological Sign of the Covenant")

I stand by my statements here. There is no need to add any further comments.

Specification 1.h (from my paper, "The Sabbath as an Eschatological Sign of the Covenant")

In addition, the Confession tends to reduce the Sabbath command to the issue of the "when" of worship, thus ignoring or downplaying the eschatological significance of the Sabbath. I am not alone in detecting a weakness in the presentation of the Sabbath in the Westminster Standards. The OPC General Assembly [Report of the Committee on Sabbath Matters](#) points out the lack of any teaching on the eschatological significance of the Sabbath:

The weekly Sabbath is an eschatological sign. This truth, central to the teaching of Hebrews 3:7-4:13 as well as fundamental to the entire biblical revelation concerning the Sabbath, does not find expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. The reason for this would appear to be that the Standards mention the Sabbath commandment primarily in terms of its bearing on the more specific matter of public and private worship.

I suspect that this non-eschatological view of the Sabbath is part of the reason why the authors of the Confession thought that the Sabbath was applicable to the unbeliever. If you begin by defining the Sabbath as a day set aside for the worship of God, it makes sense to argue that, since all men are obligated to worship God, they are obligated also to set aside the day in order to fulfill that duty. The medieval, theocratic notion of Christendom that the divines inherited from the magisterial reformers undoubtedly played a role in this thinking. All of society has an obligation to attend public worship. The Sabbath is merely the day when all of society must "shut down" in order to ensure (by means of "blue law" legislation) that public worship is attended by all.

Comment: My concerns about "this non-eschatological view of the Sabbath" were first expressed by the General Assembly Committee on Sabbath Matters. I am merely following up their concern and suggesting a possible explanation due to the historical context in which the Standards were written.

Specification 1.i (from the Report of the Ministerial Oversight Committee)

No context or comment necessary.

Specification 1.j (from my sermon, "Is the Law Abolished?")

The traditional Reformed understanding is that the moral law continues, but the civil and ceremonial law have been terminated in Christ. And this approach is not completely wrong. Obviously it's true that there are aspects of the Law that do continue today, and there are aspects of the Law that have been fulfilled in Christ, and are no longer required. Obviously, circumcision is a good example of an old covenant law that has been superseded in the new covenant ... But it doesn't really work that simply, because even within the Reformed approach to the Law, they realize that there are aspects even of the civil and ceremonial law that are relevant too. And this is the notion of general equity. Perhaps the exact form of a particular law cannot be applied today in the way it was in the Old Testament, but nevertheless there might be an underlying principle that corresponds to an eternal command, to an underlying moral principle. And so even the Reformed approach to the Law with its systematic attempt to make a simple solution to the question, starts to add some nuances and becomes a little bit more sophisticated to the point where now it's not so simple anymore. Because if you have a civil law or a ceremonial law that has an underlying general equity that does apply, you can't simply say that that law is totally thrown out. And so even the Reformed approach has its weaknesses.

But the biggest weakness of the Reformed approach is that it doesn't seem to fit with what you read in the New Testament. Nowhere in the New Testament - in the teaching of Jesus or of the apostles - do they make this threefold division of the Law. Instead, the New Testament seems to view the Law as a unit. The Law is always referred to as "the Law." And then, the New Testament writers, following the lead of Jesus himself which we'll look at in a minute, take that Law as a unit and say that it must be interpreted redemptive historically in light of its fulfillment in Christ. Now the result, of course, is quite similar to the traditional method. There will be some aspects of the Mosaic Law that continue, and there will be some that don't, when it's viewed this way. But the method of getting at that result is significantly different, and that difference then creates a tension between what is written in our Confession and what Paul does when he talks about the Law. And there's this gap, this kind of uneasiness that we have, because on the one hand, our system which is nice and neat and tidy does it this way, but when you read Paul himself he seems to be thinking differently from the traditional way.

So my desire then is to try to look at this issue, using Ephesians 2:15 as the key text, and to attempt to provide an improvement upon the traditional threefold division, and to attempt to understand the Law redemptive historically. The traditional view is not completely wrong; it doesn't need to be thrown out; there are valid insights there. But we need to improve upon it and try to make our thinking, try to make our systematic theology, conform even more closely to the biblical theology of Paul and the New Testament ...

Comment: I affirm that the Confessional approach is "not completely wrong," that it has certain "nuances" that it make it "more sophisticated." I state that when we follow the New Testament's approach of taking the Mosaic Law as a unit and interpreting it in light of its fulfillment in Christ, "the result ... is quite similar to the traditional method." I add that my desire is to "provide an improvement" upon the traditional method which "is not completely wrong" and which contains "valid insights." My desire is to "try to make our systematic theology conform even more closely to the biblical theology of Paul and the New Testament."

To reinforce this, I have gone through tapes of old sermons and found similar statements. I believe these statements are relevant to specification 1, since they show the spirit in which I have approached my criticisms of the Confession. I have always attempted to do so in a spirit of constructive criticism, of fundamentally agreeing with the core affirmations of our secondary standards regarding the Law, but wanting to improve the manner in which those doctrines are expressed or formulated. For example, in my two sermons introducing the Shorter Catechism's exposition of the ten commandments, I said:

Now I must confess as we delve into this subject of a redemptive historical approach to the Law, that I do so with fear and trepidation. My basic outline this evening is two points: the first point is the classical Reformed approach to the Law, and the second point is an outline of a redemptive historical approach. In effect, I am going to be criticizing some of the weaknesses of the classical Reformed approach to the law. That classical Reformed approach is summarized in the Westminster Standards, in chapter XIX, which deals with the Law of God. I want to be clear, however, that in making these criticisms, I am not fundamentally rejecting what the Confession teaches, but rather suggesting ways to improve it in light of the redemptive historical insights that I think have come out in the last century ... The classical approach to the Law is not completely wrong. I'm not going to argue here that it's totally wrong and needs to be replaced. But it has certain weaknesses to it because it is somewhat oversimplified. And because it's oversimplified, it doesn't take into account some of the redemptive historical context that we need to take into account... I believe in the third use of the law, and I believe that the law is a rule of life for the believer. But I believe that that third use needs to be understood with a little bit more redemptive historical background.³⁸

I argued that the classical Reformed approach to the Law is in need of improvement. I did so with great fear and trepidation, knowing that I am calling [into] question, I suppose, some of the traditional teachings of Reformed theology and even the Westminster Confession. I do so, though, not in a spirit of saying that the Westminster Confession or that traditional Reformed theology is flat-out wrong, but rather in the spirit of suggesting that it can be improved and built upon.³⁹

Specification 2

That you have denied that the Decalogue, as a summary of the moral law, continues to have binding authority over the Christian.

This specification contains three separate allegations:

The first allegation is that I have denied that the Decalogue is a summary of the moral law. That is factually incorrect, as I have shown above (pp. 24-25).

The second allegation is that I have denied that the moral law continues to have binding authority over the Christian. As I have shown, this is *not* true.

The third allegation is that I have denied that the Decalogue continues to have binding authority over the Christian. I acknowledge that I have faithfully followed the teaching of Paul and the New Testament that the Mosaic Law no longer has binding authority over New Testament believers.

Specification 2.a (from my sermon "Is the Law Abolished?")

If Paul had in mind merely the ceremonial law, he could have said that Christ abolished in his flesh the ceremonial law. But instead he says, he abolished in his flesh the Law with its commandments and regulations. There are three terms there in that phrase that refer to the Law: the word "Law," the word "commandments," and the word "regulations." **He is heaping up synonym upon synonym to say that it's not just a subset of the Law that Christ abolished, but it's the Law as Law, the Law viewed as a body of commandments and regulations - that**

³⁸ Lee Irons, "The Law: A Redemptive Historical Approach, Part I," Introduction to Shorter Catechism # 38-81, preached April 11, 1999.

³⁹ Lee Irons, "The Law: A Redemptive Historical Approach, Part II," Introduction to Shorter Catechism # 38-81, preached April 18, 1999.

is what Christ did away with. Paul seems to imply that the entirety of the Mosaic Law, in its character as commandment, in its character as an authority that has the power to regulate human behavior and conduct, has been rendered inoperative. Furthermore, the ceremonial interpretation of this verse fails to recognize that it wasn't only the ceremonial law that created a barrier between Jews and Gentiles. Paul makes a big deal out of this in Galatians 3 [where he teaches] that, in addition to the ceremonial law, the curse of the moral law also separated the Gentiles from God's covenant family. Galatians 3:10-13 makes that point.

Comment: At this point in my sermon I am attempting to understand what Paul means when he affirms that Christ "abolished in his flesh the Law with its commandments and regulations" (Eph. 2:15). I am critiquing the view that Paul is only referring to a subset of the Mosaic Law (e.g., the ceremonial law). I find it hard to believe that anyone would deny that "Paul seems to imply that the entirety of the Mosaic Law, in its character as commandment ... has been rendered inoperative." Paul certainly "seems" to be saying this.

