

**PRESENTATION OF CHARGE #2 AGAINST  
THE REV. C. LEE IRONS  
Judicial Committee of the Presbytery of Southern California, OPC  
December 13-14, 2002**

*Introduction*

"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long," declares the old covenant psalmist with delight (Ps. 119:97, all citations in this report, exclusive of quotations from others, are from the NIV, unless otherwise indicated). His words are echoed in the New Testament by Paul, "I delight in the law of God, in my inner being" (Rom. 7:22, ESV), and small wonder, for according to the the apostle of the new covenant, "We know that the law is spiritual" (v. 14). The Law not only anticipates the coming of the "new coveant" and the "new creation," it partakes of the same pneumatic character (cf. e.g., Gal. 6:15 and 1 Cor. 7:19, where "new creation" and "keeping the commandments of God" stand in parallel contrast to the outdated categories of "circumcision and uncircumcision") - and further, "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (v. 12). Does faith nullify the law? Not at all! Rather, faith upholds the law (cf. Rom. 3:31).

To be sure, the redemptive provisions of the law were ineffectual in and of themselves, for they were "external regulations applying until the time of the new order" (Hebr. 9:10). They brought redemption to God's people only as they pointed forward typologically to the coming sacrifice of Messiah. Compared to the "better hope...by which we draw near to God," - i.e., the reality of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice - the provisions of the law were "weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect)" (Hebr. 7:18-19). But what the law could not do, "God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3b-4).

There was another problem. The Jews, over time, divorced the "written code" of the law from its inward spiritual dynamic - love, faith, and obedience from a Spirit-renewed (a "circumcised") heart. "Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works" (Rom. 9:31f). "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (10:3). Accordingly, the Jews "stumbled" over the "stumbling stone," which was Christ, though He was the *telos* of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (10:4, NASB). They had done the same thing with the "gospel" as it had been preached to them, not receiving it with faith (Hebr. 4:2).

Divorced from the work of Messiah and the indwelling presence of the Spirit, the law became no more than a "written code," an empty "letter," which kills and condemns (2 Cor. 3:7,9). Circumcision was of no value to those who had become covenant-breakers, "transgressors of the law" (cf. Rom. 2:25). "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (vv. 28-29). As Moses himself had said, "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (Deut. 10:6). From the beginning, covenant-keeping (i.e., true "law-keeping") always presupposed reliance upon both the objective provisions for atonement for sin, and the subjective renewal and transformation of the heart by the Spirit of God. This was as true for Gentiles as it was for Jews (cf. Rom. 2:26-27; cf. Acts 10:34-35). Though Paul fully recognizes that the law was "powerless," he is equally emphatic that the fault is *not* with the covenantal law as given through Moses, but with the "weakness of the flesh" (Rom. 8:3, cf. 7:22b).

Thus through the coming of Messiah, the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the establishment of the "new covenant," God was "fulfilling" the law - not only bringing its redemptive provisions to their final expression in the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ, but also by restoring the people of God (converted Jews and Gentiles) to true covenant-keeping by faith and through the Spirit. "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (Rom. 7:6). C.E.B. Cranfield comments on this verse:

The believer's service is characterized, not by the lifeless effeteness of the mere letter, which is what the legalist is left with by his misunderstanding and misuse of the law, but by the freshness and hopefulness which are the effect of the

presence and activity of the Spirit. That Paul is not opposing the law itself to the Spirit is clear, since only a few verses later he affirms that the law is spiritual (v. 14). He does not use 'letter' as equivalent to 'law'. It is the letter of the law in separation from the Spirit. But, since 'the law is spiritual', the letter of the law in isolation from the Spirit is not the law in its true character, but the law as it were denatured. It is this which is opposed to the Spirit whose presence is the true establishment of the law (see on 8.1ff). Life in the Spirit is the newness of life which belongs to the new age: life according to 'the letter' (in the sense which we have indicated) belongs, by contrast, to this present age which is passing away.

Against the background of these (and other) considerations, the consensus of Reformed theology since Calvin has found that the moral law, as summarized in the Decalogue (though not confined to it) and explained and applied in the rest of Holy Scripture, though not a means of meritorious self-justification, nevertheless constitutes the *binding moral standard* for believers under the "new covenant," as it was for those under the "old." As a reflection of the holy character of God Himself, the moral law remains an unchanging and unchangeable standard of righteousness for all men in all times and places, but only those who enter into covenant with Him "through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5) can set themselves to the joyful and liberating task of walking in the way of God's commandments. "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

It is this teaching of the Reformed faith that has been challenged, indeed contradicted, by Mr. Irons in his public teaching and writings.

### **The charge against Mr. Irons**

The Presbytery has charged Mr. Irons with "*violating [his] 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 responding to this charge, the accused admits that he teaches "the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as the standard of holy living" (Reply to Charge #2, p. 2), but he does not agree that his teaching is contrary to the Scriptures or the Westminster Standards. A few preliminary observations are in order before we get into the details of this presentation:

(1) Whereas historically Reformed theology has substantially *identified* the "moral law," as summarized in the Decalogue (and further summarized in the two "great commandments," Matt. 22:37-40, or indeed in the single commandment to love the LORD God supremely, cf. Deut. 6:5) with the holy and righteous will of God (a reflection of His own perfect character), Mr. Irons is emphatic that "the Decalogue is not the same thing as the eternal moral will of God." Rather, the Decalogue is but one particular covenantal expression of the "moral will of God," suited particularly to Israel's probation in the land of Canaan (Reply to Charge #2, p. 2). This distinction between the moral *will* of God and the moral *law* is essential to Mr. Irons' whole construction of the Christian ethic. The presbyters should be careful to distinguish the different uses of these terms the trial.

(2) Generally speaking, classical Reformed discussions of the place of the Law in the life of the believer ordinarily begin with a sympathetic appreciation of the Law of God within the context of the Mosaic administration of the "covenant of grace," then proceed to examine both Jesus' and Paul's two-sided teaching on the Law - i.e., it cannot justify, as claimed by the Jewish/Judaizing perverters of the Law, but it is the abiding divine standard of the "obedience of faith" (e.g., Heidelberg Catechism 91, Q-"But what are good works? A-Only those which are done out of true faith, *in accordance with the law of God*, and to His glory..." [emphasis added], cf. WCF, XVI.1-2). Mr. Irons does not approach the discussion from this direction. Rather he critiques the Law from a decidedly one-sided reading of Paul, and reconstructs the teaching of Jesus to fit that paradigm. This approach to the Law of God is far more characteristic of evangelical "dispensationalism" than it is mainstream Reformed thought (as will be evident from what follows).

(3) Mr. Irons asserts, without exegetical or theological proof, that the Mosaic covenant is "a typological republication of the covenant of works," and that a "works-principle" informs the Mosaic covenant as a whole. This assertion highlights three important features of Mr. Irons' position:

a) A fundamental *antithesis* between a "works-principle" and a "faith-principle" (along the lines of a classic "dispensationalism").

b) The Mosaic administration is a covenantal *hybrid* - i.e., with respect to eternal salvation blessings, it is an administration of the "covenant of grace" (unlike classic "dispensationism"), but with respect to earthly blessings it is "a typological republication of the covenant of works." Any "conditionality" requiring obedience on the part of God's people is seen to be not an expression of an obedience of faith responding to the grace of God, but as a manifestation of a continuing "works-principle" which remains antithetical to grace and promise. Thus in significant respects (with profound ethical consequences), Mr. Irons places Moses in opposition to the "Abrahamic covenant," on the one hand, and the "new covenant," on the other.

c) The Decalogue is identified with the "works-principle" embodied in the Mosaic administration, and thus, despite attempts to distinguish his views from classic "dispensationism," Mr. Irons' ethical conclusions regarding the standard of morality for the believer under the "new covenant" is essentially the same as that of "dispensationism," viz., "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" (Reply to Charge #2, p. 2). This stands in stark contrast to the historical Reformed understanding of the *continuity of moral obligation* (as distinct from ceremonial or civil requirements) between "old" and "new" covenant administrations.

(4) He concludes that "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" (Reply to Charge #2, p. 2). Therefore, the "moral will of God" which is binding upon the "new covenant" believer is limited to those two commandments (presumably) as they are elaborated (applied?) in the New Testament documents. Jesus did not come to *reaffirm* the ethical principles of the "moral law" (summarized in, but not limited to, the Decalogue). Rather, He came to give a "new law," which is no "law" (for, in this scheme, law/obligation/conditionality must ever be contrary *in principle* to grace and faith). As to content, Jesus' commands may coincide in large measure with the ethical principles embodied in the "moral law" set forth in the Pentateuch (and the rest of the Old Testament). But formally, this "law" must be something radically "new." The "law of Christ" (cf. 1 Cor. 9:21) is sharply distinguished from the "law of God."

(5) Mr. Irons' approach to the Westminster Standards is a kind of "deconstruction." We are repeatedly introduced to uncertainties, tensions, ambiguities, and potential contradictions in the confession and catechisms. Then we are told that if we adopt Mr. Irons' terminology and theological schema the standards will yield a much more coherent meaning - a meaning with which he would (not surprisingly) agree.

(6) In setting forth this presentation of the case for the prosecution, your committee has attempted to do two things:

(a) Refresh and sharpen the Presbytery's memory as to the classical Reformed teaching concerning the binding authority of the Decalogue (as the summary of God's "moral law") upon the believer under the "new covenant." In one sense this might be considered unnecessary, since all the presbyters have access to the exegetical and theological sources. This, however, may not be so, especially in the case of the ruling elders. Further, in the recent trial of Mr. Miladin, your committee, in prosecuting the case on behalf of Presbytery, took the tack of simply presenting the charge and specifications against the accused, without incorporating theological argument in its "case." In this the committee believes it was not as helpful to the Presbytery as it should have been. While the defense argued its position extensively, the presbyters had little in front of them to help them weigh the case for the prosecution in light of the defense's arguments. We have sought to remedy that deficiency below. Though that does make for a far more extensive presentation of the arguments against Mr. Irons' position, we hope it will prove more valuable in the end in assisting the court in coming to a righteous judgment of the case.

(b) We have quoted extensively from acknowledged Reformed theological "authorities," not because we wish to elevate the writings of men above the Holy Scriptures (or our secondary standards), but to remind the Presbytery that the view of biblical teaching about the Law of God with which Mr. Irons is taking issue is *really the consensus view of Reformed thought* over the past 500 years. If the Presbytery wants to follow Mr. Irons' in breaking with that long and well-founded tradition, it ought to be self-conscious about its decision.

***Mr. Irons' teachings are contrary to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.***

1. Psalm 1:1-2

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Calvin comments:

The meaning of the Psalmist, as I have stated above, is, that it shall be always well with God's devout servants, whose constant endeavor it is to make progress in the study of his law...it was of importance that the righteous should be confirmed in the way of holiness... the Psalmist does not simply pronounce those happy who fear God, as in other places, but designates godliness by the study of the law, teaching us that God is only rightly served when his law is obeyed...When David here speaks of the law, it ought not to be understood as if the other parts of Scripture should be excluded, but rather, since the whole of Scripture is nothing else than an exposition of the law, under it as the head is comprehended the whole body. The prophet, therefore, in commending the law, includes all the rest of the inspired writings...From his characterising the godly as delighting in the law of the Lord, we may learn that forced or servile obedience is not at all acceptable to God, and that those only are worthy students of the law who come to it with a cheerful mind, and are so delighted with its instructions, as to account nothing more desirable or delicious than to make progress therein. From this love of the law proceeds constant meditation upon it, which the prophet mentions on the last clause of the verse; for all who are truly actuated by love to the law must feel pleasure in the diligent study of it.

There are not many rules, but one everlasting and unchangeable rule to live by. For this reason we are not to refer solely to one age David's statement that the life of a righteous man is a continual meditation upon the law, for it is just as applicable to every age, even to the end of the world. (comm. in. loc.)

## 2. Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 36:26-28; Hebrews 8:6-10:

Jer. 31:33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Ezek. 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. 28 You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

Hebr. 8:6 But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. 7 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 8 But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. 10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

In these three closely-related passages the the LORD God promises His people that in the eschatological era of redemption, the "new covenant" of the messianic age, He Himself will overcome their characteristic spiritual and ethical waywardness by renewing their hearts and minds, by placing His Spirit within them, and by writing His Law upon their hearts.

This definitive covenant-renewal will be the fulfillment of the promise contained in the Mosaic Law itself: "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live" (Deut. 30:6). The Law was always premised on the necessity of regeneration as the precondition for covenant-keeping love and obedience.

It is instructive to note that on the very occasion of the writing of the Law on "tablets of stone" by the LORD, Israel was called to "circumcise their hearts" so they might be "stiff-necked" no longer. There could be no fear the LORD of the covenant, no walking in all his ways, no heart-and-soul love or service to the LORD God, no faithful observing of the LORD's good commands and decrees apart from the renewing of their hearts by Holy Spirit.

Deut. 10:1 At that time the LORD said to me, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to me on the mountain. Also make a wooden chest. 2 I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Then you are to put them in the chest." 3 So I made the ark out of acacia wood and chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hands. 4 The LORD wrote on these tablets what he had written before, the Ten Commandments he had proclaimed to you on the mountain, out of the fire, on the day of the assembly. And the LORD gave them to me. 5 Then I came back down the mountain and put the tablets in the ark I had made, as the LORD commanded me, and they are there now. ...10 Now I had stayed on the mountain forty days and nights, as I did the first time, and the LORD listened to me at this time also. It was not his will to destroy you. 11 "Go," the LORD said to me, "and lead the people on their way, so that they may enter and possess the land that I swore to their fathers to give them." 12 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? 14 To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. 15 Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. 16 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.

Thus, what is "new" in the "new covenant" envisioned in these prophecies, as well as their fulfillment as announced in Hebrews 8, is the promise that what had been necessary from the beginning, but unrealized due to the covenant-breaking unbelief of Israel, would now at last come to pass in the redemptive-historical purpose of God realized with the advent of Messiah.

The "Law" which was to be thus internalized and rendered effective for the sanctification (covenant-keeping) of God's people, was the familiar Law of God, revealed chiefly (but not exclusively) through Moses, the abiding ethical principles of which were summarized in the Decalogue.

Is the language used here - describing a supernatural change of heart, an indwelling of the Spirit of God, the writing of the Law on the heart and mind, and the forgiveness of sins - "typological idiom?" Perhaps. But that "idiom" is fully satisfied by the classical Reformed understanding of these passages, viz., that the moral principles of God's Law, summarized but not limited to the Decalogue, are applied to the inward being of God's people in a powerful new way. The "idiom" of "writing the Law on the heart" certainly does not mean "*not* writing the Law on the heart," or writing "*another* law" upon the heart, any more than the "idiom," "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more," could describe a reality other than the atonement provided in the death of Christ.

Calvin comments on Jeremiah 31:

He afterwards says, "I will put my Law in their inward parts." *By these words he confirms what we have said, that the newness, which he before mentioned, was not so as to the substance, but as to the form only: for God does not say here, "I will give you another Law," but I will write my Law, that is, the same Law, which had formerly been delivered to the Fathers. He then does not promise anything different as to the essence of the doctrine, but he makes the difference to be in the form only* [emphasis added]. But he states the same thing in two ways, and says, that he would put his law in their inward parts, and that he would write it in their hearts. We indeed know how difficult it is that man should be so formed to obedience that his whole life may be in unison with the Law of God, for all the lusts of the flesh are so many enemies, as Paul says, who fight against God (Romans 8:7)...This is the reason why the Prophet was not satisfied with one statement, but said, I will put my Law in their inward parts, I will write it in their hearts.

