



THE CHRISTIAN

and

THE LAW

BARRY E. HORNER

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A. INTRODUCTION.

Since the first advent of Jesus Christ there has been unceasing conflict between Christianity and Mosaic Judaism. Jesus told the Jewish people that, “the scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; . . . they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger” (Matt. 23:2-4). When the Pharisees boasted that “we are disciples of Moses” (John 9:28), Jesus responded, “Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you carries out the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?” (John 7:19). The resultant Christian church became embroiled in the same controversy, so that at Jerusalem “the sect of the Pharisees who had believed [that Jesus was the Christ], in opposing a delegation from Gentile Antioch under the Apostle Paul, stood up saying: ‘It is necessary to circumcise them [Gentile Christians] and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses’” (Acts 15:5). As a consequence Paul wrote his Epistle to the Galatians in which he fervently warned against imposing the Mosaic Law upon Gentiles as a necessary gospel additive. Following the Apostle’s third missionary journey, upon returning to Jerusalem, James and the elders told Paul that, “many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed and they are all zealous for the Law.” However the reputation that had gone ahead of Paul was that frequently he was “teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs” (Acts 21:17-21).

So the tension has continued down through the centuries of church history. Because Christianity has Jewish roots, the inevitable question has been raised constantly with regard to the degree to which that legacy is either abrogated or perpetuated. In simple terms, does Moses and his administration retain a foot in the door that leads to his being accommodated in the house of Jesus? For the Jewish Christian, we believe the answer is “No,” even though he retains distinctive Jewishness through Abraham. For the Gentile Christian, we believe the answer is likewise “No” since, with the Jewish Christian, both are wholly fulfilled with the accommodation of Jesus to which Moses can add nothing.

1. The Law and terminology.

In the study of the Bible, we find that the term “law” is capable of conveying a variety of meanings such as with reference to a “regulation” or “commandment” or “statute” or “principle” or “rule.” Nevertheless when the Bible designates “the Law,” it is usually understood in terms of the Mosaic Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, and more specifically the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. However “the Law” can refer to not only the Law of Moses, but also the Prophets and the Writings of the Old Testament (John 10:34; I Cor. 14:21) and their righteous demands upon mankind in a more comprehensive sense. Context usually determines exactly what specific meaning is intended.

2. The Law and Christianity.

Nevertheless it seems almost instinctive for Christians to understand “the Law” mainly in terms of the Ten Commandments revealed by God to Israel through Moses as a summary of His everlasting righteous demands covenantally proposed to redeemed Israel and all mankind. For many Christians, both Jewish and Gentile, a critical issue arises here concerning the relevance of this divinely ordained code for their daily lives in the light of their being primarily called upon to walk in the steps of their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ (I Pet. 2:21). Hence, there is often enquiry as to the sense in which the Christian is “not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14)? Does not the law offer assistance and direction in Christian living? Would not the abandonment of the Mosaic law give rise to licentiousness and thus lead to the moral disintegration of society (Rom. 6:15)?

B. THE UNCHANGING RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

As a necessary starting point, we first consider the unchanging moral character of God. He is ever holy and righteous, and it follows that the demands of His essential ethical Being remain the same for His creation in whatever age the individual creature finds itself. For instance after the creation of Adam and Eve, whether before or after their fall through sin, God was exactly as righteous then as He was at the appearing of Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul over subsequent centuries. Hence His fundamental righteous demands have remained without the slightest diminution.

Furthermore, when God reveals His essential righteousness to His creation concerning His righteous expectations, whether internally within the human heart or externally by means of Scripture and legal stipulation, then such a revelation may be defined as His law, that is His commandments, His statutes, His ordinance, His precepts. While the way may vary throughout history by which His revelation of righteousness is made known (Rom. 2:14-15), yet the infinite demands of this revelation of righteousness ultimately do not. Furthermore, even time does not alter the demands of this essential righteousness, even through the centuries from Adam to the present. While God had sharpened His focus for a period upon Israel concerning certain vital moral demands, as distinct from the Gentiles who He has left for a period “to go their own ways” (Acts 14:16), “God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent (Acts 17:30).

Hence the Law that God revealed to Moses concerned the necessity of revealing the unholiness of His distinctive people who were called upon to be holy (Exod. 19:5-6; Lev. 11:44-45). And we should add that God’s purpose for Israel being holy after the likeness of His character was that in turn the nations might become holy (Isa. 52:15), that is enlightened through the illumination of Israel (Isa. 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4; 60:1-3).

C. THE LAW OF GOD FROM CREATION TO MOSES.

That God has revealed His righteous demands to man, from Adam to Moses, is undoubted, though there is no indication whatsoever that the Decalogue was revealed in a codified form during this era. At the beginning, Adam was specifically commanded not to eat the fruit of a specific tree in the middle of the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:16-17). The society of Noah’s age was corrupt throughout the earth. The succeeding generation of Nimrod at Babel was esteemed as

utterly worldly. Sodom was certainly guilty of gross immorality. However we reject the suggestion that the Decalogue was a creation ordinance that was incumbent upon the whole expanding human race of that time and in perpetuity; nevertheless it remains true that the demands of God's righteousness remained inviolate then as ever. As we shall consider in more detail, a further reason for maintaining that the Law of Moses was not a creation ordinance at that time is the fact of it being subsequently "added" to Israel (Jer. 11:8; Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19). Certainly God labored in creation for six days, each of these being defined by an "evening" and a "morning" (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). However upon completion of the creation, God rested on the seventh day that was not similarly defined, that is with regard to a concluding limitation, as were the other six days; God's unending rest was consecrated principally for the purpose of glorious contemplation by God of what He had wrought, even as Israel was later to appreciate and apply this principle of worship (Deut. 5:12-15). This divine rest also foreshadowed the unending faith-rest that believers would obtain through Christ (Heb. 4:9). Certainly the pattern for regular worship was established by God according to His self-contemplation at that time. However in subsequent centuries up to the time of Moses there is no suggestion that Adam and his progeny participated in rigid sabbatarian modes of work and worship, especially as they were inaugurated with considerable detail at Mt. Sinai. While there was a priesthood prior to Moses, as was exemplified by Melchizedek and acknowledged by Abraham (Gen. 14:18-20; cf. Heb. 6:20-7:7), there is no indication that it was identical to that which was later established through Aaron and Levi, but rather superior!

D. THE LAW OF GOD DURING THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL.

Concerning Israel in Jeremiah 11:7 we learn that the Lord "solemnly warned your fathers in the day that I brought them up from the land of Egypt, even to this day, warning persistently, saying, 'Listen to My voice.' Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked each one, in the stubbornness of his evil heart; therefore I brought on them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not." So after the redemption of Israel out of Egypt, Paul tells us that "the Law came in so that the transgression would increase" (Rom. 5:20); in similar words he writes that the Law "was added because of transgressions" (Gal. 5:19). Hence the Law of Moses was not a legacy of the past that was revived from former centuries. Rather it was a new, distinctive revelation and administration of the righteousness of God that had not existed before. Furthermore, at that time the Law was specifically given to Israel and no other nation (Exod. 31:12-17; Deut. 4:5-8, 32-34; 5:2-3; Ezek. 20:10-12; Rom. 3:1-2). Consequently, the Law had not been given to previous generations since: "He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them" (Ps. 147:18-20).