Specification 2.b (from my sermon "Is the Law Abolished?")

And so Paul's statement then in Eph. 2:15 has to be interpreted in light of these other statements [in Galatians 3:23-25; 4:1-5, 21, 31; 5:1, 18; Romans 7:4-6] that Paul consistently makes throughout his writings. **We are no longer under the Law. And he doesn't just mean we are no longer under the Law as a means of justification, because the Law was never given as a means of justification. It means that we are freed from the Law, we are released from its binding authority. To want to be under the Law in its commanding authority, is to want to go back to the old covenant period when God gave that Law to his people to govern them in their childhood. The authoritative rules and regulations of the Mosaic Law are for the immature. Those who understand the newness of the new covenant and their standing as mature sons in Christ - not infants, not slaves, but sons in Christ - do not need to be hand-held by an external code.** Now this raises an objection. Doesn't this interpretation leave the Christian without any law? And the answer is, the believer is not without law, but is under the Law of Christ.

Comment: The statements in bold are merely a summation of Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:23-25; 4:1-5, 21, 31; 5, 18; Romans 7:4-6, texts that I read in full to the congregation just seconds before. My language is taken from Paul: "We are no longer under the law" is from Galatians 3:24; 4:21; 5:18. "We are freed from the Law, we are released from its binding authority" is from Galatians 5:1 and Romans 7:4-6. The statement that God gave the "Law to his people to govern them in their childhood" and that we are "not infants, not slaves, but sons in Christ," is from Galatians 4:1-5. Furthermore, having paraphrased the teaching of Paul, I immediately raise a potential objection, "Doesn't this interpretation leave the Christian without any law?" This is a key transition in the sermon. The remaining two thirds of the sermon is spent demonstrating from Matthew 5:17-20 and 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 that "the believer is not without law, but is under the Law of Christ."

Specification 2.c (from my sermon "Is the Law Abolished?")

Jesus said, "You have heard that is was said ..., but I say unto you." Now in some of those antitheses, Jesus is arguing against a misinterpretation of the Mosaic Law on the part of the Pharisees, **but in some cases, he is contrasting his teaching with the original revelation that God gave through Moses. Jesus places himself in a position of unheard-of authority over the Law. He is sovereignly above it. He is not under it merely, as a scribe whose job is just to exegete it, to tell us what it means and to apply it. He is over it as a lawgiver, and to give us the definitive revelation of God's will in the new age. He adopts a superior stance to the Law as one who sovereignly reinterprets the Law by his own person and work.**

Comment: In Matthew 5:21-48, there are six antitheses each introduced with the formula "You have heard that it was said . . . , but I say unto you" (or a variation thereof). I state that in some of these antitheses, Jesus is arguing against a Pharisaic misinterpretation of the Mosaic Law, and in other cases he is contrasting his teaching with the original revelation given through Moses. It is hard to see how "But I say unto you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unfaithfulness, makes her commit adultery" (v. 32), "But I say unto you, make no oath at all" (v. 34), "But I say unto you, do not resist an evil person, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (v. 39), and "But I say unto you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (v. 44), could be fairly said to represent the original teaching of the Mosaic Law.

Specification 2.d (from my sermon "Is the Law Abolished?")

Notice the emphasis there in Matt. 5:17: "Do not think that I have *come* to abolish the Law or the Prophets." That verb "to come" focuses upon the Messianic mission of Jesus Christ, the one who is sent by the Father to come into this world and to bring all of the revelation of the old covenant to its fulfillment. But Jesus makes an important qualification in order to forestall a potential misunderstanding. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." It would be a grave error to interpret the antitheses of Jesus, "You have heard that it was said . . . but I say . . ." as indicating that the Mosaic Law has been abolished in the sense that it no longer relevant today, for Jesus came not to abolish it and do away with it and say it's not relevant, but rather he came to abolish it in order to fulfill it. He fulfills it through his person and work. The word "fulfill" cannot be reduced simply to the meaning of "confirm," because it means to provide the definitive Messianic interpretation which transcends the Law.

You see the idea here is this, that the old covenant revelation of law that God gave on Mount Sinai was a type and a shadow. It was a provisional righteousness. It was a provisional revelation of God's will. It was not the final and ultimate revelation of God's will.

Comment: My reference to the Mosaic Law as "a type and a shadow" is fleshed out in context. I chose that language in order to show that the Mosaic Law constituted a provisional revelation of God's will for that period of redemptive history. Thus, when the one whom God sent into the world finally arrives, he comes not to abolish the Mosaic Law in the sense of doing away with it and saying it's not relevant, but in the sense of providing the definitive Messianic interpretation of the Law, the final and ultimate revelation of God's will that was foreshadowed in the Mosaic Law. This is implied in Christ's statement, "I came . . . to fulfill." As R. T. France states:

The whole Old Testament, the law as well as the prophets, pointed forward to what Jesus has now brought into being. His ministry brings them to full measure by supplying the final revelation of the will of God . . . Jesus is bringing that to which the Old Testament looked forward; his teaching will transcend the Old Testament revelation, but, far from abolishing it, is itself its intended culmination.⁴⁰

Specification 2.e (from my sermon "Is the Law Abolished?")

The new Moses is here revealing the new law on the eschatological Mountain. And thus, even though Jesus does not say that the Law of Moses has been set aside and replaced by the Law of Christ, that is the point he is trying to make. It is not that the Law of Christ and the Law of Moses are two, totally contradictory laws. It's not as if the Law of Christ brings a brand new law that has no precedent in the Law of Moses. Rather, it is that the Law of Moses was only the type and the shadow. The Law of Christ is the substance and the reality.

Comment: The sentences immediately following the one quoted add an important qualification. When the sentence is read in context, it leaves the reader with a more accurate impression of my views.

⁴⁰ R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 114.

Specification 2.f & g (from my sermon "Is the Law Abolished?")

... [Paul and Jesus] both strive immediately to follow up that strong emphasis on discontinuity with a qualification to avoid misunderstanding: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law," Jesus says. Paul puts it like this: "... although not without the law of God, but under the Law of Christ." **Having denied that the Law has been abolished in that sense, Jesus and Paul then clarify the sense in which the Law remains in force. It remains in force, not as Law, not as commandment, but rather it remains in force in terms of the redemptive historical reality that has dawned in the coming of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.**

To summarize. First, the New Testament teaches that believers have been set free from the Law by means of their union with Christ in his death. **We are not under the Law. Paul uses that phrase ten times in his writings. This means that we are free from the condemnation of the Law, and we are freed from the commanding authority of the Law as the old covenant.**

Secondly, this freedom from the Law does not mean that believers have been set free from all ethical standards. For not only have they been crucified with Christ and made dead to the Law, but they have also been raised with Christ, and are thus under a new commanding authority - the commanding authority of Christ himself. They are under the Law of Christ.

Third, although the Law of Christ is not identical with the Law of Moses, it does reach back to the Law of Moses in order to bring over much of its teaching. But it brings over the teaching of the Mosaic Law into the new covenant indirectly. Any aspect of the Law of Moses that is brought over into the Law of Christ must first pass through the prism of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that every law and every commandment that Jesus gives to us, comes to us in view of our union with Christ. Jesus tells us the same things that Moses tells us in many instances. He tells us that we must love our neighbor as ourselves. Moses taught that in Leviticus. But when Jesus tells us to love our neighbor, he doesn't leave it in its old covenant form. He takes away the old wine skin and pours the content of the command of love into the new wine skins of the new covenant. He tells us we are to love one another even as I have loved you. And the cross therefore colors and conditions every single commandment that is brought over from Moses to Christ. The Law must not be abandoned, we must not stop studying the Mosaic Law, we must not stop teaching the Mosaic Law. But, after the cross, the Law of Moses no longer stands as the immediate standard of conduct for God's people. After the cross, the Law of Moses must always be studied and applied through the lens of the death and resurrection of the Messiah ...

... Is the Law abolished? Yes and no. We are free from it as an external authority. We're released from that Law. But we are not free from law. We are under the Law of Jesus Christ.

Comment: The statement that "It remains in force, not as Law, not as commandment, but rather it remains in force in terms of the redemptive historical reality that has dawned in the coming of the kingdom of Jesus Christ," is admittedly vague. It could be interpreted as if I were pitting "commandment" against "the redemptive historical reality that has dawned in the coming of the kingdom of Jesus Christ," as if there are no commandments in Christ's kingdom. But I immediately follow this statement with a number of summary points in which I clearly state that there are indeed commandments for disciples in Christ's kingdom ("every law and every commandment that Jesus gives to us").

With regard to the second quote (specification 2.g), I have two comments. First, I erred when I said that the phrase "we are not under the Law" occurs ten times in Paul's writings. It actually occurs five times (Rom. 6:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 3:25; 5:18). I confused it with the statistic for the phrase "under the Law" (which actually occurs eleven times).