Now the Prophet here testifies that it is the peculiar work of God to write his Law in our hearts...To write the Law in the heart imports nothing less than so to form it, that the Law should rule there, and that there should be no feeling of the heart, not conformable and not consenting to its doctrine. It is hence then sufficiently clear, that no one can be turned so as to obey the Law, until he be regenerated by the Spirit of God; nay, that there is no inclination in man to act rightly, except God prepares his heart by his grace; in a word, that the doctrine of the letter is always dead, until God vivifies it by his Spirit. (*comm. in. loc.*)

Patrick Fairbairn's commentary on Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36:

Jeremiah is even more explicit; he says expressly, that the Lord was going to make a new covenant with His people, different from that which he had made after the deliverance from Egypt; yet different rather in respect to form and

efficient administration, than in what might be called the essential matter of the covenant...the same law in substance still, only transferred from the outward to the inward sphere -- from the tables of stone to the fleshly tables of the heart; and this is so as to secure, what had in a great measure failed under the old form of the covenant, a people with whom God could hold the most intimate and endearing fellowship. Then, following in the same line, there are such prophecies as those of Ezekiel, in which, with a glorious rise in the Divine kingdom from seeming ruin to the possession of universal dominion, there is announced a hitherto unknown work of the Spirit of God, changing hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, and imparting the disposition and the power to keep God's statutes and judgments...From the general strain of these and many similar revelations in the prophetic Scriptures, it was evidently in the mind and purpose of God to give a manifestation of Himself among men for the higher ends and interests of His covenant, far surpassing anything that had been known in the history of the past; and that, while the demands of the law should thus be for ever established, the law itself should be made to take another place than it had been wont to do in economical arrangements, and should be so associated with the peculiar gifts and graces of the Spirit, as to bring out into quite singular prominence the spiritual elements of the covenant, and secure for these far and wide a commanding influence in the world. (*The Revelation of Law in Scripture*, pp. 205-206)

Calvin on Hebrews 8:10:

There are two main parts in this covenant; the first regards the gratuitous remission of sins; and the other, the inward renovation of the heart; there is a third which depends on the second, and that is the illumination of the mind as to the knowledge of God...In vain then does God proclaim his Law by the voice of man, unless he writes it by his Spirit on our hearts, that is, unless he forms and prepares us for obedience...Thus it comes that the Law is ruinous and fatal to us as long as it remains written only on tables of stone, as Paul also teaches us (2 Cor. 3:3). In short, we then only obediently embrace what God commands, when by his Spirit he changes and corrects the natural depravity of our hearts; otherwise he finds nothing in us but corrupt affections and a heart wholly given up to evil. The declaration indeed is clear, that a new covenant is made according to which God engraves his laws on our hearts, for otherwise it would be in vain and of no effect.

But it may be asked, whether there was under the Law a sure and certain promise of salvation, whether the fathers had the gift of the Spirit, whether they enjoyed God's paternal favor through the remission of sins? Yes, it is evident that they worshipped God with a sincere heart and a pure conscience, and that they walked in his commandments, and this could not have been the case except they had been inwardly taught by the Spirit; and it is also evident, that whenever they thought of their sins, they were raised up by the assurance of a gratuitous pardon. And yet the Apostle, by referring the prophecy of Jeremiah to the coming of Christ, seems to rob them of these blessings. To this I reply, that he does not expressly deny that God formerly wrote his Law on their hearts and pardoned their sins, but he makes a comparison between the less and the greater. As then the Father has put forth more fully the power of his Spirit under the kingdom of Christ, and has poured forth more abundantly his mercy on mankind, this exuberance renders insignificant the small portion of grace which he had been pleased to bestow on the fathers. We also see that the promises were then obscure and intricate, so that they shone only like the moon and stars in comparison with the clear light of the Gospel which shines brightly on us.

...the Law was not destitute of those benefits which we at this day receive under the Gospel, but that these benefits were then, as it were, adventitious, and that they do not properly belong to the Law; for if the Law were separated from the Gospel, it would be the same as if one was to separate Moses from Christ. If Moses be regarded not as opposed to Christ, he was the herald and witness of God's paternal kindness towards his people; his doctrine also contained promises of a free salvation, and opened to the faithful the door of access to God. But if Moses be set in opposition to Christ, he becomes the minister of death, and his doctrine leads to destruction; for the letter, as Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6 calls it, killeth, - how so? Because whosoever is attached to Moses departs from Christ; and Christ alone possesses in himself the fullness of all blessings. It then follows, that nothing remains in Moses when considered in himself. But God promised salvation to his ancient people, and also regenerated his chosen, and illuminated them by his Spirit. This he did not do so freely and extensively as now. As then God's grace is at this day more abundant, it is justly extolled in high terms by all the Prophets; and then, as I have already said, whatever God at that time conferred, was, as it were, adventitious, for all these benefits were dependent on Christ and the promulgation of the Gospel. (*comm. in. loc.*)

3. Matthew 5:17-19

Matt. 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Calvin comments on this passage:

Christ, therefore, now declares, that his doctrine is so far from being at variance with the law, that it agrees perfectly with the law and the prophets, and not only so, but brings the complete fulfillment of them.

Christ saw that the greater part of the Jews, though they professed to believe the Law, were profane and degenerate. The condition of the people was so decayed, every thing was filled with so many corruptions, and the negligence or malice of the priests had so completely extinguished the pure light of doctrine, that there no longer remained any reverence for the Law. But if a new kind of doctrine had been introduced, which would destroy the authority of the Law and the Prophets, religion would have sustained a dreadful injury. This appears to be the first reason why Christ declared that he had not come to destroy the Law. Indeed, the context makes this abundantly clear: for he immediately adds, by way of confirmation, that it is impossible for even one point of the Law to fail,- and pronounces a curse on those teachers who do not faithfully labor to maintain its authority.

We must keep in mind the object which Christ had in view. *While he invites and exhorts the Jews to receive the Gospel, he still retains them in obedience to the Law...* [emphasis added]

"I am not come to destroy." God had, indeed, promised a new covenant at the coming of Christ; but had, at the same time, showed, that it would not be different from the first, but that, on the contrary, its design was, to give a perpetual sanction to the covenant, which he had made from the beginning, with his own people. "I will write my law, (says he,) in their hearts, and I will remember their iniquities no more" (Jeremiah 31:33, 34). By these words he is so far from departing from the former covenant, that, on the contrary, he declares, that it will be confirmed and ratified, when it shall be succeeded by the new. This is also the meaning of Christ's words, when he says, that he came to fulfill the law: for he actually fulfilled it, by quickening, with his Spirit, the dead letter, and then exhibiting, in reality, what had hitherto appeared only in figures. *With respect to doctrine, we must not imagine that the coming of Christ has freed us from the authority of the law: for it is the eternal rule of a devout and holy life, and must, therefore, be as unchangeable, as the justice of God, which it embraced, is constant and uniform* [emphasis added]. With respect to ceremonies, there is some appearance of a change having taken place; but it was only the use of them that was abolished, for their meaning was more fully confirmed. The coming of Christ has taken nothing away even from ceremonies, but, on the contrary, confirms them by exhibiting the truth of shadows: for, when we see their full effect, we acknowledge that they are not vain or useless. Let us therefore learn to maintain inviolable this sacred tie between the law and the Gospel, which many improperly attempt to break. For it contributes not a little to confirm the authority of the Gospel, when we learn, that it is nothing else than a fulfillment of the law; so that both, with one consent, declare God to be their Author.

"Whoever then shall break." *Christ here speaks expressly of the commandments of life, or the ten words, which all the children of God ought to take as the rule of their life* [emphasis added]. He therefore declares, that they are false and deceitful teachers, who do not restrain their disciples within obedience to the law, and that they are unworthy to occupy a place in the Church, who weaken, in the slightest degree, the authority of the law; and, on the other hand, that they are honest and faithful ministers of God, who recommend, both by word and by example, the keeping of the law...Those who shall pour contempt on the doctrine of the law, or on a single syllable of it, will be rejected as the lowest of men...Christ declares that, when his Church shall have been renewed, no teachers must be admitted to it, but those who are faithful expounders of the law, and who labor to maintain its doctrine entire. (*comm. in. loc.*)

(Extensive commentary on this programmatic passage is included in the citations from Ridderbos and Murray below.)

#### 4. Luke 10:26-28

Luke 10:26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" 27 He answered: "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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

When Jesus is asked "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25), He pointed the inquirer to the Law of God. It is obvious from the Jewish scribe's summary of the Law with the two "great commandments," that Jesus' later affirmation of the same summary commands (Matt. 22:36-39) was not an innovation. Jesus (consistent with "the Law and the prophets") acknowledges that covenant-keeping faithfulness to God, evidenced in the keeping of the commandments of God's Law, is the pathway to covenant life (cf. Deut. 30:16-20). Yet the superficiality of the scribe's commitment to the Law is evident in the evasion of his subsequent question concerning the identity of his "neighbor" (Luke 10:29). On another occasion, Jesus similarly exposed the externalism of the Jews when he pointed the rich young ruler to the "one thing" he still "lacked" despite his claim to have kept the Law (Luke 18:20-23). In neither case does Jesus find fault with the Law itself, but with the "fleshly" heart-condition of his inquirers, which in each case rendered the law "powerless" (cf. Rom. 8:3).

##### 5. Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14

Rom. 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Gal. 5:14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

The "law" which Paul here declares is "fulfilled" by love to our fellowmen is doubtless the Mosaic Law, for Paul quotes several of the summary commands from the Decalogue. Though the commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18), is not itself part of the Decalogue, it is found in the Law, and was a well-known summary statement of the moral obligation of the Law (cf. Matt. 22:39-40).

It is worth remembering that in ethical discourse *motive* and *standard* are properly distinguished. Much confusion over the relationship between "love" and "law" results from a failure to keep this distinction clearly in view. Love "fulfills" the law, because the righteous standard of God's Law cannot be properly followed apart from a Spirit-wrought love (for God and for others) in the heart of man. Love is not itself a standard of conduct, and thus cannot be a substitute for law, because it lacks definition. It can only be defined by what it does (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7) or by the standard to which it impels obedience from the heart (as in these texts).

John Murray comments on Romans 13:8:

"Fulfil" is a richer term than "obey". It means that the law has received the full measure of that which it requires. The completeness of conformity is thereby expressed (cf. Gal. 5:14).

We are not to regard love as dispensing with law or as displacing law as if what has misleadingly been called "the law of love" has been substituted under the gospel for the law of commandments or precepts. Paul does not say that the law is love but that love fulfils the law and law has not in the least degree been depreciated or deprived of its sanction. It is because love is accorded this quality and function that the law as correlative is confirmed in its relevance and dignity. It is the law that love fulfils.

Love is emotive, motive, and expulsive. It is emotive and therefore creates affinity with and affection for the object. It is motive in that it impels to action. It is expulsive because it expels what is alien to the interests which love seeks to promote.

If love is the fulfilment of the law this means that no law is fulfilled apart from love. This must apply, therefore, to the law that governs our conduct in the state (vss. 1-7). It is a great fallacy to suppose that in the state we have simply the order of justice but that in other spheres, particularly in the church, we have the order of love. There is no such distinction; far less is there antithesis. It is only through love that we can fulfil the demands of justice. The magistrate cannot properly exercise his authority except as he is animated by love to God and to the subjects of his realm. The subjects cannot render to him the veneration that is his due and be law-abiding for conscience' sake save as they recognize God's institution and with godly fear subject themselves to it. "Fear God. Honor the king" (I Pet. 2:17). (*comm. in. loc.*)

## 6. 1 Corinthians 7:19

1 Cor. 7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.

Herman Ridderbos makes the following observations (*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, p. 286-288):

Finally, how much Christ, the law, the Spirit, and love constitute a unity may appear from a comparison of the following parallel pronouncements:

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but being a new creature. And as many as shall walk by this rule [canon], peace upon them.... (Gal. 6:15,16).

For in Christ Jesus neither does circumcision avail anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith, working through love (Gal. 5:6).

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of God's commandments [is what really matters] (1 Cor. 7:19).

The new creation brings a new canon, a new standard of judgment, along with it. This is above all redemptive-historical in nature. *It does not mean exemption from the law, or "Christian autonomy," but life in accordance with the rule of the new and no longer of the old* [emphasis added]. This can also be called faith that is active through love; or the keeping of God's commandments; or, as it is said in a similar pronouncement in Philippians 3:3, serving God by the Spirit. The combination of these pronouncements is so interesting because the canon given with the new creation (Gal. 6:16) appears to represent the category of the law (1 Cor. 7:19) as well as those of love (Gal. 5:6) and of the Spirit (Phil. 3:3). *There is thus present a reciprocal definition and delimiting of motives. It can appear on the one hand that the law once given is no longer all-important. The content of the will of God is also determined from Christ as the Inaugurator of the new creation. Therefore to serve God by the Spirit means not only a new possibility of performing the law, but also a new view of the law, that of faith in the fulfilling work of Christ* [emphasis added].

...knowledge of the will of God [requires] that inner renewal and illumination is necessary of which Paul speaks again and again with such great emphasis. *This does not mean that the "givenness" of the will of God in the law is repudiated or set aside, but the right application of what may count as "God's commandments" is made dependent on an inner condition that is conformable to the content of the commandment of God* [emphasis added]. In that sense it must certainly be said that being led by the Spirit, that prayer and faith are no less necessary for the knowledge of the will of God than exact attention to the commandments and ordinances of the law of God as the holy and spiritual expression of his will.

## 7. Ephesians 6:1-3

Eph. 6:1 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 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

Paul is in no way hesitant to make explicit appeal to the Mosaic Law (in this case the fifth commandment of the Decalogue) in calling children "in the Lord" to obey their parents. Further he makes explicit appeal to the "promise" it contains as a distinguishing feature. Reformed exegetes have customarily understood that the "earthly" promises of the old covenant (e.g., long life in the land of Canaan) frequently point (typologically) to spiritual realities. This does not mean however that these promises are *exclusively* typological. After all, a faithful child under the *old* covenant, who honored his or her parents according to the commandment of God, could legitimately expect *both* long life on the earth and an eternal "heavenly" fellowship with God after death to which the former earthly blessing pointed (not to mention an embodied blessedness in the consummate "new earth"). There is nothing in the economy of the (antitypical) "new covenant" that requires that earthly blessings now vanish in the face of their spiritual fulfillments. Indeed, if a typological reductionism is applied here, then the fifth commandment loses its distinctiveness (i.e., as, in the apostles' words, "the first commandment with a promise") for *all* God's commandments carry with them the hope of an eternal, "heavenly" blessing. Thus, Reformed theologians have legitimately seen in Ephesians 6:3 a relevant, continuing *earthly* promise (though no longer tied exclusively to Canaan) as well as a "heavenly." (Of course, we must also recognize that all promises of God's providential blessings, or threats of chastening, are subject to the deeper plan of

God for each of his people - the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, but that reality does not nullify the promises of God.)

Calvin comments:

"In the Lord." Besides the law of nature, which is acknowledged by all nations, the obedience of children is enforced by the authority of God. Hence it follows, that parents are to be obeyed, so far only as is consistent with piety to God, which comes first in order. If the command of God is the rule by which the submission of children is to be regulated, it would be foolish to suppose that the performance of this duty could lead away from God himself.

"For this is right." ...He proves it to be right, because God has commanded it; for we are not at liberty to dispute, or call in question, the appointment of him whose will is the unerring rule of goodness and righteousness...The precept, honor thy father and mother, comprehends all the duties by which the sincere affection and respect of children to their parents can be expressed.

"Which is the first commandment with promise." ...He does not merely say, that God has offered a reward to him who obeys his father and mother, but that such an offer is peculiar to this commandment. If each of the commandments had its own promises, there would have been no ground for the commendation bestowed in the present instance. But this is the first commandment, Paul tells us, which God has been pleased, as it were, to seal by a remarkable promise.

"That it may be well with thee." The promise is a long life; from which we are led to understand that the present life is not to be overlooked among the gifts of God...the reward promised to the obedience of children is highly appropriate. Those who shew kindness to their parents from whom they derived life, are assured by God, that in this life it will be well with them. "And that thou mayest live long on the earth." Moses expressly mentions the land of Canaan...Beyond this the Jews could not conceive of any life more happy or desirable. But as the same divine blessing is extended to the whole world, Paul has properly left out the mention of a place, the peculiar distinction of which lasted only till the coming of Christ. (*comm. in. loc.*)

#### 8. James 2:8-11:

James 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

James here calls believers eschew favoritism and instead to "keep the royal law." Is the "law" in view the law of Christ the messianic King as distinct from the well-known Law of God? Given James' background and audience, this seems highly unlikely. This "royal law" is "found in Scripture" - a reference to the Old Testament. James illustrates the law about which he is speaking by citing two of the commandments of the Decalogue - "Do not commit adultery" and "Do not murder."