1. The initial revelation of the Law to Israel.

The Ten Commandments were given to Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai in a covenantal framework: "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine. . . . All the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do'" (Exod. 19:4, 8). Thus, in the midst of thunder, lightening flashes, a thick cloud, the sound of the trumpet, fire and smoke, the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai to declare His "statutes and ordinances" (Deut. 5:1) while the people of Israel trembled at its foot. Hence the Decalogue was specifically given to the people of Israel redeemed out of Egypt, and just as

specifically not to the Egyptians! That this new legal deposit was essentially moral, none will deny, though it is difficult to suggest that these ten words were not civil and ceremonial as well; rather they were integral to Aaron and the present priesthood in a ceremonial sense (Exod. 19:24; 23-26) and at the same time they were also the national constitution, the civil formulation of law for the newly constituted nation that was to be implemented in conjunction with “all the heads of your tribes and your elders” (Exod. 19:7; Deut. 5:23).

2. The consequent revelation of the Law to Israel.

The detailed exposition of the Decalogue that followed from the mouth of God, according to the very necessity of practical application, certainly incorporated both civil and ceremonial details which, as a whole, were to comprise the Pentateuch or Torah. Because of the Law’s revelation of sin in Israel, it was necessary that a system of offerings through a priestly order should be established to deal with this same sin, as is especially revealed in Leviticus. However, it is simply unsupportable to claim that the Jewish understanding of these aspects of the Law of Moses regarded the moral, civil, and ceremonial elements as *distinctly separate components* whereby the abiding moral category, as defined by the Decalogue, could be separated from the more temporal civil and ceremonial categories. One suspects that this whole approach was an attempt to retain Moses while at the same time repudiating him! For instance, in Acts 15:5, when the Pharisees who had believed in Jesus declared, “It is necessary to circumcise them [the Gentile believers] and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses,” plainly the whole of the Mosaic Law was in mind here, and not just the civil and ceremonial aspects. This being so, then the eventual decree of the Council at Jerusalem, concerning the commendation of liberty for the Gentiles, also responded regarding the whole Mosaic administration and not simply the applicability of its civil and ceremonial aspects. The same point is surely true in Romans 7:1-4 where “the law” in v. 1 refers to the totality of the Mosaic revelation, in which case it is the same totality to which “you also were made to die” to in v. 4.

Following the crossing of the Red Sea, sadly the children of Israel continued more with complaints than faith in a redeeming God (Exod. 15:24; 16:2; 17:2), so that, as we have already noted from Paul, “the Law was added” for the purpose of sin being more clearly seen. Hence this leads us to enquire further as to the reason why “the Law was added” to Israel subsequent to deliverance out of Egypt? The answer of Paul is not that God’s people might be sanctified by means of the Law, that is made more holy, but rather that the sin of this nation might be seen in clearer focus, that is until the “Deliverer will come from Zion . . . [and] remove ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:26; cf. Isa. 59:21). Hence over the centuries of Israel’s history, Paul also explains that “the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal. 3:24-25). In other words, now that Christ has come, the purpose of the law in directing sinful Israel toward Him, not unlike the ministry of John the Baptist, has been fulfilled. And this is exactly what Jesus Himself declared in the Sermon on the Mount: “I did not come to abolish [the Law] but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17), that is complement its ordained purpose. Thus Israel is now to look to the administration of God’s righteousness fully embodied in Christ and not the former, abolished administration of God’s righteousness that was summarized in tables of stone through Moses.

E. THE LAW OF GOD AND THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST.

In the continuity of history that deals with human redemption, “the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Christ follows Moses in succession, not in parallel. Hence the Law “was added . . . until the seed would come. . . . But now that faith [in Christ] has come, we are no longer under a tutor [Moses]” Gal. 3:19, 25).

1. The purpose of the law in Romans 3.

While we have already considered the terminology of Law, it is vital to give closer attention to this matter, especially with regard to Paul’s usage in Romans 3, which passage deals so significantly with the relationship between Law and gospel grace. For instance, in v. 21, while the first mention of Law is a more encompassing reference, the second surely refers to the Law of Moses or the Pentateuch. However in vs. 19-20 we have four references to Law, and it is only right that caution should be employed here with regard to a specific definition. The reason is that too glibly Paul’s declaration, “for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin,” v. 20, has become almost a cliché with regard to the vital role of the Ten Commandments in convicting men of sin before they are presented with the gospel of vs. 21-26. We do not at all deny the importance of Law, as broadly defined, being a diagnostic means of exposing human corruption. However, we do suggest a right understanding of Law here with regard to evangelism will also enlarge our comprehension of the more broad concept of the demands of the righteousness of God, and that well beyond a more constricted, temporal Mosaic perspective.

The context here is enormously enlightening. In v. 19, as indeed with all of vs. 19-20, the term “Law” has obvious reference to the quotations of the preceding vs. 10-18, they being in Jewish terminology a “string of pearls,” so to speak. However, all of these passages are mainly from Psalms and also Isaiah. There is not one mention of the Pentateuch, which leads us to conclude that in fact “Law” in vs. 19-20 refers to the demands of God’s righteousness throughout the whole of the Old Testament. This being the case, it is incorrect to suggest that there is special need of thundering Decalogue proclamation with regard to pre-evangelism, or indeed sanctification as some claim. Rather the fundamental necessity is man’s confrontation with the righteousness of God, whether He be Jew or Gentile, by means of the demands of both the written Word of God and the incarnate Word of God. Compared with employment of the Ten Commandments, this more broad revelation of sin will prove to be no less effective in shutting the mouth of man with penetrating condemnation, as Paul here indicates.

2. A comparison of Moses and Christ in Romans 7:1-4.

In writing to the assembly of believers in Rome that is predominantly Gentile, Paul nevertheless addresses those “who know the law,” v. 1, especially with regard to their tendency as Christians to employ the Law, that is the Mosaic code, as an additive that they regard will aid in their sanctification. Paul will have none of this since the jurisdiction of the Law, or Torah, surely including the Decalogue, has come to a terminus, a point at which, having had authority for an appointed period, it comes to an end. Further, the consequence of this reign of the Law coming to a conclusion is the cessation of Christian obligation to its distinctive character, although certainly not the righteousness of God. A husband who dies also provides freedom from obligation so that his former wife is free to marry again. Once she is joined to a new spouse, the former husband has no claims

whatsoever on the new relationship. Indeed the fulfillment which the new husband provides makes any intrusion of the old husband to result in a deleterious effect, especially tension in loyalty. So the Christian “was made to die to the Law [of Moses as a whole] through the body of Christ [His atoning sacrifice establishing a new covenant relationship], so that you might be joined [wedded] to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear [Spiritual] fruit for God.” There is no place here for spiritual bigamy, that is being wedded to Moses and Christ, even if it is claimed that Moses merely tags along behind having a minor role; such a thought is insulting to the new Spouse. Rather the administration of the righteousness of God as revealed via Moses has been superseded by the more perfect revelation of God’s righteousness embodied in the person of the Son of God (II Cor. 3:4-18). In Moses we have a summary of divine righteousness, clothed in Judaism, without any enabling dynamic. However in Christ we have a perfect revelation of the righteousness of God that includes enabling dynamic. If it be maintained that the Christian will now conform to the Decalogue through new affections of the heart that conversion has produced, such an allegiance to Moses would in no way invalidate his death sanctions against transgressors of certain laws and conformity to the whole Sabbath system. However this is only to attempt, quite hopelessly, to pour new wine into old wineskins that are incapable of such accommodation (Matt. 9:17).

