

# **JUDICIAL WARFARE**

Christian Reconstruction and its  
Blueprints For Dominion

by Greg Loren Durand

Crown Rights Book Company  
Toccoa, Georgia

Judicial Warfare:  
Christian Reconstruction and Its Blueprints For Dominion  
by Greg Loren Durand

Third Edition

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## Preface to the Third Edition

I am gratified that this book is now in its third edition. However, the circumstances behind this new edition were less than desirable. In his 2010 polemic entitled, “The Modified Dispensationalism of Greg Loren Durand Exposed,”<sup>1</sup> as well as in his five-part lecture series entitled “Judicial Warfare: A Book Review,”<sup>2</sup> Brian Schwertley, a Theonomist in the so-called Westminster Presbyterian Church in the United States,<sup>3</sup> criticized me for teaching “a bizarre modified dispensationalism,” and “an irrational and virtually incomprehensible” view of the law that is “virtually identical with the Pharisees and the Judaizers,” which placed me “outside the pale of Reformed orthodoxy.”<sup>4</sup> These charges were, for the

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1. Brian Schwertley, “The Modified Dispensationalism of Greg Loren Durand Exposed” (2010 monograph), online at [www.reformedonline.org](http://www.reformedonline.org).

2. Brian Schwertley, “Judicial Warfare: A Book Review” (February 7, 2010 - March 7, 2010), series online at [www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com).

3. At the time of this writing, the WPCUS consists of two small congregations according to their website: [www.wpcus.org](http://www.wpcus.org). They are not recognized as a denomination by the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC): [www.naparc.org](http://www.naparc.org)

4. Schwertley, “Modified Dispensationalism,” pages 1, 6, 8. As vituperative as these epithets may seem, they are mild in comparison with the following:

After reading Durand’s book and his e-mails, I am convinced that Durand is a liar who simply makes up stuff out of thin air. Also, I am thoroughly convinced that any sharp first year student, attending a quality seminary, that reads Durand’s book would immediately recognize that he is not knowledgeable

most part, merely rehashed from his earlier ten-part lecture series in 2007 entitled “A Reformed View of the Judicial Law,”<sup>5</sup> in which he labeled me a “Pelagian” and a “natural law antinomian,” accused me of having a “totally unconfessional” and “heretical view of the law,” and insisted that I believe the Old Testament should be completely ignored, not only in the formulation of civil laws, but also in the sanctification of the individual Christian.

Schwertley’s claims were specifically addressed in a detailed internet response in late 2007,<sup>6</sup> so no further response is necessary here.

of Reformed theology, exegesis and is incredibly sloppy. Anyone familiar with the writings of Christian Reconstructionists that Durand quotes would know almost immediately that he is a crackpot (*ibid.*, page 40).

Such is the overall caustic tenor of Schwertley’s presentation, both written and spoken, and it is a wonder that he ever thought such personal venting suitable for publication. He certainly would have done much better had he heeded the advice of Greg Bahnsen who, in his 1979 response to Meredith Kline, repudiated the “ugliest forms of fallacious reasoning: ridicule, sarcasm, character assassination, name-dropping, and caricature” (“M.G. Kline on Theonomic Politics,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, Volume VI:2 [Winter 1979-1980], page 197).

5. Brian Schwertley, “A Reformed View of the Judicial Law” (August 26, 2007 - December 23, 2007), series online at [www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com).

6. “Modified Dispensationalism Denied: A Response to Brian Schwertley,” online at [www.crownrights.com/store/brian\\_schwertley.php](http://www.crownrights.com/store/brian_schwertley.php). Schwertley claims in his monograph that he “offered to debate Durand on the abiding validity of the Old Testament moral laws back in 2007. He declined” (page 68, footnote). For the record, this offer was never given by Schwertley, nor was it ever declined by myself. The truth is that I attempted over several months to privately discuss these matters with Schwertley, and was repeatedly rebuffed and finally ignored. He also wrote, “I would challenge Durand to attempt to refute this... monograph with specific arguments...” (page 68) Schwertley should consider the contents of this book as my response to his challenge. At this point, I have no intention of engaging Schwertley in any other form of public debate; not only does his overblown rhetoric make it impossible to take him seriously as a scholarly opponent, but he has not shown that he even understands the theological position he has criticized, nor has he demonstrated that he is familiar with the overwhelming corroborative testimony from stalwart Reformed theologians of the past who have taught a very similar, if not identical, view of the law. Furthermore, his hasty and unwarranted attachment of the “dispensational” la-

However, in order to prevent similar misrepresentations in the future, I feel the need to make a clarification right from the beginning. When discussing the believer's relationship to the moral law, Reformed writers have differentiated between the law considered as a covenant of works and the law considered as a rule of life. The first characteristic of the law applies only to unbelievers; the second only to believers. As the Westminster Confession clearly states, "Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet it is of great use to them... as a rule of life..." Paul himself taught that the Christian, who is "not under law [as a covenant], but under [the covenant of] grace" (Romans 6:14), is not therefore "without law to God," but (as a literal rendering should read) "in law to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21). Divested of its external covenant form, which demanded perfect and personal obedience and threatened death (damnation) for failure to produce it, the moral law has been inscribed upon the heart of the believer as the very essence of his new nature. There are no judicial sanctions attached to this form of the law, for God is no longer related to the believer as his Judge, but rather as his Father.

It is important to keep this distinction in mind for it will avert any potential confusion about what is meant when I refer to the law's abrogation, and why I am so adamant in my description of Theonomy and Reconstructionism as a modern variation of the ancient Galatian error. As

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bel to my presentation of the classic law-gospel distinction and the equally classic "republication" interpretation of the Mosaic covenant is typical of the Theonomists for reasons that will be discussed in this book. However, it should be noted that the Dispensational hermeneutic is firmly rooted, not in the law-gospel distinction or in the doctrine of republication, but in the Israel-Church distinction: "A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct.... This is probably the most basic test of whether or not a man is a dispensationalist, and undoubtedly it is the most practical and conclusive. A man who fails to distinguish Israel and the Church will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does will" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* [Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1965], page 44). I have included my critique of this very distinction between Israel and the Church in the present volume (Appendix Seven), which should put to rest any suspicion that I am proposing a "modified Dispensationalism." For another examination of Dispensationalism from a Covenantal perspective, see Nathan Pitchford, "Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology" (2010), online at [www.monergism.com](http://www.monergism.com),

will hopefully become clear to the reader in the following pages, the Theonomists have used the standard Reformed arguments for the continuation of the law as a rule of life in order to teach its establishment and continuing validity as a covenant.<sup>7</sup> This clever “bait and switch”<sup>8</sup> is perhaps one reason why the theonomic system has been tolerated within the Reformed community and has not generally been seen as the theological aberration it really is.<sup>9</sup> For example, in his 1994 assessment of Theonomy,

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7. This phenomenon is most evident in Greg L. Bahnsen’s, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984). After spending many pages proving the continuity of the moral principles found in the Old Testament (a position with which no Christian would disagree), Bahnsen then applied those arguments to a different subject: “covenantal continuity.” Such equivocation is reminiscent of the presentation of evolution found in most school textbooks today, the authors of which spend the majority of their time presenting the indisputable case for *micro*-evolution (variation within species through natural selection), and then applying those arguments to support the scientifically-unproven theory of *macro*-evolution (change from one species to another through natural selection). Using this technique, the Theonomists have been able, much like the evolutionists, to divert attention away from the real issue (that believers no longer relate to the law as a covenant of works) and, at the same time, caricaturize their critics as “dispensationalists” and “antinomians.”

8. For other clear examples, especially in the writings of Bahnsen, see John Robbins, “Will the Real Greg Bahnsen Please Stand Up?” *The Trinity Review*, August 1992.

9. Another reason for the overall ambivalence toward Theonomy was that, by the 1970s, the transformationalism of Dutch neo-Calvinism, particularly that of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Herman Bavinck, which was introduced and popularized in American Presbyterianism primarily through the forty-year teaching career of Cornelius Van Til at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, had almost completely supplanted the traditional Reformed theology of past generations, leaving the Presbyterian churches without any solid ground on which to criticize essentially the same, albeit nuanced, transformationalism of R.J. Rushdoony and the other theonomic writers. When the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia published *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), it became clear that the debate was mostly intramural over the exact details of how the so-called “cultural mandate” was to be carried out by the Church, or, more precisely, what “tools of dominion” were to be used in

Orthodox Presbyterian minister G.I. Williamson wrote, “With the coming of Christ, the Mosaic *system* [the Old Covenant] was set aside once and for all. If theonomy sought to put us under that system again, I would certainly oppose it. But does it? I have seen no convincing evidence that it does” (emphasis in original).<sup>10</sup> As I argue in this book, that is precisely what Rushdoony did explicitly, and what Bahnsen did implicitly (all other theonomic writers have followed either Rushdoony or Bahnsen). The key to an understanding of the theonomic system is an unbiblical, and decidedly unconfessional, monocovenantalism which few Theonomists have been willing to admit and few of their critics have been able to detect. This monocovenantal “law in gospel” hermeneutic is the product of the twentieth-century neo-orthodoxy of the Barth-Fuller-Shepherd school, which itself was a resurgence of some of the teachings of the

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redeeming the culture and extending Christ’s Kingdom in the world. The Theonomists immediately responded with three volumes of their own: Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991); Gary North, *Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991); and Gary North (editor), *Theonomy: An Informed Response* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). In relation to redeeming the culture for Christ and stemming the tide of rising humanism in today’s society, the Theonomists ask, “By what standard?” and in response to the perceived silence from their dissenters, they conclude that “you can’t beat something with nothing.” Of course, this begs the question as to the true nature of Christ’s Kingdom and whether the cultural work that Christians do in this world is redemptive to begin with.

Today, Dutch neo-Calvinism (Kuyperianism) remains the dominant form of Covenant theology, especially within Presbyterianism. A specific critique of this system is beyond the scope of this book, although the discussion herein of Theonomy’s reliance on Van Til’s distinctive apologetic method, as well as its denial of the Reformed “two kingdom” paradigm would apply to Kuyperianism in general as well. For a helpful and concise contrast of the Kuyperian and traditional Reformed worldviews, see David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision For Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010); Cornelius Pronk, “Neo-Calvinism,” *Reformed Theological Journal*, November 1995, pages 42-56.

10. G.I. Williamson, “Some Thoughts on Theonomy,” *New Horizons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Volume XV, Number 10 (November 1994).

Scottish Neonomians of the early Eighteenth Century.<sup>11</sup> No Theonomist thus far, nor anyone sympathetic to that perspective, has rebutted my arguments in this regard, Brian Schwertley certainly being no exception. Nor has anyone been able to prove that this monocovenantalism did not lay the foundation for the later Federal Vision movement which attracted, and still attracts, to itself so many of those formerly active in theonomic circles.<sup>12</sup>

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11. Originally written in 1645, Edward Fisher's formerly obscure work, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, was reprinted in 1718 in response to the Neonomian faction within the Church of Scotland. The Neonomians held that the Gospel was a "new law" in which faith and repentance from sin were presented as the legal requirements for salvation. The book was again republished in 1726 with added annotations by Thomas Boston. In opposition to the Neonomians, the so-called "Marrow Men" taught that faith was simple trust in the free offer of Christ to sinners in the Gospel, with repentance following, not preceding, conversion. They insisted that the failure to distinguish faith and obedience necessarily introduced human merit into the *ordo salutis*, thereby corrupting the Gospel of free grace. Ralph Erskine, one of the Marrow Men, voiced his objections in the following sonnet:

Hence Neonomians spring, as sundry call  
 The new law-makers, to redress our fall.  
 The law of works into repentance, faith,  
 Is chang'd, as their Baxterian Bible saith.  
 Shaping the gospel to an easy law,  
 They build their tott'ring house with hay and straw;  
 Yet hide, like Rachel's idols in the stuff,  
 Their legal hands within a gospel-muff (*The Poetical Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Mr. Ralph Erskine* [Falkirk: Patrick Mair, 1797], page 88.

The presbyters who sided with the Marrow Men were condemned as Antinomians and finally departed from the Church of Scotland in 1733 to form the Secession Church, which itself was the progenitor of the Free Church of Scotland formed in 1843. True to its historic opposition to Neonomianism, the Free Church of Scotland is a leading critic of Theonomy ("Theonomy and the Westminster Confession," 1998 Report of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland; online at [www.rbvincent.com/BibleStudies/Freekirk.htm](http://www.rbvincent.com/BibleStudies/Freekirk.htm)).

12. R. Scott Clark, "Theonomy and Federal Vision: Separated at Birth?" (posted 17 June 2008 at [www.heidelblog.net](http://www.heidelblog.net)).

## Preface To the Second Edition

I became a Christian in late 1984. Like so many other modern Evangelicals, I never knew exactly what to do with the Old Testament. To me, it was a confusing collection of stories that all related in some way to an angry God taking vengeance on someone — usually the Israelites. If they were not being stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath or some other seemingly trivial offense, they were being hauled off to a foreign land for worshiping idols. The New Testament seemed so radically different. Sure, idolatry was still something to be avoided, but the Apostles were now leaving room for repentance rather than pronouncing sentences of death. Even adulterers were getting off easy with mere excommunication. It seemed clear that Christians are living under a completely different redemptive system than were the chosen people in the Old Testament. What other reason could there be for a God who was once so strict to be so lenient now? I was a Dispensationalist by default because I did not know of any other alternative. Even after I had embraced a Reformed soteriology, I still failed to comprehend what relationship, if any, the New Covenant believer had to the Old Testament.

It was inevitable that something would eventually come in to fill this void in my theology. Theonomy was that something. In 1993, a friend gave me a copy of Kenneth Gentry's latest book, *God's Law in the Modern World*, and I excitedly read through it in only a few hours. *God's Law* was just a small book of little more than a hundred pages, but it packed quite a punch. Gentry's explanation of Matthew 5:17-19, Deuteronomy 4:6-8, and other theonomic proof-texts was so convincing that there was no longer anything to discuss. God intended the Mosaic law to be the standard throughout history, not only for the personal sanctification

and national polity of His covenant people, but, more importantly, also as a “blueprint” for the governments of the world, and that was that.

After a brief confrontation with the pastor of a Calvinistic Baptist church I was attending, I soon found myself firmly planted in a theonomic congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Denver, Colorado where I would commence my nearly decade-long sojourn within the ranks of the Reconstruction movement. Being a voracious reader by nature, I devoured every book by theonomic authors the church bookstore had to offer, particularly those authored by Greg Bahnsen and Gary North. Under the supervision of the session, I began publishing *The Quarterly Journal of Reformed Studies*, a sizeable theological journal self-consciously modeled after the then-defunct *Antithesis* magazine of the early 1990s and which was primarily a soapbox for my new-found views. I also wrote numerous tracts, pamphlets, and books on theonomic themes. My zeal was even noted by Bahnsen himself, who made mention of some of my writings in a 1994 issue of his *Pen Point* newsletter. My wife had frequent telephone conversations with Bahnsen’s secretary, Michael Butler, and she was told on more than one occasion that I had “great potential” and would be a good candidate for enrollment in the apologetics courses offered through the Southern California Center for Christian Studies.

Not long after moving to north Georgia to join a prominent Reconstructionist church in 2001, I unexpectedly found the theonomic rug pulled out from under me. Philip Mauro’s critique of Dispensational Premillennialism entitled, *The Hope of Israel*, which had sat unread on my bookshelf for several years, providentially caught my eye one afternoon and I started reading it. As a committed Postmillennialist, I already knew why I rejected Premillennialism, so I did not expect to learn anything new from this book. I was very mistaken. Mauro’s biblical exegesis of the spiritual nature of God’s Kingdom completely demolished not only his intended target, but my own worldview as well. The scales instantly fell off my eyes and the entire theonomic system to which I had been devoted for so long suddenly seemed alien to me. Late one night, lying sleepless in bed, I suddenly turned to my wife and said, “I’m an Amillennialist now!” After years of hearing me mock Amillennialism as “impotent religion” and its adherents as “losers in history,” this announcement must have come as quite a shock to her. Even more shocking to me was the almost effortless completion of the first draft of this book; indeed, it almost seemed to write itself. So radically had my position changed that



I struggled intensely with self-doubt, worrying that I may have fallen into rank heresy. However, after re-reading my manuscript at least a dozen times, and receiving positive feedback from several Reformed ministers and elders to whom it was submitted, I finally surrendered to the conviction that my abandonment of the theonomic ship was biblically justified. I believe that only the Holy Spirit could have brought about such an instantaneous and complete paradigm shift and it is my prayer that He will use this updated and expanded edition of my book to pull other people out of what remains today of the Reconstructionist movement.



## Introduction

The influence of the Reconstruction movement, and its underlying ethical system known as Theonomy, is quite broad despite the admission of one of its founders that it is “a recently articulated philosophy,”<sup>1</sup> “unquestionably new,” “a major break” with two thousand years of Church history, and a “theological revolution.”<sup>2</sup> Even though Reconstructionists often claim Dutch Reformed theologian Cornelius Van Til as the forerunner of their movement,<sup>3</sup> the true “father” of Reconstructionism was the

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1. Gary North, *Backward Christian Soldiers? An Manual For Christian Reconstruction* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), page 267.

2. Gary North, *Tools of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), page 7.

3. Gary North, *Political Polytheism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), page 162; Gary North, *Theonomy: An Informed Response* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), pages 16-17. Although his anti-natural law approach to apologetics laid the groundwork for Reconstructionism, Van Til himself disclaimed affiliation with the movement, writing, “...I am frankly a little concerned about the political views of Mr. Rushdoony and Mr. North and particularly if I am correctly informed about some of the views Gary North has with respect to the application of Old Testament principles to our day. My only point is that I would hope and expect that they would not claim that such views are inherent in the principles I hold” (letter to Gregg Singer, 11 May 1972; cited in North, *Political Polytheism*, page 133fn).

According to Van Til, “the natural [unregenerate] man is as blind as a mole with respect to natural things as well as with respect to spiritual things”

late Rousas John Rushdoony,<sup>4</sup> a former ordained minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church<sup>5</sup> who published the “bible” of the movement,

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*(Introduction to Systematic Theology* [Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974], page 82), and “the natural man does not, on his principles, have any knowledge of the truth” (*Common Grace and the Gospel* [Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972], page 184). To a Van Tilian, therefore, there can be no such thing as natural revelation, natural religion, and natural law. In later chapters of this book, the reader will see how the application of Van Tilianism to the civil realm has led the Reconstructionists to insist upon revealed biblical law as the only legitimate source of governmental authority, and why some of the movement’s leaders have openly denounced the historic Reformed understanding of the magistrate’s role as “heretical nonsense.” For a critique of Van Til’s presuppositionalism, see D.R. Trethewie, “A Critique of Cornelius Van Til: Being a Defense of Traditional Evidential Christian Apologetics” (2002 monograph, online at [www.members.tripod.com/~quick\\_geelong/Docs/Critique\\_of\\_Van\\_Til.pdf](http://www.members.tripod.com/~quick_geelong/Docs/Critique_of_Van_Til.pdf)).

4. Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity: A Biblical Response to Dave Hunt* (Fort Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1988), page 184; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “A Tribute to the Father of Christian Reconstruction,” *The Chalcedon Report*, April 2001.

5. Rushdoony left his pastorate in 1962 and after his resignation from the OPC in 1970 he was never again a member of any recognized church body. Instead, he conducted private Bible studies in his office with his family on Sunday mornings; these private meetings later were identified as “Chalcedon Church” in 1991, with himself presiding as “reverend,” though there is no record of when or how this change of status occurred. Rushdoony’s antagonism toward the institutional Church persisted throughout most of his career. He condemned ecclesiastical authority beyond local assemblies as “heretical” and urged his readers to separate from “modern Sanhedrins” (“The Nature of the Church,” *Calvinism Today*, October 1991, pages 4, 8). Insisting that “one of the greatest needs of our time is a radical revision of our various doctrines of the church” (“The Church: What Is It?” *Chalcedon Report*, July 1992, page 20), he wrote that “the family is central to the covenant and therefore to every Christian institution, church, state, school, and all things else” (*Systematic Theology* [Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1994], Volume II, page 678). The ordained ministry, according to Rushdoony, is “a form of Phariseeism,” because the office of elder “is the name of the head of a family” (*ibid.*, pages 683, 705). Consequently, the “keys of the kingdom” are consigned to the family rather than to the visible Church, with the man acting as “prophet, priest, and king”

*The Institutes of Biblical Law*,<sup>6</sup> in 1973. About the same time, a young admirer of Rushdoony named Greg L. Bahnsen wrote his Th.M. thesis entitled “The Theonomic Responsibility of the Civil Magistrate,” which was later published as *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*.<sup>7</sup> This work generated considerable controversy within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, of which denomination Bahnsen would become an ordained minister.<sup>8</sup> Both Rushdoony and Bahnsen are now deceased, but their work is continued by The Chalcedon Foundation in Vallecito, California and Covenant Media Foundation in Nacogdoches, Texas.

However, the most influential of the movement’s spokesmen is Gary North, who was personally mentored by Rushdoony in the 1960s<sup>9</sup>

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to his household.

Rushdoony’s views on the family and his related views on race, which he tied to the anti-hybridization and unequal yoking laws in the Old Testament, would later give rise to the Kinist movement as well as the less extreme forms of theonomic patriarchy which permeate some segments of the Christian homeschool movement. His patriarchalism also caused a split in the Reconstruction movement and was criticized as “pagan familism” by his disowned son-in-law, Gary North, in *Baptized Patriarchalism: The Cult of the Family* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1995). His radical views on the Church and consistent avoidance of ecclesiastical accountability throughout his career were documented by North in Chapter Ten of *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

6. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973).

7. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984). Bahnsen was only twenty-four when he wrote his thesis.

8. According to Gary North and Gary DeMar, “Turmoil began soon, when Bahnsen came under fire in the Southern California Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, where he was seeking ordination. It took him two years to gain it, and some of the same elders who fought him then are still trying to undermine him today” (*Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn’t* [Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991], page xiii).

9. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 21. Their relationship was so close that North eventually married Rushdoony’s daughter, Sharon. However, partly due to North’s refusal to accept Rushdoony’s extreme patriarchal views, he and his wife were disowned in 1981 and the two men remained alienated from each

and was brought to the newly-founded Chalcedon Foundation in 1973 to study the relationship between Old Testament law and economics. He has since written nearly three dozen volumes, some of which are well over 1,000 pages in length.<sup>10</sup> Over the span of his career, North has issued a long string of failed predictions relating to the imminent economic collapse of the United States.<sup>11</sup> Based on his doctrine of “covenantal sanctions,” these catastrophic events were touted as impending divine judgment on “covenant breakers,” thus giving “covenant-keeping” Christians opportunity to seize control of the government in order to implement “biblical law” in society. North did the most serious damage to his own credibility when the “Y2K computer bug” failed to bring the world to a standstill in January of 2000 as he had been warning for several years.<sup>12</sup> After a short period of relative silence, North has only recently resurfaced with a carefully repackaged “biblical economics” on Lewellyn Rock-

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other throughout the remainder of Rushdoony’s life.

10. See [www.garynorth.com/freebooks](http://www.garynorth.com/freebooks). North’s *magnum opus* is his *Tools of Dominion*. In the introduction of this massive 1,287-page volume, North reveled in the fact that *Tools* is a “fat book” and compared it to Aurelius Augustine’s *City of God*, John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, and even to the Bible itself (North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 2). While North does demonstrate an impressive education, the bulk of his writings consist of a reworking of material he has already presented elsewhere, complete with repeated footnoted references to his own publications. Even a casual reader of North’s works will notice that humility is not one of his long suits.

11. In a 1987 essay entitled, “The Plague Has Come At Last,” North also predicted global collapse and panic as a result of the AIDS epidemic: “64 million Americans will be infected by the end of 1990,” and “in 1992, we will run out of available hospital beds.”

12. Claiming on his website that he had “read more on y2k than anyone on earth,” North’s predicted that “non-compliant systems will all fail,” “two billion people could die,” “the layoffs in 2000 and 2001 will dwarf the Great Depression,” “without banks, water, sewers, communications, and electrical power, cities will become nightmares,” and “under such conditions, the Federal government would have to declare martial law.” Many of North’s followers took these dire warnings so seriously that they relocated to rural areas and began stockpiling weapons, gold and silver coins, and food in preparation for a global apocalypse which never materialized.

well's daily libertarian commentary website.<sup>13</sup>

Less visible personalities in the Reconstruction camp include Kenneth L. Gentry, Gary DeMar, and the late David Chilton. Christian political conservatism (often referred to by its opponents as “The Religious Right”) has become so infiltrated by Reconstructionism that the two have become almost synonymous terms. One of the most tenaciously held beliefs of Christian conservatives is that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and must therefore be restored to its biblical roots.<sup>14</sup> The Christian homeschool movement has also proved to be fertile soil for the growth of Reconstructionist ideas,<sup>15</sup> and one of Rushdoony's earlier books on the history and philosophy behind public education<sup>16</sup> has been referred to as “a turning point in the history of Christian education in the United States,”<sup>17</sup> and “a major influence in the fledgling homeschool movement....”<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Homeschool Legal Defense Association was founded in 1983 by Michael Farris, one of Rushdoony's follow-

13. [www.lewrockwell.com/north/north-arch.html](http://www.lewrockwell.com/north/north-arch.html). North's affiliation with Rockwell is odd considering his earlier criticisms of Rushdoony's own libertarian views (North, *Tithing and the Church*, pages 143ff).

14. John Eidsmoe, *Christianity and the Constitution: The Faith of Our Founding Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987); David Barton, *The Myth of Separation: What is the Correct Relationship Between Church and State?* (Aledo, Texas: WallBuilder Press, 1992); David Barton, *Original Intent: The Courts, the Constitution, and Religion* (Aledo, Texas: WallBuilder Press, 1997).

15. Until its recent closure, Vision Forum Ministries in San Antonio, Texas was the leading purveyor of Reconstructionism within the Christian homeschool movement. Its founder and president, Douglas Phillips, was heavily influenced by Rushdoony's teachings, particularly his controversial views on patriarchy. Generations With Vision in Elizabeth, Colorado is another popular organization with strong Reconstructionist leanings, and its director, Kevin Swanson, is a frequent speaker at homeschool conventions and workshops across the United States.

16. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education* (Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, 1963).

17. Gary North, “The Messianic Character of American Education: 50th Anniversary,” online at [www.garynorth.com](http://www.garynorth.com).

18. Jay Rogers, “The Second American Revolution,” online at [www.forerunner.com](http://www.forerunner.com).

ers, gaining over fifteen thousand members within the first seven years of its existence. Other organizations which have openly advocated or have at least been influenced by Reconstructionism are Pat Robertson's 700 Club, his Christian Broadcasting Network and Regent College, Jay Sekulow's American Center for Law and Justice, Randall Terry's Operation Rescue, Howard Phillips' Constitution Party (formerly, the U.S. Taxpayers Party), and Michael Anthony Peroutka's Institute on the Constitution and the associated American View radio program which he hosts with John Lofton. Some organizations which formerly were associated with Reconstructionism, such as the Rutherford Institute, have now distanced themselves from the movement.<sup>19</sup>

The Reconstructionists are not content to be ignored and they certainly will not go away if the Christian Church does ignore them.<sup>20</sup> One thing that may be said to their credit: they are a very zealous people. However, zeal is of no value if it is attached to serious theological error (Romans 10:2), as will be proved here. Given the voluminous literature that has been produced by the leading Reconstructionists over the last four decades, it will not be possible to respond to everything they have written. Though this book is not intended to be an exhaustive rebuttal of

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19. Rushdoony wrote the outline for Rutherford Institute founder John W. Whitehead's first book, *The Separation Illusion: A Lawyer Examines the First Amendment* (Fenton, Michigan: Mott Media, 1977), and served on the Institute's board of directors for several years (Fred Clarkson, *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy* [Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1997], pages 92-93). In turn, Whitehead wrote the foreword to Gary DeMar's *Ruler of the Nations* (Fort Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987) and gave honorable mention to Rushdoony several times in his book, *The Second American Revolution* (Elgin, Illinois: David Cook Publishing Company, 1982).

20. Gary North wrote, "Our critics... wish that theologians would go away and leave them in their ethical slumber. We won't. That is what the 1980's demonstrated: theologians will not go away. We will not shut up. Our critics can ignore us no longer and still remain intellectually respectable. We have written too much, and we continue to write" (*Tools of Dominion*, page 12).



the movement,<sup>21</sup> it is hoped that it will serve as a helpful guide for those

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21. Greg Bahnsen once denied that Reconstructionism constitutes a movement:

I don't consider Christian Reconstruction a "movement," but rather a school of thought. Christian Reconstruction includes people from a number of denominations and traditions. It has no central authority, or chain of command, or any other sociological marks of a "movement." But it does have fundamental theological distinctives: the authority of scripture, with a presuppositional approach to apologetics, the idea of moral absolutes where all the Bible is ethically relevant, and an optimistic view of redemptive history. In short, while it is not a movement, Christian Reconstruction is a distinctive and challenging school of thought (*Contra Mundum*, Winter 1992).

DeMar and Leithart also made the same attempt in *The Reduction of Christianity* (pages 30-31). However, the majority of Reconstructionist writers have not had any qualms about identifying it as a "movement." For example, in his book, *Backward Christian Soldiers?*, Gary North wrote, "The battle for the mind is between the Christian reconstruction movement, which alone among Protestant groups takes seriously the law of God, and everyone else" (pages 65-66). On the back cover of the book, North identified himself as "the economist of the Christian Reconstruction Movement." In *Tools of Dominion*, North stated that "the Christian Reconstruction movement does represent a major break with recent church history" (page 7). In *Political Polytheism*, he admitted that Reconstructionism is a "new movement" which has created "new terms" and has "redefin[ed] old terms" in order to "lay additional foundations for a theological paradigm shift which has already begun" (page 52). In the same book, he stated that Cornelius Van Til's apologetic method "launched the Christian Reconstruction movement" (page 162), and he referred to the 1980s as "a watershed period for the Christian Reconstruction movement..." (page 214). In the book description for *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn't*, which North co-authored with Gary DeMar, he wrote, "Christian Reconstruction is a theological system, a movement of independent activists, and a cultural ideal." In an August 1995 letter to I.C.E. subscribers, North gave tips on how "to become part of the Christian Reconstruction movement." Thus, not only has North consistently classified Reconstructionism as a movement, but throughout his writings, he has also identified Rushdoony and himself as its founders and Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* as its foundational text.

The official periodical of Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation has also never been shy about identifying Reconstructionism as a movement (e.g., *The Chalcedon Report*, April 1997). DeMar and Leithart, who, as mentioned above, attempted to deny that Reconstructionism constitutes a movement at one point in *Reduction of Christianity*, later contradicted themselves in the same book by

who lack the time and patience to wade through the excessive verbiage produced by the Reconstructionists in order to learn what they really teach. One of the main complaints of the Reconstructionists has been that their critics have not really understood their position and have therefore merely attacked “strawmen” rather than offering legitimate objections.<sup>22</sup> The reader may be assured that this author, himself a former Reconstructionist, knows what the main pillars of the system are and what arguments are relied upon to uphold the structure. May the Lord use what is presented in the following pages to awaken the Reformed community to the errors of Theonomy and Reconstructionism.

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writing, “Anyone who reads published criticisms of the Christian Reconstruction position should carefully examine these criticisms to see whether the particular critic offers evidence that he or she has read the basic literature of the movement and has quoted from large sections of it, word for word” (page 362).

Thus, Reconstructionism may legitimately be labeled a “movement,” despite Bahnsen’s attempt to deny the obvious. While it is true that there never was a “chain of command,” there has nevertheless always been a “central authority” and “leadership”: the writings of Rushdoony, North, and Bahnsen.

22. For example, John Maphet wrote, “The one thing that stands out in the approach many have taken in confronting the issue of theonomy is this: instead of going to primary sources... the critics have relied solely on secondary sources.... This seems to be endemic with the modern-day opponents of theonomy. With this approach the theonomist will never get a fair hearing” (“A Pastor’s Response,” in North, *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, page 298). In their book, *The Reduction of Christianity*, DeMar and Leithart agreed:

The amount of Christian Reconstruction literature is large and growing rapidly. It will continue to grow. Anyone who reads published criticisms of the Christian Reconstruction position should carefully examine these criticisms to see whether the particular critic offers evidence that he or she has read the basic literature of the movement and has quoted from large sections of it, word for word. Has the critic provided accurate footnotes to Reconstructionism’s books, articles, and newsletters? If not, then the reader should be initially skeptical of the critic’s accusations. Perhaps the critic has not really mastered the literature that is being criticized. Perhaps it is a case of bearing false witness. Critics are responsible for doing their homework carefully; they should not rush into print with a lot of wild and unsubstantiated accusations. Their books should offer evidence that they have done their homework (page 362).

## **Part One:** Theonomy

Salvation is by the grace of God through faith; sanctification is by the law of God.... Those who are in the covenant are in a covenant of grace which is also a covenant of works. The grace enables them to perform the works which are required of them....

*Rousas John Rushdoony*

Such is the natural propensity of man's heart to the way of the law, in opposition to Christ, that, as the tainted vessel turns the taste of the purest liquor put into it, so the natural man turns the very gospel into law, and transforms the covenant of grace into a covenant of works.

*Thomas Boston*



# Chapter One:

## An Overview of Historic Covenant Theology

### Covenant Theology is Biblical Christianity

Before commencing an exposition of the theonomic foundation of Reconstructionism, it is necessary to outline the theological premise upon which this book will proceed: that of historic Covenant theology as taught in the Westminster Standards and the other creeds and confessions of the various Reformed denominations. While Covenant theology was first systematized in sixteenth-century Zurich and Geneva, its doctrinal roots go deep into the patristic period.<sup>1</sup> Of course, Covenant theologians would argue that it is, in fact, the theology of the Bible and that to whatever extent one departs from it, he departs from biblical Christianity. J. Ligon Duncan described Covenant theology as follows:

Covenant theology is the Gospel set in the context of God's eternal plan of communion with his people, and its historical outworking in the covenants of works and grace (as well as in the various progressive stages of the covenant of grace). It explains the meaning of the death of Christ in light of the fullness of the biblical teaching on the divine covenants, undergirds our understanding of the nature and use of the sacraments, and provides the fullest possible explanation of the ground

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1. Andrew A. Woolsey, "The Covenant in the Church Fathers," *Haddington House Journal* 5 (2003), pages 25-52; Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology: The Key of Theology in Reformed Thought and Tradition* (Rosshire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2004), pages 13-14.

of our assurance. Put another way, covenant theology is the Bible's way of explaining and deepening our understanding of: (1) the atonement (the meaning of the death of Christ); (2) assurance (the basis of our confidence of communion with God and enjoyment of his promises); (3) the sacraments (signs and seals of God's covenant promises — what they are and how they work); and (4) the continuity of redemptive history (the unified plan of God's salvation). Covenant theology is also a hermeneutic, an approach to understanding the Scripture — an approach that attempts to biblically explain the unity of biblical revelation.

Covenant theology is a blending of biblical and systematic theology. It is biblical theology in the sense that covenant theology recognizes that the Bible itself structures the progress of redemptive history through the succession of covenants. It is systematic theology in that it recognizes the covenants as a fundamental architectonic or organizing principle for the Bible's theology. Thus it proceeds to integrate the biblical teaching about the federal headships of Adam and Christ, the covenantal nature of the incarnation and atonement, the continuities and discontinuities in the progress of redemptive history, the relation of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, law and gospel, into a coherent theological system.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of covenant is the bedrock of biblical revelation and is an inescapable reality whether one is a believer or not. This is the case because the relationship between God and man is at all times covenantal; God never deals with His creation except through covenant. According to one writer, "Essentially, 'covenant' is a bond or relationship between two parties. In the covenants between God and humanity, the Lord God sovereignly imposes the terms of these arrangements in accordance with his own will and good pleasure."<sup>3</sup> Just as in the suzerain-vassal relationships of the ancient Near East,<sup>4</sup> man does not have the freedom to decide

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2. J. Ligon Duncan, "Covenant Theology is Historic Christianity," online at [www.thirdmill.org](http://www.thirdmill.org).

3. Mark W. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 2000), page 11.

4. George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955); Meredith G. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963); J.A. Thompson, *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1964); Kenneth Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Test-*

for himself whether or not he will accept the covenantal terms imposed upon him by his Master. The very fact that he exists at God's pleasure places him under this obligation.

### The Covenant of Works

Orthodox Covenant theology traditionally has viewed the Creator-creature relationship in terms of two covenants: the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. Though distinct with regards to their contrasted conditions (works versus faith<sup>5</sup>), each of these two covenants is nevertheless directly related to and therefore cannot be properly interpreted in isolation of the other. The first of these two covenants is referred to variously as the Covenant of Life, the Covenant of Creation, the Covenant of Nature, or, as it is most commonly called, the Covenant of Works. The Westminster Standards teach that when God created man in the Garden of Eden, He entered into a Covenant of Works (or Covenant of Life) with him in which Adam, the federal head of mankind,<sup>6</sup> was promised eternal (glorified, or eschatological) life as the reward for fulfillment of the terms of the covenant,<sup>7</sup> which Covenant theologians have generally agreed was perfect obedience to the moral law for a limited

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*ament* (Chicago, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1966); Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963).

5. William Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*; in *The Complete Works of William Perkins* (Cambridge: John Legatt, 1626, Volume II, page 299; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), Book II, Chapter 9:4; 16. Theodore Beza, *The Christian Faith* (East Sussex, England: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1992), pages 40-41

6. "A federal head is a common representative, or public person; a person, as it were, dilated into many; or many persons contracted into one, appointed to stand in the stead of others: so that what he doth, as acting in that public capacity, is as valid in law, to all intents and purposes, as if those, whom he represents, had in their own persons done it" (Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants* [London: Religious Tract Society, 1846], page 62).

7. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 7, Section 2; Chapter 19, Section 1; Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 20.

time.<sup>8</sup> This condition was focused in the one commandment to abstain from eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16-17), in which commandment was contained the whole of Adam's duty to both God and his fellow man (his posterity).<sup>9</sup> Though these specific terms are not found in the Genesis account, the covenantal concept is nevertheless present,<sup>10</sup> and the prelapsarian relationship of man to God is expressly

8. Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 92; Thomas Boston, "A View of the Covenant of Works From the Sacred Records," in Samuel M'Millan (editor), *The Complete Works of the Late Reverend Thomas Boston* (London: William Tegg and Company, 1853), Volume II, page 195; Robert Lewis Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Presbyterian Publishing Company of St. Louis, 1878), page 305.

9. John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, [1816] 2009), page 12; Boston, "A View of the Covenant of Works," page 194. A compelling case has recently been made that Adam's probation primarily involved the positive duty to serve as king and priest under God (G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* [Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004]). In his kingly role, he was to expand the boundaries of the Garden by exercising dominion over the created order in general; in his priestly role, he was to guard the Garden (a prototypal temple) in particular against anything that would defile it. The test of his obedience to these assigned tasks was the prohibition regarding the Tree of Knowledge, and the promised reward of eschatological life was symbolized by the Tree of Life. Like his Creator, Adam was to finish his work and then enter his rest; of course, in allowing Satan access into God's sanctuary, Adam failed in his assignment and was cast out. This interpretation of the Edenic covenant, though not found in precisely these terms in historic Reformed literature, does appear to do justice to the New Testament's identification of Christ, the "last Adam," as both king and priest, who came to do His Father's will in conquering sin and vanquishing the Devil, and thereafter entered His eternal Kingdom.

10. Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1850), page 29. Opponents of Covenant theology, particularly the Remonstrants of the Seventeenth Century, have always insisted that the Covenant of Works is a fiction imposed on the creation narrative which lacks clear scriptural support. Some Reformed denominations, such as the Protestant Reformed Church, also reject it, as do proponents of so-called New Covenant Theology. For a scholarly defense of the doctrine and response to common objections, see J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace*



described in covenantal terms later in Scripture (Job 31:33; Hosea 6:7). In fact, it forms the basis of Paul's comparison between the "two Adams" in Romans 5:19 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-49.

It is impossible to know how long Adam's probation was intended to last before he would have received the promised reward, but that point is irrelevant given the fact that the Fall was foreordained.<sup>11</sup> In transgressing the covenant, Adam substituted his own will for that of his Creator and violated the entire moral law at once,<sup>12</sup> resulting in a loss of innocence and the imposition of the threatened curse: spiritual death and separation from God for both himself and his posterity (Isaiah 24:5; Romans

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(Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007), Chapter Three. An earlier version of this work, which was presented as a doctoral dissertation in 2005, is online at [www.calvin.edu/library/database/dissertations](http://www.calvin.edu/library/database/dissertations)

11. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 7. This is not to deny that Adam sinned by an act of his own free will: "...God set man's will only toward good; yet it was movable to evil, and that only by man himself; to whom God gave a sufficient power to stand in his integrity, if he had pleased" (Ebenezer Erskine, Ralph Erskine, and James Fisher, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism Explained* [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian Board of Publications, n.d.], Volume I, page 64). An important distinction must be maintained between God's causal and permissive decrees.

12. Edward Fisher explained how Adam violated the moral law, as it is summarized in the Ten Commandments:

1. He chose himself another god when he followed the devil.
2. He idolized and deified his own belly; as the apostle's phrase is, "He made his belly his God."
3. He took the name of God in vain, when he believed him not.
4. He kept not the rest and estate wherein God had set him.
5. He dishonoured his Father who was in heaven; and therefore his days were not prolonged in that land which the Lord his God had given him.
6. He massacred himself and all his posterity.
7. From Eve he was a virgin, but in eyes and mind he committed spiritual fornication.
8. He stole, like Achan, that which God had set aside not to be meddled with; and this his stealth is that which troubles all Israel — the whole world.
9. He bare witness against God, when he believed the witness of the devil before him.
10. He coveted an evil covetousness, like Ammon, which cost him his life, and all his progeny (*Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pages 35-36).

5:12).<sup>13</sup> He was thereafter cut off from access to the Tree of Life, banished from the Garden, and sent out into a cursed world where the effects of sin would wreak havoc on his physical body and eventually put him into the grave.<sup>14</sup> The Covenant of Works did not contain a clause of mercy, so had God not intervened by establishing a second covenant with Adam, commonly called the Covenant of Grace, through which He promised a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15), mankind would have been irreconcilably cut off from any possibility of salvation and immediately consumed by divine wrath.<sup>15</sup>

Following God's own example (Genesis 3:21), hope in the promise was kept alive by His people through the offering of animal sacrifices,<sup>16</sup> but as the centuries passed, mankind began to drift into the pagan belief that man may appease the Deity by his own works.<sup>17</sup> This belief is not so much incorrect as it is incomplete, in that the effects of the fall on human nature has rendered such a task impossible.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, his accountability to the moral law under the Covenant of Works is universally understood by every man because it is, in fact, ingrained into his very consciousness that there is a God to whom he is responsible for his sins (Romans 1: 2:15). Fallen man does not need special revelation to know his predicament, for nature itself testifies of his obligations to his

13. Westminster Confession, Chapter 6, Section 2; Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 22.

14. Westminster Larger Catechism, Questions 25-28.

15. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 48.

16. That early men associated animal sacrifice with God's promise of a Redeemer is proved by Abel's obedient offering of the best of his flocks (Genesis 4:4), and of Noah's later offering of some of "every clean beast, and of every clean fowl" on "an altar unto the LORD" (Genesis 8:20).

17. Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1916), Chapter Four, Section Two, pages 144ff. Cain was the originator of this heresy, as evidenced by his offering of grain, the work of his own physical labor (Genesis 4:3).

18. "No system of religion was ever invented, really, by man. All false religions, in their essential features, are founded in perversions of Divine truth, or, as saith the Apostle, a "changing of the truth of God into a lie" (Erasmus Q. Fuller, *The Two Sabbaths* [Cincinnati, Ohio: Poe and Hitchcock, 1864], pages 44-45).

Creator and of his failure to meet them (Romans 1:18-32).<sup>19</sup> What *is* hidden from the natural man — what he is incapable of knowing apart from special revelation — is the mystery of the Gospel that God Himself would enter human history to redeem sinners from the curse of the broken covenant (1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 3:4-6; 1 Timothy 3:16).

### The Progression of Redemptive History

The Old Testament is a record of how God providentially orchestrated human events over many centuries in preparation for the advent of the Redeemer. First, He called Abraham out of his homeland and established a covenant with him and his descendants, the only condition of which was simple faith (Genesis 15; Galatians 3:6). The New Testament makes it clear that these descendants are not merely his physical posterity (as Dispensationalism teaches<sup>20</sup>), but those who share the faith of Abraham out of every “nation, tribe, and tongue” (Galatians 3:29; Revelation 5:9). Ultimately, according to the Apostle Paul, the “seed” of Abraham is Christ Himself (Galatians 3:16), and so it is safe to conclude that the Abrahamic covenant was a further development of the Covenant of Grace which was first announced in Genesis 3:15. This covenantal relationship was passed from Abraham to Isaac, and then to Jacob, through whom the twelve tribes of national Israel came.

After the death of Joseph, the Israelites were enslaved for four hundred years in Egypt (Exodus 1:8-14). During that period, the Abrahamic faith suffered corruption and by the time God raised up Moses as their deliverer, the influence of paganism upon Israelite religion had become substantial.<sup>21</sup> In fact, there is reason to believe that worship of the Egyptian sun-god had largely supplanted that of the true God, together with its system of divine appeasement grounded on human merit. As such, knowledge of man’s fall in Adam, and of the promise of redemp-

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19. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Chapter 3:1.

20. See Appendix Seven.

21. Thomas Bell, *A View of the Covenants of Works and Grace* (Glasgow, Scotland: Edward Khull and Company, 1814), page 37; John Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Sons, 1853), page 150.

tion through the coming Redeemer, was in danger of being lost.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, God raised up Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt and brought them to Sinai (Horeb), where He declared His covenant with them, reaffirming and expanding the covenant previously made with Abraham (Exodus 19-23). As was customary in the ancient Near East,<sup>23</sup> this covenant was sealed with the blood of a sacrificial victim ceremonially sprinkled on the people (Exodus 24:8) as a sign of the curse that would befall them should the covenant bond ever be broken — a foreshadowing of Christ’s sacrificial death in behalf of His elect (Hebrews 10:22, 12:24); also included was the “first edition” of the Decalogue, written on stone tablets by God Himself (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10). During Moses’ lengthy absence on the mountain-top, the Israelites grew impatient and the greater part of them quickly reverted back to their former worship of the sun-god, symbolized by Apis or Hapi, the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-4).<sup>24</sup> Upon his return, Moses responded to this religious defection by smashing the stone tablets to pieces (Exodus 32:19) and ordering the execution of thousands of the rebels (Exodus 32:27-28).

### The Sinaitic Republication of the Covenant of Works

Historically, there has been some speculation that “the evangelic part of the Sinai transaction”<sup>25</sup> was terminated as far as the surviving violators were concerned, and the fact that Moses was required to go back up the mountain to receive a new set of commandments — apparently dictated to him (Exodus 34:27-28) rather than being directly written by the “finger of God” as before<sup>26</sup> — suggests that the covenant thereafter

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22. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 61.

23. H. Clay Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant: A Primitive Rite and Its Bearing on Scripture* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: John D. Wattles, 1893).

24. Hislop, *Two Babylons*, page 45.

25. Bell, *View of the Covenants*, page 37.

26. As noted by E.W. Bullinger, the phrase “finger of God” indicates “the direct and immediate act of God” (*Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* [New York: J.B. Young and Company, 1898], page 881). There is no contradiction between Exodus 34:27-28, which speaks of Moses writing the words of God, and Deuteronomy 10:1-4, which speaks of God Himself writ-

made with the people was, in some sense, different in nature from the initial one.<sup>27</sup> The “second legislation” of the Decalogue was also not rati-

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ing. Dictation does not detract from authorship, albeit it introduces an intermediate party to the composition.

27. Variations of this theory are found throughout the Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene periods: *i.e.* in the Second Century writings of Justin Martyr (*Dialogue With Trypho, a Jew*, Chapters XVIIIff) and Ireneus (*Against Heresies*, Book IV, Chapters 15-16), in the Third Century catholic document, *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Chapter 26), in the Fourth Century writings of Lactantius (*The Divine Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter 10) and Eusebius (*Proof of the Gospel*, Book I, Chapter VI:8), and in the Fifth Century writings of Augustine (*Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, Book III, Chapters 9-10). These sources identified that which “gendereth to bondage” (Ephesians 4:24) as not only the sacrificial system, but also the second giving of the Decalogue (*deuterosis*) and the accompanying judicial code, and they all pointed to the self-righteousness and rebellion of the Israelites — specifically their idolatry at Horeb — as the direct cause of implementation.

This “second legislation” doctrine is not merely a strange relic of the ancient Church, for it was taught in various forms well into the post-Reformation period. For example, seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian Johannes Cocceius likewise proposed that “when the Jews had provoked the Deity by their various transgressions, particularly by the worship of the golden calf, the severe and servile yoke of the ceremonial law was added to the decalogue, as a punishment inflicted on them by the Supreme Being in his righteous displeasure” [Rev. Charles Buck, “Johannes Cocceius,” *A Theological Dictionary* (Philadelphia: Joseph J. Woodward, 1829), page 101. Recently, an extensive defense of the main points of Cocceius’ position was presented in John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company 2010), Appendix B. In his annotative notes in the eighteenth-century reprint of Fisher’s *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, Thomas Boston saw “two covenants to have been delivered on Mount Sinai to the Israelites”: “first, the covenant of grace made with Abraham, contained in the preface... to which were annexed the ten commandments, given by the Mediator Christ... as a rule of life to his covenant people,” and “secondly, the covenant of works made with Adam, contained in the same ten commands, delivered with thunderings and lightnings....” According to Boston, this “twofold consideration” of the Decalogue is required by the fact that they were “twice written on tables of stone, by the Lord himself... [and] the second tables, the work of Moses, the typical mediator....” (pages 56-57) In 1816, Scottish presbyterian John Colquhoun proposed an identical sce-

fied by the sprinkling of blood, perhaps signifying the absence of Christ as Mediator within a strictly legal covenant (Exodus 19:13).<sup>28</sup> Whereas the first covenant had been a further expansion of the gracious provisions of the Abrahamic covenant, the second placed the nation under the heavy yoke of a localized covenant of works, consisting of 613 statutes which regulated even the most mundane detail of life, an intricate sacrificial system, and an establishmentarian joining of the religious and civil elements.<sup>29</sup>

Whether or not one accepts this particular theory, it is nevertheless true that the Sinaitic covenant, which dominates the rest of the Old Testament, is reflective of the original Covenant of Works with its blessing for obedience (Leviticus 18:5) and cursing for disobedience (Deuteronomy 27:26). This national covenant, referred to by Paul as a “parenthesis epoch,”<sup>30</sup> or a temporary addition to the promise of the Abrahamic

nario in his *Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* (page 62).

28. That Moses, and not Christ, was the mediator of the law covenant is clear from Exodus 20:18-21, Galatians 3:19-20, *etc.*, as well as from the contrast that the New Testament writers made between the Old and New Covenants in such passages as Hebrews 8:6, 12:18-21, *etc.* Unlike the Old Covenant, the New consists only of promises and blessings, not threatenings and cursing, and therefore enables the participants to draw near to God with confidence in His fatherly love rather than stand at a distance in fear of His judgments (Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 4:18).

29. It is important to note that the Sinaitic covenant is here spoken of in its *national* capacity only. This is not to say that the believing remnant within the nation were ever under any other *spiritual* covenant than the Covenant of Grace (Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* [London: R. Haynes, 1822], Book IV, Chapter 12:26). It cannot be doubted that the Old Testament saints “held the same doctrine, were joined with us in the true unity of faith, placed reliance on the one Mediator, called on God as their Father, and were led by the same Spirit” (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), page 115. Such was the Apostle Paul’s teaching in Romans 11:4-7.

30. The usage of this term is not intended to suggest an interruption in the flow of redemptive history, as in the Dispensational formulation, but rather the subservience of additional subject matter (the works-inheritance principle of the Old Covenant) not directly related to the main subject (the grace-inheritance principle of the New Covenant). Such is how the usage of parentheses is gener-

covenant and its fulfillment in Christ (Galatians 3:15-18), is the basis of all of God's lawsuits against Israel through His prophets.<sup>31</sup> Even though it demanded perfect and personal obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1), and threatened expulsion from the land and ultimately death for covenant-breaking (Deuteronomy 28:63-64), the Mosaic law was nevertheless a gracious provision to His people for two reasons: firstly, it served as a "wall of partition" (Ephesians 2:15) which prevented their absorption into the surrounding pagan nations and thereby preserved the ancestral line through which the Messiah would eventually come (Galatians 3:19),<sup>32</sup> and, secondly, its testimony to the absolute moral demands of God would drive the elect within the nation to despair of their own righteousness and thus to faith in the promised Redeemer as He was foreshadowed in the ceremonial system (Galatians 3:24).<sup>33</sup> As such, the Mosaic law was never intended to be a civil "model" for the rest of the world (Psalm 147:19-20),<sup>34</sup> and it therefore ceased to operate with the expiration of the nation.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the Gentile nations, not having this special covenantal relationship to God under the Mosaic legislation, were left under the unwritten natural law of the Adamic covenant and thus deprived of any true knowl-

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ally understood in standard grammar. At no time did God abandon, or temporarily set aside, His purpose to save an elect people as promised in the Abrahamic covenant. Redemptive history, according to Covenant theology, is continuous, not halting.

31. Robert Rollock, *Select Works of Robert Rollock* (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1849), Volume I, page 46.

32. Brown, *Exposition of Galatians*, page 151.

33. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 61; James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of Its History in the Church and Its Exposition From Scripture* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1867), pages 38-39. This purpose was corrupted by the unbelieving Jews, particularly the Pharisees of Christ's day and the Judaizers of Paul's day, who believed that strict observance of the law would merit God's favor. Of course, as Jesus pointed out in Matthew 5:20ff and Paul in Galatians 3:10, such men had lessened the law's demands and were not really observing it as they claimed.

34. Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 20:16.

35. Westminster Confession, Chapter XIX:4.

edge of a Redeemer (Ephesians 2:12).<sup>36</sup>

### Christ's Fulfillment of the Law

By the First Century, God's covenant people had been narrowed down to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, together with the remnant from the other ten tribes which had returned to the Lord and become absorbed by the Judahites, otherwise known as Jews (Jeremiah 50:4-7; Ezekiel 37:19-23). Christ was born as a Jew and was therefore bound, along with the rest of His kinsmen according to the flesh, to perfect obedience to the Mosaic law (John 6:38; Galatians 4:4). As the "last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45), He therefore did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-18). In fulfilling the righteousness required by the Sinaitic covenant (Matthew 3:15; John 17:4), He likewise fulfilled the more general Covenant of Works in behalf of God's elect outside of Israel. Christ's death on the cross satisfied the penalty of the broken covenant (John 19:30), and His perfect obedience (Romans 5:18-19) is imputed to the believer through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8). At the very moment of faith, the believer is forever and completely justified before God (Romans 3:21-24; 2 Corinthians 5:21); he is no longer "in Adam" under the Covenant of Works, but is now "in Christ" under the Covenant of Grace (1 Corinthians 15:22). If a Jew, he is reckoned as having fulfilled every jot and tittle of the Mosaic law; if a Gentile, he is reckoned as having fulfilled the Adamic covenant (Romans 3:31). Either way, the Christian is no longer "under the law," but is a free man "under grace" (Romans 6:14; 1 Corinthians 7:22). He is not merely restored to the probationary position of Adam in the Garden, but is instead raised and seated in heaven itself with Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:5-6). He has eternal life (Romans 6:23; 1 John 5:13) — the very promise held forth in the original Covenant of Works.<sup>37</sup> Such is the standard Reformed position on the history of redemption, the law-gospel distinction, and justification. It is the purpose of this book to show where Theonomy deviates from historic Covenant theology and thereby seriously undermines the Gospel.

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36. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book IV, Chapter 4:30; John Milton, *A Treatise on Christian Doctrine* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1825), pages 378, 381.

37. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 12:22; *ibid.*, Chapter 13:22.



## **Chapter Two:** Views of the Mosaic Covenant Within the Reformed Tradition

John Calvin (1509-1564)

Within historic Covenant theology there has existed a tension between two basic positions regarding the Mosaic covenant. Some Reformed theologians have viewed the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the Covenant of Grace bearing characteristics of the Covenant of Works, while others have viewed it as a republication of the Covenant of Works distinct from and subordinate to the Covenant of Grace. Even within these two categories there have been different nuances of thought.<sup>1</sup> Hence, because there is a somewhat wide spectrum of opinion on this subject, there is no position that may accurately be referred to as “the Reformed position.” Below is a sampling of these differing views.

In his commentary on Hebrews, John Calvin (1509-1564) described the Mosaic law as containing both “the rule of life [the moral law], and the gratuitous covenant of life [Abrahamic covenant of grace].”<sup>2</sup> He taught that “the Law,” or “the whole system of religion de-

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1. Samuel Bolton outlined the different views in the third chapter of his book, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001).

2. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), page 167.

livered by the hand of Moses,” was not intended “to do away with the blessing promised to the race of Abraham” — in other words, “that it might lead the chosen people away from Christ” — but rather “to keep them in suspense until his advent.”<sup>3</sup> He acknowledged that in a “restricted sense,” Paul spoke of the law “merely as law” in his epistle to the Galatians, while elsewhere teaching that “the covenant of free adoption is comprehended under it.”<sup>4</sup> Expanding the scope of the Mosaic law beyond national Israel, he went on to note that “complete observance” of the “perfect righteousness... set before us in the Law,” would necessarily merit the “reward of eternal salvation.”<sup>5</sup> This promise was no mere trifle to Calvin; though genuine, it is rendered unattainable due to mankind’s fall and subsequent inability to perform the obedience required. The law therefore serves as “a kind of mirror” to display “first, our impotence; then, in consequence of it, our iniquity; and, finally, the curse, as the consequence of both.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, while not expressly referring to the Mosaic covenant as a restatement of the Covenant of Works, Calvin clearly taught such by implication: “[T]he law was the ministry of condemnation and of death; for when men are instructed as to their duty, and hear it declared, that all who do not render satisfaction to the justice of God are cursed (Deut. 27:26), they are convicted, as under the sentence of sin and death. From the law, therefore, they derive nothing but a condemnation of this nature, because God there demands what is due to him, and at the same time confers no power to perform it.”<sup>7</sup> However, Calvin cautioned that the law should not be viewed in this legal capacity only, for to do so would result in “despondency, confusion, and despair, seeing that by it we are all cursed and condemned.”<sup>8</sup> He quoted Augustine on how then the law should be used: “The utility of the Law is, that it convicts man of his

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3. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 7:1.

4. Calvin, *ibid.*, Section 3.

5. Calvin, *ibid.* See also Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, pages 67-68.

6. Calvin, *ibid.*, Section 4.

7. Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), Volume II, page 177.

8. Calvin, *ibid.*

weakness, and compels him to apply for the medicine of grace, which is in Christ.”<sup>9</sup> This grace was typified for the Israelites in the ceremonies. Thus, the law in Calvin’s view contained a covenant of works, the end of which was the fulfillment of the Covenant of Grace in Christ.

### John Owen (1560-1622)

After outlining the reasons why most theologians of his day had taught that the Mosaic covenant was an administration of the Covenant of Grace, English Non-Conformist theologian John Owen noted that it “was so different from that which is established in the gospel after the coming of Christ, that it hath the appearance and name of another covenant.”<sup>10</sup> Elaborating on this point, he wrote that “we may consider that the Scripture doth plainly and expressly make mention of two testaments, or covenants, and distinguish between them in such a way, as what is spoken can hardly be accommodated unto a twofold administration of the same covenant.... Wherefore we must grant two distinct covenants, rather than a twofold administration of the same covenant merely, to be intended.”<sup>11</sup>

The Mosaic covenant was subservient to the Abrahamic covenant, and “in the giving of the law, and the curse wherewith it was accompanied, which were immixed with that administration of the covenant, there was a solemn revival and representation of the first covenant [made with Adam], and its sanction, whereby it had life and power given to it to keep the people in bondage all their days.”<sup>12</sup> In this capacity, it was “a particular, temporary covenant” which, being applicable to Israel alone, was “typical, shadowy, and removable.”<sup>13</sup> This bondage apparently only applied to the unbelievers within the nation, for Owen was quick to qualify his remarks by noting:

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9. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 7:9.

10. John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Evansville, Indiana: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1960), Volume VI, page 71.

11. Owen, *ibid.*, page 76.

12. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (London: Richard Baines, 1826), Volume XIV, page 183.

13. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, Volume VI, pages 81, 86.

The church of Israel was never absolutely under the power of that covenant as a covenant of life [works]; for, from the days of Abraham, the promise was given unto them and their seed. And the apostle proves that no law could afterwards be given, or covenant made, that should disannul that promise, Gal. 3:17. But had they been brought under the old covenant of works, it would have disannulled the promise, for that covenant and the promise are diametrically opposite. And moreover, if they were under that covenant, they were all under the curse, and so perished eternally: which is openly false, for it is testified of them that they pleased God by faith, and so were saved. But it is evident that the covenant intended was a covenant wherein the church of Israel walked with God, until such time as this better covenant was solemnly introduced. This is plainly declared in the ensuing context, especially in the close of the chapter, where, speaking of this former covenant, he says, it was “become old,” and so “ready to disappear.” Wherefore it is not the covenant of works made with Adam that is intended, when this other is said to be a “better covenant.”<sup>14</sup>

In this capacity as a representative covenant of works, Owen saw the law as having been fulfilled by Christ and therefore abrogated, not just in its ceremonial aspect, but in its entirety: “Wherefore the whole law of Moses, as given unto the Jews, whether as used or abused by them, was repugnant unto and inconsistent with the gospel, and the mediation of Christ, especially his priestly office, therein declared; neither did God either design, appoint, or direct that they should be co-existent.”<sup>15</sup> In light of this, he understood Christ’s words in Matthew 5:17 as follows: “‘I came to bring in and accomplish the whole end which it [the law] aimed at, and directed unto,’ whereon it would cease to oblige unto a further practice.”<sup>16</sup> For Owen, the Christian’s ethical standard was not to be found in the Mosaic covenant, but in Christ alone.<sup>17</sup>

### Samuel Petto (1624-1711)

The views of Non-Conformist clergyman Samuel Petto on the

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14. Owen, *ibid.*, page 662.

15. Owen, *ibid.*, Volume V, pages 428-429.

16. Owen, *ibid.*, page 461.

17. Owen, *ibid.*, page 464.

Mosaic covenant were very similar to Owen's. Based on his understanding of 2 Corinthians 3:6ff and Hebrews 8:6ff, he denied that the Old and New Covenants are but "two administrations or dispensations of the same covenant," insisting instead that "they are not merely one and the same covenant, diversely administered, but they are two covenants."<sup>18</sup> However, while the Mosaic covenant was not part of the Covenant of Grace, he nevertheless taught that it "had a special relation to the covenant of grace" in that its precepts created a wall of separation between Israel and the pagan nations and it "promised temporal mercies to Israel, upon the condition of their obedience."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the law also served a fivefold function: firstly, it acted pedagogically to bring the Israelites to Christ; secondly, it restrained them from sin; thirdly, it acted as a directory for the pure worship of God; fourthly, it was a model for Israel's civil and ecclesiastical government; and fifthly, it typified the "glorious mysteries appertaining to the covenant of grace."<sup>20</sup>

Arguing that the Mosaic covenant was strictly a covenant of works "to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ, but not so to Israel,"<sup>21</sup> Petto denounced the "sinful mixing" of the Old and New Covenants so that the believer's own works are joined with Christ's in procuring salvation.<sup>22</sup> He affirmed that the moral law, contained within the Decalogue, "is still obligatory" because it is a "perfect rule of righteousness" and is therefore perpetual. However, if understood in its former covenantal context, the law has been abolished since Christ perfectly fulfilled its demands, and in dying on the cross, satisfied the penalty inherent in the Old Covenant.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, "obedience, though evangelical, is no such condition of the new covenant, as there was of the old unto Israel."<sup>24</sup>

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18. Samuel Petto, *The Mystery of the Covenant of Grace: The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained* (Aberdeen, Scotland: D. Chalmers and Company, 1820), page 83.

19. Petto, *ibid.*, pages 83, 119.

20. Petto, *ibid.*, pages 146-148.

21. Petto, *ibid.*, page 93.

22. Petto, *ibid.*, pages 90-91.

23. Petto, *ibid.*, pages 133-138.

24. Petto, *ibid.*, page 163.

### Walter Marshall (1628-1680)

English Puritan Walter Marshall devoted a lengthy volume to the distinction between the law and the Gospel, focusing specifically on the erroneous teaching of the moralists of his day that holiness (sanctification) is to be attained through obedience to the law. According to Marshall, the Israelites were never saved nor made holy by attempting to keep the Sinaitic arrangement, for it was a secondary covenant added to the covenant of grace made previously with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for the purpose of showing them “their sinfulness and subjection to death and wrath, and the impossibility of attaining to life or holiness by their works,” thereby forcing them “to trust on the free promise only for all their salvation.”<sup>25</sup> Marshall spoke of the Covenant of Works as “the legal covenant, wherein God promiseth us no life, comfort, or happiness, until we have thoroughly performed His law,” and he believed that this “may be seen in the mount Sinai promulgation, explicated Lev. xxvi throughout.”<sup>26</sup>

### Herman Witsius (1636-1708)

Dutch theologian Herman Witsius taught:

...[I]n the ministry of Moses, there was a repetition of the doctrine concerning the law of the covenant of works. For both the very same precepts are inculcated, on which the covenant of works was founded, and which constituted the condition of that covenant; and that sentence is repeated, “which if a man do he shall live in them,” Lev. xviii.5. Ezek. xx.11,13 by which formula, the righteousness, which is of the law, is described, Romans x.5. And the terror of the covenant of works is increased by repeated comminations; and that voice heard, “cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them,” Deut. xxvii.26....

The Israelites were, therefore, thus put in mind of the covenant of works, in order to convince them of their sin and misery, to drive them out of themselves, to show them the necessity of a satisfaction, and to compel them to Christ. And so their being thus brought to a remembrance of the

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25. Walter Marshall, *The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification* (Edinburgh: James Taylor, 1887), page 135.

26. Marshall, *ibid.*, page 161.

covenant of works tended to promote the covenant of grace.<sup>27</sup>

Witsius went on to argue that the Mosaic covenant was “not formally the covenant of works,” because to re-institute that covenant with the promise of blessing for future obedience would imply the pardon of all former sins, which “the covenant of works excludes.”<sup>28</sup> However, neither was it “formally a covenant of grace,” because the promise of the New Covenant to not only require obedience, but also give the strength to obey, “appears not in the covenant made at mount Sinai.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, he concluded that it was a “national covenant” which pictured both the Covenant of Grace, in that sincere though imperfect obedience proceeding from faith would be acceptable to God, and the Covenant of Works, in that terror was instilled in the hearts of the Israelites as a warning against disobedience, but that it “was formally neither the one nor the other.”<sup>30</sup>

### Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

Scottish divine Thomas Boston discovered in the giving of the law at Mount Sinai two distinct covenants: “First, The covenant of grace made with Abraham, contained in the preface, repeated and promulgated there unto Israel, to be believed and embraced by faith, that they might be saved; to which were annexed the ten commandments, given by the Mediator Christ, the head of the covenant, as a rule of life to his covenant people. Secondly, the covenant of works made with Adam, contained in the same ten commands, delivered with thunderings and lightnings....” Because he insisted that there could be “no confounding of the two covenants of grace and works,” Boston taught that “the latter was added to the former as subservient unto it, to turn their eyes towards the promise, or covenant of grace.” He saw this twofold nature of the Sinaitic covenant

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27. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book IV, Chapter 4:47, 49. See also Herman Witsius, *Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain on the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians* (Glasgow, Scotland: W. Lang, 1807), pages 86-87.

28. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants.*, Book IV, Chapter 4: 51.

29. Witsius, *ibid.*, Chapter IV:53.

30. Witsius, *ibid.*, Chapter IV:54.

illustrated in the first and second giving of the Decalogue, but was quick to add, “I do not say, God made the covenant of works with them, that they might obtain life and salvation thereby... but he repeated, or gave a new edition of the law, and that as a covenant of works, for their humbling and conviction.”<sup>31</sup>

### Thomas Bell (1733-1803)

Scottish divine Thomas Bell argued that God established two distinct covenants with Israel, the former “being the same with the Abrahamic” in containing only blessing and life, and therefore a covenant of grace, and the latter, containing cursings and death, and therefore a covenant of works. Drawing on Galatians 3:9-10, he wrote, “They who are of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham: but as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse.... But the covenant at Horeb was that law. It was not the covenant made with the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Deut. v.2, 3, and therefore it was not the covenant of grace. But if not the covenant of grace, then it was certainly the covenant of works: for any other covenant than these two, God never revealed to man.”<sup>32</sup>

Bell went further than most other Covenant theologians in insisting that the penalty for violation of the law “was not a ceremonial, or a temporal curse, but a curse affecting the transgressor’s everlasting state: a curse standing in direct opposition to the blessing promised in the Abrahamic covenant, Gal. iii. 8, 9, and therefore consisting in suffering the loss, and feeling the wrath of Abraham’s God for ever.”<sup>33</sup> He believed that “the covenant of works was delivered at mount Sinai, not in opposition, but in subserviency, to that of grace,”<sup>34</sup> and that this relationship between the two covenants was pictured in the relationship between Hagar and Sarah.<sup>35</sup> Rejecting the assumption of some commentators, such as Dutch theologian Johannes Cocceius in the Seventeenth Century and

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31. Thomas Boston, note in Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 55.

32. Bell, *View of the Covenants of Works and Grace*, pages 255-256.

33. Bell, *ibid.*, page 257.

34. Bell, *ibid.*, page 262.

35. Bell, *ibid.*, page 264.



Bell's contemporary John Brown of Edinburgh, that Galatians 3:19 had reference to the transgression of the golden calf, he instead interpreted Paul's words to mean that the Sinaitic covenant of works was delivered "to shew the Israelites their sins, to restrain from them, and to punish for them. It entered that the offence might abound," and thus manifesting "the necessity of a suffering Surety."<sup>36</sup>

Bell taught that Moses was the mediator of only the legal covenant made with unbelieving Israel while Christ was the Mediator of the spiritual covenant made with "all the seed" of Abraham: believing Jews and Gentiles.<sup>37</sup> He saw the error of the Judaizers to consist in the "confounding of the two covenants, and of mistaking the end of the Sinaitic," and went on to explain:

Such as are not in Christ, are under that covenant: Such as are in him are not under it, and therefore their obedience is not obedience to it. There is but a step between the boundaries of the two covenants, and faith is nothing else but a stepping out of the one covenant into the other. Therefore, though the first act of faith may be considered as an act of obedience to the law as a covenant of works, binding sinners on their hearing of that [covenant] of grace to take hold of it; yet all the subsequent acts of faith, and the holy obedience flowing therefrom, are not obedience to it as a covenant, but as a rule of life, as the law of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

### Thomas Scott (1747-1821)

Anglican Calvinist Thomas Scott saw a picture of both the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace displayed in the Mosaic covenant:

The national covenant with Israel was here meant [Exodus 19:5]; the charter upon which they were incorporated, as a people, under the government of Jehovah. It was an engagement of God, to give Israel possession of Canaan, and to protect them in it; to render the land fruitful, and the nation victorious and prosperous, and to perpetuate his oracles and ordinances among them; so long as they did not, as a people, reject his authority, apostatize to idolatry, and tolerate open wickedness.

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36. Bell, *ibid.*, page 271.

37. Bell, *ibid.*, page 269.

38. Bell, *ibid.*, pages 273-274.

These things constitute a forfeiture of the covenant, as their national rejection of Christ did afterwards. True believers among them were *personally* dealt with according to the covenant of grace, even as true Christians now are; and unbelievers were under the covenant of works, and liable to condemnation by it, as at present: yet, the national covenant was not strictly either the one or the other, but had something in it of the nature of each (emphasis in original).<sup>39</sup>

Thus, Scott viewed the covenant from two perspectives: “The outward covenant was made with the nation, entitling them to outward advantages, upon the condition of outward national obedience; and the covenant of grace was ratified personally with true believers, and sealed and secured spiritual blessings to them, by producing a holy disposition of heart, and spiritual obedience to the divine law.”<sup>40</sup> Outwardly (typologically), it was a covenant of works which was corporately broken and through which the nation was judged and eventually destroyed; inwardly (antitypologically), however, it was a covenant of grace made with God’s elect within the nation which later would be expanded to all the nations through the Gospel in the New Covenant era.

### John Colquhoun (1748-1827)

John Colquhoun, a minister in the Church of Scotland, was very explicit in his teaching that the Sinaitic covenant was a republication of the Covenant of Works:

That the law of the Ten Commandments as a covenant of works was repeated and displayed on Mount Sinai in subservience to the covenant of grace appears evident from the thunderings and lightnings, the noise of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the thick darkness and the voice of the living God, speaking out of the midst of the fire on that awful occasion (Exodus 20:18; Deuteronomy 5:22-26). These terrible emblems signified the vindictive and tremendous wrath of God which is due to all the race of Adam for their breach of the covenant of works, by transgressing the law of that covenant (Galatians 3:10). They represented

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39. Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible With Explanatory Notes, Practical Observations, and Copious Marginal References* (Boston, Massachusetts: Crocker and Brewster, 1851), pages 249-250.

