

Irons Appeal

To the Rev. Donald J. Duff, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church:

And now, this tenth day of February, A.D. 2003, comes the Rev. C. Lee Irons and appeals from the judgment of the Presbytery of Southern California in his case, and in support of said appeal sets forth the following specifications of error.

Specification of error # 1:

The Presbytery of Southern California erred in finding that Mr. Irons has called into question the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding the moral law.

Note: That the Presbytery so found is evident from the fact that it sustained the following specification in support of the charge: "That you [Mr. Irons] have, on numerous occasions, publicly called into question the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding the moral law" (Specification 1).

Grounds:

The evidence as established by Mr. Irons' defense paper ("Response to Charge Two") distributed to the members of Presbytery on September 4, 2002, and by the sworn testimony taken during the course of the trial (December 13-14, 2002 and January 10, 2003), proves the opposite, namely, that Mr. Irons *affirms* the substantive teaching of the Westminster Standards concerning the moral law. The following quotations are from the evidence as established in the course of the trial, and are given here to illustrate the Presbytery's error in sustaining specification 1 of the charge:

- A. Mr. Irons testified that "he agrees the Decalogue is preeminent in the Mosaic Covenant as over against the ceremonial law. But he continues to believe the Decalogue as presented is confined to the Mosaic era, while the moral will of God, which it represents, is what is binding on believers. The New Covenant is not on tablets of stone ... The Decalogue is not binding on the Christian believer, but the moral law is binding." (From the Trial Record – Clerk's summary of the testimony of Mr. Irons on December 14, 2002)
- B. Mr. Irons testified that "he has been concerned about the matter of application in his preaching and has begun to make adjustments to provide more application. He has preached through the Decalogue using the Shorter Catechism. He wants his congregation to know their responsibilities. But he would not tell them they are under the Mosaic Covenant. Rather he would show them the 'moral requirement' contained in a particular commandment and show them how this is brought over into the New Covenant in Christ. He would do this for passages outside the Decalogue as well." (From the Trial Record – Clerk's summary of the testimony of Mr. Irons on January 10, 2003)
- C. In his defense paper, Mr. Irons wrote: "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.'" (From Mr. Irons' paper, "Response to Charge Two," p. 20)
- D. In his defense paper, Mr. Irons quoted 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."

Mr. Irons then added this comment: "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." ("Response to Charge Two," p. 21)

- E. In his defense paper, Mr. Irons quoted from one of his sermons (preached on March 4, 2001): "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." (Quoted in "Response to Charge Two," p. 24)
- F. In his defense paper, Mr. Irons quoted from a sermon (preached April 18, 1999) introducing a series of 21 sermons on the Shorter Catechism exposition of the ten commandments: "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." (Quoted in "Response to Charge Two," p. 25)
- G. In his defense paper, Mr. Irons quoted 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."

He then added this comment: "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.*" ("Response to Charge Two," p. 26)

- H. In a sermon, Mr. Irons said, "[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.**

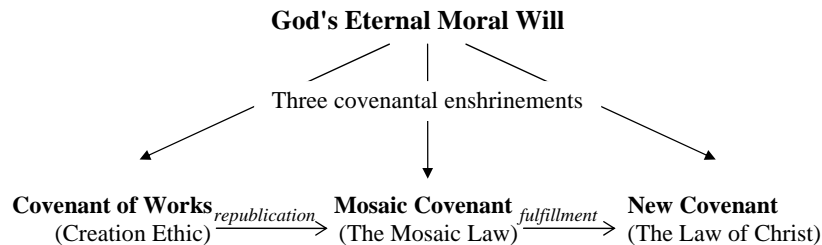
"To summarize. First, the New Testament teaches that believers have been set free from the Law by means of their union with Christ in his death. **We are not under the Law. Paul uses that phrase ten times in his writings. This means that we are free from the condemnation of the Law, and we are freed 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." (Quoted in "Response to Charge Two," p. 47. **Note: the sections highlighted in bold were taken out of context and quoted as evidence in the Presbytery's charge and specifications.**)

- I. In his defense paper, Mr. Irons reproduced the following diagram printed in a Sunday bulletin, together with selections from the sermon he preached that Sunday (January 27, 2002):



"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." (Quoted in "Response to Charge Two," pp. 52-53)

Specification of error # 2:

The Presbytery of Southern California erred in judging the teaching of Mr. Irons (viz., "that the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as the standard of holy living") to be "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" (BD III:7.b paragraph 2).