Further note that now spiritual fruit comes forth solely as a result of union with Christ (John 15:4-8), not Moses’ assistance, even though vs. 7-12 will uphold the limited capability and essential righteousness of the Law. So in Hebrews 13:20-21 it is “the blood of the eternal covenant” that will “equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” Moreover at the Transfiguration, this was precisely the same emphasis that the Father in heaven desired to establish with such vigor. Note that in Luke 9:33 we are told that, “as these [presumably Moses and Elijah] were leaving Him [Christ],” only then did Peter intervene with the suggestion that three tabernacles be built. He could not bear to have Moses and Elijah depart and be alone with Jesus. Hence the Father rebuked this misplaced concern with the charge: “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him” (Luke 9:35). So, let Moses and Elijah retire; cleave *only* to Jesus.

3. A comparison of the Old and New Covenants in Hebrews.

Notwithstanding the difficulty of identifying the human author of Hebrews, we firmly maintain that he was a highly knowledgeable Hebrew Christian who addressed Hebrew Christians in terms of the distinctive blessings and problems their Jewish heritage presented. The Jewish Christian straddles two juxtaposed administrations and is in danger of corrupting the latter with the former. However, while a Hebrew Christian retains his Jewishness as rooted in Abraham, it is nevertheless perpetuated in the new covenant made with “the house of Israel,” to the exclusion of the old covenant (Heb. 8:7-13).

a. The transcendent superiority of Jesus over Moses, Hebrews 3:1-6.

To begin with, Moses’ headship here over “His [God’s] house” does not merely concern the so-called ceremonial and civil aspects of his appointed jurisdiction. The term “house” encompasses an administration or dispensation, the whole Mosaic era, the foundations of which were laid at Mt. Sinai. However, as distinct from Moses, God the Father and Jesus Christ are co-architects/builders of the household of God; Moses’ calling was to serve *in* His house while, by way of contrast, Christ is a Son

appointed *over* His house. There is no merging here, as if Moses remains a servant in the house administration of Christ the Son. Rather Moses' house administration, as "a shadow of the good things to come" (10:1), has concluded, it being displaced by "a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises" (8:6), being "worthy of more glory," v. 3. So Arthur Pink comment:

Though officially raised over it, Moses was not the founder of the Israelitish family, but simply a member of it. . . . Moses did not make men children of God; Christ does. Moses came to a people who were already the Lord's by covenant relationship; whereas Christ takes up those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and creates them anew. Thus as the founder of the family is entitled to the highest honor from the family, so Christ is worthy of more glory than Moses.¹

- b. The transcendent superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant, Hebrews 8:6-13.

Plainly, the "first covenant" here is the Mosaic administration as a whole, including its so-called moral as well as ceremonial and civil aspects (Exod. 34:27-28; Deut. 4:13). Its distinction in terms of obsolescence, with the "second [or better] covenant," may be likened to a bride's hope in a photograph of her bridegroom that he has provided and her eventual marriage to her beloved. From an engagement promise and ring to fulfillment, the plan is the same. The photograph has a relatively weak, limited, and temporal role compared to the better relationship that the actual wedding ceremony will inaugurate; the photograph is a lifeless representation, it encourages hope, but it is vastly inferior to the eventual union based upon a better, final promise and vows signified by a wedding ring. So the second covenant in the blood of Christ, representing progress of revelation in history, declares what God has consummately done in such a better fashion, in these "last days," in comparison with what "He spoke long ago" (1:1-2). For the bride to rely on the photograph in the presence of her husband is really to insult him!

In particular, v. 13 sums up the preceding reference to Jeremiah 31. We could say of a garment: "That which is by its very nature destined to become old/obsolete is presently becoming old to the point where it is about ready to be discarded." So the old Mosaic covenant, "being made old [prone to failure/obsolescence] . . . is also [presently] growing old [to the point where it is about to be discarded]." Hence it is the whole Sinaitic dispensation that has become superceded. It is "the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones [even the moral law so-called], . . . the ministry of condemnation, . . . which fades away" (II Cor. 3:7, 9, 11). In accord with Galatians 3:24-25, this old covenant system has prepared the way over the centuries as "a tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now [in the continuity of history] that faith [particularly its object] has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (Rom. 7:1-4). Thus John Owen concludes his comment on this verse:

All the glorious institutions of the law were at best but as stars in the firmament of the church, and therefore were all to disappear at the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. To God, let there be glory.²

¹ Arthur Pink, *Hebrews*, I, p. 160.

² John Owen, *Hebrews*, IV, p. 177.

- c. The transcendent superiority of Mount Zion over Mount Sinai, Hebrews 12:18-29.

Yet again, the reference here is plainly with regard to the Decalogue revelation of the Law that originated from Mount Sinai. As with the language of 9:13-14, here is upheld not merely new covenant improvement over the old, but stark antithesis with the old, not simply new covenant development of the old, but supersession of the old. Here also the old covenant's efficient purpose is clearly stated, it being exclusively described as a ministry of guilt inducing terror and condemnation (II Cor. 3:9), not sanctification. Certainly, for the Christian, Mount Sinai is not to be understood as a companion with Mount Zion, even as an appendage of secondary importance. Rather Mount Zion is that singular pinnacle, that sole gospel refuge to which the Christian aspires.

In particular, two aspects of the Mosaic covenant are drawn upon that are set in contrast with the transcendent characteristic of the new covenant of Christ's sprinkled blood. In vs. 18-24, the earthly, fear inducing features of Mount Sinai are overwhelmed by the heavenly, salvation accomplishing features of Mount Zion. Then in vs. 25-29, the same Old Testament scenario is portrayed as a trembling, insecure, transient foundation that is replaced by the New Covenant which is immovable, steadfast, never to be removed. Here, probably in continuance of the athletic analogy of 12:1, it seems as though Christian contestants have been faced with an alternative track, that which is a detour leading to Mount Sinai, whereas the course of the narrow way has been heading toward Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* Bunyan has graphically portrayed this distracting confrontation with the Law from two perspectives, namely prior to and subsequent to conversion that takes place at the Wicket-gate.

- (1) Bunyan's portrayal of the impotence of the Law with regard to conversion.