Second, there is an important qualification in the last sentence that should not be overlooked. I stated, "This means that we are free from the condemnation of the Law, and we are freed from the

commanding authority of the Law *as the old covenant*." We are free from the old covenant form of God's law, but we are not free from it in its new covenant form (the Law of Christ).

Specification 2.h (from my paper, "The Reformed Theocrats: A Biblical Theological Response")

By treating the Mosaic Law as a generic civil code for Everynation, theonomy must suppress **the clear teaching of Scripture concerning the exclusively redemptive historical purpose of the Mosaic Law**. According to the teaching of Paul, the Law - with its punishments and its earthly blessings and curses - was "a ministry of condemnation" (2 Cor. 3:9), a harsh disciplinarian to prepare us for the coming of Christ. Now that Christ has been born under the Law and become a curse for us, the Mosaic Law has served its purpose in redemptive history.

[The text of Galatians 3:17—4:7 is inserted at this point]

The Law has clear temporal boundaries, both a historical beginning and a historical terminus. It came 430 years *after* the Abrahamic promises. And it was "added *until* the Seed should come ... Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the disciplinarian (i.e., the Law)." From the outset God gave it with the coming of Christ in view. He gave the Law to provide the proper covenantal context in which Christ would accomplish our redemption.

Kline explains:

In accordance with the terms of his covenant of works with the Father he was to come as the second Adam in order to undergo a representative probation and by his obedient and triumphant accomplishment thereof to establish the legal ground for God's covenanted bestowal of the eternal kingdom of salvation on his people. It was therefore expedient, if not necessary, that Christ appear within a covenant order which, like the covenant with the first Adam, was governed by the works principle (cf. Gal 4:4). The typical kingdom of the old covenant was precisely that. Within the limitations of the fallen world and with modifications peculiar to the redemptive process, the old theocratic kingdom was a reproduction of the original covenantal order. Israel as the theocratic nation was mankind stationed once again in a paradise-sanctuary, under probation in a covenant of works. In the context of that situation, the Incarnation event was legible. [33]

The issue is redemptive-historical legibility. The incarnation and the cross of Christ have meaning only in the context of a covenantal order in which the probationary works principle is clearly in force. Imagine how inscrutable the incarnation and death of Christ would have been apart from the covenantal context provided by the Mosaic Law. It would have been an isolated "brute fact" without rhyme or reason. But the Mosaic Law republished on a grand scale the principle of works imbedded in the Adamic covenant. Israel's obedience to the Torah was the condition of her retention of the earthly kingdom, which was a type of the everlasting kingdom of heaven. Only within this legal framework do we understand "the significance of [Christ's] mission as the accomplishing of a probationary assignment in a works covenant in behalf of the elect of all ages" ... The Mosaic Law, then, was not given to provide a blueprint for all the civil governments of the world, but to provide the historical, covenantal context for the incarnation of Christ who was "born under the Law" in order to bring it to its perfect fulfillment (Matt. 5:17).

Comment: The context explains what I mean by "the exclusively redemptive historical purpose of the Mosaic Law." In context, I draw attention to Galatians 3:17—4:7, especially 3:19 ("The Law was added ... until the Seed would come") and 4:4 ("born under the Law"). After quoting this passage at length, I wrote: "From the outset God gave it [the Law] with the coming of Christ in view. He gave the Law to provide the proper covenantal context in which Christ would accomplish our redemption." The word "exclusively" (in "the exclusively redemptive historical purpose of the Mosaic Law") is intended to *exclude* theonomy's assumption that the Mosaic Law was given to be a blueprint for civil government. The word "exclusively" is not meant to exclude secondary functions and applications that flow from the redemptive

historical function (i.e., the Law's usefulness for ethical instruction in the church – as Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and illustrates, e.g., in 1 Cor. 9:8-10). The topic at hand is the alleged usefulness of the Mosaic Law for civil government. The usefulness of the Mosaic Law in the church is not in view.

Specification 2.i (from my handout, "Three Covenantal Enshrinements of the Moral Will of God")

How do you use the chart in practice? **If you are reading the Bible and you come across a commandment, you have to ask yourself, which covenant is this command functioning in? If you are not a party to that covenant, the stipulation does not bind you directly (e.g., if you are a Christian, you are not bound to any of the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant).**

However, a particular commandment in a covenant that you are not a party to may be grounded in God's eternal moral will, and thus you should expect to find that commandment republished in the covenant you are a party to.

Comment: The statement that "if you are a Christian, you are not bound to any of the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant" must be read in light of the immediately following sentence. The failure to include that sentence could result in misunderstanding. I go on to give the example of Ephesians 6:1-4, where Paul "republishes" the fifth commandment as a stipulation of the new covenant. Christians are not bound by the fifth commandment as a stipulation of the Mosaic Covenant, but they are bound by it as a stipulation of the new covenant.

F. APPENDIX: OTHER SERMON EXCERPTS

After the Ministerial Oversight Committee reported to the presbytery (February 3, 2001), and after discussing my views of the Sabbath and the Law with my overseeing session for about a year and a half, and sensing that the discussion had proved that my views were within the bounds of the system of doctrine, at the beginning of 2002 (from January to April) I preached an eleven-part sermon series on Paul's view of the Law with the same title as the paper that I had submitted to the session. The second and third sermons are the most important. I have transcribed the following excerpts from the sermon tapes.

Married to Another, Part I

"Introduction to Paul's View of the Law"
Preached January 20, 2002

Romans 7:1-6 ... As a result of this death, through our union with Christ in his death, we are no longer in the flesh, we are married to another husband, to Jesus Christ himself. Just as death severs a marriage bond, leaving the living spouse free to remarry, so our being united with Christ in his cross has fundamentally altered our relationship to the Law. In Christ we have died to the Law. We are delivered from it. We are married to another. Jesus Christ is our new husband. The place of headship and lordship that was formerly occupied by the Law, that position of commanding and of authority over our conscience and over our actions and behavior, that ability to judge – that position of headship and lordship, the husband's role, is now occupied by Christ.

The question is not whether there are commandments which bind the Christian today in the new covenant. Anyone who reads the New Testament knows that there are. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." He told the apostles in the great commission to teach the disciples "everything that I have commanded you." That's not the question. The question is this: Is the Mosaic Law, or a subset thereof, binding upon the Christian today in the form of a covenant? That is, Is the Mosaic Law our immediate standard of conduct? Is it our husband? To this, Paul gives a clear and definitive answer. He says without

doubt, unequivocally that we have died to the Law, that we are no longer under it, and that it is not our husband and the Law has no more power to command us any more than a husband has to command his dead wife.

And if it be objected, "But what about the ten commandments? Aren't Christians still required to obey their parents, and to abstain from adultery and murder and stealing and coveting and so on?" Paul's reply is simple: Yes, we are required to do those things, but those requirements come to us in a new form, and on the basis of a new legal authority. All the commands that the new covenant believer is required to obey, come directly from Jesus Christ. He, and he alone, is our husband. He, and he alone, has the authority to direct how we must live ...

Married to Another, Part II

"Paul's Covenantal Conception of the Law"
Preached January 27, 2002

... This morning, I'd like to focus specifically on this question of what does the word "Law" mean as it is used in Paul. This issue of definition is vitally important. If we aren't absolutely clear on what Paul means when he uses this key word, then when we start looking at the key passages where Paul addresses the topic of the Law, we're going to have a distorted understanding, our vision will be blurred. We'll be a little bit off in our understanding of what Paul is trying to say. In fact, I would argue that one of the main reasons that there has been so much confusion and controversy about Paul's view of the Law is that interpreters have approached Paul assuming that they already knew from the outset what Paul meant by that word.

In Greek the word for law is *nomos*. The word *nomos* occurs 121 times in Paul's writings. 106 of those occurrences (88%) are found in Paul's two epistles, Romans and Galatians. Those are the two epistles where Paul takes the time to lay his foundation for our understanding of the Law.

Traditionally, the word *nomos* has been interpreted as the same thing as what we call "the moral law" in systematic theology. The phrase "the moral law" of course is not a biblical term, and it's not wrong to use [post-] biblical terms in theology. We do it all the time – words like "Trinity," and so on and so forth. But it is a post-biblical theological category. "The moral law" refers to the ethical standards of God's unchanging will, the basic standards of righteousness binding on all mankind. All men know that it is forbidden, it is wrong, in the sight of God, to murder, to lie, to steal, to cheat, and commit adultery. Although men often suppress the truth in unrighteousness, Paul teaches that these basic ethical requirements are known in creation and conscience. They are not only known through the Scriptural revelation in the Bible. All men, both Jews and Gentiles are held accountable to these standards of the moral law and will be judged thereby at the day of judgment.

The question is, Is this the definition of law that Paul has in mind when he uses this word *nomos*? Let's turn in our Bibles to Romans 2:12. This is a key passage because it confronts us with the fact that there is a disconnect between Paul's usage of the word *nomos* or law, and our definition in systematics. Romans 2:12: "*For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.*"

Clearly, we've got a problem, because we know that all men have access to God's moral will, God's standards of righteousness revealed in creation and conscience. In fact, Paul states that very point later on in verse 15 when he says that the Gentiles have "the work of the Law written on their heart, their conscience bearing witness to accuse or defend them."