40. Scott, *ibid.*, page 250.

also the extreme danger to which every sinner who continues under the law in its covenant form is exposed as being liable, every moment, to the eternal execution of its dreadful curse. This awful display of the law as a covenant of works, though it was not the principal part, yet it was the most conspicuous part of the Sinaic transaction; for “the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking.” And so terrible was the sight that Moses said, “I exceedingly fear and quake” (Hebrews 12:21).<sup>41</sup>

In the preface to the Decalogue, he saw “the promise made to Abraham and his seed,” and “to this promise or covenant of grace... was the law or subservient covenant of works added” which “formed no part of the covenant of grace, which had been a covenant entirely to the Patriarchs before that was added to it at Sinai...”<sup>42</sup> To Colquhoun, “the Sinaic transaction was a mixed dispensation”;<sup>43</sup> it was a typical display of both the Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Works as separate, not blended, covenants: “the former was and still is a covenant to be believed or embraced by faith; the latter was a covenant to be done or fulfilled.”<sup>44</sup> The law was added for the purpose of demonstrating to Israel “what kind and degree of righteousness it was by which they could be justified before God, and that, finding themselves wholly destitute of that righteousness, they might be excited to take hold of the covenant of grace in which a perfect righteousness for justification is graciously provided” by the promised Surety.<sup>45</sup> He concluded his discussion of the law in its covenant form by cautioning against the supposition that the Israelites were under both the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace simultaneously: “They could not be under both at the same time and in the same respects. The believers among them... were internally and really under the covenant of grace, and only externally under that terrible display of the covenant of works as it was subservient to that of grace (Galatians 3:24); whereas the unbelievers were externally, and by profession only, under that dispensation of the covenant of grace (Romans 9:24), but were inter-

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41. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, pages 56-57.

42. Colquhoun, *ibid.*, page 62.

43. Colquhoun, *ibid.*, page 61.

44. Colquhoun, *ibid.*, page 62.

45. Colquhoun, *ibid.*, page 63.

nally and really under the covenant of works (Romans 4:14).”<sup>46</sup>

### Robert Lewis Dabney (1820-1898)

Southern Presbyterian theologian Robert Lewis Dabney held to the “one covenant, two administrations” formula and therefore viewed the Mosaic covenant as a pure covenant of grace on both the typological and antitypological levels. Nevertheless, he also saw in it the imposing of “more burdensome and exacting” legal conditions which served as “a perpetual reminder of the law which was to Adam, the condition of life, now broken, and its wrath already incurred, thus to hedge up the awakened conscience to Christ.”<sup>47</sup>

### Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)

According to Dutch theologian Geerhardus Vos, the Mosaic law was “a subordinate means to a higher and spiritual end, subservient and adapted to the peculiar position which the nation occupied, and to its unique calling in the history of God’s Church.”<sup>48</sup> It was meant to “regulate simply the Covenant-relation between Jehovah and his people,”<sup>49</sup> particularly in light of the fact that “the Israelites were to enter upon the possession of a land, for centuries defiled by a heathen cultus so that almost every high place would by its associations expose them to the utmost danger of relapsing into idolatry and nature-worship.”<sup>50</sup> As such, it served the primary purpose of separating Israel from the surrounding pagan nations “that it might be holy unto God.”<sup>51</sup>

In addition to this theocratic purpose of the law, Vos wrote that the Mosaic covenant was “a reflection of the covenant of works revived, as it were, in the interests of the covenant of grace continued at Sinai”:

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46. Colquhoun, *ibid.*, pages 63-64.

47. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, pages 452ff.

48. Geerhardus Vos, *The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuchal Codes* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1886), page 52.

49. Vos, *ibid.*, page 89.

50. Vos, *ibid.*, page 91.

51. Vos, *ibid.*, page 54.

*i.e.*, that its prominent legal element served the greater, though less prominent, gracious element.<sup>52</sup> In it was held up “constantly the ideal of eternal life to be obtained by keeping the law, a lost ideal though it be.” This lost ideal is regained through faith in Christ, who perfectly kept the law and therefore received in behalf of the elect the eternal life which was promised: “When the work of the Spirit by means of the law and the gospel leads to true conversion, in this conversion the longing for this lost ideal of the covenant appears as an essential part.”<sup>53</sup>

#### Louis Berkhof (1873-1957)

Reformed systematic theologian Louis Berkhof taught that the Mosaic covenant was “a truly national covenant” which “included a service that contained a positive reminder of the strict demands of the covenant of works.” The law “was placed very much in the foreground, giving prominence once more to the earlier legal element.” Berkhof denied that the covenant of Sinai was “a renewal of the covenant of works,” for “in it the law was made subservient to the covenant of grace.” While there was a “conditional element” to the covenant, this had reference to the Israelites’ “theocratic standing in the nation, and the enjoyment of external blessings that was made dependent on the keeping of the law,” and not their eternal salvation. The law, therefore, served the dual purpose of increasing the consciousness of sin and acting as a tutor unto Christ.<sup>54</sup>

#### Meredith Kline (1922-2007)

According to Westminster Theological Seminary professor and theologian Meredith Kline (1922-2007), the theocratic kingdom of Israel was “a redemptive renewal of the paradise-sanctuary of Eden and a prototypical preview of the eternal theocratic sanctuary” of the consummated New Heavens and New Earth. He taught that the Mosaic covenant, while

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52. Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (ed. R. B. Gaffin, Jr.; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), pages 254-255.

53. Vos, *ibid.*, page 256.

54. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans and Company, 1941), page 298.

not rendering the Abrahamic covenant inoperative, must not be viewed merely as a continuation of the latter, but rather in light of its “distinct identity... as a particular administration with its own historical beginning in a concrete occasion of covenant making.”<sup>55</sup> Kline acknowledged “the massive Biblical evidence for a peculiar discontinuity present in the old covenant in the form of a principle of meritorious works,” in sharp contrast to the Abrahamic covenant and its fulfillment in the New Covenant.<sup>56</sup> However, contrary to classic Dispensationalism, which teaches that individual justification itself was held forth as the goal of the Mosaic covenant, Kline limited the application of the principle of works therein to “Israel’s retention of its provisional, typological inheritance,” while maintaining the “promise faith-grace principle of the gospel” for individual Israelite believers under the continuing and overarching Abrahamic covenant.<sup>57</sup> The “blessings of the typological kingdom community” were therefore not guaranteed by the principle of grace, but were “merited by the Israelites’ obedience to the law.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, according to Kline, there is both continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants; on the level of individual salvation, there is a continuity of the principle of redemptive grace, but the principle of works on the typological level created a sharp discontinuity: “...while grace was the principle of kingdom blessing in the Abrahamic covenant (and new covenant), in the covenant of creation [Covenant of Works] and in the old covenant (at that typological level in terms of which Paul... identifies it) the operating principle was works.”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, “by reason of the presence of this different principle of works, the old covenant was breakable — and in that respect stood in contrast to the new covenant, not in continuum with

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55. Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), pages 17-18.

56. Meredith Kline, “Gospel Until the Law: Romans 5:13-14 and the Old Covenant,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991), page 434.

57. Kline, *ibid.*

58. Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations For a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), pages 214-215.

59. Kline, “Gospel Until the Law,” pages 436-438.

it.”<sup>60</sup> However, though it was broken by the Israelites, rendering their destruction as a nation and the ending of its typological purpose a necessity, Christ, as the second Adam born under the Mosaic economy, nevertheless did fulfill the covenantal terms thereof, and thus merited the antitypological blessings of eternal life in behalf of the elect. Thus, Kline saw the identification of the Mosaic covenant with the works principle as absolutely essential to the Gospel itself:

The principle of works forms the foundation of the gospel of grace. If meritorious works could not be predicated of Jesus Christ as the second Adam, then obviously there would be no meritorious achievement to be imputed to his people as the ground of their justification. The gospel invitation would turn out to be a mirage. We who have believed on Christ would still be under condemnation. The gospel truth, however, is that Christ has performed the one act of righteousness and by this obedience of the one the many are made righteous (Rom. 5:18-19). In his probationary obedience [to the Mosaic law] the Redeemer gained the merit which is transferred to the account of the elect. Underlying Christ’s mediatorship of a covenant of grace to the salvation of believers is his earthly fulfillment, through meritorious obedience, of his heavenly covenant of works with the Father.<sup>61</sup>

Michael Scott Horton (1964- )

More recently, Westminster Seminary Professor of Theology and Apologetics Michael Scott Horton wrote:

As a theocracy typological of the eschatological paradise of God, Israel’s national existence was a repetition of the covenant of creation; hence the comparisons drawn by the biblical writers to Adam and the original creation. Israel was called to see itself as a new theocratic garden of God’s presence and as a new creation in the sense of representing humanity before God — all of this is typological of the true Israel, the faithful Adam, who is also the true heavenly temple and everlasting Son of God. As with the Adamic covenant, the Sinaitic covenant is conditional. If Israel is faithful, the people “may dwell long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” Thus Israel’s tenure in the land, like Adam’s,

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60. Kline, “Of Works and Grace,” *Presbyterion*, 9:1-2 (1983), pages 86-87.

61. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, page 68.

is conditional — although, in the former case God’s goodness was presupposed, while in the latter, God’s grace (Deut. 7:7-11). Precisely the same terms and sanctions apply: Do this and you will live long in the land and enter into my Sabbath rest. As with his appeal to the two Adams for double imputation, Paul draws on the analogy of the two mountains and two mothers to contrast the covenant of works (law) and the covenant of grace (promise) (Galatians 3 and 4).<sup>62</sup>

In light of the above information, it is evident that the debate within historic Covenant theology has focused on the importance of the legal element of the Mosaic covenant: *i.e.* whether this element constituted the actual covenant or merely existed within the covenant. This debate has roots which extend as far back in Christian history as the writings of Ireneaus and Justin Martyr in the Second Century and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* in the Third Century. However, all Reformed theologians are nevertheless agreed that it was subservient to, and therefore did not abrogate, the Abrahamic covenant. This legal element stands at the forefront of the covenant and has reference primarily to possession of the land of Canaan and to temporal blessings and cursings, but, according to the New Testament writers, it was merely typological in nature and found its spiritual fulfillment in Christ and the eternal blessings which He merited in behalf of and bestowed upon His people, the Church.

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62. Michael Scott Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), page 130.



## **Chapter Three:** An Overview of the Theonomic System

### The Monocovenantal Foundation of Theonomy

Although it resembles the establishmentarianism taught in the original Westminster Standards and held by many theologians of that period,<sup>1</sup> as well as some minority Puritan formulations of Covenant theology,<sup>2</sup> Theonomy builds its system on a different ideological foundation and thus is, at best, better identified as “neo-Puritan.”<sup>3</sup> As already discussed, the traditional Reformed position sees a continuous unfolding of redemptive history in various administrations of the Covenant of Grace, beginning with the promise of the Redeemer in Genesis 3:15, continuing with the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 15 and 17, and finding its clearest pre-Christian expression in God’s promise of the “New Covenant” in Ezekiel 37:36 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Mosaic covenant, or “Old Covenant,” is seen as a temporary addition to the Covenant of Grace, existing from its establishment at Mount Sinai 430 years after Abraham until its judicial termination on Calvary and its actual ter-

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1. See discussion on pages 204-206 and footnote on pages 282-283.

2. See footnote on pages 58-59.

3. Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), page 240. North criticized the “older Puritanism” for being “still infused with rationalism” for its allegedly deficient treatment of the continuing validity of the Mosaic law.

mination with the expiration of the Jewish nation in A.D. 70. As a republication, or type, of the original Edenic Covenant of Works, it was “added because of transgression” (Galatians 3:19) — the “stiff-necked” rebellion of the Israelites (Exodus 32:9-10; Acts 7:51)<sup>3</sup> — and served to “shut [them] up unto the faith” (Galatians 3:23) which was foreshadowed in the various sacrifices and ceremonies and would later be fully revealed in Christ Himself. It was the Mosaic covenant itself that separated the Jews from the Gentile nations of the world and made them a distinct theocratic people (Numbers 23:9; Ephesians 2:14), and it is therefore this covenant which has now passed away.

As we shall see, this is clearly the doctrine of the New Testament, particularly the Pauline epistles. However, Theonomists deny the provisional character of the Mosaic economy and instead view it as one of the two main administrations of the Covenant of Grace, which they extend back into the prelapsarian state. The terms “Older Covenant” and “Newer Covenant” were coined by Bahnsen in *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* in order to distinguish between the previous administration of Moses and the new administration of Christ without implying substantial covenantal discontinuity. For Bahnsen and Rushdoony in particular, there never was an original Covenant of Works which held forth eternal life as the reward for its fulfillment,<sup>4</sup> and for this reason, neither the Mosaic law nor the Israelites’ tenure in the land of promise should be viewed as typical restatements of the legal Edenic arrangement, but as normative expressions of the believer’s covenantal relationship with God.<sup>5</sup> Such a de-

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3. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the precise interpretation of “transgression” in this verse is open to debate. Some, such as John Brown of Edinburgh, have interpreted it as a reference to the Israelites’ defection at Sinai, while others, such as John Calvin, have interpreted it as a reference to sin in general.

4. See Chapter Four.

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), page 83. It has recently become customary for adherents to monocovenantalism to appeal to Presbyterian divine John Ball’s work entitled, *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace* (London: Edward Brewster, 1645), in order to discredit bi-covenantalism and prove that its doctrine of republication is contra-confessional. A participant in the Westminster assembly, Ball seemed to deviate from the standard Reformed identification of the original covenant with Adam as one of strict justice, writing that it was an arrangement borne out of God’s “free grace and love” in that “after

nial of the Covenant of Works, either in its original form or in its republished form, undermines the doctrine that Christ came to fulfill the demands of the law in the elect's stead, thus vicariously earning justification and securing the original promise of eternal life in their behalf, and substitutes in its place the teaching that Christ confirmed and established the covenantal authority of the Mosaic law "in exhaustive detail" for all time.

### Theonomy's Doctrine of "Two Laws"

Adherents to Theonomy will often claim that they hold to the classic three-fold division of the Mosaic law into ceremonial, judicial, and moral categories,<sup>6</sup> but they actually collapse the judicial into the moral and therefore think in terms of only a two-fold division. In fact, according to Greg Bahnsen, it is "latent antinomianism" to "draw a line between 'moral' and 'civil' laws."<sup>7</sup> This presupposition may be seen in their frequent reference to the "moral case laws" found in the Old Testament, which they insist were binding on the nations outside of Israel and

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perfect obedience performed according to the will of God, it had been no injustice in God, as he made the creature of nothing, so to have brought him unto nothing" (page 7). Furthermore, he taught that continued life in the Garden, not eternal life in a glorified state, was the promise held forth in the covenant (page 10). As will be seen, this bears some similarities to Rushdoony's and Bahnsen's denial of the Covenant of Works. Referring to the Mosaic dispensation, Ball wrote that "the old and new Covenants" were "one in substance and kind, differing only in degrees." This could be misconstrued as support of Theonomy's monocovenantalism if Ball's qualification is not also read: "How all these differences should stand, if they be not covenants opposite in kind, it is not easy to understand." Ball also shied away from the idea of the Mosaic covenant being a republication of the Covenant of Works, albeit with the admission that "we meet with great difficulty, how, and whether at all the Covenant of Grace was manifested by Moses" (page 95). Thus, Ball's position was somewhat ambiguous.

6. Kenneth Gentry, who was at one time a member of the Presbyterian Church in America, correctly noted that this division is taught in the Westminster Confession ("Theonomic Ethics and the Westminster Confession," *The Presbyterian Witness*, Spring 1996, pages 16-21). Gary North, however, referred to this tripartite division of the law as "a weakness" ("Hermeneutics and Leviticus 19:19," in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, page 259).

7. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 310.

remain perpetually binding. However, this division is much different than in conventional Reformed thought, amounting to a sharp distinction between “the ceremonial law” and “the moral-judicial law” so that the former may be abolished while the latter remains intact. Consequently, Theonomists have two different things in mind when they speak of “the law,” depending on the context. When Scripture refers to the law as having been “established,” as in Romans 3:31, or “fulfilled,” as in Matthew 5:17, they interpret this to mean “the moral-judicial law.” However, whenever Scripture speaks of the law as having been “done away” (2 Corinthians 3:7-11) or “abolished” (Ephesians 2:15), Theonomists invariably interpret this to refer to “the ceremonial law.”<sup>8</sup> They identify only “the ceremonial law” as the covenantal barrier between Israel and the nations which was “added” at Mount Sinai and later “nailed to the cross” (Colossians 2:14), thus ending forever the ethnic separation of Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14-15).<sup>9</sup> Consequently, they cannot see Paul’s co-

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8. This theory of “two laws” is strikingly similar to that of the Seventh Day Adventist sect (D.M. Canright, *Seventh Day Adventism Renounced* [New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905], pages 308ff).

9. According to Bahnsen, “The only ‘law’ that distinguished Jews from Gentiles, yet without involving inherent moral principle, was what we call today the ceremonial law” (“The Theonomic Approach to Law and Gospel,” in Stanley N. Gundry, editor, *Five Views on Law and Gospel* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1996], page 108). Elsewhere, he identified the “pedagogue” of Galatians 3:19-25 as the ceremonial law (*No Other Standard*, page 88), contrary to the overwhelming majority of Reformed and Puritan exegetes for the last five hundred years who have interpreted what was “added” to be the legal aspect, or absolute moral demands, of the Mosaic covenant itself (Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 27:26).

This same basic assumption also appeared in the writings of E.P. Sanders, N.T. Wright, and other proponents of the so-called “New Perspective on Paul,” and was later adopted by the Federal Vision movement, the ranks of which are filled mainly by Theonomists and former Reconstructionists such as Steve Wilkins, James Jordan, and Steve Schlissel. The contention of the New Perspective/Federal Vision writers is that the Protestant Reformation was mistaken in identifying the Galatian error as legalism, but that Paul’s rebuke of the Judaizers was instead for their attempt to perpetuate the “covenantal boundary markers” beyond Calvary. Thus, the “gospel” to a Federal Vision advocate is not the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer through faith, but the inclusion of the Gentiles within the covenant community of God. Only

gent argument in his epistle to the Galatians that any attempt to carry the Mosaic economy over into the New Covenant era is an implicit denial of the very Gospel itself, and instead read this epistle merely as a polemic against the use of “the ceremonial law,” and circumcision in particular, as a means of justification.<sup>10</sup>

These underlying errors lead to others still more serious. Chief among these is their concept of “taking dominion” using “God’s law-word” (the “moral-judicial law”) — a novel version of Postmillennialism which arises from R.J. Rushdoony’s theory of “restitution.” Briefly stated, Theonomists view themselves as having been restored to the covenantal relationship which Israel forfeited by disobedience, thus inheriting the responsibility to make restitution for Adam’s rebellion by subduing the world, or reconstructing the nations of the earth in God’s image.<sup>11</sup> They believe that this covenantal restoration, or “justification,” is through faith alone, but that the dominion mandate, or “sanctification,” is fulfilled individually through the application of the “moral-judicial law” to “every area of life” (Theonomy), and nationally through the application of that

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a few Reconstructionists have opposed the Federal Vision movement, among whom the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States (a micro-denomination based in Cumming, Georgia) has been the most vocal. It is the contention of this writer, however, that Federal Vision is closely related to Theonomy and that the two movements share a common origin in the teachings of R.J. Rushdoony and Greg Bahnsen.

10. It is true that Paul’s response to the Judaizers focused specifically on circumcision, but it should be remembered that circumcision, being the entry point into the national covenant, was often used as a synecdoche for the covenant itself (John 7:22; Acts 7:8; Galatians 5:11; Titus 1:10). In much the same way, faith, being the entry point into the New Covenant, was also used as a synecdoche for the Gospel (1 Corinthians 16:13; Galatians 1:23; Ephesians 4:13; Jude 3). Thus, Paul’s argument was as follows: for a Gentile to submit to circumcision was to obligate himself to the whole law, and thereby acknowledge that redemptive history had not yet found its fulfillment in the promised Messiah, that sin had not yet been atoned for, and that “everlasting righteousness” (Daniel 9:24) had not yet been established. Such an acknowledgment was simply apostasy from Christianity.

11. Not all Theonomists would agree with Rushdoony in using this specific restitution paradigm to describe the dominion mandate, though all would ascribe to it some redemptive element.

same law to society by the civil magistrate (Reconstruction). When a five-fold restitution has been made by the Christian Church, according to the principle set forth in Exodus 22:1, her mission will be complete and Christ will return to consummate history. To reject this “restitution gospel” in favor of the mainstream eschatologies, such as either historic Postmillennialism or Amillennialism, or even Dispensationalism, is to be “antinomian” and thus an enemy of the true covenant people of God. This will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.

## **Chapter Four:** Theonomy and the Covenant of Works

### R.J. Rushdoony's Prelapsarian Covenant of Grace

The great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, remarked a few years before his death, “The doctrine of the covenant lies at the root of all true theology. It has been said that he who well understands the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, is a master of divinity. I am persuaded that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scripture, are based upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenant of law and of grace.”<sup>1</sup> It is important to keep this in mind, for the backbone of Theonomy is a subtle, and sometimes outright, denial of the Reformed doctrine of the Covenant of Works, resulting in an attempt to incorporate the conditionality of the law into the Gospel. According to R.J. Rushdoony:

The Westminster Confession, one of the great documents of the Christian faith, has at one point been rightly criticized over the years. Its concept of a covenant of works is not only wrong but shows a misunderstanding of the nature of the covenant....

The covenant is always and only instituted by God's grace. It always is a covenant of law, because covenants are a form of law, and therefore it always requires works. This, however, does not make it a

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1. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Sermons of Rev. C.H. Spurgeon of London* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1883), page 172.

covenant of works.<sup>2</sup>

Rushdoony's criticism of the doctrine of the Covenant of Works stemmed from his belief that Adam's creaturely relationship to God was intrinsically covenantal, thereby rendering any additional covenant unnecessary.<sup>3</sup> Historic Covenant theology, on the other hand, teaches that God's promise of glorification on the condition of perfect obedience transcended Adam's natural constitution and therefore required an additional covenantal arrangement, or, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, a "special act of providence."<sup>4</sup> While it is true that, as a creature, Adam was already bound to submit to God as Creator according to the dictates of the natural law within him,<sup>5</sup> such obedience could never have secured anything but a continued residence in the Garden, subject always to the threat of expulsion for disobedience. What Adam needed was "eschatalogical life" from which declension was no longer possible,<sup>6</sup> and

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2. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Volume I, pp. 376-379.

3. Rushdoony, *ibid.*, page 14. On this point, Rushdoony relied on Cornelius Van Til's redefinition of "covenant" as "exhaustive personal relationship" which reflects the interaction within the "ontological Trinity" ("Covenant Theology," L.A. Loetscher (editor), *The New Schaff-Herzog Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1955], Volume I, page 306). Van Til also rejected the traditional understanding of the Edenic covenant in terms of legal merit, viewing it as a conditional "covenant of mutual love" (*The New Hermeneutic* [Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974], pages 109-161. Incidentally, the objections of the Federal Visionists to the identification of the original covenant as one of works are identical to those of Rushdoony and Van Til.

4. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 12.

5. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 31; Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book I, Chapter 9:9.

6. Augustine distinguished between Adam's probationary state of *posse peccare*, *posse non peccare* (able to sin, able not to sin) and the believer's glorified and confirmed state of *non posse peccare* (not able to sin). While in the body, with the residual corruption of the Adamic nature, the Christian is *posse non peccare* (able not to sin) when relying on the Holy Spirit for daily sanctification. The unregenerate man without the Spirit, however, is *non posse non*

*peccare* (not able not to sin). For a thorough exposition of this subject, see



such a state was set before him via special revelation in the Covenant of Works: “The law of creation requires man to perform perfect obedience, and says, ‘Do.’ But the law as a covenant of works requires him to ‘do and live’ — to do, as the condition of life; to do, in order to acquire by his obedience a title to life eternal.”<sup>7</sup>

### Greg Bahnsen’s Implicit Denial of the Covenant of Works

This concept of a Covenant of Works was also conspicuously absent in the writings of Greg Bahnsen, who claimed that the “pre-redemptive covenant is not merely a matter of law,”<sup>8</sup> but instead was one of grace containing “the element of law”<sup>9</sup> to which Adam “was bound as a condition of fellowship and continued blessing.”<sup>10</sup> Echoing the words of Rushdoony, he taught that “law observance does *not* imply a covenant of works” (emphasis in original),<sup>11</sup> and concluded elsewhere:

His covenant with Adam was gracious in character, sovereignly imposed, mutually binding, called for trust and submission on Adam’s part, and carried sanctions (blessings or curse). When Adam fell into sin, God mercifully re-established a covenantal relationship with him, one in which the gracious and promissory character of the covenant was accentuated even further — in the promise of a coming Savior, a promise which is progressively unfolded and elaborated upon throughout the Old Testament.<sup>12</sup>

The implication in this statement is that the postlapsarian covenant of Genesis 3:15 was the same in substance as the original covenant, or more precisely, that they were merely administrations of the same covenant. Contrary to Bahnsen’s suggestion, however, it is wholly inappro-

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Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1860).

7. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 11.

8. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 578.

9. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 184.

10. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 199.

11. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 187.

12. Greg L. Bahnsen, “Cross-Examination: Practical Implications of Covenant Theology,” *The Counsel of Chalcedon* (December, 1992), page 4.

priate to designate the Edenic covenant as a covenant of grace, for such is “an exclusively redemptive-historical category,” applicable only to the “divine-human covenants subsequent to the Fall.”<sup>13</sup> As noted by Meredith Kline, “Properly defined, grace is not merely the bestowal of unmerited blessings but God’s blessing of man in spite of his *demerits*, in spite of his forfeiture of divine blessings” (emphasis in original).<sup>14</sup> In other words, grace is an attitude of favor which God exhibits towards those who not only do not deserve such favor, but who actually deserve the opposite: His wrath. In this sense, then, Adam in his prelapsarian state could not have been the object of God’s grace, for as yet he had not sinned and therefore did not deserve His wrath. God’s favor was not given to him, but was already his by virtue of his innocence (Genesis 1:26-31; Ecclesiastes 7:29). However, this is not to say that Adam had any inherent right, as a creature, to the eternal life which God promised him in the Covenant of Works. God did not originally owe Adam anything, but freely bound Himself to grant the man an additional reward in exchange for his obedience. This voluntary act of God toward His creature was therefore not one of grace, but of condescension.<sup>15</sup>

In the postlapsarian covenant of Genesis 3:15, the situation was altogether different. Having violated the terms of the Covenant of Works, Adam justly incurred the wrath of God and the penalty of death, and with the loss of his innocence came the loss of God’s favor. It was impossible for God to re-establish the original covenant relationship with Adam,<sup>16</sup> as Bahnsen suggested, and the new covenant must therefore have been, not merely one of condescension, but of pure grace. Consequently, no conditions of any kind are found in Genesis 3:15, but rather the free promise of the coming Redeemer and final deliverance from the power of sin and death. Furthermore, it is in this second and altogether different covenant, and not in a renewal of the original Edenic covenant, that Reformed theology finds the basis for the continuity of redemptive history:

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works,

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13. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, page 100.

14. Meredith G. Kline, “Covenant Theology Under Attack,” *New Horizons*, February 1994, page 3.

15. Westminster Confession, Chapter VII:1.

16. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pages 36-37.

wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.<sup>17</sup> This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament.

Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.<sup>18</sup>

## The Theological Consequences of Monocovenantalism

Historic Covenant theology posits a sharp contrast between the Old Covenant — the Covenant of Works of Eden and its typological

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17. Lest it be concluded that, in requiring faith in order to be saved, God has thus instituted a conditional covenant in the Gospel, the Westminster divines immediately noted that the requirement is freely supplied through the sovereign regenerating work of the Spirit in changing the will of the elect (Psalm 110:3; Jeremiah 31:33; Ephesians 2:8-9).

18. Westminster Confession, Chapter VII:2-6.

republishation at Sinai — and the New Covenant — the Covenant of Grace first announced in the *protoevangel* of Genesis 3:15, further expanded in the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 15, and finally fulfilled in the Gospel age. It is therefore bi-covenantal, and in this way alone is the proper distinction between law and grace maintained. However, because Theonomy presses the continuity of redemptive history back into Eden, this distinction is effectively destroyed, and the legal demand of the former (“obey and live”) is carried over into the latter, thereby mixing works with faith. As a result, the very definition of redemption itself becomes hopelessly confused.

For example, building on his identification of the Adamic covenant as one of “grace containing an element of law,” through which was promised “continued blessing” in the Garden rather than eschatological life, Bahnsen insisted that both the “Older and Newer Covenants” were “*monergistic covenants of grace*” (emphasis in original).<sup>19</sup> He went on to explain, “The New Covenant presents no new covenantal law or moral order.... The New Testament and Covenant continue the same demand for obedience. Entrance to the kingdom is dependent upon attesting obedience.”<sup>20</sup> In this view, the believer is merely forgiven of his past transgressions and then sent back to the law to fulfill its demand for personal obedience. The only difference between the Old and New Covenants, then, is that the latter “brings the power of obedience with it by the agency of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>21</sup>

Bahnsen’s implicit monocovenantalism led him to not only misunderstand the nature of the Edenic covenant, but also its later restatement at Sinai, and to insist that Christians remain under the law as a covenant:

Now some people would say that New Covenant believers are under the Abrahamic covenant of promise today, but not the Mosaic covenant with its laws. However that is far from the outlook of the scriptural writers. In Galatians 3:21 Paul addresses this question to those who speak of being under one or the other covenant: “Is the law contrary to the promises of God?” And his inspired answer is, “May it never be!”

The fact is that all of the covenants of the Old Covenant (that is, all of the Old Testament covenants) are unified as parts of the one overall

19. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 184-185.

20. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, pages 184, 202.

21. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 190.

covenant of grace established by God. Paul spoke of Gentiles who were not part of the Old Covenant economy which included the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants as “strangers to the covenants of the promise” (Eph. 2:12). There were many, progressively revealed aspects to the single promise of God in the Old Testament: many administrations of the one overall covenant of grace. Thus the various covenants of the Old Covenant were all part of one program and plan. Not only were they harmonious with one another, but they are unified with the New Covenant which was promised in Jeremiah 31 and is enjoyed by Christians today (cf. Heb. 8:6-13). There is one basic covenant of grace, characterized by anticipation in the Old Covenant and by realization in the New Covenant (cf. John 1:17)....<sup>22</sup>

Nowhere does the Bible identify the unconditional promise of the New Covenant with the legal demands of the Old Covenant. Instead, the two covenants are properly understood as opposed to one another (Galatians 4:21-31), in that they set forth antithetical ways of securing righteousness: the first by personal working, leading to bondage, and the second through faith in Christ’s working, leading to freedom.<sup>23</sup> When Paul had previously asked, “Is the law then against the promises of God?” (Galatians 3:21), he did not thereby deny this works-faith dichotomy, but merely demonstrated the utter impossibility of securing God’s favor through the law due to the fallen nature of man.<sup>24</sup> Bahnsen’s incorrect citation of this verse ignored the context of the epistle and had the effect of rendering Paul’s overall argument incoherent and contradictory. Certainly, the Apostle knew nothing of “monergistic grace in the law,” for “the law is not of faith” (Galatians 3:12).

### How the Law Operated as a Covenant of Works

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22. Greg L. Bahnsen, “God’s Uniform Standard of Right and Wrong,” *Institute for Christian Economics*, Volume I, Number 3, November 1978.

23. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 9:4; Book III, Chapter 11:14; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), Book XII, Chapter 8:15. It is important to understand that the antithesis lies not in the condition, but in who fulfills the condition: the sinner or Christ?

24. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter 11:15.

Theonomy's denial of the Covenant of Works, and its republication at Sinai, is contrary to the Reformed faith as expressed in the historic creeds and confessions. According to the Westminster Confession, "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience."<sup>25</sup> That the Westminster divines associated the Mosaic covenant with the Adamic Covenant of Works is seen in their choice of proof-texts for this teaching: Genesis 2:17 and Galatians 3:10. The first verse contains the prohibition against eating from the forbidden tree and the second references the "works of the law" with a quotation from Deuteronomy 27:26: "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law to do them." The phrases "the law" and "the book of the law" can mean nothing else but the Mosaic covenant. We see this same association implied in Chapter XIX of the Confession: "God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it: and endued him with power and ability to keep it. This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables...."<sup>26</sup> Thus, the Decalogue itself, together with its sanctions, is identified as a summary of the "perfect rule of righteousness" to which Adam was bound, thereby rendering the Sinaitic covenant a restatement of the original Covenant of Works. Again, Genesis 2:17 is connected with Galatians 3:10, with the addition of Romans 2:14, which contrasts the Gentiles, "which have not the law," with the Jews to whom the written law was covenantally delivered, and Romans 10:5, which refers directly to the righteous requirements of the Mosaic law. In the Larger Catechism, we read, "The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created, was the placing him in paradise... [and] entering into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, of which the tree of life was a pledge; and forbidding to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and

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25. Westminster Confession, Chapter VII:2.

26. *Ibid.*, Chapter XIX:1-2.

evil, upon the pain of death.”<sup>27</sup> Once again, the divines chose to proof-text this teaching by citing Paul’s discussion of the Mosaic law in Galatians 3:12 and Romans 5:5. It should be noted that the usage of the variant terms “covenant of works” and “covenant of life” did not imply different covenants, but the one Covenant of Works seen from the two different perspectives of condition and promise: “This is called in the Catechism ‘a covenant of life.’ It is also often called, *the covenant of works*, from the condition of it — which was *obedience* or *works*. Man in all he did, or in all his works, was to obey his Maker. It is called the covenant of life, because life — eternal life — was the stipulation of the covenant, on the part of God. If man were perfectly obedient, his Maker promised him an endless life of perfect happiness, as his reward” (emphasis in original).<sup>28</sup>

Since it is obvious that “no mere man after the fall can perfectly keep the ten commandments,”<sup>29</sup> how then can it be said that the Mosaic covenant was, in any way, a covenant of works? It was so in two ways. With reference to the Israelites, the law was a covenant of works on a typological, or temporal, level.<sup>30</sup> Their tenure in the promised land was dependent upon their keeping of the terms of the covenant; the “life” promised was therefore possession of the land with all its attendant blessings of health, prosperity, and longevity, and the “death” threatened was expulsion from the land with all its attendant curses of disease, poverty,

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27. Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 20.

28. Ashbel Green, *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1841), Volume I, page 230.

29. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 103.

30. Meredith G. Kline, “Of Works and Grace,” *Presbyterion*, Spring, 1983, page 65. Kline’s teaching of the bi-level nature of the Mosaic covenant is not an unconfessional innovation, as is often charged by his critics, but is easily demonstrated to have once been a staple in Puritan and Reformed thought. For example, John Milton, in his treatment of the law in *A Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, noted that while the immediate meaning of Leviticus 18:5 was the promise of “temporal life,” there was nevertheless an underlying reference to eternal life as well (page 380). See also John Calvin, *Commentary on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), pages 203-205; Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, pages 67-68.

and calamity. As Moses proclaimed, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). This “life and death, blessing and cursing” was expounded in the covenantal sanctions of Deuteronomy 28. On this typological level, the covenant was merely a restatement of the original Covenant of Works, but it could not be a formal establishment thereof because, though broken by mankind in Adam, that covenant had never been abrogated and it was therefore impossible for God to reinstate it afresh for fallen men without dismissing the guilt that had existed up to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. For God to have thus pardoned the Israelites without also pardoning the rest of the world, and millions of those who had already perished in their sins up to that point in time, would have been unjust and contrary to the holy character of Him with whom is “no respect of persons” (Romans 2:11). Furthermore, the promise of eternal life for perfect obedience which was held forth by the original covenant had been rendered unattainable, not only by the imputation of Adam’s sin, but the transmission of his fallen nature to his posterity. Therefore, the Sinaitic covenant, in its relation to the Israelites, could only be an echo of the Covenant of Works, put into place primarily for the temporal purposes mentioned above, and ultimately to remind them of their guiltiness before God and their need of a Redeemer:

The Law — considered as a national covenant, by which their continued possession of the land of Canaan, and of all their privileges under the Theocracy, was left to depend on their external obedience to it, — might be called a national Covenant of Works, since their temporal welfare was suspended on the condition of their continued adherence to it; but, in that aspect of it, it had no relation to the spiritual salvation of individuals, otherwise than as this might be affected by their retaining, or forfeiting, their outward privileges and means of grace. It may be considered, however, in another light, as a re-exhibition of the Covenant of Works, for the instruction of individual Jews in the principles of divine truth.... In this aspect, it was designed, not for the justification of sinners, but for the conviction of sin.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the Mosaic law was subservient to, and therefore did not supplant, the Abrahamic covenant of promise, or the Covenant of Grace

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31. Buchanan, *Doctrine of Justification*, pages 38-39.



(Galatians 3:17). However, it was with reference to the Redeemer that the Sinaitic covenant was indeed a formal establishment of the original Covenant of Works. Having been born of a virgin, Christ was not affected by original sin, and the Covenant of Works could thus be established with Him, as the second Adam, through the instrumentality of the Mosaic law without the necessity of God pardoning the rest of mankind. The promise of life for Christ was not merely typological in relation to possession of the land, but an actual promise of glorification and eternal life in the anti-typological Kingdom of Heaven. Furthermore, because He was not a mere creature but the Son of God incarnate, Christ's obedience had intrinsic, or *meritum de condigno* (condign merit) and thus conferred a far greater legal standing upon those whom He represented than Adam's mere *meritum de pactum* (covenantal merit)<sup>32</sup> would have done had he not fallen (Ephesians 2:6; 2 Peter 1:4):

...[A]s a human being Christ was certainly subject to the law of God as the rule of life; even believers are never exempted from the law in that sense. But Christ related himself to the law in still a very different way, namely, as the law of the covenant of works. Adam was not only obligated to keep the law but was confronted in the covenant of works with that law as the way to eternal life, a life he did not yet possess. But Christ, in virtue of his union with the divine nature, already had this eternal and blessed life. This life he voluntarily relinquished. He submitted himself to the law of the covenant of works as the way to eternal life

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32. Condign merit is distinguished from covenantal merit in that it denotes merit that has inherently equal value with the reward, or an equality between service and return, rather than merit which derives its value from a pre-existing agreement. Had Adam fulfilled the Covenant of Works, glorification would have been bestowed on the basis of covenantal merit only, since he as a mere creature had no inherent claim to the reward. However, his disobedience, which was treason against an infinite Being, had equal value with the penalty of eternal death. In contrast, Christ's obedience was inherently equal in value with the reward, while the punishment He suffered in behalf of the elect was covenantal only. While condign merit and covenantal merit are the only two categories known to Reformed theology within the context of the Covenant of Works, Roman Catholicism adds a third: *meritum de congruo* (congruent merit), or an extrinsic merit which works with and supplies the deficiencies of intrinsic merit: *i.e.* the imperfect obedience of the faithful is accepted as meritorious on the grounds of Christ's merits.

for himself and his own.

The obedience that Christ accorded to the law, therefore, was totally voluntary. Not his death alone, as Anselm said, but his entire life was an act of self-denial, a self-offering presented by him as head in the place of his own.<sup>33</sup>

Because of their rejection of the bi-covenantalism of traditional Covenant theology, and their identification of the Adamic covenant and the Covenant of Grace as merely different administrations of the same “everlasting covenant,”<sup>34</sup> Theonomists undermine the biblical doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone and prevent the typology of the Old Testament from finding true fulfillment in Christ’s covenantal obedience in behalf of His people. Their denial of the Covenant of Works ultimately transforms redemptive history into a program for maintaining God’s favor through law-keeping: “With respect to the overall structuring of covenant theology, once grace is attributed to the original covenant with Adam, preredemptive and redemptive covenants cease to be characterized by contrasting governmental principles in the bestowal of the kingdom on mankind. Instead, some sort of continuum obtains. A combined demand-and-promise (which is thought somehow to qualify as grace but not as works) is seen as the common denominator in this alleged new unity of all covenants.”<sup>35</sup> This redefinition of Covenant theology is seen most clearly in Theonomy’s view of the law’s role in the life of the Christian, which will be the subject of the next chapter.

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33. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2006), Volume III, page 379.

34. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Law and Society* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1982), page 468.

35. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, page 6.

## **Chapter Five:** Theonomy's Doctrine of Covenantal Nomism

### A Radical Understanding of "Covenantal Unity"

In the words of Thomas Boston, "Such is the natural propensity of man's heart to the way of the law, in opposition to Christ, that, as the tainted vessel turns the taste of the purest liquor put into it, so the natural man turns the very gospel into law, and transforms the covenant of grace into a covenant of works."<sup>1</sup> This confusion of grace and law may be seen in the theonomic system, one key tenet of which is that Christians are supposedly under the same pedagogical covenant as were the Israelites. In his book, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, Greg Bahnsen wrote, "...[L]awlessness and disobedience lead to captivity for the Jews and removal from the promised land. Only when the people of God had learned the lesson of obedience to God's law could they be delivered according to the promise (Deut. 30:1-3)..."<sup>2</sup> This much is true. However, because Bahnsen saw the Mosaic covenant as a mere administration of the Covenant of Grace,<sup>3</sup> rather than a temporary type of the Adamic Covenant of Works, he transferred the conditions for Israel's possession of the promised land to the New Covenant and applied them to the Church:

The New Testament and Covenant continue the same demand

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1. Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, page 70.
  2. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 200.
  3. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, Chapter Eight.

for obedience. Entrance to the kingdom is dependent upon attesting obedience (Matt. 7:21), and the kingdom itself is *synonymous* with *righteousness*.... Without the obedience of kingdom righteousness Christ cannot be one's Savior (Heb. 5:9).... All men are exhorted to seek first the kingdom of God and its *righteousness* (Matt. 6:33). The chastening of God which comes in the form of affliction or persecution makes one righteous, obedient to the law, and worthy of the kingdom.... The kingdom, righteousness, and law-keeping are inseparable and mutually inclusive. The Messianic kingdom is to be advanced in the earth *along with* the teaching of obedience to the *law* of God (Matt. 28:19f). When Christ returns in judgment He will take vengeance upon all those who do not *obey* the gospel (2 Thess. 1:7f) (emphasis in original).<sup>4</sup>

If "entrance to the kingdom is dependent upon attesting obedience," and "kingdom righteousness" is that which is wrought in the believer through "obedience to the law of God," it would seem that the Christian is made "worthy of the kingdom," not by the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ through faith alone, but by an implanted righteousness that is ultimately maintained by his own works. Bahnsen could call this arrangement a "monergistic covenant of grace"<sup>5</sup> only by redefining the term to fit his monocovenantal presuppositions:

The New Testament saint, no less than the Older Testament saints or Adam in paradise, is committed to obey the law of his gracious God. If a man disobeys God's law, he has broken covenant with God, and his covenant sign loses its value; this is just as true under the New Covenant as under the Older....

Continued blessing for Adam in paradise, Israel in the promised land, and the Christian in the kingdom has been seen to be dependent upon persevering obedience to God's will as expressed in His law. There is complete covenantal *unity* with reference to the law of God as the standard of moral obligation throughout the *diverse* ages of human history (emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup>

As already discussed, "continued blessing" for Adam in the Garden and Israel in the Promised Land was associated with the Covenant of

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4. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, pages 202-203.

5. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 185.

6. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, pages 188, 203.

Works: in the former, the actual covenant itself; in the latter, a republication or type thereof. Bahnsen's insistence upon "complete covenantal unity" between Adam in the Garden, Israel in Canaan, and the Christian in the Kingdom derived from his understanding of the Covenant of Grace as a renewal of the original Adamic covenant. This necessarily leads to the conclusion that "obeying the Gospel" is not "resting upon Christ alone for salvation," but maintaining one's covenantal relationship to God through law-keeping. Such a doctrine is known as "covenantal nomism," which was described by E.P. Sanders as "the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression."<sup>7</sup> According to this view, the believer is justified by being sanctified: "Sanctification in God's law makes us children of God and brethren of Christ.... The knowledge of God and salvation depend on keeping His commandments."<sup>8</sup>

While Bahnsen attempted to conceal his covenantal nomism under Reformed terminology, Rushdoony was openly critical of the Reformed doctrine of sanctification precisely because it was not based on law-keeping:

Sanctification depends on our law-keeping in mind, word, and deed. The perfection of the incarnate Word was manifested in His law-keeping; can the people of His kingdom pursue their calling to be perfect in any way other than by His law-word? ...If the law is denied, how is man then to be sanctified? ...Protestant theology left man justified but without a way to be sanctified.... To separate the law from the gospel is to separate oneself from the law and the gospel, and from Christ....

The infiltration of Hellenic thought into the Christian community meant, among other things, the introduction of a new doctrine of sanctification. The Biblical doctrine is thoroughly practical: it calls for the progressive submission of man and the world to the law of God. It is a program for conquest and victory. The greatness of medieval culture was built on the bedrock of an obedience to the law, and the same was true of Puritanism. The staying power of the Jew in the face of adversities has been the measure of his loyalty to the law....

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7. E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Norristown, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1977), page 75.

8. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics.*, pages 176, 179.

The Reformation restated clearly the doctrine of justification, but it failed to clarify the doctrine of sanctification. The confusion is apparent in the Westminster Confession of Faith; chapter XIII, “Of Sanctification,” is excellent as far as it goes, but it fails to specify precisely what the way of sanctification is....<sup>9</sup>

According to the theonomic system, sanctification is directly connected with earthly dominion, and even the unbeliever achieves “staying power,” or “cultural dominion,” when he renders an external obedience to the law.<sup>10</sup> Thus, justification, in Rushdoony’s understanding, clears the slate of past transgressions and returns the believer to the task of sanctifying himself and the world through subjection to the law. It will be seen in a later chapter how this teaching, which Rushdoony admitted was a departure from that of the Protestant Reformation, led to his equally unorthodox “gospel of restitution.”

### The Distinction Between Righteousness and Holiness

Perhaps the main source of Theonomy’s error here is a misidentification of sanctification with righteousness. The Greek word translated “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη; *dikaiousune*) is a legal term which denotes “conformity to a standard,” or “agreeableness to a rule of judgment,” particularly in the context of a binding contract or covenant.<sup>11</sup> Distinguished from “holiness” (ἁγιωσύνη; *hagiosune*), which, when applied to men, approximates one’s conduct to the character of God and therefore may either increase or decrease,<sup>12</sup> righteousness is not a progressive term: either one has kept the covenant or one has broken it. In the New Testament, this word generally refers to a substantive conformity to God’s moral law which merits eternal life (Matthew 5:48; Romans 10:3; Galatians 3:21). However, under the Mosaic economy, “righteousness”

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9. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 307-308, 549-550.

10. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pages 964, 972.

11. Hopkins, *Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, pages 17, 18; Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, page 370; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 75.

12. W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), pages 565-566; Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 12:10.

(צִדִּיק; *tsehdek*) generally referred to a qualitative conformity to the Sinaitic covenant — a “ceremonial righteousness” or a “righteousness of the flesh”<sup>13</sup> — resulting in its temporal blessings (Deuteronomy 6:25; Proverbs 14:34). Such a righteousness could be forfeited by covenantal defecation (Ezekiel 18:20-32), but restoration was available through sacrifice (Hebrews 9:22) and covenantal renewal (Ezra 10; Nehemiah 7-9). Thus, David sometimes petitioned God on the basis of his own righteousness (Psalm 7:8, 18:20), even though his life was often plagued with many sins for which he had to be forgiven and restored (Psalm 51). This is also the sense in which Paul described his relationship to the law as a Pharisee in Philippians 3:6, despite his confession elsewhere to have been the “chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). Other instances of this external righteousness may be found in Luke 1:5-6 and Acts 10:22.

However, with the abolition of the sacrificial system, there no longer remained any means of covenantal restoration (Hebrews 10:26), thereby requiring a change of the covenant itself (Hebrews 7:12), which came with the institution of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:7-12). Theonomists often write as though the death of Christ merely replaced the Old Covenant sacrificial system, thereby rendering a change of law unnecessary,<sup>14</sup> but this assumption ignores the plain biblical teaching that the sacrifices of Calvary and of the Old Testament were essentially differ-

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13. Milton, *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, page 401.

14. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 207. In a strange form of universalism, Gary North taught that Christ “died for the whole world.... He died to save the world, meaning to give it time, life, and external blessings.” The vicarious atonement provided two kinds of grace: “*special grace* for God’s elect,” and “*common grace* which makes history possible” (North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 963); the latter grace is the means by which God has expanded the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law to include the heathen nations in order to apply its sanctions to the unregenerate (see Chapter Fourteen). The only real difference that North saw between believers and unbelievers in this regard is that God’s blessing of the latter is only temporary because they are unable to sustain “covenantal faithfulness to His *civil* law-order” without the empowerment of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the residual effect of these blessings “can last for centuries” (North, *ibid.*, pages 976, 978, 982; emphasis in original). Needless to say, this is not what the Reformed theologians have traditionally had in mind when they have discussed the doctrine of common grace.

ent. While providing atonement for transgressions against the temporal, land-bound Mosaic covenant, the animal sacrifices of the Tabernacle and the later Temple could never atone for violations of the transcendent moral law and “make the comers thereunto perfect” before God (Hebrews 10:1) as touching the righteousness required for eternal life. It must be kept in mind, therefore, that whenever Paul wrote of the believer’s righteousness, he did so in the context of perfect conformity to the universal moral law under the Covenant of Works,<sup>15</sup> never in the context of obedience to the localized statutes of the Mosaic covenant. This righteousness, or conformity to the moral law “at all times and in all places and conditions” and in “all the dispositions, thoughts, and purposes of the heart as well as to all the words and actions of the life,”<sup>16</sup> is required by God of all mankind, irrespective of nationality (Acts 17:30), and eternal damnation is the penalty for failing to produce it (Revelation 20:13). However, since all men have “fallen short” of this conformity (Romans 3:23), such a righteousness must necessarily be understood as being alien to the believer, and never what he possesses in himself other than by imputation through faith: “But now the righteousness of God without [ξωρίς; *choris*: apart from, separate from<sup>17</sup>] the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them who believe” (Romans 3:21-22).

“The kingdom, righteousness, and law-keeping” are indeed “inseparable and mutually inclusive,” but the question is, *Whose* righteousness and law-keeping are they? Bahnsen shifted the focus away from Christ, to whom alone righteousness and law-keeping are attributed in the New Testament, to the believer himself. Rushdoony did the same thing when he claimed that “the call to sanctification... is *a summons to obey the law...*” (emphasis in original)<sup>18</sup> Such a shift is fatal to the Gospel, for “[I]f righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:21). According to Rushdoony, “The antinomian believes that faith frees the Christian from the law, so that he is not outside the law but is rather dead to the law. There is no warrant whatsoever in Scripture for

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15. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, pages 85-86.

16. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 76.

17. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, page 64.

18. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 555.



antinomianism.”<sup>19</sup> While admitting that the phrase “dead to the law” is indeed found in Scripture, he insisted that “it has reference to the believer in relationship to the atoning work of Christ as the believer’s representative and substitute,” and then concluded:

...[T]he believer is dead to the law as an indictment, a legal sentence of death against him, Christ having died for him, but the believer is alive to the law as the righteousness of God. The purpose of Christ’s atoning work was to restore man to a position of covenant-keeping instead of covenant-breaking, to enable man to keep the law by freeing man “from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2), “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom. 8:4). Man is restored to a position of law-keeping.<sup>20</sup>

Contrary to Rushdoony, the “law of sin and death” from which the believer has been freed is not just the indictment of the law, but the law itself.<sup>21</sup> As a picture of the original Covenant of Works, the Mosaic covenant called to mind the perfect obedience which God requires for eternal life (Leviticus 18:5; Nehemiah 9:29; Ezekiel 20:11; Galatians 3:12; James 2:10)<sup>22</sup> — something which no man, not even the regenerate, is able to produce (Romans 3:23). However, because it did not have renewing power, it merely excited the sinful passions of fallen men and therefore brought death (Romans 7:5-11).<sup>23</sup> As John Calvin wrote, “Those who

19. Rushdoony, *ibid.*, page 3.

20. Rushdoony, *ibid.*

21. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 105; Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 208. See Appendix Three.

22. Boston, “View of the Covenant of Works,” page 259.

23. It is the view of this author that Paul’s autobiographical comments in the seventh chapter of his epistle to the Romans, specifically verses 14-25, referred either to his pre-conversion Pharisaical commitment to law-keeping, or to a personification of Israel under the Sinaitic covenant, but not to his struggle against sin as a Christian man (see Mark W. Karlberg, “Israel’s History Personified: Romans 7:7-13 in Relation to Paul’s Teaching on the Old Man,” *Trinity Journal* [Spring 1986], Volume VII:1, pages 65ff; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans’ Publishing Company, 1996], pages 447ff). Though not held by the majority of the theologians, this view was espoused by many of the Church fathers in the ante-

live to the law, therefore, have never felt the power of the law, or properly understood what the law means; for the law, when truly perceived, makes us die to itself, and it is from this source, and not from Christ, that sin proceeds.”<sup>24</sup>

Rushdoony’s misunderstandings cut at the very heart of the biblical doctrine of justification. The Gospel message is not that men may be restored to “a position of covenant-keeping,” but rather that those who trust in the righteousness of Christ alone for their standing before God are viewed by Him as covenant-keepers. No longer do they work to “fulfill the righteousness

Nicene period, as well as Augustine in his earlier works, and also has some support in Reformed history, such as in the writings of Puritan John Milton, who interpreted this passage as reflecting “the mind of Paul while under the curse of the law” (*Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, page 381).

In verses 5-6, Paul wrote, “For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.” Thus, Paul identified being “in the flesh” (unregenerate) with being “under the law.” To this hopeless condition he contrasted being “delivered from the law... to serve in newness of spirit....” He then repeated the very same argument, although switching from the third person pronoun (“we”) in the past tense (“were”), to the first person (“I”) in the historic present (“am”): “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal [“in the flesh”], sold under sin” [“under the law”]. He then went to relate how he loved the law in his mind, but found himself constantly foiled in his desire to keep it by the sinful inclinations of his own flesh (verses 15-23), finally crying out for deliverance from “the body of this death” (verse 24) and finding freedom “from the law of sin and death” in Jesus Christ (8:2). Throughout the next chapter, Paul contrasted the bondage of those who are under the law and its impossible demands — even extending such bondage to the creation itself in verse 21 — with the freedom of those who are “in the Spirit.” Clearly, then, Paul’s argument from chapter 5 through chapter 8 is a protracted theological dissertation on the two covenants: the Covenant of Works, which demands a perfect righteousness that cannot be provided by fallen man, and the Covenant of Grace, through which believers receive the perfect righteousness of Christ through faith. If Paul did intend to describe the struggle of the Christian life, it would make sense to consider such in the context of the residual corruption within the believer that ever tempts him to revert to Covenant of Works for his acceptance with God (Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*; Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*).

24. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 73.

of the law,” because for them, the broken Adamic covenant *has* been fulfilled in Christ and they have *already* become partakers of the glorified life promised in that covenant.<sup>25</sup> In the words of Christ Himself, the Christian has “passed from death unto life” (John 5:11). While Theonomy effectively places the redeemed man back under probation as was Adam in Eden, the true Gospel lifts him far above that state and actually seats him with Christ “in heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6). Having been released from the law in its covenant form, there are no more legal conditions or requirements for him to fulfill, for he is already complete in Christ.<sup>26</sup>

### Saving Faith Redefined as Obedience

In his *Institutes of Biblical Law*, Rushdoony wrote, “Salvation is by the grace of God through faith; sanctification is by the law of God.... Those who are in the covenant are in a covenant of grace which is also a covenant of works. The grace enables them to perform the works which are required of them.”<sup>27</sup> He repeated this claim in his *Systematic Theology*: “The new covenant is... at one and the same time a covenant of grace and law, a covenant of works. Works belong to the covenant, irrevocably and fundamentally.”<sup>28</sup> It is ironic that, while he reacted so negatively to the doctrine of a prelapsarian Covenant of Works, Rushdoony was nevertheless willing to thus insert the works principle into the Covenant of Grace. The implication of this unbiblical admixture of grace and law is that we are restored to a covenantal relationship with God (a state of grace) through faith, but kept there by faithful obedience to the law (works). Rather than merely teaching what the Bible teaches — that regeneration enables the Christian to obey God freely and without external compulsion (Luke 1:74-75)<sup>29</sup> — Rushdoony seemed to put forth the old Scholastic doctrine of *infusio gratiae justificantis*, or “first grace,”<sup>30</sup> defined as an inward “spiritual quality” which empowers the Christian to

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25. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 13:22.

26. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 116.

27. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 714.

28. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Volume II, page 884.

29. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, pages 281-282.

30. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 77.

perform the works required to maintain right standing with God.<sup>31</sup> Such is a subtle form of semi-Pelagianism, virtually identical to the teaching of the sixteenth-century Remonstrants.<sup>32</sup>

Bahnsen taught much the same thing. In *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, he wrote, “Whereas a ‘faith’ which is not accompanied by the works of the law is useless and cannot save a person, faith which results in the works of the law is attested, perfected, and powerful to justify (James 2:14-26).”<sup>33</sup> Several years later, his thought had progressed to abandon entirely this implied distinction between faith and the “works of the law,” and to define faith *as* obedience, or “two different sides of the same coin.”<sup>34</sup> This identification of faith with obedience is even more evident

31. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1922), First Part of the Second Part, Question 110.

32. According to Charles Hodge:

The Remonstrant system does not differ essentially from the Pelagian, so far as the parties, the promise and the condition of the covenant are concerned. The Remonstrants also make God and man the parties, life the promise, and obedience the condition. But they regard fallen men as in a state of sin by nature, as needing supernatural grace which is furnished to all, and the obedience required is the obedience of faith, or *fides obsequiosa* — faith as including and securing evangelical obedience. Salvation under the gospel is as truly by works as under the law; but the obedience required is not the perfect righteousness demanded of Adam, but such as fallen man, by the aid of the Spirit, is now able to perform (*Systematic Theology* [New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1872], Volume II, pages 355-356).

33. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 240.

34. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, page 77. This progression in Bahnsen’s thought was due in part to the influence of Daniel P. Fuller’s book, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmann’s Publishing Company, 1980), in which the “obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5, 16:26) was interpreted as “the works one must do in order to be saved, or more fully blessed” (page 113). According to Fuller, “legalism” is believing that one has within himself the resources that God needs or that “he is able to render needful service to God and his fellow man” (page 113) without the assistance of grace. Instead of “resting in what we are or have,” true faith must “do certain concrete things, so in the course of trusting God and in order to remain in his kindness, we must do all the works of love and obey the commandments of the Bible” (pages 113, 114). While he sometimes spoke of “an inseparable connection between faith and resulting works” (page 113), at other places he described

in the following excerpt from a recorded lecture:

Let me very briefly point out, some people will say James can't mean the word justify in a forensic sense, because then he would contradict Paul. Paul says we are justified by faith, not works. James says we are justified by works. So if they both mean "justify" in the forensic sense, there is a contradiction. Well, I don't think so, because in Galatians 5:6 Paul teaches exactly what James does. Paul says we are justified by faith working by love. We are justified by working, active, living faith. I think that's what James is teaching. They mean exactly the same thing. But... this has been a bone of controversy in my denomination even, because a professor at Westminster Seminary [Norman Shepherd] insisted James means this in the forensic sense.

Now... people who don't like that say, It is to be taken in the demonstrative sense. The problem is, the demonstrative sense of the word justify means "to show someone to be righteous," and that doesn't

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faith and obedience as the same thing: "[O]ne learns to live like Jesus and receive a continuous stream of blessings from [God] simply by faith, that is, by an obedience which keeps him in the place where he can always benefit from the Workman's skill" (page 115). Consequently, he concluded that "the enjoyment of grace [is] dependent on faith and good works" (page 63). Misusing the Bible's description of God as the "Great Physician," Fuller exhorted his readers to avoid legalism by "acknowledg[ing] how truly sick we are and look[ing] away from ourselves and, with complete confidence in the Doctor's expertise and desire to heal us, follow his instructions (the obedience of faith!) *in order to get well*" (page 118; emphasis in original). Thus, "grace is conditional" (page 108), or, as Rushdoony wrote, "[The] covenant of grace... is also a covenant of works."

As noted above by Hodge, this is precisely the same covenantal nomism taught by the sixteenth-century Remonstrants, and it is also undeniably that of the Theonomists. Bahnsen noted his indebtedness to Fuller's book on pages 26-27 of *No Other Standard* (footnote 16) and even employed some of the same language such as "personal resources... without the provisions of grace" in attempting to avoid the charge of legalism (*ibid.*, page 81). Gary North also expressed his appreciation for Fuller's theology on pages 21-22 of his book, *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986). The only difference between Fuller and Bahnsen (and North) is that the former readily acknowledged that the law-gospel, faith-works distinction was that of historic Covenant theology and openly repudiated it as such, whereas the latter claimed to still be teaching Covenant theology, while in substance denying it.

relieve the contradiction between James and Paul, because Paul in Romans 4 looks at Abraham as an example of how God justifies the ungodly. James is saying, Look at how God justifies someone demonstrated as godly. The contradiction is not relieved. And so what you really get — and this is crucial, this is a crucial point — modern interpreters who don't like what I am suggesting and what Professor Shepherd is suggesting end up saying that to justify in James 2 really means “to demonstrate justification,” not to “demonstrate righteousness.” That is, they make the word to justify mean “to justify the fact that I'm justified.” And the word never means that....

I'm suggesting that the reason Paul and James are not contrary to one another is because the only kind of faith that will justify us is working faith, and the only kind of justification ever presented in the Bible after the Fall is a justification by working faith, a faith that receives its merit from God and proceeds to work as a regenerated, new person.<sup>35</sup>

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35. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Calvin's Institutes* (1986), Session 34, audio tape lecture #GB449b. Norman Shepherd, who was Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (East), was censured and finally dismissed in 1981 for teaching “justification by faith plus works.” He later revised his terminology to “justification by obedient faith,” reflecting Daniel Fuller's understanding of the “obedience of faith.” Shepherd is now a major contributor to the Federal Vision movement.

In his book, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* [Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2000], Shepherd rejected the traditional understanding that Paul and James were using the term “justification” in two different senses as an assertion “of dubious validity” (page 62). Despite the attempt of some Theonomists to disassociate Bahnsen from Shepherd (*e.g.* John Otis, *Danger in the Camp: An Analysis and Refutation of the Federal Vision Heresy* [McLeansville, North Carolina: Triumphant Publications, 2005], Chapter 11), the former clearly identified his view on justification with that of the latter: “[M]odern interpreters don't like what I am suggesting and what Professor Shepherd is suggesting....” Furthermore, according to Roger Wagner, who studied with Bahnsen under Shepherd at Westminster East and later served with him as associate pastor of an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation in Chula Vista, California, “[Bahnsen] was always very favorable to Shepherd's concerns and formulations,” and he believed that “the covenant theology formulated by Shepherd... is not only biblical, but also our strongest bastion against the growing ‘Lutheranism’ and antinomianism in Reformed circles” (letter cited in Randy Booth, “Caution and Respect in Controversy,” online at

First of all, Bahnsen's association of "works of the law" with saving faith was based on a monocovenantal presupposition that the law and the Gospel are "one and the same."<sup>36</sup> However, according to the traditional Reformed view, "works of the law" are those rendered to the law as a covenant of works.<sup>37</sup> As such, "works of the law" do not accompany, but are opposed to, "the hearing of faith" (Galatians 3:2). Paul clearly rejected the notion that such works are beneficial to the Christian's spiritual well-being, but that they instead indicate an attempt to achieve righteousness by the flesh (Galatians 3:3). To be of the "works of the law" is to be "under the curse" of the law, for the law requires perfect obedience (Galatians 3:10). Thus, "no man is justified by the law in the sight of God" for "the law is not of faith" (Galatians 3:11-12).

Secondly, Bahnsen was incorrect in his interpretation of Galatians 5:6, which is better translated "faith exerting, or expressing, itself in love."<sup>38</sup> Again, neither "works of the law" nor justification are in view

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[www.cmfnow.com/AAPC/controversy.html](http://www.cmfnow.com/AAPC/controversy.html)). David Bahnsen has also testified that his father was a supporter of not only Shepherd, but Fuller as well ("Greg Bahnsen and Norm Shepherd: The Final Word," available online at [www.davidbahnsen.com](http://www.davidbahnsen.com)).

Support of Shepherd within theonomic circles has not been unique to Bahnsen, however. Joseph Braswell, who wrote for Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation, defended Shepherd's "covenantal perspective" of a "future judgment according to works" and also defined "covenant faith" as "radical repentance, faithfulness, obedience, commitment, etc." ("Lord of Life: The Confession of Lordship and Saving Faith," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* [Winter 1990-1991], Vol. XIII:1, pages 90-91). Gary North dedicated his book, *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991) to Shepherd, calling him "the most accomplished instructor I had at Westminster Seminary," and "a loyal defender of Westminster's original confession." The theological affinity of Shepherdism and Theonomy/Reconstructionism cannot be successfully denied.

36. Fuller, *Gospel and Law*, page 103.

37. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 91; Boston, note in Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pages 22-24; Boston, "View of the Covenant of Works," page 251.

38. The Greek word that is usually translated as "working" is ἐνεργουμένη (*energoumene*), from which is derived the English word "energize." Thus, faith is "the energizer of love" (Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, page 1255).

here, but rather the demonstration of true love in the heart toward other believers.<sup>39</sup> That such was Paul's intent is evident when the verse is read in the context of the remainder of the chapter (cf. 1 Peter 1:22). Secondly, and more importantly, by injecting works into the definition of saving faith and then ascribing merit to such faith, Bahnsen set forth a justification which was based, at least in part, on works.<sup>40</sup> However, the believer is not justified by his faith at all, but by the One in whom his faith is placed; faith is the means through which justification comes to the believer, but it is not the grounds thereof: "Faith connects us with the righteousness [of Christ], and is therefore totally distinct from it. To confound the one with the other is to subvert the whole gospel of the grace of God.... Faith does not justify as a work, or as a moral act, or a piece of goodness, nor as a gift of the Spirit, but simply because it is the bond between us and the substitute...."<sup>41</sup> The correct theological formulation is therefore not "justification by faith alone," but "justification by grace *through* faith alone."

Furthermore, the faith through which justification comes is not a "working faith," but a resting faith which surrenders all and throws oneself on the mercies of God in Christ. In the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel."<sup>42</sup> Horatius Bonar explained further: "The strength or kind of faith required is nowhere stated.... It is simply in believing — feeble as our faith may be — that we are invested with this righteousness. For faith is no work, nor merit, nor effort; but the cessation from all these, and the acceptance in place of them of what another has done — done complete-

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39. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, pages 152-153.

40. Herman Witsius identified precisely the same falsehood in the teachings of the Socinians, who insisted that "faith and new obedience are one and the same thing," and that "new gospel obedience... in the room of perfect obedience" is the ground of final justification, thereby "mak[ing] void the whole Gospel" (*Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 8:48).

41. Horatius Bonar, *The Everlasting Righteousness* (London: James Nisbet and Company, 1873), page 108. See also Hopkins, *Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, page 131.

42. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 86.



ly, and for ever. The simplest, feeblest faith suffices...."<sup>43</sup> Such a faith is "the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8) and full justification occurs the instant it is exercised. The good works that necessarily follow this saving faith flow from a regenerate heart into which the principle of obedience has been planted (Ezekiel 36:26; James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:23), but they are merely the evidence of true conversion and have nothing to do with justification itself: "[F]aith is one thing, and the obedience flowing from it quite another.... Faith, in its strict and proper signification, bears the same relation to obedience as the cause to the effect, as the tree to the fruit, as the mother to the daughter."<sup>44</sup> Contrary to Bahnsen, then, James' discussion of "justifying works" in the second chapter of his epistle cannot be understood in any other than a demonstrative sense without resulting in a justification by some species of works:

So the apostle James declareth faith that is alone to be dead, and biddeth us show our faith by our works; which is to be understood, not as if works were the conditions of attaining justification, but sure evidences of justification attained by faith, and very necessary (James ii. 14-26). The gospel is no covenant of works requiring another righteousness for justification by doing for life. Works justify us from such accusations of men as will deny us to have justification by faith, or that we have a true and lively faith, or are good trees (Matt. xii. 33-37); not as being our righteousness themselves, or conditions of our having Christ's righteousness, or qualifying us for it.<sup>45</sup>

### The Legalistic Principle Inherent in Theonomy

Rushdoony's suggestion that the "covenant of grace... is also a covenant of works" simply cannot be reconciled with Scripture, for the Covenant of Grace was a covenant of works *only for Christ*, not for the believer to whom Christ's perfect obedience to the law is already imputed. Because of its failure to maintain the proper distinction between faith and works, the theonomic doctrine of sanctification could be more accurately described as "progressive justification," in which the believer

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43. Bonar, *Everlasting Righteousness*, page 73-74.

44. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 8:48.

45. Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, pages 391-392.

is accounted increasingly righteous in accordance with his obedience to the law.<sup>46</sup> In the end, “entrance into the kingdom is dependent on attest-

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46. While the original Theonomists did not have the temerity to use such language, their theological descendants within the Federal Vision movement have been much less reluctant in this regard. Rich Lusk wrote, “Final justification, however, is according to works. This pole of justification takes into account the entirety of our lives — the obedience we’ve performed, the sins we’ve committed, the confession and repentance we’ve done” (“Future Justification to the Doers of the Law,” online at [www.hornes.org/theologia](http://www.hornes.org/theologia)). The focal shift away from Christ to the works of the professing Christian is obvious in this quote.

The Oxford Tractarians in the mid-Nineteenth Century taught precisely the same doctrine. For example, John Henry Newman wrote:

Man did not become guilty except by becoming sinful; he does not become innocent except by becoming holy. God cannot, from His very nature, look with pleasure and favour upon an unholy creature, or justify or count righteous one who is not righteous. Cleanness of heart and spirit, obedience by word and deed, this alone in us can be acceptable to God.... The one thing we need is the ability to please God, or to be righteous; and it is God’s gift. ...[I]t was promised under the Law; and as His gift, it is possessed by the regenerate under the Gospel.

Til the Gospel came with its manifold gifts of grace there was a contrariety and enmity between the Divine Law and the heart of man.... In consequence we were unable to please God by what we did, that is, we were unrighteous; for by righteousness is meant obedience such as to be acceptable. We needed then a justification, or making righteous.... Now... the remedy lies... not in lowering the Law, much less in abolishing it, but in bringing up our hearts to it; in preserving, in raising its standard, and in refashioning them, and so (as it were) attuning them to its high harmonies. As regards the past indeed, since it cannot literally be undone, a dispensation or pardon is all that can be given us; but for the present and future... this is what we have to pray for, — not to have the Holy Law taken away, not to be merely accounted to do what we do not do, not a nominal change, a nominal righteousness, an external blessing, but one penetrating inwards into our heart and spirit...; not a change merely in God’s dealings towards us... but... the possession of... His substantial grace to touch and heal the root of the evil, the fountain of our misery, our bitter heart and its inbred corruption. As we can conceive God blessing nothing but what is holy, so all our notions of blessing centre in holiness as a necessary foundation. Holiness is the thing, the internal state, because of which blessing comes. He may bless, He may curse, according to His mercy or our deserts; but if He blesses, surely it is by making holy; if He counts righteous, it is by making righteous; if He justifies, it is by renewing; if He reconciles us to Himself, it is not by annihilating the Law, but by creating in us new wills and new powers for the obser-

ing obedience.” Thus, “obedience to the law becomes something other than the fruit of faith. Obedience becomes a constitutive element of justification.”<sup>47</sup> Though the Theonomists would vigorously deny the charge, such a doctrine evinces the legalistic principle inherent in their system.

History has shown that the adoption of this principle is “the way that backsliding churches in all ages have gone,” for it is “that mystery of iniquity” which ultimately culminated in the apostasy of the papal system.<sup>48</sup> Not only is the confounding of justification (righteousness, or obedience *for* life) with sanctification (holiness, or obedience *from* life<sup>49</sup>) “the grand distinguishing feature of Romanism,”<sup>50</sup> it is also the foundation of every other pseudo-Christian sect which has arisen over the years to blind the minds of unbelievers to the simplicity of the Gospel mes-

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vance of it (*Lectures on Justification* [London: Rivington, 1838], pages 32-34).

According to Newman, there is an initial justification which consists of a free “dispensation or pardon” of past sins, but because God “cannot justify or count righteous one who is not righteous,” he insisted that “cleanness of heart and spirit” and “obedience by word and deed” were also required to make us “acceptable to God.” This “sanctification” comes, “not by annihilating the Law, but by creating in us new wills and new powers for the observance of it.” It is impossible to discover any substantial difference between this teaching and that of Rushdoony when he described an imparted grace which enables believers “to perform the works which are required of them.”

When an outcry was raised against them within the Church of England, the Tractarians claimed they had been falsely accused of teaching salvation by works. They, like the Theonomists and Federal Visionists of today, pointed to their doctrine of “free pardon” as proof that they had not departed from the Protestant view of justification by grace through faith alone and succeeded in gathering a large following before their movement eventually died out. Such is testimony to the deceptive power of redefinition.