Consider the deceitful proposition of Mr. Worldly-Wiseman who is on the lookout for pilgrims seeking and approaching salvation at the Wicket-gate. He seductively convinces Christian to depart the narrow way and head toward the alternative Village Morality via Mount Sinai, the result being that this pilgrim finds himself transfixed with the terrors of the Law, that is until rescued by Evangelist who offers safe redirection back to the new covenant course, as well as appropriate exhortation. This concerns,

three things in this man's counsel, that thou must utterly abhor. 1. His turning thee out of the way. 2. His laboring to render the cross odious to thee. And, 3. His setting thy feet in that way [of supposed salvation] that leadeth unto the administration of death [II Cor. 3:7]. Then said Evangelist, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they [Israel] escaped not who refused him [Moses] that spake on earth, much more shall not we [Christians] escape, if we turn away from him [Christ] that speaketh from heaven" (Heb. 12:25).³

- (2) Bunyan's portrayal of the impotence of the Law with regard to sanctification.

When Christian joins in fellowship with Faithful, this new companion recalls his own distinctive experiences. Following the carnal positioning of Madam

³ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 95.

Wanton outside the Wicket-gate, another challenge to his flesh comes in his encounter, at the foot of the Hill Difficulty, with old Adam the First. His offer of fleshly comfort and security, including marriage to his three daughters, Lust of the Flesh, Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, causes Faithful to confess, “Why, at first, I found myself somewhat inclinable to go with the man, for I thought he spake very fair.” Now while he eventually repudiates such an overture (II Tim. 2:22), yet as a result old Adam the First is aroused to enmity that leads him not only to pinch Faithful painfully, but also promise, “that he would send such a one after me, that should make my way bitter to my soul.” So Faithful is soon assaulted by Moses, the embodiment of the Law, who can only repeatedly assail the guilty pilgrim. To Faithful’s cries for mercy, he pitilessly responds, “I know not how to show mercy.” It is only when the man with the nail-prints in his hands comes along, the pilgrim’s Lord, that Moses is beaten off.⁴ Thus Moses is portrayed, not as an encourager of righteousness, but rather as a hound and ferret of unrighteousness, who responds with condemnation at the merest whiff of sin. And once he catches the guilty sinner, like a dog having caught its prey, he endeavors to shake the captive to death! Is Faithful guilty? Yes, of course he is since for a time he had a hankering for old Adam the First’s carnal proposal. Hence that was enough for Moses to pursue his quarry without the slightest thought of deliverance from carnality for this pilgrim. However Christ, in confronting Moses’ “ministry of death, . . . [his] ministry of condemnation,” beats him off by means of his “ministry of the Spirit, . . . [His] ministry of [saving] righteousness” (II Cor. 3:7-9) represented by His nail-pierced hands. Christ is well able to convince Faithful of his problem; however unlike Moses, in addition He is also able to bring cleansing and restoration through grace to this wayward pilgrim. Thus Bunyan warns in *The Heavenly Footman*,

They that will have heaven they must run for it, because the devil, the law, sin, death, and hell, follow them. There is never a poor soul that is going to heaven, but the devil, the law, sin, death, and hell, make after that soul. . . . I will assure you, the devil is nimble, he can run apace, he is light of foot, he hath overtaken many; he hath turned up their heels, and hath given them an everlasting fall. Also the law, that can shoot a great way, have a care thou keep out of the reach of those great guns, the ten commandments.⁵

F. THE LAW OF GOD AND SANCTIFICATION.

Classic Christian theology has formulated three purposes in the law of God, that is the moral law or Decalogue. First, the law of God is to direct man in the civil and societal realm, usually according to a judicial system. Second, the Law of God is to convict man of sin, that is fulfill a diagnostic purpose that results in exposure and condemnation. Third, and here there is considerable difference of opinion, the law of God is thought to be helpful in guiding and stimulating the sanctification of the Christian. It is this third aspect that we now especially focus upon since it concerns the degree, if any, to which the Decalogue is employed for the enhancement of Christian living.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 118-119.

⁵ Ibid., p. 382.

1. Being under the law of Christ.

In II Corinthians 3:4-18, Paul contrasts the New Covenant, written on “tablets of human hearts,” with the Old Covenant, written on “tablets of stone.” These two administrations do not coalesce in the slightest, even if the “New” is incomparably superior. There is no thought here of “the grace of law,” any more than we might consider there to be “the grace of condemnation.” No, the Old Covenant “kills;” it is a “ministry of death,” a “ministry of condemnation,” a “fading ministry,” a “ministry that veils the heart.” However, the New Covenant “gives life,” it is a “ministry of the Spirit,” a “ministry of righteousness,” a “ministry of remaining glory,” a “ministry that unveils the heart so that it beholds the glory of the Lord.” However, if the Christian is now not under the Old Covenant, whether he be a Jew or Gentile, then what law if any is he under? Paul answers that he, in living as do the Gentiles “without the law of God,” nevertheless is “under the law of Christ” (I Cor. 9:20-21). In other words, in Paul becoming dead to the administration and law of Moses and now wedded to Christ (Rom. 7:1-4), he has come under the dominion of a new Master; it is His commandments (John 15:15, 21, 24) that direct his steps. Having met with and learned from Christ (Gal. 1:11-12; I Cor. 11:23), Paul is committed to the Father’s directive earlier referenced, given on the mount of the transfiguration, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him [and not Moses and Elijah]” (Matt. 17:4-5).

2. Confessional representations of sanctification that align Moses with Christ.

The doctrinal belief of many Reformed Presbyterian, Reformed Baptist, and Sovereign Grace churches is essentially reflected in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* of 1646 (Presbyterian), the related *Savoy Declaration* of 1658 (Congregational), and the 1689 *Baptist Confession*. All three regard the moral or Mosaic Decalogue as a creation ordinance and an instrumental means of Christian sanctification that retains universal validity.⁶ While greatly respecting the sincere convictions of those who adhere to this doctrinal heritage, we nevertheless reject such an understanding of the Law on firstly biblical and then secondarily historical grounds.⁷ In doing this we reference two modern portrayals of this perspective as being indicative of a legalistic outworking that obviously conflicts with what we believe to be the new covenant institution of the righteousness of God mediated exclusively through the Lord Jesus Christ.

- a. Reformed Baptist, Walter J. Chantry, has written *God’s Righteous Kingdom* published by The Banner of Truth. Here he plainly, indeed militantly upholds the

⁶ In *The Westminster Confession of Faith* we read: “The moral law [given to Adam and Israel as the Ten Commandments] doth forever bind all. . . . Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly.” Philip Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, III, pp. 640-641. *The Savoy Declaration* and *The Second London Baptist Confession* have identical wording at this point, W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, pp. 276-277.