But in verse 12, when Paul uses this word "law" it's clear that we cannot assume that this word "law" means the same thing as it does in theology when we speak of the moral law. This is an easy mistake to make. Part of the problem is that we're using our English Bibles and the English translation to get at our understanding. A classic example of this from another area of theology is when people read the statement in James 2 that seems to contradict Paul's statements concerning justification. James says that Abraham was "justified by works." It's easy to make the mistake, to assume that the word "justify" in our English translations means the same thing as it does in systematic theology – Shorter Catechism # 33, "What is justification? It's an act of God's free grace wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone." If you take that definition from systematic theology and read it into James 2, you'll end up with confusion.

Obviously we need to revise our assumption that *nomos* means "the moral law." If you read that definition into Romans 2:12, that would be saying that all who have sinned without the moral law will be judged and will perish without the moral law. And that would create contradiction even within the context.

According to Romans 2:12, the Gentiles do not have this thing, whatever it is, called *nomos*, and they'll be judged apart from this thing called *nomos*. The Jews, by contrast, do have it and will be judged by it. This helps us to refine our understanding of how Paul uses this term. What is it that only the Jews are under and accountable to, and that Gentiles by definition are not under? It is nothing less than the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai. Paul uses *nomos* most often and most basically to refer to the Mosaic law as a covenant.

Only those with whom the Mosaic covenant was made are obligated to obey the terms of that covenant. This is an axiom of covenant theology. The demands of a particular covenant only apply to those who are party to the covenant. When God made the covenant with Noah, for example, after the flood, the covenant of common grace, he entered into a covenant with every creature on earth. By contrast, when God made the covenant with Israel at Sinai, he did not enter into a covenant with the whole world. He made the covenant only with the people of Israel, with those whom he had redeemed out of the house of bondage.

Notice in Romans 2:12, and the context there, that when Paul uses this word *nomos*, he clearly has this covenantal definition in mind, because he distinguishes these groups of people, the Jews and the Gentiles. And yet at the same time, he also recognizes that there is a sense in which even the Gentiles who don't have this covenant revelation and who are not bound by it, nevertheless have something equivalent – verse 14: "For when the Gentiles who do not have the law" (that is, they don't have this Mosaic covenant) "when they do instinctively the things of the law these, not having the law, are a law to themselves in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them."

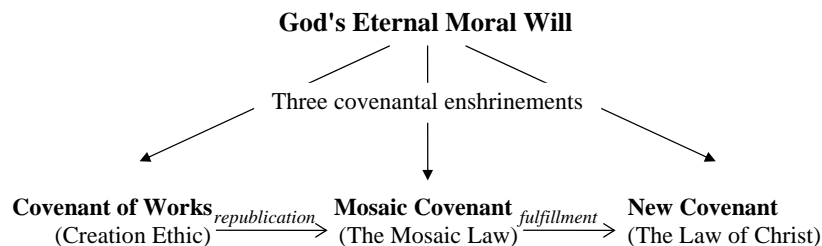
Notice how carefully Paul uses the word *nomos*. He does not say that the *nomos* itself is written on the hearts of the Gentiles. Often when we quote this verse in ordinary conversation we shorthandedly say that law is written on the heart. But that's not what Paul says. He says it's "the work of the Law" that is written on the heart of the Gentiles. And he defines what he means by that phrase, "the work of the law," by referring to the conscience. In the Westminster Confession, the phrase is "the light of nature." The light of nature and conscience are virtually the same. Man's conscience, then, according to Paul, is the functional equivalent of the Mosaic Law. I think that's actually a better translation than "work." "The work of the law" could be translated "the functional equivalent of the Mosaic law." In other words, it serves the same function. Just as the Mosaic law serves the function of showing the nature of sin, of defining sin and righteousness, and producing conviction of sin and the knowledge of sin in the hearts of the Jews, so also man's conscience is the functional equivalent of the Mosaic law, serving the function of producing the knowledge of sin.

It's clear, then, that in Paul's usage, *nomos* consistently denotes the Sinai covenant, the specific, historical, particular covenant that God made with Israel. And it doesn't distinguish between, as we often do in systematic theology, the various sub-categories of laws and commandments within the Sinai

covenant, the Mosaic covenant. For example, in theology we distinguish between the moral, the civil, and the ceremonial laws. That is again a post-biblical theological analysis. That's not the way Paul views it. He views the covenant as a unit, the Law in its totality, as that which is given to Israel. And yet there is still this validity to this concern to be able to speak of a category that is broader than merely the Law given to Israel at Mount Sinai. There is something higher as well that is applicable to all mankind.

That's why I've given you there in the bulletin, a little diagram that can help you to see that Paul does affirm that there is such a thing as God's eternal moral will. But Paul never conceives of that eternal moral will of God in the abstract, in non-historical terms. He always views it in covenantal terms. In Paul's theology, God's eternal moral will has been revealed, has been enshrined in three specific covenants: in the covenant of works at creation, in the Mosaic covenant at Sinai, and in the new covenant.

[The diagram that was included in the bulletin for January 27, 2002:]



The reference there to the covenant of works – again, that's another post-biblical theological term, but it is based upon this passage here in Romans 2, where Paul shows that even the Gentiles are accountable to the standards of God's eternal moral will, and that on the day of judgment those who have perfectly kept that moral will of God will be accounted as righteous in God's sight. And those who have failed will be judged and be guilty. Of course, as he goes on in the argument in Romans, he points out in chapter 3, verse 10, that there is no one in that first category, "there is none who is righteous, not even one," thus making it necessary for God to give us the righteousness of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation.

God's eternal moral will then is revealed or enshrined in these three covenants. And there is continuity between these three covenants. The Mosaic covenant is a republication of the covenant of works, and the ethical content of that covenant is a republication of the essential ethic of creation. When we come to the new covenant, which Paul calls, "the law of Christ" in Galatians 6:2 and 1 Corinthians 9:21, we also see continuity – not the continuity of republication, but the continuity of fulfillment.

So looking at this diagram, when Paul uses the word *nomos* he's not referring to this category at the top, "God's eternal moral will." When Paul uses the word *nomos* he is referring to the Mosaic Law. That is essential for us to understand ...

... In Paul's writings, whenever he refers to the *nomos*, to "the law" – there are a few minor exceptions – but by and large, most basically and fundamentally, when Paul refers to the law he has [Exodus 19-24] in mind – all of this covenantal event and all of the complex of events that took place in Exodus. He is operating with this covenantal conception which he derived from the Old Testament.

This then explains why it is that he never, or almost never, uses the term *nomos* to refer to this thing at the top here [in the diagram], "God's eternal moral will." Because that is binding on all men from creation onward, whether Jew or Gentile, but this law, this covenant given at Sinai, was given only to the people of Israel.

With this understanding then of what Paul means by *nomos* in his writings we can now appreciate more clearly what Paul is getting at in Romans 7:1-6. This is going to be the passage that we're going to

keep coming back to again and again over the next few weeks, because this is really the heart of Paul's teaching concerning the relationship of the new covenant Christian and the Law.

If we start off by defining *nomos* as the moral law, we're going to make some serious exegetical mistakes as we read Romans 7:1-6, especially statements like, verse 4, that "we have died to the Law," and verse 6, that "we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound." ... If we assume that "the Law" here refers to the eternal moral will of God, then we might be tempted to interpret Paul's declaration of our freedom from the Law in an antinomian sense – as if believers are free to violate God's eternal moral will. "We're not under it! We've been released from it! If we want to, we can worship other gods. If we want to, we can steal and lie and commit adultery and murder." Some fringe groups in the history of the church taught exactly that. There were those at the time of the Westminster Assembly who were called the Ranters. This was a group that John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, at one time seemed to have flirted with. The Ranters taught that we ought to sin in order that grace may abound. And they based this misguided conclusion on this simplistic reading of Paul's teaching that we are not under the Law. They came to that conclusion because they started off with the wrong definition of "law." And of course the practical consequences of this kind of thinking are disastrous in the Christian life. Indeed, Paul very clearly teaches that those who abuse God's grace in this way, to turn it into a license for sin, will not inherit the kingdom of God ...

... What we must grasp here is that Paul is referring [in Rom. 7:4, 6] to the Mosaic Law. And he is declaring that through Christ's death we have been delivered from the Mosaic Law precisely because the Mosaic Law is a covenant of works to which we were bound and because that covenant of works came to us in our fallen state as the sons of Adam, that Law did not have the affect of subduing our passions, rather it had just the opposite effect, verse 5, of arousing our sinful passions, and thus causing us to bring forth fruit unto death ...