Note: That the Presbytery so judged is evident from the fact it found Mr. Irons guilty of the charge, which states: "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." In the charge and specifications, the Presbytery further argues: "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)" (emphasis added).

Grounds:

In support of specification of error # 2, the appellant sets forth the following grounds. These are not to be interpreted as three separate grounds, but must be taken together in light of the definition of an offense serious enough to warrant a trial given at BD III:7.b paragraph 2 (quoted above).

- I. The teaching of Mr. Irons "that the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as the standard of holy living" is not contrary to the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures.
 - A. In the proof texts cited by the Presbytery 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 teach 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. (For the appellant's counter-exegesis of the Presbytery's proof texts, see "Response to Charge Two," pp. 2-18)
 - B. Scripture identifies the Decalogue, not as a timeless list of moral duties, but as "the tablets of the [old] covenant" that the LORD made with Israel (Deut. 9:9, 11, 15; Heb. 9:4).

- C. Hebrews 8:13 states that the old covenant is obsolete: "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear." Immediately after establishing this important theological truth 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 per se has also been made obsolete along with the first covenant of which it was an integral part, even though the unchanging moral content contained in the Decalogue remains in force.

- D. In spite of its "divers ways of administration" (WLC # 43), the moral will of God remains the same in all ages. Yet the New Testament teaches that believers are not under the moral will of God as administered by Moses, but under the moral will of God as administered by Christ (the Law of Christ). Here are some proof texts:

John 1:17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ ... 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another ... 14:15 If you love Me, you will keep My commandments ... 15:12 This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

Romans 6:11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, 13

and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. 14 *For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under Law but under grace.*

Romans 7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the Law), that the Law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. 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 ...* 8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 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 requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Galatians 4:1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God ... 21 *Tell me, you who want to be under the Law, do you not listen to the Law? ...* 5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery ... 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" ... 18 *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law ...* 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law ... 6:1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill *the law of Christ.*

1 Corinthians 9:20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law, *though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ,* so that I might win those who are without law.

- II. The teaching of Mr. Irons "that the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as the standard of holy living" is not contrary to the teaching of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms taken as a whole.
 - A. Nowhere do the Confession of Faith and Catechisms teach that the Decalogue per se is binding on New Testament believers as the standard of holy living.

- B. Rather than teaching that the Decalogue is the standard of holy living for believers, the Larger Catechism teaches that our duty is defined in relation to the whole revealed will of God, with special reference to "the moral law."

WLC # 3: What is the Word of God? A. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, *the only rule of faith and practice*.

WLC # 43: How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet? A. Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in his revealing to the church, in all ages, by his Spirit and Word, *in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God*, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.

WLC # 91: What is the duty which God requireth of man? A. The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his *revealed will*.

WLC # 92: What did God at first reveal unto man as the rule of his obedience? A. The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the state of innocence, and to all mankind in him ... was *the moral law*.

WLC # 95: What use is *the moral law* to all men? A. 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 ...

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, 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*.

- C. While there is a close relationship between the Decalogue and the unchanging moral law, our Catechisms carefully define that relationship by affirming that "the moral law is *summarily comprehended* in the ten commandments" (WLC # 98; WSC # 41). This formulation, which Mr. Irons affirms, makes allowance for aspects of the Decalogue that are unique to Israel (e.g., the historical prologue; the sanctions attached to the second and third commandments; the seventh-day Sabbath; the promise of long life in the land, etc.). Thus, the Catechisms do not affirm that the Decalogue is pure moral law, unmixed with positive elements pertaining to Israel's specific circumstances under the old covenant in the land of Canaan.
- D. In keeping with such considerations, the Larger Catechism's exposition of the historical prologue (WLC # 101) interprets the redemption of Israel out of Egypt as being analogous to ("as ... so ..."), but not identical with, our deliverance "from our spiritual thralldom," concluding that "therefore we are bound to take him for our God alone, and to keep all his commandments." In this way, the Catechism distinguishes the moral content of the Decalogue, which is unchanging and eternal, from the specific historical circumstances of God's covenant "with Israel of old" in which it was enshrined.

WLC # 101: What is the preface to the ten commandments? A. The preface to the ten commandments is contained in these words, *I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*. Wherein God manifesteth his sovereignty, as being JEHOVAH, the eternal, immutable, and almighty God; having his being in and of himself, and giving being to all his words and works: and that he is a God in covenant, *as* with Israel of old, *so* with all his people; who, *as* he brought them out of

their bondage in Egypt, *so* he delivereth us from our spiritual thralldom; and that therefore we are bound to take him for our God alone, and to keep all his commandments.