⁷ We prefer the new covenant emphasis of *The First London Baptist Confession* of 1644, especially with regard to sanctification that is disassociated from the old Mosaic covenant and expressed as follows: “All believers are a holy and sanctified people, and that sanctification is a spiritual grace of the New Covenant, and effect of the love of God, manifested to the soul, whereby the believer is in truth and reality separated both in soul and body, from all sin and dead works, through the blood of the Everlasting Covenant, whereby he also presseth after a heavenly and evangelical perfection, in obedience to all the commands which Christ as head and King in this New Covenant has prescribed to him.” W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 164.

abiding nature of the Decalogue while castigating those with whom he is in disagreement. Consider the following:

Who will endure the assailants of the Decalogue for a moment longer! They have not the savor of apostolic teaching. Theirs is a sinister chore who labor to undermine confidence in the very moral gauge so freely utilized from the very foundation of the Christian Church (Eph. 2:20). It is no insignificant mistake to discredit the synopsis of righteousness from God's own hand. Enemies of the Ten Commandments will cause great harm to the kingdom. . . . Ten Commandment abolitionists often seek to set aside the hated standard by seeking to convince us that the Decalogue blends in with all other Mosaic institutions. To strip the Decalogue of perpetuity, they attempt to show that the ten words differ in nothing from temporary regulations of ceremonial and theocratic flavor. But only the unlearned could think of adopting this identification of the Ten Commandments with transient Jewish nationalism and childish externalism.⁸

Aside from the inappropriate and outrageously inaccurate caricature of those with whom Chantry contends, we further quote from this author to indicate how his exaltation of Moses leads to the depreciation of Christ. So we read:

Jesus Christ was the perfect embodiment of the moral law. Here was moral law set before the eyes of sinners in a living Epistle of flesh and blood. . . . No higher exhibit of the righteousness of God may be sought.⁹

While the latter statement is wonderfully correct, nowhere in the New Testament is the Son of God described as the incarnation of the Ten Commandments, notwithstanding the undoubted fact that Jesus was the perfect Jew. Rather He is often described in a manner that makes Him antithetical to Moses (Matt. 17:1-8; John 1:17; Heb. 3:1-6; 12:18-24). However Chantry then proceeds to declare that while

Jesus the Lord is our fullest and most beautiful display of righteousness, [nevertheless] at the same time, a study of Jesus' life can be complex. . . . Nowhere in the Gospels is all of our Lord's righteousness gathered up into a condensed formula. The Ten Commandments are comprehensive enough to embrace all his pure works and compact enough to serve as a rule in our finite judgment. It certainly sounds pious when teachers want to take their ethics from Jesus, not Moses. . . . But what defines his holiness? A golden rule? Tender moments with children? Is there an objective expression of the righteousness of Christ? If not, where do we begin to make a moral appraisal of him?¹⁰

There is a disturbing tone here that is so obviously missing from the writings of Paul. The clear intimation here is of the inadequacy of the revelation of Christ when compared with the Mosaic record. Christ is not so easy to lay hold of while Moses is so much more comprehensible. In other words, we need Moses otherwise Jesus is not sufficiently clear, nor is He adequate to convict of sin. We are further told:

As men looked at our sinless Lord in his day, how could they tell that he was blameless? If no adequate rule of human conduct was given before he came, was it fair for Jesus to ask, 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' (John 8:46). Neo-antinomians who demand the rash obliteration of the Ten Commandments forbid us to compare Jesus' words and

⁸ Walter J. Chantry, *God's Righteous Kingdom*, pp. 86-87. It was this and subsequent quotations that convinced this writer of the fundamental error of Chantry's position and identification with Reformed nomism.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

conduct with the Decalogue. Then how could men tell if he sinned? Is the knowledge of Christ's moral uprightness a hunch? Or is there a scale in which to weigh his life?¹¹

Yet again, the tone here is astonishing in its obvious depreciation of the infinitely superior revelation of the Son of God. How strange that whereas Chantry claims the Gospel revelation of the life of Christ is not adequate to convict of sin, Paul tells us of the inadequacy of the law and the sufficiency of Christ in this regard. That is, "what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). The simple answer to the questions Chantry raises is to ask some questions in reply. What was it that caused Simon Peter to exclaim, in anguish of soul: "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8)? What was it that led to the repentance of Zaccheus (Luke 19:8)? With regard to the enquiry, "Is there a scale in which to weigh his [Christ's] life?" we believe the vital matter here is in fact inverted. Rather the question should be, "How does the Decalogue measure up to Christ?" The reason is that Jesus clearly asserted His dominion over the Mosaic revelation when he declared that, "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28), not that somehow He is subject to the Sabbath.

- b. Reformed Presbyterian, Joseph A. Pipa, has written *The Lord's Day* published by Christian Focus, which includes a commendation by Walter Chantry. Here, according to considerable devotion to *The Westminster Confession*, the Sabbath is upheld as a creation ordinance that is incumbent upon all men. Apart from the Sabbath pattern of Genesis 1-2, a very doubtful reference to "end of days" in Genesis 4:3, and the Sabbath instituted prior to arrival at Mount Sinai (Exod. 16:22-30),¹² the pre-Mosaic centuries offer not the slightest indication of the dominion of the Law. Certainly the Jews never regarded the Decalogue as antedating the revelation at Mount Sinai, but rather as a distinctive national deposit. It is significant that while sanctions against Sabbath-breaking included the death penalty, as Pipa acknowledges, yet quite arbitrarily he declares that this "does not apply to us."¹³ In the same subjective manner, concerning capital punishment for Sabbath-breaking, Chantry writes that such

austere measures are not appropriate to the New Covenant state of affairs. For believers a return to judicial laws would be bondage (Gal. 4:3, 9). For unbelievers such a state reinstated would be a barrier to their coming to faith, not an aid. However, we would suggest that the Law did not permit such liberty.¹⁴

Here the whole legal edifice, so vigorously defended, comes tumbling down. By what right do Pipa and Chantry randomly decide that the death penalty is not applicable for Sabbath breaking while it is likely they would not be so accommodating with regard to the death penalty for homicide? Then again, perhaps the death penalty for homicide might not be "appropriate" during the church age because it would be "a barrier to coming to faith"! Elsewhere Pipa similarly finds himself enmeshed in the

¹¹ Ibid., p. 83.

¹² Keil and Delitzsch comment here: "It is perfectly clear from this event, that the Israelites were not acquainted with any sabbatical observance at that time, but that, whilst the way was practically opened, it was through the Decalogue that it was raised into a legal institution." *The Pentateuch*, II, pp. 68-69.

¹³ Pipa, *The Lord's Day*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁴ Chantry, *God's Righteous Kingdom*, p. 121.

endless dilemmas that attempted conformity to the Mosaic law present. Consider the following.

This episode [of the man put to death for gathering wood on the Sabbath in Numbers 15] does not teach, as some suggest, that we may not cook on the Lord's day or use electricity, although the application of the principle involved would preclude going out to buy groceries on Sunday, even if we had run out of food.

Some say that The [Westminster] Shorter Catechism forbids physical rest when it requires 'spending the whole time in the publick and private exercises of God's worship . . .' Does this mean it is wrong to take a nap on a Sunday afternoon? To answer the question you must determine the purpose of the nap. Is it to refresh you so that you can pursue with renewed vigor the purposes of the day, or is it a choice of idleness because you do not want to do anything else? Some people need a nap to stay awake for the evening service or to be able to read later without falling asleep.