The king in Israel was to be God's representative, God's "son" (2 Sam. 7:14; Psalm 2:7). He was to rule the people in accordance with the Law of God delivered through Moses:

Deut. 17:18 When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. 19 It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees...

Thus the "royal law" was that law which had been given to Israel at Mount Sinai. As the king was the representative of the LORD, so his law and the LORD's were one and the same. These "righteous decrees and laws" would demonstrate Israel's greatness, wisdom, and understanding before all the nations of the earth (cf. Deut. 4:6-8). Contrariwise, if the king(s) turned away from the LORD and His "commands and decrees," Israel would experience God's chastening and "become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples" (1 Kgs. 9:6-7).

Therefore, when Jesus the Messiah came into the world to establish His kingdom, it is not surprising that He declared, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17), and that His brother James pointed to this same Law of God as the "royal law" which "brings liberty" (James 2:12), calling those who acknowledge the royal authority of Jesus, the Son of David, to "keep" and submit to

the judgment of that Law. The commandments of God, summarized in the Decalogue, are the authoritative ethical standard for those who by grace have become citizens of the "kingdom of heaven."

9. 1 John 3:4:

1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

This verse is used by the Westminster divines as a proof text for WSC Q 14. As such it will be discussed further below in our presentation of the Standards' view of the Law. Calvin understands the "law" in question here to be the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments:

...the Apostle...defines sin to be a transgression of the divine law; for his object was to produce hatred and horror as to sin...the Apostle does not make sins equal, by charging all with iniquity who sin; but he means simply to teach us, that sin arises from a contempt of God, and that by sinning, the law is violated.

The import of the passage is, that the perverse life of those who indulge themselves in the liberty of sinning, is hateful to God, and cannot be borne with by him, because it is contrary to his Law. It does not hence follow, nor can it be hence inferred, that the faithful are iniquitous; because they desire to obey God, and abhor their own vices, and that in every instance; and they also form their own life, as much as in them lieth, according to the law. (*comm. in. loc.*)

B.F. Westcott comments:

Sin and lawlessness are convertible terms. Sin is not an arbitrary conception. It is the assertion of the selfish will against a paramount authority. He who sins breaks not only by accident or in an isolated detail, but essentially the 'law' which he was created to fulfil.

This 'law' which expresses the divine ideal of man's constitution and growth has three chief applications. There is the law of each man's personal being: there is the 'law' of his relation to things without him: there is the 'law' of his relation to God. To violate any part of this threefold law is to sin, for all parts are divine (James ii.10).

The Mosaic Law was directed in a representative fashion to each of these spheres of duty. It touched upon man's dealing with himself: upon his treatment of creation (of men, animals and crops): upon his duty towards God. In this way it was fitted to bring home to men the divine side of all action. (*comm. in. loc.*)

10. Revelation 14:12:

Rev. 14:12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

In both this text and Revelation 12:17, obeying God's commandments is coupled with remaining faithful to (the testimony) of Jesus as the characteristics of the saints of God. Are these commandments different from those given by the LORD God at Mount Sinai? "The LORD gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. On them were all the commandments the LORD proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly" (Deut. 9:10). We think not. Fearing God and keeping His commandments have always been the whole duty of man (cf. Eccl. 12:13), and continues to be for the new covenant saint.

***Mr. Irons' teachings are in violation of the Westminster Standards***

The ethical tradition reflected in the Westminster Standards assumes a *substantive continuity* between what Paul calls the "requirements of the law" (Rom. 2:15) written upon the hearts of all mankind, by virtue of their being image-bearers of their divine Creator, and those specially revealed commandments which in due course were summarized in the Decalogue. The "historical prologue" to the Mosaic Torah which is the book of Genesis, reveals that, even before the Fall, God was pleased to specially reveal His will to our first parents, both by the comprehensive "creation mandate" (Gen. 1:28) and the "positive" probationary commandment concerning the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:16f). Further, the history of God's covenantal dealings with His people recorded in Genesis makes it clear that, long before they were codified under Moses, the moral precepts of the law were known to the fathers. This understanding of God's revelation of His law is reflected in ch. XIX of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:

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...
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...

This same emphasis is evident in the *Larger Catechism*, Qs 93 & 95:

WLC Q 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.

WLC Q 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.

Though the law was first given (formally) to Adam and Eve as a "covenant of works," which covenant they broke, its moral substance "continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness." As such it has appropriately been called the "moral law" (cf. XIX.3). It is this moral law which was summarized in the ten commandments given by the LORD to Moses on Mount Sinai. This is not to suggest that the Decalogue was formally propagated in the Garden of Eden, but that the law summarized therein was descriptive of man's moral obligation to His Creator from the beginning of creation.

This law binds all men *as the image of God* to "personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience." The *moral obligation* obtains in every case, regardless of whether the person in question stands condemned as a covenant-breaker under the "covenant of works," or justified by means of the redemptive provisions of God's "covenant of grace," realized finally in the Person and work of Jesus the Messiah. This understanding is summarized in WCF XIX.5:

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.

Reformed theologians since Calvin have recognized that the law cannot provide -- either by its moral or ceremonial elements -- the basis for meritorious self-justification. Indeed, they have followed the testimony of Paul in declaring that "man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ...by observing the law no one will be justified" (Gal. 2:16). To treat the law in such a way -- as a "covenant of works" by which one can commend oneself to God on the basis of one's own merit -- is to abuse and twist the law from its proper purpose. This was the error of the Jews. "Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works" (Rom. 9:31-32). This biblical conviction finds expression in the opening clause of WCF XIX:6, "...true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned..." This is not to suggest that the Mosaic economy was in fact a "republication" of the "covenant of works." It was rather one of the "covenants of the promise" (Eph. 2:12), or (as we are more accustomed to speak) an "administration" of the covenant of grace.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the law has lost its usefulness to the believer, or that its obligation as the expression of God's righteousness is nullified. WCF XIX:6 continues:

...yet is [the law] of great use to them [i.e., true believers], 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.

Again, the *Larger Catechism* speaks to the same point:

WLC Q 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 Westminster divines here enumerate several "uses" of the law for the regenerate believer: (1) the law *informs* the believer of the content of his moral obligation (duty) to God, thus directing and binding to walk accordingly; (2) the law *exposes* the believer's indwelling sin, and is thus instrumental in working in his heart and life an ongoing repentance, as well as a deepening appreciation of his continual need of Christ, and gratitude for the Savior's grace; and (3) the law *restrains* sin in the believer as an instrument of God's paternal chastening of the children he loves (cf. Hebr. 12:5-11) -- negatively, "threatenings" and "afflictions," but not the "curse;" positively, "promises" and "blessings," but not of their own merit. These functions of the law are consistent with what the Confession says elsewhere (XIV.2) concerning the nature of "saving faith," i.e., "By this faith, a Christian...acteth differently upon that which each particular passage [of the Word] containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come."

The acknowledgement of these encouraging and deterring uses of God's law does not, however, suggest that the Christian is "under the law" (in the sense that Paul uses the phrase, in the contrast in Romans 6:14, to indicate the impotency of the law to deliver from the bondage of sin). These blessed operations of the law in the life of the believer are all fully compatible with the gracious nature of the new covenant in Christ. To suggest that this dynamic is an expression of a "works-principle" as opposed to a "grace-principle" is, in the minds of the framers of the Confession, to seriously misunderstand both the law and God's covenant of grace, of which it is an integral part. This is made explicit in WCF XIX.7:

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.

Far from calling for a bare submission to external obligation in the keeping of God's law, the Confession draws our attention to the fact that obedience to God's commandments, like faith in Jesus Christ, is the fruit of the *regenerating, renewing work of the Spirit of God* in the heart and life of the believer. According to Paul and the Confession, faithful "law-keeping" is an expression of the "*new creation*" in Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" (Gal. 6:15). "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts" (1 Cor. 7:19). Keeping the law is "faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6). The Spirit's gracious *provision* answers to the law's holy *requirement*, and the result is a "free," indeed "cheerful," obedience to the will of God expressed in the His "holy, righteous and good...spiritual" law (Rom. 7:12,14).

Rom. 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Seemingly paradoxically, the believer's obedience to the law is in reality an expression of Christian liberty:

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...

It is noteworthy that the divines recognized that "childlike love" and "willingness of mind" were not absent from the Mosaic administration. The old covenant saint could say, by faith, "I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free" (Ps. 119:32). But they also acknowledge with Paul (cf. Gal. 3:23-4:7) that Jesus the Messiah has brought the "children" to their majority and the full enjoyment of their heritage of freedom in the Spirit. The continuing moral obligation of the law of God, as summarized in the Decalogue, as a rule of righteous living is in no way incompatible with these new covenant realities.

The Confession's teaching is utterly different from any Jewish, "Judaizing," or Romish "legalism" that calls for obedience (meritorious or otherwise) arising from "the flesh."

In perfect accord with this theological understanding of the role of the moral law in God's covenant, and thereby in the lives of the regenerate, the Westminster catechisms make the Decalogue the foundation for their ethical teachings.

Sin is defined explicitly in terms of "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God" generically (WSC Q 14), or severally ("any law of God," WSC Q 24). This law has been "given as a rule to the reasonable creature" (*ibid.*, cf. WLC Q 93, "The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind...").

The heart of the ethical section of both catechisms is the exposition of the Decalogue (WSC Q 39-81, WLC Q 91-148), which is understood as the "summary" of the moral law (WSC Q 41, WLC Q 98) which is in turn the revelation of "God's will" (WSC Q 40, WLC Q 92), obedience to which is the "duty which God requireth of man" (WSC Q 39, WLC Q 91). According to the proof texts cited, these commandments are the "things revealed [which] belong to us [believing covenant-keepers] and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). In them is comprised the justice, mercy, and humble walking in covenant fellowship with God that the LORD requires from His people (Micah 6:8). In citing 1 John 5:2-3, the framers of the catechism make it clear that the Decalogue-as-summary-of-the-moral-law (cf. Deut. 4:13; Matt. 19:17) represents the very same "commandments" which the *new* covenant enjoins upon believers as an expression of love for God and for the children of God -- commands which are "not burdensome" (i.e., no legalistic yoke of fleshly obedience). Thus the catechisms teach that the moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, still has commanding authority over the believer. Accordingly, WLC Q 99 sets forth eight principles of the "right understanding of the ten commandments."

### ***The moral law in Reformed theology and ethics***

This confessional understanding of the place of the moral law in God's covenant administration, and the lives of believers under the new covenant, reflects the teaching of John Calvin in particular, and has been characteristic of "mainstream" Reformed theology and ethics to the present day.

We first cite from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book II, chapter 7, sections 12ff. (Elements in Calvin's discussion which have special affinity with the Westminster confessional formulations are highlighted by italics.)

#### Calvin on the Law and the Christian

#### 12. EVEN THE BELIEVERS HAVE NEED OF THE LAW

The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, *finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns*. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God [Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16], that is, have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law in two ways.

Here is the best instrument for them *to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it*. It is as if some servant, already prepared with all earnestness of heart to commend himself to his master, must search out and observe his master's ways more carefully in order to conform and accommodate himself to them. And not one of us may escape from this necessity. *For no man has heretofore attained to such wisdom as to be unable, from the daily instruction of the law, to make fresh progress toward a purer knowledge of the divine will.*

Again, because we need not only teaching but also exhortation, the servant of God will also avail himself of this benefit of the law: by frequent meditation upon it *to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression*. In this way the saints must press on; for, however eagerly they may in accordance with the Spirit strive toward God's righteousness, the listless flesh always so burdens them that they do not proceed with due readiness. The law is to the flesh like a whip to an idle and balky ass, to arouse it to work. Even for a spiritual man not yet free of the weight of the flesh the law remains a constant sting that will not let him stand still. Doubtless David was referring to this use when he sang the praises of the law: "The law of the Lord is spotless, converting souls;... the righteous acts of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts; the precept of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes," etc. [Psalm 19:8-9]. Likewise: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" [Psalm 119:105], and innumerable other sayings in the same psalm [e.g., Psalm 119:5]. These do not contradict Paul's statements, which show not what use the law serves for the regenerate, but what it can of itself confer upon man. *But here the prophet proclaims the great usefulness of the law: the Lord instructs by their reading of it those whom he inwardly instills with a readiness to obey*. He lays hold not only of the precepts, but the accompanying promise of grace, which alone sweetens what is bitter. For what would be less lovable than the law if, with importuning and threatening alone, it troubled souls through fear, and distressed them through fright? David especially shows that in the law he apprehended the Mediator, without whom there is no delight or sweetness.

### 13. WHOEVER WANTS TO DO AWAY WITH THE LAW ENTIRELY FOR THE FAITHFUL, UNDERSTANDS IT FALSELY

Certain ignorant persons, not understanding this distinction, rashly cast out the whole of Moses, and bid farewell to the two Tables of the Law. For they think it obviously alien to Christians to hold to a doctrine that contains the "dispensation of death" [cf. 2 Corinthians 3:7]. Banish this wicked thought from our minds! *For Moses has admirably taught that the law, which among sinners can engender nothing but death, ought among the saints to have a better and more excellent use*. When about to die, he decreed to the people as follows: "Lay to your hearts all the words which this day I enjoin upon you, that you may command them to your children, and teach them to keep, do, and fulfill all those things written in the book of this law. For they have not been commanded to you in vain, but for each to live in them" [Deuteronomy 32:46-47]. *But if no one can deny that a perfect pattern of righteousness stands forth in the law, either we need no rule to live rightly and justly, or it is forbidden to depart from the law*.

*There are not many rules, but one everlasting and unchangeable rule to live by*. For this reason we are not to refer solely to one age David's statement that the life of a righteous man is a continual meditation upon the law [Psalm 1:2], for it is just as applicable to every age, even to the end of the world.

...But in this perfection to which it exhorts us, the law points out the goal toward which throughout life we are to strive. In this the law is no less profitable than consistent with our duty. If we fail not in this struggle, it is well. Indeed, this whole life is a race [cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24-26]; when its course has been run, the Lord will grant us to attain that goal to which our efforts now press forward from afar.

### 14. TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE LAW BEEN ABROGATED FOR BELIEVERS?

Now, the law has power to exhort believers. *This is not a power to bind their consciences with a curse, but one to shake off their sluggishness, by repeatedly urging them, and to pinch them awake to their imperfection*. Therefore, many persons, wishing to express such liberation from that curse, *say that for believers the law - I am still speaking of the moral law - has been abrogated*. Not that the law no longer enjoins believers to do what is right, but only that it is not for them what it formerly was: *it may no longer condemn and destroy their consciences by frightening and confounding them*.

...let us accurately distinguish what in the law has been abrogated from what still remains in force. When the Lord testifies that he "came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it" and that "until heaven and earth pass away...not a jot will pass away from the law until all is accomplished" [Matthew 5:17-18], *he sufficiently confirms that by his coming nothing is going to be taken away from the observance of the law*. And justly - inasmuch as he came rather to remedy transgressions of it. *Therefore through Christ the teaching of the law remains inviolable; by teaching, admonishing, reproving, and correcting, it forms us and prepares us for every good work* [cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17].