... The old covenant was an important enshrinement of God's eternal moral will. But it was given in the form of a covenant of works, and it was given only to Israel. Now that Christ has come, and was born under the Law, the old covenant has been fulfilled, and the Law has been brought to an end. Ephesians 2:15: "He abolished in his flesh the Law with its commandments and regulations." Again, if you take the word *nomos* there and define it as the moral will, that statement results in theological confusion. But if you understand the Law there as the Mosaic Law itself, then we understand what it means. The Law then is no longer the immediate standard of conduct for the new covenant people of God.

Where then do we now learn the content of God's moral will for us today? It is objectively revealed in the New Testament. It includes all of the teaching of Jesus himself – the Sermon on the Mount, the two great commandments, the new commandment to love one another "even as I have loved you." It includes all of the teachings of the apostles – the extensive exhortations of Paul and the other apostles in their epistles, those exhortations that are grounded in the indicative-imperative dynamic of new covenant obedience. The New Testament itself also reaches back into the Old Testament to draw out the ethical implications of the Mosaic Law, now interpreted in light of its fulfillment in Christ. The Mosaic Law then is not directly binding upon us, but ... the substance of the righteousness demanded in the Mosaic Law finds expression in new covenant form in the Law of Christ.

The issue then is not whether we are free from God's moral will to do as we please. In the analogy here [in Rom. 7:1-6] Paul does not say, "We've died to the Law and now we don't have a husband, and now we can just do whatever we want." Paul says, "No, we've died to the Law through Christ, and therefore *he* is our new husband" ... The righteousness that the Law demanded all along is now fulfilled in us by his grace.

Married to Another, Part III

"The Function of the Law in Redemptive History"

Preached February 3, 2002

Scripture reading: Romans 5:12-21

Before we delve into the text that we have read, I'd like to draw your attention to chapter XIX of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, page 859 in the back of your hymnals. There's much that we could say about this chapter, but I'd just like to focus on the first two paragraphs, although I'll read the first four paragraphs to set the context.

"1. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

"2. *This law*, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables; the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.

"3. Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances; partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the new testament.

"4. To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require."

According to *The Westminster Confession*, the Decalogue (that is, the ten commandments) is "a perfect rule of righteousness" – notice that phrase at the beginning of paragraph two – "a perfect rule of righteousness," that is, a perfect standard defining God's moral will for mankind. Furthermore, it is a timeless and universal expression of God's moral will. We see this problem right at the very outset in the first two paragraphs of chapter XIX where the Westminster divines state that the moral law was originally given to Adam in the garden, and then they go on to say that "this law" – that's very important to notice; at the very beginning of paragraph two they say, "this law," referring back to paragraph one, regarding the law given to Adam – "*this law* was delivered on Mount Sinai in ten commandments."

My concern here is that I believe that this is an a-covenantal approach to the Decalogue – "a-covenantal" in the sense that the Decalogue is not being defined in covenantal terms. Now it wouldn't be so bad if paragraph *two* had said that the Decalogue is republished as a covenant of works. Instead, the divines drop the wonderful covenantal definition of paragraph *one*, and state that the moral law was first given to Adam in the garden and then reissued merely as "a perfect rule of righteousness."

Now in criticizing the Assembly's formulation here we have to immediately go on to point out that the Assembly does not have a *totally* a-covenantal view of the Mosaic Law. Really it's just the Decalogue that gets this a-covenantal treatment. Because when you read on in paragraphs three and four, the Assembly recognizes that everything given after the ten commandments *is* covenantally conditioned. Notice at the beginning of paragraph three: "Besides this law," God also gave them the ceremonial laws (paragraph three) and the civil laws (paragraph four). By saying this, the Westminster divines show that they understood that these categories of laws, ceremonial and civil, were given to Israel as a distinct covenant community. Israel, they recognized, was a unique thing. It was a theocratic nation with an earthly temple, living in the land as an earthly type of heaven. And therefore these portions of the Mosaic Law

cannot be strictly or directly applied in the new covenant today. In fact the Westminster divines say that the ceremonial and civil laws have been abrogated.

I'd like to make a brief comment here about this three-fold division of moral, civil, and ceremonial. It's not a perfect approach. It was developed by medieval theologians as a rough first stab at a covenantal approach to the Mosaic Law. And so, as such it's a handy pedagogical technique, but it's imperfect. It's an imperfect algorithm, if you will, that does help you at least to get started exegetically. The reason I say that is because it's very difficult to make a sharp distinction between civil and ceremonial, on the one hand, and the moral law, because even the moral laws are cloaked sometimes in theocratic aspects. You see that, for example, in the fifth commandment, that if you honor your father and mother you will live long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. So I prefer to look at the entire Mosaic Law and say there are both moral and typological aspects to the Mosaic Law.

But my real concern, then, is not so much with the three-fold division. The concern here is this: the Westminster divines have set the Decalogue aside from that three-fold analysis, that covenantal analysis. They've set it aside as being *pure eternal moral law*. In effect what they've done is they've exempted the ten commandments from their covenantal analysis that they will go on to give in paragraphs three and four – they've exempted the ten commandments from the very outset, and said, "This is purely moral, and then the rest of it we can do the analysis on." They recognize that other dimensions of Israel's Law must be covenantally filtered before we apply them. There may be legitimate applications from the civil law. They talk about general equity. But they recognize that those aspects have to be covenantally filtered before we apply them in the new covenant. But what they don't do is they don't recognize that this also needs to be done with the Decalogue. Why? Why have they done this? Because they have started out with the assumption, with the presupposition, that the Decalogue is timeless moral law, first given to Adam and then reissued at Sinai as a perfect rule of righteousness.

I'm not the only one who has concerns about this formulation in chapter XIX. I've mentioned T. David Gordon and Meredith Kline as contemporary Reformed theologians who also are concerned about this. T. David Gordon, for example, delivered a series of lectures on the subject of "Paul's Understanding of the Law" in 1996 at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. I'm quoting here from one of the tapes. He says that the Westminster divines "take the Decalogue, and drive it back into the garden, which justifies their driving it forward, not only until the return of Christ but beyond the return of Christ – because they've made it a timeless expression, something which has nothing to do with the unique circumstances of Israel, but something which reflects that abiding moral will of God given to Adam earlier in the garden, and for that very reason built into the nature of our relations as humans and that which would govern us forever."

Now Professor Gordon goes on to say that his concern here is with the *theory* of the Law given in chapter XIX, not so much with the exposition of the ten commandments in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Although there are some minor exegetical flaws in their exposition of each of the ten commandments, on the whole the Westminster divines expound each of the ten commandments in light of the total teaching of Scripture. They bring to bear the New Testament witness upon each command, so that they do end up covenantally filtering the ten commandments. Although there is one flaw – actually it's a significant flaw – and that is that they have an inconsistent approach to the fourth commandment. The divines correctly appeal to the New Testament in order to establish that the day has changed from the last day of the week to the first day of the week. In other words, the Christian Sabbath is the Lord's Day, the day of the resurrection of Christ. And that part is good; that's a covenantal interpretation, a covenantal analysis in light of the New Testament. But when it comes to the question of the *manner* in which the Lord's Day is to be observed, they revert back to the Mosaic ordinance and simply lift it out of its Mosaic theocratic context and apply it today, rather than continuing on with the New Testament and saying, "What does the New Testament say about how to keep the day holy unto the Lord?"

So aside from their treatment of the fourth commandment, we really have no major bones to pick with the divines when it comes to their practical conclusions, the do's and the don'ts of the Christian life,

the bottom line of Christian ethics. The real area of concern is with the theoretical treatment that they give at the outset, primarily with the way in which the second paragraph of chapter XIX is connected back to the first paragraph with that word "this" ("this law"), because this essentially places the ten commandments back in the garden as a timeless moral law given to Adam before the fall.

Romans 5:12-21

Now what I'd like to do is to turn to Paul's teaching in Romans 5 and to see how Paul approaches the issue. What we'll see is that Paul sets forth a very different conception of the Law. For Paul, the Law came in *after the Fall* in order to make sin increase. Romans 5. To set the context here, Paul begins by comparing Adam and Christ. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned –" (verse 12). And then he sort of breaks off in mid-sentence and doesn't resume the second part of the parallel until verses 18 and 19.

What is the fundamental point of Paul's making this comparison between Adam and Christ? He says at the end of verse 14 that Adam is a type of Christ. What is the point of comparison? It's that both are covenant heads. A covenant head is someone who stands in the covenant relationship on behalf of those whom he represents. When Adam sinned in the garden, he did so in a representative capacity. His sin was not a private affair, but the covenant transgression of a public person acting on our behalf. That phrase "public person" is taken from the Larger Catechism. The result is that all men, descending from Adam, are reckoned as covenant breakers because of Adam's one act of disobedience which is reckoned to their account. In a similar manner, Christ obeyed as a covenant head, so that his one act of righteousness – I love that phrase, "one act of righteousness" from verse 18, that is, his obedience to the point of death. The climactic expression of the active obedience of Christ was his laying down his life for us upon the cross. Christ obeyed as a covenant head so that this one act of righteousness is reckoned to the account of all the elect.