This principle of necessity also helps us answer the question about the use of electricity. . . . [O]ur use of electricity is not forbidden by the prohibition to Israel about kindling a fire. A number of things necessary for a proper keeping of the Lord's day are provided by electricity. We need electricity to heat and cool our houses and church buildings and to provide light. Thus it is not contrary to the principle of the Sabbath to turn on a light switch or a heater on Sunday.

[W]e noted that the Fourth Commandment prohibits our causing others to work on Sunday. If on Sunday morning I discover that I am out of milk, is it a necessity to go down to the grocery store and buy milk because I was negligent? No, it is not. My carelessness put me into that situation. It is not carelessness that makes something a necessity, but its usefulness in enabling you to perform the purposes of Sabbath. On the other hand, if I am staying in a hotel over the weekend, it may well be a deed of necessity to eat in the hotel restaurant so I will have the strength to perform the duties of the day. Some prefer to purchase sandwich material to keep in their room and others to spend the day in fasting.¹⁵

What strikes one so clearly here is the subjective, hermeneutical morass that this author becomes entangled with. It reminds one of rabbinical conjecture that the common people of Judaism entrusted themselves to, and as a consequence became enslaved to the intricate, situational moral interpretations of the "experts." Whereas Paul would more likely repeat, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

3. A comparison of Christ and Moses.

The preceding portrayal of the necessity for the Christian of the moral law, also known as the Ten Commandments, which the New Testament aligns with the administration of Moses, tends to lead to the conclusion that for all of the superiority of Jesus, nevertheless Jesus needs Moses. The following contrast is offered so as to indicate that indeed the Christian does not need Moses.

- a. Moses' revelation from Mount Sinai was a summary, a précis of the righteousness of God. He presented an excellent synopsis of the moral character of God dressed in a manner suitable for the people of Israel by means of which He entered into a bilateral covenant with the nation of Israel established on tables of stone. This covenant was a

¹⁵ Pipa, *The Lord's Day*, pp. 63, 79-81.

fine outline of the essential, divine ethic, though it was void of any dynamic, being weak through the flesh (Rom. 3a).

- b. Jesus' revelation from Mount Zion was a perfect embodiment, a full explanation of the righteousness of God. He presents a more glorious and complete personification of God dressed in human flesh for Jew and Gentile by means of which He entered into a unilateral covenant established through His self-offering unto death. As such this covenant was a perfect and infinite proclamation of the divine ethic, while at the same time it incorporated divine dynamic (Rom. 3b-4).
 - c. In the light of the above comparison, for what solitary reason would a person ever desire to look backwards from Christ to Moses because of some present lack as a Christian? If in Christ "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9), why should a Christian regress to Moses, and his rudimentary administration, who himself was in need of Christ's redemption?
4. Illustrations of a grace union with Jesus Christ.
- a. Illustration. An attractive young lady sought work in a large city and was eventually employed as a housekeeper by a single, well-to-do young man. Upon commencing her new position, the master took the lady into the kitchen and pointed out the full list of her duties that had been attached to a notice board which also included all of the terms of her employment. As time went by, the young lady performed very well, the result being glowing approval from her employer. Indeed so pleased was the man that he began to take especial notice of the young lady in a manner that obviously indicated a more romantic interest. Eventually, the man having proposed marriage, the young lady accepted and as a result there commenced a most happy wedded union. Immediately the marriage had taken place, the man, now the husband of the young lady, took his new bride into the kitchen and simply tore down the list of duties and job description that she had so faithfully performed. Why did he do this? Certainly not for the reason that his wife might now consider taking advantage of her husband and thus slacken in her daily care of him. Quite to the contrary, after the marriage, the care of this wife for her husband only increased in terms of fulfilling his desires, even though the former legal declaration was missing from the kitchen. Why was this so? Because righteousness is produced by a vital relationship of the heart, not a legal proclamation. As already pointed out, this is the particular emphasis of Paul in Romans 7:1-4 where he similarly contrasts a legal relationship with Moses as being inferior to a wedded, fruitful relationship with Christ.
 - b. Illustration. A man living out in a country region decided to visit a close friend in a big city. Having caught a train into the great metropolis, he alighted at the very busy central railway station. There he made his way through the crowded concourse to a bus station, though he noticed a strange phenomenon. All around were notices that directed people, on pain of penalty, to discard their rubbish in the trash cans that were provided. Nevertheless, in spite of the clear and repeated directions, people seemed to ignore the warnings and throw their debris in all directions. Similarly, prohibitions against spitting and writing on walls were also disregarded. Then the man eventually arrived at his dear friend's lovely home. Again he noticed another strange phenomenon. As he entered the house it was obvious that there was not a single sign to be seen that prohibited the throwing of rubbish on the plush carpet, or

for that matter spitting and writing on the walls. Even so, with the house now full of guests, the man was surprised to notice that nobody was acting with the disregard that had been earlier observed within the great station. Why was this so? Because, as already indicated, righteousness is produced by a vital relationship of the heart, not a legal proclamation.

5. Sanctification through the gospel alone in Galatians 2:20.

One of the most common interests of a Christian is usually declared to be his “living the Christian life,” that is in terms of practical outworking. Then there arises the question as to whether the Ten Commandments are a means of grace whereby, in any degree, they assist our desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. The answer here of Paul is most plain. “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). He identifies with his past conversion through faith in Christ’s crucifixion; this has brought about a present result, that is ongoing subjection to Christ in being, as it were, crucified along with Him. Consequently, and we stress the present tense here, “the life which I am now living in the flesh [my daily practical life], I am living [day after day] by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” For Paul, “living the Christian life,” has nothing whatsoever to do with “looking unto Jesus while also looking back with an eye on Moses”! If that were the case, then as Paul declares in v. 21, “if righteousness comes through the Law [looking back toward Moses], then Christ died needlessly.”

G. LAW, GRACE, AND ANTINOMIANISM.

Doubtless some Christians who believe in the need for doctrinal balance are inclined to press for the propriety of both law and grace in the Christian life. However, according to Romans 5:20-21 it is the reign of grace alone through Christ, leading to eternal life, that supplants the reign of law which is only productive of sin reigning in death.

1. John Bunyan, and Israel’s Sabbath.

That this tinker of Bedford was committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace is beyond question. Nevertheless in considering such matters, he was always “his own man,” so to speak, and never one to submit in total to a system of belief or association of men. He was a friend of John Owen of the Westminster fraternal as well as William Dell who was decidedly not aligned with those who were influential at Westminster. Hence, especially in the later years of his ministry, Bunyan’s approach to the Law was definitely not in agreement with the Westminster Confession. So in 1685 he writes as follows concerning *Questions about the Nature and Perpetuity of the Seventh-Day Sabbath*, in which the Fourth Commandment is described as being strictly ordained for Israel, the time of that endowment being the commencement of the wilderness wanderings. There is not one sentence that allows any latitude here.