### 15. THE LAW IS ABROGATED TO THE EXTENT THAT IT NO LONGER CONDEMNS US

...The law not only teaches but forthrightly enforces what it commands. If it be not obeyed - indeed, if one in any respect fail in his duty — *the law unleashes the thunderbolt of its curse*. For this reason the apostle says: "All who are of the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who does not fulfill all things'" [Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26 p.]. He describes as "under the works of the law" those who do not ground their righteousness in remission of sins, through which we are released from the rigor of the law. *He therefore teaches that we must be released from the bonds of the law, unless we wish to perish miserably under them.*

But from what bonds? The bonds of harsh and dangerous requirements, which remit nothing of the extreme penalty of the law, and suffer no transgression to go unpunished...That we should not be borne down by an unending bondage, which would agonize our consciences with the fear of death. *Meanwhile this always remains an unassailable fact: no part of the authority of the law is withdrawn without our having always to receive it with the same veneration and obedience.*

Commenting on Romans 8:4, Calvin distinguishes the law as "doctrine," i.e., as "a perfect rule of righteousness," and its "weakness" arising, not from any inherent defect, but from the sinfulness of human nature ("our flesh"):

That no one might think that the law was irreverently charged with weakness, or confine it to ceremonies, Paul has distinctly expressed that this defect was not owing to any fault in the law, but to the corruption of our flesh; for it must be allowed that if any one really satisfies the divine law, he will be deemed just before God. *He does not then deny that the law is sufficient to justify us as to doctrine, inasmuch as it contains a perfect rule of righteousness: but as our flesh does not attain that righteousness, the whole power of the law fails and vanishes away.* ...The corruption then of our nature renders the law of God in this respect useless to us; for while it shows the way of life, it does not bring us back who are running headlong into death.

In his *Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists* (1544), Calvin writes:

I ask them *whether they think Jesus Christ wanted to add to the law of God His Father*, or whether He simply wanted to interpret it? In reply they say that He taught "the perfection of the Law."

But I insist further and ask if this perfection hadn't already been understood earlier? For if they reply no, then I say that is an obvious lie. Moses, after publishing the law, solemnly affirmed to the people that he had shown them the way of life and the way of death (Deut. 30:19). Then, recapitulating it all in a brief summary, he says that his teaching leads to this end: "that man should love God with all his heart and with all his mind and with all his soul and with all his strength" (Deut. 6:5). And still in another passage: "And now, Israel, what is it that God requires of you, but to cling to Him with all your heart?" (Deut. 10:12) and so forth.

*These passages indeed sufficiently prove that the teaching of the law contains a rule for right living, for leading man to a complete perfection. Thus, beyond a doubt, God has declared in the law His good will. He has, I say, once and for all delivered judgment on good and evil, on what is pleasing to Him or displeasing.*

*Consequently, our Lord Jesus, speaking on the perfect life, always referred those whom He taught back to the law* (Matt. 19:17 and elsewhere). And Saint Paul in the twelfth chapter of Romans (v. 19) *refers us to the same source in order to help us better understand our duty.* [*Treatises Against the Anabaptists and the Against the Libertines*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), pp. 95-96]

That the Westminster divines derived their conceptual framework regarding the law, indeed much of their terminology, from Calvin is obvious from these citations (and a plethora of other passages along similar lines in Calvin's works).

A multitude of Reformed (and other) theologians could be cited as expressing essentially this same view of the moral law as summarized in the Decalogue (your committee read and reviewed books and articles by, among others, G.C. Berkhouwer, Samuel Bolton, C.E.B. Cranfield, J. Douma, Patrick Fairbairn, A.A. Hodge, Charles Hodge, Walter C. Kaiser, E.F. Kevan, M. G. Kline, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J. Gresham Machen, John Murray, Robert L. Reymond, Herman Ridderbos, O. Palmer Robertson, C. H. Spurgeon, Ned. B. Stonehouse, J.H. Thornwell, W.A. VanGemenen, G. Vos, and G.I. Williamson). We will quote at length as characteristic only two, from the two branches of the Reformed family, the Continental and the Anglo-Scottish - Herman Ridderbos and John Murray. These two, along with Calvin above, may be considered "witnesses for the prosecution."

Herman Ridderbos on the teaching of our Lord concerning the abiding authority of the Law of God upon the life of the believer (from *The Coming of the Kingdom*, pp. 241-259, 285-329):

29. *The Fulfillment of the Father's Will*

*The Sermon on the Mount also shows the importance of the commandments in Jesus' preaching [emphasis added]. Starting from Matthew 5:13, the whole Sermon on the Mount is one impressive exhortation to do "good works" (Matt. 5:16), to do "justice" (5:20; 6:1; 6:33), to fulfill "the law and the prophets" (5:17-48; 7:12), to go through "the narrow gate" and upon "the narrow path" (7:13,14), to bear "fruit" (7:16-20), to do the Father's will (7:21), and to "hear and do" Jesus' words (7:24-27, cf. also Luke 6:27-49).*

This is not yet the place to enter into the content of Jesus' commandments in a detailed way. Our present goal is to ascertain their position within the scope of Jesus' preaching, and to determine in what relation the promulgation of God's demand stands with respect to the remission of sins and God's fatherhood. In other words, our present subject is to determine the relationship between the indicatives preaching God's work of salvation and the imperatives calling man to action.

So there can be little doubt that Jesus considered the carrying out of God's will as the condition and the preparation for entry into the kingdom of heaven. But in what sense is this to be taken? *There can be no question here of a Jewish belief in meritoriousness, for this already follows from what has been said above about the position of the remission of sins in Jesus' proclamation of salvation [emphasis added].* It is now necessary to discuss the opinion...that Jesus did not mean such conditions in a positive but in a hypothetical sense. He wished to lead his disciples indirectly to the recognition that in the way of the fulfillment of the law they could never enter into the kingdom, and to open their eyes to a "better" kind of righteousness.

But the question is not whether Jesus' commandments do not or should not also induce man to be humbly repentant and feel his guilt. The real question is whether or not the demand explained by Jesus for doing God's will also has a *positive* significance, and if the obedience demanded by him is not really the condition for entering into the kingdom of heaven. In our opinion this question can only be answered in the affirmative. For, apart from other considerations which make unacceptable the taking of an exclusively negative attitude toward Jesus' commandments, the most decisive argument against this view is the fact that Jesus not only posits the doing of God's will as a condition and a preparation for entry into the kingdom, but also preaches it as *a gift* belonging to the salvation of the kingdom proclaimed by him. And besides, he speaks of this gift, neither hypothetically nor as something irrational, but in a very positive sense.

*It is the salvation of the Lord for his people that he makes them different human beings and writes his commandments in their hearts, and, because of this, obedience to God's will can be effectively asked [emphasis original].*

This viewpoint...is the starting-point of all the commandments in Matthew 5:13-16. For in close connection with the beatitudes we find here *the ethical indicative of salvation*: "Ye are the salt of the earth, Ye are the light of the world." The reason is clear, for they belong to the kingdom of heaven. This is their advantage over "men" (verse 16), and in this they have a preserving (salt) and a redeeming (light) significance for mankind and the world. Their advantage is not a gift of an exclusively objective nature consisting in the promise, but is a new station in life into which they have been transposed, in which they have become different human beings, have had their hearts, their being, changed. That is why they are capable of doing good works by virtue of the gift granted them. These indicatives are connected with the imperatives that follow: those who are the light of the world and the salt should effectuate the working of salt and light in their "good works," i.e., in their ethical fulfillment of God's will...the good works Jesus demands from his disciples must in the first place be viewed as the result and as the manifestation of the salvation of the kingdom in which they participate in Christ.

Very emphatically good works are spoken of as *the manifestation of the sonship of believers*. This is done especially in Matthew 5:45,48 (cf. Luke 6:35,36). There the disciples are exhorted to love their enemies, with the motivation being "that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven." It is clear, especially in the verses that follow in which the disciples are exhorted to do as their Father does (to be perfect" as he is perfect) that sonship is not to be considered here as a future goal but as a present state. So, loving the enemy is *evidence* of the communion in which

the disciples live with their heavenly Father. Sonship to God (a gift of the kingdom) thus appears also to have a moral meaning.

From the above we may infer that the great imperative of the gospel and what belongs to it, as well as the indicative proclaiming the salvation of the kingdom, is granted as a gift of God and is again and again ascribed to God's redemptive action. Even the ethical message itself occurs in the gospel in the form of the proclamation of salvation (Matt. 5:13).

Thus it now becomes clear to us how we may consider the relationship between the two dominant viewpoints of Jesus' ethical preaching, viz., that of condition and that of gift. For the very reason that the salvation of the Lord embraces not only divine but also human action, the human aspect may be subsumed under all the categories of salvation (viz., that of fulfillment, the remission of sins, sonship to God), and conversely, the divine salvation may be subsumed under all ethical categories (as a reward, as dependent upon ethical conditions, as the destination of "the narrow path," etc.). They are both inseparable, the one always fits into the other and forms its counterpart, as it were. They do not nullify each other, however, nor is the character of the one sacrificed to that of the other. The fact that nobody will enter into the kingdom of heaven unless he does the will of the Father does not mean that the gift of the kingdom is not solely dependent upon God's gracious action. *And conversely, God's gift of grace does not render fictitious human responsibility with respect to God's will, nor does it deprive the commandment of its character of a condition* [emphasis added]...As the preaching of the kingdom, as the proclamation of Father's will, all the imperatives of the gospel are always founded in the great indicative that the time has been fulfilled and the salvation has come.

These words and others denote without doubt the fulfillment of God's will as the norm and standard of sonship to God and of entry into the bliss of the coming kingdom. But for the carrying out of the divine will man is by Jesus' imperatives referred to the grace of God and not to his human self. This is the difference between Jesus and the Pharisees, between the gospel and "the spirit of bondage again to fear" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:24). *This is also the new element, namely, that of fulfillment in doing God's will. It is not this will which is new (although given its most radical meaning in Jesus' commandments); nor is it the law as the order of grace and as God's gift to his people. But the new feature is God's inauguration of the new covenant, his writing his law in the hearts of his people* [emphasis added]. He himself undertakes the fulfillment of the conditions of the covenant (Jer. 31:33). This is why repentance and doing of righteousness, as well as withstanding the temptation of Satan (Luke 22:32), are acts of *faith* (Matt. 21:32; Mark 11:31, cf. Mark 1:15). For, indeed, the principal part of the law consists of justice, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23), i.e., in the certainty of God's help and salvation.

[RE Matthew 11:28-30] Those who learn God's will from him and accept it, are, consequently, not only dependent upon his word as a *command*, but are also called to fellowship with his person for its fulfillment. He it is who gives those who live in his fellowship the rest, the assurance of salvation. For he teaches them how to bear this burden in their new relation to God as children of their heavenly Father, because he himself bears this burden as the one that has been sent by the Father. Therefore, all the commandments, as well as the warning not to be mistaken, and the threat of the last judgment, at bottom only point to Jesus himself. In his fellowship the salvation of the kingdom is received and the "yoke of the kingdom" becomes easy. For through his lowliness and meekness he has laid the foundation of the new covenant in which God writes his law in the hearts of his own." What is true of the remission of sins and of sonship to God also holds for the carrying out of the Father's will. The new element of fulfillment is not to be sought in the thing as such, but in fellowship with the person of him who demands it. Together the indicative and the imperative denote the salvation that has begun with Christ's coming and work for his people.

The Holy Spirit is the author of the whole of the renewing and re-creating work of God which will become manifest with the coming of the kingdom. But apart from this fact, in the dispensation of fulfillment that began with Christ's coming, the Spirit distributes the gifts of the salvation of the kingdom of heaven among the children of God. He creates and maintains the communion between the Father and his children (*our* Father). He, too, is the agent of the sanctifying of God's name and the doing of God's will on earth.

This promised gift of the Holy Spirit is the result of the coming of the kingdom of heaven and belongs to the salvation proclaimed by Jesus. Its deepest ground and explanation lies in the fact that Jesus himself is the Messiah who has been equipped by God with the Holy Spirit. Though the synoptic gospels contain only a few explicit passages on the gift of the Spirit as the treasure of salvation of believers, it nevertheless cannot be denied that the concurrence of the kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit is one of the great presuppositions of the entire gospel.

### 32. "Kingdom of God" and "Righteousness"

We have seen what an important place the demand to do the Father's will occupies in Jesus' preaching. We have been able to form an idea of the general meaning of this moral demand within the scope of the gospel of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus. *We are now confronted with the task of entering more minutely into the content and the purport of Jesus' commandments* [emphasis added]. The first question, then, is in what respect the content of Jesus' commandments is determined by the idea of the kingdom of heaven or, in other words, what constitutes the specific meaning of these commandments.

These pronouncements also show the close connection between the concepts "kingdom of God" and "righteousness." In Matthew 6:33, the kingdom of God and righteousness are spoken of in the form of a hendiadys...It may rightly be said, therefore, that kingdom and righteousness are synonymous concepts in Jesus' preaching. The one is unthinkable without the other.

*It is the absolutely theocentric character of the kingdom which determines the content of Jesus' commandments* [emphasis added]. Especially in their radical demands they are intended to govern the whole of life from this theocentric standpoint and to put everything in the balance for this single goal.

The norms of the righteousness demanded by Jesus are not founded in an earthly ideal of God's kingdom, nor in the future and transcendent character of the kingdom. God's will expressed in Jesus' commandments is not subordinated to certain creaturely values, nor is it to be derived from the latter, nor does it consist in their negation. It rests solely in God's own communication...It is the "ethics" of obedience in the full sense of the word. That which is "righteousness," and may be taught as such, is always to be traced back to God's own words. This fundamental notion is the great presupposition of the remarkable fact that again and again Jesus speaks of "God's will" without any further explanation (Matt. 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; 21:31; Luke 12:47,48), the "commandment" or "God's commandments" (Matt. 15:3; Mark 7:8,9; Matt. 19:17; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20), "God's word" (Matt. 15:6; Luke 11: 28), as that which man has to "fulfill," to "do," to "keep," and which as such is known, or at least can be known. *If, therefore, the question is asked by what Jesus' commandments are regulated, the ultimate answer is only this: by God's will as it is revealed in his law* [emphasis added]. This is the meaning of the great program of the Sermon on the Mount, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). What is implied in this "fulfillment" of the law we shall have to investigate in a later chapter. *But it must be emphatically stated at the outset that Jesus' ethical preaching does not have a deeper ground than the law as the revelation of God's will to Israel, the people of the covenant* [emphasis added]. And this not only appears from Matthew 5:17, but as we shall see, from the whole of Jesus' teaching that has come down to us. *Again and again it is the law, and only the law, the meaning and purpose of which is also the meaning and purpose of Jesus' commandments* [emphasis added].

That is why the connection between the "kingdom of God" and "righteousness" does not mean that God's kingdom represents a new ethical norm expressed in the righteousness preached by Jesus. But this connection is to be sought in the preaching of the kingdom as that of God's coming in Jesus Christ, and it takes the revelation of God's will seriously as the great criterion for the coming of the kingdom. This revelation is again and again referred to by Jesus as set down in the law and the prophets. *Therefore, one may not only speak of the theocentric character of Jesus' commandments (in contrast to all humanistic ideals of the kingdom of God), but also of the theonomy of the righteousness preached by him. The will of God finds expression in the revelation of the law. This is why the preaching of the kingdom is also that of the law* [emphasis added]. So we should not be surprised that Jesus as the Christ not only proclaims the coming of the kingdom as the fulfillment of the great time of salvation and as the fulfillment of Scripture (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:21), but that he also gives supreme emphasis to the fulfillment of the law as the purpose of his messianic coming and as the content of the gospel of the kingdom.

### 33. The Fulfillment of the Law

For a correct insight into the meaning of the righteousness demanded by Jesus, we must first determine more closely the character of his commandments as the fulfillment of the law. Then we have to deal with those texts in which Jesus' relation to the law set down in the Old Testament is explicitly mentioned. We have already quoted Matthew 5:17ff which may be considered of paramount importance in this connection. But this pronouncement is not an independent and isolated one.

For one thing, we should point out a whole series of references in support of the programmatic words of Matthew 5:17. Jesus' own life had been subjected to the law from his earliest youth...Jesus' messianic and substitutionary work, including his suffering and death, are to be considered as the fulfillment of God's law.

No less clear are the numerous data in which Jesus' teaching also binds others to the revealed law of God [e.g., Matthew 7:12; 19:17]...So in these passages we are told what is needed to enter the kingdom of heaven, viz., the fulfillment of the law. Even when in the continuing conversation, the young man is told by Jesus to sell all that he has and to give it to the poor, this demand does not exceed that which the law requires us to do. It is its actual application...