47. Joel R. Beeke, “Publisher’s Introduction,” in Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page xxiii.

48. Boston, “View of the Covenant of Works,” page 270.

49. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 174.

50. Charles Pettit McIlvaine, *Righteousness By Faith: The Nature and Means of Our Justification Before God* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Protestant Episcopal Book Society, 1864), page 89. See also Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Decree on Justification, January 1547.

sage.<sup>51</sup> It is not surprisingly, therefore, that this was the very point on which the Judaizers of the First Century erred:

When Paul speaks of a man being justified he means, not that he has been made righteous, but that he has been accepted as righteous. And in two important respects his doctrine of justification differs from that of the Judaizers with whom he is in opposition. In the first place he insists that man can never win acceptance by the due performance of the divine requirements — the transcendent holiness of God and the depravity and servitude of man combine to make that way of acceptance impossible. Man cannot be justified by his own works but simply by faith in *God*. In the second place acceptance need not be postponed till that final day when we stand before Christ for judgment: man may be justified here and now, so soon as he turns to God in faith and flings himself on God's mercy.... As conceived by the Judaizers, however, justification came not at the beginning, but at the end of the process; it came not before the gift of the Spirit, but at the day of judgment; and the special significance of the gift of the Spirit was that it enabled the recipients so to live that they might in the end be justified. It was a noble ideal; but in Paul's eyes it was not Christian, for the simple reason that it reverted to the legalist conception of a man being judged and justified by works

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51. Mormonism: "For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (*Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 25:23). "Salvation is free, but it must also be purchased; and the price is obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel" (Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* [Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 2002], Volume III, page 462). Jehovah's Witnesses: "[Belief] involves taking in accurate knowledge of God's purposes and his way of salvation. Then faith has to be exercised in Jesus Christ as the Chief Agent of salvation. This places the Christian in a saved condition, but he must now persevere in doing God's will and continue to adhere to all of God's requirements for the rest of his life. Only then will he be saved to eternal life" (*The Watchtower*, 15 December 1989, page 30). Radical Arminianism: "Whenever [the Christian] sins, he must, for the time being, cease to be holy. This is self-evident. Whenever he sins, he must be condemned; he must incur the penalty of the law of God.... The Christian, therefore, is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys; or Antinomianism is true.... Full present obedience is a condition of justification" (Charles Finney, *Systematic Theology* [Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1976], pages 46, 57).

(emphasis in original).<sup>52</sup>

However, the true Gospel, for which Paul so vehemently contended in his epistle to the Galatians, declares that, not only are we justified through faith alone, we are also sanctified by grace through faith alone: “The principle acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.”<sup>53</sup> This “resting” has specific reference to setting aside “works of the law,” or attempts to keep the law in its legal capacity (covenant form), and pursuing the holiness that has been promised as a free gift in the Gospel. Firmly grounded in the imputed righteousness of Christ, the motive for obedience changes from fear of an offended Judge to gratitude and love for a reconciled Father; the “residence” of the believer is no longer “Mount Sinai,” with its fearful sanctions, but “Mount Zion” with its blessed assurance (Hebrews 12:18-24).

It is absolutely essential to a full and proper understanding of the Gospel to maintain the biblical doctrine of the “two Adams”: the first having been placed in the Garden under the Covenant of Works, his obedience to be rewarded with glorification for himself and his posterity; the second willingly subjecting Himself to the same Covenant of Works as it was republished in the Mosaic law, His obedience actually rendered and rewarded with glorification for Himself and His elect. Because both Rushdoony and Bahnsen expressly denied both the original Covenant of Works and its republication,<sup>54</sup> it was inconsistent for them to attempt to fit the imputation of Christ’s active obedience to the law into their system.<sup>55</sup> They conceded that Christ’s atonement has indeed satisfied for

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52. George S. Duncan, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1934), pages xliii-xliv.

53. Westminster Confession, Chapter XIV:2.

54. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Volume I, page 376; Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 187.

55. Wilhelmus A’Brakel was correct in noting that “whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will very readily deny that Christ by His active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect” (*The Christian’s Reasonable Service* [Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992], Volume I, page 355).

the penalty of past sins, but, drawing their teaching on “covenantal unity” out to its logical conclusion, there can be no positive declaration of righteousness for the Christian immediately upon conversion and apart from sanctification. Punishment has been negated, but conditions must still be met in order for the promise to take effect.<sup>56</sup> The believer is merely re-

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While Bahnsen attempted to retain this crucial doctrine of Reformed theology (*Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, Chapter Six), the next generation of Theonomists saw the implications of rejecting a Sinaitic covenant of works and have therefore jettisoned the doctrine of imputation altogether. For example, Rich Lusk sees the active obedience of Christ merely as the “precondition of his saving work in his death and resurrection.” This obedience “is not saving in itself,” nor did it merit anything that is legally transferred to the believer, for, according to Lusk, “God’s righteousness is his own righteousness, not something imputed....” (“Response to ‘Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” in E. Calvin Beisner (editor), *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons* [Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004], pages 140, 142). In the Federal Vision, “eschatological life” is achieved through “union with Christ” initiated in baptism and maintained by covenantal faithfulness. Justification “requires no transfer or imputation of anything,” and is seen as a present reality because of the certainty of the future resurrection and glorification of those who are still found “in Christ” on the last day.

56. Reformed theologians, such as Ezekiel Hopkins, have usually described this distinction in terms of “righteousness of obedience” and “righteousness of satisfaction,” or “positive” and “negative” righteousness:

From hence we may... distinguish righteousness, into a righteousness of obedience, and a righteousness of satisfaction: the former ariseth from performing the precept of the law; the latter, from undergoing the penalty. Between these two righteousnesses this remarkable difference may be observed, that the promise of life being annexed to the fulfilling of the precept, the righteousness of obedience gives a full right and title unto the life promised: but no such right results from the righteousness of satisfaction; for it is not said in the law, “Suffer this, and live,” since the suffering itself was death, but “Do this, and live.” So that, by mere satisfaction, a man is not accounted the fulfiller of the law; nor yet farther, to be dealt withal, as a transgressor of it. Hence, then, the one may be called a positive righteousness, because it ariseth from actual and positive conformity of our obedience to the rules of the law: the other, only negative righteousness, because satisfaction is equivalent to innocency, and reduceth the person to a guiltless condition; which I here call a negative righteousness....

...[T]here are two ends, for which we stand in need of a righteousness:

stored to the position of Adam before he sinned and therefore has the law set before him with all its requirements, together with blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience. If there was no legal covenant made with Adam in which he would have been rewarded for his obedience with eternal life — a condition which transcended his natural created state — then he was to remain in a probationary state, never secure because ever liable to fall. Likewise, if the believer has merely been restored to Adam's condition, then he, too, is never secure in his salvation. Thus, a denial of the Covenant of Works undermines the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. However, if the doctrine of the Covenant of Works is affirmed, accompanied by faith in Christ's active obedience to the law as the fulfillment of that covenant in behalf of the believer, then insecurity regarding one's salvation dissipates. The works required by the law have already been done by Christ, and therefore our own works have nothing at all to do with our standing before God. They flow *from* our salvation, but never do they *contribute* to it: "To pretend to sanctification, and then to rely on it for justification, is to derive the fountain from the stream, the cause from the effect, and so to invert the order of the blessings of salvation."<sup>57</sup>

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the one is, a freeing of us from the penalty threatened; the other is, an entitling of us to the reward promised. Now, had we no other but the righteousness of Christ's satisfaction made over unto us, this indeed would perfectly free us from our liableness to punishment; for, if our Surety hath undergone for us, we ourselves would not be liable: but still we should need a righteousness to entitle us to the reward; and that must necessarily be a righteousness of perfect obedience (*Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, pages 20-21, 37-38).

When Christ announced that He had come to give "life... more abundantly," or "life to the full" (John 10:10), to the elect, it is evident that a mere negative righteousness was not what He had in mind, but rather the gift of a positive righteousness with its reward of glorification. However, since this positive righteousness comes only with perfect and perpetual conformity to the law as a covenant of works, it must of necessity be imputed to the believer by faith in Christ's obedience alone and not in any way result from his own obedience which is never perfect (see Boston, note in Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 165).

57. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 309.

## How the Gospel is Obeyed

The Gospel is a covenant and therefore involves a command to be obeyed according to God's stipulations (Acts 17:30; 2 Thessalonians 1:8). However, the question, "What must I do to be saved?" has only one answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16:30-31). As Herman Witsius wrote, "[F]aith is a virtue or grace, commanded by the law of God.... [A] believer, by his very believing, obeys God."<sup>58</sup> This simple trust in the finished work of Christ is alone the "obedience of faith" spoken of by Paul in Romans 1:5 and 16:26. The attempt to add any work whatsoever to what Christ has already done, whether it be Rushdoony's "sanctification by the law" or Bahnsen's more craftily-disguised "attesting obedience," will render one a debtor to the whole law and therefore subject to its curse (Galatians 3:10, 5:3). "Keeping the covenant," though an imperative taken for granted in theonomic literature,<sup>59</sup> is therefore entirely foreign to the New Covenant, for unlike the Old Covenant, it cannot be broken (Jeremiah 31:31-34): "Whom God accepts in Christ, he will continue to do so for ever; whom he quickens to walk with him, they shall do it to the end. And these three things, *acceptance with God, holiness from*

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58. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 8:48.

59. For example, the writings of Gary North are replete with the assertion that Christians who "keep the covenant" will be blessed and those who do not will be cursed. However, these blessings and curses are usually only associated with the temporal sanctions of Deuteronomy 28. Some Theonomists, such as Daniel F.N. Ritchie, have been more brazen in connecting "covenant-keeping" to salvation itself: "People who do not keep the covenant, and strive to obey the law, will be damned" (statement directed at this author, posted on the Confessional Puritan Board at [www.confessionalphuritan.forumcircle.com](http://www.confessionalphuritan.forumcircle.com) on 12 February 2010). Ritchie apparently did not perceive the important difference between "keeping the covenant" (perfect obedience) and "striving to obey the law" (imperfect obedience). Although Ritchie subsequently removed this incriminating statement from his website, he has never issued a retraction, and he defended his position on the Theonomy Resources website ("The Covenantal Orthodoxy of Daniel Ritchie Defended: A Response to Greg Loren Durand's 'The Covenantal Nomism of Daniel Ritchie'"; online at [www.theonomy-resources.blogspot.com](http://www.theonomy-resources.blogspot.com)). Ritchie's lengthy defense of Theonomy is found in *A Conquered Kingdom: Biblical Civil Government* (Saintfield, Northern Ireland: Reformed Worldview Books, 2008).



*God, and a defense upon them both unto the end, all free and in Christ, are that threefold cord of the covenant of grace which cannot be broken*" (emphasis in original).<sup>60</sup> In fact, because the Holy Spirit sovereignly regenerates (John 3:8), thereby producing saving faith in the human heart, there is a very real sense in which the New Covenant "consists of mere promises, and, as it relates to elect persons, has the nature of a testament, or last will, rather than of a covenant strictly speaking, and depends on no condition..."<sup>61</sup> This makes sense in light of the fact that the Covenant of Grace is ultimately between the first and second Persons of the Godhead, with the elect being merely the beneficiaries of the reward earned by the "second Adam."

While the Bible does speak of the necessity of perseverance (Matthew 10:22), it is the perseverance *in faith* that is in view. In other words, it is necessary to maintain the imputed righteousness of Christ as the sole ground of our acceptance before God; once our own obedience enters into the equation, we are "fallen from grace" and are cut off from Christ (Galatians 5:4). The earnest of the indwelling Spirit guarantees that the elect will persevere in this faith (Ephesians 1:13-14), whereas the non-elect professor will eventually fall into a system of works-righteousness, or will apostatize altogether (Hebrews 6:4-6).

The following words of Walter Marshall are a fitting conclusion to this chapter:

...[T]he practice of true holiness cannot possibly be attained unto, by seeking to be saved by the works of the law; because... this doctrine of salvation by sincere obedience is according to the terms of the law, and not of the gospel. And hereby those also may see their error, that ascribe justification only to the gospel, and sanctification to the law....

The end which God aimed at in giving the law to Moses, was not that any should ever attain to holiness or salvation by the condition of perfect or sincere obedience to it.... There was another covenant made before that time with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — a covenant of grace, promising all blessings freely through Christ, the promised Seed, by

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60. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, Volume XI, page 179.

61. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book IV, Chapter 4:56. See also Witsius, *ibid.*, Book III, Chapter 1:8-23; Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 116.

which only they were to be saved. And the covenant of the law was added, that they might see their sinfulness and subjection to death and wrath, and the impossibility of attaining to life or holiness by their works, and be forced to trust on the free promise only for all their salvation.... None of the Israelites under the Old Testament were ever saved by the Sinai covenant; neither did any of them ever attain to holiness by the terms of it.... Of itself it was only a killing letter, the ministration of death and condemnation; and therefore it is now abolished (2 Cor. iii. 6, 8, 9, 11). We have cause to praise God, for delivering His Church by the blood of Christ from this yoke of bondage; and we have cause to abhor the device of those that would lay upon us a more grievous and terrible yoke, by turning our very new covenant into a covenant of sincere works, and leaving us no such better covenant, as the Israelites had under their yoke, to relieve us in our extremity.<sup>62</sup>

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62. Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, pages 121, 135-136.

## **Chapter Six:** The Object and Cause of True Sanctification

### How Christ's Obedience and the Christian's Obedience Differ

In his preface to the reprint edition of Edward Fisher's classic, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, Thomas Boston wrote:

The gospel method of sanctification... lies so far out of the ken of natural reason, that if all the rationalists in the world, philosophers and divines, had consulted together to lay down a plan for repairing the lost image of God in man, they had never hit upon that which the divine wisdom has pitched upon.... In all views which fallen man has towards the means of his own recovery, the natural bent is to the way of the covenant of works. This is evident in the case of the vast multitudes throughout the world, embracing Judaism, Paganism, Mahometanism, and Popery. All these agree in this one principle, that it is by doing men must live, though they hugely differ as to the things to be done for life.<sup>1</sup>

This list of perversions of the Gospel throughout history must now include Theonomy, for, as we have seen, its doctrine of "covenantal nomism" is merely a thinly-disguised legalism. Of course, the Theonomists themselves would certainly object to this conclusion, for their rejection of "merit theology" (the classic Reformed doctrine of the Covenant

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1. Boston, preface to Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pages 9-10.

of Works, and its typological republication at Sinai)<sup>2</sup> is believed to be sufficient to shield them from the charge of teaching salvation by works. According to Greg Bahnsen:

Theonomy is not a scheme for personal self-justification. God's grace, expressed in the accomplished and applied redemption of Jesus Christ, alone can save us. The Savior is not embraced but by faith; one's works cannot earn his salvation. However, all too often Christians leave matters at that point, failing to see that God not only forgives the sinner, but also develops his "new life" according to the (previously spurned) pattern of holiness. God remedies not only our legal guilt (justification) but also our moral pollution (sanctification).... Theonomy is the Christian's pattern of sanctification. The believer's life is comprised not only of repentance and faith, but also of continual growth into conformity with the stature of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

This statement appears orthodox on the surface, but the problem lies in the definitions. As we have seen, both Bahnsen and Rushdoony were clear in teaching that the Christian has been "graciously" restored to the covenant which bound both Adam in the Garden and Israel in Canaan, with its judicial sanctions for either obedience or disobedience. The Covenant of Grace, which Reformed theologians have always viewed as

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2. James Jordon, who wrote several theonomic books and essays in the late 1980s and early 1990s, remarked, "Bahnsen thought merit theology and the covenant of works were ridiculous" (comment posted on the Green Baggins blog on 1 August 2007; [www.greenbaggins.wordpress.com/2007/08/01/the-trinity-and-postmillennialism](http://www.greenbaggins.wordpress.com/2007/08/01/the-trinity-and-postmillennialism)). Jordon himself, now an advocate of the Federal Vision, has rejected the idea that "Adam would earn eternal life, though the reward earned was out of all proportion to the merits acquired through Adam's work" (covenantal merit) as "fundamentally Pelagian in character" ("Merit Versus Maturity: What Did Jesus Do For Us?", in Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, *The Federal Vision* [Monroe, Louisiana: Athanasius Press, 2004], page 153). Likewise, former Chalcedon Foundation associate and fellow Federal Visionist, Andrew Sandlin equated this "merit theology" with the system "espoused by Judaizers and Pharisees" ("Covenant in Redemptive History," in Wilkins and Garner, *ibid.*, page 68). This same caricaturization of the works principle, especially in regards to the Mosaic law, is common with theonomic writers and speakers.

3. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 35-36.

one of unconditional promise and blessing, is reinterpreted as a “covenant of works” conditioned on the “faithfulness” of the believer. “Justifying faith” is seen not only as “resulting in the works of the law,” but as practically, if not actually, synonymous with obedience. “Sanctification” in the theonomic system is therefore a process in which the believer becomes “worthy of the kingdom,” and the “previously spurned pattern of holiness” by which this end is realized is none other than the Old Covenant, or the Mosaic law minus the ceremonies.

Bahnsen’s reasoning in this regard was thus: Christ “necessarily complied with the law’s every demand,” and so the Christian must “*imitate the same obedient spirit*” with his own “adherence to God’s law” (emphasis in original).<sup>4</sup> However, it must be noted that Christ came to merit justification by a perfect obedience which is impossible for even the regenerate to produce. Not only do we daily break God’s commandments in “thought, word, and deed,”<sup>5</sup> but even our repentance is impure and requires its own repentance. The obedience of Christ and that of the believer are therefore categorically different because the former was prior to and necessary to declared righteousness (legal obedience), whereas the latter follows as the proper response to declared righteousness (evangelical obedience). Unlike Christ, who was born “under the law” (Galatians 4:4) in order to fulfill its demands (Matthew 3:15, 5:17),<sup>6</sup> the Christian has been reborn “under grace” (Romans 6:14) and is already “worthy of the kingdom” based solely on an external righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, the law in its covenant form cannot be the cause, means, or pattern of sanctification. According to the Westminster Confession:

They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created within them, are further sanctified really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more

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4. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 155.

5. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 82.

6. “To be under the law, signifies here, to come under the yoke of the law, on the condition that God will act toward you according to the covenant of the law, and that you, in return, bind yourself to keep the law” (Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 134).

weakened and mortified, and then more and more quickened and strengthened, in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.<sup>7</sup>

Here “sin” is distinguished from “the several lusts thereof,” and therefore refers to a state or condition,<sup>8</sup> not individual acts. The Shorter Catechism states it even more succinctly: “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, sanctification is an ongoing work of God in which the believer lives and thinks decreasingly in accordance with his former identity in Adam (sin) and increasingly in accordance with his present identity in Christ (righteousness). In discussing sanctification, Paul viewed sin in light of the Christian’s legal standing before God, demonstrating that its indulgence in the life of the believer is wholly incompatible with his justification: “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? ...[R]eckon ye also yourselves dead indeed unto sin” (Romans 6:2, 11). While those in whom this process does not occur are evidently not true believers (Matthew 7:16-18),<sup>10</sup> Paul never conditioned the Christian’s inheritance on the level of his sanctification because he is already positionally *complete* in Christ (Colossians 2:10):

Justification precedes and is basic to sanctification in the covenant of grace. In the covenant of works the order of righteousness and holiness was just the reverse. Adam was created with a holy disposition and inclination to serve God, but on the basis of this holiness he had to work out the righteousness that would entitle him to eternal life. Justification is the judicial basis for sanctification. God has the right to demand of us holiness of life, but because we cannot work out this holiness for ourselves, He freely works it within us through the Holy Spirit on the ba-

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7. Westminster Confession, Chapter XII.

8. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 17.

9. *Ibid.*, Question 35.

10. “Sooner might fire be without heat, and a solid body be without weight, than a true faith of the gospel be without evangelical holiness.... None is in the way of heaven but he who, by a life of faith and the practice of those good works which are the fruits of faith, is advancing toward perfection of holiness” (Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, pages 195, 299).

sis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to us in justification. The very fact that it is based on justification, in which the free grace of God stands out with the greatest prominence, excludes the idea that we can ever merit anything in sanctification.<sup>11</sup>

### Paul's Usage of the "Pedagogue" Metaphor

It must be kept in mind that the law of Moses was given to restrain a people who were as yet carnal and disobedient and it did this by threatening *temporal* punishments and promising *temporal* blessings, both of which were intended to point them to *spiritual* realities, and ultimately to Christ Himself. Paul wrote of the Hebrew experience under the Sinaitic covenant as follows: "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.... But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by [or, through the means of<sup>12</sup>] faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:19, 23-25). The word translated "kept" (φρουρέω; *phroureô*) literally means to be held under military guard,<sup>13</sup> or "kept as under the case of a sentinel,"<sup>14</sup> and the word translated "shut up" (συνκλείω; *sunkleiô*) means to be "shut in on every side,"<sup>15</sup> or imprisoned "as in a fortress."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Paul likened the law to a pedagogue (παιδαγωγός; *paidagôgos*), or a strict disciplinarian which did not itself instruct in the faith,<sup>17</sup> but rather "conducted

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11. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 536.

12. W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), page 1308. The Greek word here is ἔκ (*ek*), which indicates instrumentality, not causation.

13. Vine, *ibid.*, page 628.

14. Brown, *Exposition of Galatians*, page 172.

15. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, page 593.

16. Brown, *Exposition of Galatians*, page 172.

17. Παιδαγωγός is derived from παῖς (*pais*) ("child") and ἄγω (*agô*) ("to lead"). The common translation of this word as "schoolmaster" is somewhat misleading, for if Paul meant to present the law itself as the instructor, he would have

children to and from school, attended them out of school hours, formed their manners, superintended their moral conduct, and in various respects prepared them”<sup>18</sup> for the true Teacher, who is Christ. Thus, the imagery used in this passage to describe the law was that of bondage: one softened by mercy as displayed in the sacrificial system, but nevertheless a bondage “not desirable” from which the elect within Israel longed to be redeemed (Luke 2:38; Hebrews 2:14-15).<sup>19</sup> Any interpretation of the law which reverses the order of bondage to freedom, and has the true Teacher returning His pupils to the charge of the disciplinarian, is therefore unbiblical. The epistle to the Hebrews was written specifically with this error in mind, warning the Jewish believers that they could not place themselves back under the “military guard” of the law without trampling upon their new Master, renouncing the New Covenant, and insulting the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:29). Furthermore, it is impossible for any believer, whether he be Jew or Gentile, to spiritually ascend into the heavens (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1-3) while believing himself to be confined within the “prison” of an earthly law<sup>20</sup>:

The substance of the apostle’s assertion is that “the law was added because of transgressions till the Seed should come, in reference to whom the promise” of justification to the Gentiles by faith “was made;” that “before faith came,” before the gospel revelation was given, the Jewish church “were shut up under the law,” till the good news promised afore was announced; and that “the law was the tutor or pedagogue” of the infant church “till Christ.” The apostle now proceeds to

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used the word διδάσχαλος (*didascalos*) instead (Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, page 1135).

18. S.T. Bloomfield, *The Greek Testament With English Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845), Volume II, page 276. See also Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, page 605; Brown, *Exposition of Galatians*, pages 173-174. Paul used παιδαγωγός in the same manner in 1 Corinthians 4:15, when he spoke contemptuously of the so-called “super apostles” who lorded over the Corinthians believers by confining them to “the mere first rudiments, with the view of keeping them always in bonds under their authority” (Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Corinthians*, Volume I, page 169).

19. Brown, *Exposition of Galatians*, page 172.

20. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 106.



show that the law, though an institution necessary in and suited to that imperfect and preparatory state, was utterly unnecessary and unsuited to that new and better state into which the church had been brought by the coming of the Savior, and to the full and clear revelation of the way of salvation, and therefore to perpetuate it was the height of criminal folly....

“We are no longer under a schoolmaster.” These words seem a statement not only of the fact, but of the reason of it. It is as if the apostle had said, “We are no longer, and we no longer need to be, under such a restrictive system as that of the law.” The necessary imperfection of the revelation of the method of salvation, till the Savior appeared and finished His work, and the corresponding limitation of the dispensation of divine influence, rendered such a restrictive system absolutely requisite; but the cause having been removed, the effect must cease. Till faith came, it was necessary that we should be under the tutelage of the law; but now that faith is come, we need our tutor no longer. When the child, in consequence of the development of his faculties, and the completion of his education, becomes a man, and capable of regulating his conduct by internal principles, the tutor is dismissed, and his pupil is freed from external restraints now understood to be superseded by the expanded, instructed, disciplined, rational and moral powers of his nature.<sup>21</sup>

Much of Paul’s epistle to the Romans is devoted to a contrast between the bondage of the law and the freedom of life in the Spirit. In Romans 7:1-4, he likened this bondage to a marriage: in their former state, the Jews were under the law’s dominion as a married woman to her husband.<sup>22</sup> However, upon the husband’s death, she is free to “be married

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21. Brown, *Exposition of Galatians*, pages 175, 176.

22. Some scholars, such as Douglas J. Moo and Mark W. Karlberg have argued that the seventh chapter of Romans contains a personification of Israel’s history, particularly the period under the Sinaitic covenant. This interpretation would certainly accord with the fact that the recipients of Paul’s epistle were predominantly Jewish. Though the population of Rome was generally Gentile, there was nevertheless an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 Jews living in the city who were descendants of the Diaspora dating back to the Second Century, B.C. (J.D.G. Dunn, “Letter to the Romans,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne [editor], *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* [Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992], page 838). The church at Rome at the time of Paul’s epistle is thought to have been planted in one or more of the synagogues by those converted Jews who had been present in Jerusalem during the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:10-

to another, even to him who is raised from the dead” (verse 4). Notably, it is in this “remarriage” to Christ that the believer is said to “bring forth fruit to God” and thus be sanctified, not in attempting to exhume the corpse of the former husband in order to resubmit to his authority:

...[W]hen we are taught “to serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter, that so we may bring forth fruit unto God,” the meaning is, that we must endeavour to bring forth the fruits of holiness, not by virtue of the law, that killing letter to which the flesh is married, and by which the motions of sin are in us, but by virtue of the Spirit and His manifold riches, which we partake of in our new state, by a mystical marriage with Christ (Rom. vii. 4-6), and by virtue of such principles as belong to the new state declared in the gospel, whereby the Holy Spirit is ministered to us.<sup>23</sup>

In the next chapter, Paul wrote, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:12-14). Throughout this entire chapter, the dynamic of sanctification is the leading, witness-bearing, and intercession of the Holy Spirit and the focal point of obedience is identification with Christ and our adoption as “joint-heirs” (verse 17) and “sons of God” (verse 19). Such is the case in his epistles to the Philippians and the Colossians as well. Unlike the fleshly Israelites under the law, covenantal blessing for the Christian therefore does not derive from obedience, but obedience de-

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11). Though Gentiles were certainly present in the Roman congregations, the decidedly Jewish perspective of the epistle is evident in Paul’s appeal to “those knowing the law” (Romans 7:1) as well as his exposition of the Gospel’s Abrahamic origins. This is in contrast with his address to the exclusively Gentile audience on Mars Hill in Acts 17:16-34, in which no reference at all to the Old Testament is made other than a brief mention of Noah in verse 26. This is not to suggest that Paul’s Gentile readers, then or now, could not benefit indirectly from his discourse; although they themselves had never been under, or “married” to, the law (Romans 2:14), they were nevertheless under the Covenant of Works of which it was a type. Whether written or unwritten, the law in its covenant form brings bondage and condemnation.

23. Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, page 258. See also Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 168.

rives from covenantal blessing: “The pattern of the Christian’s life is not one in which we are commanded to do and to be in order to become and to have. Rather the pattern of the Christian life is this: because of who you are and what you possess in Christ, be and do the things that are pleasing to Christ.”<sup>24</sup> This approach to sanctification may seem counterintuitive, and will invariably be viewed by the Theonomist as antinomianism,<sup>25</sup> as it certainly was by Paul’s Judaizing critics (Romans 3:8, 6:1), but those in whom the Spirit truly abides and whose consciences are tender to His promptings and corrections, will understand what it means to walk in the “newness of spirit and not the oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6).

### Sanctification By Grace Through Faith

One will search in vain throughout the New Testament for anything resembling the claim that “sanctification depends on our law-keeping in mind, word, and deed.” According to Ephesians 3:14-4:6, sanctification is rooted instead in the apprehension of Christ’s love for His people. Sanctification flows from the “inner man” to outer behavior (Ephesians 3:16) because the Holy Spirit is “the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20) to produce the fruit that glorifies God before men (Matthew 5:16). The Spirit’s designation as the Comforter (*παράκλητος*; *paraclaitos*) in John 14:26, 15:26, and other verses indicates His role in providing consolation through admonishment or exhortation, “always prospective, looking to the future, in contrast to the meaning of comfort,

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24. Albert N. Martin, “Who We Are and What We Possess in Union With Christ,” posted on [www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com) on 5 June 2005.

25. Antinomianism was a sixteenth-century heresy which taught that the holiness of Christ was imputed to the believer, thereby relieving him of an obligation to strive for sanctification through the mortification of the flesh. As such, it confounded justification, or conformity to the law of God, and sanctification, or conformity to the character of God. The charge of “antinomianism” frequently made by theonomic writers against their Reformed dissenters is therefore historically and theologically inaccurate. Ironically, Theonomy itself may be labeled “latent antinomianism” because it not only blurs the distinction between justification and sanctification, but also relaxes God’s demand for perfect conformity to the moral law by teaching that personal “covenant-keeping,” which is necessarily imperfect, is required to secure blessings in His Kingdom.

which is retrospective, having to do with trial experienced.”<sup>26</sup> The believer is thus “comforted,” or supported in his daily struggle against sin by having his attention focused on Christ and the work of salvation He began and has promised to bring to completion (Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 12:2; cf. John 16:12-13; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13): “It is by means of the gospel that the Holy Spirit continues to apply Christ, with His righteousness and fullness, to the hearts of believers for increasing their sanctification and consolation. They are said in Scripture to be ‘sanctified through the truth’ (John 17:17-19), to be clean through the word which Christ has spoken to them (John 15:3), and to have their hearts purified by faith (Acts 15:9).”<sup>27</sup> There is no such power to sanctify in an exterior legal or moral code which focuses rather on work yet to be done.

While the law is indeed useful to the Christian, it is so in an entirely different sense than in the theonomic system. Since perfect fulfillment of the moral requirements of the law is impossible for mere man,<sup>28</sup> it serves as a mirror that illuminates indwelling sin: “In order to render them more humble and contrite, to cause them to renounce, in a higher degree, all confidence in their own wisdom, righteousness, and strength, and to trust constantly and only in the Lord Jesus for all their salvation, the law discovers to them the sin that dwells in them, and that cleaves to all their thoughts, words, and actions. It is of great use to teach them of the need that they have to be more humble, penitent, and holy.”<sup>29</sup> Because of regeneration, the believer has a new bent towards God and away from sin (Jeremiah 31:33-34), and his reaction to the indwelling sin thus revealed is therefore one of repentance followed by a reliance on the strength of the Holy Spirit to mortify it (Romans 8:13).<sup>30</sup> Even these efforts at mortification will not be fully successful until the moment of death, and thus, by showing the believer what he is in himself apart from God’s grace, the law serves to daily renew his faith in Christ as his only hope. Only in this way is the Old Covenant “profitable for doctrine, for

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26. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, page 400.

27. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 122.

28. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 82.

29. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 131.

30. John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin in Believers* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1842).

reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17):

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 free from the 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 of the house. My meaning is, when this law with its thunderings 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 may not, will not, cannot, dare not make it my saviour 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.<sup>31</sup>

It has been rightly observed that “we can never live to God in holiness except we be dead to the law, and live only by Christ living in us by faith. That faith which receiveth not holiness as well as remission of sins from Christ will never sanctify us, and therefore it will never bring us to heavenly glory (Heb. xii. 14).”<sup>32</sup> Sanctification is the product of God’s free grace no less than justification, though it is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit rather than a one-time declaratory act. This is clearly the point of Ezekiel 36:25-27: “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and all your idols, I will cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and

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31. John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977), Volume II, page 388.

32. Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, pages 228-229.

cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (cf. John 14:15<sup>33</sup>). Again, while the law (Leviticus 18:5; Luke 10:28; Galatians 3:21) says, “Do” (fulfill the demand) and then “live” (receive the merited reward), the Gospel (Ephesians 2:10; Phillipians 2:13; Galatians 5:22-23) says, “Live” (receive the blessing as a gift) and “do” (receive also the working as a gift). Believers naturally conform to the essence of the law when they cease from a “legal obedience” (striving to keep the law in its covenant form) and instead, through resting in the Gospel, rely on the Spirit to love God with their whole heart, soul, and mind, and their neighbor as themselves (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:16). However, reversing this order and attempting to keep the law in order to be sanctified is not only expressly condemned in Scripture (Galatians 3:3), but will actually have the opposite effect:

The very reason why sin reigns in the sinner is because he is under the dominion of the law; which stands as a bar to prevent sanctifying influences from flowing into his heart. The law, especially in its condemning and irritating power, “is the strength of sin” (1 Corinthians 15:56). Every man, therefore, who is under the dominion of the law as a covenant is, and cannot but be, under the dominion and strength of sin (Romans 6:14). It is impossible for that man who continues alive to the law to be a holy or a godly man. He may have the form, but he cannot experience the power of godliness. He may take his encouragement from the law as a covenant, and delight in the works of it; but he cannot delight in the holiness and spirituality of the law as a rule. He may advance to a high degree of counterfeit virtue, but he remains an entire stranger to true holiness.<sup>34</sup>

In short, “true holiness is an infallible mark of one delivered from the law; and unholiness, of one that is yet hard and fast under it.”<sup>35</sup> Biblical sanctification is therefore a growth in grace, not law-keeping: “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” (Galatians 5:18). In 2

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33. The English Standard Version renders this verse, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” That this was a promise, and not an imperative, not only accords with the promises of Ezekiel 36:25-27, but also with the whole of Christ’s discourse here, especially verses 12, 21, and 23.

34. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 252.

35. Boston, “A View of the Covenant of Works,” page 257.

Corinthians 3:18, Paul contrasted the veiled glory of Moses' face under the Old Covenant with the unveiled "glory of the Lord" under the New Covenant and taught that by contemplating the latter, the believer is "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Christians are therefore never told to look to Moses in order to be sanctified, but to Christ alone. They are daily to turn from their sin and unto righteousness: the perfect righteousness of Christ that is theirs through faith. This is the starting point and daily object of their sanctification. Because Christ has perfectly kept the law in their behalf, they have been "accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6) and are therefore to strive earnestly to please God in every thought, word, and deed (John 14:15). Moral principles may indeed be extracted from the Old Testament and used to further the sanctification process, but it is Christ-believing, not law-keeping, that sanctifies. According to Louis Berkhof, "[T]he degree of sanctification is commensurate with the strength of the Christian's faith and the persistence with which he apprehends Christ."<sup>36</sup> In Christ, the believer is already declared completely righteous, and therefore cannot add one iota of righteousness to his standing before God by any of his own alleged law-keeping. Sanctification is by grace through faith alone (Acts 26:18) and Christ alone is the object of faith: "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Galatians 2:19-20). Walter Marshall sealed the lid on Theonomy's erroneous "sanctification by the law" doctrine with the following observations:

One great mystery is, that the holy frame and disposition, whereby our souls are furnished and enabled for immediate practice of the law, must be obtained "by receiving it out of Christ's fulness," as a thing already prepared and brought to an existence for us in Christ, and treasured up in Him; and that, as we are justified by a righteousness wrought out in Christ, and imputed to us, so we are sanctified by such an holy frame and qualifications as are first wrought out and completed in Christ for us, and then imparted to us. And as our natural corruption was produced originally in the first Adam, and propagated from him to us; so our new nature and holiness is first produced in Christ, and derived from Him to us, or, as it were, propagated. So that we are not at all to work together with Christ, in making or producing that holy frame in us, but only to

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36. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 537.

take it to ourselves, and use it in our holy practice, as made ready to our hands. Thus we have fellowship with Christ, in receiving that holy frame of spirit that was originally in Him; for fellowship is, when several persons have the same things in common (1 John i.1-3). This mystery is so great, that notwithstanding all the light of the gospel, we commonly think that we must get an holy frame by producing it anew in ourselves, and by forming and working it out of our own hearts. Therefore many, that are seriously devout, take a great deal of pains to mortify their corrupted nature, and beget an holy frame of heart in themselves, by striving earnestly to master their sinful lust, and by pressing vehemently upon their hearts many motives to godliness, labouring importunately to squeeze good qualifications out of them, as oil out of a flint. They account, that though they be justified by a righteousness wrought out by Christ, yet they must be sanctified by a holiness wrought out by themselves. And though, out of humility they are willing to call it infused grace, yet they think they must get the infusion of it by the same manner of working, as if it were wholly acquired by their endeavours. On this account they acknowledge the entrance into a godly life to be harsh and unpleasing, because it costs so much struggling with their own hearts and affections to new-frame them. If they knew that this way of entrance is not only harsh and unpleasing, but altogether impossible; and that the true way of mortifying sin, and quickening themselves to holiness, is by receiving a new nature out of the fulness of Christ; and that we do no more to the production of a new nature, than of original sin, though we do more to the reception of it — if they knew this, they might save themselves many a bitter agony, and a great deal of misspent, burdensome labour, and employ their endeavours to enter in at the strait gate, in such a way as would be more pleasant and successful.<sup>37</sup>

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37. Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, pages 43-44.



## Chapter Seven: Was the Law Established “In Exhaustive Detail”?

### The Importance of Matthew 5:17-20 to Theonomy

Orthodox Reformed theologians have always held that while the moral law, as it is summarized in the Ten Commandments, remains intact as a guide for Christian living, it is nevertheless of vital importance to remember that “from the law, *as a covenant*, we are eternally *delivered*, through Christ” (emphasis in original).<sup>1</sup> Because the perfect law-keeping of the “second Adam” is imputed to the believer by grace through faith, his covenantal relationship to God is no longer conditioned on his own obedience. Though obedience is certainly present in the life of the believer, it is now rendered freely from a heart that apprehends God’s great love and mercy, not from a servile fear of punishment or hope of reward (Matthew 25:24-30; John 15:15; 1 John 4:17-19).<sup>2</sup>

As we have seen, Theonomy teaches something quite different: there is an initial justification that is by grace and through faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice, but beyond this, a life of faithful obedience to the “pre-

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1. Francis Goode, *The Better Covenant Practically Considered From Hebrews 8:6, 10-12* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: William S. Young, 1842), page 135.

2. Reformed theologians have traditionally distinguished these two approaches as “evangelical obedience” and “legal obedience”: the first as that which alone pleases God; the latter as that which only results in the curse of the law (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter 19:4; Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pages 196-197; Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 114).

viously spurned pattern of holiness” (the Mosaic law) is the condition for kingdom worthiness. Grace and law are no longer kept distinct, but are merged into a “covenant of grace that is also a covenant of works.” Christ, then, is essentially a new Moses, dispensing judicial sanctions (“curses and blessings”) in accordance with a renewal of the “everlasting covenant” originally made with man in the Garden.<sup>3</sup> It is important to keep this premise in mind as we examine how Theonomists interpret Christ’s words in the following passage of Scripture:

Think not that I am come to destroy [καταλῦσαι, *katalusai*] the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil [πληρῶσαι, *plerôsai*]. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20).

R.J. Rushdoony called this passage “one of the most important and most misunderstood of all Biblical declarations concerning the law.”<sup>4</sup> According to Greg Bahnsen, these verses, which constitute “the *locus classicus* pertaining to Jesus and the law,”<sup>5</sup> affirm the “abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail”<sup>6</sup> and therefore, “*Every* single stroke of the law must be seen by the Christian as applicable to *this* very age between the advents of Christ” (emphasis in original).<sup>7</sup> Lest his point be missed, Bahnsen elsewhere added the following statements: “Jesus warned against dismissing even the least Old Testament commandment.... Not a single law, word, or stroke can be violated with impunity.... Christ did not

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3. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 188-189; Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, page 468.

4. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 698.

5. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 39.

6. This is the title of the second chapter of Greg Bahnsen’s *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*.

7. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 82.

intend to have the slightest stroke of that law altered.... Matthew 5:17-19, for instance, teaches the abiding validity of every Old Testament precept.... Jesus bound us... to every jot and tittle of the Old Testament legislation of God’s will, not allowing us to subtract even the least commandment.”<sup>8</sup> Again, “Christ’s coming did not abrogate anything in the Old Testament law, for every single stroke of the law will abide until the passing away of this world; consequently the follower of Christ is not to teach that even the least Old Testament requirement has been invalidated by Christ and His work.”<sup>9</sup>

These statements, of course, are really overstatements. If Christ established the Mosaic law in exhaustive detail, so that not one “jot or tittle” will pass away in history, then what are we to do with the ceremonial aspects of that law? Should Christians abstain from eating pork and shrimp or wearing clothes of mixed threads, and should they observe the sabbaths, new moon festivals, and the various feasts appointed in the Old Testament? Elsewhere, Bahnsen backpedaled from his sweeping declarations and added a qualification to his thesis: “[O]ur attitude must be that all Old Testament laws are presently our obligation *unless* further revelation from the Lawgiver shows that some change has been made.... This is *not* to say that there are *no changes* from Old to New Testament. Indeed, there are — important ones” (emphasis in original).<sup>10</sup> Gary North elaborated on this point:

The principle of interpretation which is supposed to govern Christian orthodoxy is that Christ came to establish, confirm, and declare the Old Testament law (Matt. 5:17-18). Only if we find an explicit abandonment of an Old Testament law in the New Testament, because of the historic fulfillment of the Old Testament shadow, can we legitimately abandon a detail of the Mosaic law. The proper exegetical principle is this: *Mosaic law is still to be enforced, by the church or the State or both, unless there is a specific injunction to the contrary in the New Tes-*

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8. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, pages 99, 121, 165, 221.

9. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard: The Authority of God’s Law Today* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), page 27.

10. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 3.

*tament* (emphasis in original).<sup>11</sup>

According to Bahnsen, the most important change that has occurred is that “the ceremonial system of the Older Covenant has become obsolete and grown old” and hence has been “put out of gear.”<sup>12</sup> However, this all sounds like double-talk. What difference does it make whether we view the ceremonial laws as abrogated, or “obsolete” and “out of gear”? The result is the same: they are no longer in operation; we cannot observe them, or teach others to observe them, without nullifying the sacrifice of the cross. Therefore, Christ’s words in Matthew 5:18-19 cannot be interpreted as Bahnsen claimed without resulting in a glaring contradiction. If we can indeed “abandon a detail of the Mosaic law” when “there is a specific injunction to the contrary in the New Testament,” as North conceded, then “every single stroke of the law” is not binding in this age after all. The Theonomists have merely succeeded in arguing themselves out of their own argument.<sup>13</sup>

In an attempt to alleviate the “inconsistent premise”<sup>14</sup> at the very heart of their system, the Theonomists will invariably resort to their “two laws” theory: “The most fundamental distinction to be drawn between Old Testament laws is between *moral* laws and *ceremonial* laws.... This is not an arbitrary or ad hoc division, for it manifests an underlying rationale or principle” (emphasis in original).<sup>15</sup> Thus, the “ceremonial law” is “obsolete” and “put out of gear” while the “moral-judicial law” is “estab-

11. North, *Sinai Strategy*, pages 242, 255.

12. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 209.

13. John Robbins referred to this contradictory argumentation as “theonomic schizophrenia” (*The Trinity Review*, February 1992).

14. “As logicians know very well, from contradictory premises one is able to prove *anything whatsoever* (by means of logical addition, then disjunctive syllogism). Thus if a system of thought incorporates inconsistent premises or principles... it may arbitrarily lead to any conclusion or application one wishes. This arbitrariness, depending upon which side of the contradiction one wishes to stand upon at any given point, would render the system of thought unreliable and irrational” (Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, page 296; emphasis in original).

15. Bahnsen, *By This Standard*, page 135.

lished” and “confirmed.” However, this argument is a mere contrivance,<sup>16</sup> for the Bible does not permit such a separation of the Mosaic law. While there certainly were moral, ceremonial, and judicial duties prescribed in the law, it was a complete package, or “a total, unified order or arrangement.”<sup>17</sup> According to Paul, he who received the ceremonial rite of circumcision was a “debtor to the whole law” (Galatians 5:3). Therefore, it either stands as a covenantal whole “in exhaustive detail” or it was abolished as a covenantal whole.<sup>18</sup> Given how ὁ νόμος (*ho nomos*; “the law”) is used in the Bible,<sup>19</sup> one may not arbitrarily interpret the term to mean one thing (the moral-judicial law) in one passage of Scripture and something completely different (the ceremonial law) in another. Furthermore, the Old Testament itself does not clearly categorize the 613 laws of the

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16. According to John Calvin, this theory originated with Origen and Jerome, and was utilized by the Roman Catholics to evade Paul’s clear denunciation of the Judaizers for teaching justification by works of the law (*Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 67). He noted that “although the arguments of the false apostles were confined wholly to ceremonies,” Paul nevertheless “enters into a controversy about the whole law” (*ibid.*, page 68).

17. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, page 65.

18. See Appendix Three.

19. ὁ νόμος with reference to the Mosaic institution appears 185 times in the New Testament, and is used interchangeably to refer either to general moral duties or to the Decalogue specifically (Matthew 22:36-40, 23:23; Luke 10:26; John 7:19-23; Acts 7:53; the entire epistle to the Romans; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; James 2:10-11), the duties prescribed in the ceremonial system (Matthew 12:5; Luke 2:22-39; Acts 15:5-24; the entire epistle to the Hebrews), and the judicial, or case, laws (Matthew 5:40; John 7:51, 8:5-17; Acts 23:3, 24:6; 1 Corinthians 9:9). In other instances, “the law” refers to the Pentateuch (Luke 24:44; John 1:17, 45; Acts 5:34, 6:13, 13:15, 25:8; Ephesians 2:15; 1 Timothy 1:7); and in still others, the entire Old Testament, including the Prophets (Matthew 5:17, 7:12, 11:13, 22:40; Luke 16:16; Acts 24:14; 1 Corinthians 14:21) and even the Psalms (John 10:34, 12:34, 15:25). To focus on a part does not discount the whole, nor does focusing on various parts indicate more than one whole. One can say, “I injured my foot,” or “I injured my arm,” and both statements equally mean “I received bodily injury.” The foot and the arm are both parts of one body, just as the “judicial law” and the “ceremonial law” were both parts of one law.

Mosaic code;<sup>20</sup> some laws have both moral and ceremonial characteristics, and even the Theonomists have not agreed amongst themselves on what is of continuing force and what has been abrogated.<sup>21</sup>

### Does Πληρῶσαι Mean “To Establish”?

Greg Bahnsen’s claim that πληρῶσαι (*plerôsai*), which is translated as “fulfill” in the King James Version, should instead be translated “establish” or “confirm”<sup>22</sup> is disproved by how this word and its root πληρῶ (*plerô*) are used elsewhere in the New Testament. In Mark 1:15, we find Jesus’ first recorded words in the preaching of the Kingdom: “The

20. The nineteenth chapter of Leviticus is a good example. All three characteristics of the law (moral, ceremonial, and judicial) are found represented in this passage of Scripture with no differentiation made between them; they are referred to indiscriminately as “all my statutes, and all my judgments” (verse 37).

21. For example, in his *Institutes of Biblical Law*, Rushdoony taught the continuing force of the ceremonial laws prohibiting the mixture of clothing, crops, and livestock (Leviticus 19:19; Deuteronomy 22:11) which he applied to all forms of “hybridization,” including interracial marriages, desegregation, and organ transplants:

To bring diverse things together in an unnatural union is to despise the order of God’s creation....

Deuteronomy 22:10 not only forbids unequal religious yoking by inference, and as a case law, but also unequal yoking generally.... The burden of the law is thus against inter-religious, inter-racial, and inter-cultural marriages, in that they normally go against the very community which marriage is designed to establish.... Unequal yoking means more than marriage. In society at large it means the enforced integration of various elements which are not congenial....

[H]ybridization and unequal yoking involve a fundamental disrespect for God’s handiwork which leads to futile experimentation, such as organ transplants, which represent sterile and limited gains in some areas, and a basic loss of moral perspective in every area.... Hybridization is an attempt to deny the validity of law. Its penalty is an enforced sterility. In every area, where man seeks potentiality by a denial of God’s law, the penalty remains the same, limited gains and long-range sterility (pages 87, 256-257, 262).

Although the origin of the so-called Kinist movement is found in this teaching, few other Theonomists have agreed with Rushdoony here, preferring instead to assign these laws to the category which was “put out of gear.”

22. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 70.

time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Here, the word πληρώω clearly means that the time of anticipation was over and that the prophesied reign of “Messiah the Prince” (Daniel 9:25) was soon to be inaugurated.<sup>23</sup> Bahnsen’s definition of πληρώω as “to establish” would render this proclamation nonsensical (*i.e.* “the time of anticipation is established”). Likewise, in Luke 21:24, we read that “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” We must interpret this as “until the times of the Gentiles be completed,” rather than “until the times of the Gentiles be established,” for the latter reading would be self-contradictory. In Acts 7:30, the King James Version translates this word as “expired” with reference to the time of Moses’ sojourn in the wilderness. Indeed, nowhere in the New Testament does πληρώω mean “establish” or “confirm”; the same is true of the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. As it is used in Matthew 5:17, πληρώσαι is the telic (purpose) infinitive form of πληρώω and therefore refers, not to an ethical establishment, but to the eschatological fulfillment of the Mosaic law.<sup>24</sup> In other words, Christ came in His messianic role as the “second Adam” to obey the law in its covenant form, not to command its observance for all time: “For Christ is the end [τέλος; *telos*<sup>25</sup>] of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4). If it was truly Christ’s intent “to confirm or establish” the law, rather than to fulfill it and bring it to an end, the words στερίζω (*sterizō*), ἵστέμι (*histemi*), or βεβαιῶ (*bebaioō*) would have been used, not πληρώσαι (see Romans 3:31, 15:8; 1 Corinthians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 2:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:2).<sup>26</sup>

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23. For compelling evidence that Christ was referring directly to the prophecy of His Advent in Daniel 9:24-25, see Philip Mauro, *The Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation* (Swengle, Pennsylvania: Bible Truth Depot, 1944).

24. Πληρώω is used seventeen times in Matthew’s gospel (1:22, 2:15, 2:17, 2:23, 3:15, 4:14, 8:17, 12:17, 13:14, 13:35, 13:48, 21:4, 26:54, 26:56, 27:9, 23:32), and in every instance but one (13:48), it is eschatological in meaning.

25. This is the root of τετέλεσται (*tetelestai*), which is translated “it is finished” in John 19:30 — again a reference to Christ’s fulfillment of the law.

26. For a thorough response to Bahnsen’s exegesis, see Timothy R. Cunningham, *How Firm a Foundation?: An Exegetical and Historical Critique of the “Ethical Perspective of [Christian] Reconstructionism” Presented in Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

Following Bahnsen's lead, many Theonomists ridicule the above interpretation as a "not so subtle contradiction."<sup>27</sup> The "strawman argument" is set up which has the critics reading Christ's words as "I came not to abrogate the law, but to put it to an end." However, with very few exceptions, καταλῦσαι (*katalusai*) and its root καταλύω (*kataluô*) do not mean "abrogate," but "destroy," just as Matthew 5:17 is translated in the King James Version. W.E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* gives the definition of this word as follows: "KATALUO, *kata*, down, intensive, and [*luo*], to destroy utterly, to overthrow completely.... See DISSOLVE, NOUGHT (come to), OVERTHROW, THROW."<sup>28</sup> This same word is used in Matthew 24:2, Mark 13:2, and Luke 21:6 to describe the violent destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, in Romans 14:15 of the ruination of a weak Christian's faith, in Acts 5:36 of the ultimate bringing "to nought" of the purposes of men, and in 2 Corinthians 5:1 of the dissolution of the physical body. Christ did not come to do any of these things with regards to the law; He came to submit to it and thereby fulfill its covenantal purpose. His obedience is reckoned by God as our obedience (Hebrews 5:8-9) and we are therefore free from the letter of the law and delivered into the obedience of the spirit:

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit to God (Romans 7:1-4).

### "Heaven and Earth" in Jewish Cosmology

The Theonomists insist that the phrase, "til heaven and earth pass," in Matthew 5:18 must be taken as the time frame in which the Mo-

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27. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 54.

28. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, pages 304-305.



saic law continues to be valid: “[The law] extends to the minutest part and will hold until the universe passes away.”<sup>29</sup> Given how many times and the manner in which Bahnsen cited this passage throughout his book, and the prominence it is given by the other theonomic writers, it has been correctly noted that, without this particular interpretation, Theonomy would not be able to stand.<sup>30</sup> However, such a reading is awkward at best in that it presents conflicting time frames (*i.e.* “until the end of time, no part of the law will ever pass away, until it has been fulfilled”) or, if the two are taken as equivalent time frames, then the law will not be fulfilled until the universe passes away — an unacceptable conclusion in light of Christ’s mission to “fulfill all righteousness” in His life and death (Matthew 3:15; Philippians 2:8), and His own declaration that He had completed that mission (John 17:4, 19:30). However, when read as a Hebrew apocalyptic idiom, “heaven and earth” does not necessarily refer directly to the physical universe, but rather to a covenantal order, namely the Jewish kingdom under the Old Covenant economy:

Granted the apocalyptic atmosphere of the first century A.D., the prophetic-apocalyptic context of the whole of chapter 5 and of the whole of Matthew’s gospel, we should be careful not to reduce “till heaven and earth pass away” to a bland “never.” Rather, it states the truth expressed in the main clause (5:18c: not the slightest element shall pass from the Law) is restricted temporally. Not the slightest part of the Law shall pass away until the apocalyptic event of the passing away of the old world.<sup>31</sup>

This position is supported by such Old Testament passages as Isaiah 51:15-16, which describes the establishment of the nation of Israel in terms of “plant[ing] the heavens, and lay[ing] the foundations of the earth....” Conversely, judgment against both Israel and the surrounding nations was frequently pronounced using the same metaphors: “I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and

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29. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 44.

30. T. David Gordon, “A Critique of Theonomy: A Taxonomy,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (Spring, 1994), pages 23-43.

31. John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), pages 229-230. See also W.D. Davies, *Christian Origins and Judaism* (London: Darton, Longmann, and Todd, 1962), pages 31-66.

your earth as brass” (Leviticus 26:19); “Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.... He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet” (Psalm 18:7, 9); “Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger” (Isaiah 13:13); “I will shake the heavens and earth” (Haggai 2:21-22). Later in Isaiah, we find the prophecy of the coming messianic Kingdom couched in similar metaphoric language: “For behold I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind” (Isaiah 65:17).

If it is true that the phrase “heaven and earth” refers to Old Covenant Israel, then Hebrews 8:13 stands as a direct refutation of the theonomic interpretation of Matthew 5:18: “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vanish away.” One writer noted, “Whether or not these words refer to the historical destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., they at least affirm the dissolution of the old Mosaic order, because the new order of redemption reality has come.”<sup>32</sup> Later in the epistle, we read of the “shaking” and “removing” of both “heaven and earth,” and the establishment in their place of a kingdom that “cannot be moved” (Hebrews 12:26-28). A parallel passage is 2 Peter 3:10-13:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of the God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

That this passage refers exclusively to the end of the physical universe has been denied by many reputable commentators, including John Owen and John Lightfoot, who interpreted this rather as a prophecy

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32. George Eldon Ladd, *The Last Things: An Eschatology For Laymen* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), page 27.

of the destruction of the “Judaical church and state,”<sup>33</sup> and the “abolishing of the dispensation of Moses.”<sup>34</sup> If such be the case, then Daniel’s prophecy of the “seventy weeks,” which connects the atoning work of Christ with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the First Century (Daniel 9:26-27; cf. Luke 21:20-27), would serve as a cross-reference to Hebrews 12:26-28 and 2 Peter 3:10-13. The “shaking,” “removing,” “dissolving,” *etc.* of “heaven and earth” would correspond to the making “desolate” of the “city and sanctuary,” and the “new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” would correspond to the bringing in of “everlasting righteousness” through the “cutting off” of the Messiah. The Kingdom that “cannot be moved” is undoubtedly Christ’s “everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and the kingdom which shall not be destroyed” foretold in Daniel 7:14 (cf. Psalm 2:6-9; Matthew 28:18).

It should be remembered that Jesus was speaking to a Jewish audience in His Sermon on the Mount, and therefore a Hebrew cosmology, not a Greek one,<sup>35</sup> would have been the framework in which His words in Matthew 5:18 were originally heard.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the Gospel message itself makes little sense if separated from its Jewish background (Romans 11), and there has never been any serious debate regarding the Church’s identification in Scripture as “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” (Revelation 21:2; cf. Galatians 4:6). Consequently, if the “new heavens and new earth” of Isaiah 65:17,

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33. Owen, *Works of John Owen*, Volume XII, page 434.

34. John Lightfoot, *The Whole Works of Rev. John Lightfoot* (London: J.F. Dove, 1823), Volume XII, page 434. See also Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Eaton and Maines, 1890), page 489 (footnote); Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1954), page 115.

35. Dirk L. Couprie, *Heaven and Earth in Ancient Greek Cosmology: From Thales to Heraclides Ponticus* (New York: Springer Science and Business Media, 2011).

36. For a thorough treatment of how the phrase “heaven and earth” was used to denote a “symbolic universe” in Matthew’s gospel, see Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Boston, Massachusetts: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2007). See also John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ Illustrated in a Series of Expositions* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1854), pages 513ff.

Revelation 21:1, and other related passages refers to the age of the Gospel, it is reasonable to conclude that the previous “heaven and earth” refers to the age of “the law and the prophets.” Jesus seemed to equate the passing of “this generation” (that of the unbelieving Jews: Matthew 16:14, 23:33-38) with the passing of “heaven and earth” in Matthew 24:34-35, contrasting its temporality with the eternity of His words.

According to one New Testament scholar, the “passing away” in both Matthew 5:18 and 24:35 indicates a singular, rather than plural referent.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the interpretation of this phrase can be narrowed even further to apply, not just to the Old Covenant generally, but specifically to the Temple in Jerusalem itself.<sup>38</sup> According to Jewish historian Josephus, the Temple was considered to be a microcosm of the creation, with the outer courts representing the earthly realm of men and the inner “holy of holies” representing the heavenly throne of God: “Now the room within those pillars was the most holy place; but the rest of the room was the tabernacle, which was open for the priests. However, this proportion of the measures of the tabernacle prove to be an imitation of the system of the world; for that third part thereof which was within the four pillars, to which the priests were not admitted, is, as it were, a heaven peculiar to God.”<sup>39</sup> Here, again, we find the familiar “heaven and earth” motif associated with the Mosaic covenant. That the Temple was considered to be the focus of the covenant in the time of Christ, being the very point at which the divine came into contact with the mundane, cannot be doubted. The disciples expressed typical Jewish sentiment when they associated the prophesied destruction of the Temple with the end of the world (Greek:

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37. Leroy Andrew Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew* (Boston, Massachusetts: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2010), page 284fn.

38. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in Matthew*, page 153, 200; Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis, “The Destruction of the Temple and the Relativization of the Old Covenant: Mark 13:31 and Matthew 5:18,” in K.E. Brower and Mark W. Elliot (editors), *Eschatology in Bible and Theology: Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997), pages 145-169.

39. Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus, the Learned and Authentic Jewish Historian* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Applegate and Company, 1854; translated by William Whiston), page 88.

αἰών, *aion*) in Matthew 24:1-3. To speak of destroying the Temple, or defiling it in any way, was, in fact, tantamount to blasphemy in the minds of Christ’s enemies (Matthew 26:61; Acts 6:11-14, 21:26-28), for failing to discern its typological function, they viewed the Temple and the law it represented as perpetual. If the physical Temple and its “beggarly elements” (Galatians 4:9) was the heart and soul of the old “heaven and earth,” then the new spiritual “heaven and earth” required an equally new spiritual Temple, which is precisely the description given to the Church in 1 Peter 2:5: “Ye, also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:20-22).<sup>40</sup>

Luke 16:17 contains a similar declaration as Matthew 5:18 and could be considered to be a slight variation of the same statement: “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, then one tittle of the law to fail.” As in Matthew’s account, the “law” and the “prophets” are inseparably joined in a single phrase: the law declared God’s righteous requirements for the people of Israel, and the prophets pronounced His judgment against the people for their failure to keep the law. The duration of “the law and the prophets” was “until John,”<sup>41</sup> or the time when the public proclamation of the new Covenant of Grace began: “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).<sup>42</sup> Hebrews 1:1-2 teaches that

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40. Based on the detailed vision of Ezekiel 40-42, Orthodox Jews associate the rebuilding of a Third Temple in Jerusalem with the future establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. The Amillennialist would argue instead that Ezekiel’s vision has already been fulfilled and that Christianity itself, or rather Christ and His body, the Church, are the Third Temple.

41. The Greek word μέχρι (*mechri*) means “up to the point of,” and is a “preposition of extent” which “denotes the terminus” of the subject (James Strong, *Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981], page 48).

42. That the translators of the King James Version perceived in this verse an implied antithesis between the law and the gospel, is evidenced by their insertion of the word “but,” which does not appear in the original Greek text. In this perception, they were not alone, for John Calvin had also noticed the same antithesis (*Commentary on the Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids, Mich-

the time period in which God spoke to His people through the prophets had come to an end with the Advent of His own Son. Consequently, the time of Israel's national existence under the Mosaic covenant had also come to an end, bringing with it Israel's final destruction threatened centuries before in Deuteronomy 32:1-29 and proclaimed by Christ Himself in Matthew 23:32-38. If the law continues "in exhaustive detail," then so must the nation of Israel remain with its typological land grant and its typological ceremonial system, so must there be prophets to press God's covenantal lawsuit against Israel, and so must also continue the saints' waiting for the inauguration of the New Covenant. To declare the continuation of the law "in exhaustive detail" is therefore to teach Judaism, and not Christianity. However, God Himself made such a system impossible when He utterly destroyed the Jewish nation, burning their temple<sup>43</sup> with its sacrificial elements, dissolving any right they had to the land, and scattering them to the ends of the earth. The former age "of the letter" had ended and the new age "of the Spirit" had begun (2 Corinthians 3:6); with the beginning of this new age, "the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" (Revelation 21:1)<sup>44</sup>.

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igan: Baker Book House, 1993], Volume I, page 52; *Commentary on Romans*, pages 386-387). So important did the Protestant Reformers view the law-gospel distinction, that Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples' 1524 French translation of the Bible — a treasured possession of English Queen Anne Boleyn — even had this verse embossed on the cover (Paul F.N. Zahl, *Five Women of the English Reformation* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001], page 18).

43. With the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ, the edifice in Jerusalem was no longer God's Temple, but the abandoned house of the unbelieving Jews (Matthew 23:38; Luke 13:35).

44. The ending of the old economy of the law was proclaimed at the very moment of Jesus' death, when "there was darkness over all the land" (Matthew 27:25; cf. Isaiah 13:9-10), the "earth quaked" (Matthew 27:51; cf. Isaiah 13:13), and the veil which partitioned off the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple "was rent in twain from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). This latter event is most significant in that it clearly demonstrated that the barrier of sin that had separated the God of heaven from man on earth had been removed in Christ (Daniel 9:24; Hebrews 10:19-20). As promised so many centuries before, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Revela-

All authorities concur moreover in the declaration that when all these things should have been done, *the End should come*: that “*the mystery of God should be finished*, as he had declared to His servants the prophets:” *it should be completed*: time should now be no more: the End of all things (so foretold) should be at hand, and be fully brought to pass: *in these days should be fulfilled all that had been spoken of Christ* (and of his Church) *by the Prophets*: or, in other words, When the Gospel should have been preached in all the world for a testimony to all nations, and the power of the Holy People be scattered (abroad), *then should the End come*, then *should all these things be finished*. I need now only say, All these things have been done: the old and elementary system passed away with a great noise; all these predicted Empires have actually fallen: and the *New kingdom*; the *New heaven and earth*, the *New Jerusalem* — all of which were to descend from God, to be formed by his power, have been realized on earth; all these things have been done in the sight of all the nations: God’s holy arm has been made bare in their sight: His judgments have prevailed, and they remain for *an everlasting testimony to the whole world*: *His kingdom* has come, as it was foretold it should, and His Will has, so far, been done; *His purposes have been finished....*(emphasis in original)<sup>45</sup>

Thus, while announcing the termination of the former economy

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tion 21:3; cf. Leviticus 26:11-12; Ezekiel 36:28). The Jews were granted a forty-year “stay of execution” (Luke 23:34), thereby giving them opportunity to hear the Gospel (2 Peter 3:8-9) that was being preached by the early Christians and bearing fruit throughout the world (Acts 1:8; Colossians 1:6), but those who refused to believe their testimony were not spared from utter destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 2:2-4)

45. Eusebius, *On the Theophania, or Divine Manifestation of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London: Duncan and Malcolm, 1843; translated by Samuel Lee), page cli. This is not to deny that there is yet to be a final close of history, or as Eusebius wrote in his conclusion of the above passage, “the extreme end of time.” Just as Israel under the law was a type of Christ, and the land of Canaan a type of the heavenly Kingdom, so too was the destruction of Jerusalem a type of the coming judgment of the world on the last day. Amillennialism allows for an already/not-yet fulfillment of prophecy (Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case For Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2003]). The Kingdom itself comes in three stages: anticipation (Isaiah 65:9-25), inauguration (Daniel 7:13-14), and consummation (Revelation 21-22).

of the law, Christ nevertheless emphasized the impossibility that even the smallest detail of the law would fail before it was fulfilled by Him. Indeed, it was only in the completion of His mission that this cosmic shift was possible. Theonomists are so focused on their narrowly-interpreted time frame at the beginning of Matthew 5:18 that they seem to ignore the corresponding time frame at the end of the verse, or, as historian Alfred Edersheim noted, “the addition made by Christ, on which all depends: ‘till all be fulfilled.’”<sup>46</sup> Christ said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34), and also, “...[T]he works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works I do” (John 5:36). These works were clearly the perfect obedience required by the law in its covenant form. When Christ declared on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30), we cannot conclude otherwise than that the law’s fulfillment of which He formerly spoke had come, that He had accomplished what He was sent by the Father to do (John 17:4), and thus had entered into His rest (Hebrews 4:10). Those who are in Christ also enjoy this rest from the works of the law, of which rest the Old Testament Sabbath was but a shadow: “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Hebrews 4:9-11). To look to the dead works of the law rather than to the saints’ rest in Christ is equated by the writer of Hebrews with unbelief, and yet this essential doctrine of the Gospel is obscured by Theonomy much as it was by the Pharisees in Christ’s day.

### The Mosaic Law Was a Covenantal Whole

Following His resurrection, Christ said, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). This fulfillment of the law by Christ is also discussed in the epistle to the Hebrews:

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they of-

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46. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1897), Volume I, page 537.



ferred year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.... Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hast pleasure therein; which are offered by the law.... He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second (Hebrews 10:1, 5-9).

This passage does not teach a re-establishment of the first law under a new administration, but the establishment of a second law that is distinct from the first. Thus, the Old Covenant (“the first”) must give way to the New Covenant (“the second”), for both cannot exist simultaneously. Theonomists will attempt to deflect the force of this argument by claiming that only the sacrificial system is referred to here. While it is true that the sacrifices performed by the Levitical priests are the immediate topic of discussion in this passage, it should be remembered that the priesthood was inseparably connected with the Mosaic covenant as a whole. The sacrificial system was instituted specifically to provide atonement for transgressions against the law (Leviticus 17:11) and restoration to covenantal righteousness (Deuteronomy 33:19). Therefore, if that priesthood has been “taken away,” the rest of the covenant must have passed away as well: “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Hebrews 7:12).

It should again be stressed that the law of Moses was a unit, and could not be divided: “Neither Christ nor the apostles ever distinguish between the moral, the ceremonial, and the civil law, when they speak of its establishment, or its abolition.”<sup>47</sup> Even Greg Bahnsen gave the sense of καταλῦσαι in Matthew 5:17 as “the destruction of something by sepa-

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47. John Kitto, *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature* (New York: American Book Exchange, 1880), page 232. Kitto distinguished between the nomothetical and the didactical authority of the Mosaic law, and argued that the former is what has been abolished while the latter has been retained. To illustrate his point, he quoted Martin Luther as follows: “The law belongs to the Jews and binds us no more.... [I]t is clear that the ten commandments also do not belong to us, because he has not led us out of Egypt, but the Jews only. Moses we will take to be our teacher, but not as our lawgiver unless he agrees with the New Testament and the natural law” (*ibid.*, page 234).

rating its pieces,”<sup>48</sup> and then noted that τὸν νόμον (*ton nomon*; the accusative case of ὁ νόμος) “comprises more than simply those aspects of the Mosaic legislation (*i.e.*, ‘the Law’) which have permanent moral application and sanction; the class of commandments traditionally termed ‘ceremonial’ or ‘ritual’ is also within the scope of the term. Nothing in the text supports a restriction of this term’s referent to the moral law. Jesus is saying that He did not come to abrogate *any* part of the law” (emphasis in original).<sup>49</sup> Again, if this interpretation of Matthew 5:17 is correct, then we cannot avoid the conclusion that, not just the moral and civil aspects of the law, but the sacrifices themselves have been established for all time by Christ and therefore are equally obligatory under the New Testament as under the Old. Bahnsen apparently sensed the corner he was backing himself into, for he added that “the meaning of the ceremonies is eternal, while their outward form and use are temporal” and “only the pre-incarnation *use* of these ceremonial procedures is removed for the Christian in the New Covenant” (emphasis in original).<sup>50</sup> Further on in his book, he continued:

According to the foregoing thesis, every jot and title of the Lord’s law is binding upon God’s people in all ages. Does this mean that New Testament Christians are required to observe the Older Testament ritual? The answer to this question is yes and no. Yes, Christians under the New Covenant are still responsible to offer blood atonement for their sins and tend to the obligations of the temple, *etc.*; however, we must be mindful of the fact that the way or manner in which Christians do these things under the New Covenant is not identical with the Older Testamental observation of the ritual and ceremony.<sup>51</sup>

This teaching comes dangerously close to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the perpetual offering up of Christ in the “sacrifice of the Mass.” Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians instructed to offer up any other sacrifices than “spiritual sacrifices” (1 Peter 2:5). These sacrifices are the Christian’s own body “as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1), which means that we are to “mortify the deeds of the body” (Ro-

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48. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 47.

49. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 48.

50. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 49.

51. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 207.

mans 8:13), and the “sacrifice of praise,” which is “the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15). There is “no more sacrifice for sins” (Hebrews 10:26) because “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:28); as reconciled children of God (2 Corinthians 5:18), our sins are now to be confessed (1 John 1:9), not propitiated by sacrifice.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, there are no longer any “obligations of the temple,” for Christians are themselves the “temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Of course, Bahnsen again back-pedaled by writing, “Christ is the once-for-all sacrifice for Christians.... The purpose of the ceremonies, then, was realized in the New Testament. Christ released us from the relative and provisional bondage of which the Mosaic ritual was the instrument. The ceremonial observations were stop-gap and anticipatory; Christ and the New Covenant are the *fulfilled reality*. Therefore, all Christians have had the ceremonial laws observed for them finally and completely *in Christ*” (emphasis in original).<sup>53</sup> Thus, on the one hand, Bahnsen made the sweeping claim that “Christians under the New Covenant are still responsible to offer blood atonement for their sins,” but on

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52. This point is vital: God propitiated His own wrath once and for all through the death of His Son on the cross and no longer deals with the believer in terms of the Covenant of Works:

...[B]elievers are not under the law as a covenant of works, but are under it, as it is the law of Christ.... [T]herefore a believer cannot sin against the law as a covenant of works, but only against it as a rule of life.... God cannot see sin in a believer, as committed against the law as a covenant, but only as committed against the law as a rule of life... [and] therefore God can have no vindictive or legal anger at them for their sins, but only a fatherly anger and displeasure.... [B]elievers ought not to mourn over, or confess their iniquities, in a legal manner, viewing them as committed by persons under the covenant of works; but ought to confess and mourn over them, as sins done against a reconciled father, and breaches of his law as a rule of life (Thomas Boston, *Memoirs of the Life, Times, and Writings of the Rev. Thomas Boston of Ettrick* [Aberdeen, Scotland: George and Robert King, 1852], page 456; see also Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 168).

Consequently, to suggest that the wrath of God must still be propitiated through any offering whatsoever is to disdain the Covenant of Grace and thereby subject oneself to the curse of the law.

53. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 207-208.

the other, he insisted that they are free from this obligation because “Christ released us from the relative and provisional bondage of which the Mosaic ritual was the instrument.” This sort of contradictory argumentation is wearisome, to say the least. It should also be noted that Bahnsen resorted to his detractors’ interpretation of the word “fulfill” here, which raises the question, If Christians are no longer under the ceremonial aspect of the Mosaic law because it has been fulfilled “finally and completely *in Christ*,” why cannot the same be said for the rest of the law, which Christ also fulfilled? That being the case, the real issue has still been avoided by the Theonomist: God required not only belief in the substance, but the actual performance of the ceremonies. The establishment of “every jot and tittle” of the law “in exhaustive detail,” simply cannot be qualified so as to apply only to the inner substance and not to the outward performance. The theonomic theory, then, raises many more theological problems than it claims to solve and therefore “dies the death of a thousand qualifications.”<sup>54</sup>

### Matthew 5:17-20 Interpreted in Light of Covenant Theology

It is admitted that, on the surface, Matthew 5:17-20 is a difficult passage and its precise meaning has vexed many commentators throughout the centuries. The self-contradictory theonomic interpretation aside, the most prevalent view within Reformed circles defines “the law” here as the moral law summarized in the Decalogue and therefore uses this passage to set forth the Ten Commandments as the perpetual ethical standard for Christians.<sup>55</sup> However, such a narrow definition would never have entered the minds of Christ’s Jewish audience to whom “the law” meant “the Mosaic institution viewed as a whole,” or “the whole arrange-

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54. John Frame, “The One, the Many, and Theonomy,” in Barker and Godfrey, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, page 89.

55. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 7:14-15; John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), Volume I, page 277. Calvin’s argument on this point, especially as it is presented in the latter source, would appear at first reading to support the theonomic position. However, it should be noted that Calvin was referring to the law’s establishment as a rule of life, not to its continuation in its covenant form, the latter of which he vehemently denied throughout his writings.

ment or covenant under which the people of Israel were placed at Sinai,”<sup>56</sup> not just the Decalogue, and for this reason alone, it must be rejected as inadequate. Certainly, no interpretation of this passage that does not comport with the clear teachings of the rest of Scripture can be accepted; if it is clearly stated elsewhere that the economy of the law was temporary, it cannot be said to be permanent here. Perhaps, then, the solution is simply to read Christ’s declaration through the lens of Covenant theology:

Do not even consider that I have come to set aside the Covenant of Works as it is typified in the Mosaic law, or the words of the prophets whom God commissioned to remind you of its demands and declare judgment for its violation. I, as the second Adam and a true Jew, have not come to set aside the demands of the law, but to fulfill every one of them to the minutest detail. Truly I say to you, until the end of the present age, not even the least requirement will pass away from the law unless it has been fulfilled. I speak now to those who believe that they may justify themselves before God: whoever denies that the law demands perfect and personal righteousness, and does not perform the same, shall be considered least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever both acknowledges the law’s demand and performs it, shall be considered great in the kingdom. However, unless your righteousness exceeds the professed righteousness of the religious leaders who claim to keep the law, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Understood thusly, this passage actually undermines the theonomic system rather than supports it. This is the case even if “heaven and earth” is taken as a reference to the physical universe. The point remains the same: righteousness through perfect law-keeping as the qualification for entrance into the heavenly Kingdom is clearly the subject here, for as Thomas Boston noted, “God discharges none from [the law], but upon full satisfaction made to all its demands on them.... The sinner shall be obliged to give the law fair count and reckoning, and payment, else he cannot have his discharge.”<sup>57</sup> Therefore, those who affirm “the abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail,” such as did the scribes and Pharisees of Christ’s day, are self-condemned because they are unable to per-

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56. Brown, *Exposition of Galatians*, pages 60, 148.

57. Boston, “A View of the Covenant of Works,” pages 219-220.

form the true demands of the law. On the other hand, those who claim that God has lessened or set aside the demands of the law in any way and that He now accepts our best efforts, or “sincere obedience,” as righteousness, as is a form of neonomianism held by many professing Christians today, are equally condemned. With the Covenant of Works as its backdrop, Matthew 5:17-20 is instead one of the strongest declarations of the Reformed doctrine of justification to be found in the gospels. The true Christian does indeed acknowledge the law’s demand for perfect righteousness, and yet he also understands that Christ was sent specifically to fulfill that demand in his behalf. Moreover, the believer’s righteousness does in fact exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees because it is *Christ’s* righteousness, imputed to him by faith, and not his own vain attempts at law-keeping:

Jehovah is satisfied, more than satisfied, with Christ’s fulfilling of the law which man had broken. For never had that law been so fulfilled in all its parts as it was in the life of the God-man. For man to fulfill it, would have been much; for an angel to fulfill it, would have been more; but for Him who was God and man to fulfill it, was yet unspeakably more. So satisfied is Jehovah with this divine law-fulfilling, and with Him who so gloriously fulfilled it, that He is willing to pass from or cancel all the law’s sentences against us; nay, to deal with us as partakers of or identified with this law-fulfilling, if we will but agree to give up all personal claims to His favour, and accept the claims of Him who hath magnified the law and made it honourable.<sup>58</sup>

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58. Bonar, *Everlasting Righteousness*, pages 80-81.

## Chapter Eight: The Biblical Doctrine of the Law

### The Mosaic Law Was an “Administration of Death”

Even the casual reader of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* will notice Greg Bahnsen’s constant usage of the terms “Older Covenant” and “Newer Covenant.” Such novel terminology was a conscious effort on his part to distinguish between two administrations of the Covenant of Grace without implying covenantal discontinuity.<sup>1</sup> From this premise, Bahnsen concluded that we should consider all the laws of the Old Testament still valid *unless* they are specifically abrogated in the New Testament. Not only does this qualification undermine his “established in exhaustive detail” argument, but it is contradicted by the writer of Hebrews, who declared that the Mosaic law has not only been changed, but has been taken away and replaced by the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:8-9; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-32). Theonomists mock their critics’ supposedly inconsistent interpretation of Matthew 5:17 (“I came not to abrogate, but to abolish”), but they fail to read this verse in light of the rest of the New Testament, especially the epistles of Paul:

But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glori-

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1. This error was specifically addressed by Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book IV, Chapter 12:26.

ous? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious (2 Corinthians 3:7-11).

It is not possible to interpret that which was “done away” as merely the outward performance of sacrifices, for it was certainly not the ceremonial law which was “engraven in stones,” but “the words of the covenant, the ten commandments” (Exodus 34:28). Furthermore, in speaking also of that which was “written,” Paul intended to bring to mind Deuteronomy 31:9: “And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel.” Therefore, all the case laws, tithing laws, sacrificial laws, *etc.*, as well as the summary laws of the Decalogue, were all classed together by Paul as “the ministration of death” (a covenant of works), and declared to have passed away in contrast to the ministry of the Gospel “which remaineth.” As John Milton wrote, “On the introduction of the gospel, or new covenant through faith in Christ, the whole of the preceding covenant, in other words, the entire Mosaic law, was abolished... [W]e are therefore absolved from subjection to the decalogue as fully as to the rest of the law.”<sup>2</sup> This assertion will sound strange, even heretical, to the ears of the Theonomist, but it is the standard Reformed interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 and other related passages.<sup>3</sup> All this is not to say, however, that the moral principles reflected in the law, or its “sum and essence,”<sup>4</sup> have been abolished. If the Mosaic law had never been given at Mount Sinai, these principles would still have bound mankind because they are co-existent with man’s nature as the image-bearer of God Himself (Genesis 1:26-27, 9:6) and therefore were not exclusive to the Jewish nation.<sup>5</sup>

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2. Milton, *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, page 412.

3. Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, page 113; Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 3:5; Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, Volume V, pages 428-429.

4. Milton, *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, page 419.

5. Westminster Confession, Chapter XIX:1-2; Boston, note in Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 176.



This passage alone deals a devastating blow to Bahnsen's assertion that Jesus "did not come to abrogate *any* part of the law." According to Paul, Christ instead abrogated the *whole* Mosaic covenant, which agrees with the teaching of the book of Hebrews that the law has not only been changed, but has been taken away. It is therefore not surprising that Greg Bahnsen only briefly mentioned this passage twice in his entire book, writing that "the law is not to be exalted at the expense of the gospel. The gospel far *excels* in glory because it has renewing *power*" (emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup> This is only partially true and very misleading; the Gospel far excels the law in glory because it is eternal, while the law was only meant to be temporary. John Calvin commented:

The Apostle says, that the law was but for a time, and required to be abolished, but that the gospel, on the other hand, remains for ever. There are various reasons why the ministry of Moses is pronounced transient, for it was necessary that the shadows should vanish at the coming of Christ, and that statement — The law and the Prophets were until John (Matt. xi. 13) — applies to more than the mere shadows. For it intimates, that Christ has put an end to the ministry of Moses, which was peculiar to him, and is distinguished from the gospel. Finally, the Lord declares by Jeremiah, that the weakness of the Old Testament arose from this — that it was not engraven on men's hearts (Jer. xxxi. 32, 33). For my part, I understand that abolition of the law, of which mention is here made, as referring to the whole of the Old Testament, in so far as it is opposed to the gospel, so that it corresponds with the statement — The law and the Prophets were until John. For the context requires this. For Paul is not reasoning here as to mere ceremonies, but shows how much more powerfully the Spirit of God exercises his power in the gospel, than of old under the law.<sup>7</sup>

In Ephesians 2:11-18, Paul went on to write:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from

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6. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 136.

7. Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Corinthians*, Volume II, pages 178-179.

the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace. And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

Bahnsen attempted to prove that “the law of commandments contained in ordinances” was merely a reference to the ceremonial laws,<sup>8</sup> but this simply is not the case. Paul wrote on the same subject in Colossians 2:13-14: “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” Since the sacrifices were instituted to “make [ceremonial] atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11), they were foreshadows of God’s grace finally displayed in the death of Christ,<sup>9</sup> and therefore were neither against nor contrary to Old Testament believers; in themselves, they were the means of covenantal restoration, not of condemnation. In Romans 7:5-11, Paul further identified “the enmity” and “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us” to be the entire law itself, including the Decalogue:

For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But

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8. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 209-210 (footnote).

9. Westminster Confession, Chapter VII:5. The inclusion of these “means of grace” in the Mosaic economy is the reason why some Reformed commentators in the past, such as Owen and Colquhoun, viewed it as a “mixed dispensation.” It certainly demonstrates that the law could not have been a pure covenant of works for Israel since the original Covenant of Works was strictly legal and contained no gracious element. However, at the same time, the sacrifices were made necessary by the legal element that was present in the Mosaic covenant in that they displayed the righteousness of satisfaction that was required for transgression and which would be provided by the Surety. Again, the Mosaic law was a pure covenant of works for Christ alone.

now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived, and by it slew me.

Can there be any doubt that when Paul wrote of “the ministration of death” in his second epistle to the Corinthians, “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us” in his epistle to the Colossians, and “the commandment” which he found to be “unto death” in his epistle to the Romans, he had the very same subject in mind? Paul’s doctrine is unmistakable: the Mosaic covenant in its entirety was fulfilled in the life and death of Christ and thus has ceased to operate: “[T]hat law which, not only cannot justify, but is the source of trouble and subversion to believers; which even tempts God if we endeavour to perform its requisitions; which has no promise attached to it, or, to speak more properly, which takes away and frustrates all promises, whether of inheritance, or adoption, or grace, or of the Spirit itself; nay, which even subjects us to a curse; must necessarily have been abolished.”<sup>10</sup> Even John Calvin himself, whom many Theonomists claim as one of their own, viewed the law as finding its fulfillment and abrogation in the work of Christ. Commenting specifically on the Sabbath, but extending his argument to the entire law, Calvin wrote:

When [God] calls it a “perpetual” or eternal “covenant,” the Jews rest on it as a ground of their obstinacy, and wantonly rave against Christ as a covenant-breaker, because He abrogated the Sabbath.... Whatever was spoken of under the Law as eternal, I maintain to have had reference to the new state of things which came to pass at the coming of Christ; and thus the eternity of the Law must not be extended beyond the

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10. Milton, *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, pages 416-417. Milton made it clear that “the above effects result, not from the ceremonial law alone, but from the whole law” in its covenant form, and therefore, “the whole law is abolished.” See Appendix Three.

fulness of time, when the truth of its shadows was manifested, and God's covenant assumed a different form. If the Jews cry out that what is perpetual, and what is temporary, are contraries to each other, we must deny it in various respects, since assuredly what was peculiar to the Law could not continue to exist beyond the day of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

### The Law Was Unique to Israel

Driven by his implicit monocovenantalism, Bahnsen wanted his readers to see the continuity between the Mosaic law and the Gospel,<sup>12</sup> but Scripture does not teach such a continuity. Rather, the continuity is between the promise made to Abraham and his Seed (Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:17-18) and the Gospel (Galatians 3:8). This was the historical outworking of the Covenant of Grace originally announced in Genesis 3:15, of which the elect — both Jews and Gentiles — are the beneficiaries through faith (Galatians 3:16-17). Paul taught that the law “was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made” (verse 19). As Thomas Boston wrote, “This covenant from Mount Sinai was the covenant of works as being opposed to the covenant of grace, namely, the law of the ten commandments, with promise and sanction....”<sup>13</sup> It was this other legal covenant (or, the legal element within the covenant) that was temporary and served to “shut up” the Hebrew people until the object of the promise (Christ) should be re-

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11. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House 1993), Volume II, pages 443-444.

12. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 185-188. In asserting this continuity, Bahnsen taught the same doctrine that was more fully developed in Daniel Fuller's *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?*, published a few years after Bahnsen's book. Fuller criticized the Reformers, particularly Calvin, for contrasting law and Gospel, openly admitting that such a contrast was essential to historic Covenant theology.

13. Boston, “A View of the Covenant of Works,” page 181. It should be remembered that Boston saw two covenants reflected simultaneously in the Sinai administration: the Abrahamic Covenant of Grace, as set forth in the preamble to the Decalogue and in the Ten Commandments considered as a rule of life, and a republication of the Adamic Covenant of Works, as set forth in the judicial sanctions of the same Ten Commandments (see Chapter Two).

vealed: “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [*παιδαγωγός*] to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (verses 23-24). The “we” of whom Paul spoke in these verses were those “who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles” (Galatians 2:15). Elsewhere, Paul stated that the Gentiles “have not the law” (Romans 2:14), “followed not after righteousness” (Romans 9:30), and were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). These statements agree with the Old Testament’s teaching that the law was unique to Israel (Deuteronomy 4:8), that the Gentiles “have not known” the law (Psalm 147:20), and that Israel was chosen out of the nations of the world to be “a peculiar people” (Deuteronomy 14:2; cf. 2 Samuel 7:23-24; 1 Chronicles 17:21-22). Therefore, the law in this immediate context never even served as the “schoolmaster” for the Gentiles,<sup>14</sup> much less was it intended to bind their consciences after they were converted by the Gospel. In Romans 4:13, Paul went on to write, “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, Abraham was not under the law of Moses and neither are his spiritual children, whether Jew or Gentile:

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid...

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to

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14. This is not to deny that the law, particularly the Ten Commandments, may be used to convict Gentiles of sin. However, in its covenantal function as the pedagogue (see previous discussion in Chapter Six), it had no relationship to any other people but Old Testament Israel, for “the law was given to Jews, not to Gentiles....” (Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 147).

15. Directly contradicting this verse, Reconstructionists believe that the sanctions of the law are the “tools of dominion” by which they will become “heirs of the world.” This will be discussed in a later chapter.

another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God (Romans 6:14, 7:1-4).

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Now I say, That an heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?...

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.... But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law (Galatians 3:26-27, 29, 4:1-9, 5:1, 18).

Again, a clear distinction is made here between the Jews ("we") who were "children under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father," and the Gentiles ("ye") who were "servants... unto them which by nature are no gods." However, though both were in a state of legal servitude, now they are "all the children of God" and "Abraham's seed." The Apostle's point is clear: if the Jews, to whom the law was given, were delivered from its "yoke of bondage," how much more absurd was it for the Gentiles, who never were under the law's jurisdiction to begin with, to subject themselves to it after it had been fulfilled and abrogated by Christ? Certainly, Paul was no Theonomist. In Galatians 5:11, he asked, "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased." "Circum-

cision” was used here as a synecdoche for the entire law, since it was the “initiatory rite”<sup>16</sup> of the covenant which God had made with Israel: “For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law” (Galatians 5:3). The Gospel of grace was an offense to the Jews because it teaches freedom in the Spirit, rather than bondage to the law. It elevates the believer to the status of an adult heir of God, rather than keeping him in perpetual childhood under “tutors and governors” (Galatians 4:2). It produces self-restraint and self-rule without the threatenings of external force (Philippians 4:13; 1 Timothy 1:9). It produces familial love for God rather than servile fear of His judgments (Romans 8:15; 1 John 4:17-18). All these things are unattainable to the unregenerate man and are therefore “unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). The entire epistle to the Galatians was written to refute essentially the same error which is now promoted by Theonomy — that the law of Moses continues in force under the New Covenant — and it is absolutely astounding that thousands of professed Reformed believers over the last four decades have not seen this lucid fact:

Like many other of St. Paul’s Epistles, the one now before us is chiefly occupied in opposing the disposition shown by the Christian converts to unite Judaism with Christianity; and since so much of the present Epistle is employed on the subject of circumcision, which point was sooner settled than many others, it is evident that it was written at an earlier stage of this great controversy than when the Epistles to the Corinthians and the Romans were composed. It appears, indeed, that one or more influential Christian Jews, probably from Jerusalem, had intruded into the Galatian church — which had been founded on the idea of Christian liberty from the yoke of the Law, which Paul entertained — and taught the necessity of circumcision, and of obedience to the whole Law. They seem to have considered, with many others who stirred up the churches against St. Paul, that Christianity was merely a sect or modification of Judaism, which did not by any means dispense with the obligations of the Law, which they believed to be perpetual. This notion it was natural enough for Jews to entertain; and even some of the apostles appear to have relinquished it with difficulty. Indeed, it seems, in this age, to have been the hardest of all things for the Jewish Christians to understand that the new religion was an original, independent, and superseding

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16. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, page 150.

revelation. St. Paul was constantly brought into contact with the class of feelings arising from such views; since, as the apostle of the Gentiles, it became necessary to him to state the separate claims of Christianity broadly and distinctly. He had to tell the Gentile converts whether they were to obey the Law of Moses or not: whereas the apostles who laboured among the Jews, had not the subject equally pressed upon their attention, and did not feel it urgently necessary to teach their converts to *discontinue* that obedience to the Law which they had been accustomed to render. If the apostles of the circumcision permitted these things, as matters indifferent to those who were Jews, Paul felt that it behoved him not to allow that, which might thus be permitted to them as an *indifferent* thing, to be set up as a matter of *necessity* to the Gentiles. To require the Gentiles to conform to the Law of Moses, and above all to be circumcised, was to lay upon their shoulders a yoke very different from the easy one of Christ; and was calculated to hinder the progress of the Gospel among them (emphasis in original).<sup>17</sup>

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17. John Kitto, *The Holy Bible According to the Authorised Version, With Original Notes and Pictorial Illustrations* (London: James Sangster and Company, n.d.), Volume II, page 1060.



## **PART TWO:** Reconstructionism

The only true order is founded on Biblical Law. All law is religious in nature, and every non-Biblical law-order represents an anti-Christian religion. Every law-order is a state of war against the enemies of that order, and all law is a form of warfare....

*Rousas John Rushdoony*

...[T]here are some who deny that any commonwealth is rightly framed which neglects the law of Moses, and is ruled by the common law of nations. How perilous and seditious these views are, let others see: for me it is enough to demonstrate that they are stupid and false....

*John Calvin*



## Chapter Nine: The Philosophical Foundation of Reconstructionism

### Conscience Is the Agent of the Covenant of Works

By definition, Reconstructionism is the application of theonomic principles to society with a view to reconstructing it according to the covenantal model of Old Testament Israel. Greg Bahnsen wrote, “The general continuity which we presume with respect to the moral standards of the Old Testament applies just as legitimately to matters of socio-political ethics as it does to personal, family, or ecclesiastical ethics.”<sup>1</sup> Certainly all professing Christians would agree wholeheartedly that the morality taught in the Old Testament is universally applicable. However, it must be remembered that the Theonomists, who depart from the traditional three-fold categorization of the Mosaic law in their identification of the civil laws with the moral, have much more in mind than underlying principles when they speak of “the moral standards of the Old Testament.” As we shall see, it is not merely the general equity of those laws which they seek to apply to the civil realm, but the actual laws themselves.

The leading Reconstructionists have been unabashed in their commitment to the presuppositional apologetic system, or “reconstructive apologetic methodology,”<sup>2</sup> of Cornelius Van Til and it would not be an

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1. Bahnsen, *By This Standard*, page 347.

2. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 130. North coined this phrase based on Van Til’s insistence that man must be “receptively reconstructive” (Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* [Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1978], page 16) in how he thinks and in

overstatement to say that Reconstructionism could not have been built on any other foundation. According to R.J. Rushdoony, “If there is going to be any kind of Christian reconstruction, then, in every area of thought, the philosophy of Cornelius Van Til is of critical and central importance.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Gary North wrote that “the Christian Reconstructionists have inherited the bulk of Van Til’s legacy.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, it is necessary to give an outline of his philosophy and a brief rebuttal of its tenets before proceeding with an examination of Reconstructionism itself.

The first chapter of Paul’s epistle to the Romans teaches that, even in the absence of special revelation, fallen man not only knows that the true God exists (verses 20-21), but he also knows that this God has an absolute moral standard which binds all mankind and to which is attached the penalty of death for disobedience (verse 32). This “natural law” serves to “sufficiently instruct in a right course of conduct” and to “render man inexcusable” for failing in that course, thus subjecting him to a “righteous condemnation.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, men are aware that there is a Covenant of Works because the “work of the law” has been “written in their heart” (Romans 2:15). This assertion is proven by the fact that every human religion is a manifestation, in one form or another, of a works-based system of righteousness. Even the most primitive savage has a concept of an offended deity whose wrath he fears and whose favor he seeks to reclaim through good works, rituals, or even sacrifice.

The subject of which Paul wrote in verses 18 and 19 of the first chapter, and also in verses 14 and 15 of the second chapter, is the conscience — a word derived from the Latin *com* (with) and *scire* (to know or to discern). A man with a conscience is therefore a man “with knowl-

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everything he does: he must “think God’s thoughts after him” (Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969], page 271).

3. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1978), page 363.

4. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 133.

5. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 2:22. See also John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), page 202; Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pages 337-338.

edge.” Commonly referred to as “God’s vicegerent in the soul,”<sup>6</sup> the conscience is “the faculty by which [man] perceives the moral effect of actions in Time in reference to their results upon himself in Eternity. It is that sense which over and above the idea of Right and Wrong, has with it the idea of duty, the sense that it is right, and proper, and suitable to act this way, and not that; and the sense that if we do this way, then are we to be declared just; if we do that way, then are we to be declared unrighteous. That it is the sense of Duty and of Responsibility.”<sup>7</sup> The function of the conscience is threefold: “The first is Prohibitory. ‘This act thou shouldest not do.’ The second, Recording. ‘This act I have done.’ The third is Prophetic. ‘Therefore for this act I am responsible’ .... The Prohibitory has reference to the Present; the Recording to the Past; the Prophetic to the Future.”<sup>8</sup> It is therefore the agent of the Covenant of Works, setting forth the moral standard, informing man that he has failed to meet this standard, and declaring that he stands before his Creator in a state of condemnation as a result of that failure. William Shakespeare put it thusly: “My conscience hath a thousand several tongues; and every tongue brings in a several tale; and every tale condemns me for a villain.” Conscience may at times slumber, but it is awakened by the Spirit of God through the instrumentality of the moral law in the myriad of ways it is brought to man’s attention, and again the conscience pronounces its judgment against sin (John 16:8; Romans 7:9). John Calvin wrote:

That there exists in the human mind and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives

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6. John Flavel, *The Whole Works of the Reverend John Flavel* (Glasgow, Scotland: John Orr, 1754), Volume II, page 74; Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity in a Series of Sermons on the Shorter Catechism* (Aberdeen, Scotland: George King, 1838), page 48; Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards* (New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1852), Volume IV, page 458.

7. William Adams, *The Elements of Christian Science: A Treatise Upon Moral Philosophy and Practice* (Philadelphia: H. Hooker, 1850), page 78.

8. Adams, *ibid.*, page 81.

to his service. Certainly, if there is any quarter where it may be supposed that God is unknown, the most likely for such an instance to exist is among the dullest tribes farthest removed from civilisation. But, as a heathen tells us, there is no nation so barbarous, no race so brutish, as not to be imbued with the conviction that there is a God. Even those who, in other respects, seem to differ least from the lower animals, constantly retain some sense of religion; so thoroughly has this common conviction possessed the mind, so firmly is it stamped on the breasts of all men. Since, then, there never has been, from the very first, any quarter of the globe, any city, any household even, without religion, amounts to a tacit confession, that a sense of Deity is inscribed on every heart.<sup>9</sup>

According to Calvin, the ability to investigate the “divine perfections” of God “is common both to those within and to those without the pale of the Church.”<sup>10</sup> However, through his conscience, the unregenerate man can only know God as His Judge. Inheriting original sin from Adam, and worsening his condition by his own actual sins (Romans 5:12-19), the sinner is always running away from his Creator (Genesis 3:7-10; Revelation 6:15-17), and yet at every turn, God thunders out His judgments through the faculty of his own conscience (Romans 2:14-15). Indeed, there is a civil war raging within the unbeliever in which his depraved will compels him to indulge his sinful passions in opposition to the authority of conscience (John 8:34; Romans 6:16). In fact, the obstinate sinner will spend his entire life attempting to silence the voice of his conscience<sup>11</sup> — to suppress the righteousness of God (Romans 1:18) — and in this effort he will only be successful if abandoned by God to his own lusts (Romans 1:28). The traditional Reformed doctrine of common grace enters at this point to teach that all men are not as evil as they could or would be because God inhibits such efforts to render the conscience inactive.<sup>12</sup> Man longs for autonomy (Psalm 2:1-3), and often may behave as though he has achieved it.<sup>13</sup> However, his own conscience — the ever-

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9. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Chapter 3:1.

10. Calvin, *ibid.*, Book I, Chapter 3:6.

11. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 12:20.

12. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 2:3.

13. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book I, Chapter 5:94.

present voice of God's moral law<sup>14</sup> — acts as a barrier to the realization of his desire, preventing him from giving full vent to his depravity.<sup>15</sup>

As Thomas Boston wrote, “[Sinners] are driven from sin, and to their duty, by the fear of hell and wrath, rather than drawn from the one to the other by any hatred of the one, and love of the other, in themselves.... It is the influence of the covenant of works in its terrible sanction, that moves them.”<sup>16</sup> The utter impossibility of escaping God's presence should lead the sinner to repentance (Psalm 139:7), but, if left to himself, he will instead respond by hating his perceived tormenter (Job 21:14), and will either manufacture a deity to suit his lusts (Isaiah 2:8),<sup>17</sup> or attempt to persuade himself that no deity exists at all (Psalm 14:1).<sup>18</sup> The unregenerate man is therefore rendered unable to hear God's merciful offer of forgiveness as it is declared in the Gospel (Romans 10:21) and unable to trust in Christ for salvation (John 6:44, 10:26).

### Cornelius Van Til's Doctrine of Utter Corruption

The Calvinistic doctrine of “total depravity” is often misunderstood to mean that fallen man is so thoroughly wicked that he cannot do

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14. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 2:22.

15. It seems that this common grace was largely absent in the antedeluvian period, and as a result, the world was plunged into such a state of chaos that its complete destruction was necessary. With the exception of Noah and his family, the entire human race at that time was a living illustration of Paul's doctrine of reprobation in Romans 1:18-32.

16. Boston, “View of the Covenant of Works,” page 273.

17. “Every individual mind being a kind of labyrinth, it is no wonder, not only that each nation has adopted a variety of fictions, but that almost every man has had his own god. To the darkness of ignorance have been added presumption and wantonness, and hence there is scarcely an individual to be found without some idol or phantom as a substitute for Deity. Like water gushing forth from a large and copious spring, immense crowds of gods have issued from the human mind, every man giving himself full license, and devising some peculiar form of divinity, to meet his own views” (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Chapter 5:10).

18. “Atheism is the wish of a wicked heart, rather than the conviction of the intelligent mind” (Jared Bell Waterbury, *The Child of the Covenant* [Boston: T.R. Marvin and S.K. Whipple and Company, 1855], page 70).

or know any temporal good.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the Bible itself nowhere teaches that the functions of human nature are inoperative or that they are inherently evil. Man's "corruption is extensive but not necessarily intensive";<sup>20</sup> his will has been corrupted by sin and his mind is "enmity against God" (Romans 8:7),<sup>21</sup> but, under normal circumstances, the conscience remains quite active and it is to this human faculty that the Gospel message is addressed. While the Bible does acknowledge an antithesis between Christians and non-Christians, this is primarily moral, and only secondarily epistemological: *i.e.* fallen man *first* hates God's moral standards (John 3:19), and *then* becomes blind to the truth, rather than *vice versa*. This is clearly the pattern described by Paul in the first chapter of Romans, but it appears from the context of the passage that such is an extreme example of human rebellion. Unbelievers generally can and do operate within the bounds of the moral law in their daily lives and vocations, sometimes with more consistency than professing believers (*e.g.* Genesis 20).<sup>22</sup> Cornelius Van Til, on the other hand, went far beyond the

19. This common mistake is why some writers have suggested that "total inability" be used instead. The first point of the Calvinist acronym T.U.L.I.P. refers to man's inability to love God as he ought or choose to believe the Gospel apart from regeneration; the context of the five points is soteriological.

20. Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932), page 61.

21. Just as the regenerate mind is "the citadel and throne of virtue" (Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 12:21), so also is the unregenerate mind the locus of sin. While the believer is "transformed by the renewing of his mind" (Romans 12:2) and is enlightened in his understanding by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:18), the unbeliever is increasingly given over to the depravity of his mind (Romans 1:28) and is thereby blinded by the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Regeneration is likened in Scripture to the removal of a veil from the mind (2 Corinthians 3:16). Consequently, the literal meaning of the Greek word *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*; repentance) is a "change of mind" (Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, page 962).

22. Ultimately, however, the biblical antithesis between believers and unbelievers is not in relation to the common kingdom of this present age, but to the spiritual Kingdom of which Christians alone are citizens (Philippians 3:20). While their natural birth gives them common ground with the people of the world, the spiritual birth of regeneration gives Christian an identity which is alien to the world (1 Peter 2:11). Members of Christ's Church are called out



Scriptures and mainstream Reformed theology in developing his own distinct version of the “antithesis,” adopting a hyper-depravity, or utter corruption, which virtually eliminated the image of God in man after the Fall. Unregenerate man, according to Van Til, is so thoroughly depraved that he has no knowledge whatsoever of right and wrong: “The natural man cannot will to do God’s will. He cannot even know what the good is.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, there can be no such thing as an inherent moral law natural to man in his fallen state and therefore no common ground between believers and unbelievers. To the Van Tilian, there is “no other standard” for ethics outside of special divine revelation, for even though fallen man has access to general revelation in the creation, he will always interpret it “in terms of his assumption of human autonomy” (*i.e.*, that there is no God). Therefore, “The unbeliever is the man with yellow glasses on his face. He sees himself and his world through these glasses. He cannot remove them. His interpretation of himself and of every fact in the universe relating to himself is, unavoidably, a false interpretation.”<sup>24</sup>

Van Til insisted that there are only two ways of interpreting reality: “in exclusively temporal categories or in exclusively eternal categories.”<sup>25</sup> Unregenerate man interprets reality in “exclusively temporal categories,” and therefore it is impossible for him to know anything about God. In fact, if he does believe in a god, it must by definition be a finite deity. In other words, fallen man is an epistemological atheist in that he interprets “everything with which he comes into contact without reference to God.”<sup>26</sup> However, this assertion flatly contradicts Paul’s assertion in Romans 1:19-20 that all men know the true God *and* His “eternal power

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(ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia*), and sanctified (ἡγιασθητε, *hagiasthete*), or set apart from, the world. A two-kingdom perspective is therefore essential to making sense of how the Bible teaches wives to be in submission to their husbands, children obedient to their parents, slaves honoring of their masters, citizens subject to their earthly governments, *etc.* while at the same time teaching “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ” (Galatians 3:28).

23. Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, page 54.

24. Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, pages 258-259.

25. Cornelius Van Til, *Metaphysics of Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1931), page 99.

26. Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, page 47.

and Godhead” through the universe which He has made. Man’s culpability — his lack of excuse, as Paul described it (verse 20) — is derived from the fact that, though he begins with the “first principle” of knowledge of the true God, he actively rebels against that knowledge and turns turns aside to idols (verses 21-25). Yet even amidst the gross immorality that results from his idolatry, sinful man cannot escape “knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death....” (verse 32) Clearly, “knowing the judgment of God” is an eternal category which Van Til claimed is alien to the natural man’s mind.

However, man’s blindness is not limited to the divine, according to Van Til, but extends even to the mundane. Not only is the unbeliever unable to have any knowledge of his Creator, but he also cannot understand the natural world correctly: “...[T]he natural man is as blind as a mole with respect to natural things as well as with respect to spiritual things,”<sup>27</sup> and “the natural man does not, on his principles, have any knowledge of the truth.”<sup>28</sup> He insisted that “every bit of supposedly impersonal and neutral investigation, even in the field of science, is the product of an attitude of spiritual hostility to the Christ through whom alone there is truth in any dimension.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, a scientist who develops a cure for disease, an economist who makes accurate market predictions, and a mathematician who solves an intricate problem all do so from “an attitude of spiritual hostility to Christ,” and therefore do not really possess the knowledge or expertise that they appear to have. All human institutions must be baptized in the name of Christ — there must be “Christian science,” “Christian economics,” “Christian mathematics,” *etc.* — for apart from the “exhaustive understanding” which God has provided in Scripture,<sup>30</sup> man’s only “final reference point” is “within him-

27. Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), page 82.

28. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972), page 184.

29. Cornelius Van Til, *The Case for Calvinism* (Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, 1964), page 145.

30. “The Bible is authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything” (Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, page 29). This is clearly not how the Reformed faith has traditionally understood the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. To be sure, Scripture is authoritative and sufficient “to give that

self,” and consequently, he “has no true knowledge of anything at all.”<sup>31</sup> To a Van Tilian, therefore, there can be no truly accessible natural revelation, natural religion, or natural law. The natural man has to be constantly “borrowing” from the revealed Christian worldview in order to make sense of the world around him: “Men need to presuppose the truth of Christian theism in order to account for their own accomplishments,”<sup>32</sup> and “the Christian theist must claim that he alone has true knowledge about cows and chickens as well as about God.”<sup>33</sup>

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knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation” (Westminster Confession, Chapter I:1), but it is not a sufficient guide for “the human-as-mechanic, the human-as-physician, the human-as-businessman, the human-as-parent, the human-as-husband, the human-as-wife, or the human-as-legislator” (T. David Gordon, “The Insufficiency of Scripture,” *Modern Reformation* [Volume XI, Number 1], January/February 2002, page 19).

31. Van Til, *Christian Theory of Knowledge*, page 17.

32. Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, page 120.

33. Van Til, *Metaphysics of Apologetics*, page 194. Van Til’s insistence that “Christian theism” (Trinitarianism), as distinguished from simple theism, is the only true reference point for human knowledge evidences the affinity for mono-covenantalism within his system. While he retained the Covenant of Works category, his view downplayed the strictly legal character of the Edenic dispensation and, following Abraham Kuyper, he redefined it as a “covenant of mutual love” which was intended to reflect the relationship within the ontological Trinity, or the “mutually exhaustive representational” indwelling of the Persons of the Godhead (*ibid.*, pages 78-79; *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, page 220). It was left to Van Til’s ideological descendants to develop this concept of the covenant further, thus resulting in the outright denial of “merit theology” found in Theonomy/Reconstructionism, the Federal Vision, and other outgrowths of Dutch neo-Calvinism. However, according to the traditional Reformed understanding, the doctrine of the Trinity is directly tied to the eternal Covenant of Redemption: the unbegotten Father, who purposes to save the elect from the curse of the violated Covenant of Works, covenants with the begotten Son, who willingly submits to the law in its demand for both positive righteousness and penal satisfaction, and the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, in turn is sent to regenerate the elect and create within them faith through which the active and passive obedience of the Son is imputed. Since there is no election, redemption, or regeneration under the Covenant of Works, the theism of those under its jurisdiction is necessarily unitarian: *i.e.* God is known only as Creator and Judge. Certainly, an unbeliever is able to acknowl-

Van Tilianism is a subtle denial that the conscience is the voice of God within all men and effectively reduces fallen man to the level of a brute with whom the Christian cannot really communicate:

It will be quite impossible then to find a common area of knowledge between believers and unbelievers unless there is agreement between them as to the nature of man himself. But there is no such agreement.<sup>34</sup>

But without the light of Christianity [regeneration] it is as little possible for man to have the correct view about himself and the world as it is to have the true view about God. On account of the fact of sin man is blind with respect to the truth wherever the truth appears. And truth is one. Man cannot truly know himself unless he truly knows God.<sup>35</sup>

“Every one of fallen man’s functions [the emotions, the conscience, the reason, *etc.*] operates wrongly,” according to Van Til.<sup>36</sup> He insisted that “the ‘reason’ of sinful man will invariably act wrongly,”<sup>37</sup> and so the Christian may only declare “thus saith the Lord” and should never attempt to reason with him on the subject of sin and judgment. Although an unbeliever may appear to assent to biblical truths, Van Til believed that this was only “formal” (apparent) and not actual assent, because “there can be no intelligible reasoning unless those who reason together understand what they mean by their words.”<sup>38</sup> The unbeliever may speak of such matters as the soul of man or of a supreme Being, but what he means by these terms is completely different from what the believer means. Van Til criticized traditional Reformed apologists because “they

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edge the Creator as the source of the laws of nature, science, or mathematics, and it is equally certain that a saving knowledge of Christ as Savior of His Church has nothing at all to do with “cows and chickens,” *etc.* The incarnate Son is revealed in the Gospel alone, but this revelation comes only after the demands of the Covenant of Works have been pressed and felt.

34. Van Til, *Metaphysics of Apologetics*, page 67.

35. Van Til, *ibid.*, page 73.

36. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), page 43.

37. Van Til, *ibid.*, page 83.

38. Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, page 77.

attribute to the natural man not only the ability to make formally correct statements about ‘nature’ or themselves, but also to mean by these statements what the Christian means by them.”<sup>39</sup> The “antithesis” between believer and unbeliever is so severe that they cannot even agree on the meaning of the words “is” and “is not.”<sup>40</sup>

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39. Van Til, *Systematic Theology*, page 113.

40. Van Til, *ibid.*, page 37. In all these statements, Van Til left no room whatsoever for the possibility that human reason *ever* acts rightly, or that communication between Christians and non-Christians is *ever* possible. At other times, however, he acknowledged the “difficult point” (*i.e.* contradiction) this extreme and unbiblical stance created — especially when he attempted to integrate a more orthodox view of common grace into his system and was thereby forced to admit that unbelievers do indeed possess truth “as far as it goes” — but he remained agnostic regarding its solution: “[W]e cannot give any satisfactory account of the situation as it actually obtains.... All that we can do with this question as with many other questions in theology, is to hem it in in order to keep out errors, and to say that truth lies within a certain territory” (*Systematic Theology*, page 26). Like Bahnsen did in his interpretation of Matthew 5:18, Van Till frequently made sweeping and absolute statements in his writings which he would elsewhere attempt to qualify, although, also like Bahnsen, his qualifications often would undermine his original thesis. Sometimes, these contradictions would occur many pages apart, or in other works entirely: “I understand no fact aright unless I see it in its proper relation to Christ as Creator-Redeemer of me and my world.... The world may discover much truth without owning Christ as Truth. Christ upholds even those who ignore, deny, and oppose him” (Cornelius Van Til, in Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* [Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1998], pages 20, 712). However, on occasion the contradiction would occur within the same statement: “The common ground we have with the unbeliever is our knowledge of God, and I refer repeatedly to Romans 1:19. All people unavoidably know God by hating God. After that they need to have true knowledge restored to them in the second Adam. I deny common ground with the natural man, dead in trespasses and sins, who follows the god of this world” (*Christianity Today*, December 30, 1977, page 22).

It should be noted that Van Til, who believed that the laws of logic were created by God and were therefore inferior to His transcendent thought (*Introduction to Systematic Theology*, page 92), encouraged his students to “embrace with passion the apparent contradictory” (*Common Grace and the Gospel*, page 9) because “we dare not maintain that [God’s] knowledge and our

This extreme view on man's condition, which could justly be labeled "epistemological snobbery,"<sup>41</sup> not only contradicts Scripture, but experience as well.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, it undermines the preaching of the Gospel, which, as previously stated, is a direct appeal to the conscience and the reason of the sinner using the moral law. God Himself reasoned with unbelievers on the irrationality of their rebellion thusly: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). The Apostle Paul, who was certainly a master of evangelism, regularly declared the reasonableness of Christianity to his

knowledge coincide at any single point" (Cornelius Van Til, "A Complaint Against the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church" [1944], page 5). While on the one hand, he insisted that true knowledge is not possible outside of God's revelation in Scripture, on the other hand, he also taught that such knowledge may only be "analogical" to God's higher reality (*Defense of the Faith*, page 61), and therefore, "all teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory" (*Common Grace and the Gospel*, page 142). The inherent irrationalism of Van Til's system may explain how two radically different branches of thought have developed out of his teachings: mono-covenantal/single kingdom Reconstructionist — e.g. R.J. Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North, *et. al.* — and bicovenantal/two kingdom non-Reconstructionist — e.g. Meredith Kline, Michael Horton, R. Scott Clark, *et. al.*). For a discussion of the logical tensions in Van Til's thought, see John Frame, "Van Til on Antithesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995), pages 81-102, and John W. Robbins, "Cornelius Van Til," *The Trinity Review*, May-June 1986 (online at [www.trinity-foundation.org](http://www.trinity-foundation.org)).

41. This is a play on C.S. Lewis' term "chronological snobbery," which he defined as "the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited" (C.S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1966], pages 207-208). Those who have an "uncritical acceptance" of Van Til's philosophy, assume that they alone possess the truth and that every other philosopher that has come before them, Christian and non-Christian alike, is "on that count discredited." Even Van Til himself was known to hold the opinion that "everyone else was wrong" (North, *Political Polytheism*, page 131).

42. The reader needs only to consider the non-Christians in his life who are intelligent, honest, conscientious, and hard-working people in order to refute Van Til's "ivory tower" philosophy.

unbelieving Gentile audiences. While Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, relied exclusively on special revelation in making his evangelistic appeals (Acts 2:14-41), Paul drew his arguments from natural revelation and even from heathen philosophers rather than appealing directly to Scripture. In Acts 17, we find him utilizing logical argumentation when introducing his pagan listeners to the righteous demands of God's moral law in an attempt to awaken their consciences — something which would have been unthinkable if Van Tilianism were indeed true.

### The Function of the Civil Magistrate

Besides the conscience, there is another “vicegerent” through which the eternal God speaks to the fallen world: the civil magistrate, who occupies the same office externally which the conscience occupies internally. What is said of the conscience in Romans 2:14-15 is also said of the magistrate in Romans 13:1-6 and there is no reason to assume that the law which each enforces is not the same natural law.<sup>43</sup> However, in removing the natural law from the individual, Van Tilianism, if consistent, likewise removes it from society as a whole. Everything which is denied to the private citizen must also be denied to the civil magistrate.<sup>44</sup> According to Rushdoony:

[T]here is no law in nature, because nature is fallen and cannot be normative.... Neither positive law nor natural law can reflect more than the sin and apostasy of man: *revealed* law is the need and privilege of Christian society....

The point is that the law of God must govern us. As Van Til has observed with respect to philosophical thought, “God is the original... and man is derivative.” Moreover, “If one does not make human knowl-

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43. An extensive treatise on this subject may be read in Thomas Rutherforth, *Institutes of Natural Law* (Baltimore, Maryland: William and Joseph Neal, 1832), Book II.

44. On this point, however, Van Til was not consistent with his own system and he expressed concern that some of his students, such as Rushdoony and North, were applying his teachings to the political realm in a way he did not approve (North, *Political Polytheism*, page 133, footnote). North frequently complained in his writings about this lack of consistency in Van Til's thought, referring to it as “inherently antinomian” and blaming it for laying “the intellectual foundations for the acceptance of political pluralism” (*ibid.*, pages 127, 161).

edge wholly dependent upon the original self-knowledge and consequent revelation of God to man, then man will have to seek knowledge within himself as the final reference point." Where God's absolute law-word is gone, truth and true witness quickly vanish.... Without God's absolute word, man can only offer a "life-style," not the truth; authority is also gone when truth is gone. The ability to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, is also gone.... (emphasis in original)<sup>45</sup>

Rushdoony assumed that natural law originates within nature and is discovered through the natural senses and reason. However, this was a confusion of natural theology with natural law as it has traditionally been understood by Christian theologians for centuries. Rather than reflecting the disorder of the cursed creation or fallen man's "sin," "apostasy," or "autonomy," natural law originates with *God* as transcendent moral Governor of His creation, constitutes *His very image* which is implanted into the consciousness of humanity, and thus reflects *His* eternal holiness, righteous standards, and sovereignty. Natural law is therefore not developed through observation or through reason, but is known instinctively. Building on this categorical fallacy, the Reconstructionists insist that, because true knowledge of politics, economics, or any other social science is supposedly impossible apart from special revelation as understood by the regenerate man alone, those who give place to any "natural law theory" thereby "surrender critically important areas of human thought and scientific inquiry to the dominion and control of fallen men, men under the rule of anti-Christ."<sup>46</sup> The groundwork has thus been laid for a proposed society ruled by Christians imposing "biblical law" upon unbelievers. However, because the New Testament lacks any "blueprint" for such a theocracy, the Reconstructionist necessarily is driven back to the judicial laws of Old Covenant Israel. This point must be kept in mind for it is crucial to the theonomic position relating to law and government.

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45. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 10, 578-579, 580.

46. Rex Downie, "Natural Law and God's Law: An Antithesis," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* (Summer 1978), Volume V:1, page 85.



## Chapter Ten: Natural Law and Civil Government

### Natural Law in the Noahic Covenant

In what could easily pass as a direct response to Van Tilianism, John Calvin wrote, “To charge the intellect with perpetual blindness so as to leave it no intelligence of any description whatever, is repugnant not only to the Word of God, but to common experience.”<sup>1</sup> He went on to describe at great length man’s “natural instinct to cherish and preserve society” from the inward “impressions of civil order and honesty,” and thus, the ability of “ancient lawgivers” to “arrange civil order and discipline with so much equity.” Calvin found the continuing operation of this “natural instinct” not only in the civil realm, but also in philosophy, the medical arts, and academics. Never questioning the fall of mankind into sin, Calvin traced the source of this residual natural good to the preserving Spirit of God and cautioned that his readers “be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver.”<sup>2</sup>

This brings our discussion to the Reformed doctrine of “common grace.” In the words of Louis Berkhof, common grace is “a grace which is communal, does not pardon nor purify human nature, and does not effect the salvation of sinners. It curbs the destructive power of sin, main-

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1. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 2:12.

2. Calvin, *ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 2:13, 15.

tains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of men.”<sup>3</sup> Of note in this description is Berkhof’s mention of “the moral order of the universe.” This phrase is a reference to the covenant established between God and Noah’s descendants (Genesis 9:9) and ultimately with all of creation (verse 10), including the earth itself (verse 13). Matthew Henry wrote:

Now here we have the *Magna Charta* — the great charter of this new kingdom of nature which was now to be erected, and incorporated, the former charter having been forfeited and seized.

I. The grants of this charter are kind and gracious to men.

1. A grant of lands of vast extent, and a promise of a great increase of men to occupy and enjoy them. The first blessing is here renewed: *Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth* (v. 1). Now, (1) God sets the whole earth before them, tells them it is all their own, while it remains, to them and their heirs. Though it is not a paradise, but a wilderness rather; yet it is better than we deserve. Blessed be God, it is not hell. (2) He gives them a blessing, so that in a little time all the habitable parts of the earth should be more or less inhabited. Though death should still reign, yet the earth should never again be dispeopled as now it was, but still replenished, Acts xvii. 24-26.

2. A grant of power over the inferior creatures, v.2. Man in innocence ruled by love, fallen man rules by fear. Now this grant remains in force, and thus far we have still the benefit of it. Now here see, (1) That God is a good Master, and provides, not only that we may live, but that we may live comfortably, in his service; not for necessity only, but for delight. (2) That every *creature of God is good*, and nothing to be refused, 1 Tim. iv.4.

II. The precepts and provisos of this charter are no less kind and gracious, and instances of God’s good-will to man. The Jewish doctors speak so often of the seven precepts of Noah, or of the sons of Noah, which they say were to be observed by all nations, that it may not be amiss to set them down. The first against the worship of idols. The second against blasphemy, and requiring to bless the name of God. The third against murder. The fourth against incest and all uncleanness. The fifth against theft and rapine. The sixth requiring the administration of

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3. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 434.

justice. The seventh against eating of flesh with the life (emphasis in original).<sup>4</sup>

This covenant may rightly be called the “covenant of nature,” in that it reaffirmed the dominion mandate of Genesis 1:28, albeit with the added provision that “every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you” (Genesis 9:3). The Noahic covenant should not, however, be misconstrued as a renewal of the original Adamic covenant. After the fall, the Covenant of Works extended no blessings, but only a curse, to the inhabitants of the earth, whereas God has granted manifold unconditional blessings in the Noahic covenant to mankind even in its fallen condition, as noted above by Matthew Henry. It may therefore also be called the “covenant of preservation,” for as God said in Genesis 8:21-22, “I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake [despite the fact that] the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” Christ Himself reaffirmed this common preserving element of the Noahic covenant<sup>5</sup> in Matthew 5:45 by saying, “[God] maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Not only did God graciously provide for creaturely comforts and the means of bodily sustenance, but He also established the basic framework for human government and social order through the means of the civil “sword” (Genesis 9:6; cf. Romans 13:4). It is precisely at this point that the Noahic covenant differed from the previous Edenic covenant:

In the former case, God is the administrator of the law, as he is the immediate and sovereign party in the legal compact. In the latter case, man is, by the express appointment of the Lord of all, constituted

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4. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), page 22.

5. Although it is not part of the unfolding Covenant of Grace, the Noahic covenant nevertheless preserves the creation long enough for the total number of God’s elect to be brought into His Kingdom (2 Peter 3:9). While benefitting mankind in general, its true purpose is to serve the Church, and thus it may be viewed as the “scaffolding of the New Creation,” which, at the final consummation of the Kingdom, will no longer be needed and will then terminate.

the executive agent. "By man shall his blood be shed." Here, then, is the formal institution of civil government. Here the civil sword is committed to the charge of man. The judgment of death by the executioner is solemnly delegated to man in vindication of human life. This trust is conveyed in the most general terms. "By man." The divine legislator does not name the sovereign, define his powers, or determine the law of succession. All these practical conditions of a stable government are left open questions. The emphasis is laid solely on "man." On man is impressively laid the obligation of instituting a civil constitution suited to his present fallen condition. On the nation as a body it is an incumbent duty to select the sovereign, to form the civil compact between prince and people, to settle the prerogative of the sovereign and the rights of the subjects, to fix the order of succession, to constitute the legislative, judicial, and administrative bodies, and to render due submission to the constituted authorities. And all these arrangements are to be made according to the principles of Scripture and the light of nature.<sup>6</sup>

As stated above, the specific details of governing under this covenant are left "open questions" to be determined by man himself, not only "according to the principles of Scripture," but also "the light of nature": *i.e.* natural law interpreted through natural reason. Thus, while government as an institution has been ordained by God (Romans 13:1), it is still *human* government (1 Peter 2:13) and it is to endure as such "while the earth remaineth."<sup>7</sup>

### Calvin and Westminster on the Natural Law

The Reconstructionists claim that all forms of natural law theory are derived from pagan Greek and Roman philosophy, and as such, are anti-Christian and must not be countenanced in any way by the Church.<sup>8</sup>

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6. James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), pages 228-229.

7. The implication is, "while the earth remaineth in its present unglorified state": *i.e.* pre-consummation.

8. Downie, "Natural Law and God's Law," pages 80, 81; Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), page 185; North and DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction*, page xx; Joseph P. Morecraft III, "Natural Law or Biblical Law?" *The Counsel of Chalcedon*, April-May 2001, page 33.

Furthermore, they insist that such a declamation is the necessary consequent of a Reformed view of fallen humanity. However, it is difficult to find anyone in the Reformed tradition in agreement with them prior to the advent of Dutch neo-Calvinism in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, specifically that of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, and later, Cornelius Van Til. The Reconstructionists will often seize upon comments such as the following from John Calvin to justify their rejection of natural law:

...[C]onscience, instead of allowing us to stifle our perceptions, and sleep on without interruption, acts as an inward witness and monitor, reminds us of what we owe to God, points out the distinction between good and evil, and thereby convicts us of departure from duty. But man, being immured in the darkness of error, is scarcely able, by means of that natural law, to form any tolerable idea of the worship which is acceptable to God. At all events, he is very far from forming any correct knowledge of it. In addition to this, he is so swollen with arrogance and ambition, and so blinded with self-love, that he is unable to survey, and, as it were, descend into himself, that he may so learn to humble and abase himself, and confess his misery. Therefore, as a necessary remedy, both for our dulness and our contumacy, the Lord has given us his written Law, which, by its sure attestations, removes the obscurity of the law of nature, and also, by shaking off our lethargy, makes a more lively and permanent impression on our minds.<sup>9</sup>

Here Calvin taught that natural law is inadequate as a guide for acceptable worship because it does not overcome the blindness of man's fallen nature and the enmity he has toward his Creator; only a direct work of the Holy Spirit within the heart of man and the written Word can remedy this animosity of his mind (Colossians 1:21). Even after regeneration, man needs special revelation in order to know how to properly approach God in worship; hence, the necessity of what the Reformers termed the Regulative Principle of Worship, which enjoins all things commanded in Scripture, and forbids all things not commanded, during the public worship of the Church.<sup>10</sup> However, the civil realm is an entirely different subject

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9. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 8:1.

10. Reconstructionism wrongly attempts to apply this principle to the State, where neither Scripture nor the Reformed tradition have ever applied it, while decrying its application to the Church as a "Presbyterian folk myth" (Gary

because it is not concerned with divine worship in the Church, but rather social relations between man and man in the common kingdom of this world.<sup>11</sup> Gary North has claimed that Theonomy is “Calvinism’s judicial theology applied”<sup>12</sup> and “*the judicial extension of Reformed theology*” (emphasis in original),<sup>13</sup> but Calvin himself denied its most basic premise by writing that, not only have the judicial laws of the Old Testament been abrogated along with the ceremonial laws,<sup>14</sup> but that the natural law is indeed a sufficient guide for the drafting of just laws and the maintaining of an orderly society. In fact, Calvin denounced the same doctrines which are now propagated by Reconstructionism as “dangerous errors,” “perilous and seditious,” “stupid and false,” “malignant... and invidious of the public good,” and “most absurd.” His rejection of the idea of a modern theocracy based on Mosaic law was unequivocal as the following lengthy quotation will demonstrate:

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North, “Critical Mass: Liturgy and Church Growth,” *Christian Reconstruction*, Volume XIII, Number 1 [January/February, 1994], page 1). Many leading Reconstructionists, such as Steve Schlissel and James Jordan, who have been among the most vocal critics of the Regulative Principle of Worship, are responsible for the introduction of all manner of neo-Romanist innovations into Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Some of those who have been influenced by their teachings have gone on to convert to either Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy.

11. The Reformers did teach that one of the duties of the civil magistrate is to “foster and maintain the external worship of God” (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 20:2). In seventeenth-century Great Britain, this was interpreted as a duty to establish and support Presbyterianism, and conversely to suppress and punish other forms of religious expression, such as Roman Catholicism. However, in the modern pluralistic Western world, this duty would translate into the public acknowledgment of God as Creator and Moral Governor, and the discouragement and even suppression of open atheism, blasphemy, or anything else tending to undermine the moral fabric of society. Spiritual matters, such as the specific details of corporate worship, are outside the jurisdiction of the magistrate and are reserved to officers in the Church.

12. North, *Theonomy, An Informed Response*, page 26.

13. North, *ibid.*, page 30.

14. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 20:15.

...[T]here are some who deny that any commonwealth is rightly framed which neglects the law of Moses, and is ruled by the common law of nations. How perilous and seditious these views are, let others see: for me it is enough to demonstrate that they are stupid and false....

...[E]ach nation has been left at liberty to enact the laws which it judges to be beneficial; still these are always to be tested by the rule of charity, so that while they vary in form, they must proceed on the same principle....

What I have said will become plain if we attend, as we ought, to two things connected with all laws — viz. the enactment of the law, and the equity on which the enactment is founded and rests. Equity, as it is natural, cannot be the same in all, and therefore ought to be proposed by all laws, according to the nature of the thing enacted. As constitutions have some circumstances on which they partly depend, there is nothing to prevent their diversity, provided they all alike aim at equity as their end. Now, as it is evident that the law of God which we call moral, is nothing else than the testimony of natural law, and of that conscience which God has engraven on the minds of men, the whole of this equity of which we now speak is prescribed in it. Hence it alone ought to be the aim, the rule, and the end of all laws. Wherever laws are formed after this rule, directed to this aim, and restricted to this end, there is no reason why they should be disapproved by us, however much they may differ from the Jewish law, or from each other (August. *de Civit. Dei*, Lib. xix.c.17).

The law of God forbids to steal. The punishment appointed for theft in the civil polity of the Jews may be seen in Exodus xxii. Very ancient laws of other nations punished theft by exacting the double of what was stolen, while subsequent laws made a distinction between theft manifest and not manifest. Other laws went the length of punishing with exile, or with branding, while others made the punishment capital. Among the Jews, the punishment of the false witness was to “do unto him as he had thought to have done with his brother” (Deut. xix.19). In some countries, the punishment is infamy, in others hanging, in others crucifixion. All laws alike avenge murder with blood, but the kinds of death are different. In some countries, adultery was punished more severely, in others more leniently. Yet we see that amidst this diversity they all tend to the same end. For they all with one mouth declare against those crimes which are condemned by the eternal law of God — viz. murder, theft, adultery, and false witness; though they agree not as to the mode of punishment. This is not necessary, nor even expedient. There may be a country which, if murder were not visited with fearful punishments, would instantly become a prey to robbery and slaughter.

There may be an age requiring that the severity of punishments should be increased. If the state is in troubled condition, those things from which disturbances usually arise must be corrected by new edicts. In time of war, civilisation would disappear amid the noise of arms, were not men overawed by an unwonted severity of punishment. In sterility, in pestilence, were not stricter discipline employed, all things would grow worse. One nation might be more prone to a particular vice, were it not most severely repressed. How malignant were it, and invidious of the public good, to be offended at this diversity, which is admirably adapted to retain the observance of the divine law. The allegation, that insult is offered to the law of God enacted by Moses, where it is abrogated, and other new laws are preferred to it, is most absurd. Others are not preferred when they are more approved, and most absolutely, but from regard to time and place, and the condition of the people, or when those things are abrogated which were never enacted for us. The Lord did not deliver it by the hand of Moses to be promulgated in all countries, and to be everywhere enforced; but having taken the Jewish nation under his special care, patronage, and guardianship, he was pleased to be specially its legislator, and as became a wise legislator, he had special regard to it in enacting laws.<sup>15</sup>

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15. Calvin, *ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter XX:14-16. In an attempt to side-step these clear statements, some theonomic writers and speakers have claimed that Calvin was responding only to the radical Anabaptists of his day and that his words should therefore not be taken out of their historical context and used to condemn the modern Reconstructionist application of “God’s law-word” in government today. Robert Godfrey countered this argument as follows: “Calvin’s strong words may have been inspired in part by the radical, violent Anabaptist theocracy at Munster (1534-1535), but he comes to his conclusion from a clear line of reasoning” (“Calvin and Theonomy,” in Barker and Godfrey, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, page 302). It should be noted that many of the creeds and confessions of the Church were formulated in response to error, but the documents themselves stand on their own merits outside of their original historical context. A case in point: one need not have extensive knowledge of the Arian controversy in the early Fourth Century in order to correctly interpret the Nicene Creed’s doctrine of the Trinity and of the Deity of Christ. The same may be said of Calvin’s conclusion, “The Lord did not deliver [the judicial laws] by the hand of Moses to be promulgated in all nations, and to be everywhere enforced...” Rushdoony understood the importance of this statement, and commented, “Such ideas... are still heretical nonsense” (*Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 9).



Hence, “it matters not what your condition is among men, nor under what laws you live, since in them the kingdom of Christ does not at all consist.”<sup>16</sup> As noted by Calvin, this was the doctrine taught by Augustine in his landmark work, *The City of God*. Here, the latter wrote of the use the “heavenly city” (the living saints) is to make of “civic obedience and rule,” stating that Christians are to work with non-Christians in society “to attain the things which are helpful to this life.” He went on:

Consequently, so long as it [the “heavenly city”] lives like a captive and a stranger in the earthly city, though it has already received the promise of redemption, and the gift of the Spirit as the earnest of it, it makes no scruple to obey the laws of the earthly city, whereby the things necessary for the maintenance of this mortal life are administered; and thus, as this life is common to both cities, so there is a harmony between them in regard to what belongs to it.... This heavenly city, then, while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, not scrupling about diversities in the manners, laws, and institutions whereby earthly peace is secured and maintained, but recognising that, however various these are, they all tend to one and the same end of earthly peace. It therefore is so far from rescinding and abolishing these diversities, that it even preserves and adapts them, so long only as no hindrance to the worship of the one supreme and true God is thus introduced.<sup>17</sup>

The subject of natural law, also known as the law or light of nature, and how it is to be used, was also a doctrine with which the Westminster divines in particular were very much concerned. Like Calvin before them, they acknowledged that unregenerate men may know God, not only in a generic sense, but specifically in His attributes of goodness and sovereignty, although never in a salvific manner:

Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge

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16. Calvin, *ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter XX:1.

17. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1950; translated by Marcus Dods, D.D.), Book XIX:17. Ironically, Gary North credited Augustine’s book for “restructur[ing] Western civilization’s concept of history” by “adhering to the biblical worldview” (*Tools of Dominion*, page 2).

of God and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation....

The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doeth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.<sup>18</sup>

However, the divines were not content to leave the matter there, for such an innate knowledge involves moral responsibility. Thus, the law of nature is elsewhere referred to as the moral law when discussed in the context of the Covenant of Works:

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it. This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man....

The moral law doth for ever 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.<sup>19</sup>

The Confession does not teach that the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) *are* the moral law; instead, the moral law was delivered *in* the Ten Commandments. In other words, the law that was originally delivered to Adam in the Garden as “a covenant of works” — *i.e.* encapsulated, or summarized in the positive command to abstain from the Tree of Knowledge — was again summarized in the Decalogue<sup>20</sup> as “a perfect rule of righteousness,”<sup>21</sup> so that, though that particular covenantal form

18. Westminster Confession, Chapter I:1, XXI:1.

19. *Ibid.*, Chapter XIX:1-2, 5.

20. Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 98.

21. As previously noted, “righteousness” is a technical term which refers to the fulfillment of a covenantal requirement. “Covenant of works” and “perfect rule of righteousness” are therefore corresponding phrases meant to connect the giving of the law at Mount Sinai with the original Adamic covenant. The “per-

be abolished, the essential moral principles remain completely intact: “The Ten Commandments are the sum and substance of [the moral law]. There is, however, this difference between it and them: in it there is nothing but what is moral, but in them there is something that is positive.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is the moral law to which all mankind is bound, not necessarily the specific laws of the Sinaitic covenant. In this way is reconciled the seeming contradiction between Paul’s declaration that the “ministration of death, written and engraven in stones” has passed away, and the clear prohibitions found throughout the New Testament against idolatry, adultery, theft, *etc.*<sup>23</sup> To say that the Decalogue is an easily-accessed summary of the moral law to which one may turn for “instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16),<sup>24</sup> is a far different thing than saying that he is under the Mosaic law with regards to its blessings and curses, which, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, is precisely what the Reconstructionists are teaching and what sets them apart from the Reformed doctrine of the law.

### The Mosaic Civil Laws Have Expired

In addition to this inscription of the moral law onto the tables of stone, God also delivered “sundry judicial laws,” but the Westminster

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sonal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience” which was the condition of the Covenant of Works was restated in the Mosaic covenant (with the stone tablets of the Decalogue standing for the unwritten moral law), along with the promise of life for fulfillment of the condition and the threat of death for transgression.

22. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 7.

23. While the moral law in its original covenant form continues to bind mankind in general due to the perpetuity of the Covenant of Works, it does so no longer for the Christian for whom its demands have been fulfilled. The believer relates to the moral law as a rule of life, or the law of a reconciled Father to whose family he now belongs. The difference between the law as a covenant and the law as a rule of life is incomprehensible to the Reconstructionists due to their monocovenantal presuppositions and their rejection of the classic Reformed doctrine of republication. According to Rushdoony, “To say that man is no longer under the law, and yet obliged to avoid murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and other sins, is to play with words. Either a law is a law and is binding, or it is no law, and man is not bound but is free to commit those acts” (*Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 308).

24. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book IV, Chapter 4:27.

Confession is careful to add that these laws have “expired together with the State of that people; not obliging under any now, further than the general equity thereof may require.”<sup>25</sup> Clearly, the “general equity” spoken of here was the same as the “natural law” spoken of by Calvin and the “common law” spoken of by Augustine. It is this moral law which the Confession later declares it the duty of the civil magistrate to enforce “in the wholesome laws of each commonwealth.”<sup>26</sup> Nowhere does the Confession teach the continuing binding authority of the Mosaic case laws, although many of the provided scriptural proof-texts point to certain statutes as examples of the enacted moral law.<sup>27</sup>

None of the other Reformed confessions or catechisms differ in this matter.<sup>28</sup> However, Rushdoony directly contradicted five centuries of Reformed teaching by asserting that “it is a serious error to say that the *civil law* was also abolished, but the *moral law* remained” (emphasis in original).<sup>29</sup> Commenting on the “general equity” clause of the Westminster Confession, he unequivocally stated, “At this point, the Confession is guilty of nonsense.”<sup>30</sup> Gary North, who referred to the Confession’s tripartite division of the law as “a weakness,”<sup>31</sup> insisted that “Christians cannot legitimately proclaim the continuing moral validity of the Ten Commandments without also proclaiming the continuing judicial validity of the Mosaic case laws.”<sup>32</sup> This is because fallen man is supposedly incapable of rightly interpreting the moral law apart from divine revela-

25. *Westminster Confession*, Chapter XIX:4.

26. *Ibid.*, Chapter XXIII:2.

27. An American law textbook might also cite a particular law of England as an example of how legal principles may be applied to a particular situation without binding it as an obligation upon the reader. For example, William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* was a favorite reference work for American lawyers in the Eighteenth Century.

28. Belgic Confession, Article XXXVI; Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter IX, Chapter XII; London Baptist Confession (1689), Chapter XIX:4.

29. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 304.

30. Rushdoony, *ibid.*, page 551.

31. Gary North, “Hermeneutics and Leviticus 19:19,” in *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, page 259.

32. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 89.

tion, and he cannot employ his reason to determine how it should be applied to society; thus, the only legitimate source of law is found in Scripture. Consequently, Reconstructionists reject the standard Reformed teaching that the State is “ruled by the common law of nations” as “heretical nonsense,”<sup>33</sup> “philosophical humanism,”<sup>34</sup> “rationalism,”<sup>35</sup> and “social antinomianism.”<sup>36</sup> They claim that to rely on “Noah’s low-content covenant” in formulating civil laws “grants enormous authority to self-proclaimed autonomous man and his representative, the messianic State,”<sup>37</sup> and that “an attitude favorable to natural law theory” leads to “common-ground philosophy, common-ground ethics, and the autonomy of man.”<sup>38</sup>

There is, of course, no proof that an appeal to the natural law of the Noahic covenant necessarily “grants enormous authority” to the State; in fact, the very essence of Jeffersonian *limited* government was based on the “laws of nature” from which were derived the natural rights of “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” The secession of the American colonies from an oppressive government across the ocean was predicated upon the premise that “to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”<sup>39</sup> Governments seize “enormous au-

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33. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 9.

34. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 30.

35. Downie, “Natural Law and God’s Law,” pages 82, 85.

36. Brian Schwertley, “Reformed Social Antinomianism: An Examination and Refutation of Reformed and Evangelical Arguments Against the Old Testament Moral Case Laws and Their Penalties” (2013 monograph), online at [www.reformedonline.com](http://www.reformedonline.com)

37. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 314.

38. North, *ibid*, page 20.

39. Thomas Jefferson, though not a Christian himself, came very close to outlining the historic Reformed doctrine of the State when he penned the Declaration of Independence. This was no accident, for it is an historical fact

thority” because of the sinful tendency of men to desire domination over their fellow men (Matthew 20:25), not because they are granted that power by the alleged “low content” of the Noahic covenant.

The second claim is also a *non sequitur*: just because a Christian believes in a “common-ground ethic” for believers and non-believers alike, founded in the eternal nature of God and the common nature of man as His image-bearer, does not mean that he will make the logical leap to affirm a “common-ground philosophy” and “the autonomy of man.” It is certainly true that there is no philosophical common ground between the children of God and the children of the world (2 Corinthians 6:15), but this is only because the latter “hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). The word *κατεκόντων* (*katechontôn*; hold) carries the implication of actual possession, as seen in 1 Corinthians 11:2 (“keep the ordinances, as I delivered unto you”), 1 Thessalonians 5:21 (“hold fast that which is good”), in Hebrews 3:6 (“hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end”), and in Hebrews 10:23 (“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering”). The point of Romans 1:18 is that unbelievers are actually in possession of the moral law of God, but they deliberately suppress it because of their hatred for Him and act “as though they possessed not” (1 Corinthians 7:30). The problem is therefore not epistemological, but moral; fallen men are not *unable* to know God, but are *unwilling* to know Him. This is brought out in the next verse: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them” (verse 19). Moreover, “they knew God” — unbelievers instinctively know His moral demands — but “they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (verse 21). There is indeed clear “ethical common-ground” between believers and unbelievers

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that he was heavily influenced by the writings of John Locke, who was in turn influenced by the Calvinism of Scottish Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford and the Puritan Levellers. In his book, *Natural Law and Calvinistic Political Theory* (Bloomington, Indiana: Trafford Publishing, 2004), L.S. Koitsier outlined the many striking similarities between the political views of Locke and Calvin (Chapter Four). The fact that many Reconstructionists point to the Declaration as evidence of America’s “Christian heritage,” is odd in light of its clear endorsement of “natural law theory.” Only Gary North has seen the contradiction and thus repudiates the Declaration and the later Constitution as “atheistic” and “humanistic” documents (*Political Polytheism*, page 403).

because both bear the image of God and both are forced by their shared human nature to agree to a standard which is “self-evident.” Human autonomy is not therefore the necessary correlative to a belief in natural law simply because it is God’s law and not man’s.

### Man’s Rebellion Against Natural Revelation

Fallen man’s rebellion is against natural revelation and natural law, not against the law of Moses.<sup>40</sup> Was Paul therefore teaching the “autonomy of man” because he affirmed that there is indeed a natural law which is inherent to the nature of man as God’s image-bearer? Certainly not, for he said to the heathen philosophers on Mars Hill, “[T]he times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31). God’s universal standard of righteousness is antecedent to and transcendent to the localized laws which were delivered to Israel, and it is the former by which the world will be judged, not the latter.<sup>41</sup>

C.S. Lewis did an excellent job of explaining the self-evidence of natural law in Book One of his classic work, *Mere Christianity*, and he rightly used this “common-ground ethic” as the springboard for the presentation of the Gospel:

These, then, are the two points I wanted to make. First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in....

It is after you have realised that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power — it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk. When you know you are sick, you will listen to the doctor. When you have realised that our position is nearly

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40. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 2:22

41. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book IV, Chapter 4:30.

desperate you will begin to understand what the Christians are talking about. They offer an explanation of how we got into our present state of both hating goodness and loving it. They offer an explanation of how God can be this impersonal mind at the back of the Moral Law and yet also a Person. They tell you how the demands of the law, which you and I cannot meet, have been met on our behalf, how God Himself becomes a man to save man from the disapproval of God.<sup>42</sup>

If mankind is thus so disobedient to the “work of the law written in their hearts” (Romans 2:15), why should one expect that enacting the written laws of Moses in society at large would be met with any better reception? The Reconstructionists will answer that the Mosaic code will not be imposed upon society until there has first been a massive spiritual revival and the people have voluntarily accepted it.<sup>43</sup> However, this answer runs counter to Paul’s declaration in 1 Timothy 1:9-11 that “the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine....” It is doubtful that a society consisting of regenerate men who fully understand the grace of God and their lofty position in Christ will willingly subject themselves to the “weak and beggarly elements” (Galatians 4:9) of a law “added because of transgression” (Galatians 3:19). What they will do instead is enact just laws which reflect the eternal moral law of God by restraining and punishing evil-doers when they commit acts “against nature,” while leaving well-doers to govern themselves without regulation or restraint (Romans 13:3-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14). This freedom to live their lives to the glory of God and to preach the Gospel without interference is what Christians are to pray and work for (1 Timothy 2:2), not the imposition of an outdated and rigid law code that was specifically designed to restrain “a stiff-necked people” (Exodus 32:9) who “do always resist the Holy Ghost” (Acts 7:51):

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42. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Westwood, New Jersey: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1952), pages 7, 27.

43. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 57.