Now as to the imposing of a seventh day Sabbath upon men from Adam to Moses, of that we find nothing in holy writ either from precept or example. . . . But of this [Sabbath] you see we read nothing, either by positive law, or countenanced example, or any other way, but rather the flat contrary; to wit, that Moses had the knowledge of it first from heaven, not by

tradition. . . . The seventh day Sabbath therefore was not from paradise, nor from nature, nor from the fathers, but from the wilderness, and from Sinai. . . . What can be more plain . . . that the seventh day Sabbath, as such, was given to Israel, to Israel *only* [Bunyan's emphasis]; and that the Gentiles, as such, were not concerned therein!¹⁶

2. John Bunyan – “*of the Law and the Christian.*”

This late work, posthumously published in 1692, was discovered in a broadsheet or handbill format which George Offor suggests was probably designed, as was then the popular mode, to be “posted against a wall, or framed and hung up in a room,”¹⁷ for ready consumption. Though brief, filling just over one page in Offor's edition, yet it presents us with the most mature expression of Bunyan's understanding of the role of the law in the life of a Christian. Bunyan sees a contrast between the first giving of the law in Exodus 19:16-20 where God revealed Himself with terror and severity, and the second giving of the law in Exodus 34:1-8 where God revealed Himself as “merciful, gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgressions and sins.” To sum up, Bunyan does not discard the law in a total sense. But he rejects the law as a necessary judge of the conscience, as an adjunct system that the Christian requires (Rom. 7:1-4). However, if the law ministers of the essential good character of God, like the second revelation of the law to Moses, then that is profitable. The text in full is as follows.

The law was given twice upon mount Sinai, but the appearance of the Lord when he gave it the second time, was wonderfully different from that of his [appearance], when at the first he delivered it to Israel (Exod. 19 and 34).

1. When he gave it the first time, he caused his terror and severity to appear before Moses, to the shaking of his soul, and the dismaying of Israel (Exod. 19:16; Heb. 12:18-20). But when he gave it the second time, he caused all his goodness to pass before Moses, to the comfort of his conscience, and the bowing of his heart (Exod. 34:8).

2. When he gave it the first time, it was with thunderings and lightnings, with blackness and darkness, with flame and smoke, and a tearing sound of the trumpet (Exod. 19:16-18). But when he gave it the second time, it was with a proclamation of his name to be merciful, gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgressions and sins (Exod. 34:6,7).

3. When he gave it the first time, Moses was called to go up to receive it through the fire, which made him exceedingly fear and quake (Exod. 19:18; Heb. 12:21). But when he went to receive it the second time, he was laid in a clift of the rock (Exod. 31:22).

4. From all which I gather, that, though as to the matter of the law, both as to its being given the first time, and the second, it binds the unbeliever under the pains of eternal damnation, if he close not with Christ by faith; yet as to the manner of its giving at these two times, I think the first doth more principally intend its force as a covenant of works, not at all respecting the Lord Jesus; but this second time not, at least in the manner of its being given, respecting such a covenant, but rather as a rule, or directory, to those who already are found in the clift of the rock, Christ: for the saint himself, though he be without law to God, as it is considered the first or old covenant, yet even he is not without law to him as considered under grace, not without law to God, but under the law to Christ (I Cor. 9:21).

¹⁶ John Bunyan, *Works*, II, pp. 363, 365, 366.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

5. Though therefore it be sad with the unbeliever, because he only and wholly standeth under the law, as it is given in fire, in smoke, in blackness, and darkness, and thunder; all which threaten him with eternal ruin if he fulfill not the utmost tittle thereof; yet the believer stands to the law under no such consideration, neither is he so at all to hear or regard it, for he is now removed from thence to the blessed mountain of Zion, to grace and forgiveness of sins; he is now, I say, by faith in the Lord Jesus shrouded under so perfect and blessed a righteousness, that this thundering law of mount Sinai cannot find the least fault or diminution therein; but rather approveth and alloweth thereof either when, or wherever it find it (Heb. 12). This is called the righteousness of God without the law, and is also said to be witnessed by both the law and the prophets: even the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ 'unto all and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference' (Rom. 3:22).

6. Wherefore whenever thou who believest in Jesus, dost hear the law in its thundering and lightning fits, as if it would burn up heaven and earth; then say thou, I am freed from this law, these thunderings have nothing to do with my soul; nay even this law, while it thus thunders and roareth, it doth both allow and approve of my righteousness. I know that Hagar would sometimes be domineering and high, even in Sarah's house and against her; but this she is not to be suffered to do, nay though Sarah herself be barren; wherefore serve IT also as Sarah served her, and expel her out from thy house. My meaning is, when this law with its thundering threatenings doth attempt to lay hold on thy conscience, shut it out with a promise of grace; cry, the inn is took up already, the Lord Jesus is here entertained, and here is no room for the law. Indeed if it will be content with being my informer, and so lovingly leave off to judge me; I will be content, it shall be in my sight, I will also delight therein; but otherwise, I being now made upright without it, and that too with that righteousness, which this law speaks well of and approveth; I am not, will not, cannot, dare not make it my savior and judge, nor suffer it to set up its government in my conscience; for by so doing I fall from grace, and Christ Jesus doth profit me nothing (Gal. 5:1-5).

7. Thus therefore the soul that is married to him that is raised up from the dead, both may and ought to deal with this law of God; yea, it doth greatly dishonor its Lord and refuse its gospel privileges, if it at any time otherwise doth, whatever it seeth or feels. The law hath power over the wife so long as her husband liveth, but if her husband be dead she is freed from that law, so that she is no adulteress though she be married to another man (Rom. 7:1-3). Indeed so long as thou art alive to sin, and to thy righteousness which is of the law, so long thou hast them for thy husband and they must reign over thee: But when once they are become dead unto thee, as they then most certainly will, when thou closest with the Lord Jesus Christ; then I say, thy former husbands have no more to meddle with thee, thou art freed from their law. Set a case, a woman be cast into prison for a debt of hundreds of pounds, if after this she marry; yea, though while she is in the gaoler's hand, in the same day that she is joined to her husband, her debt is all become his; yea, and the law also that arrested and imprisoned this woman, as freely tells her, go, she is freed, saith Paul, from that, and so saith the law of this land. The sum then of what hath been said is this, the Christian hath now nothing to do with the law, as it thundereth and burneth on Sinai, or as it bindeth the conscience to wrath and the displeasure of God for sin; for from its thus appearing, it is freed by faith in Christ. Yet it is to have regard thereto, and is to count it holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12); which that it may do, it is always whenever it seeth or regards it, to remember that he who giveth it to us is 'merciful, and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,' &c. (Exod. 34:6).¹⁸

3. Questions to consider concerning the Law and gospel grace.

- a. Living under grace, is it now necessary to teach children the Ten Commandments?

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 387-388.

In the light of this enquiry, we might also ask if, now being under the dominion of the New Covenant, we should indeed teach children the Old Testament as a whole? Of course the very suggestion here borders on the absurd. We very much believe in teaching our children the Ten Commandments, including their distinctive Jewish character and expansion in the whole Pentateuch. At the same time we also point out the representations in the Decalogue of the unchanging righteousness of God that also find their parallel representation in the New Testament, and preeminently the Lord Jesus Christ. While children should learn about faithful Moses and the temporal administration he represents, we give priority to the Lord Jesus' command: "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt. 19:14).