Moreover, the commandment to love God and one's neighbor which is repeatedly given by Jesus as the summary of all his commandments, is nothing else but the summary of the law (Matt. 7:12; 22:40, cf. also Mark 12:34; Matt. 24:12). So Jesus' most radical commandments, which are always the particularizations of this love (cf., e.g., Matt. 5:38ff, 43ff), do not represent a new kind of righteousness (e.g., that of love in contrast to that of right), but only give expression to what Jesus proclaims as the demand of the law and the prophets...

The question now is, what is the meaning of this continuous appeal to the law, and what is the sense of Jesus' emphatic pronouncement in his introduction to the great antithetical passage of the Sermon on the Mount when he says that he has come to fulfill the law and the prophets (*pleroosai*), Matthew 5:17? This question can only be fully answered (if such an answer is possible) after a survey of the whole of Jesus' ethical preaching. Nevertheless the words quoted from Matthew 5:17-19 are of great importance, because this general pronouncement is not obscure in itself, nor incompatible with the rest of the context...

The first thing to be observed about the fulfillment (*pleroosai*) in Matthew 5:17 is that here *the category "law" in its sense of an external authority is fully maintained* [emphasis added] - which follows logically especially from verse 17 (cf. Luke 16:17). Hence there can be no question here of a replacing of the law as the source of our knowledge of God's will by "the new disposition," "conscience," etc. Moreover, *any exegesis which explains the text as if it meant a quantitative supplement of the law does not do justice to the meaning of the words* [emphasis added]. In this sense, e.g., Jeremias wishes to take Matthew 5:17. He thinks that Jesus, as the bearer of "the complementary and final will of God," contrasts himself here to Moses, the bearer of "the provisional divine will." But *"fulfillment" does not mean "completion of the law as the source of our knowledge of the divine will," but the effectual assertion of the demands of the law* [emphasis added]. The word suggests a vessel that is being filled. The "vessel" of the law is given its rightful measure. For this purpose Jesus has come. And this measure, naturally, consists in the demands of the law being accomplished.

In our opinion the context clearly shows that both "the law" and "the prophets" refer to the divine demand. The seventeenth verse explains the sixteenth, which deals with "good works." And the whole paragraph of Matthew 5:21-48, to which 5:17-20 forms an introduction, deals with the divine demand. We therefore think that we must conceive of "the law and the prophets" in the same sense as in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount (7:12 and also Matt. 22:40).

Therefore, it is entirely in agreement with the whole character of Jesus' preaching when this word about the fulfillment of the law and the prophets is taken to refer to the promise of the new covenant, according to which God will write his law in the hearts of his people and thus himself answers for its fulfillment (Jer. 31:31ff).

All this, however, does not detract from the fact that in the exegesis of Matthew 5:17 we are primarily concerned with the prophetic-messianic interpretation of the law and, consonant with this, that for which the disciples are held to be responsible.

...it has often been asserted that Jesus' definitive exegesis of the law and its attendant criticism of the Jewish scribes distinctly contains a criticism of the law itself, if not literally, at least implicitly...This view is especially based on what is called the incompatibility of Matthew 5:17-20 (the explicit maintenance of the law) with the antithesis following it, Matthew 5:21-48. To refute this argument we restrict ourselves to the following.

Firstly, those antitheses are formally directed against the scribes' doctrine of the law, not against the law itself.

Connected with this is the translation of *tois archaios* (vss. 21ff). In our opinion it is almost indisputable that this should be translated, "by them of old time," and not, "to them of old time." Those of old time are then those who had explained the law in the so-called *halacha*. In Jesus' days the teaching of the scribes went back to this exegesis.

1) Jesus does not quote what has been written, but what has been said (*errethe*, not *gegraptai*), whereas in verse 18 he speaks of the law as that which has been expressed in letters (jot and tittle). By what has been said, he refers to what the scribes taught the people orally as the tradition of the teaching of the law by "those of old time."

2) ...when "those of old" are mentioned in connection with the law, the scribes are meant, at least in Jewish writings. In the tracts of the Talmud and in the Midrashim, there is repeated mention of the "words of them of old."

3) This is corroborated by Matthew 15:2, in which Jesus explicitly mentions the "tradition of the elders," and contrasts God's law to it (verse 3). It is true that the text here does not mention *archaioi* but *presbuteroi*, but there is no technical difference between these two words. In both cases the Jewish *zekenim* are no doubt referred to.

4) Another argument - which in our opinion is conclusive - is that what Jesus quotes as "having been said" is for the greater part not found in the Old Testament in this form, but contains all kinds of additions and which, in at least one instance, are in obvious conflict with the Old Testament (cf. 5:43). These quotations clearly bear the character of instruction in the law, interpretation, *halacha*, not that of quotations from the law proper.

5) In contrast to what has been said ("by them of old"), Jesus emphatically asserts his: "But I say unto you." The antithesis not only relates to the contents of what was said in olden times and to what is said now, but also to the persons responsible for such "sayings," i.e., Jesus and "them of old."

But it is not only from the form in which the antithesis is expressed but also from the contents of the antithetical commandments themselves, that it appears that Jesus does not combat the law but the superficial conception, the devaluation of the demand of the law...*Though in the antithetical part of the Sermon on the Mount the fulfillment of the law is certainly something different than a mere repetition there nevertheless can be no doubt that in these commandments Jesus only wanted to do justice to the law as the normative instance. Therefore, he does not here correct or complete the law of God, but is its defender and guardian* [emphasis added].

It is true that Jesus again and again has strongly emphasized the necessity of a heart disposition to please God in contrast to an external view of the law. He makes the possibility of a good deed dependent upon a good disposition of the heart, found especially in the sayings about the tree and its fruit (Matt. 7:17ff; 12:33ff). But all this does not in the least cancel God's law as an external authority and source of knowledge, nor does it replace this law by man's good disposition...*The disposition of the heart (indicated in whatever way it may be) is not some attribute transcending the law, but is subjected to the law and demanded by the law...The disposition of the heart is an indispensable condition of a good deed for the very reason that it is included in the precept of the law and is demanded by God in the revelation of his will. The theonomy of the gospel is subjection to the law, and any attempt to eliminate the category of law from the gospel is frustrated by the continuous and undeniable maintenance of the law by and in the gospel* [emphasis added].

*All such views consider the fulfillment of the law by Jesus as the cancellation of the category of law or of part of its contents at the expense of another part of the law. In opposition to them it must now be stated that Jesus' attitude toward the law is invariably and exclusively positive* [emphasis added]. The meaning of this is clearly seen from the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus explains the meaning of the law by means of a number of examples of its application. These examples must not be looked upon as a number of "new independent commandments," nor must they be divorced from the given law, but they must be viewed within the scope of the whole of the law. *Jesus does not give a new description or summary of things ethical, but he gives profound insight into the depth of the revealed divine law* [emphasis added].

Only on one point - although a very important one - has the law been suspended, viz., when its contents can no longer be made compatible with the meaning of the administration of salvation inaugurated by Jesus' coming.

Sometimes the fulfillment of the law formulated by Jesus in his commandments consists in a deepening, a refinement, a qualitative reduction of a particular sin to its root and origin; at others it contains the rejection of the atomistic

conception of sin and righteousness, and sets God's demand in the light of the original meaning of the whole of all the divine commandments. *It is always the law that Jesus claims to maintain and fulfill* [emphasis added]. And every time it appears that the interpretation of the law, i.e., the knowledge of the divine will from the law, must satisfy higher demands than those made by the current interpretation of the Jewish teachers of the law. The issue is not the law as such but its interpretation.

...the divine will has not been put into words for every separate and concrete situation, and that God holds man responsible for his decisions not only with respect to the doing but also with respect to the knowing of his will. *The divine law is not a textbook with sections for every situation in life, not a doctrine of cases that needs only to be consulted to know God's will. Rather, the law requires spiritual discernment and judgment from man with respect to the knowledge of God's will and desires to lead him to such knowledge. This does not mean that there is no question at all of a law as a permanent and universally valid instance, or only of divine commandments of a concrete character* [emphasis added]. The divine law not only gives a few applications of the divine will, a few actual examples or demonstrations, but also undoubted basic lines of conduct, summaries, general principles. In this respect, e.g., the ten commandments have a different character than that of the commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, which, at least in part, have this character of actual application (cf. above). This does not detract from the fact that, with respect to the Old Testament law also, the knowledge of the divine will is a matter of spiritual judgment and discretion, and that in the antithesis between Jesus and the Pharisees this discretion is again and again the real issue.

...the whole of [Jesus'] teaching is dominated by the thought of the living reality of God's revealed will in his law. Jesus does not appeal from the law to "the open reality" of God, but points out this reality in the law. His frequently recurring reproach is not directed against commitment to the law but against their refusal to be really committed to the law (Matt. 15:6; 9:13 passim). *No doubt the most basic cause of this refusal of Judaism's was the fact that it had divorced the law from the living God, and had made the law merely a subject for formal and scholarly learning. In contrast to this Jesus leads his disciples back to God himself for the knowledge of the divine will. They must show that they are the children of their heavenly Father. But this encounter only takes place in the law, conceived, however, as the translation and wording of God's will, as the personal address by the living and holy God. The specific trait in Jesus' fulfillment of the law is not that he allows man to look beyond the limits of the law, but that within these limits he holds man responsible for the knowledge of God's will* [emphasis added].

If the question is asked as to what is special and characteristic in Jesus' fulfillment of the law, the answer must be *that it is certainly not to be found in the pointing out of the limited importance of the law as a source of knowledge about the divine will, but much rather, in Jesus' vindication of the totalitarian and all-embracing nature of the demand of the law* [emphasis added]. This, and nothing else, is the meaning of the radicalization of the law's demand in the applications given by Jesus in his commandments. This is also the starting-point of the antithesis, "Unless your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees." This "excess" demanded by Jesus is not meant in a quantitative sense (reality confronts us with more situations than are provided for by the law), but in a qualitative sense (the demand of the law goes deeper and reaches further than the very elaborate interpretation of the law by the scribes would suggest). The dimension in which such fulfillment moves is not one of width but of depth. This indication of the totalitarian character of God's law is, therefore, the common tendency of all the examples of the interpretation of the law given by Jesus. Always, such an example is like a vertical section of the law revealing its all-embracing demand. Hence, the tracing back of manslaughter to hatred and quarreling, of adultery to unclean lust; hence, the radical formulation of the commandment of love, both intensively and extensively; hence, the demand imposed upon the rich young ruler (put in a general form in Luke 12:33) to sell all that he has and give to the poor (Matt. 19:21). This is the "perfection" required by Jesus, viz., the holding of nothing back, the unconditional surrender to the will of God with all that one is and has. This, and nothing else, is the meaning of the reduction of the content of the law to the duty of loving God above all and one's neighbor as oneself.

In the service of God everything depends upon integrity, perfection, the readiness to serve without any reserve. This is the love that Jesus demands, and which is also the love that is the content and summary of the law.

[B]ecause *this* love both to God and to our neighbor is the great content of the law, Jesus' commandments expressing the divine will are of such a radical nature. To put it in one statement, we can therefore say that the fulfillment of the law by Jesus consists in his setting in the light in a matchless way the character of love of the obedience demanded by the law. In this statement love is conceived of as the totalitarian all-embracing self-surrender.

From what has been said it follows that the purport of Jesus' commandments as well as the fulfillment of the law intended by him very clearly refer to what lies behind the specifically ethical aspect, and really concentrate on the religious root of obedience to the divine will. This is the important element of truth in the conception (held by Bultmann and others) that the real issue in the commandments, as also in the other parts of Jesus' preaching, is always one of decision (*Entscheidung*). There is no doubt that Jesus' commandments are more than exhortations to come to a decision. They are genuine commandments demanding obedience, and they also include the life out of the decision. But they all make clear that without this decision there is no possibility of obedience and of fulfillment of the law. This is the sense of their radicalism. This is why the great antithesis between Jesus and the Pharisees regarding the fulfillment of the law cannot be expressed in a particular ethical schema. For this fulfillment lies in the great pre-ethical decision, in the way wherein a man stands before God.

From this point of view it appears that the fulfillment of the law is a matter of the heart. *This does not mean that our heart is elevated to the source of our knowledge of the divine will* [emphasis added]. But it does imply that the sole possibility of fulfilling the law is dependent upon our conversion to God, and any zeal in behalf of the law without such conversion (i.e., while keeping our hearts far away from God) is hypocrisy...Even though the Pharisees were the upholders of Moses' law, and should be recognized as such, the spirit ruling their teachings was pernicious. For it was the spirit of hypocrisy in the above mentioned sense. It is this great religious antithesis with regard to the fulfillment of the law which dominated the relation between Jesus and the scribes.

Here, we must be reminded of the fact that the salvation of the kingdom includes the renewal of the heart and the fulfillment of the new covenant in which God will write in the hearts of his people all that he has proclaimed as his law.

#### 34. The Application of the Demand of Love

This is the complexity of the revealed law of God which takes account of the complexity of human life and of the power of sin. The idea that in his application of the law Jesus has denied or annihilated this multiform complexity and has, instead, reduced the whole of righteousness to a few radical rules of life is obviously in conflict with the explicit character of these commandments. Jesus' warning is not directed against this complexity and the complicated content of the revealed divine will, but against any "hypocritical" appeal to it.

Jesus' commandments indicate the only level upon which the revealed law of God in its concrete demand can be understood and fulfilled. That this level is so high is because it is the level of grace and of the redemption of the kingdom of heaven which has appeared in Christ.

On this level Jesus' commandments are meaningful and obligatory as concrete applications of the one great principle of love. This also implies that love is not a law unto itself. Love is the prerequisite and the root of the fulfillment of the law. But it is directed and guided by the divine law as the expression of God's will. And it is also guided by Jesus' commandments as applications of this revealed divine law.

Jesus' commandments, therefore, certainly contain indications of how the children of the kingdom are to act in certain concrete situations.

#### Ridderbos on the "Third Use of the Law" in Paul's theology (from Paul: An Outline of His Theology, pp. 378-288)

The question remains, however, as to where it is that the apostle himself in his precepts and commandments derived the norms for the new obedience required by him, as well as to the manner in which in its moral judgment of itself and in its own activity the church is able to receive correct insight into the will of God to be accomplished by it. In particular it should come up for discussion here whether and, if so, in what sense the law continues to function in the Pauline paraenesis as the source of the knowledge of the will of God and as the standard for the new life.

...it is not strange [in view of the freedom from the law as means of salvation...which the apostle declares with such great vigor] that many have arrived at the idea that the norm for the new life can no longer be derived from the law.

However much such a conclusion seems at first glance to lie in the line of Paul's absolute rejection of the law as the means to righteousness, on more careful inspection it appears that it does not do justice to the whole of his

pronouncements concerning the law...in other places, as it were self-evidently, he time and again harks back to the law, namely, when he wishes to define the content of the new obedience and the express will of God for the new life [cf. Rom. 8:3,4; 13:8-10; I Cor. 7:19; 9:21; Gal. 5:14; 6:2].

If we survey the whole, so far as the positive significance of the law is concerned, the following may be noted by way of summary.