They (the Jews) had therefore a law, a course of discipline, and a prophecy of future things. For God at the first, indeed, warning them by means of natural precepts, which from the beginning He had implanted in mankind, that is, by means of the Decalogue (which, if any one does not observe, he has no salvation), did then demand nothing more of them. As Moses says in Deuteronomy [5:22], “These are all the words which the Lord spake to the whole assembly of the sons of Israel on the mount, and He added no more; and He wrote them on two tables of stone, and gave them to me.” For this reason He did so, that they who are willing to follow Him might keep these commandments. But when they turned themselves to make a calf, and had gone back in their minds to Egypt, desiring to be slaves instead of freemen, they were placed for the future in a state of servitude suited to their wish — a slavery which did not indeed cut them off from God, but subjected them to the yoke of bondage; as Ezekiel the prophet [20:24], when stating the reasons for the giving of such a law, declares: “And their eyes were after the desire of their heart; and I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments in which they shall not live”....

Why, then, did the Lord not form the covenant for the fathers? Because “the law was not established for righteous men” [1 Timothy 1:9]. But the righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls, that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbour. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates (*correctoriis literis*), because they had the righteousness of the law in themselves. But when this righteousness and love to God had passed into oblivion, and became extinct in Egypt, God did necessarily, because of His great goodwill to men, reveal Himself by a voice, and led the people with power out of Egypt, in order that man might again become the disciple and follower of God; and He afflicted those who were disobedient, that they should not contemn their Creator; and He fed them with manna, that they might receive food for their souls....<sup>44</sup>

Because of the radical moral change that the Gospel brings (Jeremiah 31:33), the Christian now stands on the same level as the “righteous fathers” of long ago, not depending on the rudimentary instructions of a detailed written code to guide his every step (Galatian 3:23-24), but on

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44. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV:15, 16; in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (editors), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), Volume I, pages 479, 481.

the inner leading of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 18). Indeed, “the teachings of Christianity are facts and principles, not propositions and restrictions; its institutions are simple outlines, not precise ceremonies; and its laws are moral sentiments, not minute mechanical directions.”<sup>45</sup> Consequently, God calls His people to think and act as mature adults with “all wisdom and understanding” (Ephesians 1:8) rather than as “foolish... [and] sottish children” (Jeremiah 4:22), who need constant supervision (Galatians 4:2) and must be motivated to obedience by the threat of punishment (Proverbs 22:15). “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1).

### Theonomy in the First Century Church

When the Judaizers were troubling the early Church with the “theonomy” of that time, the Council of Jerusalem was convened to render a decision on the disputed question, Were Gentile Christians obligated to observe the Mosaic law? The final verdict has direct relevance to our present discussion:

Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well (Acts 15:24-29).

In answer to the expected response that only circumcision was at issue here, Calvin wrote, “Circumcision is indeed mentioned alone in this place; but it appeareth by the text that they moved the question about the

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45. H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (editors), *The Pulpit Commentary: II Corinthians* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1890), page 80.

keeping of the whole Law. And, because circumcision was, as it were, a solemn entrance and admission into other rites of the law, therefore, by *synecdoche*, the whole law is comprehended under one part.”<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that the council, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Himself, denied that the law “in exhaustive detail” was binding on the consciences of Gentile Christians, leaving only one other possible ethical standard: natural law. If such is the Bible’s standard for God’s people in the Church, how much more so for those outside the Church? The reader will remember that Greg Bahnsen himself denied that God should “be represented as having a double standard of judgment.”

In direct contrast with the teachings of John Calvin and the Westminster Confession is Reconstructionism’s hermeneutic “that each of God’s revealed Old Covenant case laws is still in force, *having been resurrected with Christ* unless a New Testament revelation or principle has annulled it” (emphasis in original)<sup>47</sup> and that “nothing is more deadly or more derelict than the notion that the Christian is at liberty with respect to the kind of law he can have.”<sup>48</sup> In the face of this obvious discrepancy, the Reconstructionists still present themselves as “Calvinists”<sup>49</sup> and, in some cases, as “confessional Presbyterians.”<sup>50</sup>

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46. John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), Volume II, page 36.

47. North, *Theonomy, An Informed Response*, page 7.

48. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 14.

49. In his book, *Political Polytheism*, Gary North asked the rhetorical question: “How can a Calvinist, who affirms the absolute sovereignty of God over every aspect of history, deny the existence of theocracy?” (page 207). In response, one might ask of North, How can a professed Calvinist deny the clear teachings of Calvin on natural law? Elsewhere, North admitted, “That Calvin was no theonomist is clear....” (*Tools of Dominion*, page 1211).

50. Kenneth Gentry once complained about the “unfortunate recurring opposition to theonomic ethics among many reformed Christians,” and insisted that “reformed Christians operating under the Westminster Standards ought to be the first to recognize the legitimacy of theonomy” (“Theonomic Ethics and the Westminster Confession,” *Presbyterian Witness*, Spring 1996, page 16). According to Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, “Many of the teachings of ‘Christian reconstructionists’ are developments of particular Reformed doctrines that find their best expression in the confessional standards of the Westminster Confes-

We close this chapter with the following admission of Gary North regarding the novelty of Reconstructionism as a theological system:

For almost two thousand years, Bible commentators — Jews and gentiles — have simply not taken seriously the specific details of Old Testament law. Despite the fact that John Calvin did preach about two hundred sermons on the Book of Deuteronomy, including its case laws, and that the Puritans, especially the New England Puritans, did take biblical law seriously, they did not write detailed expositions showing how these laws can be applied institutionally in New Testament times....

This exegetical approach is unquestionably new.... This is why the Christian Reconstruction movement does represent a major break with recent church history. On this point — and just about only on this one — Reconstructionism’s critics are correct. We represent a discontinuity in church history. Christian Reconstructionists alone have gone to the Bible’s legal passages in search of permanent authoritative guidelines (“blueprints”) for what society ought to do and be. In this sense, we Reconstructionists are theological revolutionaries.<sup>51</sup>

North has acknowledged that no one else in the history of the Christian Church — with the possible exception of the New England Puritans — has held the views which have been promulgated since the late 1960s by the Reconstructionists. That fact alone should give us reason to doubt the validity of what they are teaching, for, as Tertullian so aptly stated in the early Third Century, “[W]hatever is first is true, whereas that is spurious which is later in date.”<sup>52</sup>

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sion of Faith” (*Reduction of Christianity*, page 31). As already shown in this chapter, and as will be further proved in the remainder of this book, the main tenets of Reconstructionism instead directly contradict the Confession.

51. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 7.

52. Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, Chapter II; in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume III, page 598.

## Chapter Eleven: Reconstructionism's Rejection of Natural Law

### An Implicit Denial of Common Grace

Scottish theologian William Cunningham made the following statement on the subject of civil government:

[C]ivil government is intended to bear, at least principally and most directly, upon the temporal welfare of men, and ought to be regulated chiefly by a regard to the principles of natural reason. God has not prescribed His written word as the only rule to be followed by nations and their rulers in establishing and administering civil government; and He has not given them in His word sufficient materials to guide them authoritatively in determining all the questions which, with reference to this matter, they may be called upon to entertain and dispose of. Yet where the word of God does speak to these issues, it ought to be authoritative in regulating the opinions and conduct of those who acknowledge it as such.<sup>1</sup>

Such has been the consensus of Reformed theologians for several centuries: while the Scriptures do indeed speak authoritatively to professing Christians in all moral areas of life — in principle more often than in precept — there is nothing in the Bible which requires unbelieving magistrates, or nations in general, to submit themselves thereunto. This much

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1. William Cunningham, *Discussions on Church Principles: Popish, Erastian, and Presbyterian* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), pages 196-197.

should be obvious, since special revelation is addressed to God's covenant people to prepare them for spiritual life in His eternal Kingdom, whereas civil government serves the merely temporal purpose of maintaining external law and order in "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4) — "the world" which "passeth away, with all its lusts" (1 John 2:17) — and as such is regulated by natural law. The two kingdoms (the Church and the world) are therefore distinct, being under two different covenants (the Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Works) and relating to God in two different ways (as Father/Redeemer and as Creator/Judge).<sup>2</sup>

Due to its inherent monocovenantalism, Reconstructionism has no tolerance for the Reformed "two kingdom" view and is therefore an implicit denial of God's covenant of common grace. Although Gary North has written somewhat extensively on the subject of common grace,<sup>3</sup> he has redefined the term to fit his doctrine of "covenantal sanctions."<sup>4</sup> Reconstructionists interpret all of history in terms of the Mosaic covenant,<sup>5</sup> which they refer to as the "everlasting covenant" originally manifested in the Garden, renewed through Noah after the flood, restored to Israel in the promised land, and finally established "in exhaustive detail" by Christ.<sup>6</sup> In line with Cornelius Van Til's innovative Trinitarianism,<sup>7</sup> this paradigm is believed to reflect the "personal structure bond between the three Persons of God," in which "man was created to partici-

2. VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, page 2.

3. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987); North, *Tools of Dominion*, Appendix A, pages 953ff.

4. See footnote on page 79 and further discussion in Chapter Fourteen.

5. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, page 34.

6. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, pages 468, 655.

7. Van Til wrote, "The three persons of the trinity are co-substantial; not one is derived in his substance from either or both of the others. Yet there are three distinct persons in this unity; the diversity and the identity are equally underived" (*Defense of the Faith*, page 12). This statement is a clear departure from the orthodox Nicene, Athanasian, and Fourth Lateran formulations of the Trinity in which the Father is the source of the Godhead, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father as the Logos, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. For an historically and doctrinally sound exposition of Trinitarianism, see Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume III.

pate,"<sup>8</sup> and not a "special act of providence" imposed on Adam subsequent to his creation, as taught in the Westminster Shorter Catechism.<sup>9</sup> In fact, because the triune God has impressed His image on everything He

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8. Jordan, *Law of the Covenant*, pages 4-5. Van Til likewise taught that "the three persons of the Trinity have exhaustively personal relationship with one another," and that this relationship "is the idea of the covenant" ("Covenant Theology," in L.A. Loetscher (editor), *The New Schaff-Herzog Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1955), Volume I, page 306. In other words, the Triune God is a "society" in which its members mutually indwell one another in the bonds of covenant love to such an extent that their unity is "equally ultimate" with their plurality (Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, page 26). Originally found in the writings of Abraham Kuyper, who suggested that the "idea of the covenant with regard to man" had its "archetypal original" in the "essential relations of the Three Persons in the Divine Essence" (Kuyper, quoted in Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformed Free Publication Association, 1985], page 295), this covenantal conception of the Trinity is the very foundation of all forms of transformationalism which have descended from Dutch neo-Calvinism, and is more fully developed in Ralph Allan Smith, *The Eternal Covenant: How the Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2002); Cornelius Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga (editors), *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (University of Notre Dame, 1989). Historically, Reformed theologians have identified the covenant activity of the members of the Trinity with their economic functions as they relate to the salvation of the elect (the Covenant of Redemption, or *pactum salutis*), and not with their ontology, or essence. It is bizarre, to say the least, to suggest that the Father, Son, and Spirit have eternally covenanted to mutually love and obey, and thereby to receive blessings from, one another, for such implies that the cause and effect of the law is transcendent to God Himself and upon which the unity of the Godhead depends; as such, it comes dangerously close to tritheism. Federal Visionists, such as Smith, Jordan, Lusk, *et. al.*, have taken this concept to its logical conclusion that God is "righteous" because He is always covenantally faithful, not just in history (economically), but also in eternity (ontologically), and have relied on this understanding to deny the forensic imputation of Christ's active obedience to the law and to support their doctrine of the "faithful obedience" of those who are finally justified

9. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 12. The reader will perceive here the genesis of the monocovenantalists' desire to remove the legal element from the original Adamic covenant..

has created,<sup>10</sup> no part of the cosmos operates outside of “the covenant,” or “the principle of judgment and of salvation, of curses and of blessings.”<sup>11</sup> This “monistic pan-covenantalism” is the source of the Reconstructionists’ inability to distinguish between the moral law in its covenant form and as a rule of life,<sup>13</sup> and also colors their interpretation of common grace. Any good that comes to the unregenerate, any forbearance that God exhibits toward rebels, and any temporal dominion that is allowed to the reprobate must be understood in terms of the sanctions of the law: “Different individuals... [and] different societies experience different histories, depending on the extent to which they affirm or deny the covenant by their actions. The working out of the principle of covenantal blessing can lead to the positive feedback operation: historical blessing to covenantal reaffirmation to greater historical blessing....”<sup>14</sup>

Reconstructionism is the epitome of power religion. According to North, God extends “common grace” to the unregenerate so they may “match the power of the Christians” and “imitate covenantal faithfulness” in order to achieve dominion in history.<sup>15</sup> However, this “understanding of the power which biblical law confers on those who seek to abide by its standards,”<sup>16</sup> is not restricted to mankind alone, for “the same kinds of gifts that God extends to mankind in general are also extended to Satan

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10. According to Van Til, “...[I]n the Christian doctrine of the self-contained ontological Trinity we have the foundation concept of a Christian theory of being, of knowledge and of action” (*Defense of the Faith*, page 9). Following Van Til, Rushdoony wrote, “...[A]ll factuality in the universe is created and understandable only in terms of the ontological trinity” (*One and the Many*, page 9).

11. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 656.

12. Reconstructionism bears a striking resemblance to Hinduism and its all-pervasive law of Karma. Hence the term used here.

13. “‘God’s moral law’ is the code phrase for the evangelical and Reformed man who does not want to be branded an antinomian, but who also does not want to be bound by the case laws of the Old Testament” (North, *Tools of Dominion*., page 48).

14. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, page 32.

15. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 972.

16. North, *ibid.*, page 971.



and his demonic host: time, law, power, knowledge, *etc.*"<sup>17</sup> Because "conformity to the precepts of the law brings external blessings,"<sup>18</sup> regardless of God's "implacable hatred of His enemies" even as they render it,<sup>19</sup> His interaction with men is therefore mechanical and ultimately impersonal. Certainly, He is not exhibiting any goodness toward the reprobate, for His true purpose for blessing them (and Satan) is simply "in order to heap coals of fire" on their heads,<sup>20</sup> and to give "ethical rebels enough rope to hang themselves for all eternity."<sup>21</sup> However, because these blessings are dependent on law-keeping, they cannot rightly be defined as "grace," much less as "gifts, but rather as wages" (Romans 4:4).

Of course, North's hypothesis is contradicted by numerous passages such as Ezekiel 18:32, Jonah 4:11, Matthew 23:37, Mark 10:21, *etc.*, all of which demonstrate God's genuine benevolence and pathos toward even the worst of sinners on the basis of their humanity.<sup>22</sup> North's error is more specifically refuted by Jesus Himself in Matthew 5:43-48, in which believers are told to "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you," which command is immediately followed by the reason: "that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the on the unjust." Here, the believers' interaction with the wicked is directly related to the doctrine of divine common grace toward the reprobate, and therefore, in loving their enemies, Christian imitate the moral perfection of their Father in heaven (verse 48). Keeping in mind the distinction between God's judicial wrath toward the reprobate under the Covenant of Works, and His love for their humanity of which He is the author and His pity for them as lost sinners, it is no contradiction to say that God may both hate and love the same person.

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17. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, page 35.

18. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 971.

19. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, page 18.

20. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 971.

21. North, *Dominion and Common Grace*, page 29.

22. God cannot but love His own image (Genesis 1:27). However, the fallen angelic hosts, not having been made in God's image and likeness, are not the recipients of those benevolence and pathos.

## Is the Mosaic Law the Only Ethical Standard?

The Reconstructionists' rejection of natural law is most evident in their "no other standard" argument: *i.e.* that there is no other ethical standard for civil government outside of the Mosaic law. According to Gary North, "If you abandon the continuing judicial authority of the Old Testament case laws and their sanctions, you must actively adopt or at least passively accept some other civil law structure to serve as the judicial basis of society. There are no judicial vacuums. Either God's law is sovereign in society or else autonomous man's declared law is sovereign. There is no third choice."<sup>23</sup> For North, it is either the Mosaic law or humanism: "Christian Reconstruction or Tower [of Babel] Reconstruction."<sup>24</sup> However, if it is indeed true that natural law is not a viable alternative, it would seem inexplicable how entire civilizations grew up and prospered in the 1,500 years before God ever revealed the law to Moses. Why did Cain fear that he would be executed for murder by the societies to which he was fleeing, when they did not have the Mosaic law (Genesis 4:14)? How did Hammurabi, king of Babylon, formulate just property laws when he did not have the Mosaic law?<sup>25</sup> How did Abimelech, king of Gerar, know that adultery was "a great sin" and upon what grounds could he complain that Abraham had "done deeds unto [him] that ought not to be done" when he did not have the Mosaic law (Genesis 20:1-9)? Such questions could be multiplied a hundredfold, but the answer to them all is the same: since all men bear the image of God, they all instinctively know His moral law. How else could those who have never heard of the Mosaic law have "integrity of heart" (Genesis 20:5-6<sup>26</sup>), or, conversely, "hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans

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23. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 18.

24. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 83.

25. Robert Francis Harper, *The Code of Hammurabi: King of Babylon About 2250 B.C.* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1904).

26. God Himself acknowledged that, despite his paganism, Abimelech had a strong commitment to the moral law, and He would not therefore punish him for intending to take Sarah into his harem. One interesting feature of this story is that Abraham apparently had adopted a Van Tilian perspective regarding the people of Gerar. As an excuse for his deceptiveness regarding his relationship to Sarah, he said, "...I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place."

1:18)? The “no other standard” argument results in a denial of the Bible’s clear teaching on the “light of nature” which God has impressed upon every human heart (Romans 2:14-15). For example, when Paul presented his case against the wearing of long hair by men, he asked, “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?” (1 Corinthians 11:14); his question was not, “Doth not the Mosaic law teach you...?” In Romans 1:25-26, “the truth of God” is identified as that which is “natural” and therefore, those “who change the truth of God into a lie” engage in behavior “which is against nature.” The Reconstructionists point to verse 32 as proof that all men know that sexual perversity is subject to the penal sanctions of the Mosaic law,<sup>27</sup> but Paul did not mention those sanctions anywhere in his thesis. His reference was unmistakably to the “common law” of the covenant of common grace, or the “light of nature.”<sup>28</sup> Commenting on Romans 2:14-15, John Calvin wrote:

[Paul] indeed shows that ignorance is in vain pretended as an excuse by the Gentiles, since they prove by their own deeds that they have some rule of righteousness: for there is no nation so lost to every thing human, that it does not keep within the limits of some laws. Since then all nations, of themselves and without a monitor, are disposed to make laws for themselves, it is beyond all question evident that they have some notions of justice and rectitude... which are implanted by nature in the hearts of men. They have then a law, though they are without law: for though they have not a written law, they are yet by no means wholly destitute of the knowledge of what is right and just; as they could not otherwise distinguish between vice and virtue; the first of which they restrain by punishment, and the latter they commend, and manifest their approbation of it by honouring it with rewards. He sets nature in opposition to a written law, meaning that the Gentiles had the natural light of righteousness, which the place of that law by which they were instructed,

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27. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 340, 440; Kenneth L. Gentry, “Civil Sanctions in the New Testament,” *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, pages 153-157; Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, pages 138, 465.

28. In the original Westminster Confession, Romans 1:32 was used as a proof-text for the teaching that the civil magistrate may proceed against someone for “their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature....” (Chapter XX:4). The American revision confined this procedure to the jurisdiction of the Church, but the proof-text remained.

so that they were a law to themselves.<sup>29</sup>

### Judicial Warfare and the Mark of the Beast

As we have already established, natural law is sufficient to regulate society, even though it is not sufficient to bring men to salvation. Romans 13:1-7 teaches that the magistrate who rightly employs this law to restrain evildoers is “the minister of God to thee for good” (verse 4). In contrast, Gary North ridiculed those Christians who submit themselves “unto the higher powers” (verse 1) based “on the supposed ‘natural conformity’ to the Decalogue of their societies’ legal order.”<sup>30</sup> However, Paul, who clearly taught the abolition of the Mosaic covenant in its entirety, would certainly not have contradicted himself by teaching in Romans 13 that the civil magistrate must enforce the penal sanctions of that abrogated law system. As a highly educated Jew, he knew that the origin of civil government is found in Genesis 9, not in Deuteronomy.<sup>31</sup>

It is a misunderstanding of this truth that has led some followers of Reconstructionism into all manner of civil disobedience and anti-social behavior. On the more benign side have been the non-violent abortion clinic “sit-ins” practiced in the late 1980s and early 1990s,<sup>32</sup> which were motivated by the “blood guiltiness” doctrine derived from Numbers 35:33-34, Deuteronomy 21:1-9, and other related Old Testament passages; those on the opposite end of this spectrum have taken these judicial laws more seriously and have advocated, and even committed, the actual killing of abortionists.<sup>33</sup> The so-called Christian Jural Societies,

29. Calvin, *Commentaries on Romans*, pages 96-97.

30. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 19.

31. Samuel Rutherford, *Lex Rex: A Dispute For the Just Prerogative of King and People* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1843), pages 1-2.

32. The main organizer of these events was Operation Rescue, founded by Randall Terry. In a speech delivered at a U.S. Taxpayer’s Alliance banquet on August 8, 1995, Terry said, “You better believe I want a Christian nation, because the only [other] option is a pagan nation.... I want the Bible to be quoted, to be read, to be referred to, to be revered in political gatherings.”

33. Paul Hill, who was tried and executed for his 1994 murder of abortionist Dr. John Britton in Pensacola, Florida, had ties to the radical Reconstructionist anti-abortion group, The Army of God, and left behind numerous manuscripts in

which were a branch of the broader "Patriot" movement in the United States, applied Reconstructionist ideology to driving without licenses and motor vehicle tags and the filing of "non-statutory abatements" and "writs of trespass" against local law enforcement agencies, judicial officers, and even departments of the Federal Government.<sup>34</sup> Such people are usually sincere in their attempts to apply theonomic principles to "every area of life," and most are relatively harmless, albeit overtaken by a serious error. However, their harmlessness is a result of their failure to achieve full consistency with their belief system. According to R.J. Rushdoony:

In brief, every law-order is a state of war against the enemies of that order, *and all law is a form of warfare....*

Since law is a form of warfare, it follows that there is a required continual barrier to peace with evil. Man cannot seek co-existence with evil without thereby declaring war with God.... A law-order cannot escape warfare: if it makes peace in one area, it thereby declares war against another....

The commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," means also "Thou shalt have no other powers before me," independent of me or having priority over me. The commandment can also read, "Thou shalt have no other law before me"....

The only true order is founded on Biblical Law. All law is religious in nature, and every non-Biblical law-order represents an anti-Christian religion....

Peace with God means warfare with the enemies of God. Christ made clear that allegiance to Him meant a sword of division (Matt. 10:34-36). In a sinful world, some warfare is inescapable. A man must

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which he cited the works of R.J. Rushdoony to justify his use of force against abortionists. Prior to his execution, Hill sent two of his papers to Gary North for review, to which North wrote a lengthy response on September 29, 1994, warning Hill that he was "headed to hell."

34. This movement's *de facto* leader was the late John William Saunders III, the former actor better known by his Hollywood screen name, John Quade, who was an associate of the Chalcedon Foundation in Vallecito, California for several years and a frequent contributor to the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*. Saunders' research group, The King's Men, published *The Christian Jural Society News* and several editions of *The Book of Hundreds* in the 1990s, in which they argued that civil process from the Internal Revenue Service and other "commercial entities" could be estopped using biblical law.

therefore pick his enemies: God or sinful man? If a man is at peace with sinful men, he is at war with God. Peace in one sector means warfare in another (emphasis in original).<sup>35</sup>

Rushdoony went on to write, “Every court, because it is inescapably concerned with law, is a religious establishment.”<sup>36</sup> Gary North likewise insisted that “*those who proclaim a law-order alien to the one set forth in the Bible are thereby proclaiming the validity of the word of some other god. They have become idolaters... [and] are aiding and abetting the plans of men who worship another god*” (emphasis in original).<sup>37</sup> He elsewhere asked the rhetorical question, “[W]hose law is enforced in the civil courts of this land, Baal’s or God’s?” and thereafter answered, “Not God’s.”<sup>38</sup> The Reconstructionists’ unofficial motto is, “There is no neutrality,” which phrase is repeated like a mantra throughout their literature. When taken to heart and consistently acted upon, this ideology can only produce dangerous enemies of the public who will view the undermining of existing political systems as a religious duty.<sup>39</sup>

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35. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 93, 94, 113, 781.

36. Rushdoony, *ibid.*, page 619.

37. North, *Sinai Strategy*, page 21.

38. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 65.

39. Gary North has stated that Reconstructionism’s ultimate goal is to “tear down judicial institutions that still rely on natural law or public virtue.” He then added, “I have in mind the U.S. Constitution” (*ibid.*, page 133). Rushdoony, on the other hand, was not nearly as consistent:

The New Testament abounds in warnings against disobedience and in summons to peace. The key is regeneration, propagation of the gospel, and the conversion of men and nations to God’s law-word. Meanwhile, the existing law-order must be respected, and neighboring law-orders must be respected as far as is possible without offense to one’s own faith. The pagan law-order represents the faith and religion of the people; it is better than anarchy, and it does provide a God-given framework of existence under which God’s work can be furthered. The modern perspective leads to revolutionary intolerance: either a one-world order in terms of a dream, or “perpetual warfare for perpetual peace” (*Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 113-114).

One can easily see the contradiction in Rushdoony’s thinking: if “every law-order is a state of war against the enemies of that order, and all law is a

Rushdoony's "law is warfare" doctrine is often superimposed over the Apostle Paul's teaching on the civil magistrate in Romans 13:1-7, leading to the conclusion that the magistrate is "God's minister" only when he enforces the Mosaic law: "The commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me,' requires that we recognize no power as true and ultimately legitimate if it be not grounded in God and His law-word..."<sup>40</sup> The implication is that the magistrate is not "God's minister" if he legislates by any "other standard" and is instead a "beast" who must be resisted. In fact, according to David Chilton, "submission to ungodly, statist, antichristian law" — *i.e.* any governmental enactment that is not grounded on the Mosaic law — is to take upon oneself the "mark of the beast" and thus be damned.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, those who advocate natural law in the civil realm are "rationalists... severed from the claims of Christ," and guilty of making a "truce with Antichrist," thereby allowing the Devil to bring "the hell on earth he has worked for since that day in Eden."<sup>42</sup>

Reconstructionists obviously have strong feelings when it comes to this subject. However, their rejection of natural law as inherently humanistic and anti-Christian leaves them on the horns of a dilemma when they try to justify running for and holding public office, or otherwise making use of the legal system, in a country which is not theocratic. If "all legal systems that are not derived directly from the Bible [*i.e.* the Old Testament case laws] have to be wrong,"<sup>43</sup> and if "any other system of law" which "mixes the law of God with the laws of men" is "an Asherah

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form of warfare," and "peace with God means warfare with the enemies of God," then it is difficult to imagine how a Christian is to strive to live peaceably with unbelievers (Romans 12:18) and respect their non-theocratic societies (Jeremiah 29:7) without committing idolatry.

40. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 61. See also Gary DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations: Biblical Principles For Government* (Fort Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), page 141; North, *Tools of Dominion*, pages 49, 316; Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 377-378, 384-385, 387-390.

41. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), page 31.

42. Rex Downie, "Natural Law and God's Law," pages 85, 87.

43. North, "Editor's Introduction," *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, page 17.

[idol] next to the altar of God,”<sup>44</sup> how can they avoid their own “antinomian” label when they thus acknowledge, at least implicitly, the legitimacy of the current political and legal system in this country? They cannot do so, and rarely do they try. Of course, this dilemma does not present itself to those who interpret Romans 13:1-7 in the context of the Noahic covenant, viewing the civil magistrate as “God’s minister” insofar as he enacts and enforces just laws in accordance with the natural law.

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44. DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations*, page 47.



## **Chapter Twelve:** **The Reconstructionist Appeal to Deuteronomy 4:6-8**

Was the Mosaic Law a “Model For the Nations”?

Speaking of the Mosaic law, John Calvin wrote:

The allegation, that insult is offered to the law of God enacted by Moses, where it is abrogated, and other new laws are preferred to it, is most absurd. Others are not preferred when they are more approved, and most absolutely, but from regard to time and place, and the condition of the people, or when those things are abrogated which were never enacted for us. The Lord did not deliver it by the hand of Moses to be promulgated in all countries, and to be everywhere enforced; but having taken the Jewish nation under his special care, patronage, and guardianship, he was pleased to be specially its legislator, and as became a wise legislator, he had special regard to it in enacting laws.<sup>1</sup>

Such is the standard Reformed position on the purpose and limited jurisdiction of the law. To counter this position, Reconstructionists will frequently point to Deuteronomy 4:6-8:

Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?

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1. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 20:16.

And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

This passage is cited to prove that “God’s Law was in fact designed to be a model for the nations”<sup>2</sup> and that the Mosaic code was applicable “to those living outside the borders of Israel.”<sup>3</sup> From this premise the conclusion is reached that, “People from all nations are under obligation to God’s Law today”<sup>4</sup> and, “The revealed law of God is supposed to be in the judicial center of every society today.”<sup>5</sup> “Otherwise,” argued Greg Bahnsen, “God would be represented as having a double standard of judgment.”<sup>6</sup> The reader should keep in mind that when the Reconstructionist uses the term “God’s law,” he is not referring to the moral law which God has infused as part of His image into the nature of man, but to the specific case laws and accompanying sanctions of the Mosaic code:

The cities of Sodom and Ninevah provide adequate proof that nations which have not been corporately selected by God for special care and that have not been granted a special, written transcript of God’s law are nevertheless fully responsible to God’s standard of holiness as revealed in the law. Being a city full of exceedingly wicked sinners (Gen. 13:13; 18:20), Sodom was justly destroyed for its “unlawfulness” (2 Pet. 2:6-8). For that reason it is paradigmatic throughout Scripture for God’s judgment upon iniquity. Sodom was destroyed for breaking God’s law; the ethical presupposition of this historical event was the responsibility

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2. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, page 464.

3. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 342. Gary North differed from Bahnsen on this point, claiming that the Mosaic law did not bind the other nations until the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. He even suggested that the nations antecedent to the establishing of Israel were under the terms of the Noahic covenant, not the Mosaic (*Tools of Dominion*, page 89), which necessarily means that they were under natural law — a conclusion which contradicts his claim elsewhere in the same book that “*there is no such thing as a universal system of rational natural law which is accessible to fallen human reason*” (emphasis in original; *ibid.*, page 28).

4. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, page 465.

5. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 104.

6. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 342.

of that non-Jewish nation to God's righteous requirements. And this was not simply a vague, general responsibility (*e.g.*, to the broad guidelines of only the Decalogue), for the statute that Sodom was specifically guilty of violating is not one of the Ten summary Commandments but a specific and particularized case law: the prohibition of homosexuality (Gen. 19:4ff.; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; cf. Deut. 23:17; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:26; 2 Kings 23:7). Hundreds of years *before* the constitution of Israel as a nation under the written law of God that same law had ethical authority; if there had been no binding law, there could have been no sin and hence no justified vengeance of God against the Sodomites (emphasis in original).<sup>7</sup>

From this and other similar instances in the Old Testament (*i.e.* the threatened destruction of Ninevah, the annihilation of the Canaanite peoples, *etc.*), Bahnsen derived "scriptural reason to deny the premise that God's law did not morally bind the nations outside of Israel's covenant community."<sup>8</sup> However, there is one important question which Bahnsen avoided in presenting his case: since he admitted that the "specific and particularized case law" prohibiting homosexuality had not yet been delivered, how could the Sodomites have known of God's condemnation of such behavior and have thus been deserving of His wrath? Whether his avoidance of this question was intentional or not, the fact remains that the only answer is that God's prohibition against homosexuality was written upon their hearts as part of the law of nature. This is precisely the doctrine of the Apostle Paul, who wrote in Romans 1:26-32 that homosexuals know their behavior is against nature and yet willfully indulge in it nonetheless. Thus, by appealing to the destruction of Sodom as a proof-text for the universal application of the Mosaic case laws, Bahnsen undermined his own thesis. Even if we were to accept the Reconstructionists' claim that man must have a specifically revealed law of God to regulate his behavior, we need not look for it in Leviticus or Deuteronomy. The moral prohibition against homosexuality is implied in the first words God spoke to Noah, and through him to all his posterity, following the flood: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 9:1). This was merely a reaffirmation of the commandment delivered to mankind through Adam and is part of the creation mandate which predated the

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7. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 354.

8. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 356.

Mosaic law by about two thousand years. Homosexuality is counterproductive to this commandment and is also obviously contrary to the natural order of opposite sex unions, resulting not only in corruption and death for its participants (Romans 1:27), but sterile relationships that cannot produce the future generations upon which every nation depends for its very survival. It therefore falls within the purview of the civil magistrate's duty to protect society from decay from within by restraining and punishing the commission of unnatural behavior. Paul acknowledged that homosexuality is so detrimental to the health of human society that it is "worthy of death" (Romans 1:32), equating "the judgment of God" with the natural order of creation, not the civil sanctions of the Mosaic code as Rushdoony claimed.<sup>9</sup> Thus, a strong "natural law argument" can be made for laws against homosexuality, theft, murder, adultery, or any other social vice without a single reference to the Mosaic law.

### Israel Was a Unique Theocratic Kingdom

In previous chapters, the case was made that the Mosaic law was given exclusively to Israel for the following reasons: firstly, it served in its judicial capacity to keep them "under guard" in order to preserve the godly line until the promised Messiah should come; secondly, it served in its moral capacity as a republication of the original Covenant of Works, not only to explicate the conditions of their earthly inheritance of the land, but to display the absolute righteousness required for the eternal inheritance of which the land was but a type, and thereby to convict them of their sin and convince them of their need of a Surety; and thirdly, it served in its ceremonial capacity to provide the means of forgiveness for trespasses and for covenantal restoration. Not one of these purposes applied to the heathen nations surrounding Israel, and further, when these purposes ceased with the fulfilled work of Christ, so did the law.

Consequently, when understood in this redemptive-historical context, Deuteronomy 4:6-8 does not support the lofty claims of the Reconstructionists. The "statutes and righteous judgments" were said to be the "wisdom" and "understanding" of the Hebrew people "in the sight of the peoples," but nothing is ever said about the obligation of the heathen to adopt the Mosaic code within their own respective nations. To the

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9. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 735.

contrary, verse eight clearly states that no other nation but Israel “hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law,” which agrees with the Apostle Paul’s statement in Romans 2:14 that the Gentiles “have not the law.” However, heathen kings outside of Israel were highly esteemed by God when they ruled justly according to the natural law. Of Cyrus, king of Persia, God said, “He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure” (Isaiah 44:28), and Cyrus is then called God’s “anointed” (Isaiah 45:1), even though he never enacted the Mosaic code within his kingdom. Following his return to sanity, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, “praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:34); and yet, this acknowledgment of God’s “crown rights” over the earth and the subsequent restoration of his throne did not motivate Nebuchadnezzar to enact the Mosaic code within his kingdom either. Neither Joseph in Egypt nor Daniel in Babylon had any scruples against holding positions of authority in heathen governments, even though the natural law, rather than the Mosaic code, was the law of the lands in which they sojourned. The Gentiles’ admiration of the Israelites for their just laws simply did not equate to an obligation to enact those same laws in their own countries.<sup>10</sup> Because, as John Calvin noted, “the Lord did not deliver it by the hand of Moses to be promulgated in all countries, and to be everywhere enforced,” it therefore follows that the judicial law of Moses is not now the legislative standard for modern America nor any other nation on earth. The following comments of Kenneth Myers are conclusive in this regard:

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10. In his usual penchant for the absurd, Brian Schwertley responded to this statement as follows: “[S]o they’re just, but we’re not obligated to follow them. That makes no sense whatsoever.... If the Gentiles nations are not obligated to enact just laws, are they allowed to enact unjust laws?” (“Reformed View of the Judicial Law,” Part Four). Here is another example of the “excluded middle” fallacy previously noted in the writings of Gary North: all laws must be derived from the Old Testament or they are “secular humanistic..., radically unjust, wicked, and anti-Christian” (Schwertley, “Modified Dispensationalism,” page 13). Of course, what Schwertley labeled as “natural law antinomianism” has always been the standard Christian, and especially the Reformed, position on the extent of the Mosaic law’s jurisdiction (see Appendix One).

Israel had an obligation to be a covenantally righteous nation, to meet standards that God did not establish for, say, Egypt. Israel was a holy nation as no nation before or since could claim to be. Its national identity was a mechanism of God's redemptive work in a unique way. In every aspect of its national life as ordered by God, Israel was anticipating the character of the people of God upon the consummation of redemptive history.... To regard either the law (as do my postmillennialist friends and some of my premillennialist friends) or the prophets (as do many of my premillennialist and amillennialist friends) as speaking univocally to the United States begs too many questions, to say the least. There are certainly many principles for the development of political thinking within the Old Testament. But any application of a text that ignores its original context in redemptive history, especially the relationship of the covenant to the original recipients of the text, must be regarded as of dubious value.

There is no *a priori* reason to believe that any given aspects of the law of Israel are normative for the U.S. civil code.... Unless we have established that the law is normative for our age, we must not assume it to be. Similarly, we must not take the declamations of the prophets out of their eschatological context and regard them as timeless wisdom.... Unfortunately, many of these doctrines are obscured in the attempt to reduplicate Israel's national polity or to anticipate the eschatological kingdom in ways we are not meant to. Until Christ returns, the church is God's new holy nation, and God has postponed his judgment. Our thinking about political obedience must keep this in view.<sup>11</sup>

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11. Kenneth A. Myers, "Biblical Obedience and Political Thought: Some Reflections on Theological Method," in Richard John Neuhaus (editor), *The Bible, Politics, and Democracy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), pages 24-25.

## Chapter Thirteen: Reconstructionism and Mosaic Penology

### Are Magistrates Bound to Enforce the Mosaic Penal Sanctions?

One of the most disturbing aspects of Reconstructionism is its stated goal to reinstate the penal sanctions of the Mosaic law. Under that system, the list of civil crimes which carried a death sentence went beyond murder to include homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13), adultery (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22), incest (Leviticus 20:11, 14), lying about one's virginity (Deuteronomy 22:20-21), bestiality (Leviticus 20:15-16), witchcraft (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:27), idolatry or apostasy (Leviticus 20:2; Deuteronomy 13:6-17), public blasphemy (Leviticus 24:10-16), false prophesying (Deuteronomy 13:5), kidnapping (Exodus 21:16), rape (Deuteronomy 22:25), and bearing false witness in a capital case (Deuteronomy 19:16-19). In each of these cases, the civil magistrate of the commonwealth was given the very same prohibition (either explicitly or implicitly): "Thine eye shall not pity him" (Deuteronomy 19:13, 21).

According to Greg Bahnsen, "the *overall* view of the civil magistrate according to Scripture (whether Older Testament, New Testament, Israelite or Gentile) has been found to be *uniform and unchanged*.... Thus the doctrine of the state presented by Paul in Romans 13 is a *reaffirmation of the essential Older Testament conception of the civil magistrate*" (emphasis in original).<sup>1</sup> On the surface, we can agree with this proposition: all magistrates are duty-bound by God to execute just laws which re-

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1. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 398.

flect His moral law for the good of the society over which they rule. However, Bahnsen meant much more than that, for the claim of Reconstructionism is that “‘every jot and tittle’ covers the numerous penal laws of the Older Testament just as it covers all else,”<sup>2</sup> and that “‘this law is to be enforced by the civil magistrate where and how the stipulations of God so designate.’”<sup>3</sup> The magistrate is therefore not free to substitute other forms of punishment such as imprisonment or fines in place of the death penalty or the other lesser penalties of the Mosaic code, and he rebels against God when he does so:

Because all sin is defined by God, all sin must receive the punishments assigned by God, for *this* Judge will certainly do right. A smorgasbord approach to penology is just as wrong as personal selectivity in one’s personal obedience to God’s commandments. Thus, we should accept God’s direction with respect to crime in order that our earthly magistrates maintain genuine justice and righteousness in society; otherwise, whether we want to be or not, we are afloat in a sea of autonomy. If the magistrate is to have direction from God, if the magistrate is to be limited in what he can legitimately do, and if there is to be any court of appeal above the magistrate to which the Christian can plead against abuse, then the magistrate should be seen as bound by the law of God and obligated to enforce it....

...[I]t is the clear duty of civil magistrates to duly enforce this law — not with their own estimates of proper penology, but with God’s true and proper judgments. Then every crime will receive its perfectly equitable recompense; the magistrate, as God’s minister for avenging wrath against evil-doers, does not have the right to enforce *any other* than a *just penalty* (emphasis in original).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Bahnsen concluded that “there is no cancellation of the death sentence for those crimes which are specified in the Older Testament...”<sup>5</sup> In the words of Mark Rushdoony, son of R.J. Rushdoony, “The divorce problem will be solved in a society under God’s law because any spouse guilty of capital crimes (adultery, homosexuality, Sabbath dese-

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2. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 467.

3. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 34.

4. Bahnsen, *ibid.*, page 466.

5. Bahnsen, *ibid.*



cration, *etc.*) would be swiftly executed, thus freeing the other party to remarry.... Parents would be required to bring their incorrigible children before the judge and, if convicted, have them stoned to death.”<sup>6</sup> Like the younger Rushdoony, Gary North has insisted upon stoning as the “most covenantally valid form of execution,”<sup>7</sup> which conclusion, though not uniformly held among the Reconstructionists, certainly would seem to follow from the premise that “every jot and tittle” of the Mosaic code is still valid and that “a smorgasbord approach to penology” is wrong. Stoning, after all, was the only form of execution prescribed in the Old Testament for capital crimes (Deuteronomy 17:7, 21:18).

The main weakness of the Reconstructionists’ argument lies in the fact that the nation of Israel was unique in world history as God’s specially selected and covenanted people. For them, and for them alone, He legislated directly, adding specific laws and penalties to the already existing moral law (without supplanting it). His purpose for doing this was to keep the Israelites “shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed” (Galatians 3:23). It should be remembered that the children of Israel had just spent four hundred years as residents of a pagan civilization, most of which time they were in bondage there as slaves. With few exceptions, they were themselves pagans at heart, as their constant backsliding into Baal-worship demonstrated, and a severe law code was necessary to preserve the godly line through which Christ would come into the world. Thus, we are told in Chapter XIX:4 of the Westminster Confession that the “sundry judicial laws” given to Israel as “a body politic” have “expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.” Under the New Covenant there is no such “body politic,” since God’s spiritual Kingdom transcends all national, cultural, racial, and even linguistic boundaries (Revelation 7:9). The only body for which God has legislated directly is the catholic (universal) Church, and all agree that that body only possesses the sanction of excommunication, not execution.

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6. Mark Rushdoony, *The Chalcedon Report* #252 (1986).

7. Gary North wrote, “Public stoning forces citizens to face the reality of the ultimate civil sanction, execution, which in turn points to God’s ultimate sanction at judgment day. Stoning also faithfully images the promised judgment against Satan: the crushing of his head by the promised Seed” (*Tools of Dominion*, page 44).

## The Proper Interpretation of General Equity

The Westminster Confession deals a fatal blow at this point to the very heart of Reconstructionism, so it behooves us to take a closer look at the term *general equity*. Below are the definitions given to each word separately in a popular law dictionary:

General. From Latin word *genus*. It relates to the whole kind, class, or order.... Pertaining to or designating the genus or class, as distinguished from that which characterizes the species or individual; universal, not particularized, as opposed to special; principal or central, as opposed to local; open or available to all, as opposed to select; obtaining commonly, or recognized universally, as opposed to particular; universal or unbounded, as opposed to limited; comprehending the whole or directed to the whole, as distinguished from anything applying to or designed for a portion only.<sup>8</sup>

Equity. Justice administered according to fairness as contrasted with... strictly formulated rules.... The term "equity" denotes the spirit and habit of fairness, justness, and right dealing which would regulate the intercourse of men with men.... A system of jurisprudence collateral to, and in some respects independent of "law"; the object of which is to render the administration of justice more complete, by affording relief where the courts of law are incompetent to give it....<sup>9</sup>

Thus, general equity is defined here as a universal standard of justice in contrast to the local, limited, or strictly formulated laws of a particular jurisdiction. The former transcends all political or national distinctions and binds all men alike, while the latter are enacted for a specific purpose or circumstance and are therefore unable to bind the human race as a whole. Such is a secular definition of general equity. The historic Reformed definition is no different. John Calvin wrote:

The judicial law, given them [the Jews] as a kind of polity, delivered certain forms of equity and justice, by which they might live together innocently and quietly. And as that exercise in ceremonies properly pertained to the doctrine of piety, inasmuch as it kept the Jewish

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8. *Black's Law Dictionary*, page 682.

9. *Ibid.*, page 540.

Church in the worship and religion of God, yet was still distinguishable from piety itself, so the judicial form, though it looked only to the best method of preserving that charity which is enjoined by the eternal law of God, was still something distinct from the precept of love itself. Therefore, as ceremonies might be abrogated without at all interfering with piety, so, also, when these judicial arrangements are removed, the duties and precepts of charity can still remain perpetual. But if it is true that each nation has been left at liberty to enact the laws which it judges to be beneficial, still these are always to be tested by the rule of charity, so that while they vary in form, they must proceed on the same principle....

What I have said will become plain if we attend, as we ought, to two things connected with all laws — viz. the enactment of the law, and the equity on which the enactment is founded and rests. Equity, as it is natural, cannot be the same in all, and therefore ought to be proposed by all laws, according to the nature of the thing enacted. As constitutions have some circumstances on which they partly depend, there is nothing to prevent their diversity, provided they all alike aim at equity as their end. Now, as it is evident that the law of God which we call moral, is nothing else than the testimony of natural law, and of that conscience which God has engraven on the minds of men, the whole of this equity of which we now speak is prescribed in it. Hence it alone ought to be the aim, the rule, and the end of all laws. Wherever laws are formed after this rule, directed to this aim, and restricted to this end, there is no reason why they should be disapproved by us, however much they may differ from the Jewish law, or from each other (August. *de Civit. Dei*, Lib. xix.c.17).<sup>10</sup>

Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, likewise stated:

Although we do not hold to the forms of the Mosaic polity, yet when such judicial laws prescribe equity in judgments, which is part of the decalogue, we, not being under obligation to them insofar as they were prescribed by Moses to only one people, are nevertheless bound to observe them to the extent that they embrace that general equity which should everywhere be in force.... The Lord commands that a deposit be returned, and that thieves be punished.... Because it follows natural equity, and expounds that perpetual precept of the decalogue, *Thou shalt not steal*, to this extent all are bound to fulfill them both. The thief is

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10. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 20:15, 16.

sentenced to make restitution for the theft, sometimes twice as much, sometimes four times as much.... This penalty is purely political, and it binds the one nation of the Israelites, to whom alone it was adapted. Therefore it is permitted for the magistrate, in his exercise of sovereignty and for definite and good causes, to prescribe a more severe manner of punishment.... And to be sure, if anyone compares several of the laws of the Greeks, and many of the laws of the Romans, with the Mosaic, he will find a similarity among them in establishing penalties, so that it is sufficiently plain that all were adapted to the same goal of natural equity.<sup>11</sup>

According to English Puritan William Perkins:

Therefore the judicial laws of Moses according to the substance and scope thereof must be distinguished.... Some of them are laws of particular equity, some of common equity. Laws of particular equity, are such as prescribe justice according to the particular estate and condition of the Jews' Commonwealth and to the circumstances thereof.... Of this kind was the law, that the brother should raise up seed to his brother, and many such like: and none of them bind us, because they were framed and tempered to a particular people. Judicials of common equity, are such as are made according to the law or instinct of nature common to all men: and these in respect of their substance, bind the consciences not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles: for they were not given to the Jews as they were Jews, that is, a people received into the Covenant above all other nations, brought from Egypt to the land of Canaan,... but they were given to them as they were mortal men subject to the order and laws of nature as all other nations are.<sup>12</sup>

The eminent Samuel Rutherford wrote, "Judicial laws may be judicial and Mosaic, and so not obligatory to us, according to the degree and quality of punishment.... No man but sees the punishment of theft is of common moral equity, and obligeth all nations, but the manner or degree of punishment is more positive: as to punish theft by restoring four oxen for the stealing of one ox, doth not so oblige all nations, but some

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11. Theodore Beza, *De Haereticis a Civili Magistratu Puniendis Libellus* (Geneva, Switzerland: Robert Stephanus, 1554), pages 222-223.

12. William Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience* (Cambridge: J. Legat, 1596), Book I, page 514.

other bodily punishment, as whipping, may be used against thieves.”<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere, he condemned the doctrine of Thomas Erastus on the Mosaic judicial laws, which was very similar, if not identical, to that of modern Reconstructionism:

But sure Erastus erreth, who will have all such to be killed by the magistrate under the New Testament, because they were killed by him in the Old: Why, but then the whole judicial law of God shall oblige us Christians as Carolostadius and others teach? I humbly conceive that the putting of some to death in the Old Testament, as it was a punishment to them, so was it a mysterious teaching of us, how God hated such and such sins, and mysteries of that kind are gone with other shadows. “But we read not” (saith Erastus) “where Christ hath changed those laws in the New Testament.” It is true, Christ hath not said in particular, I abolish the debarring of the leper seven days, and he that is thus and thus unclean shall be separated till the evening; nor hath he said particularly of every carnal ordinance and judicial law, it is abolished.

But we conceive, the whole bulk of the judicial law, as judicial, and as it concerned the Republic of the Jews only, is abolished, though the moral equity of all those be not abolished; also some punishments were merely symbolical, to teach the detestation of such a vice, as the boring with an aul the ear of him that loved his master, and desired still to serve him, and the making of him his perpetual servant. I should think the punishing with death the man that gathered sticks on the Sabbath was such; and in all these, the punishing of a sin against the Moral Law by the magistrate, is moral and perpetual; but the punishing of every sin against the Moral Law, *tali modo*, so and so, with death, with spitting on the face: I much doubt if these punishments in particular, and in their positive determination to the people of the Jews, be moral and perpetual: As he that would marry a captive woman of another religion, is to cause her first to pare her nails, and wash herself, and give her a month, or less time to mourn the death of her parents, which was a judicial, not a ceremonial law; that this should be perpetual because Christ in particular hath not abolished it, to me seems most unjust; for as Paul saith, He that is circumcised becomes debtor to the whole law, sure to all the ceremonies of Moses his law: So I argue, *a pari*, from the like: He that will keep one judicial law, because judicial and given by Moses, becometh debtor

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13. Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* (London: Andrew Crook, 1649), pages 298-299.

to keep the whole judicial law under pain of God's eternal wrath.<sup>14</sup>

Such quotations from Reformed authorities of the past could be multiplied a hundredfold, but those cited above should be sufficient to clarify what the Westminster Confession is teaching at Chapter XIX:4. In stating that the judicial laws are no longer binding "further than the general equity thereof may require," the Confession is clearly pointing to the universal principles of the moral or natural law, rather than the particular statutes of the Mosaic code, as the standard to which magistrates are bound. Indeed, the entire chapter of the Confession in which this phrase appears deals with the moral law which "doth for ever 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..."<sup>15</sup> Thus, whatever is of general equity is that which agrees with the moral law and is equally applicable to all men without distinction.

### An Appeal to the Original Westminster Confession

It should be obvious that the Reconstructionists are at odds with the entire Reformed tradition of the law at this point. However, in defense of their position, they will often appeal to the general consensus of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Reformers that the magistrate is the *custus utriusque tabulae*, or the custodian of both tables of the Decalogue, and thus is obligated to punish idolatry and suppress the propagation of false religion just as in the Old Testament. In particular, Chapters XX:4 and XXIII:3 of the original Westminster Confession are cited to prove that its authors "were theonomic in their political and social ethic," and that "theonomists wrote the Confession."<sup>16</sup> In the first section, the divines taught that those "publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature or to the known principles of Christianity" may "lawfully be called to account,

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14. Samuel Rutherford, *Divine Right of Church Government* (London: John Field, 1646), pages 493-494.

15. Westminster Confession, Chapter XIX:5.

16. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "Theonomy and the Confession: A Review and Report," *The Chalcedon Report* (November 1997), pages 12, 16.

and proceeded against by the censures of the Church, and by the power of the civil magistrate," citing a total of nine Old Testament passages as biblical support.<sup>17</sup> The 1788 American revision of the Confession deleted the last phrase, thus restricting the censuring power to the Church.

The changes made to Chapter XXIII:3 were even more significant. In the original, the duty of the civil magistrate is said to extend so far as "to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed." To these ends, the magistrate "hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God." Two of the proof texts offered in support of this position (Leviticus 24:16 and Deuteronomy 13:5) are taken as proof that the "ordinances of God" referred specifically to the Old Testament case laws.<sup>18</sup> This section was almost completely rewritten in the American revision, restricting the magistrate's duty to the protection of religious liberty and prevention of persecution "upon pretense of religion or of infidelity." The previous judicial proof-texts were removed, thus evidencing American Presbyterians' complete repudiation of the establishmentarianism of their British forefathers.<sup>19</sup> However, despite these theocratic tendencies, the Reformers of that period did not arrive at their conclusions via the radical theonomic doctrine of "covenantal continuity," but rather via their understanding of general equity as explicated in Chapter XIX:4. In other words, they believed that the underlying principle with regard to the suppression of public idolatry by the magistrate

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17. Only one of these citations (Deuteronomy 13:6-12) came from the Mosaic judicial laws; the rest were historical examples (2 Chronicles 15:12ff, 34:33; 2 Kings 23:5ff; Ezra 7:23-28; Nehemiah 13:15ff; Daniel 3:29; Isaiah 49:23; Zechariah 13:2-3).

18. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 543-544.

19. Greg Bahnsen attempted to prove that the American revisions should not be construed as a repudiation, but rather as a clarification, of the theocratic principle (*Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, pages 527ff). Gary North, on the other hand, correctly noted that the revisions "ended the ideal of the theocratic republic in mainstream Presbyterianism and American Protestantism in general" (*Political Polytheism*, page 547).

continued, not that “every jot and tittle” of the Mosaic law is covenantally applicable in the New Testament era.<sup>20</sup>

### The Civil Magistrate is God’s Minister

We have already seen that Rushdoony accused Calvin of teaching “heretical nonsense” in his doctrine of general equity, so it should come as no surprise that his opinion of the Westminster divines was not much different. Referring to the above section of the Confession, he bluntly stated, “At this point the Confession is guilty of nonsense.”<sup>21</sup> Other Reconstructionists, such as Greg Bahnsen, have preferred to be less obvious in their rejection of the doctrine of the Confession:

The *New Testament* teaches us that — unless exceptions are revealed elsewhere — every Old Testament commandment is binding, even as the standard of justice for all magistrates (Rom. 13:1-4), including every recompense stipulated for civil offenses in the law of Moses (Heb. 2:2). From the New Testament alone we learn that we must take as our operating *presumption* that any Old Testament penal requirement is binding today on all civil magistrates. The presumption can surely be modified by definite, revealed teaching in the Scripture, but in the absence of such qualifications or changes, any Old Testament penal sanction we have in mind would be morally obligatory for civil rulers....

[A]s I read it, the Bible does not teach the temporary use of the penal sanctions.... (emphasis in original).<sup>22</sup>

Just as Bahnsen’s “every jot and tittle” argument falls apart upon close examination, so does his argument here. First of all, his citation of Romans 13:1-4 does not support his thesis, since this passage merely sets forth the doctrine of the civil magistrate as “God’s minister” to whom au-

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20. The Westminster Assembly was also a product of its time. Rather than making a complete break with the semi-Erastianism which had infected the Church of England since the days of Henry VIII, the divines attempted to merely reform it according to Presbyterian, rather than Episcopalian (prelatical), principles. The Constantinian concept of Church-State relations, which Charles Hodge noted has been the source of “deplorable evils” (*Systematic Theology*, Volume III, page 268), still held sway in seventeenth-century Britain.

21. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 551.

22. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, pages 68, 252.



thority is given to “bear the sword” against “him that doeth evil.” There is nothing in the text to support Bahnsen’s assumption that the source from which the magistrate derives his authority are the specific judicial laws of the Old Testament. If such were the case, very few rulers in the history of the world would qualify as “God’s minister.” Instead, as we have seen, the magistrate is the appointed guardian of society on the basis of the moral or natural law to which all mankind is bound. This conclusion is substantiated by 1 Peter 2:13-14, which similarly commands Christians to “submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” The Greek phrase ἀνθρώπινη κτίσει (*anthrôpine ktisei*) which is translated “ordinance of man” in the King James Version, is better rendered “human institution.” The first word indicates that which is common to mankind,<sup>23</sup> and the second implies an act of creation or the erection of an edifice;<sup>24</sup> hence, the Apostle enjoined submission to those civil institutions which are built upon what is common to man *as man*: the natural law. Thus, rather than calling them to establish a neo-Mosaic theocracy, this passage teaches God’s “peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9) to see themselves as “strangers and pilgrims” (verse 11) in this world, and therefore strive to have their “conversation honest among the Gentiles” (verse 12). To use Augustine’s previously quoted metaphor, the “city of God” temporarily resides in the midst of the “city of man,” and the members thereof must not misconstrue their eternal standing before God as an exemption from temporal submission to earthly rulers, even though the latter may be heathen (verse 16) who “were Christ’s adversaries and... used their own authority, so that no representation of God, which secures the chief reverence, appeared in them.”<sup>25</sup> Paul’s doctrine in Romans 13:1-4 is no different,<sup>26</sup> despite Bahnsen’s misuse of the passage.

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23. Strong, *Greek Dictionary*, page 12.

24. Strong, *ibid.*, page 44.

25. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), page 80.

26. Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Company, 1874), pages 575ff.

Bahnsen also cited Hebrews 2:2: “For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; [here Bahnsen wished his readers to stop, but we must finish the writer’s thought in the next verse] how shall we escape so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?” A cross-reference of this verse to Galatians 3:19 will show the fallacy of using it as a proof-text for the perpetuity of the civil laws: “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.” The phrases “the word spoken by angels” and “it was ordained by angels” both refer to the same event (the giving of the law at Sinai), and yet the latter verse states that the law was meant to be temporary, not permanent: “The word *added* implies that the law was not a central theme in God’s redemptive plan; it was supplementary and secondary to the enduring covenant made with Abraham. As the word *added* marks the beginning point for the Mosaic law, the word *until* marks its end point. The Mosaic law came into effect at a certain point in history and was in effect only until the promised *Seed*, Christ, appeared. There is a contrast here between the permanent validity of the promise and the temporary nature of the law” (emphasis in original).<sup>27</sup> The entire book of Hebrews was a solemn warning to those Jews of the First Century who were in danger of apostatizing back into the law after becoming acquainted with Christ. The inspired writer was simply showing how much more severe will be the penalty to those who neglect the Gospel, attested by God’s Son Himself, than that which attended violations of the Mosaic law, that was merely “ordained by angels.” Arthur W. Pink wrote:

While it is true that salvation is not only announced, but is also secured to and effectuated in God’s elect by the Holy Spirit, yet it must not be forgotten that the Gospel addresses the *moral responsibility* of those to whom it comes. There is not only an effectual call, but a general one, which is made unto “the sons of men” (Prov. 8:4). The Gospel is for the sinner’s *acceptance*, see 1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Cor. 11:4! The Gospel is more than a publication of good news, more than an invitation for burdened souls to come to Christ for relief and peace. In its first address to

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27. G. Walter Hansen, *Galatians* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2010), page 101.

those who hear, it is a Divine mandate, an authoritative command, which is disregarded at the sinner's imminent peril. That it does issue a "command" is clear from Acts 17:30, Rom. 16:25, 26. That disobedience to *this* "command" will be punished, is clear from John 3:18, 1 Peter 4:17, 2 Thess. 1:8 (emphasis in original).<sup>28</sup>

That the apostolic writer was not arguing for the continuing force of the civil law is established by his statement that it "was [not *is*] steadfast"; it was "firm, of force... [and] sure"<sup>29</sup> for the purpose for which it was instituted — "because of transgressions" — and for the time frame in which God intended it to continue — "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." As we have seen from 2 Corinthians 3:6-13, the Mosaic law, or "the ministration of death," has passed away, while the Gospel, or "the ministration of righteousness," remains forever. Thus, Bahnsen's alleged "proof text" actually disproves his theory, rather than supports it. While civil magistrates are certainly bound to believe and obey the Gospel, as are all men of whatever station in life, there is no command given here for them to enforce the "sundry judicial laws" which have "expired together" with the commonwealth of Israel.

### Problems Inherent in the Theonomic Thesis

According to Bahnsen, "The New Testament cites the judicial laws of the Old Testament too often, and without apology or disclaimer, to accept at face value the claim of theonomic critics that these laws have been abolished by the work of Christ or the coming of the Holy Spirit."<sup>30</sup> It is certain that his case was overstated here. First of all, the New Testament is completely silent regarding the bulk of the Mosaic judicial code. For example, nowhere are we told that the case laws in Deuteronomy 25:11-12 and Exodus 31:14 have been either abolished or altered. Are we therefore to assume that these laws should continue to be enforced by the magistrate today because they have not been "modified by definite, re-

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28. Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1954), page 88.

29. James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament* (Maclean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), page 18.

30. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, page 100.

vealed teaching in the Scripture”? If not, then Bahnsen’s assertion that in the absence of “such qualifications or changes, any Old Testament penal sanction we have in mind would be morally obligatory for civil rulers” is self-refuted. In the few instances where the apostolic writers did cite a case law, it was usually lifted from its Old Testament context and used in a completely different way than originally intended. 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18 are two examples: in both of these passages, Paul appealed to an obscure law in Deuteronomy 25:4 (“Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn”), and applied it to the financial support of teaching elders in the local church. Not once are any of the judicial laws appealed to in a theocratic sense as Bahnsen suggested.

Secondly, the theonomic thesis is not only unsupported by what the apostolic authorities in the New Testament taught, but it is also contradicted by their actions, or lack thereof. In addressing the Corinthian Christians, Paul wrote, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Most of the sins listed in this passage were capital offenses under the Mosaic code, and yet Paul said nothing here about execution. The Reconstructionists will answer that Paul was dealing with ecclesiastical matters, and since the Church does not have the power of the sword, his silence was appropriate.<sup>31</sup> However, this explanation does not take into account that, according to the penology of Reconstructionism, the Roman government did have the power of the sword and was obligated to execute such offenders according to the Mosaic code. Why then did Paul not contact the authorities and have these people arrested? After all, the penal law of the Old Testament was pitiless in its demand for the death penalty for these crimes, notwithstanding the repentance and spiritual regeneration of the perpetrator: “Thine eye shall not pity him.” It should be noted that the people to whom Paul wrote his epistle were all within the jurisdiction of the Roman government. The fact that they were still alive and

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31. Gary DeMar, “The Sorry State of Christian Scholarship,” in North, *Theonomy: An Informed Response*, page 351 (footnote).

well indicates that the State was not, in fact, enforcing the penal sanctions of the Mosaic code. How then could Paul declare this same State to be “God’s minister” in Romans 13 if the magistrate “does not have the right to enforce *any other* than a *just penalty*”: *i.e.*, the specific sanctions of the Old Testament? What should we think of a government which executes violent criminals by lethal injection rather than by stoning, as demanded by Gary North? What about a police officer who issues a citation to a motorist for expired registration or failure to maintain insurance on his vehicle — both offenses unknown to the Mosaic code? Do such magistrates lose their status as “ministers of God” because of their “smorgasbord approach to penology”? How should a court proceed against a computer hacker and what penalty should be imposed upon conviction? What penalty should be imposed for identity theft? For child pornography? For the sale or possession of illegal drugs? For indecent exposure? Is a convicted car thief required to restore five cars, or just four, to his victim? In attempting to apply a law code designed for an agrarian people four thousand years ago to the highly technological society of the modern world, Reconstructionism raises many more questions than it claims to answer. In the final analysis, the Reconstructionists themselves are forced to admit that modern governments may adapt “the underlying principles of the Old Testament civil law” to their respective circumstances,<sup>32</sup> which is essentially the same position taken by the non-Reconstructionist who looks beyond the Mosaic code to the moral law of God for his ethical standard. Again, the Reformed view of the civil magistrate allows for a wide range of diversity in applying the moral law to each jurisdiction, for the social and political needs of the nations of the world differ from one another to such an extent as do their cultures. “How malignant it were,” wrote John Calvin, “and invidious of the public good, to be offended at this diversity, which is admirably adapted to retain the observance of the divine law.”<sup>33</sup>

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32. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard*, page 160. See also Bahnsen, *By This Standard*, page 5; North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 49; North, *Theonomy, An Informed Response*, page 293.

33. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 20:16.



## **Chapter Fourteen:** The Covenantal Sanctions of Deuteronomy 28

### The Sanctions Relate to Possession of the Promised Land

Having seen in a previous chapter how important the doctrine of “covenantal sanctions” is to the Reconstructionist system, we will now examine the primary text of Scripture that is most often cited in its defense. According to R.J. Rushdoony, “Deuteronomy 28 tells us precisely, and for all time, how prayers are answered and a people blessed.”<sup>1</sup> Entire volumes of Gary North’s work have been based upon his theory of historical covenantal sanctions, and discussion of these alleged sanctions by his followers appear in the context of a wide variety of subjects.<sup>2</sup> As usual, such a theory is based on an assumption which is never proven: that God’s dealing with Israel, as detailed in Deuteronomy 28, are His normative method of dealing with nations throughout history.

On its face, the book of Deuteronomy in general, and chapter 28 in particular, disprove this assumption. First of all, Moses began his discourse with these words: “And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth”

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1. Rushdoony, “Foreword,” in Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page ix.

2. E.g. Ralph Allan Smith, *The Covenantal Kingdom: A Brief Summary of the Biblical Argument For Postmillennialism* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Christian Liberty Press, 1999); Jeffrey Ziegler, *Republic Restored: Faith, Fidelity, and Action* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2010).

(Deuteronomy 28:1). This is where the Reconstructionists begin reading, but we need to go back further if we are to understand what Moses meant when he referred to “all his commandments which I command thee this day.” A good starting place is in chapter 5, wherein is given the summary of the moral aspect of the law in the Decalogue.

However, the Reconstructionists are immediately confronted with a problem in verse 3: “The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.” In other words, there is something about the Sinaitic covenant that made it distinct from God’s previous dealings with the Patriarchs, particularly Abraham.<sup>3</sup> This opening statement does not do well for their theory of the universal applicability of the sanctions of the covenant which appear later in chapter 28. The same problem arises in verses 4-6: “The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire... saying, I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.” Then follows the first three commandments. Attached to the Fourth Commandment are similar words: “And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day” (verse 15). Thus, these commandments were being given to a nation which had been in bondage to the Egyptians and which had been delivered by a direct act of God. Who but the children of Israel could this be? Who but the children of Israel were at Horeb (verse 2) and “heard [God’s] voice out of the midst of the fire” (verse 24)? Who but the children of Israel beheld the Ten Commandments written “in two tables of stone” (verse 22)? We must keep in mind that it was this same “ministration of death, written and engraven in stones” which the Apostle Paul declared to be “done away” (2 Corinthians 3:7). If the covenant to which the sanctions are attached is no longer in operation, how can a nation expect to be blessed by obedience to it? It might be said in response that a people will experience the sanctions of chapter 28 as they

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3. We have already seen this distinctiveness to be the addition of a legal arrangement that was reminiscent of the original Covenant of Works, as evidenced by the imposition of sanctions.



observe the moral principles behind the Decalogue.<sup>4</sup> It certainly cannot be denied that a nation should enact, and its citizens should obey, laws which reflect the morality contained in these commandments and that a nation's prosperity and even its very existence depends on the moral condition of its people.<sup>5</sup> However, this conformity to the moral law of God alone cannot bring the blessings of Deuteronomy 28, because there are still twenty-two chapters and over 600 laws to go before the sanctions are enumerated.

In chapter 7, God forbade the Israelites to make marriages or covenants with the heathen people within the promised land, commanding them rather to “destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire” (verse 5). This commandment is later repeated in Deuteronomy 12:2-3. Then they were commanded to “consume all the people which the LORD thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee” (verse 16). Again we read, “But the LORD thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed. And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them” (verses 23-24). Such was another stipulation for receiving the blessings of chapter 28, but what sane Reconstructionist would attempt to obey this commandment in a pluralistic country like modern America? Would they not be obligated by these verses to burn down Roman Catholic churches, Jewish synagogues, and Mormon and Masonic temples, not to mention assassinate idolatrous

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4. Gary North specifically denied this proposition, however, when he criticized American Christians for basing their allegiance to their country “on the supposed ‘natural conformity’ to the Decalogue of their societies’ legal order” (*Tools of Dominion*, page 19). In the same book, he later declared that one “cannot legitimately proclaim the continuing moral validity of the Ten Commandments without also proclaiming the continuing judicial validity of the Mosaic case laws” (*ibid.*, page 89). North has made it impossible for his followers to think and consistently live within the context of the “general equity” clause of Westminster Confession, Chapter XIX:4.

5. Violation of natural law has natural consequences: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

Presidents and Congressmen and otherwise declare war on the entire political system of the United States?<sup>6</sup> Reconstructionists are instead among the most zealous of professing Christians when it comes to political activity and are the most eager to make common cause with those of other faiths whenever the opportunity to further their agenda presents itself. They clearly want the blessings of chapter 28 without having to meet the same standards to which the Israelites were held accountable.<sup>7</sup>

Moses recapped the giving of the law, the ratification of the covenant, and the history of Israel's rebellion in the wilderness, and renewed the exhortation to covenantal obedience in chapters 8 through 11. Chapter 12 resumes with a repetition of the command to "utterly destroy all the

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6. Reconstructionists may reply that these are obligations for the civil magistrate to fulfill, not the private citizen. Gary North wrote, "God delegates the right of execution to the civil government, not to individual man acting outside a lawful institution in the pursuit of lawful objectives" (*Tools of Dominion*, page 343). However, one may counter this response by pointing out that Phinehas, who was the grandson of Aaron and not a civil magistrate, took it upon himself to slay an Israelite man who had gone into his tent to fornicate with a Moabite woman. According to God Himself, "Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel" (Numbers 25:11-13). Reconstructionist and former Presbyterian minister Paul Hill appealed to this passage in his 1994 monograph entitled, "A Time to Kill: A Study Concerning the Use of Force and Abortion," to justify his murder of abortionist John Britton.

7. Gary North, who typically interprets the Bible through an economic filter, would argue that this command is obeyed in the Church's gradual dispossession of unbelievers throughout history. Until they are strong enough to take full dominion, Christians need the labor of non-Christians in order to maintain economic stability (North, *Tools of Dominion*, pages 961-962). The Israelites' conquest of the promised land, however, was military and not economic. In one instance, the Gibeonites were allowed to serve as "hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD" (Joshua 9:27), but in all others, the Israelites were forbidden to socially interact with the heathen, or to enter into political alliances with them (Exodus 23:31-33).

places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: and ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place” (verses 2-3). The laws pertaining to sacrifice, the commandment to sustain the Levitical priests and the prohibition of eating flesh “with the blood” conclude the chapter. Chapter 13 commands the execution of false prophets who seek to proselytize within Israel to the worship of other gods. Chapter 14 contains the various dietary laws as well as the tithing laws. Chapter 15 deals with provision for the poor and regulates voluntary servitude. Chapter 16 appoints the observance of the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and various other ceremonial festivals. Chapter 17 requires the execution of those involved in the astrological arts. Chapter 18 again commands the support of the Levites, as well as the death penalty for occult practitioners and false prophets.

Chapter 19 provides for the construction of “cities of refuge” to house fleeing manslayers. Chapter 20 contains the laws regarding warfare and commands the annihilation of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.<sup>8</sup> Chapter 21 contains the laws regarding

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8. These laws have been the cause of much calumny on the part of Bible sceptics. Granted, the genocidal manner in which the Israelites were commanded to wage war against these nations, right down to the slaughter of women and children, seems excessively brutal by modern standards of civilized warfare. However, what is usually not taken into account is the utter debauchery into which these cultures had descended, particularly their wholesale indulgence in ritual prostitution, sodomy, bestiality, and even child-sacrifice. From the time that He promised the land to Abraham, God stayed His hand of judgment on its inhabitants for four centuries (Genesis 15:13, 16), thus granting them time to turn from these abominable practices; they did not do so, and God thus used the Israelite armies as agents of His judgment, just as He would later use the Assyrians and Babylonians against His own people. Furthermore, it needs to be kept in mind that Israel’s conquest and occupation of the land was typical of the final judgment of unbelievers and the consummation of the eternal Kingdom (2 Thessalonians 1:8). The Israelites were not told to wage total war against those nations outside the boundaries of the land because, by their geographical location, they already typified those who will finally be excluded from the “new Jerusalem” (Revelation 22:15).

blood-guiltiness, betrothal, polygamy, and the death penalty for incorrigibility. Chapter 22 forbids the wearing of clothing pertaining to the opposite sex, prohibits the mixture of seed, plowing with an ox and a donkey together, and wearing of clothing made of mixed threads, and commands the stoning of a betrothed woman who is raped and fails to cry out. Chapter 23 prohibits a sexually mutilated man or an Ammonite or Moabite from entering the covenant community, proclaims uncleanness for nocturnal emissions, provides for sanitation, prohibits the charging of usury in loans to Israelites while permitting it in loans to Gentiles, and prescribes the gleaning laws. Chapter 24 contains divorce laws, demands the death penalty for kidnapping, and provides again for the poor. Chapter 25 commands a man to marry his deceased brother's wife. Chapter 26 contains additional tithing laws and finally, chapter 27 concludes the giving of the law with a series of self-maledictory oaths.