- b. Are not the Ten Commandments vital for the government of the United States?

Certainly the Decalogue has played a significant role in British common law, even as this legacy has flowed on to be incorporated in the law code of the United States. However, it would probably be more accurate to say that the moral roots of America are Judeo-Christian at their source. President Harry Truman, most likely reflecting his Southern Baptist roots, is said to have acknowledged the vital foundational role of the Decalogue in US law. Be that as it may, a right legal system faithfully reflecting the righteousness of the God of Abraham in its demands will not save a country; at best it will only restrain for a time. The sole hope of the United States is the implanting of the saving righteousness of God in the human heart, and this will only be obtained through the proclamation and Spirit enabled application of the gospel of the grace of God to repentant sinners. America's future destiny will ultimately be determined by its response to the gospel, not the law. If it is revived through the gospel, then its law-abiding character will be established; if it declines in terms of spurning the gospel, then it will be judged by the law it fails to uphold.

- c. Are not the Ten Commandments easier to follow than the ethics of Jesus?

The suggestion here is that since Jesus' commands in the New Testament are both less orderly and complex, therefore the more basic and easily followed code of the Decalogue is preferable for the common man. In other words the Ten Commandments present a "make it as easy to understand as you can" approach, that is a "simplistic" modus operandi with regard to understanding the righteousness of God. However the pursuit of the kingdom of God is never to be thought of in this manner. To begin with, the Decalogue is but a summary of the Pentateuch or Torah which the Jews understand to be comprised of 613 commandments (Deut. 5:22, 31). Further, while the Ten Commandments present only law or ethic, that is God's righteous demands upon His people, the commandments, words and works of Jesus present both law or ethic (Mark 12:29-31) and gospel or dynamic (Mark 10:45). How strange it is that while Moses presented the Law to rebellious Israel, in all of its "simplicity," the Lord Jesus also ministered to great multitudes, "and the large crowd enjoyed listening to him" (Mark 12:37). However, on another occasion a great number departed from Him because His teaching was "difficult" (John 6:60), at which time Jesus did not consider it necessary that He simplify or codify his message. We believe that the Sermon on the Mount, although referencing the Law, yet transcends the ethical demands of the Law.

- d. Is the Law then in conflict with the Christian gospel?

Paul puts it this way, “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God”? (Gal. 3:21a). The answer is “May it never be!” when the law is used “lawfully,” that is for the “lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers” (I Tim. 1:8-10). Here then is the legitimate use of the Law, that is the revelation of God’s righteousness according to the whole of the Word of God. Similarly Galatians 3:19 tells us that the Law “was added because of transgressions.” So here Paul continues, “If a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law” (Gal. 3:21b). Hence to suggest that the Law has a sanctifying capacity is to impose Moses upon Christ to some degree, whereas to believe that the Law as broadly comprehended has a diagnostic capacity is to rightly understand its intended design.

- e. What is it to stand in grace?

Paul writes that through our Lord Jesus Christ, “we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Rom. 5:2). Better we translate the perfect tense of “stand” here, “into this grace in which we have stood.” In other words we initially stood upon the grace of God at conversion and have continued to do so up to the present. As John Newton has written:

’Tis grace has brought me safe thus far’
And grace will lead me home.

To stand upon grace is to trust continually in the saving and sanctifying power of the gospel; it is ceaselessly boasting in the cross of Christ, the result being that “through which [boasting] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). Here is the Apostle yet again indicating the transforming, life changing power of grace as opposed to the impotence of law.

- f. What is it for the heart to be strengthened by grace?

The author of Hebrews writes: “Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods” (Heb. 13:9). Here the power of the grace of God is likened to spiritual nutrition. The stability of the pilgrim is in mind, that is steadfastness, standing firm, by means of spiritual food that strengthens the soul, and even the body in a resultant sense. The vital ingredient is the nourishment of “grace” (cf. Heb. 2:9; 4:16; 10:29; 12:15, 29; 13:25), that is the inward renewal of the soul mediated through those “who led you, who spoke the word of God to you,” v. 7, in contrast with mere outward priestly form, carnal nourishment, religious performance, legal conformity. Of course this “grace” is bestowed through faith alone as 11:1-38 makes clear, that is especially in the environment of a local church where the Word is faithfully ministered by godly leaders, vs. 7-8.

4. The grace inclination of Paul in his presentation of the gospel.

It could never be said that the Apostle Paul was inclined towards legalism in his preaching of the gospel. Quite the opposite critique is surely the case, for Paul tended to lay himself open to the charge of antinomianism and opposition to the Law (Acts 18:13), that is the belief that legal demands and personal behavior have no necessary place or determining effect in the life of the person who simply believes in Jesus. Consequently, claims Paul's critic, with such faith, surely we can sin with abandon since grace will nevertheless preserve us. For instance, in Romans 6:1, 15, Paul responds to very real criticism that salvation by grace alone through faith alone nullifies personal accountability, so much so that we should not be worried about personal sin because grace will nevertheless cover it. Indeed, logically speaking, the more we sin as believers, the more we encourage the provision of grace! Of course, notwithstanding Paul's proclamation of *sola fide* (Rom. 4:4-5), he vigorously denied such charges brought against him while, not in the slightest diminishing his preaching of free grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22-24; 4:16).

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, commenting on Romans 6:1, makes a very searching application concerning the charge of antinomianism that not only the Apostle Paul, but also Martin Luther and John Bunyan appear to have endured, while not ever being called legalists.

The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel. Let me show you what I mean. If a man preaches justification by works no one would ever raise this question.

There is a sense in which the doctrine of justification by faith only is a very dangerous doctrine; dangerous, I mean, in the sense that it can be misunderstood. It exposes a man to this particular charge. People listening to it may say, 'Ah, there is a man who does not encourage us to live a good life, he seems to say that there is no value in our works, he says that 'all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags'. Therefore what he is saying is, that it does not matter what you do, sin as much as you like.' There is thus clearly a sense in which the message of 'justification by faith only' can be dangerous, and likewise with the message that salvation is entirely of grace. I say therefore that if our preaching does not expose us to that charge and to that misunderstanding, it is because we are not really preaching the gospel. Nobody has ever brought this charge [of antinomianism] against the Church of Rome, but it was brought frequently against Martin Luther. . . . It was also brought against George Whitefield two hundred years ago. It is the charge that formal dead Christianity—if there is such a thing—has always brought against this startling, staggering message, that God 'justifies the ungodly', and that we are saved, not by anything that we do, but in spite of it, entirely and only by the grace of God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I would say to all preachers: If your preaching of salvation has not been misunderstood in that way, you had better examine your sermons again, and you had better make sure that you really are preaching the salvation that is offered in the New Testament to the ungodly, to the sinner, to those who are enemies of God.¹⁹

¹⁹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Romans, Exposition of Chapter 6, p. 8-10.

Yet many gospel preachers today have never known such a charge of even mild antinomianism, and this being so, they ought to ask themselves, "Why is this so?" John Bunyan certainly suffered this accusation, even being charged as antinomian by Richard Baxter, and he is to be admired for it because he betrays a true Pauline spirit.