- E. Furthermore, in stating that the moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments, the Catechisms do not affirm that the moral law is *exhaustively* comprehended in the Decalogue, since a summary is necessarily not exhaustive. Many other passages of Scripture are cited by the divines in the proof texts of their exposition of the ten commandments, thus showing that the whole of Scripture is necessary for our developing a full grasp of the moral will of God. But the Presbytery's charge implies that the Decalogue is exhaustive when it refers to the Decalogue as "the" standard of holy living.
- F. While WCF XIX:2, taken literally, could be interpreted as teaching that the Decalogue and the moral law are equivalent, WCF XIX:3 refers to the ten commandments as "commonly called *moral*." This language indicates that the divines recognized that such an identification is not necessary and is only a common manner of expression.

WCF XIX:2-3: This law, after [Adam's] 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 four first commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man. Besides this law, commonly called *moral*, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws ...

- G. Many notable Reformed theologians have historically recognized that the Decalogue and the moral law are not equivalent. E.g., Patrick Fairbairn argued that the near equation of the moral law and the Decalogue at WCF XIX:2 is "quite intelligible and proper, though certainly capable of being misapplied (if too literally taken)" (*The Revelation of Law in Scripture*, pp. 46-48).
- H. The Confession of Faith and Catechisms contain teaching which implies that the Decalogue per se is *not* binding on New Testament believers as the standard of holy living. Consider the following argument:
 - 1. The Larger Catechism defines 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. (Exodus 20:11: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the *seventh* day; therefore the LORD blessed the *seventh* day and made it holy.")
 - 3. If the Confession of Faith and Catechisms taught that the Decalogue, *as delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai and recorded in the 20th chapter of Exodus*, is binding on believers as the standard of holy living, then they would also teach that the Sabbath must be observed by Christians on the *seventh* day of the week.
 - 4. But the Confession of Faith and Catechisms do not so teach. On the contrary, they 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 Confession of Faith and Catechisms do not teach that the Decalogue, *as delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai and recorded in the 20th chapter of Exodus*, is binding on believers as the standard of holy living.

- III. In the historical context of the Westminster Assembly, the teaching of Mr. Irons "that the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as the standard of holy living" is consistent with the system of doctrine set forth in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms.

The following is a condensed version of the historical argument presented by Mr. Irons in "Response to Charge Two" (pp. 28-38):

According to Samuel Bolton (who was a commissioner to the Westminster Assembly), there were at least four views among Reformed divines at the time of the Westminster Assembly over the nature of the Mosaic covenant. Only two were considered to be orthodox. The first, held by the majority of orthodox divines, was that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of grace administered in the form of a covenant of works. The second was that the Mosaic covenant was a subservient covenant of works pertaining to the temporal blessings and curses in the land of Canaan.

Given the testimony of Bolton, published right at the time of the Assembly, it would appear that the divines refrained from deciding between these two views and determined to allow room for both. This was accomplished in the Westminster Standards by means of the ambiguous phrase "the law, as a covenant of works" which occurs four times in the Standards:

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. (Cp. WLC # 92-93)

WCF XIX:6: Although *true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works*, 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 ... 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*.

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.

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).

Those divines who held the "subservient covenant" view went on to argue, as an extension of that view, that the moral law is not given to the new covenant people of God as promulgated by Moses, but as renewed and handed to us by Christ. This view influenced the formulation of the third use of the Law given at WCF XIX:5b ("Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve but much strengthen this obligation") and WLC # 97 (which affirms that believers have been "delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works" and are now "bound to Christ"). Bolton's work and another popular treatise titled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* both advocated this view in the year 1645:

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) (Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, p. 57).

[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 (Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity with notes by Thomas Boston*, pp. 173-75).

Without knowledge of this historical background, it would be easy to fail to perceive the way 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. The "system of doctrine" set forth in the Standards – the essential core of Reformed orthodoxy required of all ordained officers in the OPC – is ascertained, not only by examining the Standards, but by examining the language of the Standards in light of the historical context in which they were written.

Since Mr. Irons' view of the moral law ("the law of Christ" view) was regarded as orthodox by the Westminster divines, was held by some of the Westminster divines themselves (e.g., Bolton), and is actually embraced in the Standards at several points (e.g., WCF XIX:5b; WLC # 97), Mr. Irons' teaching is consistent with the system of doctrine set forth in the Standards.

C. Lee Irons
Date: February 10, 2003