Now the reason that Paul interrupted himself is because in verses 13 and 14, before he completes the comparison, he realizes that if he is going to show these parallels between Adam and Christ, he must first demonstrate that Adam's sin was covenantal and imputed on the basis of his unique role as covenant head. The function of the parenthesis, then, in verses 13 and 14 is to set forth a powerful argument demonstrating that this is indeed the case.

What is Paul's argument here? First of all, notice that he singles out a particular segment in covenantal history – verse 13, "for until the Law," and again in verse 14, "death reigned from Adam until Moses." These two phrases are synonyms defining this period of redemptive history after the fall of Adam until the giving of the Law at Sinai.

Having isolated that period of covenant history, from Adam to Moses, Paul now makes his argument. The first premise in verse 13a is non-controversial. "Until the Law, sin was in the world." Just read your Bible. Remember, Cain slew his brother Abel. In the days of Noah, all flesh had corrupted itself upon the earth and had to be destroyed in the flood. And so on. The existence of sin in the world after the fall of man and prior to the giving of the Law at Sinai is undisputed. So that's the first premise.

Then, in verse 13b, he lays down the second premise: "But sin is not imputed when there is no law." And this statement here is a theological axiom. The first thing we have to point out is that those of us who are familiar with the Reformed terminology of imputation, we don't want to read that definition – the Reformed covenantal definition of imputation – into the English word "imputed" here. Because imputation in systematic theology means taking something from someone else's account and crediting it to someone else, [e.g.,] Adam to the human race, Christ to the elect. Here, though the word "imputed" simply means "to take sin into account and thus to punish it." Sin is not taken into account, Paul is saying, unless there is a covenant framework in which sin is first defined and in which punishment has also been defined and can be meted out on the basis of the covenant. The argument here depends on Paul's unique usage of the word

nomos. As we've seen, *nomos* does not mean an ethical standard universally binding on all men, but a covenant based upon the principle of works. In such a covenant, obedience is rewarded with life, and transgression of the covenant is punished with death.

Just a little aside here, this supports what we said last week about Paul's covenantal conception of the Law. Even though God's moral will continues after the fall and is revealed to all men through creation and conscience, leaving all mankind without excuse, that's not what Paul has in mind here when he uses the word *nomos*. This is the point I tried to make last week in our discussion of Romans 2:12, where if you take that definition – the moral law – and read it into Romans 2:12, it makes no sense – that those who sinned apart from the moral law will be judged apart from the moral law? How does that fit? The Gentiles, of course they have the moral will of God revealed to them in creation and conscience. The same thing applies here. If you take the definition "*nomos* equals moral law," then Paul's statement in verse 13 is totally nonsensical. He would be saying that there was sin in the world prior to the coming of the moral law. And it would also conflict with his earlier statement in Romans 2:14 where he argues for the moral culpability and inexcusability of the Gentiles even apart from their knowledge of the special revelation at Sinai. So *nomos*, clearly, is more specific than the moral will of God. It is a covenant arrangement in which the sanction of death is threatened against those who transgress the covenant.

So let's return to the argument here. We've looked at verse 13, a and b. Then in verse 14, Paul says, "Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses." If death is the wages of sin, and if sin is not taken into account unless there is a law, it follows that those who died from Adam until Moses, died because they were being imputed – and here we are using [the word "imputed"] in that technical Reformed systematic sense – because they were being imputed with Adam's sin under the *nomos* of creation. Paul has demonstrated that the covenant breaking of Adam was a covenant breaking of a covenant head, whose one transgression has inaugurated a reign or dominion of sin and of death, in which all men are hopelessly enslaved, totally unable to rescue themselves from the overwhelming power of Adam's sin and its divinely applied death sanction. It's a powerful argument, isn't it, that Paul is making here. Of course, it goes against the grain of our egalitarian, democratic views to argue that we are imputed with Adam's sin and that death reigns because of his sin, but that's precisely the point that Paul is making. And of course that only sets the stage for the wonderful truth of Christ's work and his accomplishment as our covenant head.

There's so much more that we could say about this whole passage. We're going to have to overlook that wonderful section in verses 15 through 19 and skip down to verse 20, where Paul returns to the issue that he raised in his parenthesis in verses 13 and 14. Verse 20: "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase." Now we need to realize that this statement would have been revolutionary in Paul's day. What did the Jews believe? The Jews generally believed – and of course it's always dangerous to make generalizations about Judaism because there were a lot of different sects and varieties of Judaism – but I think it's true that they generally believed that the giving of the Torah to Israel was a positive thing, a means of grace by which Israel would recover all the lost glory of Adam. In fact, that's a direct quote from the writings of the Qumran sect in the Dead Sea Scrolls. They believed that God gave the Law so that Israel could recover all of the lost glory of Adam by means of observing the Law.

Paul has a completely different view, doesn't he? For Paul, by contrast, the Law "came in" – notice that verb – "came in" to this picture of Adam's imputed sin and the reign of death upon all mankind on the basis of his one sin. It came in, not in order to undo Adam's sin – that belongs to Christ alone – but in order to turn sins into covenantal transgressions, thus exacerbating and amplifying the hopeless situation of fallen Adamic humanity enslaved under the reign of sin and death. It's quite a shocking statement here. Paul places the Torah on the side, not of the solution, but of the problem.

So what can we learn from this passage concerning the function of the Law in redemptive history? Go back to verse 14. Notice that Paul selected the period "from Adam to Moses" as the basis for his argument. Of course he had to isolate that period, the pre-Mosaic era, because the coming of the Law changed the situation by re-introducing a *nomos* arrangement. After Sinai, sin does occur in the likeness of the transgression of Adam. When people sinned, they received the curse-sanction of death. They

transgressed the covenant. That's why he had to stop at that point, that's why he had to pick that particular segment of history. The implication is interesting. According to Paul, God's pre-fall covenant with Adam, and his post-fall covenant with Israel under the Mosaic Law, both involved the presence of a *nomos*-type arrangement, that is, both were covenantal arrangements in which obedience was rewarded with life and transgression was punishable by death.

Remember as I said, the problem with the Westminster Confession is not that they put the idea that there was a covenant of works in the garden. The problem is that when they come back to Sinai it's not defined in covenant terms but merely as a perfect rule of righteousness.

Notice, as well, that Paul sees the sins committed by the sons of Adam after the fall as sins (he says "sin was in the world"), but the sins committed by the sons of Adam after the fall and prior to the coming of the Law, were not sins committed "in the likeness of the transgression of Adam." [Verse 14:] "Even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam." The NIV, by the way, completely botches it there where they say that they did not sin "by breaking a command as Adam did." It's not that they didn't break a command. It's that they didn't break a *covenant*, they didn't violate a covenant.

So this then helps us to understand verse 20, doesn't it? Because when the Law came in, what did it do? Suddenly sin reappears in the likeness of Adam. The transgression increases. The one transgression of Adam, the one covenant violation of Adam, is increased and multiplied on a national scale in Israel.

This understanding of the function of the Law in redemptive history is supported by two cross references that I'd like to turn to. The first is in Romans 4, and verse 15. Paul has already hinted at this. He says, Romans 4:15, "for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation." He doesn't say, notice, that there is no sin, because he acknowledges that sin existed in the world prior to the coming of the Law. But there is no violation, meaning there is no violation of a covenant. Or a transgression; transgression and violation are synonymous terms.

The second cross reference is in Galatians 3, and verse 19. "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions." The translation "because of transgressions," however, is inaccurate. The NASB has a footnote that comes closer to the truth. The footnote says, "for the sake of defining transgressions." It all depends on how you translate this one Greek word *charin*. *Charin* means, literally it just means "for the sake of" or "for the purpose of." Some people think that what Paul is saying here is that God gave the Law as a guardian to protect Israel from sin. That's based on their misunderstanding of the pedagogue later on in the chapter. But I believe that, based on the cross references that we've seen in Romans 4:15 and 5:20, that a better translation would be, "the Law was added for the sake of defining transgressions," or even more accurately, "to turn sins into transgressions of the covenant." Now that's epexegetical, it's not a literal translation, but it does bring out the point that Paul is trying to make. When you transgress the covenant, that's different from committing a sin. When you transgress the covenant, the covenant itself is broken, just as Adam broke the covenant when he ate of the forbidden tree, and just as Israel broke the covenant and was sent into exile. This is quite different from the many sins that were committed by the sons of Adam in the context of Adam's pre-existing sin and condemnation.

This passage in Galatians 3:19 is a helpful cross-reference to Romans 5:20. The function of the Law is that it was added, or it entered into, the state of man after the fall, in order to reveal the true nature of sin as a violation of the covenant, and thus to seal man's enslavement to the guilt and power of sin.