(1) *However much, speaking out of the Jewish conception of the law as the means of salvation, Paul emphatically places the negative significance of the law in the foreground, on the other side the so-called "third use" of the law is also unmistakable in his epistles [emphasis added]. After all that has been said on "having died to the law," Christ as "the end of the law," etc., the abiding significance of the law as the expression of the will of God is maintained with a certain self-evidentness [emphasis added]. Nor is there materially the slightest opposition between the one and the other...the same thing applies to the very positive manner in which he speaks of "good works" and "righteousness" as well. This involves the fact that it is absolutely impossible, without having recourse to arbitrariness and artificiality, to deny this double significance of the law, namely, both as pedagogue to Christ and as rule for the new life, either on the one side or the other, or to distinguish both aspects even terminologically from each other. One will therefore not be able to maintain that love or the Spirit or even Christ is the norm and the rule of conduct of the new life, at least if this would mean a substitution for the law [emphasis added].*

Love functions here [Rom. 13:8-10 and Gal. 5:14] not as a new Christian ideal or as a new norm, which comes in the place of the law or makes it superfluous. It is precisely required here as the summary of the law (*anakephalaioantai*; Rom. 13:9). In other words, the law does not find its criterion in love, but just the reverse, the requirement of love is so imperative because in it lies the summary of the law...in this respect Paul's canticle of love, no less than Jesus' radical commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, is a matchless unfolding of the deep and unmistakable content of the law, an unfolding that can be such a radical and previously unattained pinnacle because it forms the reverse side of the preaching of God's unimaginably great revelation of love in Jesus Christ (cf. Phil. 2:5ff.; Rom. 12:1; Eph. 3:18, 19). *But this detracts nothing from the significance of the law as the expression of this love and as source for knowledge of the will of God. Every antithesis men would make here between the binding character of love and the not binding character of the law is to be rejected in the light of Paul's clear pronouncements [emphasis added].*

*This [i.e., Paul speaking of the Spirit in connection with liberty and obedience, and as the norm of the new life] does not mean...that the Spirit as the standard and norm of the new life sets himself over against or in the place of the law and that he who walks after the Spirit or is led by the Spirit no longer has any need of commandment or law [emphasis added]. ...this conception...is in flagrant conflict with the explicit pronouncements of the apostle. We must not here permit ourselves to be misled by the sound of some words. When in Galatians 5:18 Paul says "If you allow yourselves to be led by the Spirit, you are not under the law," it can appear as though for believers the knowledge and validity of the will of God were no longer situated in the law, but in the Spirit. Here again, however, what is meant by "under the law" is the condition of impotence and condemnation to which man is subjected outside faith and the life-giving power of the Spirit. A moment later, in verse 23, it can accordingly be said that the law is not against such (i.e., those who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit). *That the dispensation of the Spirit does not abrogate the validity and the requirement of the law, but precisely confirms this and brings it to fulfillment is not to be denied [emphasis added].* The work of the Spirit consists precisely in the working out of the law in the life of believers (Rom. 8:4: "that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"). The difference between the "mind of the flesh" and the "mind of the Spirit" lies precisely in this, that the flesh does not submit itself to the law of God, nor can it do so (Rom. 8:7)...The law itself is holy and spiritual (Rom. 7:14), and thus cannot be placed over against the Spirit; it is not made superfluous by the Spirit, but rather established. "Letting oneself be led by the Spirit" consists also in learning anew to discern and prove the good and well-pleasing and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2), qualifications that with a little variation are elsewhere applied to the law (Rom. 7:12).*

(2) Yet with the above everything has not of course been said. This is evident in particular from those pronouncements which have a bearing on the relationship of Christ and the law...with the advent of Christ the validity of the law in its historical form has not remained the same.

This passage [1 Corinthians 9:21] contains three elements in which the relationship of Christ and the law in its continuing significance is clearly expressed:

(a) The law no longer has an unrestricted and undifferentiated validity for the church of Christ. In a certain sense the church can be qualified as "without the law."

(b) The law of God is not thereby abrogated.

(c) This continuing significance of the law can be qualified as "being bound to the law of Christ" (*ennomos Christou*). All three elements can be further elucidated from all the epistles of Paul.

As to (a), that the law of Moses in its particularistic significance as making a division between Jews and gentiles is no longer in force constitutes the foundation of Paul's apostolate among the gentiles. He speaks of it as "the law of commandments, consisting in ordinances" and as "the middle wall of partition." It holds for the law functioning in this way that it has been pulled down and rendered inoperative (Eph. 2:14ff.; cf. Gal. 2:14; 4: 10; 5:2ff.; 6:12; Col. 2:16ff.; 3:11; also Rom. 2:26ff.; 3:30; 4 passim; I Cor. 7:18,19). This holds above all for circumcision, but in general for "living as a Jew" (*Ioudaizein, Ioudaikos zen*; Gal. 2:14), as a description of those regulations which had the effect of maintaining the line of demarcation between Israel and the gentiles in a ritual-cultic and social respect. To be sure, in the epistles that have been preserved to us nowhere is a distinction made explicitly between the moral and the ceremonial, particularistic parts of the law, but materially Paul, certainly continuing to build on the antecedent missionary preaching (cf. Col. 2:6ff.), nevertheless starts from such a distinction. In Colossians 2:16ff., with regard to the keeping of dietary regulations, feasts, new moons, or sabbath days, we find the typical expression: "which are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is Christ's." In comparison with the administration of redemption that has commenced with Christ, all these prescriptions are but provisional and unreal, as a shadow exhibits only the dim contours of the body itself. Herein is the important viewpoint that with Christ's advent the law, also as far as its content is concerned, has been brought under a new norm of judgment and that failure to appreciate this new situation is a denial of Christ (Gal. 5:2).

In regard to (b), *however great the significance of all this is for correct insight into the continuing requirement of the law, one cannot say that with Christ another law has come or that for Paul "the law of Christ," or simply "the law," may be said to mean the eternal and abiding law of God and that he spoke of it in conscious contrast with or distinct from the law of Moses* [emphasis added]. Some, to be sure, are of the opinion that one must not translate Romans 13:8 by "he who loves the other has fulfilled the law," but by "he who loves has fulfilled the other law," whereby the law of Christ as "the other law" would have been set in the place of or alongside the law of Moses. But this translation is a labored evasion of the obvious, and the unmistakable intention of the text, viewed also in the light of Galatians 5:14, is otherwise. So far as the law of Moses is concerned, when Paul gives expression to the continuing demand of the law, he cites the Decalogue specifically. One can hardly make contrasts here between "Moses" and "Christ," nor between "the law" and "the law of Moses." And this holds, too, for the qualification "the commandments." However true it is that Christ has abolished "the law of commandments, consisting in ordinances" (Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14), this does not alter the fact that it is said elsewhere that what really matters is the keeping of God's commandments (entolon, 1 Cor. 7:19), and that in concrete cases an explicit appeal can be made to an individual "ordinance" in the law of Moses (Eph. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:9ff.). Also the contrast between the unity (of the law of Christ) and the multiplicity (of the law of Moses), however meaningful this distinction may be in a specific context (cf. Mark 12:32ff.), must be rejected as false, if it is intended to oppose the continuing significance of Moses.

As for (c), if one asks himself what the material content is of the expression "bound to the law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21), the answer will lie in the fact that Christ *suo modo* represents the law of God and thus the law of Moses. *Not only does Christ by his Spirit bring about a new bond to the law in the hearts of believers, whereby the law retains its force as the expression of the will of God in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:33; cf. 2 Cor. 3:3), but Christ also represents the new standard of judgment as to what "has had its day" in the law and what has abiding validity (Col. 2:17)* [emphasis added]. Finally, one should point out the interpretation of the law given by Christ, to which Paul appeals in more than one place (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10ff.), which determines the expression of Galatians 6:2 as well, namely, that he who helps to bear the sin of his brother "fulfills the law of Christ." *There can thus be no doubt whatever that the category of the law has not been abrogated with Christ's advent, but rather has been maintained and interpreted in its radical sense ("fulfilled"; Matt. 5:17)* [emphasis added]; on the other hand, that the church no longer has to do with the law in any other way than in Christ and thus is *ennomos Christou*.

John Murray on the Law in the New Covenant (from Principles of Conduct, pp. 181-201)

## CHAPTER VII -- OUR LORD'S TEACHING

No part of Scripture is more relevant to the question of the biblical ethic than the teaching of our Lord in what is called the sermon on the mount. A large section of that discourse is concerned with the relation to the Law of God to the order of things which Jesus came into the world to establish.

Jesus says [Matt. 5:17] that he did not come to abrogate any of the existing Scriptures ...he came to realize the full measure of the intent and purpose of the law and the prophets. He came to complete, to consummate, to bring to full fruition and perfect fulfilment the law and the prophets.

The inclusiveness of Jesus' statement requires us to regard 'the law' as comprising more than those aspects of the law of Moses which have permanent application and sanction. Jesus is saying that he came not to abrogate any part of the Mosaic law. What we call the ritual or ceremonial comes within the scope of his declaration as well as the moral.

[Matt. 5:18] is a clear assertion that the law in all its details must come to fulfilment and be accomplished...We are not to expect an undervaluation, far less disparagement, of the details of law; and we may as well expect from the outset that, if our perspective is one that looks for the wood but not the trees, then we shall not be at home in the teaching of Jesus.

As we proceed we find that Jesus' discourse is progressively pointed to the precise question of the relation of the kingdom of heaven to the law of God until his teaching becomes focused very specifically in the words of the Decalogue.

[According to Matt. 5:19] our relation to the kingdom of heaven is defined in terms of our relation to the law...The terms of the passage would naturally indicate that in verse 19 Jesus is dealing with the criteria of gradation in the kingdom of God whereas in verse 20 he is enunciating the principle of exclusion from it. The law is the norm in both cases, in the former case the criterion by which our relative position in the kingdom of God is determined, in the latter case the criterion by which we are excluded entirely from the kingdom. Hence there can be no escape from the conclusion that the law is directly relevant to membership in and station within the kingdom of God.

The criterion of our standing in the kingdom of God and of reward in the age to come is nothing else than meticulous observance of the commandments of God in the minutiae of their prescription and the earnest inculcation of such observance on the part of others...if the criterion by which our relative position in the kingdom of God is determined is meticulous concern for the commandments of God, then the criterion of membership in the kingdom of God cannot be divorced from that righteousness of which the commandments of God are the norm and standard.

What Jesus is saying [Matt. 5:20] is that the righteousness of the scribes, notwithstanding its meticulous adherence to the minutiae, does not begin to qualify for the kingdom of heaven; it has no affinity with the demands of the kingdom of heaven. This is so not because the kingdom of heaven does not demand righteousness, not because it is indifferent to the minutiae of divine prescription, but because the demands of the kingdom of heaven are far greater than anything that ever enters into the conception of the scribes and Pharisees. They have not begun to reckon with the demands of the kingdom of heaven. Paradoxically, it was their concern for detail that led them to miss the whole genius of kingdom righteousness; the detail was not the detail of divine prescription. They made void the law of God by their own traditions.

It might be supposed that the righteousness [of the kingdom of heaven] is the righteousness of imputation...The context, however, offers no warrant for this interpretation...It must be the doing of the commandments that Jesus has in view when he speaks of the righteousness that abounds more than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees...The righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees is therefore that of character and behaviour, the righteousness of doing and teaching the commandments of God...if we are to be members of the kingdom of heaven, our righteousness, that is to say, the righteousness of our attitude, character, and behaviour, will have to be of an entirely different sort; different not in respect of concern for details, but different in respect of the details for which we entertain concern, and in respect of the intensity with which the law is applied to heart, thought, and word as well as to overt action. Jesus, however, does not inform us here of the way by which we come to possess that righteousness.

It is the third principle [i.e., There is a complete contrast between the righteousness which the kingdom of heaven requires and that exemplified in the scribes and Pharisees] particularly that needs to be borne in mind in the interpretation of the sustained contrast [in Matt. 5:21-48] between rabbinic and pharisaic perversion, on the one hand, and the righteousness characteristic of the kingdom of heaven, on the other.

The contrast...is not a contrast between the teaching of the Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus himself...We must conclude, therefore, that the antithesis Jesus institutes repeatedly in this discourse is that between his own interpretation and application of the law of the Old Testament and the externalistic interpretation of rabbinic tradition.

[Matt. 5:23-26] are an application, within what is strictly the sphere of worship, of the demands of the sixth commandment which Jesus had distinctly enunciated in the two preceding verses...Jesus is not here declaring anything essentially new in the progress of divine revelation. He is reiterating and reinforcing the requirements of the sixth commandment in the preceding verses. Here he is reiterating and enforcing what had been emphasized again and again in the Old Testament [cf. Isaiah 1: 10-17; Amos 5: 21-24; Micah 6: 6-8]...Here we have illustrated what our Lord considers the sixth commandment to involve. We would not have thought that the ramifications of the commandment were so far-reaching. It is just the thought of the psalmist, 'I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad'. It extends to the deepest recesses and most rudimentary motions of the human spirit.

The ultimate standard of right is the character or nature of God. The basis of ethics is that God is what he is, and we must be conformed to what he is in holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness, and love...The reason of the biblical ethic is God's perfection; the basic criterion of ethical behaviour is God's perfection; the ultimate goal of the ethical life is conformity to God's perfection...It is to trifle with the sanctities which ever bind us as creatures of God, made in his image, to think that anything less than perfection conformable to the Father's own could be the norm and the goal of the believer's ethic. It is precisely this that underlies the sermon on the mount; it is this that it inculcates; in this it finds its epitome. And that, in summary, is the ethic which our Lord's teaching exhibits.

## CHAPTER VIII -- LAW AND GRACE

No subject is more intimately bound up with the nature of the gospel than that of law and grace. In the degree to which error is entertained at this point, in the same, degree is our conception of the gospel perverted. An erroneous conception of the function of law can be of such a character that it completely vitiates our view of the gospel; and an erroneous conception of the antithesis between law and grace can be of such a character that it demolishes both the substructure and the superstructure of grace.

We are compelled therefore to recognize that the subject of law and grace is not simply concerned with the antithesis that there is between law and grace, but also with law as that which makes grace necessary and with grace as establishing and confirming law. *It is not only the doctrine of grace that must be jealously guarded against distortion by the works of law, but it is also the doctrine of law that must be preserved against the distortions of a spurious concept of grace* [emphasis added]. This is just saying that we are but echoing the total witness of the apostle of the Gentiles as the champion of the gospel of grace when we say that we must guard grace from the adulteration of legalism and we must guard law from the depredations of antinomianism.

It is strange indeed that...antipathy to the notion of keeping commandments should be entertained by any believer who is a serious student of the New Testament. Did not our Lord say, 'If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments' (John 14: 15)? And did he not say, 'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love' (John 15:10)?...To say the very least, the witness of our Lord and the testimony of John are to the effect that...love will be operative in the keeping of God's commandments. It is only myopia that prevents us from seeing this, and when there is a persistent animosity to the notion of keeping commandments the only conclusion is that there is either gross ignorance or malignant opposition to the testimony of Jesus.

*The law of God is the holiness of God coming to expression for the regulation of thought and conduct consonant with his holiness* [emphasis added]. We must be perfect as God is perfect; the law is that which the perfection of God dictates in order to bring about conformity with his perfection.

The purity and integrity of the gospel stand or fall with the absoluteness of the antithesis between the function and potency of law, on the one hand, and the function and potency of grace, on the other. But while all this is true it does not by any means follow that the antithesis eliminates all relevance of the law to the believer as a believer. The facile slogan of many a professed evangelical, when confronted with the claims of the law of God, to the effect that he is not under law but under grace, should at least be somewhat disturbed when it is remembered that the same apostle upon whose formula he relies said also that he was not without law to God but under law to Christ (I Corinthians 9:21). This statement of the apostle demands careful examination because it bears the implication that Paul was under law to God and he expressly states that he was under law to Christ. It would seem as if he said the opposite of what he says in Romans 6:14. But in any case what Paul says to the Corinthians prohibits us from taking the formula 'not under law' as the complete account of the relation of the believer to the law of God.

Examination of this passage will disclose something very important respecting Paul's use of the expression 'under law'. When he says that for those under law he behaved as one 'under law', he cannot mean that he behaved as one 'under law' in the sense in which he uses that expression in Romans 6:14. In that passage 'under law' bears the sense, or at least the implication, of being in bondage to sin. But Paul in I Corinthians 9:20,21 cannot in the least be suggesting that he behaved as one under bondage to sin. Such a thought is inconceivable and therefore completely removed from the universe of discourse. So he must be using the expression 'under law' in some sense other than that of Romans 6:14. And the precise meaning is not obscure. He means 'under law' in the sense in which Jews who had not yet understood the significance of the death and resurrection of Christ for the discontinuance of the Mosaic rites and ceremonies considered themselves to be under law, and therefore obliged to keep the rites and customs of the Mosaic economy. When Paul characterizes the people in question as those under law, he is not reflecting upon their moral and spiritual state as one of bondage to sin. All unbelievers are in that category of being in bondage to sin and therefore 'under law' in the sense of Romans 6:14; consequently the characterization, 'under law' of Romans 6:14 would not differentiate between the diverse sorts of people whom Paul has in view in I Corinthians 9. It must be therefore that 'under law' in this latter instance carries the import of being under the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic economy. We are not to suppose that Paul is admitting that any at that stage of redemptive revelation were in reality bound to the observance of the Mosaic rites; he is reflecting simply upon what a certain group of people considered to be their obligation. And when he says that he was for such as one under law, he means that he accommodated himself to the customs and rites which these people observed and to which they considered themselves obligated.