### The Conditional Covenant Ended in A.D. 70

God required the Israelites to keep the above commandments down to the minutest detail; failure to obey at even one point would bring the curses of chapter 28: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). These sanctions were clearly part of the conditional covenant God made with the children of Israel to give them possession of the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 5:33, 6:10, 18, 23) and the passage concludes with a prophecy of their final destruction as a nation (Deuteronomy 28:49-68). Therefore, the covenant and its sanctions ceased to function in A.D. 70, when the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the armies of Titus and the surviving Jews were permanently scattered throughout the world.<sup>9</sup> There was no promise of return to the land following this final expulsion, and therefore, no re-

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9. The events of A.D. 70 so perfectly fulfilled the negative sanctions detailed in these verses that the destruction of Jerusalem affords one of the strongest apologetic supports for biblical prophecy and also of the veracity of Christianity. See George Peter Holford, *The Destruction of Jerusalem: An Absolute and Irresistible Proof of the Divine Origin of Christianity* (Frankford, Pennsylvania: Joseph Sharpless, 1812); Alexander Keith, *Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion Derived From the Literal Fulfillment of Prophecy* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1859).

sumption of the covenant.<sup>10</sup> Reconstructionists are forced to ignore the plain context of Deuteronomy 28 in order to universally apply its blessings and curses to every nation throughout history, rather than locally to a particular people and a particular circumstance. As John Calvin noted, it is a gross and carnal error to view these covenantal sanctions as anything but “shadows and images” of the spiritual benefits which God has given to His people under the Gospel and of the final end of the wicked:

The restriction of the recompense [for violation of the covenant]... to this earthly and transitory life, is a part of the elementary instruction of the Law; for, just as the spiritual grace of God was represented to the ancient people by shadows and images, so also the same principle applied both to rewards and punishments. Reconciliation with God was represented to them by the blood of cattle; there were various forms of expiation, but all outward and visible, because their substance had not yet appeared in Christ. For the same reason, therefore, because so clear and familiar an acquaintance with eternal life, and the final resurrection, had not yet been attained by the Fathers, as now shines forth in the Gospel, God for the most part shewed forth by external proofs that He was favourably disposed to His people or offended with them.... The earth does not now cleave asunder to swallow up the rebellious: God does not now thunder from heaven as against Sodom: He does not now send fire upon wicked cities as He did in the Israelitish camp: fiery serpents are not sent forth to inflict deadly bites: in a word, such manifest instances of punishment are not daily presented before our eyes to make God terrible to us; and for this reason, because the voice of the Gospel sounds much more clearly in our ears, like the sound of a trumpet, whereby we are summoned to the heavenly tribunal of Christ. Let us

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10. All the typological prophecies of a literal return of the Jews to the land and of the rebuilding of the Temple (Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Jeremiah 30) were fulfilled at the end of the Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C. (Jeremiah 29:10). However, on the antitypological level, these promises were actually made to the true spiritual Israel — Jesus Christ and those united to Him through faith (Galatians 3:16, 29) — and were therefore fulfilled in the inauguration of His eternal Kingdom and the gathering of the elect, both Jew and Gentile (Matthew 24:31; see Philip Mauro, *The Hope of Israel: What Is It?* [Boston, Massachusetts: Hamilton Brothers, 1929]). The re-establishment of Israel as a political entity is unknown to the New Testament, for as Daniel 9:26-27 and Matthew 23:36-38 clearly state, the Jews’ “house” (their national and covenantal existence) was left “desolate” in A.D. 70.

then learn to tremble at that sentence, which banishes all the wicked from the kingdom of God. So, on the other hand, God does not appear, as of old, as the rewarder of His people by earthly blessings; and this because we “are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God”; because it becomes us to be conformed to our Head, and through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of heaven.... I admit, indeed, the truth of what Paul teaches, that “godliness” even now has “the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come,” (1 Tim. iv. 8); and assuredly believers already taste on earth of that blessedness which they shall hereafter enjoy in its fulness. God also inflicts His judgments on the ungodly in order to remind us of the last judgment; but still the distinction to which I have adverted is obvious, that since God has opened to us the heavenly life in the Gospel, He now calls us directly to it, whereas He led the Fathers to it as it were by steps.... In short, let us no more wonder that the Israelites were only attracted and alarmed by temporal rewards and punishments, than that the land of Canaan was to them a symbol of their eternal inheritance, in which, nevertheless, they confessed themselves strangers and pilgrims; from whence the Apostle correctly concludes, that they desired a better country (Gen. xvii. 9; Ps. xxxix. 12; Heb. xi. 16).<sup>11</sup>

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11. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, Volume III, pages 215-216. Rushdoony criticized Calvin’s commentary here as “silly and trifling reasoning” (*Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 653).

## **Chapter Fifteen:** **How Does God Bless the Nations?**

### The Gospel is Now the Standard of God's Blessing

Nowhere does the Bible teach that the blessings and cursings of Deuteronomy 28 were intended to have universal application outside the covenantal boundaries of national Israel. In fact, it teaches the opposite. In the Old Testament, David wrote, “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 147:19-20). According to the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, it was Israel “to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises” (Romans 9:4). The Gentiles, on the other hand, were “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Paul said in his Mars Hill discourse, “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:29-30). Obviously, the heathen nations’ idolatrous practices were at odds with the second of the Ten Commandments and the case laws against idolatry to which the death penalty was attached (Leviticus 19:4, 26:1, 30). Furthermore, the *sine qua non* of the sanctions of Deuteronomy 28 was the command that the Israelites not “go after other gods to serve them” (Deuteronomy 28:14). To do so was to break the covenant and suffer under the curses

of verses 16-44. Therefore, if the Reconstructionists are correct in their universal application of Deuteronomy 28, God could never have “winked” at the idolatry of the heathen nations any more than at the idolatry of Israel.

It is important to note that Paul, in addressing the idolaters on Mars Hill, never once mentioned the sanctions of Deuteronomy 28, but instead warned them that God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). He elaborated upon this in his epistle to the Romans by writing, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:16-18). It was Greg Bahnsen’s assertion that “the whole world shall be judged by the same righteous, absolute moral standard: God’s law.”<sup>1</sup> Gary North agreed by writing, “Old Testament law, mediated and restored through Jesus Christ and preached by His church, has in New Testament times become judicially obligatory on a worldwide basis. All nations will be judged finally in terms of God’s law....”<sup>2</sup> However, the standard of righteousness in Paul’s mind is clearly the Gospel of Christ, not the law of Moses, and it will be by their obedience or disobedience thereunto that Christ Himself will judge the peoples and nations of the world at the last day: “[T]he Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).<sup>3</sup> Again, there is not a hint anywhere in the New Testament that the sanctions of Deuteronomy 28 are now being applied by God to any people or nation. In fact, Christ Himself

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1. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, page 356.

2. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 90.

3. As seen in Chapter Five, to disobey the Gospel is to refuse to receive the righteousness of Christ through faith alone. The Gospel is not a “new law” in which “obedient faith” takes the place of perfect fulfillment of the law.



testified that “the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). There is just no way to avoid the Bible’s teaching that this judgment will not occur within history, as the Reconstructionists claim, but at the final consummation (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Peter 2:9). Such was John Calvin’s conclusion in his commentary on the second chapter of Romans:

The ungodly gather now the indignation of God against themselves, the stream of which shall then be poured on their heads: they accumulate hidden destruction, which then shall be drawn out from the treasures of God. The day of the last judgment is called the day of wrath, when a reference is made to the ungodly; but it will be a day of redemption to the faithful.... Farther, by adding the word revelation, Paul intimates what this day of wrath is to be, — that the Lord will then manifest his judgment: though he gives daily some indications of it, he yet suspends and holds back, till that day, the clear and full manifestation of it; for the books shall then be opened; the sheep shall then be separated from the goats, and the wheat shall be cleansed from the tares.<sup>4</sup>

In Genesis 22:16-18, we find God’s promise to Abraham: “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” If the sanctions of Deuteronomy 28 do not apply to this universal blessing of the nations — the promise against which all other promises fade into insignificance — then they cannot be said to apply anywhere else. However, what did Paul say? “For the promise, that he should be heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Romans 4:13). Elsewhere, he went on to say that the “blessings of Abraham” (Galatians 3:14) were, in reality, the blessing of eternal life itself through the Gospel: “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee

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4. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), page 101.

shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Galatians 3:6-9). Once again, we see that faith in Christ, as He is revealed in the Gospel, is God’s standard of blessing and cursing for the nations, not obedience to the law of Moses.

### The Impossibility of Pragmatic Law Observance

The Reconstructionist doctrine of historical sanctions states that a nation, regardless of whether its citizens are truly regenerate or not, may gain temporal favor with God and receive material or civil blessings based merely on an external observance of the law. According to Gary North:

The nations of the earth will recognize the justice that is provided by God’s revealed law, as well as see the external blessings that inevitably come to any society that covenants itself to God, and subsequently adheres to the ethical terms of God’s covenant. It is crucially important to maintain that these blessings will be visible (Deut. 28:1-14). The Bible is insistent: *there is an inescapable cause-and-effect relationship between national covenantal faithfulness and national prosperity*. Adherence to biblical law *inevitably* produces visible results that are universally regarded as beneficial....

*[T]he affirmation of a long-term relationship between covenant-keeping and external blessings in history, as well as covenant-breaking and external cursings in history, is the heart and soul of the Christian Reconstructionist position on social theory, its theological identifying mark (emphasis in original).*<sup>5</sup>

Gary DeMar agreed: “External blessings accrue to societies that conform to the laws of God, and there are curses for those societies that fail to conform externally to these laws (Deuteronomy 28:1-68). The laws of God that relate to blessings and curses are operative for all peoples.”<sup>6</sup> The reader should keep in mind that the Reconstructionists are not referring here to an adherence to just the moral law of God, but to the specific statutes enumerated in the law of Moses; these are “the laws of God that relate to blessings and curses” according to Deuteronomy 28. Elsewhere, North added, “Those who are ethically subordinate to Satan can neverthe-

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5. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pages 63-64.

6. DeMar, *Ruler of the Nations*, pages 96-97.

less receive external blessings if they obey God's law externally,"<sup>7</sup> and "[God] rewards those *societies that obey His covenant's external ethical requirements* even if they do not adhere to the formal theological affirmation of Trinitarian faith" (emphasis in original).<sup>8</sup> How he was able to reconcile these statements with Paul's doctrine in Romans 8:7 or with John's doctrine in 1 John 2:22-23, he did not say. North has even gone so far as to teach that men may become rich "because they or their entire society have conformed themselves to biblical law (Deut. 28:1-14)," and conversely, "men are poor because they or their entire society are in rebellion against God and God's law (Deut. 28:15-68)."<sup>9</sup> "Deny this," insisted North, "and you are an antinomian."<sup>10</sup>

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7. Gary North, *Liberating Planet Earth: An Introduction to Biblical Blueprints* (Fort Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), page 146. Elsewhere, North taught that Satan himself has received common grace blessings from God in the form of world dominion (*Dominion and Common Grace*, pages 31, 34-35), which implies that he is also "obeying God's law externally." However, this does not square with the Reconstructionist belief that the current political systems of the world are "antinomian" because they are not, in fact, based on God's law.

8. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 863. This statement contradicts the entire thesis of *Political Polytheism*, in which North claimed that America has been under the negative sanctions of the law precisely because our founding fathers did *not* "adhere to the formal theological affirmation of Trinitarian faith" in drafting the Constitution. It also contradicts North's own Van Tilian belief that without regeneration and a Trinitarian view of God, "The natural man cannot will to do God's will. He cannot even know what the good is."

9. North, *ibid.*, page 771. This was also the theme of Ray Sutton's book, *That You May Prosper*.

10. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 87. The Reconstructionists have highjacked the term "antinomian" and redefined it to mean anyone who does not believe that "every jot and tittle" of the Mosaic system continues under the New Testament economy, complete with the temporal blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 (*Political Polytheism*, page 158). In fact, Gary North has written that every Christian who denies even one point of the five-point theonomic model first "discovered" by Ray Sutton in 1987 is an antinomian (*ibid.*, pages 27-28, 50-51) and therefore guilty of "satanic reasoning" (*ibid.*, page 44). Of course, this definition is completely contrived and unknown outside the Reconstructionists' own literature, as even North himself has admitted: "I realize that I am departing from the accepted definitions offered by the historical Church. This

Job's friends could not have expressed this sentiment with more clarity, but it simply is not biblical (John 9:1-3). In fact, it was precisely

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is necessary.... One inescapable aspect of a new movement or new way of viewing the world is the creation of new terms (e.g. 'theonomy'), and the redefining of old terms.... I am doing my best to help establish effective theological terminology for future use by those who have adopted a theonomic worldview. We Christian Reconstructionists need not be limited in our critical analysis by the inherited vocabulary of our theological opponents.... The older definitions of 'antinomian' were devised by those who... were themselves antinomians" (*ibid.*, pages 27, 52, 53, 60). Such a tactic could justly be labeled "Reconstructionist Newspeak"; indeed, it is intellectually dishonest to divest a theological term of its accepted content, insert a completely different meaning, and then use that redefined term to castigate one's dissenters.

Though the Bible does not employ the actual term, it nevertheless clearly identifies the doctrine of Antinomianism and its remedy in Romans 6:1-13. Louis Berkhof explained:

The Antinomians held that the justification of the sinner took place in eternity, or in the resurrection of Christ. They either confounded it with the eternal decree of election, or with the objective justification of Christ when He was raised from the dead. They did not properly distinguish between the divine purpose in eternity and its execution in time, nor between the work of Christ in procuring, and that of the Holy Spirit in applying the blessings of redemption. According to this position we are justified even before we believe, though we are unconscious of it, and faith simply conveys to us the declaration of this fact. Moreover, the fact that our sins were imputed to Christ made Him personally a sinner, and the imputation of His righteousness to us makes us personally righteous, so that God can see no sin in believers at all (*Systematic Theology*, pages 517-518).

Thus, according to the New Testament and the unanimous consensus of the Christian Church, "antinomianism" is properly defined as the belief that a Christian is not under any obligation to live a holy life because of its gnostic distinction between the fleshly nature of the "old man" and the sinlessness of the "new man." This heresy therefore refers exclusively to a faulty understanding of justification and sanctification and has nothing at all to do with an affirmation or denial of the historical sanctions of Deuteronomy 28. It would seem that North does not feel himself bound by his own premise that "our *definitions* must be in terms of *biblical revelation*" (North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 843; emphasis in original).

for this doctrine of pragmatic law observance<sup>11</sup> that God condemned the apostate Jews throughout the Old Testament (Isaiah 1:12-15) and Jesus condemned the Pharisees in the New Testament (Matthew 23:27). No fallen man, or corporate group of fallen men, can earn the blessing of an infinitely holy God with a mere outward conformity to the law (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 8:7-8; Galatians 3:11). First of all, no man has ever kept all of the moral laws, much less has any nation ever perfectly implemented the judicial laws. The Mosaic law clearly required absolute obedience to its “every jot and tittle,” and the covenant member who did not comply with this requirement was under its curse. Moses himself made this point clear in Deuteronomy 27:26 (“Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them”), and the Apostle Paul further verified it by quoting this verse in Galatians 3:10-11: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.” Jesus came to “magnify the law” (Isaiah 42:21) far beyond its written precepts, often using it as a “two edged sword” against the self-righteous in order to expose the hidden “thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12; cf. Matthew 19:16-22). God is not impressed with the “filthy rags” of an external obedience (Isaiah 64:6), for “all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13) and He knows the desperate wickedness of the human heart (Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; John 2:24). With the undiminished law as the standard of judgment,<sup>12</sup> no one can expect to receive God’s blessings, for “the law worketh wrath” (Romans 4:15). Certainly, if Israel, to whom God spoke directly, was not able to keep the law and was thus cursed, no other nation could ever hope

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11. Gary North wrote that, during the coming Golden Age, “even unbelievers will be sufficiently pragmatic to obey God’s civil laws... perhaps for the sake of receiving the external blessings and avoiding the external cursings, even though they will not really possess eternally saving faith in the Son of God” (*Political Polytheism*, pages 58, 156).

12. Anyone who claims to be a “covenant-keeper” must first diminish the law in order to claim that they have obeyed it. This is why legalism is really a disguised form of antinomianism.

to keep it and thereby be blessed. Consequently, to lay the yoke of the law upon anyone today is a most burdensome doctrine indeed and one which was expressly condemned by the very first Church council in Acts 15:10 as well as the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the church at Galatia.

## Chapter Sixteen: Theonomic Postmillennialism and the Bible

### Theonomic Postmillennialism Is Not Historic Postmillennialism

[Christian Reconstruction is] the belief that God, the sovereign, predestinating Creator, has delegated to mankind the responsibility of obeying His Bible-revealed law-order, Old and New Testaments, and promises to bless or curse men in history, both individually and corporately, in terms of this law-order. This law-order and its historically applied sanctions are the basis of the progressive sanctification of covenant-keeping individuals and covenantal institutions — family, church, and State — over time, and they are also the basis of the progressive disinheritance of covenant-breakers.<sup>1</sup>

The way to the restoration of dominion is not by revolution.... Those who seek reconstruction by means of blood and violence shall reap a harvest of the same. There must be rather the grace of God unto salvation, followed by the restoration of dominion through the law of God. As men keep the law, they shall reap the dominion which the law establishes (Deut. 28:1-4).<sup>2</sup>

Does God progressively reward covenant-breakers in history, while bringing covenant-keepers into bondage to them, long term? Any eschatological system that teaches that the unrighteous will triumph over

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1. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 75.

2. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1983), page 41.

the righteous in Church history should also explain how this view of the future fits God's covenantal promises — God's blessings and cursings in history — in such passages as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.<sup>3</sup>

If the conditional promises of Deuteronomy 28:1-14 are taken seriously, and our empowering by the Holy Spirit is taken seriously, then the doctrine of historical progress can be taken seriously. This progress must become externalized through the Biblical system of positive feedback (Deuteronomy 8:18). To deny such historical, institutional progress, the pessimist must reject Biblical law.<sup>4</sup>

Directly related to the belief in the continuing covenantal sanctions of the Old Testament is the Reconstructionist version of Postmillennialism, which, as Gary North admitted, differs greatly from the historic doctrine as taught by Jonathan Edwards, Loraine Boettner, and others.<sup>5</sup> As explained in the above quotes, the future “golden age” of the Church will supposedly be ushered in on earth as all the nations are brought under the Mosaic law and begin to experience the blessings of Deuteronomy 28. According to Kenneth Gentry, “theonomic postmillennialists expect eventual *majoritarian Christendom*” (emphasis in original),<sup>6</sup> which, as we shall see, means an earthly dominion (inheritance of

3. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, page 494.

4. North, *Liberating Planet Earth*, page 146.

5. North, “Foreword” in Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, page xxx. Elsewhere, North referred to Edwards' eschatology as “pietistic, antinomian postmillennialism” (*Political Polytheism*, pages 151, 367), because he “expected to see the blessings of God come as a result of merely soteriological preaching” (North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 980; see also North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, pages 238ff). Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart likewise acknowledged the “subtle distinction” between historic Postmillennialism and the Reconstructionists' version (*Reduction of Christianity*, page 42).

6. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, page 477. Christ commanded His disciples to “enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). This clear statement would seem sufficient to discount any hope of a future “golden age” in which the majority of the world will be converted, but Gentry was ready with a response. Quoting B.B. Warfield, he



Christians and a corresponding subjugation (disinheritance) of non-Christians. “This is the orthodox faith,”<sup>7</sup> insisted North.

### The Restitution of All Things Occurs at the Second Coming

R.J. Rushdoony elaborated upon this theonomic eschatology:

The purpose of Biblical history is to trace the victory of Jesus Christ. That victory is not merely spiritual; it is also historical. Creation, man, and man’s body, all move in terms of a glorious destiny for which the whole creation groans and travails as it awaits the fulness of that glorious liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8:18-23). The victory is historical and eschatological, and it is not the rejection of creation but its fulfilment.

This victory was set forth in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who destroyed the power of sin and death and emerged victorious from the grave. As St. Paul emphasized in I Corinthians 15, this victory is the victory of all believers. Christ is the first-fruit, the beginning, the alpha and omega of the life of the saints. Had Christ merely arisen as a spirit from the grave, it would have signified His lordship over the world of spirit but His surrender of matter and history. But by His physical resurrection, by His rising again in the same body with which He was crucified, He set forth His lordship over creation and over history. The world of history will see Christ’s triumph and the triumph of His saints, His

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wrote, “The resolution to the matter is to realize ‘our Lord’s purpose is rather ethical impression than prophetic disclosure.’ That is, He is urging His disciples to consider the present situation they witness round about them. They are to look around them and see that so many souls are presently perishing, so few men are seeking righteousness and salvation. What will they do about this sad predicament? Do they love Him enough to seek its reversal? Christ’s challenge to them is ethical” (*ibid.*, page 475). This supposed solution to the problem is inadequate. Christ made a statement of fact — “narrow is the road to life” — which was followed by the consequence — “few they be that find it.” There is no ethical imperative here and there is no indication given that the narrow road will ever be broadened in some future era. In fact, Christ instructed His followers to “strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24). The entering of many through the gate of salvation is exactly what the Reconstructionist expects, but Christ dispelled that expectation by declaring the gate to be narrow until the end.

7. North, *Liberating Planet Earth*, page 44.

church, and His kingdom. History will not end in tribulation and disaster: it will see the triumph of the people of God and the manifestation of Christian order from pole to pole before Christ comes again. The doctrine of the resurrection is thus a cornerstone of the Biblical dimension of victory....

The goal of the Messianic purpose of history is the “restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21), their fulfilment in Jesus Christ, first in time and then in eternity.<sup>8</sup>

On the surface, Rushdoony’s thesis sounds plausible, but it falls apart upon close examination of his selected proof-text:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:18-23).

This passage does nothing to prove the claim that the “restitution of all things” occurs “first in time and then in eternity.” The reader will notice the sharp contrast between “the sufferings of this present time” (verse 18) and the future “adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (verse 23). This latter event — the resurrection and glorification of the saints — is linked by Paul to the final deliverance of the earth itself “from the bondage of corruption”; both events occur simultaneously. This was also described by Peter in his second epistle:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and god-

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8. Rousas John Rushdoony, *A Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1959] 1997), pages 25-26.

liness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Peter 3:10-12).<sup>9</sup>

It cannot be disputed that the “new heavens and new earth” mentioned above by Peter is the same as that described in Revelation 21-22, in which we are told “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4). Although death and suffering were defeated by the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55-57; Hebrews 2:14), they will not be ultimately vanquished until His second advent and the final delivering up of the Kingdom to the Father:

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject un-

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9. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, there is good reason to believe that the immediate context of this passage was the passing away of the old Mosaic order and the inauguration of the Gospel age. However, it should be remembered that inauguration is not consummation; the destruction of the Temple and the annihilation of the Jewish nation was merely typological of the conflagration which will come upon the entire world at the last day when God’s eternal Kingdom is fully manifest, not just in principle, but in actuality. In terms of Jewish marriage custom, the Church is now as a betrothed woman who keeps her lamp trimmed in the night as she awaits the coming of the groom (Matthew 25:1-13), the blessing of the “marriage supper” (Revelation 19:6-9), and the glorious dawn of her future life at his side (Revelation 21:23).

to him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:19-28).

Rushdoony's second proof-text was Acts 3:21: "...[T]he heaven must receive [Jesus Christ] until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, he interpreted the phrase "restitution of all things" to be a reference to the ongoing theonomic work of the Church in making restitution for Adam's transgression by bringing all earthly institutions under the Mosaic law. Thus, while Reconstructionism teaches that Christ will not return *until* this restitution has been accomplished, the Bible teaches that Christ's return will *itself* be the restitution, or restoration "As touching the force and cause, Christ hath already restored all things by his death; but the effect doth not yet fully appear; because that restoring is yet in the course.... For as the kingdom of Christ is only begun, and the perfection thereof is deferred until the last day, so those things which are annexed thereunto do now appear only in part."<sup>10</sup> It is the "glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" that is the "blessed hope" of the Christian (Titus 2:13), for redemptive history will then be complete as "God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." One such Old Testament prophecy is found in Isaiah 65:

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former will not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall no more be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and

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10. Calvin, *Commentary Upon Acts*, Volume I, page 153.

while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD (Isaiah 65:17-25).

According to Gary North, "A postmillennialist can interpret this passage literally: a coming era of extensive millennial blessings before Jesus returns in final judgment.... But the amillennialist cannot admit the possibility of such an era of literal, culture-wide blessings in history. His eschatology denies any literal, culture-wide triumph of Christianity in history. Therefore, he has to 'spiritualize' or allegorize this passage."<sup>11</sup> North has claimed that one of these "extensive millennial blessings" will be the reversal of the second law of thermodynamics (entropy), resulting in the decrease of disease and the ultimate longevity of human life:

Jesus Christ's resurrection in principle restored redeemed man's ethical relationship to God, thereby overcoming the break in mankind's personal relationship to God that took place when Adam rebelled.... [N]ature's relationship to man and God has also been altered in principle by the resurrection, just as this relationship was altered by the curse which God placed on the cosmos when Adam rebelled....

The earth was brought under a curse by God in Genesis 3:17-19.... But what about the resurrection? The resurrection was the great healing event in history. It definitively restored redeemed mankind as the legitimate heir of God. This new ethical and legal relationship is to be worked out progressively in history. Therefore, these questions must be raised: What effects on the cosmos did Christ's resurrection produce? None? If not, then why not? If God's visible curses were placed on the cosmos because of Adam's covenantal rebellion, then why were there no blessings placed on the cosmos as a result of the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ? Was Adam's rebellion of greater consequence historically and cosmically than the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Why did the covenantal restoration of the resurrection produce no healing cosmic effects? Why is the curse of God in Genesis 3 still in full force in history?

The answer is: it isn't. There has been a progressive healing of the earth since Calvary. This has come sporadically in response to the

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11. North, Foreword in Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, page xxviii. North's charge here against Amillennialism is essentially the same as that of classic Dispensationalism and is dealt with in Appendix Seven.

sporadic covenantal faithfulness of God's people.... It is their responsibility self-consciously to carry out the dominion assignment of Genesis 1:26-28, which is why Christ delivered the Great Commission to the church (Matt. 28:18-20). The effects of death and decay are progressively rolled back when God's people faithfully transform their lives, institutions, and physical environments to conform to God's revealed laws....

God's covenantal judgment is a two-fold process: blessings and cursing. The resurrection of Jesus Christ points to the cosmic reality of the potential blessings. Christ's bodily resurrection implies that the cursed aspects of the second law of thermodynamics can be progressively removed in history in response to societies' increased covenantal faithfulness.... (emphasis in original)<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that North shifted the "great healing event of history" away from the cross to the resurrection, thereby implicitly denying that the removal of the curse of the broken moral law and the reconciliation of men to God was accomplished through the vicarious atonement on Calvary (Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:20-22).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, this "covenantal restoration" applies only to God's "new creation," the Church (2 Corinthians 5:17); the curse of the broken Covenant of Works is still very much active within the "old creation" and will remain so throughout the semi-eschatological period. Though "not appointed unto wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9), the saints themselves, while in this world, will continue to experience reminders of this curse as they strive against residual sin, labor hard to earn their daily suste-

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12. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), pages xx-xxi, xxiii.

13. This identification of the believer's "justification" with the resurrection is also a hallmark of Federal Vision writers. Much like North, Rich Lusk wrote that "the resurrection is the real centerpiece of the gospel since it is the new thing God has done.... It is not Christ's life-long obedience *per se* that is credited to us. Rather, it is his right standing before the Father manifested in his resurrection. His resurrection justified us because it justified him" ("Response to 'The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" in Beisner, *Auburn Avenue Theology*, page 142; emphasis in original). It is not uncommon for those influenced by this doctrine to insist, as did N.T. Wright, that "'the gospel' is not an account of how people get saved. It is... the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ" (*What Saint Paul Really Said* [William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997], page 131).

nance, suffer the pain of childbirth, experience loss and deprivation, endure the frailty and disease of aging bodies, and finally, encounter the grave itself. However, “though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). This seemingly contradictory existence is a good illustration of the tension between the “present evil world [age]” (Galatians 1:4) — which in principle ended at the cross (Colossians 2:15) and ever since, “passes away” (1 Corinthians 7:31; 1 John 2:17) — and the “world [age] to come” (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Hebrews 6:5) — inaugurated at the resurrection (Acts 13:33; Ephesians 1:20), and growing in strength until the day “when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality,” at which time “death shall be swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). Meanwhile, the Christian “groan[s], earnestly desiring to be clothed with [his] house which is from heaven” (2 Corinthians 5:2).<sup>14</sup>

### Old Covenant Sanctions Do Not Belong to the New Covenant

North insisted that Isaiah 65:20 “prophesies an extended life expectancy for sinners and righteous people before the day of judgment,” and then concluded that “death, aging, and the decay of nature” are not “uniformitarian processes,” but may be at least partially overcome by “conformity to God’s law through the empowering of the Holy Spirit” and “covenantal faithfulness.”<sup>15</sup> In this context, he cited Exodus 23:25-26: “God promised Israel the miracle of genetic near-perfection: no miscarriages of man or beast in Israel, just so long as the people were covenantally faithful to God.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, “There is no indication in the revelation of God to His Old Covenant people that they would experience anything except large families, zero miscarriages, and high rates of population growth, if they would conform themselves to His law.... Exodus 23:25-26 speaks of God’s positive sanctions in history. These sanc-

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14. An excellent treatment of this “inaugurated eschatology” position is found in Geerhardus Vos’ final work entitled, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1930).

15. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, pages 9, 10.

16. North, *ibid.*, page 3.

tions are biological.”<sup>17</sup> Such was also Rushdoony’s teaching: “It [the keeping of the law] means freedom from plagues and diseases. It means fertility and a safe delivery of the young. It means long life for covenant man and his household. The law is thus clearly a *promise of life* to covenant man when he walks in faith and obedience” (emphasis in original).<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, North further commented, “God is the Judge, both in history and eternity. When God renders judgment, He does at least three things: 1) He evaluates a person’s thoughts and actions in terms of the requirements of His law; 2) He pronounces judgment, either ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty’; and 3) He imposes the appropriate sanctions, either cursings or blessings.”<sup>19</sup> The health, wealth, and fertility of a professing Christian are therefore indications that he is a diligent keeper of the Mosaic law; the lack thereof is an indication that he is *not* keeping that law. What words of comfort, then, can the Reconstructionist have for the Christian woman who has had a miscarriage, or the young Christian couple who are unable to have children? Are those believers who fall sick and even die to be viewed as guilty “covenant-breakers” under God’s covenantal curses? To say so is to contradict the clear teaching of Paul in Romans 8:1 that “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,” and in Galatians 3:13 that “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” Indeed, “God never speaks to a believer out of Christ; and in Christ he speaks not a word in the terms of the covenant of works.”<sup>20</sup>

If consistently held, this doctrine of the Reconstructionists can only produce hearts of stone toward other suffering Christians, not hearts dominated by the tenderness and compassion which Christ has for His people: “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15). It also denies the chief means by which God intends to sanctify His people and prepare them for Heaven: tribulation and affliction:

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17. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 858. See also Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant: Genesis* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1982), page 174.

18. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 173.

19. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 849.

20. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pages 162-163.



Whatever be the kind of tribulation with which we are afflicted, we should always consider the end of it to be, that we may be trained to despise the present, and thereby stimulated to aspire to the future life. For since God well knows how strongly we are inclined by nature to a slavish love of this world, in order to prevent us from clinging too strongly to it, he employs the fittest reason for calling us back, and shaking off our lethargy. Every one of us, indeed, would be thought to aspire and aim at heavenly immortality during the whole course of his life. For we would be ashamed in no respect to excel the lower animals; whose condition would not be at all inferior to ours, had we not a hope of immortality beyond the grave. But when you attend to the plans, wishes, and actions of each, you see nothing in them but the earth. Hence our stupidity; our minds being so dazzled with the glare of wealth, power, and honours, that they can see no farther. The heart also, engrossed with avarice, ambition, and lust, is weighed down and cannot rise above them. In short, the whole soul, ensnared by the allurements of the flesh, seeks its happiness on the earth. To meet this disease, the Lord makes his people sensible of the vanity of the present life, by a constant proof of its miseries. Thus, that they may not promise themselves deep and lasting peace in it, he often allows them to be assailed by war, tumult, or rapine, or to be disturbed by other injuries. That they may not long with too much eagerness after fleeting and fading riches, or rest in those which they already possess, he reduces them to want, or, at least, restricts them to a moderate allowance, at one time by exile, at another by sterility, at another by fire, or by other means. That they may not indulge too complacently in the advantages of married life, he either vexes them by the misconduct of their partners, or humbles them by the wickedness of their children, or afflicts them by bereavement. But if in all these he is indulgent to them, lest they should either swell with vain-glory, or be elated with confidence, by diseases and dangers he sets palpably before them how unstable and evanescent are all the advantages competent to mortals. We duly profit by the discipline of the cross, when we learn that this life, estimated in itself, is restless, troubled, in numberless ways wretched, and plainly in no respect happy; that what are estimated its blessings are uncertain, fleeting, vain, and vitiated by a great admixture of evil. From this we conclude, that all we have to seek or hope for here is contest; that when we think of the crown we must raise our eyes to heaven. For we must hold, that our mind never rises seriously to desire and aspire after the future, until it has learned to de-

spise the present life.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, evidence of God's favor toward His people is seen in their perseverance in faith in the midst of their earthly miseries, not in the absence of such miseries (2 Thessalonians 1:3-5; James 5:10-11). In this patient endurance of suffering is found the true victory of the Christian, not in an earthly dominion (James 1:12; 1 Peter 4:12-13; 1 John 5:4; Revelation 13:7, 15:2). The New Testament's doctrine of the saints' earthly travail directly contradicts Gary North's doctrine of "covenantal sanctions." In fact, the latter appears very similar to the heretical doctrines of the Manifest Sons of God cult and the Word of Faith (Positive Confession) movement, both of which groups teach that God's will for the believer is a life of prosperity and health, and that the Christian Church in its maturity will overcome sickness and even death in a future era of earthly dominion. According to a popular Word of Faith teacher, "Yes, sin, sickness and disease, spiritual death, poverty, and everything else that's of the devil once ruled us. But now, bless God, we rule them — for this is the Day of Dominion!"<sup>22</sup> Like the Reconstructionists, the Word of Faith teachers also teach that the "covenantal sanctions" of Deuteronomy 28 are a major factor in this dominion, which they have dubbed "the end-time transfer of wealth" from "covenant-breakers" to "covenant keepers."<sup>23</sup> Given the similarity of their dominionist views (which even North himself has admitted<sup>24</sup>), it is no surprise that the Reconstruction-

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21. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, Chapter 9:1.

22. Kenneth Hagin, article: "This is the Day Which the Lord Has Made," *Word of Faith*, September 1996. For thorough exposé of the Word of Faith theology, see D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

23. This slogan was derived from an alleged prophecy that Charles Capps claimed to receive in 1978, and has been popularized in the Word of Faith movement by the Kenneth Copeland ministries.

24. In *Unholy Spirits: Occultism and New Age Humanism*, North wrote:

Some of the charismatic groups believe in tightly knit church covenants. The reconstructionists have been the major theologians of the biblical covenant. Other charismatics have preached personal financial victory and health through prayer and by obeying God's "principles." The reconstructionists

ists are often found working closely with such groups to further their agenda.<sup>25</sup> However, if it is true that “the effects of death and decay are progressively rolled back” when God’s people “faithfully transform their lives” according to the Mosaic law, and that this “positive feedback” for “covenantal faithfulness” will have “visible effects in history,”<sup>26</sup> why then did the Apostle Paul seem so ignorant of this allegedly important truth?

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us....

[B]ut though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.... While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life (2 Corinthians 4:6-7, 16, 18, 5:1-4).

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have been the major defenders of the continuing legitimacy of God’s law in New Testament times. Some of these “positive confession” charismatics (also called “word of faith”) have begun to preach that the optimism which God offers to individuals also applies to God’s other covenanted associations: families, churches, and civil governments. This represents a major break with the traditional pessimistic eschatology of fundamentalism, called dispensationalism. These charismatic leaders have not self-consciously made the break from premillennialism to postmillennial optimism, but the term “dominion” implies it ([Fort Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1986], pages 374-375).

Elsewhere, he acknowledged that “the only broad-based acceptance of the theonomic position today is taking place in charismatic circles.... (*Political Polytheism*, page 150).

25. William M. Alnor, “Is Reconstructionism Merging With ‘Kingdom Now’?” *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1988, page 5; Robert M. Bowman, Jr., “Are Christians Supposed to Take Dominion?”, *ibid.*, page 31.

26. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, page 158.

If our bodies can be renewed by “ethical activity” (law-keeping),<sup>27</sup> there would really be no need for Christians to ever die, and thus no absolute need for a future resurrection; we could theoretically immortalize ourselves through the works of the law. This conclusion, though never drawn by North, seems reasonable. In the Reconstructionists’ “postmillennial kingdom,” in which the Mosaic law is supposedly being kept by a large majority of people on earth, then it would be theoretically possible for the corporate Church to likewise immortalize the earth itself. However, this would directly contradict the Scripture’s declaration that the creation’s “groaning” corresponds to the saints’ “groaning,” and neither will be relieved of “the bondage of corruption” until the “manifestation of the sons of God”: the resurrection which will occur at the final coming of Christ. This event was prophesied by David in Psalm 102:25-26: “Of old thou hast laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.” The hope of the Christian is therefore not realized in history, as the Reconstructionists claim, but in eternity when both we and all of creation will be renewed: “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Romans 8:24-25; cf. Titus 2:13). Furthermore, it is important to note Paul’s contrast between the veil which was placed over the face of Moses, “that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished” (2 Corinthians 3:13), and “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). While Gary North would have us to look back to “that which is abolished” (the Mosaic law) in order to obtain blessings that are *external* and *earthly*, Paul directed his readers to look to “that which remaineth” (the Gospel of Christ) for blessings that are *internal* and *spiritual*. The Christian is instructed by Scripture to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7); we know that we are the children of God because of the inward witness of His Spirit (Romans 8:16), not because we see “visible positive feedback in history” (Luke 17:21-22).

Thus we see that North’s erroneous universal application of the sanctions of Deuteronomy 28 is really what is behind his literalistic inter-

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27. North, *ibid.*, page 9.

pretation of Isaiah 65 and his criticism of Amillennialism for allegorizing the text. However, if we cannot allegorize Isaiah 65:17-25, what are we to do with 2 Peter 3:10-12, Revelation 21-22, and even 1 Corinthians 15:19-28 — all of which deal with the very same subject: the “new heavens and new earth”? While acknowledging that the “new creation” began in principle at Christ’s death and resurrection, these passages ultimately refer to a time when the current universe “shall be dissolved,” when “there is no more death,” and when Christ “shall have delivered the kingdom up to God, even the Father” having destroyed the last enemy, which is death. By claiming that Isaiah’s prophecy, which is couched in highly symbolic language, refers to “a coming era of extensive millennial blessings *before* Jesus returns in final judgment,” the Reconstructionists are forced to acknowledge two different “new heavens and new earths,” or two “ages to come.”<sup>28</sup> Even on its face, this passage from Isaiah cannot be interpreted literally, for while it says that “the voice of weeping shall no more be heard in her,” it then adds that “the child shall die an hundred years old.” Would not parents still grieve for a deceased child, even though he lived to be one hundred years old? Do the Reconstructionists really expect that carnivorous animals will become vegetarians and that snakes will eat dust? They must if they really “interpret this passage literally,” as Gary North claimed.<sup>29</sup> Do they then also believe that “the LORD’s house” is a literal mountain (Isaiah 2:2), that the wicked are literally “cedars” and “oaks” (Isaiah 2:13), that the grave literally has a mouth (Isaiah 5:14), that the Lord is literally “a stone” (Isaiah 8:14), that He literally “rideth upon a swift cloud” (Isaiah 19:1), *etc.*? It is interesting to note that in his book, *He Shall Have Dominion*, Kenneth Gentry

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28. Robert Strimple, “An Amillennial Response,” in Darrel L. Bock and Stanley N. Gundry (editors), *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1999), page 63 (footnote).

29. Actually, Gary North apparently does so expect: “Isaiah’s language indicates that the blessings of restoration also involve an eventual return to vegetarianism, where the wolf and lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw” (*Dominion Covenant*, page 113). However, in the footnote on the same page, he wrote, “It is possible that Isaiah’s language is allegorical, and that he was referring to political tranquility rather than a world of vegetarianism.” This candid admission completely undermines his entire thesis that Isaiah 65 is a prediction of events which occur “in time and on earth.” After all, if the language of verse 25 may be allegorical, why not the entire passage?

allowed for a spiritual interpretation of Old Testament prophecy over against the “literalistic hermeneutic” of Dispensationalism,<sup>30</sup> pointing out that “literalism plagued the Jews throughout Jesus’ ministry.”<sup>31</sup> In light of these statements, the unabashed double-standard employed by Gary North in criticizing Amillennialism for its non-literalistic interpretation of prophecy is truly amazing.

In conclusion, the alleged future earthly “golden age” proposed by the theonomic Postmillennialists, with its period of temporal blessings and curses lasting “tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years,”<sup>32</sup> seems rude and even anti-climatic in contrast with the glorious “inaugurated eschatology” presented in Scripture, and taught by faithful biblical expositors throughout the centuries:

These are exaggerated modes of expression; but the greatness of such a blessing, which was to be manifested at the coming of Christ, could not be described in any other way. Nor does he mean only the first coming, but the whole reign, which must be extended as far as to the last coming.... Let us remember that these things take place in us so far as we are renewed. But we are only in part renewed, and therefore we do not yet see a new heaven and a new earth. We need not wonder, therefore, that we continue to mourn and weep, since we have not entirely laid aside the old man, but many remains are still left. It is with us also that the renovation ought to begin; because we hold the first rank, and it is through our sin that “the creatures groan, and are subject to vanity,” as Paul shews. (Rom. viii.20.) But when we shall be perfectly renewed, heaven and earth shall also be fully renewed, and shall regain their former state. And hence it ought to be inferred... that the Prophet has in his eye the whole reign of Christ, down to its final close, which is also called “the day of renovation and restoration.” (Acts iii.21.)<sup>33</sup>

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30. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, pages 145-158.

31. Gentry, *ibid.*, page 157.

32. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, 1985), pages 221-222. Kenneth Gentry likewise expects the “millennium” to last for “ages” (*He Shall Have Dominion*, page 418).

33. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), Volume IV, pages 398-399. Calvin was obviously an Amillennialist.

## Chapter Seventeen: Reconstructionism's Theocratic Kingdom

### Is Amillennialism “Impotent Religion” and “Blasphemy”?

Reconstructionists tend to paint other eschatologies with a very large and uncharitable brush. For example, in his book, *He Shall Have Dominion*, Kenneth Gentry mentioned “the intrinsic, historical pessimism in all non-postmillennial systems.”<sup>1</sup> In his usual dramatic style, Gary North wrote, “The traditional pessimillennialists have issued a clarion call: Come join us; we’re historical losers. They have built their institutions by attracting people who are content to remain historical (pre-second coming) losers.”<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, he alleged that all non-Reconstructionist eschatologies lead to a gnostic dichotomy between “evil matter and good spirit” and the belief that “this hostile, forever-evil world cannot be redeemed, reformed, and reconstructed,”<sup>3</sup> and he insisted that the “near pagan doctrine”<sup>4</sup> of Amillennialism in particular “leads to the defeat of Christians on the battlefields of culture” and teaches “the victory of Satan’s forces over the church.”<sup>5</sup> Gentry likewise claimed that

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1. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, page 457.
  2. Gary North, “Foreword,” in Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, pages xxv, xxix.
  3. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pages 59, 60; North, *Healer of the Nations*, page 345.
  4. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 154.
  5. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 967.

the Amillennialist believes there will be “*a continuity of cultural decline and defeat for Christianity until Jesus comes again*” (emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup> None of the Reconstructionist writers have been more defamatory, however, than R.J. Rushdoony:

Amillennialism and premillennialism are in retreat from the world and blasphemously surrender it to the devil. By their very premise... that the world will only get worse... they cut the nerve of Christian action.... If we hold that the world can only get worse... what impetus is left for applying the word of God to the problems of this world? The result is an inevitable one: premillennial and amillennial believers who profess faith in the whole word of God number *conservatively* 25 percent of the American population. They are also the most impotent segment of American society, with the least impact on American life.

To turn the world-conquering word of the sovereign, omnipotent, and triune God into a symbol of impotence is not a mark of faith. It is blasphemy (emphasis in original).<sup>7</sup>

It will be granted that some Amillennialists, especially those within the Dutch Reformed tradition, have stressed an ever-increasing disparity between good and evil as history progresses toward its end. Such was the view advanced by Cornelius Van Til:

All common grace is earlier grace. Its commonness lies in its earliness.... At the very first stage of history there is much common grace. There is a common good nature under the common favor of God. But this creation-grace requires response. It cannot remain what it is. It is conditional. Differentiation must set in and does set in. It comes first in the form of a common rejection of God. Yet common grace continues; it is on a “lower” level now; it is long-suffering that men may be led to repentance.... Common grace will diminish still more in the further course of history. With every conditional act the remaining significance of the conditional is reduced. God allows men to follow the path of self-chosen rejection of Him more rapidly than ever toward the final consummation. God increases His attitude of wrath upon the reprobate as time goes on, until at the end of time, at the great consummation of history,

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6. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, page xxvi.

7. Rousas John Rushdoony: “Postmillennialism Versus Impotent Religion,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* (Winter 1976-1977), Volume III:2, page 127.



their condition has caught up with their state....

But when all the reprobate are epistemologically self-conscious, the crack of doom has come. The fully self-conscious reprobate will do all he can in every dimension to destroy the people of God. So while we seek with all our power to hasten the process of differentiation in every dimension we are yet thankful, on the other hand, for the "day of grace," the day of undeveloped differentiation. Such toleration as we receive on the part of the world is due to this fact that we live in the earlier, rather than in the later, stage of history. And such influence on the public situation as we can effect, whether in society or in state, presupposes this undifferentiated stage of development.<sup>8</sup>

First of all, Van Til's doctrine of conditional "earlier grace" is a departure from the standard "two kingdom" understanding of common grace, which acts as a preserving element throughout the present age. While the Noachic covenant, under which common grace operates, is not itself redemptive, it nevertheless provides the historical platform on which the redemption of the elect is played out. Dispensed indiscriminately to mankind in general, common grace is really for the benefit and protection of the Church (1 Timothy 4:10); it is the "handmaid" of the Covenant of Grace and is therefore unconditional. While it is true that God does abandon individuals and cultures to the natural effects of their own rebellion (Romans 1:18-32), this does not alter the covenant itself: the sun still rises and the rain still falls, the institution of civil government still functions, natural law still dictates human behavior, the conscience still restrains and rebukes, *etc.* How man responds to God's forbearance may change, but common grace itself does not, for He has promised that it will continue "while the earth remaineth" (Genesis 8:22).

Van Til's suggestion that common grace will decline over time so that the reprobate become "epistemologically self-conscious" in history is also untrue, both individually and corporately. Even the most depraved of men must retain at least some degree of their natural humanity in order to function in society, and even the most debauched of societies must remove the criminal element which threaten its existence; indeed, "self preservation is the first law of nature," and no one but the thoroughly insane will seek his own destruction. For the unbeliever, then, "epistemological self-consciousness" is only fully achieved in hell when

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8. Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, pages 82-83, 85.

all common grace has been removed and he is left entirely to his own unrestrained depravity for all eternity (Matthew 13:42). The Dutch neo-Calvinist version of Amillennialism should therefore not be used to caricaturize the position as a whole. One can certainly expect a general parallelism between good and evil in history without giving up the Amillennial position. This seems to be the implication of such passages as Matthew 24:37 and 2 Peter 3:3-4. It should also be noted that even some theonomic Postmillennialists have interpreted Revelation 20:7-9 as a prediction of a future worldwide, though short-lived, revolt against Christ's theocratic Kingdom.<sup>9</sup> Amillennialists would similarly interpret this passage as a final revolt against the Gospel and a widespread persecution of the Church which results in the second advent of Christ, the ultimate destruction of the wicked, and the consummation of the "new heavens and new earth." Whereas the Reconstructionist is forced by his

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9. Gentry conceded that there will be a "brief rebellion," but he insisted that it will be instigated by "*a minority*" who have not been converted to Christ (*He Shall Have Dominion*, page 253; emphasis in original). Later on in the same book, the size of the rebellion seemed to have grown substantially:

At the end of the kingdom era and just preceding Judgment Day, Satan is loosed very briefly (a "little while," Rev. 20:3) from his bondage. During this short period of time, he is allowed to gather a sizeable force of rebels, who will attempt to supplant the prevailing Christian majoritarian influence in the world (Rev. 20:7-9). Under His providential rule, Christ's spiritual kingdom will have spread over the face of the earth and have dominated human life and culture for ages. But all men are never converted during any period of history. Consequently, upon Satan's brief loosing, he quickly incites to war repressed children of wickedness (*ibid.*, page 418).

One has to wonder why these "children of wickedness" will feel so "repressed" when, according to Gary North, even people who are "ethically subordinate to Satan" will be experiencing the covenantal blessings of Deuteronomy 28 in the millennial period.

David Chilton wrote that this final rebellion will occur when "God's Kingdom has realized its earthly potential..." (*Days of Vengeance*, page 520). It is very strange, therefore, for Reconstructionists to constantly castigate other eschatologies for their "pessimism," when their own earthly dominion, having reached its highest potential, will apparently end in a rebellion of such magnitude that the direct intervention of Christ Himself will be needed to rescue the Church from destruction (North, *Political Polytheism*, pages 148-149).

system into a contradiction into a contradiction — *i.e.*, it is difficult to image how the ungodly will be as numerous “as the sand of the sea” (verse 8) and will “compass the camp of the saints about” (verse 9) if there is “majoritarian Christendom” or a “five-to-one ratio for Christians over non-Christians at the height of the millennial glory”<sup>10</sup> — the Amillennialist, who does not insist on an earthly dominion of the Church, is not threatened in the least by this prophecy.

North's charge of Gnosticism is unjustly leveled against Amillennialists,<sup>11</sup> who believe that heaven itself will actually be transferred to a purified earth; the earth will in fact be “redeemed, reformed, and reconstructed,” but this will be done by Christ Himself when He returns (Acts 3:21). Just as Christians will be resurrected with glorified, immortal bodies at Christ's coming wherewith to reign with Him forever (Job 19:26), so too will the earth be glorified and thus “abide forever” (Ecclesiastes 1:4). This is the context of the benediction in Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” Without exception, whenever the New Testament mentions an earthly inheritance of the saints, it is in this context; until that time, our reign is in the “heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6) even as our lives in this present world are fraught with trial and tribulation (John 16:33; 1 Peter 4:12-19).<sup>12</sup>

### Christ's Kingdom is Spiritual Not Earthly

It should be kept in mind that behind the Reconstructionists' denunciations of all other eschatologies but their own is really the belief that all Christians who reject the continuing sanctions of Deuteronomy 28 have no alternative but to “proclaim the inevitable institutional and

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10. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, page 254.

11. North holds this view in common with numerous Premillennial writers, both Historic and Dispensational: Tim Warner, “The Gnostic Roots of Amillennialism and Dispensationalism,” online at [www.answersinrevelation.org](http://www.answersinrevelation.org); Sam A. Smith, “The Non-Christian and Anti-Cosmic Roots of Amillennialism,” online at [www.biblicalreader.com](http://www.biblicalreader.com); Thomas Ice, “The Unscriptural Theologies of Amillennialism and Postmillennialism,” online at [www.raptureready.org](http://www.raptureready.org)

12. For an extensive exposition from the Amillennial perspective of the condition of the Church in both heavenly and earthly realms, see Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999).

cultural defeat of Christianity in history.”<sup>13</sup> Reconstructionists often write as though their hope rests upon a mass conversion of souls in the future. According to North, “The road to the comprehensive peace of God begins with the transformation of the covenant-breaking heart. Personal regeneration must precede comprehensive social reconstruction. This has always been the position of Christian Reconstruction.”<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, he wrote:

The Bible does not allow the imposition of some sort of top-down bureaucratic tyranny in the name of Christ....

The basis for building a Christian society is evangelism and missions that lead to a widespread Christian revival, so that the great mass of earth’s inhabitants will place themselves under Christ’s protection, and voluntarily use His covenantal laws for self-government. Christian reconstruction begins with personal conversion to Christ and self-government under God’s law, then it spreads to others through revival, and only later does it bring comprehensive changes in civil law, when the vast majority of voters voluntarily agree to live under biblical blueprints....

The kingdom will not be brought in by a bureaucratic theocratic regime, but by the heart-transforming work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

With a careful reading of the totality of their literature, however, one can easily discern that individual salvation is really just the means to an end for the Reconstructionists, for “God wants Christians to control the earth on His behalf.”<sup>16</sup> Identifying the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 with the mandate of Genesis 1:28, they insist that the Church has been given a “creation (cultural) mandate” to take dominion over and transform the institutions of this world.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, there must be

13. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 160.

14. North, *ibid.*, page 20.

15. North, *Tools of Dominion*, pages 55, 57.

16. North, *Liberating Planet Earth*, page 23.

17. North, *Backward Christian Soldiers?* pages 45-47. Reconstructionism is just one of the branches of transformationalism which have grown out of Dutch neo-Calvinism (Kuyperianism). While it generally maintains an orthodox soteriology, neo-Calvinism errs in teaching that God’s ultimate purpose in sending His Son was not to save individual sinners, but to redeem the cosmos, and that because there is no “nature-grace” or “sacred-secular” dichotomy, the

“converted nations with *converted laws*, converted politics, converted economics, converted education and so forth” (emphasis in original).<sup>18</sup> In other words, Christians must work to bring these human institutions under the Mosaic law: “Until they do, the millennium has not begun.”<sup>19</sup>

Of course, this claim that regeneration is necessary for the reconstruction of society also contradicts the theory that non-Christian societies and even “people ethically subordinate to Satan,” can nevertheless accumulate God’s “millennial blessings” by a mere external observance of the law. Furthermore, such disclaimers are hardly reassuring when it is kept

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traditional Reformed “two kingdom” paradigm is frequently dismissed as “dualistic,” “neo-Platonic,” or “gnostic.” An indication that a transformationalist theology is in play is the suggestion that the Church participates with Christ within the third aspect of the Creation-Fall-Redemption motif, as well as the usage of such catch phrases as “cultural discipleship,” “doing kingdom work in all of life,” “incarnating the Church in the world,” “living out the Gospel,” *etc.* Reconstructionism’s debt to the Dutch neo-Calvinists is rarely mentioned in their writings, and this is probably because, as Gary North stated, “none of them developed an explicitly Bible-based social philosophy” (*Political Polytheism*, page 680 [footnote]). In fact, while he credited Cornelius Van Til for his “radical, uncompromisingly rejection of all forms of natural law philosophy” (*ibid.*, page 129), North nevertheless labeled him an “antinomian” for not “refer[ring] in his writings to God-revealed Old Testament biblical law as the only systematically Christian alternative to autonomous man’s natural law” (*ibid.*, page 131). In fact, it is precisely this point that sends Reconstructionism on a different trajectory than the other streams of Kuiperianism.

Currently popular personalities who espouse neo-Calvinist transformational ideas without the theocratic trappings of Reconstructionism are Timothy J. Keller and Tullian Tchividjian, and recent neo-Calvinist publications include Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985); Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002); and Michael Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008).

18. Ray R. Sutton, “A Covenantal View of the Millennium,” *Covenant Renewal* III (February, 1989), page 2; quoted in North, *Millennialism and Social Theory*, page 246.

19. Sutton, *ibid.*, page 247.

in mind that the true Kingdom of God was already “brought in” when Christ rose from the dead and sat down at the right hand of God the Father: “And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Acts 13:32-33). The Kingdom promised to Abraham, prophesied by God’s prophets throughout the Old Testament, preached by Jesus Christ, inaugurated with His death and resurrection, and proclaimed by His Apostles and the Christian Church ever since, is the present and spiritual reign of all true believers with Christ “in heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6). The New Testament is completely silent on the topic of God’s people “taking dominion” over the world’s institutions; instead, like the saints before them, Christians “confess that they [are] strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” and therefore “desire a better country, that is an heavenly” (Hebrews 11:13, 16). We will return to this important subject in the next chapter.

As if he were responding directly to the Reconstructionists, John Calvin wrote, “[H]e who knows to distinguish between the body and the soul, between the present fleeting life and that which is future and eternal, will have no difficulty in understanding that the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things very widely separated....”<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the purpose of the Apostles in preaching the Gospel was “not to form a civil polity, but to establish the spiritual kingdom of Christ....”<sup>21</sup> Calvin described the nature of this spiritual Kingdom as follows:

That the strength and utility of the kingdom of Christ cannot... be fully perceived, without recognising it as spiritual, is sufficiently apparent, even from this, that having during the whole course of our lives to war under the cross, our condition here is bitter and wretched. What then would it avail us to be ranged under the government of a heavenly King, if its benefits were not realised beyond the present earthly life? We must, therefore, know that the happiness which is promised to us in Christ does not consist in external advantages — such as leading a joyful and tranquil life, abounding in wealth, being secure against all injury, and having an affluence of delights, such as the flesh is wont to long for — but properly belongs to the heavenly life. As in the world the prosper-

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20. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 20:1.

21. Calvin, *ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter 20:12.

ous and desirable condition of a people consists partly in the abundance of temporal good and domestic peace, and partly in the strong protection which gives security against external violence; so Christ also enriches his people with all things necessary to the eternal salvation of their souls, and fortifies them with courage to stand unassailable by all the attacks of spiritual foes. Whence we infer, that he reigns more for us than for himself, and that both within us and without us; that being replenished, in so far as God knows to be expedient, with the gifts of the Spirit, of which we are naturally destitute, we may feel from their first fruits, that we are truly united to God for perfect blessedness; and then trusting to the power of the same Spirit, may not doubt that we shall always be victorious against the devil, the world, and everything that can do us harm. To this effect was our Saviour's reply to the Pharisees, "The kingdom of God is within you." "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (Luke xvii. 21, 22). It is probable that on his declaring himself to be that King under whom the highest blessing of God was to be expected, they had in derision asked him to produce his insignia. But to prevent those who were already more than enough inclined to the earth from dwelling on its pomp, he bids them to enter into their consciences, for "the kingdom of God" is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17). These words briefly teach what the kingdom of Christ bestows upon us. Not being earthly or carnal, and so subject to corruption, but spiritual, it raises us even to eternal life, so that we can patiently live at present under toil, hunger, cold, contempt, disgrace, and other annoyances; contented with this, that our King will never abandon us, but will supply our necessities until our warfare is ended, and we are called to triumph: such being the nature of his kingdom, that he communicates to us whatever he received of his Father.<sup>22</sup>

My kingdom is not of this world. By these words [Christ] acknowledges that he is a king, but, so far as was necessary to prove his innocence, he clears himself of the calumny [of insurrection]; for he declares, that there is no disagreement between his kingdom and political government or order; as if he had said, "I am falsely accused, as if I had attempted to produce a disturbance, or to make a revolution in public affairs. I have preached about the kingdom of God; but that is spiritual, and, therefore, you have no right to suspect me of aspiring to kingly power." This defence was made by Christ before Pilate, but the same doctrine is useful to believers to the end of the world; for if the kingdom of

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22. Calvin, *ibid.*, Book II, Chapter XV:4.

Christ were earthly, it would be frail and changeable, because *the fashion of this world passeth away*, (1 Cor. vii.31); but now, since it is pronounced to be heavenly, that the whole world were overturned, provided that our consciences are always directed to *the kingdom* of Christ, they will, nevertheless, remain firm, not only amidst shakings and convulsions, but even amidst dreadful ruin and destruction. If we are cruelly treated by wicked men, still our salvation is secured by *the kingdom* of Christ, which is not subject to the caprice of men. In short, though there are innumerable storms by which *the world* is continually agitated, *the kingdom* of Christ, in which we ought to seek tranquility, is separated from *the world* (emphasis in original).<sup>23</sup>

Charles Hodge likewise wrote:

As to the nature of this kingdom, our Lord Himself teaches us that it is not of this world. It is not analogous to the kingdoms which exist among men. It is not a kingdom of earthly splendor, wealth, or power. It does not concern the civil or political affairs of men, except in their moral relations. Its rewards and enjoyments are not the good things of this world. It is said to consist in “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. xiv.17). Christ told his hearers, “The kingdom of God is within you.” The condition of admission into that kingdom is regeneration (John iii. 5), conversion (Matt. xviii. 3), holiness of heart and life, for the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God; nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10; Gal. v. 21; Eph. v. 5).<sup>24</sup>

### The Apparent Fate of “Antinomians” Under Theonomic Rule

The separation of Church and State has thus been a predominant tenet of the Reformed faith for five hundred years.<sup>25</sup> Gary North, on the

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23. Calvin, *Commentary on John*, Volume II, page 209.

24. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Volume III, page 857.

25. In his response to James Henley Thornwell in the October 1863 issue of the *Southern Presbyterian Review* (see Appendix Six), Thomas E. Peck demonstrated that the civil magistrate derives his authority from God as Creator, not from Christ as Mediator. Within the bi-covenantal structure of historic Reformed theology, which places the world at large under a different covenant (the Covenant of Works) than the Church (the Covenant of Grace), the magistrate must enforce the moral law, which “forever bindeth all” (Westminster



other hand, correctly noted that Reconstructionists “are the only Christians on earth calling for the building of a biblical theocracy,”<sup>26</sup> and supposedly it is they, not the mainstream “antinomian” Christian Church, who will be used of God to establish and rule His earthly Kingdom. In fact, the future does not look very bright for non-Reconstructionists:

All who are content with a humanistic law system and do not strive to replace it with Biblical law are guilty of idolatry. They have forsaken the covenant of their God, and they are asking us to serve other gods. They are thus idolaters, and are, in our generation, when our world is idolatrous and our states also, to be objects of missionary activity. They must be called out of their idolatry into the service of the living God....

“Christian” man is thus doubly a sinner when he is antinomian and despises God’s law: he has denied the law in Adam, and now, with consummate profanity, he denies it in the name of Christ. He thus doubly denies the everlasting covenant, and doubly transgresses the laws.<sup>27</sup>

Rushdoony, who insisted that “antinomianism [as defined by his monocovenantalism] can... never legitimately call itself Christian,”<sup>28</sup> apparently viewed non-Reconstructionist Christians as unconverted idolaters in need of evangelism.<sup>29</sup> Gary North also expressed this sentiment when he wrote, “[T]hose who proclaim a law-order alien to the one set forth in the Bible are thereby proclaiming the validity of the word of some other god. They have become idolaters — perhaps not conscious idolaters, but idolaters nonetheless. They are aiding and abetting the plans of men who worship another god.... To proclaim a rival law-order is to

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Confession, Chapter XIX:5), but he is under no obligation to — indeed *cannot* — establish the specific laws which God has designed to govern the Church.

26. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 53.

27. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, pages 316, 468.

28. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 709.

29. We have already seen how Rushdoony called the faith of “antinomian” and “pietistic” Amillennialists into question, accusing them of “blasphemy.” It is not difficult to understand why Reconstructionists typically respond with great animosity toward those who challenge their doctrines.

*proclaim a rival god*" (emphasis in original).<sup>30</sup> It should be remembered that idolatry is on the Reconstructionists' list of capital offenses, and even though such "antinomians" are the subjects of "missionary activity" in today's "idolatrous" (*i.e.* pluralistic) society, it was made very clear elsewhere that they would be viewed as "traitors" under a theonomic system: "[A] nation grounded in God's law-system [must] preserve that order by punishing the basic treason against it... Those who preach by... antinomian tendencies a defective view of Scripture are also traitors.... The fundamental religious presupposition of every society is either defended, or the society perishes. In a Christian social order, it is not the ecclesiastical deviations which must be the civil concern, but rather the challenges to its law-structure."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, it seems that freedom of dissent and even theological debate would also be stifled in this imagined theocracy, for "intellectual attack" (public criticism) upon the law system will be viewed as a "social evil" to be punished by the magistrate.<sup>32</sup> One need only read Deuteronomy 13:5, of which the above words were a commentary, to learn what Rushdoony had in mind for such "enemies of the State": "Idolatry is thus not only punishable by law as socially detrimental, it is in fact a capital offense. It constitutes treason to the King or Sovereign, to Almighty God."<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere, he accused these alleged "antinomians" of "bearing false witness," and wrote thusly of their punishment: "The false witness concerning Jesus Christ, to which all unbelievers, all apostate churchmen, and all nations and institutions which deny His sovereignty and His law-word, with one accord assent, that law requires their death (Deut. 19:16-21). So Christ puts evil away from His realm, both in time and in eternity."<sup>34</sup> While it may be granted that Rushdoony's extreme views at this point are not universally held among Reconstructionists, an inquisitorial spirit is nevertheless inherent in their system of which the public in general, and the Christian Church in particular, ought to be made aware.

According to Gary North, the Reconstructionist agenda involves

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30. North, *Sinai Strategy*, page 21.

31. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 39, 560.

32. Rushdoony, *ibid.*, pages 93-94.

33. Rushdoony, *ibid.*, page 66.

34. Rushdoony, *ibid.*, page 574.

installing candidates in public offices with the long-term goal of undermining the political system: “[I]f ‘we, the regenerate, covenanted people’ ever get a sufficient number of votes, we could legally amend the Constitution.... [D]emocratic persuasion is only an intermediary step to coercion” (emphasis in original).<sup>35</sup> Thus, the Reconstructionists, while decrying democracy as “heresy,” “the great love of failures and cowards,” and the “inevitable enemy of Christianity,”<sup>36</sup> are more than willing to use the democratic process to set up their system under which non-Christians, and perhaps also non-Reconstructionist Christians, will be disfranchised and “every jot and tittle” of the Mosaic code will be enforced against all dissenters:

The long-term goal of Christians in politics should be to gain exclusive control over the franchise. Those who refuse to submit publicly to the eternal sanctions of God by submitting to His Church’s public marks of the covenant — baptism and holy communion — must be denied citizenship, just as they were in ancient Israel....

“[Reconstructionists’] long-term task is to create a theocratic republic in which only voting church members are allowed to vote in civil elections....”<sup>37</sup>

So let us be blunt about it: we must use the doctrine of religious liberty to gain independence for Christian schools until we train up a generation of people who know that there is no religious neutrality, no neutral law, no neutral education, and no neutral civil government. Then they will get busy in constructing a Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God.<sup>38</sup>

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35. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 101.

36. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 100; Rousas John Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1978), pages 39, 67.

37. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 87. If mainstream Christians are viewed as idolaters, traitors, false witnesses, apostates, *etc.*, then it is likely they would not be allowed to vote, either.

38. Gary North, “The Intellectual Schizophrenia of the New Christian Right” in *Christianity and Civilization: The Failure of the American Baptist Culture*, Number I (Spring, 1982), page 25.

This strategy is not only disingenuous, it is also unrealistic. Modern Americans are far too accustomed to civil and religious liberty to allow for the establishment of a theonomic totalitarianism in which the followers of Rushdoony and North will “exercise biblical dominion under God by obeying and enforcing God’s holy law.”<sup>39</sup> Reconstructionists often write and act as if Article VI and the First Amendment were not part of the United States Constitution with their obvious disestablishment of religion and the erection of the proverbial “wall of separation” between Church and State. The few Reconstructionists who may be successful in getting elected to public office will find themselves backed up against this wall and “stoned” by public opinion if they should ever attempt to actually do in the civil realm what they postulate in their writings. Therefore, the peaceful take-over of government in this country by the election of large numbers of Reconstructionists to public office may be inspirational fuel for conservative political rallies, but it is highly unlikely that

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39. North, *Tools of Dominion*, page 53. Reconstructionists strongly object to the description of their views as “totalitarian,” “dictatorial,” “tyrannical,” etc.:

The reason why theonomists are continually accused of wanting to set up a “dictatorship by the saints” is because our critics reason in terms of premillennialism or amillennialism. They simply refuse to take seriously our defense of postmillennialism. They cannot imagine a future society in which a majority of people will voluntarily agree to be governed in every area of life in terms of the comprehensive covenants of God. They cannot imagine such a move of the Holy Spirit. So, when they read that we want to see the whole world run in terms of God’s law, they inevitably think, “international elitist tyranny” (North, *Political Polytheism*, page 157).

North is absolutely correct on this point: Reformed Amillennialists in particular refuse to accept the theonomic version of Postmillennialism because they take seriously the Bible’s declaration that the “ministration of death” was fulfilled by Christ and has thus “passed away” (see Chapter Eight). They also take seriously the Westminster Confession’s declaration that the judicial laws have “expired with the state” of the Jewish people (Chapter XIX:4). Consequently, they cannot imagine the reversal of redemptive history that the establishment of a neo-Mosaic theocracy on earth would entail (Luke 16:16; Galatians 3:19). Such would not be “a move of the Holy Spirit,” but of the flesh, and thus, by very definition, it would be totalitarian and tyrannical.

it will ever manifest in reality.<sup>40</sup>

One of the most significant differences between the administration of the Old Testament and the New Testament is that God's covenantal dealings with mankind are no longer national, but are now individual. To be sure, the Church of the redeemed is called "an holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9), but the designation is wholly spiritual, not political. It cannot be stressed enough that the seat of the Christian's reign is in "heavenly places," not on earth. In the words of John Calvin, "It is a Jewish vanity to seek and include the kingdom of Christ under the elements of this world..."<sup>41</sup> Although "Christendom" (those cultures in which professing Christians have comprised the majority of the population), has existed in a general sense, there has been no successful theocratic "covenant nation" established since the advent of the New Testament 2,000 years ago.

The notion of a modern theocracy also directly contradicts the words of Christ in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew:

And another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

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40. The decade of the 1980s, when the influence of Reconstructionism was at its peak, did not bring any significant or lasting change to the American socio-political realm, nor were large numbers of Reconstructionists elected to public office. The movement obviously failed in its stated goal to "dispossess God's enemies" as evidenced by the sharp decline of conservative Christian values in the latter years of the Twentieth Century, which continues unabated to this day. At the time of this writing, not only has abortion-on-demand remained legal throughout most of the United States, but eighteen States have now legalized same-sex "marriage." It would appear that rather than "taking dominion" over "covenant breakers," Christians are instead finding themselves increasingly marginalized in society and even persecuted for their stand for basic morality — a scenario inconsistent with the covenantal sanctions described by Gary North, but entirely consistent with Christ's words in John 15:18-20: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

41. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 20:1.

but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn....

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear (verses 24-30, 36-43).

One important thing to notice in this passage is that the righteous do not “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” until after the “harvest”; the “wheat” and the “tares” are said to grow together in the world within the context of the common grace covenant until the final day of judgment, and then, it is Christ’s angels who will “gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity,” not the Reconstructionists who have gained control of the government and have started ripping up the tares themselves with the penal sanctions of the Mosaic law. The New Testament repeatedly declares that the wicked will be consumed because they have refused to believe the Gospel, not because they have failed to submit to a localized (and terminated) covenant to which they were never subject in the first place. This day of judgment will not occur until the Gospel has been preached to all nations and the full number of the elect has been gathered into Christ’s Church (Matthew 24:31; John 11:52; Ephesians 1:10).

## Chapter Eighteen: Cultural Work and Kingdom Proclamation

### Why the Early Christians Were Persecuted by Rome

On the back cover of *Backward Christian Soldiers?*, North wrote:

Jesus said to “Occupy till I come.” But if Christians don’t control the territory, they can’t occupy it. They get tossed out into cultural “outer darkness,” which is just exactly what the secular humanists have done to Christians in the 20th century: in education, in the arts, in entertainment, in politics, and certainly in the mainline churches and seminaries. Today, the humanists are “occupying.” But they won’t be for long.... For the first time in over a century, Christians are beginning to proclaim a seemingly new doctrine, yet the original doctrine was given to man by God: dominion (Genesis 1:28). But this doctrine implies another: victory. That’s what this book is all about: *a strategy for victory*. Satan may be alive on planet earth, but he’s not well. He’s in the biggest trouble he’s been in since Calvary. If Christians adopt a vision of victory and a program of Christian Reconstruction, we will see the beginning of a new era on earth: the kingdom of God manifested in every area of life. When Christ returns, Christians will be occupying, not hiding in the shadows, not sitting in the back of humanism’s bus (emphasis in original).