Now the reason that I had you turn to Galatians 3, is because in addition to the statement in 3:19 that the Law was added in order to turn sins into transgressions, Paul adds another very important and inter-related function of the Law as well. Notice the rest of the verse: "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions" (or for the sake of transgressions) "having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator" (the mediator is Moses) "until the Seed would come to whom the promise had been made." The Law was inserted into the midst of redemptive history "until the Seed would come." Paul picks up on this thought later on in Galatians 4:4: "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His

Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law." You see what Paul is saying. From the outset God gave the Mosaic Law with the coming of Christ in view. He gave the Law to provide the proper covenantal context in which Christ would become incarnate so that he might accomplish our redemption. Christ was born under the Law in order to take upon himself the Law's curse and in order to fulfill the Law's positive demands.

The Mosaic covenant of works, however, was *not* given to Israel in the same way that it was given to Adam in paradise. And that's important to keep in mind. The Mosaic covenant of works is not a proper, genuine covenant of works. Nobody, not a single Israelite could have ever kept the Mosaic Law and achieved eternal life on the basis of it. The most that you could have done is to generally keep what the Law requires and live long in the land. But the land was a picture of heaven. Therefore, the Mosaic covenant of works is not a proper covenant of works, but rather it is a "subserving covenant." This is the language that was favored by a number of the Puritans who understood this aspect of the Mosaic covenant. Samuel Bolton in his book *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, and Edward Fisher in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. These were Puritan theologians who wrote right around the same time as the Westminster Assembly. In fact Samuel Bolton was nominated to the Assembly and may have attended it in later sessions. It was a subserving covenant. Subserving to what? Subserving to God's ultimate purpose of the Seed who would come in order to fulfill it and thus to bring about his purpose of grace given to Abraham. The Mosaic covenant of works was not intended to supplant or replace the covenant of grace established in Genesis 3:15 and reestablished with Abraham. "It was *added* because of transgressions until the Seed should come" (Gal. 3:19). It was added as a subserving covenant in order to set the stage for the execution of God's eternal decree to save the elect through Jesus Christ the promised Seed and ultimate Law-keeper.

This is why Paul raises the question in verse 21: "Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God?" Does the Mosaic Law negate the previous promises given to Abraham? "God forbid!" he says, and he even states in the rest of verse 21 that the Law itself could never have given righteousness or eternal life. The Mosaic Covenant was not given as a means of justification. If it had been given as a means of justification then it would have nullified the earlier Abrahamic promise. Rather, it was subordinated to the covenant with Abraham, and thus the Mosaic covenant of works was given, not as if Israel could perform its requirements and be justified by it, but precisely to show Israel's inability and failure under the Law, and thus to prepare the way for God to do what the Law could not do. Romans 8:3-4: "For what the Law could not do, because it was weak through the flesh, God did. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us." And then in Romans 10:4 he says that "Christ is the *telos* of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes." *Telos* means it is a fulfillment that terminates. Both aspects are present: the aspect of fulfillment and the aspect of termination. But it's a certain kind of termination. It's not just a termination of saying, "Okay, it's over." It's a termination that occurs by means of fulfillment. By being born under the Mosaic Law and fulfilling it in our place, both as to its precept and as to its penalty, Christ wrought a perfect righteousness, a divine righteousness, which is imputed to our account as a gift and received by faith alone. As a result, we who are aware of our guilt by God's grace, who are made aware of our state as those who are totally destitute in Adam, but who are nevertheless resting in and receiving this freely offered righteousness – we are the ones who are now regarded in the sight of a holy God just as if we ourselves had fulfilled the absolute perfection demanded by the Law.

Conclusion

So notice the contrast, then, between the way Paul approaches the issue of the Law and the way the Westminster Confession does. The Westminster Confession says that the function of the Law is to serve as a perfect rule of righteousness, and it has this function both before and after the fall, as a timeless expression of God's moral will. Since it is a timeless moral law, the law continues even for the redeemed to function in this capacity as the believer's rule of life.

But this is not what Paul teaches. As we saw last week, and again this morning, the Law is not a timeless moral law, but the specific historical covenant established with Israel at Sinai. And furthermore, this covenant was a covenant of works, not a proper covenant of works, but it was a republication on the typological level of Israel's retention of the land so that it was *like* God's covenant with Adam in the garden. As such, as a covenant of works, the function of the Mosaic Law in redemptive history is twofold, and these two functions are inter-connected:

First, to turn sins into covenantal transgressions, thus increasing sin and sealing us in the state of helpless enslavement under the power and condemnation of sin. Paul makes that statement there in Galatians 3:23, "before faith came" (that is, before Christ, the object of our faith came) "we" (that is, the people of God, Israel) "were kept in custody under the Law being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed."

Second, having shut Israel up under sin, the Law then provided the necessary legal framework for the incarnation of the Son of God, so that by his perfect obedience under the Law, and by satisfying the Law's curse in our place, we might be justified in the sight of God.

Now remember, because this Mosaic covenant is not a proper covenant of works, when Christ was born under the Mosaic Law, his being born under the Mosaic Law was simply the historical, visible form of the eternal covenant of works between the Father and the Son. The earthly Mosaic covenant of works was not a proper covenant of works. But it did provide for what we call "redemptive historical legibility." Redemptive historical legibility means when I look at the cross, when I look at the incarnation, do I understand what's taking place there? Do I understand the profound judicial transaction that's taking place there? Well I can't understand it unless I know that Christ existed and was born under a legal framework, and that is why Israel had to exist beforehand so that Christ could become incarnate under the Law. But properly speaking the law that Christ fulfilled and the curse that he took is the eternal covenant of works between the Father and the Son, so that we might be justified not just with respect to the earthly land but with respect to the heavenly land itself.

Now, again, the ten commandments are not unrelated to God's moral will. We talked about this using this little diagram that I gave you – God's eternal moral will at the top, then three covenantal enshrinements – the covenant of works enshrines it in one form, the Mosaic covenant enshrines it in another form in the land and the typology, and the new covenant enshrines it in its fulfilled form in Christ. But precisely because the ten commandments enshrine the moral will of God in the form of a covenant of works, that's exactly why the ten commandments cannot be made the immediate standard of conduct for the people of God. The Law, with its blessings and curses – the whole issue of Israel's probationary tenure in the land – was intentionally designed by God to set the legal framework of a covenantal works arrangement, which would then serve as the redemptive historical setting for Christ's incarnation and obedience under the Law. Just think about that. If the Decalogue were simply given as a rule of righteousness, and not as a covenant of works, then the Law could have never functioned in that way to set the context for Christ's incarnation and obedience. Conversely, the other is true as well. If we have established from Scripture (Galatians 4:4) that that is the purpose of the Law – to serve this Christological role of redemptive historical legibility so that we can understand that Christ is fulfilling the covenant of works – then that proves that the Law was given as a covenant of works.

This is absolutely vital. It's vital for us to view the ten commandments never as rule of life merely, as if the blessings and the curses and the conditionality of the Law could somehow be stripped away, thus leaving a core ethical standard for us. Because by defanging the Law into a mere standard, it loses its nature as a covenant of works. And once it loses its nature as a covenant of works, it no longer shows us our utter inability to keep it, and thus we are prone ever to deceive ourselves into thinking that we can somehow do it. And then what do we do? We start applying the Law to ourselves directly, skipping the absolutely essential step of first seeing how it was fulfilled by Christ in our place.

I believe that this is what happens in a subtle way – not intentionally but in a subtle way – when the Westminster divines go through each of the ten commandments in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Or at least I should say, this is the effect that it sometimes has when people go to the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. It's as if we're just reading a description here of what the Christian life ought to look like. They go through each commandment, describing the duty required and the sins forbidden, and so on. Now I think that the Westminster divines themselves in terms of their theological understanding recognized the danger of that. Because when they finally finish their exposition of the ten commandments, at the very end they ask, "Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?" [WSC # 82]. Of course the answer is No man. The answer is that we are shut up to Christ. And so they go on immediately to point us to Christ. We can only be delivered from the curse of the Law by faith in Christ, by repentance, and by the means of grace (the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer).

No one goes out and says, "I'm going to interpret and apply the ten commandments apart from Christ." At least I hope not! But if we start off with the assumption that the ten commandments are only a *rule* and not a *covenant*, then we are setting ourselves up to do precisely that. And we set ourselves up, then, for the fatal sin of self-deception, the sin of thinking that we *can* do what the Law requires. But if we refuse to defang the Law into an a-covenantal rule of life – if we leave the Law as it is, in all of its covenantal integrity and wholeness as a covenant of works – then we will be shut up to faith in Christ as the only means of fulfilling it.

Married to Another, Part VIII

"Conclusion to the Letter and the Spirit / Objections"
Preached March 24, 2002

... The first objection is this: "If the ten commandments are not the immediate standard of conduct for the new covenant believer, how do we avoid antinomianism?" In other words, if it is not through the ten commandments that we know God's moral will, then how? How do we know God's will for our lives?