This force of the expression 'under law' throws a great deal of light upon the same expression in Galatians 3:23: 'Before faith came we were kept in ward under law'. The context makes it abundantly clear that what Paul means by the law in this context is the Mosaic economy. In the preceding verses he asks the question, 'What then is the law?' and he answers, 'It was added on account of the transgressions' (Galatians 3:19). He is thinking of that economy which was instituted four hundred and thirty years after the giving of the promise to Abraham (cf. verse 17), that economy which, he says, was 'ordained through angels in the hand of a mediator' (verse 19). When, in verse 23, he says that 'before faith came we were kept in ward under law' he is contrasting the pedagogical nonage and tutelage of the Mosaic economy with the mature sonship and liberty enjoyed by the New Testament believer. He is not here equating the 'under law' of which he speaks with the same expression in Romans 6:14; he is not suggesting, far less is he intimating, that the people of Israel who were kept in ward 'under law' were under the bondage of sin which is the obvious import of the 'under law' of Romans 6:14.

In like manner when Paul says in I Corinthians 9:20 that he became to those under law as under law, he is referring to those who had not yet recognized the epochal change that had been signaled by the New Testament redemptive events, and to his own behaviour in conforming by way of concession to the prejudices and customs of those who considered themselves bound by what were in reality only the temporary provisions of the older economy. And when he appends the qualifying clause, 'not being myself under law', he means that, though accommodating himself by way of expediency to these customs, he did not consider himself under any divine obligation to observe such rites and practices; he was not himself under that law. Again we see how impossible it is to apply the same sense of 'not under law' in Romans 6:14 to the 'not under law' of I Corinthians 9:20. For if we were to do this then we should have to understand Paul as adjusting his behaviour to the practices of those who were under the dominion of sin, an utterly impossible and unthinkable supposition.

The second qualification which Paul felt constrained to make in I Corinthians 9:20,21 is the one that is more directly germane to our topic: 'not being without law to God but under law to Christ'. He is guarding himself against the inference that, in becoming to those without law as without law, he recognized himself as free from obligation to the

law of God and of Christ. What he means when he says that to those without law he became as without law is that, in his relations with such people, he did not conform to Mosaic customs and ordinances. 'Without law' in this case is the contrary of 'under law' in the same context. And since 'under law' means conformity to Mosaic rites, 'without law' means the opposite, namely, nonconformity with such rites. *But lest this assertion of nonconformity should be misunderstood as implying release from all conformity to law he immediately adds that he is bound in and to the law of God and of Christ. Paul is not lawless in respect to God; he is law-bound in respect to Christ* [emphasis added].

The expression Paul uses, 'under law to Christ', is a particularly impressive one. It is as if he had said 'inlawed to Christ', 'bound in law to Christ', 'under the obligation of the law of Christ'. *The intent of Paul's terms is not to contrast the law of God and the law of Christ, as if he had said, 'not under law to God but rather under law to Christ'. The negative clause is not at all, 'not under law to God', but 'not without law to God'. The implication is that he is under law to God and this 'under law to God' finds its validation and explanation in his being under law to Christ. Paul asserts most unequivocally, therefore, that he is bound by the law of Christ and of God* [emphasis added].

The conclusions to which we must come are as follows. (1) In one sense the believer is not under law. To be 'under law' in this sense is correlative with the dominion and bondservice of sin. The believer has been discharged from the law (Romans 7:6), he has been put to death to the law through the body of Christ (Romans 7:4), and therefore he has died to the law (Romans 7:6). Having died to the law he died to sin (Romans 6:2), and sin will not have dominion over him (Romans 6:14). (2) In still another sense the believer is not under law; he is not under the ritual law of the Mosaic economy. This pedagogical tutelary bondage has been terminated by the epochal events of Calvary, the resurrection, and Pentecost. Christ redeemed them that were once under this law so that all without distinction may enjoy the mature and unrestrained privilege of sons. Freedom from the law in this specific sense is just as absolute as freedom from law in the preceding sense. (3) *There is another sense in which the believer is 'under law'; he is bound in law to God and to Christ. The law of God and of Christ binds him precisely because of his relation to Christ* [emphasis added].

This third conclusion is not only derived from I Corinthians 9:21. There are several other considerations which demand the same conclusion. The fallacy of the interpretation that Paul conceives of the believer as in no sense under law and seeks to derive this from Romans 6:14; 7:1-6 should have been corrected by a more careful study of the context in which these same passages occur.

(1) Romans 6:14 cannot be dissociated from Romans 6:15: 'What then? shall we sin, because we are not under law but under grace? God forbid.' The apostle repudiates in the most emphatic way any insinuation to the effect that grace gives licence to sin - or provides an inducement to sin. Grace intervenes and rules over us to deliver from the dominion of sin, and therefore establishes and promotes the opposite of sin, namely, righteousness...And if sin is the transgression of the law, righteousness must be conformity to the law. *The law of God which Paul characterizes in this Epistle as spiritual, that is to say, divine in its origin and nature, and holy and just and good after the pattern of him who is its author (Romans 7:12,14), must be regarded as the criterion of righteousness no less than it is the criterion of sin* [emphasis added].

(2) If Paul thought of himself as released from obligation to the law of God, how could he ever have confessed as a believer, 'I consent unto the law that it is good...I delight in the law of God after the inward man...Consequently then I myself with the mind serve the law of God' (Romans 7:16, 22, 25)? It is fully admitted that the inner conflict and tension delineated in Romans 7:14-25 pose acute exegetical difficulties; but there is surely little room for question that when Paul describes his most characteristic self, the self that he most centrally and fundamentally is as one united to Christ in the virtue of his death and the power of his resurrection (cf. Romans 6:2-6), he describes himself as delighting in the law of God and serving that law with his mind. This service is one of bondservice, of commanded commitment; and yet it is not the bondservice of enforced and unwilling servitude. It is service constrained by delight and consent in the deepest recesses of heart and mind and will. It is total commitment, but it is the commitment also of spontaneous delight. The restraint which Paul deplors in this context and which compels him to exclaim 'O wretched man that I am' (Romans 7:24) is not the restraint which the law of God imposes, but the restraint arising from the lack of conformity to it, that he wills the good but does not carry it into effect. The burden he bemoans is not the law but that which is its contradiction, the other law in his members warring against the law of his mind (Romans 7:23).

(3) It is eloquent of what Paul had in view in these protestations regarding his delight in, and service of, the law of God that in this same Epistle Paul furnishes us with concrete illustrations of the law to which he refers and of the ways

in which conformity to the law is expressed. He does this in the more immediate context of Romans 6:14 when he says, 'I had not known lust except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet' (Romans 7:7). But in that part of his Epistle which deals directly with the details of Christian conduct his reference to at least four of the commandments is even more illuminating. 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Romans 13:8,9). What is of particular interest to us at present is to note that Paul regards these precepts of the Decalogue, four of which he quotes, as relevant to the behaviour which exemplifies the Christian vocation. The emphasis falls upon the fact that love fulfils them and that they are summed up, or summarized, in the word, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. But, if love fulfils them, we must still bear in mind that they are fulfilled; and if they are fulfilled they exist as precepts which call for fulfilment: and if they are summarized in one word, the summary does not obliterate or abrogate the expansion of which it is a summary. *It is futile to try to escape the underlying assumption of Paul's thought, that the concrete precepts of the Decalogue have relevance to the believer as the criteria of that behaviour which love dictates* [emphasis added]. And it is all the more significant that these criteria should have been enunciated by the apostle in a context where the accent falls upon love itself. 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another' (verse 8).

Other passages in Paul's Epistles yield the same lesson respecting his conception of the place of law in the realm of grace. The situation in the church at Corinth made it necessary for Paul in his first Epistle to devote a considerable part of it to questions which fall within the realm of ethics and in several particulars he was called upon to administer reproof and correction for the misconduct of believers. He takes the occasion to remind them that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. He lists for us a catalogue of sins, thereby illustrating the unrighteousness which excludes from the kingdom of God - fornication, idolatry, adultery, effeminacy, sodomy, thievery, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling, extortion (I Corinthians 6:9,10). His intent is to illustrate the character and conduct which identify those who have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (cf. verse 10), and he is saying in effect: 'You believers have been washed and sanctified and justified, and you cannot play fast and loose with any wrongdoing; as heirs of the kingdom of God you must behave accordingly; you must appreciate the antithesis between the kingdom of God and the world'. *The point of particular interest for our present study is the criterion, presupposed in Paul's teaching here, by which this antithesis is to be judged. We need but scan the sins which Paul mentions to discover what this criterion is; the precepts of the Decalogue underlie the whole catalogue* [emphasis added]. Idolatry - the first and second commandments; adultery - the seventh commandment; theft and extortion - the eighth; reviling - the ninth and possibly the third; covetousness - the tenth. *Hence it is only too apparent that the criteria of the equity which characterizes the kingdom of God and the criteria of the iniquity which marks off those who are without God and without hope in the world are those norms of thought and behaviour which are epitomized in the ten commandments* [emphasis added]. And it is Paul's plea that the operations of grace (cf. verse 11) make mandatory the integrity of which these precepts are the canons. *It is not grace relieving us of the demands signalized in these precepts, but grace establishing the character and status which will bring these demands to effective fruition* [emphasis added].

We have therefore abundant evidence from Paul's Epistles to elucidate what he means when he says: 'Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law' (Romans 3:31). This is the protestation with which Paul brings to a conclusion one of the most eloquent statements of the contrast between the function of law and the operation of grace: 'But now without the law the righteousness of God is made manifest'; 'Where then is boasting? it is excluded. Through what law? of works? Nay, but through the law of faith. For we reckon that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law' (Romans 3:21,27,28). It is a protestation that Paul fully establishes and verifies in the later portions of this Epistle. But, in manner characteristic of the apostle, he interjects at this early point, at the conclusion of his peroration respecting the impotence of law and the efficacy of grace, *the most emphatic warning to the effect that this total impotence of law to justify the ungodly does not carry with it the inference that the law is thereby discarded or abrogated* [emphasis added]. The inferences so frequently drawn from Romans 6:14 should have been obviated by the reminder which Paul announces in Romans 3:31, and the context of Romans 6:14 advises us of the reasons why grace does not make the law of none effect. 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good' (Romans 7:12). 'The law is Spiritual' (Romans 7:14). It is unqualifiedly and unreservedly good (Romans 7:13,16,19,21). And how could the unreservedly good be relieved of its relevance or deprived of its sanctity?

*A good deal of the misconception pertaining, to the relation of the law to the believer springs from a biblico-theological error of much broader proportions than a misinterpretation of Paul's statement in Romans 6:14. It is the misinterpretation of the Mosaic economy and covenant in relation to the new covenant. It has been thought that in the*

*Mosaic covenant there is a sharp antithesis to the principle of promise embodied in the Abrahamic covenant and also to the principle of grace which comes to its efflorescence in the new covenant, and that this antithetical principle which governs the Mosaic covenant and dispensation is that of law in contradistinction from both promise and grace [emphasis added].*

It is thought, therefore, that the Mosaic covenant is the outstanding example of works of law as opposed to the provisions of promise and grace. It is easy to see how such an interpretation of the Mosaic economy would radically affect our construction not only of the Mosaic economy itself but also of the Abrahamic covenant, on the one hand, and of the new covenant, on the other; the Mosaic would stand in sharp antithesis to both in respect of constitutive and governing principle. And the contrast between law and grace which we find in the New Testament would naturally be interpreted as a contrast between the Mosaic economy and the gospel dispensation of grace. In other words, the real contrast between 'under law' and 'under grace', as it appears in Romans 6:14 and Romans 7:1-4, would be exemplified in the realm of the historical unfolding of covenant revelation in the contrast between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant. This interpretation has exercised a profound influence upon the history of interpretation and it has cast its shadow over the exegesis of particular passages. It is necessary for us to consider this question: What is the governing principle of the Mosaic covenant? Is this principle one of law as contrasted with grace and therefore antithetical to that of the new covenant?

There is a plausible case that could be made out for this construction of the Mosaic covenant. The first express reference to the covenant made with Israel at Sinai is framed in terms of obedience to the commandments of God and of keeping the covenant. 'Now therefore if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:5,6). And the engagement of the people is in similar terms: 'All that the Lord hath spoken will we do and be obedient' (Exodus 24:7). Surely, we might say, these are not the terms of a covenant of grace but the terms of a covenant of legal and contractual stipulations. How, we might ask, does the condition of obedience comport with the provisions of an administration of grace? If grace is contingent upon the fulfilment of certain conditions by us, then surely it is no more grace. Hence, it may well be argued, this conditional feature of the Mosaic covenant requires that it be placed in a different category. In dealing with this question we must take several considerations into account.

1. The Mosaic covenant in respect of this condition of obedience is not in a different category from the Abrahamic. 'And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations' (Genesis 17:9). Of Abraham God said, 'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him' (Genesis 18:19). *There is nothing principally different in the necessity of keeping the covenant and of obeying God's voice, characteristic of the Mosaic covenant, from what is involved in the keeping of the covenant required in the Abrahamic [emphasis added].*

2. The Mosaic covenant, no less than the Abrahamic, contemplates a relation of intimacy and fellowship with God epitomized in the promise 'I will be your God and ye shall be my people' (cf. Exodus 6:7; 18:1; 19:5,6; 20:2; Deuteronomy 29:13). Religious relationship on the highest level is in view. If the covenant contemplates religious relationship of such a character, it is inconceivable that the demands of God's holiness should not come to expression as governing and regulating that fellowship and as conditioning the continued enjoyment of its blessings. This note is frequent in the Pentateuch (cf. Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7,26; 21:8; Deuteronomy 6:4-15). It is summed up in two words: 'Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' (Leviticus 19:2); 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might' (Deuteronomy 6:5). And the import is that the holiness of God demands holiness on the part of those who enter into such a covenant relation with him. It is the same principle as that expressed in the New Testament, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord' (Hebrews 12: 14), and is reiterated in Old Testament terms by Peter when he says, 'As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy' (I Peter 1:15; cf. Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7). The holiness which is demanded by the covenant fellowship is expressed concretely in obedience to the divine commandments. This is really all that needs to be said to demonstrate not only the consonance of the demand for obedience with the covenant as one of religious relationship on the highest level of spirituality but also the necessity of such a demand. It is because the covenant is one of union and communion with God that the condition of obedience is demanded.

3. Not only is holiness, as expressed concretely and practically in obedience, demanded by the covenant fellowship; we must also bear in mind that holiness was itself an integral element of the covenant blessing. Israel had been redeemed and called to be a holy people and holiness might be regarded as the essence of the covenant blessing. For holiness consisted in this, that Israel was a people separated unto the Lord. Their election is meaningless apart from that to which they were elected. And this holiness again is exemplified in obedience to the commandments of God (cf. Psalm 19:7ff.).

4. Holiness, concretely and practically illustrated in obedience, is the means through which the fellowship entailed in the covenant relationship proceeds to its fruition and consummation. This is the burden, for example, of Leviticus 26. It is stated both positively and negatively, by way of promise and by way of threatening. 'If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them...I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people' (Leviticus 26:3,11,12).

We may therefore sum up the matter by saying that the holiness of God demanded conformity to his holiness, that holiness was of the essence of the covenant privilege, that holiness was the condition of continuance in the enjoyment of the covenant blessings and the medium through which the covenant privilege realized its fruition. Holiness is exemplified in obedience to the commandments of God. Obedience is therefore entirely congruous with, and disobedience entirely contradictory of, the nature of God's covenant with Israel as one of union and communion with God.