To begin with, to answer this question we have to review what we said several weeks ago. The ten commandments were given in the form of a covenant. They are in fact called "the tablets of the covenant" (Deut. 9:9, 11, 15; Heb. 9:4). The historical prologue at the beginning says, "I am the LORD your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." And this prologue stands at the very beginning of the ten commandments to make it clear that these laws that are about to be given are binding only upon Israel, only upon the covenant people who were redeemed out of Egypt. They are stipulations of a covenant. And therefore the stipulations are only binding on those who are members of the covenant. The ten commandments then are not the universal moral law binding on all mankind in all ages.

Since the old covenant has been abolished, and since the church is under a new covenant, the ten commandments per se cannot be placed upon the church as the eternal expression of God's moral will. Even the most rigorous traditionalist would agree that that is the case when they come to the fourth commandment, because the fourth commandment does not teach merely that we should set aside one day out of seven; it teaches that we must observe the Saturday observance of the Sabbath.

Having said all this, though, it is nevertheless true that the ten commandments reflect and are founded upon God's eternal moral will. I think the fourth commandment would be the only exception to that because the fourth commandment is unique in the sense that it's the sign of the covenant. There is a parallel sign of the covenant in the new covenant, namely, the Lord's Day, but the idea of having the sign of the covenant I would argue is not founded on the moral will per se. But the other nine commandments are indeed founded upon God's eternal moral will, and God's moral will cannot change because it is founded upon his own unchanging nature.

The ten commandments therefore, while not binding as a covenant, that is, as the direct moral standard for the believer, are nevertheless re-issued in a new form, in a form that is applicable to the new covenant administration of God's moral will as summed up by Jesus Christ himself in the two great commandments.

Let's turn to Mark 12:28-31:

28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God is one LORD; 30 and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

If you think about it, the ten commandments that God gave to Israel were a catechetical summary of God's moral will for them. There were many other things that the Israelites had to do besides the ten commandments. But the ten commandments were a helpful summary. Just like children need a little catechism to help them get down in their minds in a simple, summary form the basics of the Christian faith, so also the ten commandments served that catechetical purpose. Jesus then in the new covenant provides us as well with a similar summary. He takes these two commandments, both of which are found in the Old Testament, although interestingly neither one is listed as part of the ten commandments. The first commandment, the greatest commandment, is from Deuteronomy 6, and the second greatest commandment is from Leviticus 19. Jesus pulls these two commandments out of the Mosaic context and he places his stamp of approval upon them. It's as if Jesus is saying to you, the new covenant church, "Here – here are the two things that you need to focus on and pay attention to. Everything else is summarized here in these two commandments" ...

... What about the second greatest commandment, love for neighbor? Jesus also modifies this commandment in the upper room with his disciples. In John 13:34 he said, "A new commandment I give to you." Notice that if there is a new covenant, then there's also going to be a new commandment, because all commandments in the Bible are part of a covenant. So he says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 13:34). It's the same command as the one in Leviticus 19:18, but the motive is different. We no longer love our neighbor *as ourselves*, but *as Christ loved us*. The example of Christ, his offering himself upon the cross in our place, his self-sacrificial love for his church becomes the paradigm of our love of the brethren ...

... So here then is the answer to the question, "How do we avoid antinomianism? How do we know what God's moral will is for us in the new covenant?" We have these two great commandments of the new covenant to guide us.

Now the question is raised at this point, "Are these two commandments enough? Are they sufficient to give us all that we need?" And the answer of course is "No." There are a lot of other things that are implied in those two commandments that the two commandments themselves don't specifically state. But remember the ten commandments aren't sufficient either. There's a lot of stuff besides the ten commandments that we're supposed to do. These are just catechetical summaries. The ten commandments was the summary that God wanted Israel to have. The two great commandments is the summary that he wants us to have in the new covenant. But remember this summary given to us by Jesus with his stamp of approval upon it is the pinnacle of God's revelation to us. As Paul said in Romans 13:8-10: "Love is the fulfillment of the Law." And if there's any other commandment – thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not kill ... whatever other commandment you might come up with – [Paul] says it's all summed up in that one command to love ...

... We have the two great commandments to guide us, as well as all of the teaching of Jesus and the apostles in which those commandments are fleshed out in greater detail – so that we have all kinds of ethical exhortations and teachings, we have the epistles of Paul, we have all the teaching concerning sexual purity, and all the things that are given there to flesh all of that out, so that we understand what is included [in the two great commandments].

Objection # 2 (from "The Sabbath as an Eschatological Sign of the Covenant")

[I've included this excerpt, even though it is from one of the documents in the case, in order to draw attention to what might otherwise go unnoticed in such a long paper. It is relevant to the charge since it deals with my understanding of the Decalogue. At this point in the paper, I am responding to two objections to my view of the Sabbath. The second objection that might be raised is:]

"Since the Sabbath is one of the ten commandments, and since the ten commandments are a summary of the moral law (and the moral law is binding on all men) - doesn't it follow that the Sabbath is binding on all men?" [10]

... The Mosaic Sabbath is expressly said to have been "given" (Exod. 16:29) by Yahweh to the people of Israel to be a sign of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his covenant people. "You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you ... It is an everlasting sign between Me and the sons of Israel" (Exod. 31:13, 17) ... Just as the sign of circumcision set the covenant seed of Abraham apart, so the sign of the Sabbath sanctifies Israel in the sight of the nations.

These exegetical data have important implications for one's interpretation, not just of the fourth commandment, but of the Decalogue as a whole. They call into question the long-standing opinion that each of the ten commandments is rooted in the abiding moral will of God. In addition to the fourth commandment itself, numerous aspects of the Decalogue are directed specifically to the covenant community (e.g. Exod. 20:2, 5-6, 7, 8-11, 12b). Indeed, so intimate is the connection between the Decalogue and the covenant made with Israel at Sinai, the ten commandments are frequently referred to in Scripture as the covenant itself (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 5:2ff; 9:9-11; 1 Kings 8:9). There is a sense in which the entire Decalogue was limited to the covenant community only. The preamble to the Decalogue places a covenantal limiter on the Decalogue, grounding the stipulations that follow in the historically particular act of redemption at the exodus. [11] We must not suppress the force of this mounting exegetical data, even if it means we must rethink cherished traditions.

On the other hand, granting all of this evidence pointing to the covenantal nature of the Decalogue, we must also recognize that, with the exception of the fourth commandment, nine of the commandments do constitute a summary of God's moral will - albeit in typological-covenantal form (as seen, for example, in the fifth commandment's promise of long life in the land of Canaan). Although we cannot say that the Decalogue per se is binding on all men, it is certainly legitimate to say that nine of the ten commandments overlap⁴¹ with the moral will of God revealed in creation and conscience.

Why is the fourth commandment the only commandment of the ten that is not grounded in the moral will of God? The purpose of the Mosaic Law (of which the Decalogue was the summary, written on tablets of stone) was not to provide a timeless list of eternal commands binding on all men, but to function as a covenantally particular and typological re-enactment of Adam's probation in the garden. The Sabbath is included in the Decalogue precisely in order to signal that this is the covenant of works, and that Israel is

⁴¹ The "overlap" image may not clearly communicate the point I am trying to make. I should have said: "Nine of the ten commandments *are founded upon* the moral will of God revealed in creation and conscience."

now on probation in the land ("My rest" - Psalm 95). Israel's obedience to the other nine commandments is functioning within the context of the covenant of works.

The traditional explanation is on the right track: the Decalogue is clearly set apart from the rest of the Mosaic legislation. Unlike the rest of the Mosaic corpus of laws, the Decalogue was written directly by the finger of God, on tablets of stone, and placed inside the ark of the covenant. It is unique also in that it does not contain any ceremonial or cultic legislation pertaining to sacrifice, the clean and unclean distinction, etc. There seems to be a divine spotlight on the Decalogue, as if God wanted to say to Israel, "Here are the really important and crucial commandments; the rest is either application and outworking of the principles contained here, or else mere positive law."

Good. But how do we then account for the unique typological elements in the Decalogue: the promise of long life in the land; the curse sanction added to the second commandment; the seventh day rest, etc.? The view that the Decalogue is a covenantally specific, typological re-enactment of the Adamic covenant of works, pertaining to the probationary nature of Israel's national election and inheritance accounts for everything that the traditional explanation covers, plus the features it can't explain. It explains (1) why the Decalogue seems to be mainly "moral" law (because a republication of the Adamic covenant of works *ought* to enshrine the core creation ethic rooted in God's nature), and (2) why the Decalogue also contains the typological elements mentioned above (because it is a *typological* republication of the Adamic covenant of works in which Israel's tenure in the land is a picture of our ultimate, eschatological inheritance in the heavenly places). This then explains why the fourth commandment is unique among the ten commandments in that it is binding only on the covenant community.⁴² As the sign of the covenant of works, the fourth commandment rightly belongs amid the stipulations in which the covenant of works is summarily comprehended. [12] ...

⁴² Originally this sentence read, "This then explains why the fourth commandment is unique among the ten commandments in that it alone is binding on the covenant community." When this error was brought to my attention, I removed the word "alone" and added the word "only" (the corrected version was uploaded to my website on August 1, 2002).