In all of this the demand of obedience in the Mosaic covenant is principally identical with the same demand in the new covenant of the gospel economy. The new covenant also finds its centre in the promise, 'I will be your God and ye shall be my people'. The new covenant as an everlasting covenant reaches the zenith of its realization in this: 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people' (Revelation 21:3). But we must ask: Do believers continue in this relationship and in the enjoyment of its blessing irrespective of persevering obedience to God's commands? It is one of the most perilous distortions of the doctrine of grace, and one that has carried with it the saddest records of moral and spiritual disaster, to assume that past privileges, however high they may be, guarantee the security of men irrespective of perseverance in faith and holiness. Believers under the gospel continue in the covenant and in the enjoyment of its privileges because they continue in the fulfilment of the conditions; they continue in faith, love, hope, and obedience [cf. I Pet. 1:5; Hebr. 3:14; 6:11,12; Col. 1:22,23; Phil. 3:20,21, but cf. vv. 10-14]...This is just to say that...the consummation of covenant blessing is...achieved...through perseverance. And this means nothing if it does not mean concentrated obedience to the will of Christ as expressed in his commandments. We readily see, however, that the attainment of the goal is not on the meritorious ground of perseverance and obedience, but through the divinely appointed means of perseverance. *Obedience as the appropriate and necessary expression of devotion to Christ does not find its place in a covenant of works or of merit but in a covenant that has its inception and end in pure grace* [emphasis added].

*The disposition to construe the demand for obedience in the Mosaic economy as having affinity with works rather than grace arises from failure to recognize that the demand for obedience in the Mosaic covenant is principally identical with the same demand under the gospel* [emphasis added].

The New Testament believer is not without law to God but under law to Christ. He delights in the law of God after the inward man and he therefore reiterates the exclamation of the Old Testament saint, 'O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day' (Psalm 119:97). And he also is not forgetful that he who was the incarnation and embodiment of virtue, he who is the supreme and perfect example, said, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart' (Psalm 40:8).

Murray on the sanctity of the Moral Law (Collected Writings-1, pp. 193-204)

*Yes, with all the emphasis of which I am capable, I do say, that in the denial of the permanent authority and sanctity of the moral law there is a direct thrust at the very centre of our holy faith, for it is a thrust at the veracity and authority of our Lord himself. If we wish to lend speed and force to the widespread attack upon the Christian religion, we need but endorse and support this antinomian propaganda* [emphasis added].

*God does not change; his moral perfections do not change; his moral law does not change* [emphasis added]. Times change; conditions change; we change. But under and through all there remains man's conscience, man's

responsibility; and over all there is the unchanging holiness, justice, and authority of God, issuing in the commands that bind man's conscience and, with a divine imperative must regulate his life, in one word, the moral law.

*When we are possessed by the sense of the authority and sanctity of the moral law, we must come to Calvary if any true and living hope is to be engendered within us. But when we rise from our prostration before the Cross, it is not to find the moral law abrogated, but to find it by the grace of God wrought into the very fibre of the new life in Christ Jesus [emphasis added].* If the Cross of Christ does not fulfil in us the passion of righteousness, we have misinterpreted the whole scheme of divine redemption. 'For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). Is it that the moral law might cease to bind and regulate? Oh no! But 'that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.'

Murray on Paul's use of "nomos" (Collected Writings-4, pp. 133-141)

*It is to negate the aim and achievement of grace to conceive of the law as abrogated in its regulative claim within the sphere of redemption [emphasis added].* And Paul's protestation in Romans 3:31 will have to be regarded as bearing most emphatically on this thesis that the law never ceases to wield its claims and demand fulfilment of its requirements. The love that fulfils the law (cf. Rom. 13:8,10) is itself the fruit of redeeming love, it is love generated in us by the love of God in Christ Jesus (cf. John 4:19). But love is motive; it is not directive. Love is the fulfilment of the law.

To conclude our discussion then, *we find that, according to Paul, there is no realm of human relationship in which the law as the law of God does not wield its authority, and the reason is that it is the law of God [emphasis added].*

Summary:

Both Ridderbos and Murray agree and are representative of the basic elements of the "Reformed consensus" regarding the relationship of the Law to the Christian under the new covenant:

1. The "moral law" is a reflection of the ethical perfection of God the Creator, and thus is an unchangeable ethical standard, binding upon all men as "image-bearers" of God.
2. The moral law was revealed definitively through Moses (in both history and precept), and was summarized in the commandments of the Decalogue. The prophets and wise men who followed Moses unfold those abiding ethical principles as they apply the covenant Law to unfolding historical situations. The apostolic authors continue to apply the Law in light of Christ's coming, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and the specific circumstances of the new covenant churches.
3. The Mosaic covenantal administration, like the Abrahamic, is fundamentally one of promise/grace, not law/works. The Jews, by pursuing the Law "not by faith but as if it were by works" (Rom. 9:32), twisted the Law to a purpose contrary to God's intent. Both Jesus and Paul consistently critiqued and corrected that error in their teaching, while maintaining their support for the Law itself (e.g., Matt. 5:17ff; Rom. 7:12,14).
4. The Mosaic covenant also contained many redemptive features (e.g., sacrifices, priesthood, sanctuary, "separation" provisions) which were preparatory and therefore temporary as they pointed forward typologically to their fulfillment in Christ.
5. With the coming of Christ, and particularly the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God "fulfilled the Law" in the sense of providing for a new quality of obedience to the Law through the Spirit's indwelling power to love God and obey His Law which is now internalized ("written") in the hearts of His people.
6. Therefore,
  - a. The temporary redemptive provisions of the Law have been fulfilled and set aside as a result of the coming and accomplishment of Christ.

b. The Law can never serve as a basis for man's justification before God.

c. The moral law, as revealed through "the Law and the prophets" and summarized in the Decalogue, continues under the "new covenant" as God's unchanging moral standard for believers.

*Is the charge serious enough to warrant a trial?*

The Presbytery's charge alleges: "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)."

In his paper to the Presbytery responding to the charge (pp.), Mr. Irons argues that his views do not violate the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures, based on a lengthy discussion of Samuel Bolton's analysis (in *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 1645) of the views of the Mosaic Law entertained by the Westminster divines. He claims to have offered "compelling evidence that [his] 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."

We do not intent to engage Mr. Irons' argument in detail here. One would have to read the whole discussion of the question in Bolton's *True Bounds* in order to asses whether or not Mr. Irons' analysis, and especially his conclusions, are accurate. The claim that "many of the Westminster divines" shared his view of the Law (even if some did), seems unproven. Some of Mr. Irons' representations of Bolton, when read in the broader context, do not seem warranted.

Most importantly, however, is the doubtfulness of Mr. Irons' claim that (according to Bolton) those who took a view of the Mosaic covenant similar to Mr. Irons' (i.e., that, in Mr. Irons' words, "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," in which a works-principle was the characteristic *modus operandi*) would agree with his conclusion that the Decalogue (as summary of the moral law) is no longer applicable to the saints of God under the new covenant.

...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. (Irons, Response to Charge #2, p. 31)

...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. (*ibid.*, p. 36)

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." (*ibid.*, p. 37)

Irons implies by this that Bolton agrees with him that the content or *standard* of moral obligation changes from that contained in the Law of Moses to that given to the believer under the new covenant. The problem is that on several occasions Bolton states the contrary. Mr. Irons' cites Bolton's statement:

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

But Bolton goes on to argue for the continuing binding authority of the content of the Law as a standard of ethical behavior, consistent with the mainstream of Reformed orthodoxy (represented, as we have seen, not only by the Westminster Standards, but also Calvin, Ridderbos, Murray, and many others we could readily cite).

Indeed, the law, as it is considered *as a rule*, can no more be abolished or changed than the nature of good and evil can be abolished and changed. The *substance of the law* is the sum of doctrine concerning piety towards God, charity towards our neighbours, temperance and sobriety towards ourselves. *And for the substance of it, it is moral and eternal, and cannot be abrogated.* We grant that the circumstances under which the moral law was originally given were temporary and changeable, and we have now nothing to do with the promulgator, Moses, nor with the place where it was given, Mount Sinai, nor with the time when it was given, fifty days after the people came out of Egypt, nor yet as it was written in tables of stone, delivered with thunderings and lightnings. We look not to Sinai, the hill of bondage, but to Sion, the mountain of grace. We take the law as the image of the will of God which we desire to obey, but from which we do not expect life and favour, neither do we fear death and rigour. This, I conceive, is the concurrent opinion of all divines. For believers, the law is abrogated in respect of its power to justify or condemn; but *it remains full of force to direct us in our lives.* It condemns sin in the faithful, though it cannot condemn the faithful for sin. Says Zanchius: 'The observance of the law is necessary for a Christian man, and it is not possible to separate such observance from faith.' And as Calvin says: 'Let us put far from us the ungodly notion that the law is not to be our rule, for it is our changeless rule of life.' The moral law, by its teaching, admonishing, chiding, and reproof, prepares us for every good work. The law is void in respect of its power to condemn us, but *it still has power to direct us*; we are not under its curse, but yet under its commands.

Again, the moral law is perpetual and immutable. This is an everlasting truth, that the creature is bound to worship and obey his Creator, and so much the more bound as he has received the greater benefits. If we claim to be free from obedience, we make ourselves the servants of sin...

Therefore, against that opinion which holds forth the abrogation of the law, and says that we are freed from obedience to it, I shall state and endeavour to make good two propositions which will serve fully to answer the query, and to refute the false notions. The propositions are these:

- (1) That the law, for the substance of it (for we speak not of the circumstances and accessories of it), remains as a rule of walking to the people of God.
- (2) That there was no end or use for which the law was originally given but is consistent with grace, and serviceable to the advancement of the covenant of grace.

If these two propositions are made good, the doctrines of the abrogation of the law and of freedom from the law will both fall to the ground. (*ibid.*, pp. 57-59, emphasis added)

We shall begin with the first proposition, namely, that the law, in the substance of it, remains in force as a rule of walking to the people of God. I shall not need to stay long over this, for when the second proposition is made good it will be seen that it establishes this also. *By the law is meant the moral law comprehended in the Decalogue or ten commandments. By the substance of it, I mean the things commanded or forbidden which are morally good or evil, and cannot be changed or abolished.* For what is the law in the substance of it but that law of nature engraven in the heart of man in innocency? and what was that but the express idea or representation of God's own image, even a beam of His own holiness, which cannot be changed or abolished any more than the nature of good and evil can be changed? *And that the law thus considered remains as an unchangeable rule of walking to believers I am now to prove.* (*ibid.*, pp.59-61, emphasis added)

We cry down the law in respect of justification, but we set it up as a rule of sanctification. The law sends us to the Gospel that we may be justified; and the Gospel sends us to the law again to inquire what is our duty as those who are justified. (*ibid.*, p. 71)

[Matthew 5:17-18] seems to be very full and plain for the continuance of and obligation to the law...In Christ the law had an end of perfection and consummation, not of destruction and abolition. (*ibid.*, pp. 61)

Therefore, since Christ, who is the best expounder of the law, so largely strengthens and confirms the law (witness the Sermon on the Mount, and also Mark 10:19); since faith does not supplant, but strengthens the law; since the apostle so often presses and urges the duties commanded in the law of God in his mind, and that he was under the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21); I may rightly conclude that the law, for the substance of it, still remains a rule of life to the people of God...*If Christ and His apostles commanded the same things which the law required, and forbade and condemned the same things which the law forbade and condemned, then they did not abrogate it but strengthened and confirmed it. And this is what they did: see Matt. 5:19... (ibid., pp. 62, emphasis added)*

...but he that breaks the law does sin, as says the apostle: "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), and "Where no law is there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15)...*Therefore Christians are bound, if they would avoid sin, to obey the law. (ibid., pp. 66, emphasis added)*

Lastly, under this head, let me exhort you all to judge of the law aright, and then let it be your care to maintain it. *Let not Moses take the place of Christ; but, at the same time, make a right use of Moses.* When works and obedience take their right place, when the law is rightly used, then it is holy, just and good. But if we use it as our life, then we trample the blood of Christ underfoot, and make His life and death in vain. Let the servant follow the Master; let Moses follow Christ; the law, grace; obedience, faith; and then all act their proper and designed parts.

...You whom the law has sent to the Gospel, let the Gospel again send you to the law; study now your duty; abundance of mercy calls for abundance of duty.

No, let the righteousness of the law be fulfilled in us; let us 'walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (Rom. 8.4). The law is a royal law: 'If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture', says James, 'ye do well' (2.8). It is a royal law, that we might live royally above the ordinary rank of men in obedience. 'Receive not the grace of God in vain' (2 Cor. 6.1). If you receive it not in vain, you will have power to will, and power to do; you will prize grace and walk thankfully. (pp. 73-75, emphasis added)

This conclusion by Bolton is the very one Mr. Irons repeatedly denies.

We would address one other point regarding the seriousness of this alleged offense. Since Mr. Irons' opinions call for a revision of the church's understanding of the *standard* of holy living under the new covenant, they represent a significant potential threat to both the sanctification of the individual Christian and the purity of the church. We believe the concerns expressed by Walter C. Kaiser in response to the views of Douglas J. Moo (with whose arguments and conclusions on this subject those of Mr. Irons have very strong similarity) are worth considering:

The question must now be asked: But what law does Moo propose to obligate Christians to obey? He answers, "God's law." But that is strange, since I thought that he is the one who gave the *tôrâ*. To make the "in-lawed to Christ" of 1 Corinthians 9:21 and the "law of Christ" in Galatians 6:2 the new law for believers is to invent a replacement theology by making distinctions in terms that are largely synonyms for each other-much the way that some in the past have divided between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. The terms are different, to be sure; but it remains to demonstrate that the substance is also. What this position owes us is a list of new commandments that goes beyond "love one another" and "bear one another's burdens." Having compiled that list, it must then be shown that all, or most, of the features in that list are brand new and in no way are a renewal and repetition of what was urged in t'rf or in the times 'before' Christ.

Moo concludes that the Mosaic law "is not a *direct* [or] *immediate* source of guidance to the new covenant believer." However, he suggests that there is an "essential 'moral' content of the Mosaic law [that] is...applicable to believers." But this confuses me still more, for now the moral aspect of the unified law can be ascertained and is applicable, but not in any direct or immediate way. Moo concludes, "I am no Marcionite." For this I am glad; but please tell me how his disciples are going to be able to resist Marcionitism, given the force, direction, and logic of his position? Ultimately, Moo is bound only by what is clearly repeated within the New Testament teaching. What advice will he give on marriage to close relatives (cf. Lev. 18), involvement with forms of witchcraft and various forms of the occult (cf. Lev. 19), the case for capital punishment (cf. Gen. 9), or the proscription against abortion (cf. Ex. 21)? Did Americans not learn in 1973 that a New Testament exclusivistic ethic landed us squarely in one of the largest legalized murdering ventures in recent times-now exceeding Hitler's six million Jews sent up a chimney by four times over with some twenty-four million babies going in a bucket? What will it take to wake us up to the narrowness of our views? If this is not a Marcionite view, it is at least semi-Marcionite-and the disciples of our teaching will soon prove what

direction it was that we were heading in if we refuse to fully follow the implications of our own thought. (*The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian*, p. 400)

Specifications:

We do not intend to comment on the individual specifications here. If you compare what Mr. Irons teaches - even in the larger contexts he cites in his response to this charge - we believe you will be able to see the obvious contradictions between his views and those of the Scripture, the Standards, and the Reformed authorities quoted above. We believe you have good grounds to conclude that he has (1) publicly called into question the teaching of the Westminster Standards regarding the moral law, and (2) denied that the Decalogue, as a summary of the moral law, continues to have binding authority over the Christian.

In due course, the judicatory will be called upon to deliberate and vote "on each charge and each specification separately" (cf. BD, IV:C-3-a, p. 118). Though you will have to deliberate and vote on the specifications *seriatim*, you will have to consider them, not in *isolation* from each other, but as *elements* in the statement of a *coherent* theological perspective on the relationship of the Law to the Christian - one which, we believe, is out of accord with the confession and historic understanding of the OPC (as well as other Reformed churches).