The passage to which North alluded here is Luke 19:13. That this does not refer to the occupation of a conquering army, as suggested above, is clear not only from the context of the Parable of the Talents in which the verse appears, but also from the specific Greek word which is often somewhat misleadingly translated “occupy”: *πραγματεύσασθε* (*pragmateusasthe*) is a commercial term which means “to busy oneself...

to trade,”<sup>1</sup> and is that from which the English “pragmatic” is derived. Thus, Christians are to be “pragmatists,” in that they diligently work with their hands in some useful occupation or vocation (1 Thessalonians 4:11), just as Paul himself worked as a tent-maker besides his duties as an Apostle of Christ (Acts 18:3). Biblical Christianity is neither power religion nor escapism; it is spiritual and yet practical. Believers are not taken “out of the world” when they are converted; they remain “in the world” while they are not “of the world,” and are sent as emissaries “into the world” (John 17:11, 14-16, 18) to proclaim an entirely different kingdom than the world has ever known (Luke 17:20-21; John 3:3-7). In this spiritual Kingdom of Christ, believers are “kings and priests” who “reign with him” (Revelation 5:10, 20:6), and who “overcome [the evil one] by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11). In the common kingdom of of this world, however, they are “servants of all” (Mark 9:35), and “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Peter 2:11) who are often overcome in the flesh by those in positions of power (Revelation 13:7).

The world will normally tolerate religious diversity within certain parameters. For example, the Romans acknowledged the Jews’ long history as a distinguishable ethno-political religious community, which the Jews themselves zealously reinforced by their refusal to participate “in the common intercourse of mankind,” and their “sullen obstinacy” in holding to their ancient traditions.<sup>2</sup> Although it was well-known that they expected “a conquering Messiah” to soon arise to overthrow their oppressors and “invest the favorites of heaven with the empire of the earth,”<sup>3</sup> Rome nevertheless tolerated “a superstition [monotheism] which they despised,”<sup>4</sup> and accorded Judaism the protected status of *religio licitia*. The inhabitants of Judea thus lived as a “client kingdom” with their own semi-independent king, and so long as they paid their taxes and did not openly rebel, they were generally left to conduct their own affairs without harassment. In fact, both Julius and Augustus supported the Jews’ free-

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1. Strong, *Greek Dictionary*, page 60.

2. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J.B. Lippincott, 1871), Volume I, page 508.

3. Gibbon, *ibid.*, Volume II, page 4.

4. Gibbon, *ibid.*, Volume I, page 509.



dom to worship as they chose, and their synagogues were even classified as “colleges” to circumvent the laws which banned secret societies.

Consequently, the early Christians escaped notice by the Romans so long as they were viewed as a mere subset of Judaism. As historian Edward Gibbon wrote:

By the wise dispensation of Providence, a mysterious veil was cast over the infancy of the church, which, till the faith of the Christians was matured, and their numbers were multiplied, served to protect them not only from the malice but even from the knowledge of the Pagan world. The slow and gradual abolition of the Mosaic ceremonies afforded a safe and innocent disguise to the more early proselytes of the gospel. As they were, for the greater part, of the race of Abraham, they were distinguished by the peculiar mark of circumcision, offered up their devotions in the Temple of Jerusalem till its final destruction, and received both the Law and the Prophets as the genuine inspirations of the Deity. The Gentile converts, who by a spiritual adoption had been associated to the hope of Israel, were likewise confounded under the garb and appearance of Jews, and as the Polytheists paid less regard to articles of faith than to the external worship, the new sect, which carefully concealed, or faintly announced, its future greatness and ambition, was permitted to shelter itself under the general toleration which was granted to an ancient and celebrated people in the Roman empire.<sup>5</sup>

However, after their expulsion from the synagogues, the Christians lost this umbrella of protection, and being forced to meet nocturnally in private homes and other unconventional places, they were eventually classified as *superstitio* and accused of being a subversive secret society which practiced human sacrifice, incestuous orgies, and other depraved activities.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the Jews, the Christians had no common ethnic identity<sup>7</sup> and rather than withdrawing into their own ghettos, they

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5. Gibbon, *ibid.*, Volume II, pages 14-15.

6. Gibbon, *ibid.*, page 11.

7. While the earliest converts were almost exclusively of Jewish ethnicity, the overall demographic of the Church was becoming increasingly Gentile as a result of the missionary labors of Paul. By the end of the First Century, there were an estimated one million Christians, the overwhelming majority of whom

went about their worldly affairs as they had prior to conversion (1 Corinthians 7:20),<sup>8</sup> albeit with a different motivation (Ephesians 6:6), even as they believed themselves citizens of heaven (John 18:36). Given their obedience to the commands to “live peaceable with all men” (Romans 12:18), “resist not evil” (Matthew 5:39<sup>9</sup>), “be subject unto the higher

were of Greco-Roman origin (David B. Barrett, editor, *World Christian Encyclopedia* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982]).

8. In one of his earliest writings, Tertullian denied that Christians, by their profession of faith, were made useless to society: “So we sojourn with you in the world, abjuring neither forum, nor shambles, nor bath, nor booth, nor workshop, nor inn, nor weekly market, nor any other places of commerce. We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you; and in like manner we unite with you in your trafficking — even in the various arts we make public property of our works for your benefit” (*Apology*, Chapter XLII; in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume III, page 49).

9. In their immediate context, Christ’s words in Matthew 5:39-44 were instructions to His disciples on how to behave specifically toward the occupying Romans who were often harsh in their treatment of individual Jews. While not teaching pacifism, Jesus nevertheless taught a general attitude of meekness in “turning the other cheek” (verse 39), “walking the extra mile” (verse 41), *etc.* Such behavior is the outward expression of genuine love for one’s enemy (verse 44) and demonstrates that God’s spiritual Kingdom is not primarily concerned with strict legal justice. Gary North, however, offered an extremely unusual interpretation of this passage:

The ethic of the Sermon on the Mount is grounded on the principle that a godly bribe (of goods or services) is sometimes the best way for Christians to buy temporary peace and freedom for themselves and the church, assuming the enemies of God have overwhelming temporal power. Such a bribe must be given in good conscience in order to achieve a righteous end. Christian citizens or servants are not thereby granted a license to offer the rulers bribes in order to achieve unrighteous ends. Nevertheless, this one fact should be apparent: turning the other cheek is a bribe. It is a valid form of action for only so long as the Christian is impotent politically or militarily. By turning the other cheek, the Christian provides the evil coercer with more peace and less temporal danger than he deserves. By any economic definition, such an act involves a gift: it is an extra bonus to the coercing individual that is given only in respect of his power. Remove his power, and he deserves punishment: an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Remove his power, and the battered Christian should either bust him in the chops or haul him before the magistrate, and possibly both (“Biblical Bribery,” in Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 846).

powers” (Romans 13:1), offer “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks... for kings and all that are in authority” (1 Timothy 2:2), *etc.*, it should have been obvious that the Christians embodied all the qualities of the ideal citizen and were thus no threat at all to the Empire.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it was precisely because the early Christians were not viewed as a distinct community, or an ancient nation with their own established customs, but rather as a sectarian novelty, that they aroused first the surprise and then the resentment of their neighbors (1 Peter 4:4). As with all pagan nations in the ancient world, the mundane was merged with the divine in the Roman Empire to form an all-pervasive civil religion which included enthusiastic participation in or endorsement of the theater and games, and culminated in the gross impiety of enforced Caesar-worship. To be a citizen of Rome was necessarily to be a votary of the established faith, and therefore subject to its religious tribute; one’s very status in the community was inseparably linked to his participation in the public rites (Revelation 13:16-17).<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the Christians’ “two kingdom” perspective, which “render[ed] to Caesar the [earthly] things that are Caesar’s,” but reserved spiritual matters to God’s jurisdiction alone (Matthew 22:21), led to their marginalization and finally wholesale persecution. Not only did the Jews have a recognized national identity, but their magnificent Temple with its lavish ceremonies also served as visual evidence of a genuine religious devotion, and they were thus exempted from the public altar of Rome. Conversely, the pagan multitudes were unable to comprehend the worship of “a spiritual and solitary God, that was neither represented under any corporeal figure or visible symbol, nor was adored with the accustomed pomp of libations

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10. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Volume II, pages 1-2

11. Civil religion has always been encouraged by governmental authorities because it acts as an important cohesive element in mitigating individual differences among the citizenry and reducing the frequency of social disruption brought on by opposing factions. An analogy in modern America would be the celebration of seasonal or patriotic holidays, public rituals such as singing of the National Anthem or reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance, and general public enthusiasm for the professional sports. Though persecution is not likely to result from one’s abstinence from these activities, some level of social disapproval would certainly be experienced.

and festivals, of altars and sacrifices.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Christians’ disdain for the customs and generally immoral amusements of their countrymen,<sup>13</sup> and their pious refusal to offer tribute to Caesar,<sup>14</sup> or to worship in any recognizable manner, was a source of great offense to their countrymen and led to their classification as “atheists” and “haters of mankind.” Rome’s irrational fury was not therefore a reaction to any political aspirations on the part of the Church, or because Christians “wanted to order society in terms of their faith,”<sup>15</sup> but was rather the outward manifestation of the spiritual enmity which exists between the world and God’s “called out ones” (Genesis 3:15; John 15:18-20; 2 Corinthians 6:17).

### The Cultural Work of Christians is Preservative Not Redemptive

If the Church is not called to take dominion over culture, neither is it called to retreat from culture, what then is its mission? As a spiritual institution, the Church has been given no cultural mandate; her only legitimate function is to preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, oversee the flock, and practice ecclesiastical discipline (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2). However, as individuals who also live in the common kingdom, Christians are to “love their neighbor as themselves” (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31) by providing for their temporal needs (Romans 12:20), and to do everything within their sphere of influence and ability to alleviate the suffering which has been brought on creation through sin (Romans 8:22). In short, Christians are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14): *i.e.*, agents of preservation and illumination in human society within the purview of the Noahic covenant which continues “while the earth remaineth” (Genesis 8:22). It is important to understand the significance of these metaphors in their historical context. Salt was a precious com-

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12. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Volume II, pages 7-8.

13. Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume III, pages 79ff.

14. *The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp*, in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume I, pages 39ff.

15. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1986), page 7.

modity in the ancient world, so much so that even Roman soldiers' salaries were often paid in salt.<sup>16</sup> In an age that long pre-dated refrigeration, salt was widely used as a preservative for meat; too little salt would result in putrefaction, and too much salt would result in the meat becoming unpalatable. John Brown of Edinburgh explained:

“Ye are the salt of the earth.” The earth here plainly symbolizes the human inhabitants of the earth, or the earth viewed as their residence, and affected by their moral state. The use of the figure indicates that the earth needs salt. It is in a state of spiritual decomposition — moral putrescence. The world, mankind, are in a state of ignorance and error, of guilt and depravity — a state of which animal matter, tending to, undergoing, the process of dissolution, is a striking figure: offensiveness and danger to other sentient beings, and destruction of the putrifying substance itself, are the significant parts of the figure....

...[I]t seems equally beyond doubt, that Christians must mingle themselves with society, in order to serve the purpose of their being constituted the salt of the earth. It is not the will of our Lord, that we should be monks or hermits. It is his will that Christian churches should be select bodies, “a people taken out from among the Gentiles” — “a peculiar people” — “a people dwelling alone.” It is his will that his people in their most confidential friendships, should follow the law of the elective affinities of their new nature. But while all this is true, it is not only their duty to go out of the world, but in all ordinary circumstances they cannot do their duty unless they are in it. The world is surely the place for the salt of the world. Christians must mingle with society, and in mingling with society, they must, in the various ways which may seem best fitted to gain their object, apply to their fellow-men that truth by which alone they can be saved.<sup>17</sup>

The world is therefore “seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6) when Christians actively participate in the public marketplace and take a decided stand on important moral issues such as abortion and homosexuality, and yet they can also unwittingly bring harm upon the visible Church when they attempt to extend its authority beyond its proper spiritual bounds, thereby causing unnecessary offense and aggravating the already

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16. The word “salary” is derived from the Latin *salarium*, which literally means “salt-money.”

17. Brown, *Discourses and Saying of Our Lord*, pages 141, 145.

existing hostility which the world harbors towards God's people. Along these lines, Jesus cautioned His disciples to be "wise as serpents, but harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

In the same way, Christians are called by God to illuminate the world with their witness to the heart-transforming power of the Gospel (Jeremiah 31:33), not just in their words, but more importantly in their deeds: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16; cf. Titus 2:10). At the same time, they should not shine their light so brightly that it blinds others to the grace of God in Christ; sinners cannot be expected to think and act as saints, and to present a bare moralism rather than God's offer of forgiveness is to fail in their calling.<sup>18</sup> Again, the comments of John Brown are helpful:

The same truths which are taught us by Christians being termed the salt of the earth, are brought before the mind under a different figurative representation in the words that follow, "Ye are the light of the world." "The world," that is, the inhabitants of the world, are supposed to be in a state of darkness. Darkness, in Scripture, is the emblem of ignorance, of error, of sin, and of misery. Mankind are here then represented as in a state of ignorance, error, guilt, depravity, and misery; and the disciples of our Lord are held forth as the instrumental means of dispelling this darkness, of bringing men to the knowledge and faith of the truth, and, under the influence of that truth, making them truly holy and happy....

In their profession, character, and conduct, they live to the world a representation of true Christianity. Like mirrors, they reflect the glory of the Lord, as manifested in the person and work of him, who is "the image of the invisible God" — "the Father of lights"....

If this is the Christian's light, it is not difficult to perceive what is meant by his "letting his light shine before men." The injunction obviously implies, that Christians are not to retire from the active scenes of life, but are to continue to associate with their fellow-men. The salt could not serve its purpose, unless scattered over the putrifying mass. The

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18. One example which immediately comes to mind is the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, who have made Christianity odious in the eyes of many by their practice of picketing funerals with signs bearing obnoxious slogans such as "God hates fags." The late Fred Phelps, founder of the sect, was a hyper-Calvinist with theonomic views.

lamp, when lighted, must be placed amid the darkness which it is intended to dispel.<sup>19</sup>

Christians are to be sober-minded in their cultural work; they must maintain their separate identity as God's "peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9), and yet not isolate themselves from those around them, nor are they to be overbearing in their dealings with unbelievers.<sup>20</sup> The state of God's people in the semi-eschatological period between the inauguration and consummation of Christ's Kingdom is analogous to that of Abraham and the other patriarchs, who "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," and were not "mindful of that country from whence they came out... desir[ing] a better country, that is an heavenly" (Hebrews 11:13, 15-16), and yet did not shrink from intercourse with the unbelievers around them, giving military aid to the grossly immoral (Genesis 14), covenanting with heathen kings (Genesis 21:22-32), conducting commercial transactions with foreigners (Genesis 23:1-20), and even serving as advisors and in other positions of authority in pagan governments (Genesis 41; Daniel 2); or that of the Jewish exiles in Babylon, who for the duration of their sojourn in a foreign land, were told, "Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jeremiah 29:5-7). This is clearly the New Testament's picture of God's people in the present age; indeed, nowhere is the Church's condition in this world ever equated with the theocratic status of the Israelites in the promised land, which was a type of the consummated Kingdom.

This is precisely the point where biblical Amillennialism differs from all forms of transformationalism, whether theonomic or more mainstream, as well as the chiliastic views of both Premillennialism and Postmillennialism. The spiritual Kingdom of Christ and the common kingdom of the world run parallel to one another in history, but at no time

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19. Brown, *Discourses and Saying of Our Lord*, pages 149-150, 151.

20. For a helpful discussion of how Christians are to live out their dual citizenship, see VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, Part Three.

are they never joined. While in the body, Christians live in this world, but their ultimate “conversation is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). They seek to glorify God in all that they do (1 Corinthians 10:31), but at the same time, they entertain no illusions that they are “redeeming culture” in a world that will finally pass away (1 John 2:17). They use the good things of this world with thankfulness to the God who provides them (1 Timothy 4:4), but they know that everything ultimately will “perish with the using” (Colossians 2:22).

If, then, Christians have in this world “no enduring city” (Hebrews 13:14), what is the point of any cultural activity at all? Should they be “polishing the brass on a sinking ship”? As noted before, the continued operation of this world under the common grace of the Noahic covenant has one ultimate purpose: to hold off the final judgment until God has brought the last of His sheep into the fold.<sup>21</sup> In serving their fellow man, in praying for those in positions of authority, and in working to preserve the present world through their cultural activity, Christians are truly loving their brothers and sisters in Christ, untold numbers of whom are not yet born (Galatians 6:10). Love of the brethren, and not a desire to dispossess the heathen, should be ample motivation for the heart that truly loves God (1 John 4:21). Thus, while the “ship” is not sinking, it is wearing out and, having finally served its purpose, it will be scuttled when the eternal Kingdom is consummated (Isaiah 51:6; 1 Corinthians 7:31; 2 Corinthians 4:6-18):

*Though our outward man [perish]...[T]he Apostle intended to comprehend, under this term, everything that relates to the present life. As he here sets before us two men, so you must place before your view two kinds of life — the earthly and the heavenly. The outward man is the maintenance of the earthly life, which consists not merely in the flower of one’s age (1 Cor. vii. 36), and in good health, but also in riches, honours, friendships, and other resources. Hence, according as we suffer a diminution or loss of these blessings, which are requisite for keeping up the condition of the present life, is our outward man in that proportion corrupted. For as we are too much taken up with the present life, so long as everything goes on to our mind, the Lord, on that account, by taking*

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21. As stated in the Westminster Confession, the number of the elect is “so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished” (Chapter III:4).



away from us, by little and little, the things that we are engrossed with, calls us back to meditate on a better life. Thus, therefore, it is necessary, that the condition of the present life should decay, in order that the inward man may be in a flourishing state; because, in proportion as the *earthly* life declines, does the *heavenly* life advance, at least in believers. For in the reprobate, too, the *outward man* decays, but without anything to compensate for it. In the sons of God, on the other hand, a decay of this nature is the beginning, and, as it were, the cause of production....

*While we look not [at the things which are seen].* Mark what it is, that will make all the miseries of this world easy to be endured — if we carry forward our thoughts to the eternity of the heavenly kingdom. For a moment is long, if we look around us on this side and on that; but, when we have once raised our minds heavenward, a thousand years begin to appear to us to be like a moment. Farther, the Apostle's words intimate, that we are imposed upon by the view of present things, because there is nothing here that is not *temporal*; and that, consequently, there is nothing for us to rest upon but confidence in a future life. Observe the expression, *looking at the things which are unseen*, for the eye of faith penetrates beyond all our natural senses, and faith is also on that account represented as a *looking at things that are invisible* (Heb. xi.1) (emphasis in original).<sup>22</sup>

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22. Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*, pages 211-212, 214-215.



## Chapter Nineteen: The Nature of the Christian's Inheritance

### The Blessings of the Gospel Are Spiritual

Modern political orders are polytheistic imperial states, but the churches are not much better. To hold, as the churches do, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist, and all others virtually, that the law was good for Israel, but that Christians and the church are under grace and without law, or under some higher, newer law, is implicit polytheism....

*God's law is the testing of man; therefore, man cannot presume to be god and put God and his law-word on trial.* Such a step is a supreme arrogance and blasphemy; it is the opposite of obedience, because it is the essence of disobedience to the law. Hence, it is contrasted to a diligent keeping of the law. This obedience is the condition of blessing: it is the ground of conquest and of possession, in terms of which the covenant people of God, His law-people, enter into their inheritance (emphasis in original).<sup>1</sup>

Because “the covenant” and its accompanying sanctions encompasses all of reality, the Reconstructionist is necessarily hostile to the historic Lutheran and Calvinist law-gospel distinction. Instead, “diligent keeping of the law” is the condition which God's people must meet before they may enter into their inheritance: physical dominion over the earth. However, according to Paul's discourse in Ephesians 1:1-2:7, the Christian's inheritance is something entirely different. This lengthy pas-

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1. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 18, 27.

sage contains nothing less than “the gospel of [our] salvation” (1:13) and thus should be read with great care and understood. To believe any other “gospel” than what Paul described here is to believe “in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:2) and to preach any other “gospel” is to be “accursed” (Galatians 1:8-9).

In verse 3, we are told that God “hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Of special note is the word εὐλογήσας (*eulogaisas*; blessed), which is in the aorist tense and signifies past completed action. Next, we find the phrase πάση εὐλογία πνευματικῆ (*pasai eulogia pneumatikai*). The first word is a form of πᾶς (*pas*), “which radically means ‘all’.... the totality of the persons or things referred to.”<sup>2</sup> Secondly, εὐλογία indicates an overwhelming bounty<sup>3</sup> or a shower of blessing (Ezekiel 34:26; LXX). Finally, πνευματικῆ, which “always connotes the ideas of invisibility and of power,”<sup>4</sup> denotes the source and nature of the blessings: they come directly from the Holy Spirit and are intangible, yet powerful (1 Corinthians 2:9). In other words, Christians have *already* received *everything* that was promised in the Gospel — the “blessings of Abraham” (Genesis 12:2-3; Galatians 3:14) — and the locality of these bountiful blessings is “in heavenly places in Christ” (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-4). God’s blessings are therefore not future and earthly, but present and spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:42-49).

What then are these blessings of the Gospel? Paul enumerated them as follows: (1) God “hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (verse 4). Christ’s righteousness has been credited to our account and “there is now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1) because we have been made “the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, the “righteousness of the law [is] fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:4). (2) We have received “the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” (verse 5) and “he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (verse 6); God “hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:18), our faith in Christ is “reckoned to [us] for righteousness” (Romans

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2. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, page 48.

3. Vine, *ibid.*, page 145.

4. Vine, *ibid.*, page 1087.

4:9), and He is “not ashamed to call [us] brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). (3) In Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (verse 7). We were “bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20), not with “corruptible things, as silver and gold... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19), and are now “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9). (4) God has “made known unto us the mystery of his will” (verse 9): namely, that “the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6) and that God is gathering to Himself a people “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9). (5) We have “obtained an inheritance” (verse 11), which is “imperishable and undefiled” and “is reserved in heaven” (1 Peter 1:4). (6) We have been “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance” (verses 13-14). Therefore, “we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1-2). Finally, (7) God “hath quickened us together with Christ... and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5-6). This lofty position is “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:21), and since we are “his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (verse 23), God has “put all things under [our] feet” just as He has done for Christ, the Head (verse 22). This is “the hope of his calling” which Paul was so anxious for his readers to understand, and no wonder: all worldly allurements of wealth and power fade into obscurity when compared to the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God by which we have been “made partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

### The New Birth is the “First Resurrection”

Following Christ’s example (John 5:24-25, 11:25), Paul repeatedly used physical resurrection throughout his epistles as a metaphor for spiritual regeneration (Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 2:19-20; Colossians 2:12-13). Just as Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, so have we also been raised to sit with Him. Whatever inheritance Christ has received of the Father, so has the

Church, for we are “joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). Therefore, just as Christ rules over and subdues the nations by the power of His Gospel (Psalm 2:7-9; Matthew 28:18; Revelation 11:15), so does His Church through the preaching of that same Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 1:16; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Revelation 2:26-27). Christ said, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame” (Revelation 3:21). According to the Apostle John, this “overcoming” begins at the moment of conversion: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:3-5) Just as Christ has “overcome the world” (John 16:33), so have we “overcome the wicked one” (1 John 2:13). Just as Christ has gone “forth conquering, and to conquer” (Revelation 6:2), so are we “more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:37).

The spiritual resurrection and reign spoken of by Paul is also described by John in the book of Revelation: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.... This is the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:4-5). Thus, the “first resurrection” — the so-called “millennium” — is not a future earthly phenomenon, but the present, spiritual reality of those “who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). This is the faith which moved Paul to go forth with boldness and preach the Gospel “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4). This is the faith which enables the Christian to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Ephesians 6:16). This is the faith which “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions” (Hebrews 11:33). This is the faith that “overcomes the world” (1 John 5:4).

It cannot be disputed that the salvation and spiritual resurrection preached in the Gospel is the very Kingdom which God promised thousands of years ago to Abraham and His other faithful witnesses:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Following the faith of Abraham, it is to the very same “heavenly city” which Christians come by faith, not through the works of the law:

For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) but ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Hebrews 12:22-23).

This Kingdom “cannot be moved” (verse 28; cf. Daniel 7:14; Luke 22:29) because it is not “upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal,” but “in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (Matthew 6:19-20); Christ’s Kingdom “is not of this world” (John 18:36). Hence, what is commonly called “Amillennialism” — what Rushdoony denounced as “impotent religion” and “blasphemy,” and what North ridiculed as “the theology of ‘pie in the sky by and by’”<sup>5</sup> — is the very Gospel itself, “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

### The Expectation of an Earthly Kingdom is Unbelief

Misunderstanding the spiritual nature of the promises God gave to Abraham, the unbelieving Jews sought to obtain their inheritance by

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5. North, *Political Polytheism*, page 131.

a carnal observance of the law of Moses (Romans 9:32). They could not tolerate a Messiah who refused to set up an earthly kingdom and dispossess the Gentiles (John 6:15), and who told them that their legalistic religion was in fact unbelief which shut them out of God's true Kingdom (Matthew 8:11-12). Because of their false eschatology, they not only called Christ a "blasphemer" (Matthew 9:3, 26:65) and His disciples "antinomians" (Acts 6:11), but they also aligned themselves with "the princes of the world" who "crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8) and later persecuted the Church (1 Thessalonians 2:15). For this final apostasy, the Jews' "house was left unto [them] desolate" (Matthew 23:38). Thus, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Romans 11:7). Clearly, the doctrine of an earthly kingdom was the driving force behind the persecuting antichrist of the New Testament (apostate Judaism) as well as the bloody antichrist of the later "dark ages" (the Roman papacy).<sup>6</sup>

Even after Christ's resurrection, His disciples still clung to the Jewish hope of an earthly kingdom: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Only after the Holy Spirit had been given on the Day of Pentecost was this expectation relinquished. The Judaizers which troubled the early Church were also driven by this false notion, and a large part of the Apostle Paul's epistles was devoted to denouncing the accompanying error of law observance. All heretics, cultic systems, and false eschatologies which have since arisen "to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30) have built, to one extent or another, upon the same foundation, and all are condemned by God and doomed to destruction. Reconstructionism will prove to be no exception.

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6. Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV:6 (original wording). It was customary in the days of the First and Second Reformations, to apply the designation of the biblical antichrist to the Pope of Rome. This was certainly true in those days in light of the fact that it was the papacy, in collusion with the civil powers, that was "wearing out the saints" (Daniel 7:25). However, it should be noted that Scripture predicts "many antichrists" (1 John 2:18); "antichrist" literally means "in the place of Christ": *i.e.* an individual or religious system that substitutes false worship or a false plan of salvation in the place of true worship and justification by grace alone through faith alone.



## **Chapter Twenty:** **Reconstructionism's Gospel of World Dominion**

Is the Gospel a Renewal of the Adamic Covenant?

The Reconstructionists' errors concerning the universal application of the Mosaic system and its accompanying sanctions leads them into even more serious errors regarding the nature of the Gospel itself:

The covenant circumscribes all men without exception. The original covenant was with Adam; the renewed covenant was with Noah. All men are either covenant keepers or covenant breakers; all men are thus inescapably tied to the covenant and its promises of love and hate, blessings and curses. Christ, in renewing the covenant, made it clear that all men are involved in it.... By becoming the sacrifice, the priest, and the divine renewer of the covenant of God with man, Jesus would draw all men to Him, *i.e.*, become the principle of judgment and of salvation, of curses and of blessings.<sup>1</sup>

Rushdoony's unbiblical monocovenantalism is plainly seen here: the "original covenant" with Adam has undergone a series of renewals — from Noah, to Abraham, to Moses — until it is finally renewed and forever established by Jesus Christ, thus binding all men to the demands of the law. To meet these demands is to be a "covenant keeper" and thus be loved and blessed; to fail to meet these demands is to be a "covenant breaker" and thus be hated and cursed. Gary North likewise declared that "the covenant that God made with Israel has now been extended by God

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1. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 655-656.

to the whole world”; the “gospel” therefore consists of “a sovereign God, a hierarchical system of governments, biblical laws, God’s sanctions in history and eternity, and God’s system of inheritance and disinheritance.”<sup>2</sup> Rather than preaching the good news that the law’s demand for a perfect and personal righteousness has been fulfilled in Christ, thereby making salvation a free gift through faith alone, the permanent subjection of all men to the “ministration of death” is now the message which the Church has supposedly been commissioned to carry to the nations: “Evangelism means teaching people to obey God’s law, through the empowering of God’s Holy Spirit. Evangelism means *obedience*” (emphasis

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2. Gary North, *When Justice is Aborted* (Fort Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1989), pages 11-12. What North referred to here is the so-called “five point covenant model” which first appeared in Ray Sutton’s book, *That You May Prosper*: “THEOS... stands for Transcendence, Hierarchy, Ethics, Oath, and Succession” (page xv). In the publisher’s synopsis on the back cover, North wrote, “[I]n the history of Christianity there has never been a theologian who has explained to anyone’s satisfaction just what the Biblical covenant is.... Until Ray Sutton cracked the code of the Bible’s covenant structure in late 1985, no one had gone into print with a clear, Biblically verifiable model of the covenant — or if anyone did, no trace of his work has survived. Covenant theologians have never adopted it.” He went on to state that this model “is the Bible’s most important doctrine relating to the communion of God and man. If we do not understand what the covenant is and how it works, we are certain to be crippled in our walk with Christ.... It is in fact the key that unlocks the Scriptures” (back cover, page xvi). Elsewhere, he even suggested that the historic creeds of the Church are wrong and in need of revision because of their omission of this model (*Political Polytheism*, page 57). Not only should such outrageous claims immediately raise the proverbial “red flag” of suspicion, but they also necessarily imply that the Christian Church did not have the complete Gospel (or the tool to properly understand the Bible) until it was “restored” in the latter part of the Twentieth Century by a Reconstructionist publishing company in Tyler, Texas. North’s predicted that, with this “key” in its possession, “the Christian world will never be the same,” and he elsewhere insisted that anyone who did not accept it was “inherently antinomian” (*Political Polytheism*, pages 27-28, 127). Of course, North’s lofty claims were not well-received by the more moderate Theonomists like Greg Bahnsen, who completely rejected Sutton’s covenantal model as “the artificial imposition of an imagined, blanket outline (with imprecise, pre-established categories) on Biblical materials” (*No Other Standard*, page 21 [footnote]).

in original).<sup>3</sup> According to North, the failure of American Christians in particular to accept this fact is the real reason behind “the failure of worldwide Christian evangelism today.”<sup>4</sup> Until believers abandon their “political polytheism,”<sup>5</sup> the Church will not be victorious in the battle with humanism for world-dominion.<sup>6</sup> North continued:

To teach that the progress of the gospel in history is not progres-

3. North, “Publisher’s Foreword,” in Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), pages ix-x. This is not to deny that obedience to God’s moral law is part of the Church’s message; the giving of a new heart to obey is one of the “I will” promises of God in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33). It will be remembered that Reformed theology distinguishes between obedience to the law as a covenant (legal obedience) and obedience to the law as a rule of life (evangelical obedience). In determining which form of the law is in view, one need only ask, “Are there sanctions”? If so, legal obedience is being inculcated, which is the very opposite of the Gospel message of free grace. To say that the Spirit empowers this obedience does not lessen the error, for that is precisely the doctrine of Rome. See Bolton, *True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, pages 140-144; Arthur W. Pink, *Practical Christianity* (Lafayette, Indiana: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), pages 159ff.

4. North, *Political Polytheism*, page xiv.

5. This term was coined by Greg Bahnsen in his essay, “The Theonomic Position,” in Gary Scott Smith (editor), *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1989), page 30.

6. The Reconstructionists, and North in particular, often portray the “antithesis” in terms of a cosmic war between “light and darkness,” “Christianity and anti-Christianity,” “covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers,” “the Church and humanism,” *etc.* This is done, no doubt, for its psychological effect on their readers. After all, who would not want to be on the “winning side” of this great human struggle? However, they seem to ignore the biblical fact that “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). Contrary to North, God does not “wait” on the Church, nor has He ever “suffered embarrassment” as a result of the failure of His people to “control the media, the educational systems (especially higher education), civil government, and the economies of this world” (*Political Polytheism*, pages xiv-xv).

sive, *i.e.*, that the gospel does not lead to worldwide dominion by covenant-keepers, is to teach that *ethical cause and effect in history is per verse*, testifying not to a God who keeps His promises in history but rather a god who breaks them.... God gives His people blessings in history when they obey Him. This is a testimony to His reliability as the God of the covenant [Deut. 8:18]....

This confidence in God's covenant should be the basis of Christians' confidence about the earthly future. God will progressively extend His visible kingdom on earth in response to the covenantal faithfulness of His people. The end result will be the creation of an international theocratic kingdom in which all nations and peoples will be formally covenanted to God.... It is time to adopt a vision of victory regarding the kingdom of God in history. To do less is to betray the God of the covenant. As His sole, lawful, delegated agents in history, Christians must make visible in history the kingdom of God which exists already in eternity and exists judicially. The ascension of Jesus to the right hand of God was the definitive historical manifestation of Christ's kingdom reign; it is our task to make His reign manifest in history. This is the requirement of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). This spiritual *and cultural* commission must not be evaded or defined out of existence by His people (emphasis in original).<sup>7</sup>

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7. North, *ibid.*, pages 143, 619, 620. North's establishmentarian doctrine here should not be confused with the older Puritan establishmentarianism. Many British Covenant theologians in the Seventeenth Century taught that Jesus Christ's "mediatorial kingdom" extends over both the Church and the State, thereby requiring civil magistrates to formally submit to His rule in their drafting of constitutions and making of laws. Coincident with this teaching was the expectation that a future "golden age" would result from "national covenanting" on a global scale. This doctrine was a staple of Scottish Presbyterian Covenanter theology, and as such, was held by many of the divines who attended the Westminster Assembly. Perhaps its most articulate defense is found in William Symington's nineteenth-century work entitled, *Messiah the Prince: The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1881). The New England Puritans, being immigrants from Great Britain, self-consciously relied on these establishmentarian ideas in their efforts to implement a "City on a Hill" theocracy in the New World. They also frequently appealed to the Old Testament in the formulation of their civil governments, although they never taught that the Mosaic judicial laws were meant to be "tools of dominion" (a fact which North himself has admitted). Establishment-

Elsewhere, North insisted that “the dominion assignment of Genesis 1:26-28” is the same as “the Great Commission to the church (Matthew 28:18-20).”<sup>8</sup> Of course, he was not alone in teaching this error. According to George Grant:

Christians have an obligation, a mandate, a commission, a holy responsibility to reclaim the land for Jesus Christ — to have dominion in the civil structures, just as in every other aspect of life and godliness.

But it is dominion that we are after. Not just a voice.

It is dominion we are after. Not just influence.

It is dominion we are after. Not just equal time.

It is dominion we are after.

World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish. We must win the world with the power of the Gospel. And we must never settle for anything less.

If Jesus Christ is indeed Lord, as the Bible says, and if our commission is to bring the land into subjection to His Lordship, as the Bible says, then all our activities, all our witnessing, all our preaching, all our craftsmanship, all our stewardship, and all our political action will aim at nothing short of that sacred purpose.

Thus, Christian politics has as its primary intent the conquest of the land — of men, families, institutions, bureaucracies, courts, and governments for the Kingdom of Christ. It is to reinstitute the authority of God's Word as supreme over all judgments, over all legislation, over all

arianism remains a principal doctrine of those Reformed denominations today which have descended from the Covenanters, most notably the Free Church of Scotland and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, resulting in some crossover into Reconstructionism, especially with members of the RPCNA (*e.g.* the late Raymond Joseph, who was an RPCNA minister in Southfield, Michigan and a staunch defender of Theonomy, and Brian Schwertley, the aforementioned Theonomist who was at one time also ordained in the RPCNA). The Continental Reformed theologians, on the other hand, generally made a clearer distinction between the ecclesiastical and civil realms, and therefore confined Christ's mediatorial kingdom to the Church only (*e.g.* Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter XX:1), leaving the common institutions of the world subject to God as Creator, not Redeemer. Reconstructionists, such as North, have their own peculiar version of establishmentarianism, but its roots are in Dutch neo-Calvinism rather than British Presbyterianism.

8. North, *Is the World Running Down?*, page xxi.

declarations, constitutions, and confederations. True Christian political action seeks to rein the passions of men and curb the pattern of digression under God's rule.<sup>9</sup>

Rushdoony likewise wrote:

The redeemed are recalled to the original purpose of man, to exercise dominion under God, to be covenant-keepers, and to fulfill "the righteousness of the law" (Rom. 8:4). The law remains central to God's purpose. Man has been re-established into God's original purpose and calling....

As the new chosen people of God, the Christians are commanded to do that which Adam in Eden, and Israel in Canaan, failed to do. One and the same covenant, under differing administrations, still prevails. Man is summoned to create the society God requires....

God's covenant with Adam required him to exercise dominion over the earth and to subdue it (Gen. 1:26ff) under God according to God's law-word.... The restoration of that covenant relationship was the work of Christ, His grace to His elect people. The fulfillment of that covenant is their great commission: to subdue all things and all nations to Christ and His law-word....

By His birth of God, and of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ is head of the new race, as the new Adam, to provide earth with a new seed to supplant the old Adamic race.... As the second and last Adam, Christ undoes the work of the first Adam and begins the dispossession of the fallen race from the world and the re-establishment of the earth as the Kingdom of God under His new race....

The goal is the developed Kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem, a world order under God's law....

The blessed meek are those who submit to God's dominion, have therefore dominion over themselves, and are capable of exercising dominion over the earth. They therefore inherit the earth.

This point is of very great importance. Apart from it, the gospel is perverted. Man has a God-given urge to dominion, to power. The purpose of regeneration is to re-establish man in his creation mandate, to exercise dominion and to subdue the earth. The purpose of the law is to give man the God-appointed way to dominion. The purpose of the call to obedience is to exercise dominion....<sup>10</sup>

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9. Grant, *Changing of the Guard*, pages 50-51.

10. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 3-4, 14, 210, 357, 450.

### The “Royal Race of the Redeemed”

According to Rushdoony, to deny this “creation mandate” is to “deny Christ and to surrender the world to the devil.”<sup>11</sup> While insisting that the Reconstructionists “recognize in all things the primacy of regeneration,”<sup>12</sup> he redefined the term to mean the restoration of men “into the image of God and the calling [to keep the covenant] implicit in that image.”<sup>13</sup> The Bible, however, teaches that the purpose of salvation is to confer on the elect full justification (Romans 5:18) and restoration of fellowship with God (2 Corinthians 5:18), not as a Judge who dispenses covenantal sanctions “according to their works” (Revelation 20:13), but as their adoptive Father (Romans 8:15) who has “blessed [them] with all spiritual blessings” and “hath made [them] accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:3, 6). To the contrary, Rushdoony taught that God’s purpose in sending Christ was to create an army of covenant-keepers — the “royal race of the redeemed”<sup>14</sup> — which would “make five-fold restitution” to the earth for Adam’s rebellion by working to return it to its Edenic state:

Where God’s law is broken, man’s required penalty and restitution are made by Jesus Christ, our federal head. The violation of God’s law, however, involves God primarily, and, secondarily, men and earth.

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11. Rushdoony, *ibid.*, page 725.

12. Rousas John Rushdoony, “Jesus and the Tax Revolt,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* (Winter 1975-1976), Volume II:2, page 140.

13. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 449. The inescapable implication of this doctrine is that non-Christians, or “covenant breakers,” do not possess the image of God, which contradicts Genesis 9:6 and many other passages of Scripture. The historic Christian doctrine is that the image of God in man has been marred, not eradicated, by the Fall. Thus, the so-called “creation mandate” of Genesis 1:26-28 is a command for mankind in general to exercise dominion over the earth and not a call for Christians to “dispossess” unbelievers.

14. This phrase was coined in the 1990s by former Chalcedon Foundation associate Andrew Sandlin in his essay of the same title. Though Chalcedon apparently has removed the essay from their website, they continue to use the phrase in their doctrinal statement posted at [www.chalcedon.edu/about/credo](http://www.chalcedon.edu/about/credo). The original concept of the “new race” was presented by Rushdoony: “...Jesus Christ is head of the new race, as the new Adam, to provide earth with a new seed to supplant the old Adamic race” (*Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 210).

Hence, there must be restitution; the sabbath year has as its purpose in part the restoration of the earth. Man must yield to the earth its due, for having taken from the earth.<sup>15</sup>

With redemption, the effects of sin are steadily overcome as man works to restore the earth and to establish his dominion under God. Man, life, and the earth have been injured and killed by the effects of sin. To undo the fall, to protect and prosper life under God, means that, under the sixth commandment, man has a mandate to restore the earth by work and to inhibit and limit the injuring and killing effect of sin.... The goal of restitution is the restored Kingdom of God....

Work thus has as its goal the restored Kingdom of God; work therefore is a religious and moral necessity.<sup>16</sup>

Rushdoony insisted that, while forgiveness for individual sins has been provided in Christ's death on the cross, it is nevertheless a "serious and major error" to teach that the guilt of original sin can ever be removed apart from the ongoing redemptive work of God's chosen people: "Sin as this principle of independence and autonomy *cannot* be forgiven... [I]t must be eradicated" (emphasis in original).<sup>17</sup> It is therefore left to the Christian Church to "civilly atone"<sup>18</sup> for Adam's rebellion by removing all traces of sin from the world through the dispossession of un-

15. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1983), page 292.

16. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 308-309. This teaching may have been derived from Cornelius Van Til, who wrote, "If nature groans in pain and travail because of man's abuse of it, this very fact — that is, the very curse of God on nature — should be instrumental anew in making men accuse or excuse themselves. Nature as it were yearns to be released from her imprisonment in order once more to be united to her Lord in fruitful union. When nature is abused by man she cries out to her creator for vengeance and through it for redemption" (Cornelius Van Til, *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture* [Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1967], page 9). Van Til, however, was an Amillennialist who saw this redemption of the earth occurring at the second coming of Christ, whereas Rushdoony, the Postmillennialist, moved it into history.

17. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 458.

18. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, page 263; Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 461.



believers and the establishment of an earthly theocracy. As this mission was rejected by national Israel, so it is now also being rejected by all “antinomian” Christians today who are, in effect, deniers of the cross of Christ.<sup>19</sup> In fact, according to Rushdoony, salvation itself is incomplete apart from the work of “restitution”:

True confession is restitution. Forgiveness is a juridical term in the Bible and means that charges are dropped because satisfaction has been rendered. Forgiveness thus means “satisfaction” or restitution. Confession is worthless, and forgiveness invalid, where restitution has not been made....

Salvation is inseparable from restitution, because God's redemption of man and of the world is its restoration to its original position under Him and to His glory. Man's work of restitution for the sin of Adam, for his own original sin as it has worked to mar the earth, is to recognize that, as a new creation in Christ, he must make the earth a new creation under Christ. The work of Christ in man is this work of restitution.<sup>20</sup>

Not only must the world be restored to its original glory, but, by virtue of the requirements of restitution, it must, to a double, fourfold, and fivefold degree, be developed to the glory of God and His service as man's required restitution. Man must restore to God His due, total lordship over all things, and this restoration, begun by Christ's regenerating act, continued by the Holy Spirit, and made the very life of the redeemed man to further, shall begin to come into its own only when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9).<sup>21</sup>

This program of “undoing the fall,” or making restitution for the sin of Adam is ultimately what the Reconstructionist has in mind when he speaks of “sanctification.” The reader will recall Greg Bahnsen's claim that saving faith and obedience, or “works of the law,” are one and the same thing. This is also what Rushdoony meant when he wrote, “Man's *justification* is by the *grace* of God in Jesus Christ; man's *sanctification* is by means of the *law* of God.... Sanctification depends on our law-keeping in mind, word, and deed. The perfection of the incarnate Word was

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19. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, page 207.

20. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, page 459, 463.

21. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, pages 33-34.

manifested in His law-keeping; can the people of His kingdom pursue their calling to be perfect in any way other than by His law-word?" (emphasis in original)<sup>22</sup> Only when individual Christians have become "covenant-keepers" and the corporate Church has completed its restitution work will Christ return to bring history to a close. This "sanctification" process may take "tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years."<sup>23</sup>

If the historic Reformed faith has been correct in identifying the Edenic covenant as one of works, requiring a personal and perfect righteousness for eternal life,<sup>24</sup> then the Reconstructionist's belief that this covenant has been renewed for the Church to fulfill is a bizarre form of legalism (Galatians 3:2-3). While the Covenant of Works does continue in full force, all those who remain under its jurisdiction "are under [God's] wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever"<sup>25</sup> (1 Corinthians 15:22; cf. John 3:18). However, the "second Adam" came to accomplish what the first man failed to do, and those who have been united to Him through faith alone are accounted as having themselves perfectly kept the law and therefore receive all the blessings promised (Galatians 2:20); they are no longer subject to the Covenant of Works or to its curse (Romans 6:14; Galatians 3:13). Therefore, to equate the Adamic covenant with the Gospel is to mix law and grace, and to effectively destroy the latter by implying that Christ's work was in itself somehow deficient and thus requires the supplementary works of man before divine justice will be fully satisfied. Taking all this into account, it is clear that Reconstructionism, with its carnal "tools of dominion," is "another gospel" which can only condemn those who knowingly embrace its tenets (Galatians 1:6-9).

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22. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, pages 4, 307.

23. Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, pages 221-222.

24. Westminster Confession, Chapter VII:2.

25. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 19.

## Conclusion

One of the most important aspects of the traditional Calvinist teaching on the covenant is the use of the law-gospel distinction. The antithesis between law and gospel denotes two opposing principles of inheritance, appropriate to the Pauline teaching on the two Adams in Romans 5. The forensic contrast between the order of law (creation) and the order of grace (redemption) is one of opposition. Regrettably, much of recent Reformed theology has openly denied the importance of the law-gospel distinction, substituting in its place the Barthian notion of “law in grace.” The neoorthodox school of interpretation maintains only one order or covenant, the covenant of grace, comprehending both creation and redemption. Otherwise, contend these neo-orthodox critics, the speculative and dualistic notion of law and grace (comparable to the scholastic nature-grace dichotomy) results in a faulty conception of God as Creator and as Redeemer. Others in the Reformed tradition have been less open in their rejection of the law-gospel contrast, but nevertheless are sympathetic to Barth’s viewpoint. Repudiation of the law-gospel antithesis, however, immediately registers itself in other critical and related areas of Reformed exposition, particularly that of justification by faith and the atonement of Christ. The result is a *radical* reinterpretation of Reformation theology.

The central issue in this present debate in Reformed theology, both within and without confessional orthodoxy, as it turns out, is the interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant (emphasis in original).<sup>1</sup>

The above author was absolutely correct in suggesting that one’s interpretation of the Mosaic covenant will have a profound effect upon

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1. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, pages 17-18.

his understanding of the Gospel message, and will either support or undermine the biblical doctrine of justification. While there has been debate within the Reformed tradition regarding the precise definition of the legal element within the Mosaic covenant — whether it constituted the actual covenant or merely existed within the covenant — all orthodox Covenant theologians have agreed that the Sinaitic economy was never intended to be normative throughout history and that it has been abolished. As we have seen, this legal element primarily had reference to possession of the land of Canaan and to temporal blessings and cursings, but, according to the New Testament writers, it was merely typological in nature and found its spiritual fulfillment in Christ and the eternal blessings which He merited in behalf of and bestowed upon His people, the Church. Second Temple Judaism (Pharisaism) confounded the typical and atypical dimensions of the covenant, and, failing to see its true pedagogical function, they changed it from a system of geo-political works-righteousness into a system of spiritual works-righteousness in which salvation itself could be attained through the works of the law. Of course, they had to jettison the idea that the law in this spiritual context required perfect and personal obedience, and substitute in its place an imperfect yet sincere obedience. The Judaizers with whom the Apostle Paul later contended, though accepting Jesus as the promised Messiah, likewise had this mistaken view of the law, and thereby insisted that Gentiles must be circumcised and submit to the law in order to be fully accepted by God.

Modern-day Theonomy commits the same fundamental error when it teaches that the Mosaic covenant was only an administration of the Covenant of Grace, and thereby transfers the typological elements of the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Because of the monocovenantal presuppositions of theonomic writers, any suggestion of a substantial difference between the Old and New Covenants, or the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants, is viewed as evidence of “the influence of Dispensationalism.” This unwillingness to assign to the Mosaic covenant any distinctive legal feature is usually rooted in a denial of the Edenic Covenant of Works, and invariably results in a subtle recasting of the Covenant of Grace as a system of covenantal nomism in which the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is rejected either implicitly or explicitly, faith is redefined as “covenantal faithfulness,” sanctification is transformed into a form of progressive justification, and law-keeping becomes the condition for entrance into God’s Kingdom as it is manifested on

earth through the redemptive dominion work of the Christian Church.

In the final analysis, it is apparent that theonomic Reconstructionism is a serious departure from the Reformed faith. It is an aberrational theology at best, and may even cross over the line into damnable heresy when some of its premises are carried out to their logical conclusion. It seeks to impose a law-order upon the world which the Christian Church has historically believed was abrogated by the New Testament, and more importantly, never had direct application to any people other than national Israel. It attempts to place the Christian back under a “bastard covenant of works”<sup>2</sup> by making law-keeping necessary for receiving God’s covenantal blessings. It downplays the centrality of the cross in Christian theology by redefining the Gospel in terms of the resurrection of Christ rather than His substitutionary atonement and the forgiveness of sins. Consequently, it tends to disparage the heavenly hope of the Church by shifting the Christian’s focus from his present spiritual reign with Christ to a mythical earthly dominion in the future. Finally, it engenders contempt in its followers for other Christians who do not accept its teachings and a pharisaical rigidity toward those within its ranks who fail to live up to its own contrived standards.

It should be noted that the preceding critique has been aimed solely at the Reconstructionist leaders and was not meant to imply that the followers of this movement are not genuine Christians, or that they are consciously pursuing an unbiblical agenda. These deceived souls really believe that they are “applying God’s Word to every area of life” and, because of the ingenuity of the system and its roots in Van Tilian fideism,<sup>3</sup> it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to entertain any doubts as to its validity. As with any cultic mindset, only the illumination of the Holy Spirit is able to cut through the intricate network

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2. Thomas Boston, *Sermons and Discourses on Several Important Subjects in Divinity* (Aberdeen, Scotland: George and Robert King, 1849), page 88.

3. Van Til taught his followers to distrust and even reject reason: “Reason has no right to judge in matters of theology, or for that matter, anything else” (*Introduction to Systematic Theology*, page 29). Because the Van Tilian may “embrace with passion the apparent contradictory” (*Common Grace and the Gospel*, page 9), the fact that logic, Scripture, and Church history completely contradict the Reconstructionist’s belief system will only encourage him to cling to it all the more passionately.

of falsehood to reach the heart.

Let us conclude this study with the following lengthy, though necessary, warning from Martin Luther regarding the source and dangers of legalistic perversions of the Gospel, taken from his commentary on the epistle to the Galatians:

*Unto another gospel.* Note the resourcefulness of the devil. Heretics do not advertise their errors. Murderers, adulterers, thieves disguise themselves. So the devil masquerades all his devices and activities. He puts on white to make himself look like an angel of light. He is astoundingly clever to sell his patent poison for the Gospel of Christ. Knowing Satan's guile, Paul sardonically calls the doctrine of the false apostles "another gospel," as if he would say, "You Galatians have now another gospel, while my Gospel is no longer esteemed by you."

We infer from this that the false apostles had depreciated the Gospel of Paul among the Galatians on the plea that it was incomplete. Their objection to Paul's Gospel is identical to that recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Acts to the effect that it was not enough for the Galatians to believe in Christ, or to be baptized, but that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses, for "except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." As though Christ were a workman who had begun a building and left it for Moses to finish.

Today the Anabaptists and others, finding it difficult to condemn us, accuse us... of timidity in professing the whole truth. They grant that we have laid the foundation in Christ, but claim that we have failed to go through with the building. In this way these perverse fanatics parade their cursed doctrine as the Word of God, and, flying the flag of God's name, they deceive many. The devil knows better than to appear ugly and black. He prefers to carry on his nefarious activities in the name of God....

When the devil sees that he cannot hurt the cause of the Gospel by destructive methods, he does it under the guise of correcting and advancing the cause of the Gospel. He would like best of all to persecute us with fire and sword, but this method has availed him little because through the blood of martyrs the church has been watered. Unable to prevail by force, he engages wicked and ungodly teachers who at first make common cause with us, then claim that they are particularly called to teach the hidden mysteries of the Scriptures to superimpose upon the first principles of Christian doctrine that we teach. This sort of thing brings the Gospel into trouble....

*Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you....* Paul calls the false apostles troublers of the church because they taught circumcision and the keeping of the Law as needful unto salvation. They insisted that the Law must be observed in every detail. They were supported in this contention by the Jews, with the result that those who were not firmly established in faith were easily persuaded that Paul was not a sincere teacher of God because he ignored the Law. The Jews were offended at the idea that the Law of God should be entirely ignored by Paul and that the Gentiles, former idol-worshippers, should gratuitously attain to the station of God's people without circumcision, without the penitentiary performance of the law, by grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus.

These criticisms were amplified by the false apostles. They accused Paul of designs to abolish the law of God and the Jewish dispensation, contrary to the law of God, contrary to their Jewish heritage, contrary to apostolic example, contrary to Paul's own example. They demanded that Paul be shunned as a blasphemer and a rebel, while they were to be heard as true teachers of the Gospel and authentic disciples of the apostles. Thus Paul stood defamed among the Galatians....

*And would pervert the gospel of Christ.* To paraphrase this sentence: "These false apostles do not merely trouble you, they abolish Christ's Gospel. They act as if they were the only true Gospel-preachers. For all that they muddle Law and Gospel. As a result they pervert the Gospel. Either Christ must live and the Law perish, or the Law remains and Christ must perish; Christ and the Law cannot dwell side by side in the conscience. It is either grace or law. To muddle the two is to eliminate the Gospel of Christ entirely."

It seems a small matter to mingle the Law and Gospel, faith and works, but it creates more mischief than man's brain can conceive. To mix Law and Gospel not only clouds the knowledge of grace, it cuts out Christ altogether.<sup>4</sup>

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4. Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1949), pages 27-29.





# **APPENDICES**



# **Appendix One:**

## **Historical Testimony Against Theonomy and Reconstructionism**

### **On Human Reason and Natural Law**

To charge the intellect with perpetual blindness so as to leave it no intelligence of any description whatever, is repugnant not only to the Word of God, but to common experience....

Since man is by nature a social animal, he is disposed, from natural instinct, to cherish and preserve society; and accordingly we see that the minds of all men have impressions of civil order and honesty. Hence it is that every individual understands how human societies must be regulated by laws, and also is able to comprehend the principles of those laws. Hence the universal agreement in regard to such subjects, both among nations and individuals, the seeds of them being implanted in the breasts of all without a teacher or lawgiver....

If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or contemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver. How, then, can we deny that truth must have beamed on those ancient lawgivers who arranged civil order and discipline with so much equity? Shall we say that the philosophers, in their exquisite researches and skilful description of nature, were blind? Shall we deny the possession of intellect to those who drew up rules for discourse, and taught us to speak in accordance with reason? Shall we say that those who, by the cultivation of the medical art, expended their industry in our behalf, were only raving? What shall we say of the mathematical sciences? Shall we deem them to be the dreams of madmen? Nay, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without the highest admiration; an

admiration which their excellence will not allow us to withhold.<sup>1</sup>

“When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meantime accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom. ii. 14-15). If the Gentiles have the righteousness of the law naturally engraven on their minds, we certainly cannot say that they are altogether blind as to the rule of life. Nothing, indeed, is more common, than for man to be sufficiently instructed in a right course of conduct by natural law....<sup>2</sup>

...[T]here are some who deny that any commonwealth is rightly framed which neglects the law of Moses, and is ruled by the common law of nations. How perilous and seditious these views are, let others see: for me it is enough to demonstrate that they are stupid and false....

...[E]ach nation has been left at liberty to enact the laws which it judges to be beneficial, still these are always to be tested by the rule of charity, so that while they vary in form, they must proceed on the same principle....<sup>3</sup>

As domestic society is by nature’s instinct, so is civil society natural *in radice*, in the root, and voluntary *in modo*, in the manner of coalescing. Politic power of government agreeth not to man, singly as one man, except in that root of reasonable nature; but supposing that men be combined in societies, or that one family cannot contain a society, it is natural that they join in a civil society, though the manner of union in a politic body... be voluntary, Gen. x.10, xv.7; and Suarez saith, That a power of making laws is given by God as a property flowing from nature... not by any special action or grant, different from creation, nor will he have it to result from nature, while men be united into one politic body: which union being made, that power followeth without any new action of the will.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 2:12, 13, 15.

2. Calvin, *ibid.*, Book II, Chapter 2:22.

3. Calvin, *ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter 20:14, 15.

4. Rutherford, *Lex Rex*, pages 1-2.

## On the Law as a Republication of the Covenant of Works

The hope of eternal life is, therefore, given to all who keep the Law; for those who expound the passage as referring to this earthly and transitory life are mistaken. The cause of this error was, because they feared that thus the righteousness of faith might be subverted, and salvation grounded on the merit of works. But Scripture does not therefore deny that men are justified by works, because the Law itself is imperfect, or does not give instructions for perfect righteousness; but because the promise is made of none effect by our corruption and sin. Paul, therefore, as I have just said, when he teaches that righteousness is to be sought for in the grace of Christ by faith (Romans 10:4), proves his statement by this argument, that none is justified who has not fulfilled what the Law commands. Elsewhere also he reasons by contrast, where he contends that the Law does not accord with faith as regards the cause of justification, because the Law requires works for the attainment of salvation, whilst faith directs us to Christ, that we may be delivered from the curse of the Law. Foolishly, then, do some reject as an absurdity the statement, that if a man fulfills the Law he attains to righteousness; for the defect does not arise from the doctrine of the Law, but from the infirmity of men, as is plain from another testimony given by Paul (Romans 8:3). We must observe, however, that salvation is not to be expected from the Law unless its precepts be in every respect complied with; for life is not promised to one who shall have done this thing, or that thing, but, by the plural word, full obedience is required of us.<sup>5</sup>

...[T]hough a man were to excel all the angels in holiness, no reward is due to works, but on the footing of a Divine promise. Perfect obedience to the law is righteousness, and has a promise of eternal life annexed to it; but it derives this character from God, who declares that “they who have fulfilled them shall live” (Lev. xviii. 5).<sup>6</sup>

Since man fell from obedience to God, which he was enabled and engaged to perform by the comforts of his first happy state in paradise, God might have justly refused ever to give man again any comforts beforehand, to encourage him to his duty; that the way to holiness being hedged up against him with the thorns and briars of fear, grief, and de-

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5. Calvin, *Commentary on the Four Last Books of Moses*, Volume III, pages 204-205.

6. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, pages 67-68.

spair, he might never be able to escape the sentence of death which was denounced against his first transgression. This justice of God is manifest in the method of the legal covenant, wherein God promiseth us no life, comfort, or happiness, until we have thoroughly performed His law; and may be seen in the mount Sinai promulgation, explicated Lev. xxvi throughout.<sup>7</sup>

For that the Old Testament did serve specially to prepare men to receive Christ, which in his appointed time was to come. For law was a schoolmaster unto Christ (Gal. 3:24). Therefore the greatest part of the Old Testament is spend propounding, repeating, and expounding the covenant of works. And because Christ was not yet manifested in the flesh, therefore the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace is more sparingly and darkly set forth in it.<sup>8</sup>

It is the New Testament, in respect of that which was, from the time of Moses, and in respect of the promise made to the Fathers: not in respect of the essence, but in respect of the manner; because in them in respect of the manner of administering, there was some representation of the Covenant of works, from which this Testament doth essentially differ.... Freedom doth consist in this. First, that the government of the Law, or mixing of the covenant of works, which did hold the ancient people in a certain bondage is now taken away.<sup>9</sup>

...[B]ut now, by this time, sin had almost obliterated and defaced the impressions of the law written in their hearts; and by their being so long in Egypt, they were so corrupted, that the instructions and ordinances of their fathers were almost worn out of mind; and their fall in Adam was almost forgotten.... Nay, in that long course of time betwixt Adam and Moses, men had forgotten what was sin.... [T]herefore, “the law entered,” that Adam’s offense and their own actual transgression might abound, so that now the Lord saw it needful, that there should be a new edition and publication of the covenant of works, the sooner to compel the elect unbelievers to come to Christ, the promised seed, and that the grace of God in Christ to the elect believers might appear the

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7. Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, page 161.

8. Rollock, *Select Works of Robert Rollock*, Volume I, page 46.

9. William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London: Edward Griffin, 1639), pages 175-176.

more exceeding glorious.<sup>10</sup>

The Law — considered as a national covenant, by which their continued possession of the land of Canaan, and of all their privileges under the Theocracy, was left to depend on their external obedience to it, — might be called a national Covenant of Works, since their temporal welfare was suspended on the condition of their continued adherence to it; but, in that aspect of it, it had no relation to the spiritual salvation of individuals, otherwise than as this might be affected by their retaining, or forfeiting, their outward privileges and means of grace. It may be considered, however, in another light, as a re-exhibition of the Covenant of Works, for the instruction of individual Jews in the principles of divine truth.... In this aspect, it was designed, not for the justification of sinners, but for the conviction of sin. In that form, it was afterwards employed even by the Apostles of Christ, to prove the impossibility of justification by the deeds of the Law, and the necessity of another righteousness, the righteousness of faith; and for the same end, it is still applied to the conscience by every faithful preacher of the Gospel. Thus considered — as a re-exhibition of the Covenant of Works — it had a tendency to produce “a spirit of bondage unto fear;” and this would have been its only effect, had it not been associated with a revelation of God’s purpose and promise of grace.<sup>11</sup>

### On the Extent of the Mosaic Law’s Jurisdiction

The Mosaic Law was a written code consisting of many precepts, intended for the Israelites alone, with a promise of life to such as should keep them, and a curse on such as should be disobedient.... Exod. xix. 5, 6. “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.” Deut. iv. 45. “these are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt.” 1 Kings viii. 21. “I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of Jehovah, which he made with our fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.” Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. “he sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel; he hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for his judgments, they

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10. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 61.

11. Buchanan, *Doctrine of Justification*, pages 38-39.

have not known them.” This wall of partition between the Gentiles and Israelites was at length broken down by the death of Christ, Eph. ii. 14. until which time the Gentiles were aliens from the whole of the covenant, v. 12. “being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.”<sup>12</sup>

The allegation, that insult is offered to the law of God enacted by Moses, where it is abrogated and other new laws are preferred to it, is most absurd. Others are not preferred when they are more approved, not absolutely, but from regard to time and place, and the condition of the people, or when those things are abrogated which were never enacted for us. The Lord did not deliver it by the hand of Moses to be promulgated in all countries, and to be everywhere enforced; but having taken the Jewish nation under his special care, patronage, and guardianship, he was pleased to be specially its legislator, and as became a wise legislator, he had special regard to it in enacting laws.<sup>13</sup>

The Gentiles, who had heard nothing of the giving of the law in the wilderness, were not bound to observance of that law, as it was published to the Israelites, but only as inscribed on their own consciences. Hence the apostle says, “that as many as have sinned without law,” namely, the written law, “shall also perish without law,” Rom. ii. 12. That is, shall not be condemned in consequence of the law, as delivered to Israel in writing, but of the violation of the natural law.<sup>14</sup>

Here the law of Moses has its place. It is no longer binding on us because it was given only to the people of Israel. And Israel accepted this law for itself and its descendants, while the Gentiles were excluded. To be sure, the Gentiles have certain laws in common with the Jews, such as these: there is one God, no one is to do wrong to another, no one is to commit adultery or murder or steal, and others like them. This is written by nature into their hearts; they did not hear it straight from heaven as the Jews did....

Moses was an intermediary solely for the Jewish people. It was to them that he gave the law. We must therefore silence the mouths of those factious spirits who say, “Thus says Moses,” *etc.* Here you simply reply: Moses has nothing to do with us. If I were to accept Moses in one commandment, I would have to accept the entire Moses. Thus the conse-

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12. Milton, *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, pages 379-380.

13. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 20:16.

14. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book IV, Chapter 4:30.



quence would be that if I accept Moses as master, then I must have myself circumcised, wash my clothes in the Jewish way, eat and drink and dress thus and so, and observe all that stuff. So, then, we will neither observe nor accept Moses. Moses is dead. His rule ended when Christ came. He is of no further service.<sup>15</sup>

### On Bi-Covenantalism and the Law-Gospel Distinction

We divide this Word into two principal parts or kinds: the one is called the “Law,” the other the “Gospel.” For, all the rest can be gathered under the one or the other of these two headings.

What we call Law (when it is distinguished from Gospel and is taken for one of the two parts of the Word) is a doctrine whose seed is written by nature in our hearts. However, so that we may have a more exact knowledge, it was written by God on two Tables and is briefly comprehended in ten commandments. In these He sets out for us the obedience and perfect righteousness which we owe to His majesty and our neighbours. This on contrasting terms: either perpetual life, if we perfectly keep the Law without omitting a single point, or eternal death, if we do not completely fulfil the contents of each commandment (Deut. 30:15-20; James 2:10).

What we call the Gospel (“Good News”) is a doctrine which is not at all in us by nature, but which is revealed from Heaven (Matt 16:17; John 1:13), and totally surpasses natural knowledge. By it God testifies to us that it is His purpose to save us freely by His only Son (Rom. 3:20-22), provided that, by faith, we embrace Him as our only wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). By it, I say, the Lord testifies to us all these things, and even does it in such a manner that at the same time he renews our persons in a powerful way so that we may embrace the benefits which are offered to us (1 Cor. 2:4).<sup>16</sup>

...[B]y the term Law, Paul frequently understands the rule of holy living in which God exacts what is his due, giving no hope of life unless we obey in every respect; and, on the other hand, denouncing a

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15. Martin Luther, in Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna (editors), *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2012), pages 96-97.

16. Beza, *The Christian Faith*, pages 40-41.

curse for the slightest failure. This Paul does when showing that we are freely accepted of God, and accounted righteous by being pardoned, because that obedience of the Law to which the reward is promised is nowhere to be found. Hence he appropriately represents the righteousness of the Law and the Gospel as opposed to each other....

But they observe not that in the antithesis between Legal and Gospel righteousness... all kinds of works, with whatever name adorned, are excluded.....<sup>17</sup>

The two Testaments are the Covenant of works, and the Covenant of grace, one promising life eternal to him that doth all things contained in the law: the other to him that turns and believes in Christ. And it must be observed, that Paul saith, they are two, that is two in substance, or kinds. And they are two sundry ways. The law, or covenant of works, propounds the bare justice of God, without mercy.... Secondly, the law requires of us inward and perfect righteousness, both for nature, and action.... Thirdly, the law promises life upon condition of works.... Fourthly, the law was written in Tables of Stone... Fifthly, the law was in nature by creation....<sup>18</sup>

By “the law” here is meant the moral law as a covenant of works, and by “the gospel” is meant the gospel in its strict and proper sense. To know the difference so as to be able to distinguish aright between the law and the gospel is of the utmost importance to the faith, holiness, and comfort of every true Christian. If he does not know the difference between the law and the gospel he will be apt, especially in the affair of justification, to confound the one with the other. The consequence will be that in his painful experience, bondage will be mixed with liberty of spirit, fear with hope, sorrow with joy, and death with life. If he cannot so distinguish the gospel from the law as to expect all his salvation from the grace of the gospel, and nothing of it from the works of the law, he will easily be induced to connect his own works with the righteousness of Jesus Christ in the affair of justification.

This was the error of the Judaizing teachers in the churches of Galatia. They mingled the law with the gospel in the business of justification, and thereby they so corrupted the gospel as to alter the very na-

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17. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 9:4; Book III, Chapter 11:14.

18. Perkins, *Complete Works*, Volume II, page 299.

ture of it and make it another gospel.<sup>19</sup>

There is no point on which men make greater mistakes than on the relation which exists between the law and the gospel. Some men put the law instead of the gospel; others put gospel instead of the law. A certain class maintains that the law and the gospel are mixed.... These men understand not the truth and are false teachers.<sup>20</sup>

### On the Abrogation of the Whole Law as a Covenant

On the introduction of the gospel, or new covenant through faith in Christ, the whole of the preceding covenant, in other words, the entire Mosaic law, was abolished.... Luke xvi. 16. "the law and the prophets were until John".... [W]e are therefore absolved from subjection to the decalogue as fully as to the rest of the law.... Not only the ceremonial code, but the whole positive law of Moses, was a law of commandments, and contained in ordinances; nor was it the ceremonial law which formed the sole ground of distinction between the Jews and Gentiles... but the whole law; seeing that the Gentiles, v. 12, "were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise," which promise was made to the works of the whole law, not to those of the ceremonial alone; nor was it to these latter only that the enmity between God and us was owing, v. 16.<sup>21</sup>

The covenant made with Israel on Mount Sinai is abolished by Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb. viii. 8, 9, 13). And the ten commandments bind us not, as they were words of that covenant (Exod. xxxiv. 28).<sup>22</sup>

In a word, the whole of the Mosaic law though abrogated as to any obligation of observance, ceases not to exhibit to us, for our instruc-

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19. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 141.

20. Charles Spurgeon, *New Park Street Pulpit* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), Volume I, page 285.

21. Milton, *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*, pages, 387-389.

22. Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, page 113.

tion, a type of spiritual things.<sup>23</sup>

Wherefore the whole law of Moses, as given unto the Jews, whether as used or abused by them, was repugnant unto and inconsistent with the gospel, and the mediation of Christ, especially his priestly office, therein declared; neither did God either design, appoint, or direct that they should be co-existent.<sup>24</sup>

In what respect, then, is it abolished? Paul, we have said, looks at the law as possessing certain qualities, and those qualities we shall enumerate. It annexes to works a reward and a punishment; that is, it promises life to those who keep it, and curses all transgressors. Meanwhile, it requires from man the highest perfection and most exact obedience. It makes no abatement, gives no pardon, but calls to a severe reckoning the smallest offences. It does not openly exhibit Christ and his grace, but points him out at a distance, and only when hidden by the covering of ceremonies. All such qualities of the law, Paul tells us, are abolished; so that the office of Moses is now at an end, so far as it differs in outward aspect from the covenant of grace....

[W]here the Spirit reigns, the law has no longer any dominion. By moulding our hearts to his own righteousness, the Lord delivers us from the severity of the law, so that our intercourse with himself is not regulated by its covenant, nor our consciences bound by its sentence of condemnation. Yet the law continues to teach and exhort, and thus performs its own office; but our subjection to it is withdrawn by the Spirit of adoption.<sup>25</sup>

The word “destroy,” in its figurative acceptation, may mean to abrogate, or to violate, or to invalidate. Many interpreters understand the word in the first sense, and consider it [Matthew 5:18] as a declaration, that it was not our Lord’s intention to abrogate the moral law. There are, however, insuperable objections to this mode of exposition. We have no right to restrict the term “law,” to the moral part of the Mosaic institute: and there can be no doubt with a careful reader of the New Testament, that our Lord did come to abrogate the law of Moses. It belonged to a temporary, as well as a typical economy. “It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come, in reference to whom the promise

23. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book III, Chapter 3:5.

24. Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, Volume V, pages 428-429.

25. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, pages 110, 168.

was made,” and then, having served its purpose, it was to cease; and, accordingly, we are informed, that our Lord has “taken it out of the way,” that he has “blotted out the handwriting” which was against the Gentiles, that he has nailed it to the cross,” so that his people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are no longer under that “pedagogue,” having been introduced by him into a state of mature sonship.<sup>26</sup>

### On Saving Faith as Distinct From Obedience

But we are farther to inquire, how faith justifies. Not certainly in that sense, as if God graciously accepts the act of faith, and new gospel obedience flowing therefrom in the room of the perfect obedience, which, from the rigour of the law, we are bound to perform in order to justification: as the Socinians, and Curcellaeus, who imitates them in this respect, explain it; understanding by faith the obedience of the precepts of the Gospel, which God has prescribed by Christ. For this is to make void the whole Gospel. The Gospel has not substituted our faith, but Christ’s obedience, by which the righteousness of the law is fulfilled, in the room of that perfect obedience, which the law requires in order to justification. It is also false, that faith and new obedience are one and the same thing. I own that faith is a virtue or grace, commanded by the law of God, and that a believer, by his very believing, obeys God. I likewise confess, that we are to look upon nothing as true and living faith, which is not fruitful in good works. But yet faith is one thing, and the obedience flowing from it quite another, especially in the matter of justification, of which we now speak, where Paul always contradistinguishes the obedience of all manner of works to faith. For it is a rash attempt to confine to a certain species or kind of works what the apostle says concerning them all in general.<sup>27</sup>

...[I]f any good quality or work of ours were made the condition of our justification or title to eternal life, this would turn the covenant of grace exhibited in the gospel into a covenant of works. The covenant of grace revealed and offered to sinners in the gospel is the only covenant according to which a sinner can be justified and entitled to life eternal. It is absolutely impossible that he can be justified according to the broken covenant of works. But were any graces, acts, or works of his the proper conditions of his justification, the covenant of grace would be as

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26. Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord*, page 154..

27. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants.*, Book III, Chapter VIII:48.

much a covenant of works as ever the covenant made with Adam was. The condition of Adam's covenant was perfect obedience; and, according to this imaginary law of easier terms, the conditions of the covenant of grace are sincere faith and sincere obedience. But it was far easier for Adam in his state of innocence to perform the condition of perfect obedience than it is for the impotent sinner, or even for the holiest saint, to perform that of sincere faith and obedience. The terms of the new covenant, according to that scheme, would, instead of being more mild, be more rigorous and difficult than those of the old. The condition of the one covenant would be works as well as that of the other; for works are still works whether they are perfect or sincere. All indeed who, according to the covenant of grace, attain justification are justified by faith; but it is one thing to be justified by faith as merely the instrument of justification and another to be justified by faith as an act or work according a title to justification. It is one thing by faith as an act of obedience, and as being seminally all sincere obedience, to give a title to justification; and it is a very different thing for faith as a means or instrument to receive a title to it. Faith, according to the gospel, gives no manner of title to the smallest blessing of the everlasting covenant; but it receives the surety-righteousness of the second Adam, which gives a full title to every one of them (Romans 5:18). It gives possession of nothing in that gracious covenant, but it takes possession of everything.<sup>28</sup>

The Pharisees of old... and the Papists to this day, own free grace in their profession; and what wonder, since innocent Adam, pleading life upon his works, could not have denied but he was a debtor to free grace? But here lies the matter; they put in their own works, their repentance, holiness, and obedience (turning faith into a work, that it may go in with the rest), between free grace and them, making themselves but debtors to it at second hand for life and salvation. And if one shall tell sinners, Here you are to do or work nothing for life and salvation, but only receive the free grace gift of life and salvation from Christ by faith, and be debtors at first hand; though withal we tell them, that repentance, holiness, obedience, and good works, are the inseparable attendants of faith; they cry out, Error, Antinomianism, Licentious doctrine!<sup>29</sup>

Our present business is with the Papists. They ridicule us, when we argue with Paul that, if righteousness come by works, Christ is dead

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28. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, pages 113-114.

29. Boston, "View of the Covenant of Works," page 207.

in vain. They imagine it to be a beautiful reply, with which their sophists furnish them, that Christ merited for us the first grace, that is, the opportunity of meriting; and that the merit of his death concurs with the satisfactions of works for the daily pardon of sins. They must refute him before they can refute us. We know that he had to deal with men, who did not entirely reject the grace of Christ, but ascribed the half of salvation to works. In opposition to them he argues, that “if righteousness is by the law, then Christ is dead in vain;” and by so doing, he certainly does not allow to works one drop of righteousness. Between these men and the Papists there is no difference; and therefore, in refuting them, we are at liberty to employ Paul’s argument.<sup>30</sup>

According to modern liberalism, faith is essentially the same as “making Christ master” of one’s life.... But that simply means that salvation is thought to be obtained by our obedience to the commands of Christ. Such teaching is just a sublimated form of legalism.<sup>31</sup>

### On Sanctification Through Faith Not By Law

The gospel method of sanctification, as well as of justification, lies so far out of the ken of natural reason, that if all the rationalists in the world, philosophers and divines, had consulted together to lay down a plan for repairing the lost image of God in man, they had never hit upon that which the divine wisdom has pitched upon, viz: that sinners should be sanctified in Christ Jesus, 1 Cor. i.2, by faith in him, Acts xxvi.18; nay, being laid before them, they would have rejected it with disdain, as foolishness, 1 Cor. i.23.

In all views which fallen man has towards the means of his own recovery, the natural bent is to the way of the covenant of works.... Howbeit, that can never be the channel of sanctification, whatsoever way men prepare it and fit it out for that purpose, because it is not, by divine appointment, the “ministration of righteousness and life,” 2 Cor. iii.<sup>32</sup>

Some will allow that faith is the sole condition of our justification, and the instrument to receive it, according to the doctrine maintained formerly by the Protestants against the Papists; but they account

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30. Calvin, *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, pages 77-78.

31. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1923), page 143.

32. Boston, “Preface,” in Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pages 9, 10.

that it is not sufficient or effectual to sanctification, but that it rather tendeth to licentiousness, if it be not joined with some other means that may be powerful and effectual to secure an holy practice. They commend this great doctrine of Protestants as a comfortable cordial for persons upon their death-beds, or in agonies under terrors of conscience; but they account that it is not good for ordinary food, and that it is wisdom in ministers to preach it seldom and sparingly, and not without some antidote or corrective, to prevent the licentiousness to which it tendeth. Their common antidote or corrective is, that sanctification is necessary to salvation, as well as justification; and that though we be justified by faith, yet we are sanctified by our own performance of the law; and so they set up salvation by works, and make the grace of justification to be of none effect, and not at all comfortable....

It is also the ruin of souls to seek only remission of sins by faith in Christ, and holiness by our endeavours according to the terms of the law; whereas we can never live to God in holiness except we be dead to the law, and live only by Christ living in us by faith. That faith which receiveth not holiness as well as remission of sins from Christ will never sanctify us, and therefore it will never bring us to heavenly glory (Heb. xii. 14).<sup>33</sup>

Faith is the mediate or instrumental cause of sanctification as well as justification. It does not merit sanctification any more than it does justification, but it unites us to Christ and keeps us in touch with Him as the Head of the new humanity, who is the source of the new life within us, and also of our progressive sanctification, through the operation of the Holy Spirit. The consciousness of the fact that sanctification is based on justification, and is impossible on any other basis, and that the constant exercise of faith is necessary, in order to advance in the way of holiness, will guard us against all self-righteousness in our striving to advance in godliness and holiness of life. It deserves particular attention that, while even the weakest faith mediates a perfect justification, the degree of sanctification is commensurate with the strength of the Christian's faith and the persistence with which he apprehends Christ.<sup>34</sup>

The very reason why sin reigns in the sinner is because he is under the dominion of the law; which stands as a bar to prevent sanctifying influences from flowing into his heart. The law, especially in its con-

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33. Marshall, *Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, pages 68, 228-229.

34. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 537.



demning and irritating power, “is the strength of sin” (1 Corinthians 15:56). Every man, therefore, who is under the dominion of the law as a covenant is, and cannot but be, under the dominion and strength of sin (Romans 6:14). It is impossible for that man who continues alive to the law to be a holy or a godly man. He may have the form, but he cannot experience the power of godliness. He may take his encouragement from the law as a covenant, and delight in the works of it; but he cannot delight in the holiness and spirituality of the law as a rule. He may advance to a high degree of counterfeit virtue, but he remains an entire stranger to true holiness.<sup>35</sup>

### On Freedom From the Law in its Covenant Form

And thus you see your freedom and liberty from the law as it is the law of works. And that you may be the better enabled to “stand fast in this liberty, wherewith Christ has made you free,” beware of conceiving that the Lord now stands in any relation to you, or will any way deal with you as a man under that law. So that if the Lord shall be pleased hereafter to bestow upon you a great measure of faith, whereby you shall be enabled to yield an exact and perfect obedience to the mind and will God; then beware of conceiving that the Lord looks upon it as obedience to the law of works, or will in any measure reward you for it, according to the promises of that law. And if in case, at any time hereafter, you be, by reason of weakness of your faith, and strength of temptation, drawn aside, and prevailed with to swerve from the mind and will of the Lord, then beware of conceiving that the Lord sees it as any transgression of the law of works. For if you cannot transgress that law, then it is impossible the Lord should see that which is not; and if the Lord can see no sin in you, as a transgression of the law of works, then it is impossible that he should either be angry with you, or correct you for any sin, as it is a transgression of that law. No, to speak with holy reverence, as I said before, the Lord cannot, by virtue of the covenant of works, either require any obedience of you, or give you an angry look, or any angry word; much less threaten and afflict you for any disobedience to that covenant.<sup>36</sup>

For believers are dead to the law as a covenant of works, Rom. vii. 4, and therefore as a husband cannot pretend to command his wife

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35. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 252.

36. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, pages 223-224.

after she is dead and the relation dissolved; so believers being dead to the law as a covenant, it cannot have any commanding authority over them. They are not under it, Rom. vi. 14, how then can it have any commanding power over them? They are not under its jurisdiction, but under that of grace.<sup>37</sup>

Our apostle does not say to the believers in Rome, “You have become dead to the curse of the law merely,” but, “Ye are become dead to the law.... Ye are delivered from the law” (Romans 7:4, 6), from the law itself, from that which is most essential to the law in its federal form. In another place he addresses them thus: “Ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14). Neither does he say here, “You are not under the condemning sentence or curse of the law,” but, “Ye are not under the law” (Galatians 4:4).<sup>38</sup>

### On the Unconditionality of the New Covenant

The ten words, or commandments... are not the form of a covenant properly so called, but the rule of duty: much less are they the form of the covenant of grace: because that covenant, in its strict signification, consists of mere promises, and, as it relates to elect persons, has the nature of a testament, or last will, rather than of a covenant strictly speaking, and depends on no condition.... And Jeremiah has shewn us, that the form of the covenant of grace consists in absolute promises, chap. xxxi. 33 and xxxii. 38-40.<sup>39</sup>

This covenant is absolute and “unconditional”: the covenant of works is conditional: Adam, according to it, was to continue in that happy state in which he was created and put, while he obeyed the voice of God, and abstained from the forbidden fruit; but if he eat of that, he was to be stripped of his happiness, and die; the language of that covenant is, do this and live; if obedient to it, then blessing and life; but if disobedient, then cursing and death. The covenant God made with Abraham and his seed, concerning their having the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, was conditional; if willing and obedient, and so long as they behaved themselves well, according to the laws of God given them, they were to possess it, and enjoy the good things of it, (Isa.

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37. Boston, “View of the Covenant of Works,” page 259.

38. Colquhoun, *The Law and the Gospel*, page 208.

39. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, Book IV, Chapter 4:56.

1:19) but if otherwise, to be dispossessed of it; and accordingly, when they broke the laws of God, their neighbouring nations were let in upon them, and harassed and distressed them, or they were carried captive by them out of it; as, first by the Assyrians, then by the Chaldeans, and at last by the Romans; in which state they now are. But not such is the covenant of grace, that is without any conditions on the part of men. Some, indeed, make it to be a conditional covenant, and faith and repentance to be the conditions of it. But these are not conditions, but blessings of the covenant, and are as absolutely promised in it, as anything else; the promise of a “new heart,” and of a “new spirit,” includes the gift of faith, and every other grace; and that of taking away the “stony heart,” and giving an “heart of flesh,” is fully expressive of the gift of the grace of repentance, (Ezek. 36:26). Besides, if these were conditions of the covenant, to be performed by men in their own strength, in order to be admitted into it, and receive the benefits of it; they would be as hard, and as difficult to be performed, as the condition of the covenant of works, perfect obedience; since faith requires, to the production of it, almighty power, even such as was put forth in raising Christ from the dead, (Eph. 1:19, 20) and though God may give men means, and time, and space of repentance, yet if he does not give them grace to repent, they never will....

Christ’s work, and the Spirit’s grace, supersede all conditions in the covenant, respecting men; since they provide for everything that can be thought of, that is required or is wanting: Christ’s work of redemption, atonement, and satisfaction for sin, as has been observed, is the only condition of the covenant; and that lies on the Mediator and Surety of the covenant, and not on the persons for whose sake it is made; “When thou shalt make his soul,” or, “if his soul shall make an offering for sin” (Isa. 53:10), then such and such things are promised in the covenant, both to him and to his seed. Otherwise, the promises to them are absolute and unconditional, and run in this strain, I “will,” and they “shall,” without any “ifs” or conditions; as, I “will” be their God, and they “shall” be my people; I “will” put my law in their hearts; I “will” forgive their iniquities; they “shall” all know me, from the least to the greatest; I “will” put my fear in their hearts, that they “shall” not depart from me; I “will” sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye “shall” be clean; I “will” give you a new heart, and a new spirit, and an heart of flesh; and I “will” take away the stony heart, and I “will” put my Spirit within you, and “cause” you to walk in my statutes, and ye “shall” keep my judgments, and do them, (Jer. 31:33, 34, 32:38, 40; Ezek. 36:25-27). The blessings of the covenant are not suspended on any conditions to be performed; they do not wait for any, but take place without them. Re-

demption by Christ, the great article of the covenant, was not deferred on account of any condition to be performed by men; but Christ, in the fulness of time agreed on in covenant, when men were without strength to do anything, died for the ungodly; while they were yet sinners Christ died for them; and when enemies, they were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; and herein appeared the love of God; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10; 1 John 4:10). Adoption takes place among men, who were not the people of God; and justification has for its objects the ungodly; and God forgives the iniquities of men, and remembers them no more, though they have done nothing to deserve it, but are guilty of the greatest ingratitude and unkindness; and regeneration finds men dead in trespasses and sins, foolish, disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, without any previous dispositions or preparations in them for it (Hosea 1:10; Rom. 4:5; Isa. 43:25; Eph. 2:4, 5).<sup>40</sup>

### On the Two Kingdoms and Christ's Spiritual Rule

...I call "earthly things" those which do not pertain to God or his kingdom, to true justice, or to the blessedness of the future life; but which have their significance and relationship with regard to the present life and are, in a sense, confined within its bounds. I call "heavenly things" the pure knowledge of God, the nature of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom. The first class includes government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts. In the second are the knowledge of God and of his will, and the rule by which we conform our lives to it....

Let us first consider that there is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the "spiritual" and the "temporal" jurisdiction (not improper terms) by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the present life — not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby a man may live his life among other men holily, honorably, and temperately. For the former resides in the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior. The one we may

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40. John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: B. Graves, 1810), page 169.

call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority.<sup>41</sup>

...[T]he place where Christ executes his kingly office, is in the hearts of believers... for Christ's kingdom is not temporal or secular over the natural lives or civil negotiations of men; but his kingdom is spiritual and heavenly, over the souls of men, to awe and over-rule the hearts, to captivate the affections, to bring into obedience the thoughts, and to subdue and pull down strong holds.<sup>42</sup>

The provinces of Church and State are perfectly distinct, and the one has no right to usurp the jurisdiction of the other. The State is a natural institute, founded in the constitution of man as moral and social, and designed to realize the idea of justice. It is the society of rights. The Church is a supernatural institute, founded in the facts of redemption, and is designed to realize the idea of grace. It is the society of the redeemed. The State aims at social order; the Church at spiritual holiness. The State looks to the visible and outward; the Church is concerned for the invisible and inward. The badge of the State's authority is the sword, by which it becomes a terror to evil doers, and a praise to them that do well. The badge of the Church's authority is the keys, by which it opens and shuts the kingdom of Heaven, according as men are believing or impenitent. The power of the Church is exclusively spiritual; that of the State includes the exercise of force. The Constitution of the Church is a Divine revelation; the Constitution of the State must be determined by human reason and the course of providential events. The Church has no right to construct or modify a government for the State, and the State has no right to frame a creed or polity for the Church. They are planets moving in different orbits, and unless each is confined to its own track, the consequences may be as disastrous in the moral world as the collision of

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41. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 2:13; Book III, Chapter 19:15.

42. Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, page 243.

different spheres in the world of matter.<sup>43</sup>

The next point of difference between Church and State is in the rules by which they are to be respectively regulated in the exercise of their functions. The rule of the Church is the word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This is the statute book of the visible kingdom of Christ. The rule for the State is the “light of nature,” or human reason. The power of the Church is, strictly and only, “ministerial and declarative”; the power of the State is magisterial and imperative. The Church has no power to make laws, but only to declare the law of God. All her acts of government are acts of obedience to her Head and King. The State has the power to make laws as well as to declare them; has a legislative as well as a judicial power. Hence, the form of government for the Church, the regulative and the constitutive principles of her organization, are not matters to be determined by human reason, but to be derived from the Bible as the constitution and statute-book: while, in the State, these are matters to be settled by the history and condition of political communities. The life of the State is natural, and it is left to assume an organization for itself. The life of the Church is supernatural, and God prescribes an organization for it.<sup>44</sup>

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43. James Henley Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871), Volume IV, page 449.

44. Thomas Ephraim Peck, “Church and State,” *The Miscellanies of Rev. Thomas E. Peck* (Richmond, Virginia: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1895), Volume II, page 281.

**Appendix Two:**  
**The Moral Law Displayed in the Form**  
**of a Covenant of Works on Sinai**  
by John Colquhoun

The violated covenant of works was not, and could not be, made or renewed with the Israelites at Sinai; for it was a broken covenant, and besides, it was a covenant between God and man as friends, whereas now man has become the enemy of God. But though it was not renewed with them, yet it was, on that solemn occasion, repeated and displayed to them. It was not proposed to them in order that they might consent, by their own works, to fulfill the condition of it; but it was displayed before them in subservience to the covenant of grace that they might see how impossible it was for them as condemned sinners to perform that perfect obedience which is the immutable condition of life in it. Although the Lord knew well that they were far from being able to yield perfect obedience, yet He saw proper to set forth eternal life to them upon these terms (Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 27:26), and so to speak to them in a strain adapted to their self-righteous temper. For previous to the giving of the law to them at Sinai, they were so ignorant of the perfection and vast extent of that holy law, as well as of their own utter inability to perform the smallest acceptable obedience to it; and, at the same time, they were so full of self-confidence as to say to Moses, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). God therefore displayed on Mount Sinai the law of the Ten Commandments as a covenant of works in subservience to the covenant of grace. He displayed it in that form in order that the people might, by contemplating it, see what kind and degree of righteousness it required as the condition of eternal life; and that by means of it, finding them-

selves utterly destitute of perfect righteousness, they might be impelled to take hold of the covenant of grace in which the perfect righteousness of the second Adam is provided and exhibited for the justification of all who believe.

That the law of the Ten Commandments as a covenant of works was repeated and displayed on Mount Sinai in subservience to the covenant of grace appears evident:

1. From the thunderings and lightnings, the noise of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the thick darkness and the voice of the living God, speaking out of the midst of the fire on that awful occasion (Exodus 20:18; Deuteronomy 5:22-26). These terrible emblems signified the vindictive and tremendous wrath of God which is due to all the race of Adam for their breach of the covenant of works, by transgressing the law of that covenant (Galatians 3:10). They represented also the extreme danger to which every sinner who continues under the law in its covenant form is exposed as being liable, every moment, to the eternal execution of its dreadful curse. This awful display of the law as a covenant of works, though it was not the principal part, yet it was the most conspicuous part of the Sinaiic transaction; for "the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking." And so terrible was the sight that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake" (Hebrews 12:21). Now the covenant of works was displayed in this tremendous form before the Israelites in order that self-righteous and secure sinners among them might be alarmed, and deterred from expecting justification in the sight of God by the works of the law; and that, convinced of their sinfulness and misery, they might be persuaded to flee speedily to the blessed Mediator, and to trust in Him for righteousness and salvation. That terrible display, accordingly, contributed in some measure to humble them, to lessen that self-confidence which they had formerly discovered, and to show them their need of the divine Redeemer, and of union with Him by faith, in order to their being qualified for performing acceptable obedience. This appears from their own words to Moses after the dreadful sight which they beheld: "Speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear and do." Standing afar off, they do not say, as they did before the publication of the law at Sinai, "All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do," but "We will hear and do. We will first hear or believe, and then do." For speaking in this strain, the Lord commended them thus: "They have well said all



that they have spoken. Oh, that there were such an heart in them” (Deuteronomy 5:27-29). Hearing applies to the words of the gospel as well as to those of the law. They said well in that they made hearing or believing the principle of acceptable obedience (Hebrews 11:6). The law then, as it is the covenant of works, entered at Sinai “that the offense might abound,” not in the life by the commission of it, but in the conscience by conviction (Romans 5:20); it entered that it might be their schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ, that they might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24).

2. That the law as a covenant of works was displayed on Mount Sinai appears also from this: the Ten Commandments, written on tables of stone, and so given to Moses on Sinai, are, by the Apostle Paul, called “the ministration of death, written and engraven on stones” (2 Corinthians 3:7). Now it is manifest that these commandments are no otherwise the ministration of death than as they are in the form of the covenant of works. In this form they were delivered to Moses to be deposited in the ark in order to prefigure the fulfilling of them by Messiah, “the Surety of a better covenant,” and the concealing of that form, or the removal of it from them, to all who should believe in Him.

3. The moral law, as it was delivered from Mount Sinai is in Scripture expressly called a covenant. These are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai (Galatians 4:24). The law, in that promulgation of it, was such a covenant as had the appearance, through misapprehension of its design, of disannulling the covenant of grace made with Abraham. “The covenant,” says the Apostle Paul, “that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect” (Galatians 3:17). The law included a way of obtaining a title to the heavenly inheritance, typified by that of Canaan, so very different from that of the promise made to Abraham as to be incompatible with it. “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (Galatians 3:18). The covenant of the law from Mount Sinai, then, was the covenant of works; which contains a method of obtaining the inheritance inconsistent with that of the promise, but which cannot disannul the promise or covenant of grace. Besides, Moses, speaking of that law under the denomination of a covenant, affirms that it was not made with the Patriarchs, or displayed publicly before them. “The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb; the Lord made not

this covenant with our fathers, but with us” (Deuteronomy 5:2-3). This covenant displayed on Sinai, then, was not the covenant of promise made with the fathers of the Israelite people.

4. The covenant of works is, in the New Testament, introduced and illustrated from the law as given by Moses. Our blessed Lord, in replying to one who asked Him what good thing he should do that he might have eternal life, said, “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments”; namely, “Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother....” (Matthew 19:17-19). These being some of the commandments promulgated from Mount Sinai, our Lord repeats them to him in the form of the covenant of works. And the Apostle Paul, when mentioning the promise of the covenant of works, says, “Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law; that the man which doeth those things shall live by them” (Romans 10:5). In expressing also the penal sanction of that covenant, he says, “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written [Deuteronomy 27:26], Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Galatians 3:10). That a conditional promise (Leviticus 18:5), then, and a dreadful curse (Deuteronomy 27:26) as well as the Ten Commandments were published to the Israelites is plain; and it is no less evident that, according to our apostle in the passages cited above, they are the form of the covenant of works.

5. That the law in the form of a covenant of works was displayed on Mount Sinai appears, likewise, from the opposition between the law and grace often mentioned and inculcated in the New Testament. We there read that, “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17), and that, “The law is not of faith; but the man that doeth them shall live in them” (Galatians 3:12). But it is in its covenant form only that the law in Scripture is contrasted with grace.

6. In the Sinaitic transaction, the hewing of the latter tables of stone by Moses, before God wrote the Ten Commandments on them, might be intended to teach sinners that they must be convinced of their sin and misery by the law as a covenant of works before it can be written legibly on their hearts as a rule of life.

7. Last, the same also appears from these words of the Apostle Paul cited above, “These are the two covenants; the one from Mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage” (Galatians 4:24). The covenant which

genders to bondage is the covenant of works, made with Adam as the head and the representative of all his natural posterity, and displayed on Mount Sinai to the Israelites. This covenant genders to bondage for, according to the apostle, the children of it, or they who are under it, are excluded from the heavenly inheritance, as Ishmael was from Canaan, the typical and earthly inheritance. "Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman" (Galatians 4:30). The generating of bondchildren, excluded from the heavenly inheritance, is a distinguishing property of the covenant of works; and it cannot be the property of the covenant of grace under any of its dispensations. It is the covenant of works only that has a tendency to beget a servile and slavish frame of spirit.

It is evident, then, that the covenant of works was displayed on Mount Sinai. It was there displayed, together with the covenant of grace, in order to subserve the latter, and particularly to represent to the Israelitish church that the discharging of the principal and penalty of the covenant of works was to be required of Messiah, the Surety of elect sinners, as the proper condition of the covenant of grace.

Although the Sinaic transaction was a mixed dispensation, yet the covenant of grace and the covenant of works were not blended together in it. The latter, as well as the ceremonial law, was added to the former, and was added to it in order that the Israelites might be so convinced of their sinfulness and misery as to see their extreme need of embracing the promise, or covenant of grace. God, says the Apostle Paul, "gave it [the inheritance] to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Galatians 3:18-19). The promise made to Abraham and his seed we have found in the preface to the Ten Commandments. To this promise or covenant of grace, then, was the law or subservient covenant of works added. It formed no part of the covenant of grace, which had been a covenant entirely to the Patriarchs before that was added to it at Sinai; and it is a covenant entirely to believers under the gospel after that is removed from it. For our Apostle says, "It was added till the seed should come."

Accordingly, the Ten Commandments as promulgated from Mount Sinai must be considered at least in a two-fold point of view, namely as the law of Christ, or the law as a rule of life to believers, and as the law as it is the matter of the covenant of works to unregenerate sin-

ners. This, I humbly apprehend, is intimated to us by their having been twice written on tables of stone by God Himself (Exodus 32:16 and 34:1), and by the double accentuation of them in the sacred original.

In the Sinaic transaction, then, the promise or covenant of grace was published to the Israelites, and the law or covenant of works also as subservient to it. The former was and still is a covenant to be believed or embraced by faith; the latter was a covenant to be done or fulfilled. The Apostle Paul, accordingly, contrasts the one with the other thus: "The law is not of faith; but the man that doeth them shall live in them" (Galatians 3:12). The covenant to be embraced by faith was given to the fathers of the Israelites as well as to themselves; but concerning the covenant to be done Moses said to them, "The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us" (Deuteronomy 5:3). And again, "The Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire... and He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even Ten Commandments" (Deuteronomy 4:12-13). Although the same covenant of works that was made with Adam was displayed from Mount Sinai, yet it was for a very different purpose. God's design in making this covenant with Adam was to have that righteousness which was due to Him from man; but His great design in displaying it to Israel at Sinai was that they, by contemplating it, might see what kind and degree of righteousness it was by which they could be justified before God, and that, finding themselves wholly destitute of that righteousness, they might be excited to take hold of the covenant of grace in which a perfect righteousness for justification is graciously provided.

**Appendix Three:**  
**On the Abolition of the Whole Law**  
**of Moses by the New Covenant**  
by John Milton

The Mosaic law was a written code consisting of many precepts, intended for the Israelites alone, with a promise of life to such as should keep them, and a curse on such as should be disobedient; to the end that they, being led thereby to an acknowledgement of the depravity of mankind, and consequently of their own, might have recourse to the righteousness of the promised Saviour; and that they, and in process of time all other nations, might be led under the Gospel from the weak and servile rudiments of this elementary institution to the full strength of the new creature, and a manly liberty worthy the sons of God (Heb. 9:8).

The law was intended for the Israelites alone. "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" (Exod. 19:5- 6); "these are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt" (Deut. 4:45); "I have set there a place for the ark, wherein is the covenant of Jehovah, which he made with our fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 8: 21); "he sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel: he hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for his judgments, they have not known them" (Psalm 147:19-20). This wall of partition between the Gentiles and Israelites was at length broken down by the death of Christ (Eph. 2:14), until which time the Gentiles were aliens from the whole of the covenant, "being ali-

ens from the whole of the covenant, “being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” (verse 12); “who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways: nevertheless he left not himself without witness” (Acts 14:16-17); “that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.... The times of this ignorance God winked at” (Acts 17:27, 28, 30).

With the promise of life; namely, temporal life, as is obvious from the whole of the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus. “Ye shall keep my statutes, which if a man do, he shall live in them” (Lev. 18:5); “it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before Jehovah our God, as he hath commanded us” (Deut. 6:25); “the law is not of faith; but the man that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal. 3:12). Though the law, however, does not promise eternal life, this latter seems to be implied in the language of the prophets. “I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by” (Zech. 3:7).

A curse on such as should be disobedient. “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them” (Deut. 27:26); “as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10).

Acknowledging the depravity. “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20); “the law worketh wrath” (4:15); “moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (verse 20); “when we were in the flesh, the motions of sin which were by the law did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death” (7:4); “I had not known sin, but by the law... but sin taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence” (5:7-9); “wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just, and good: was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid: but sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good: that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (5:12-13); “wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Gal. 3:19). Hence to those who are not yet regenerate, the law of nature has the same obligatory force, and is intended to serve the same purposes, as the law of Moses to the Israelites: “We know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them that were under the

law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19); compared with, “that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed them” (Rom. 1:19).

The righteousness of the promised Saviour. Hence Christ’s invitation: “Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28); that is from the curse of the law. Hence also the conflict in the mind of Paul while under the curse of the law, and the thanks which he renders to God for the atonement of Christ: “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24-25); “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom. 10:4); “that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident, for the just shall live by faith” (Gal. 3:11); “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (verse 13); “if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” (verse 21); “but the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (verse 22); concluded, that is, declared all guilty of sin; “wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (verse 24.); “the letter killeth” (2 Cor. 3:6), that is, the letter of the law (elsewhere called *the elements*) killeth, in other words does not promise eternal life; “blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us” (Col. 2:14). Thus the imperfection of the law was manifested in the person of Moses himself; for Moses, who was a type of the law, could not bring the children of Israel into the land of Canaan, that is, into eternal rest; but an entrance was given to them under Joshua, or Jesus. Hence Peter testifies that eternal salvation was through Christ alone under the law, equally as under the gospel, although he was not then revealed: “Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:10-11); “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). For although, under the law, as many as were able to keep all the commandments were justified, the promises extended only to happiness in this life: “Jehovah commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear Jehovah our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, and it shall be our righteousness if we observe to do all these commandments” (Deut. 6:24-

25). But what neither the law itself nor the observers of the law could attain, faith in God through Christ has attained, and that even to eternal life.

The Gospel is the new dispensation of the Covenant of Grace, far more excellent and perfect than the law, announced first obscurely by Moses and the prophets, afterwards in the clearest terms by Christ himself, and his apostles and evangelists, written since by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, and ordained to continue even to the end of the world, containing a promise of eternal life to all in every nation who shall believe in Christ when revealed to them, and a threat of eternal death to such as shall not believe.

The new dispensation. "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers" (Jer. 31:31-32, compared with Heb. 8:8-9). It is called "the new testament" (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6). But the word *diatheke* in the Hebrew is generally used by the inspired writers for *suntheke*, covenant, and is rendered in Latin by the word *pactum* (2 Cor. 3:14; Gal. 4:24. *Veteris pacti*). The Gospel is only once called testament in a proper sense, and then for a particular reason which is subjoined: "For this cause he is the mediator of the new testament that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance; for where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator" (Heb. 9:15-16, *etc.*).

More excellent and perfect than the law. "Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Matt. 13:17); "if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remained is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech; and not as Moses" (2 Cor. 3:11, *etc.*); "the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God: and inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest; for those priests were made without an oath, but this with an oath... by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:18-20, 22); "by how much more also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises... I will put my laws into their mind" (8:6, *etc.*); "whoso looketh into the



perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:25); “of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you... with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Pet. 1:10, *etc.*). The Gospel is also called “the ministry and word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Whereas on the contrary, “the law worketh wrath” (Rom. 4:15).

By Moses and the prophets. “They are they which testify of me” (John 5:39); “had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me” (5:46); namely Gen. 3:15, 22:18, 49:10; Deut. 18:15; “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27); “searching the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 27:11); “saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (26:22-23); “being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Rom. 3:21); “who prophesied of the grace which should come unto you” (1 Pet. 1:10).

Written in the hearts of believers. “As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith Jehovah. My Spirit which is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith Jehovah, from henceforth and for ever” (Isai. 59:21); “behold the days come... but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith Jehovah [a declaration particularly worthy of attention, as it specifies in what respect the new covenant is more excellent than the old], I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts...” (Jer. 31:31-33); compared with, “this is my covenant... I will put my laws into their mind... and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Heb. 8:10, *etc.*); “it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh... and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit” (Joel 2:28-29). To these may be added, from the chapter of Jeremiah quoted above, “they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them” (verse 34); “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28). Compare Acts 2:16-18. For although all real believers have not the gift of prophecy, the Holy Spirit is to them an equivalent and substitute for prophecy, dreams, and visions: “ye are manifestly de-

clared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3); “ministers of the new testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (verse 6); “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

By the Holy Spirit, the gift of God, and peculiar to the gospel. “The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39); “the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father shall send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (14:26); see also Luke 12:12; “ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts 1:8); see also 2:1, *etc.*; “repent... and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (verse 38); “by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5); “in words which the Holy Ghost teaches” (1 Cor. 2:13); “the communion of the Holy Ghost” (2 Cor. 13:14); “who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:8). See also Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 1 Pet. 1:12; 1 John 4:13.

Ordained to continue even to the end of the world. “Much more that which remained is glorious” (2 Cor. 3:11); “till we all come... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

A promise of eternal life. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel.... He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15-16); “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

To all who shall believe. “Whosoever believeth in him” (John 3:15-16); “to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16-17); “this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life” (1 John 2:25). Under the name of believers the penitent are comprehended, inasmuch as in the original annunciation of the gospel repentance and faith are jointly proposed as conditions of salvation. “He that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him” (Matt. 3:1, 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:39-41, 10:35, 19:3-4, 20:21); and elsewhere.

A threat of eternal death to such as shall not believe. “Whosoever shall not receive you nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that city, shake off the dust of your feet: verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom....” (Matt. 10:14-15); “he sent unto them his son... but when the husbandmen saw the son, they said... let us kill him.... They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men”

(21:37, *etc.*); “he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16); “this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19); “every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:23); “taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel” (2 Thess. 1:8-9); “if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remained no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment” (Heb. 10:26, *etc.*). By unbelievers, however, those only can be meant to whom Christ has been announced in the gospel; for “how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14).

In every nation. “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14); “to every creature” (Mark 16:15); “other sheep I have which are not of this fold” (John 10:16); “of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him” (Acts 10:34-35); “their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (Rom. 10:18). This was predicted: “It shall come to pass in the last days” (Isai. 2:2, *etc.*); “in that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan” (Isai. 19:18, *etc.*); “unto all people” (25:6); “the isles shall wait for his law” (42:4, *etc.*); “look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (45:22-23.); “a witness to the people” (55:4-5); “neither let the son of the stranger... speak, saying, Jehovah hath utterly separated me from his people” (56:3, *etc.*); “I will also take of them for priests and Levites, saith Jehovah” (46:21); “all the nations shall be gathered unto it” (Jer. 3:17); “because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north” (25:8, *etc.*); “the desire of all nations shall come” (Hagg. 2:7); “there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities” (Zech. 8:20).

On the introduction of the gospel, or new covenant through faith in Christ, the whole of the preceding covenant, in other words, the entire Mosaic law, was abolished (Jer. 31:31-33, as above). “The law and the prophets were until John” (Luke 16:16); “now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (Acts 15:10); “now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested” (Rom. 3:21); “ye are not under the law, but under grace” (6:14); “ye also are become dead to the law by the

body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him that is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (7:4); “now are we delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (5:6). In the beginning of the same chapter the apostle illustrates our emancipation from the law by the instance of a wife who is loosed from her husband who is dead. “I had not known sin but by the law [that is, the whole law, for the expression is unlimited], for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (5:7). It is in the Decalogue that the injunction here specified is contained; we are therefore absolved from subjection to the Decalogue as fully as to the rest of the law: “ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear” (8:15); “all things indeed are pure” (14:20); compared with, “unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled” (Tit. 1:15); “all things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Cor. 6:12); “all things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (10:23); “not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3); “ministers of the new testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life: but if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious... how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?” (verse 11); “if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remained is glorious” (verse 15); “the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished” (verses 6-8); “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (verse 17); “wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made” (Gal. 3:19); “after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (verse 25); “the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant... until the time appointed of the father: even so we, when we were children, were in bondage, under the elements of the world; but when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (4:1, *etc*). Compare also verse 21, addressed to those who desired to be under the law; and of Hagar and Sarah, “these are the

two covenants; the one from mount Sinai, which gendered to bondage, which is Agar... but Jerusalem which is above” (verse 24); “is free” (verse 26); hence, “Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman” (verse 30); “if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” (verse 18); “who hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (Eph. 2:14-15). Now not only the ceremonial code, but the whole positive law of Moses, was a law of commandments, and contained in ordinances; nor was it the ceremonial law which formed the sole ground of distinction between the Jews and Gentiles, as Zanchius on this passage contends, but the whole law: seeing that the Gentiles, “were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise” (verse 12), which promise was made to the works of the whole law, not to those of the ceremonial alone; nor was it to these latter only that the enmity between God and us was owing (verse 16). So “blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, he took it out of the way” (Coloss. 2:14-17); “the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also in the law.... There ariseth another priest, who is made not after the law of a carnal commandment” (Heb. 7:12, 15-16); “there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before [that is, of the commandment of works], for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof” (verse 18); “in that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old; now that which decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vanish away” (8:13); “ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more.... But ye are come unto mount Sion... and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant” (12:18, *etc.*).

It is generally replied, that all these passages are to be understood only of the abolition of the ceremonial law. This is refuted, first, by the definition of the law itself, as given in the preceding chapter, in which are specified all the various reasons for its enactment; if therefore, of the causes which led to the enactment of the law considered as a whole, every one is revoked or obsolete, it follows that the whole law itself must be annulled also. The principal reasons then which are given for the enactment of the law are as follows: that it might call forth and develop our

natural depravity; that by this means it might work wrath; that it might impress us with a slavish fear through consciousness of divine enmity and of the hand-writing of accusation that was against us; that it might be a schoolmaster to bring us to the righteousness of Christ; and others of a similar description. Now the texts quoted above prove clearly, both that all these causes are now abrogated, and that they have not the least connection with the ceremonial law.

First then, the law is abolished principally on the ground of its being a law of works; that it might give place to the law of grace. "By what law? Of works? Nay but by the law of faith" (Rom. 3:27); "if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace" (11:6). Now the law of works was not solely the ceremonial law, but the whole law.

Secondly, "the law worketh wrath; for where no law is, there is no transgression" (4:15). It is not however a part, but the whole of the law that worketh wrath; inasmuch as the transgression is of the whole, and not of a part only. Seeing then that the law worketh wrath, but the gospel grace, and that wrath is incompatible with grace, it is obvious that the law cannot co-exist with the gospel.

Thirdly, the law of which it is was written, "the man that doeth them shall live in them" (Gal. 3:12; Lev. 18:5); and, "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10), was the whole law. From "the curse of this law Christ hath redeemed us" (verse 13), inasmuch as we were unable to fulfil it ourselves. Now to fulfil the ceremonial law could not have been a matter of difficulty; it must therefore have been the entire Mosaic law from which Christ delivered us. Again as it was against those who did not fulfil the whole law that the curse was denounced, it follows that Christ could not have redeemed us from that curse, unless he had abrogated the whole law; if therefore he abrogated the whole, no part of it can be now binding upon us.

Fourthly, we are taught that the law "written and engraven in stones" was "the ministration of death," and therefore was "done away" (2 Cor. 3:7). Now the law engraven in stones was not the ceremonial law, but the decalogue.

Fifthly, that which was, as just stated, a law of sin and death (of sin, because it is a provocative to sin; of death, because it produces death, and is in opposition to the law of the spirit of life), is certainly not the cer-

emonial law alone, but the whole law. But the law to which the above description applies, is abolished: "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 7:2).

Sixthly, it was undoubtedly not by the ceremonial law alone that "the motions of sin which were by the law, wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Romans 7:5). But of the law which thus operated it is said that we "are become dead thereunto" (verse 4), and "that being dead wherein we were held" (verse 6), "we are delivered from it," as a wife is free "from the law of her husband who is dead" (verse 3).

We are therefore "delivered" (verse 6), not from the ceremonial law alone, but from the whole law of Moses.

Seventhly, all believers, inasmuch as they are justified by God through faith, are undoubtedly to be accounted righteous; but Paul expressly asserts that "the law is not made for a righteous man" (1 Timothy 1:9; Galatians 5:22-23). If, however, any law were to be made for the righteous, it must needs be a law which should justify. Now the ceremonial law alone was so far from justifying, that even the entire Mosaic law had not power to effect this (Gal. 3:11, *etc.*). Therefore it must be the whole law, and not the ceremonial part alone, which is abrogated by reason of its inability in this respect.

To these considerations we may add, that that law which, not only cannot justify, but is the source of trouble and subversion to believers; which even tempts God if we endeavour to perform its requisitions; which has no promise attached to it, or, to speak more properly, which takes away and frustrates all promises, whether of inheritance, or adoption, or grace, or of the Spirit itself; nay, which even subjects us to a curse; must necessarily have been abolished. If then it can be shown that the above effects result, not from the ceremonial law alone, but from the whole law, that is to say, the law of works in a comprehensive sense, it will follow that the whole law is abolished; and that they do so result, I shall proceed to show from the clearest passages of Scripture. With regard to the first point, "We have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law" (Acts 15:24); "why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples?" (verse 10) Certain of the Pharisees which believed, said that "it was needful for them to keep the whole law" (verse 5), when therefore Peter in opposition to this doctrine contends, that the yoke of the law ought to be removed from the necks of

the disciples, it is clear that he must mean the whole law. Secondly, that the law which had not the promise was not the ceremonial law only, but the whole law, is clear from the consideration, that it would be sufficient if one part had the promise, although the other were without it; whereas the law which is so often the subject of discussion with St. Paul has no promise attached to either of its branches: "The promise that ye should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13, 16); "if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. 3:18); and therefore not by the law, or any part of it; whence St. Paul shows that either the whole law, or the promise itself, must of necessity be abolished: "If they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of none effect" (Rom. 4:14). Compare also Gal. 3:18 as above. By the abolition of the promise, the inheritance and adoption are abolished; fear and bondage, which are incompatible with adoption, are brought back (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:1, 21, 24, 26, 30), as above; union and fellowship with Christ are dissolved: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whomsoever of you are justified by the law" (Gal. 5:4); whence follows the loss of glorification; nay, grace itself is abolished, unless the abolition of the law be an entire abolition: "Whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4), whereby the word *law* is intended the entire code, as appears not only from the preceding verse, "he is a debtor to do the whole law," but from other considerations. Finally, the Spirit itself is excluded: "if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18); therefore, *vice versa*, if ye be under the law, ye are not led of the Spirit. We are consequently left under the curse: "as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them" (Gal. 3:10). Therefore "all things which are written in the law," and not the things of the ceremonial law alone, render us obnoxious to the curse. Christ therefore, when "he redeemed us from the curse" (verse 13), redeemed us also from the causes of the curse, namely, the works of the law, or, which is the sense, from the whole law of works; which, as has been shown above, is not the ceremonial part alone. Even supposing, however, that no such consequences followed, there could be but little inducement to observe the conditions of a law which has not the promise; it would be even ridiculous to attempt to observe that which is of no avail



unless it be fulfilled in every part, and which nevertheless it is impossible for man so to fulfill; especially as it has been superceded by the more excellent law of faith, which God in Christ has given us both will and power to fulfill.

It appears therefore as well from the evidence of Scripture as from the arguments above adduced, that the whole of the Mosaic law is abolished by the gospel. It is to be observed, however, that the sum and essence of the law is not hereby abrogated; its purpose being attained in that love of God and our neighbour, which is born of the Spirit through faith. It was with justice therefore that Christ asserted the permanence of the law: "Think not that I come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17); "do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31); "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

The common objection to this doctrine is anticipated by St. Paul himself, who expressly teaches that by this abrogation of the law, sin, if not taken away, is at least weakened rather than increased in power: "sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace: what then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid" (Rom. 6:14-15). Therefore, as was said above, the end for which the law was instituted, namely, the love of God and our neighbour, is by no means to be considered as abolished; it is the tablet of the law, so to speak, that is alone changed, its injunctions being now written by the Spirit in the hearts of believers; with this difference, that in certain precepts the Spirit appears to be at variance with the letter, namely, wherever by departing from the letter we can more effectually consult the love of God and our neighbour. Thus Christ departed from the letter of the law: "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27), if we compare his words with the fourth commandment. St. Paul did the same in declaring that a marriage with an unbeliever was not to be dissolved, contrary to the express injunction of the law: "to the rest speak I, not the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:12). In the interpretation of these two commandments, of the Sabbath and marriage, a regard to the law of love is declared to be better than a compliance with the whole written law; a rule which applies equally to every other instance: "On these two commandments [namely, the love of God and our neighbour], hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). Now neither of these is propounded in express terms among the ten command-

ments, the former occurring for the first time in Deut. 6:5 and the latter in Lev. 19:18, and yet these two precepts are represented as comprehending emphatically, not only the ten commandments, but the whole law and the prophets: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12); "he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law; love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8, 10); "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Gal. 5:14); "the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:5). If this is the end of the Mosaic commandment, much more is it the end of the evangelic: "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, thou shalt do well" (James 2:8). Hence all rational interpreters have explained the precepts of Christ, in his sermon on the mount, not according to the letter, but in the spirit of the law of love. Hence it is said, "where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15); that is, no transgression in disregarding the letter of the law, provided that under the direction of the Spirit the end of the institution be attained in the love of God and our neighbour.

On the united authority of so many passages of Scripture, I conceived that I had satisfactorily established the truth in question against the whole body of theologians who, so far as my knowledge then extended, concurred in denying the abrogation of the entire Mosaic law. I have since, however, discovered, that Zanchius, in his commentary on the second chapter of Ephesians, declares himself of the same opinion, remarking, very justly, that "no inconsiderable part of divinity depends on the right explanation of this question; and that it is impossible to comprehend the Scriptures properly especially those parts which relate to justification and good works, [he might have added, the whole of the New Testament] unless the subject of the abrogation of the law be thoroughly understood." He proves his point with sufficient accuracy, but neglects to follow up his conclusions; losing himself in a multitude of minute exceptions, and apparently fluctuating between the two opinions, so as to leave the reader, if not extremely attentive, in a state of uncertainty. I have also observed that Cameron somewhere expresses the same opinion respecting the abolition of the whole law.

It is asserted, however, by divines in general, who still maintain the tenet of the converted Pharisees, that it is needful for those who are

under the gospel to observe the law (a doctrine which in the infancy of the church was productive of much mischief), that the law may be highly useful, in various ways even to us who are Christians; inasmuch as we are thereby led to a truer conviction of sin, and consequently to a more thankful acceptance of grace; as well as to a more perfect knowledge of the will of God. With regard to the first point, I reply, that I am not speaking of sinners, who stand in need of a preliminary impulse to come to Christ, but of such as are already believers, and consequently in the most intimate union with Christ; as to the second, the will of God is best learnt from the gospel itself under the promised guidance of the Spirit of truth, and from the divine law written in the hearts of believers. Besides, if the law be the means of leading us to a conviction of sin and an acceptance of the grace of Christ, this is effected by a knowledge of the law itself, not by the performance of its works; inasmuch as through the works of the law, instead of drawing nearer to Christ, we depart farther from him; as Scripture is perpetually inculcating.

In the next place, a distinction is made; and Polanus in particular observes, that “when it is said that we are not under the law, it is not meant that we are not under an obligation to obey it, but that we are exempt from the curse and restraint of the law, as well as from the provocation to sin which results from it.” If this be the case, what advantage do believers reap from the gospel? Since even under the law they at least were exempted from the curse and provocation to sin: and since to be free from the restraint of the law can mean nothing but that for which I contend, an entire exemption from the obligation of the law. For as long as the law exists, it constrains, because it is a law of bondage; constraint and bondage being as inseparable from the dispensation of the law, as liberty from the dispensation of the gospel.

Polanus contends on Gal. 4:4-5 (“to redeem them that were under the law”) that “when Christians are said to be redeemed from subjection to the law, and to be no longer under the law, this is not to be taken in an absolute sense, as if they owed no more obedience to it. What then do the words imply? They signify, that Christians are no longer under the necessity of perfectly fulfilling the law of God in this life, inasmuch as Christ has fulfilled it for them.” That this is contrary to the truth, is too obvious not to be acknowledged. So far from a less degree of perfection being exacted from Christians, it is expected of them that they should be more perfect than those who were under the law; as the whole tenour of

Christ's precepts evinces. The only difference is, that Moses imposed the letter, or external law, even on those who were not willing to receive it; whereas Christ writes the inward law of God by his Spirit on the heart of believers, and leads them as willing followers. Under the law, those who trusted in God were justified by faith indeed, but not without the works of the law: "the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:12). The gospel, on the contrary, justifies by faith without the works of the law. Wherefore, we being freed from the works of the law, no longer follow the letter, but the spirit; doing the works of faith, not of the law. Neither is it said to us, *whatever is not of the law is sin*, but, *whatever is not of faith is sin*; faith consequently, and not the law, is our rule. It follows, therefore, that as faith cannot be made matter of compulsion, so neither can the works of faith.

From the abrogation, through the gospel, of the law of servitude, results Christian liberty; though liberty, strictly speaking, is the peculiar fruit of adoption, consequently was not unknown during the time of the law. Inasmuch, however, as it was not possible for our liberty either to be perfected or made fully manifest till the coming of Christ our deliverer, liberty must be considered as belonging in an especial manner to the gospel, and as consorting therewith; first, because truth is principally known by the gospel — "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17) — and truth has an essential connection with liberty; "if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make ye free" (John 8:31-32); "if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (verse 36). Secondly, because the peculiar gift of the gospel is the Spirit; but "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17).

## **Appendix Four:**

### **The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel**

by Theodore Beza

*That which we call The Word of God: its two parts — the Law and the Gospel.* On this subject we call the “Word of God” (for we know well that the Eternal Son of God is also so named) the canonical books of the Old and New Testament; for they proceed from the mouth of God Himself.

We divide this Word into two principal parts or kinds: the one is called the “Law,” the other the “Gospel.” For, all the rest can be gathered under the one or the other of these two headings.

What we call Law (when it is distinguished from Gospel and is taken for one of the two parts of the Word) is a doctrine whose seed is written by nature in our hearts. However, so that we may have a more exact knowledge, it was written by God on two Tables and is briefly comprehended in ten commandments. In these He sets out for us the obedience and perfect righteousness which we owe to His majesty and our neighbours. This on contrasting terms: either perpetual life, if we perfectly keep the Law without omitting a single point, or eternal death, if we do not completely fulfil the contents of each commandment (Deut. 30:15-20; James 2:10).

What we call the Gospel (“Good News”) is a doctrine which is not at all in us by nature, but which is revealed from Heaven (Matt 16:17; John 1:13), and totally surpasses natural knowledge. By it God testifies to us that it is His purpose to save us freely by His only Son (Rom. 3:20-22), provided that, by faith, we embrace Him as our only wisdom, righ-

teousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). By it, I say, the Lord testifies to us all these things, and even does it in such a manner that at the same time he renews our persons in a powerful way so that we may embrace the benefits which are offered to us (1 Cor. 2:4).

*The similarities and the differences between the Law and the Gospel.* We must pay great attention to these things. For, with good reason, we can say that ignorance of this distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the principle sources of the abuses which corrupted and still corrupt Christianity.

The majority of men, blinded by the just judgment of God, have indeed never seriously considered what curse the Law subjects us to, nor why it has been ordained by God. And, as for the Gospel, they have nearly always thought that it was nothing other than a second Law, more perfect than the first. From this has come the erroneous distinction between precept and advice; there has followed, little by little, the total ruin of the benefit of Jesus Christ.

Now, we must besides consider these things. The Law and the Gospel have in common that they are both from the one true God, always consistent with Himself (Heb. 1:1-2). We must not therefore think that the Gospel abolishes the essence of the Law. On the contrary, the Law establishes the essence of the Gospel (Rom. 10:2-4); this is what we shall explain a little further on. For both set before us the same God and the essence of the same righteousness (Rom. 3:31), which resides in perfect love to God and our neighbour. But there is a great difference in these points which we shall touch on, and especially concerning the means of obtaining this righteousness.

For, in the first place, as we alluded to before, the Law is natural to man. God has engraven it in his heart from creation (Rom. 1:32; 2:14,15). When, a long time afterwards, God made and exhibited the two Tables of the Law, this was not to make a new law, but only to restore our first knowledge of the natural law which, because of the corruption of sin, was little by little becoming obliterated from the heart of man (Rom. 7:8-9). But the Gospel is a supernatural doctrine which our nature would never have been able to imagine nor able to approve without a special grace of God (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:14). But, the Lord has revealed it, firstly to Adam shortly after his sin, as Moses declares (Gen. 3:15), afterwards to the patriarchs and the prophets in increasing degrees as seemed good to Him (Rom 1:2; Luke 1:55, 70), until the day in which He manifested Je-

sus Christ in Person. It is He who has clearly announced and accomplished all that is contained in the Gospel (John 15:15; 6:38). This Gospel God still reveals today and will reveal it until the end of the world by the preaching instituted in His Church (John 17:18; Matt. 28:20; 2 Cor. 5:20).

In the second place, the Law lays bare to us the majesty and justice of God (Heb. 12:18-21). The Gospel sets forth this same justice to us, but there it is pacified and satisfied by the mercy manifested in Christ (Heb. 12:22-24).

In the third place, the Law sends us to ourselves in order to accomplish the righteousness which it commands us, that is to say, the perfect obedience to its commandments, which is necessary in order to escape guilt. That is why it shows us our curse and subjects us to it, as the Apostle declares (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10-12). But the gospel teaches us where we shall find what we do not have and, having found it, how we shall be able to enjoy it. That is why it delivers us from the curse of the Law (Rom. 3:21-22; Gal. 3:13-14). In conclusion, the Law pronounces us blessed when we accomplish it without omitting anything; the Gospel promises us salvation when we believe, that is to say, when, by faith, we take hold of Jesus Christ who has everything which we lack, and still more that we need. Now, these two terms — to do what the Law commands, or to believe what God offers us in Jesus Christ — are two things which are not only very difficult but totally impossible to our corrupt nature. This latter, as St Paul says, cannot even perceive what is of God (2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 1:29). That is why it is necessary to add a fourth difference between the Law and the Gospel.

Thus, the fourth difference between the Law and the Gospel is that the Law, by itself, can only show us, and make us see, our evil more exceedingly, and aggravate our condemnation; not through any fault of its own (for it is good and holy), but because our corrupt nature burns for sin the more it is reproved and threatened, as St. Paul has declared through his own example (Rom. 7:7-14). But the Gospel not only shows us the remedy against the curse of the law, but it is at the same time accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit who regenerates us and changes us (as we have said above); for He creates in us the instrument and sole means of applying to us this remedy (Acts 26:17-18).

In order to speak even more clearly, let us expound these words “letter” and “spirit” which some have taken in the wrong sense. I say,

therefore, that the Gospel is not “letter,” that is to say, only a dead doctrine which sets before us in its bareness and simplicity (I do not say those things which it is fitting for us to do — for that is the office of the Law) the things which it is necessary for us to believe: that salvation is promised freely in Jesus Christ to those who believe; but it is “spirit,” that is to say, a powerful means full of efficacy from the Holy Spirit, and He uses it to create in us the power to believe the things which He teaches us, that is to say, to embrace free salvation in Jesus Christ. It is thus that the Law itself, which kills us and damns us in ourselves, justifies us and saves us in Jesus Christ, taken hold of by faith (Rom. 3:31).

This is the reason why I have said that the Law and the Gospel are not contrary in that which concerns the essence of the righteousness with which we must be clothed in order to be accepted before God and to participate in eternal life; but they are contrary with regard to the means of having this righteousness. For the Law justly seeks in us this righteousness; it has no regard to what we can do but to what we ought to do (Gal. 3:12). Man, indeed, by his own fault alone, has made himself unable to pay; nevertheless, he does not cease to be a debtor even if he is unable to pay. And consequently, the Law does us no wrong in demanding from us that which we owe, although we cannot pay it. But the Gospel, softening this righteous rigour as with the honey of God’s mercy, teaches us to pay by Him who has made Himself our Surety, who has put Himself, I say, in our place and paid our debt, as principal debtor, and to the last farthing (Col. 2:13,14). So that the rigour of the Law which made us tremble in ourselves and struck us down completely, now confirms us and accepts us in Jesus Christ. For, since eternal life is due to those who have obeyed the Law perfectly, and Jesus Christ has fulfilled all righteousness in the name of those who should believe in Him and take hold of Him by faith (1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9), it follows that, even according to the rigour of the Law, salvation cannot fail those who, by faith, have become united and incorporated with Jesus Christ.

*For what ends the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the Law.* Having carefully understood this distinction of the two parts of the Word of God, the Law and the Gospel, it is easy to understand how and to what end the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the one and the other in the Church. For there is no doubt that He employs them for the purpose for which they have been established.

We are then all so blind, whilst our corruption reigns in us, that



we are ignorant even of our ignorance (John 9:41) and, not ceasing to smother the little light of knowledge which has been left to us so as to render ourselves inexcusable (Rom. 1:20-21; 2:1), we are pleased about that which ought to displease us most. It is necessary, before all things, that God, all good and full of pity, makes us know clearly the cursed pit in which we are. He could do it no better than by informing us, by the declaration of His Law, what we ought necessarily to be. Thus, blackness can never be better known than in being placed beside white (Rom. 3:20, 7:13). This is why God begins with the preaching of the Law. In it alone we can see what we ought to be; and yet we cannot fulfil a single point of it. In it alone, we can see how near we are to our damnation, unless there comes to us some very strong and sure remedy.

And indeed, the stupidity which has reigned in the world at all times and reigns now more than ever, shows clearly how necessary it is that God begins at this point in order to draw us to Himself: by making us know what great and certain danger those are in who think least of it. The fact is, the Law was not given to justify us (for if this were so, Jesus Christ would have died in vain, as St. Paul says; Gal. 2:21, 3:18-21), but, on the contrary, to condemn us, and to show us the hell which is opened wide to swallow us, to annihilate and totally abase our pride, in making the multitude of our sins pass before our eyes and showing us the wrath of God which is revealed from Heaven against us (Rom. 1:18; 4:15; Gal. 3:10, 12). However, for a long time men have been blind and senseless. Not only do they seek their salvation in that which condemns them wholly or in part, that is to say, in their works, instead of running to Jesus Christ by faith, the only remedy against all that they can be justly accused of before God; but, what is more, they do not cease to add law upon law to their conscience, that is to say, condemnation upon condemnation, as if the Law of God did not condemn them enough (Gal. 4:9, 10, 5:1; Col. 2:8, 16-23). It is like a prisoner to whom the prison door would be opened, but who, turning away from a freedom which he does not understand, goes away and voluntarily locks himself in a prison which is even more secure.

There then is the first use of the preaching of the Law; to make known our innumerable faults so that in ourselves we begin to be miserable and greatly humble ourselves; in short, to beget in us the first degree of repentance which is called "contrition of heart"; this produces a full and open confession toward the Lord. For he who does not know that he

is sick will never come to the physician. There are none more unfit to receive the light of salvation than those who think they see clearly by themselves, through lack of understanding how thick is the darkness in which they are born; so great that they must come out of it. On the contrary, they have always made it thicker from then on, and have not ceased to rush on willingly in it (John 9:41).

*The other part of the Word of God called "Gospel": its authority, why, how and for what end it was written.* After the Law comes the Gospel, the use and necessity of which cannot be better understood than by noting the following points:

Firstly, even as there is only one Saviour (Matt. 1:21; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5), there is also only one doctrine of salvation which is called Gospel, that is to say, Good News (Rom. 1:16). It was fully announced and declared to the world by Jesus Christ (John 15:15) and the Apostles (John 17:8; 2 Cor. 5:19-20), and faithfully recorded by the Evangelists (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 1:25) so as to prevent the wiles and craftiness of Satan who, without this, would have more easily put forward to men his dreams under the name of the gospel; however, he has not entirely failed to do so, by the just vengeance of God who has been provoked to anger against the men who, in their accustomed manner, have always preferred darkness to light. And when we say that the Apostles and Evangelists have faithfully recorded all the doctrine of the Gospel, we understand three points:

1. They have truly added nothing of their own as far as the substance of the doctrine is concerned (Col. 1:28; 2 Tim 3:16-17), but they have obeyed with precision and simplicity what the Lord had said to them: "Go, preach all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20); and St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, confesses that he does so (1 Cor. 11:23).

2. They have omitted nothing of that which is necessary to salvation. For, otherwise, they would have been disloyal to their commission which is not possible. And we see also St. Paul (Acts 20:27; Gal. 1:9) and St. Peter (1 Pet. 1:25) testify how conscientious they have been and how particular in this area (John 15:15, 16:13). That is why St. Jerome, writing on this subject, says, "Chatter and babbling must not be believed without the authority of Holy Scripture." And St. Augustine says even more clearly, "It is true that the Lord Jesus did many things which have not all been written down; for the Evangelist himself testifies that Jesus Christ said and did much that has not been written down. But God has chosen to have written down those things which are sufficient for the sal-

\vation of those who believe” (John 20:30-31).

3. What they have written, is written in such a way that the most uncultured and most ignorant in the world, if it is only held out to them, can learn there what is necessary for their salvation (1 Cor. 1:26-27). For otherwise, why would the Gospel have been put in written form in a language which everyone was then able to understand (1 Cor. 14:6-40), and even in the most familiar and popular manner of speaking which it had been possible to choose (1 Cor. 2:1). That is why St. Paul said that if the Gospel was hidden, it was hidden to those who were perishing and whose mind the god of this world had blinded, that is to say, the unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:3). And, indeed, the experience of all times has shown that God has not called the most wise and most learned, but, on the contrary, mostly of the most ignorant of the world (Is. 29:14; Luke 10:21; 1 Cor. 1:26-27, 3:18); so far from the truth is it, that He wished to hide or cover His doctrine so that it should be understood by no-one.

We draw, then, two conclusions from this discourse which are very useful to what we are discussing:

The first is, that it is not necessary to reckon as Gospel anything which men have added to the Word of God written, that is to say, the doctrine contained in the books of the Old and New Testament; but that all additions are merely superstitions and a corruption of the only true Gospel of our Lord (Matt. 15:9); St. Paul, has also spoken of this (Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). And St. Jerome wrote on this subject, “What is said without the authority of Holy Scripture is also easily set aside, as has been said.”

The second conclusion is that those who say that it only belongs to certain persons to read Scripture, and who, for this reason, do not want it to be translated into the common language, for fear that simple women and other people may read it (Rom. 1:14; Gal. 3:28; Matt. 11:28), are the true antichrists, and instruments of Satan (Matt 23:13); they are afraid that their abuses be discovered by the coming of the light.

*The manner in which the Gospel includes, in substance, the books of the Old Testament.* Moreover, by this word *Gospel* we are far from meaning what is commonly called such, *i.e.*, certain extracts which are disconnected without reason, neither discourses from the books of the four Evangelists or from the Epistles of St. Paul. On the contrary, we understand under this word Gospel, not only all of the New Testament but also all that has been promised or predicted in the Old Testament on the subject of Jesus Christ (Acts 26:22-23, 28:23; John 5:39; Rom. 1:2).

For, as we have already said, the Gospel is the only means by which, from the beginning of the world, God has always saved His elect (Heb. 13:8; Acts 4:12). That is why, as Moses declares (Gen. 3:15), God began to announce it to the world from the sin of Adam, although it was manifested and preached clearly, a long time afterwards, by Jesus Christ Himself in Person, and by His Apostles (Rom. 1:1-6, 16:25, 26).

Thus, to summarize, we call Gospel the Good News which, from the beginning, and by His grace and mercy alone, God has announced to His Church: those who, by faith, embrace Jesus Christ shall partake of eternal life in Him (Rom. 3:21-22; John 6:40).

*How what we say about the authority of the written Word must be understood: Why it is necessary that it be translated into all languages.* When we say that the Gospel, written and recorded in the manner which God has given us, is the sole ordinary means which God uses to save men (that is why this Word is called The Word of Life and of reconciliation; John 6:68; Acts 5:20; Phil. 2:16); we do not stop at the syllables, nor at the paper and ink, nor at a Gospel hung by the neck, or pronounced only as the charmers pronounce their charms, nor at a well patterned book, or worshipped with incense or other fineries. Let us never displease God by approving such sorceries and sacrileges.

But, in the first place, we close the door to all these fantastic notions which the Devil has made use of, in all times, to corrupt men.

And then, we hear the Gospel well and duly preached and expounded, so as to better understand the substance of it (Rom. 10:8; 1 Pet. 1:25), to put it in the heart where, by faith, it can produce the fruits of true repentance (Matt. 13:23; Acts 16:14). The Apostles show this clearly. When Jesus Christ sent them out, He did not say to them, "Go, read the Gospel in an unknown tongue, and worship the book in which it is written." but He said to them, "Go and preach the Gospel to every creature." (Matt 28:19). I leave aside the remonstrances that St. Paul makes to the Corinthians when he speaks of the abuse that those committed in taking pleasure in hearing foreign languages ring out in the Church of God, without any prophet to explain what was said (1 Cor. 14). But how shall anyone believe without having heard, seeing that faith comes from what is heard, as St. Paul says (Rom. 10:17)? And how shall anyone hear it when, far from being duly expounded, it is chanted in an unknown language (1 Cor. 14:9, 16-28)? How also shall anyone be established in the holy and true doctrine, comforted amid so many and various temptations, warned to resist false doctrines (Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16), without medi-

tating night and day in the Word of God (Ps. 1:2), and examining carefully the passages of Holy Scripture (Acts 17:11; John 5:39). Thus has it always been done in the Church, until the Devil, through the just punishment of God, removed this light to bring in his darkness, without anyone perceiving it. St. Peter is a witness for this, when writing to all believers, he commends the diligence with which they should take heed to hear the word of the prophets (2 Pet. 1:19-20). For he knew that the word which the Lord had said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:15-17), must be heard from the preaching of the Word of Life. St. Paul, also, expounded the same thing and practised it (Acts 20:27-28).

However, we do not say that it is permitted to everyone to be a teacher in the Church, and to expound the Holy Scriptures; for this office belongs, as we shall soon say more fully, to those who are called and lawfully ordained to do it (Rom. 10:15). But we say that everyone must read the Scriptures, and have the knowledge of them to confirm what has been expounded well in the Church, and to reject the false doctrine of false pastors. We say that the reading of the Holy Scriptures — adding what is necessary, *i.e.* the pure preaching and exposition of them: it is for this that teachers and pastors are ordained in the Church (1 Cor. 4:2; 2 Cor. 5:19-20), and not to re-sacrifice Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:18) or to howl in a language unknown to the people (1 Cor. 14:28) — is far from committing heresy; on the contrary, there is no other means of extirpating heresies (2 Tim. 3:15-17). And whoever prevents the reading of the Scriptures takes away, at the same time, from the poor people the only means of consolation (Rom. 15:4) and salvation (Luke 1:77; Acts 13:26; Eph. 1:13).

*How the Holy Spirit uses the external preaching of the gospel to create faith in the heart of the elect, and to harden the reprobate.* In the same way as the external preaching of the Gospel is an odour of death for the rebels who harden themselves, so is it an odour of life for the children of God (2 Cor. 2:15-16). Not that this force and power to save resides in the sound of the word, or that it comes from the energy of him who preaches (1 Cor. 3:7-8). But the Holy Spirit, whose office we are describing, uses this external preaching as a pipe or channel; He comes then to pierce to the depth of the soul, as the apostle says (Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23) so as to give by His grace and goodness alone, understanding to the children of God that they may be able to perceive and comprehend this high mystery of their salvation through Jesus Christ (Acts 16:14; Eph. 1:18-19). Then, He also corrects their judgment so that they approve, with wis-

dom from God, what sense and reason used to think was folly (1 Cor. 2:6-16). Moreover he corrects and changes their will so that, with ardent affection, they embrace and receive the sole remedy which is offered in Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:29; Acts 13:48) against the despair into which, without this, the preaching of the Law would necessarily bring them (Eph. 2:14-5).

This then is how the Holy Spirit, by the preaching of the Gospel, heals the wound which the preaching of the Law has uncovered and made worse (Rom. 6:14). This, I say, is how the Holy Spirit, by the preaching of the Gospel, creates in us the gift of faith which comes, at the same time, to take hold of all that is necessary for salvation in Jesus Christ; this is what we have shown above.

*The other fruit of the preaching of the Law, once the preaching of the Gospel has effectually done its work.* Among the effects that Jesus Christ produces when He dwells in us, we have shown, and this is not the least, that He creates in us a pure heart (Ps. 51:10) to know (Jer. 24:7), to will and to do what is of God (Phil. 2:13); previously we were slaves in sin (Rom. 6:22), enemies of God (Eph. 2:12), incapable even of thinking anything good (2 Cor. 3:5).

Thus, when our disposition has been changed, the preaching of the Law begins also to change its effect in us, such that instead of terrifying us, it consoles us (1 John 2:17; 2 Pet. 1:10-11); instead of showing us how near our damnation is, it serves us as a guide to teach us the good works (Jer. 31:33; Rom. 7:22) in which God has purposed we shall walk (Eph. 2:10); finally, instead of being an unpleasant and unbearable yoke, it becomes pleasant and light to us (Matt. 11:30). There remains with us only one regret: that of not being able to obey it perfectly, as we wish to do, on account of the remnant of our corruption which battles against the Spirit (Rom. 7:22,23). But all this regret does not drive us to despair, but rather drives us to pray ardently to our Father who strengthens us more and more (Rom. 8:23-26). Faith, which is the testimony of the Spirit of God crying in our hearts (Rom. 8:15), indeed assures us that the curse of the Law has been blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ to whom it unites us (Rom 8:1); moreover, the same faith also assures us that the Spirit shall conquer, however long He tarries (Rom. 6:14), and even death shall be the means of our victory (John 5:24; 1 Cor. 15:26, 54; Heb. 2:14). Thus is brought to completion in us, by degrees, the remainder of true repentance, which comes from true conversion; it begins with contrition, or feeling of sin, and progresses by amendment of all that is in the

man, visible and invisible (1 Thes. 5:23).

That is also why we conclude that this leads every true penitent to confess his fault before him whom it concerns, that is to say, before those who have been offended, and even before the whole assembly of the Church, if that is necessary. This confession must be accompanied, according to the measure in which this is possible, with restitution and satisfaction towards one's neighbour, for, without this, repentance can only be feigned and counterfeit. Thus, it is easy to see that we do not reject, but, on the contrary, require as necessary to salvation the true confession which has been ordained of God. Nevertheless, we have no desire to torment consciences by auricular confession (as it is called), which men have invented, in place of true confession and repentance, nor to establish towards God any other satisfaction than the sole satisfaction of Jesus Christ.

*The second means which the Holy Spirit uses to enable us to enjoy Jesus Christ, and why the Lord has never been content solely with the preaching of His word.* We have said that the Sacraments are the other means, the other instrument by which the Holy Spirit applies to us all that is necessary for our salvation. But, since by this word is generally understood all the signs by which any sacred and spiritual thing is declared to us, it is necessary, first of all, to limit the meaning of the word.

Therefore, we must understand that our God, who is perfectly merciful, in using our very poor and miserable nature as a means to better manifest His goodness and long suffering, has not been content to simply make known to us and to show us, as it were from a distance, the means by which it has pleased Him to save us. Nevertheless, even in this, He uses incomprehensible gentleness and compassion in informing us of His will through men similar to ourselves (Deut. 18:15; Phil. 2:7; 2 Cor. 5:19-20), and, what is more, stammers, so to speak, with us as nurses do with their little children (1 Thess. 2:7). But, in addition, to crown His infinite goodness, He has willed to add to the preaching of His Word certain actions which are designed to compel the most uneducated and stubborn in the world to believe more and more that God is not mocking them in offering them eternal life by this most wondrous means — the death of His own Son. Thus, by such signs and actions, all their senses are driven to consent to the doctrine of the Gospel, as if they were already fully enjoying the salvation which is promised to them. In the same way, we see (if it is proper to make a comparison between affairs in the world and the incomprehensible goodness of God) that, when judicially the posses-

sion or ownership of something is awarded to us, certain ceremonies and actions will be used in the act of taking possession or in the execution of a warrant, to assure us and to testify to others that such and such belongs to us. Even in our civil affairs, although a lawyer has signed a contract and appended the name of the witnesses, in addition to all this, the seal of the office where the contract was drawn up will be affixed, so as to render the contract more valid and authentic (Rom. 4:11).

Thus, from the beginning, our Lord God was not content with announcing to Adam the grace by which He had purposed to save His Church through His Son; He willed to add thereto sacrifices, as living figures of the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ, to strengthen the faith of the children of God in the redemption which they were awaiting (Heb. 11:4). Then afterwards, renewing this covenant of grace and of mercy to Abraham, He added thereto the Sacrament of circumcision (Gen. 17:10-11). Finally, at the time of Moses, He added thereto the Sacrament of the Passover Lamb and many other ceremonies (Ex. 12); these were Sacraments representing to them what Jesus Christ would accomplish in His time, that is to say, all the mystery of their salvation: the Apostle declares this amply in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

But when the time appointed by God arrived, Jesus Christ, by His coming, put an end to all that which had prefigured His coming. He put an end to the shadows and Old Testament Sacraments and brought to the world another greater clarity so that, henceforth, men might worship God with more pure and spiritual service, as approaching more closely the nature of God who is Spirit (John 4:21-25). However, having still regard to our frail and dull nature, He thought well to add some Sacraments and external signs to the preaching of this eternal Word, to better nourish and support our faith. For, although Jesus Christ has already acquitted us by His death, yet, while we are below, we possess the Heavenly Kingdom only by hope (Rom. 8:24; 1 Cor. 13:9); it is needful that we be supported to grow in this and persevere to the end (Eph. 4:15).



## **Appendix Five:**

### **The Relation of the State to Christ**

by James Henley Thornwell

The Constitution of the United States was an attempt to realize the notion of popular freedom, without the checks of aristocracy and a throne, and without the alliance of a national church. The conception was a noble one, but the execution was not commensurate with the design. The fundamental error of our fathers was, that they accepted a partial for a complete statement of the truth. They saw clearly the human side — that popular governments are the offspring of popular will; and that rulers, as the servants and not the masters of their subjects, are properly responsible to them. They failed to apprehend the Divine side — that all just government is the ordinance of God, and that magistrates are His ministers who must answer to Him for the execution of their trust. The consequence of this failure, and of exclusive attention to a single aspect of the case, was to invest the people with a species of supremacy as insulting to God as it was injurious to them. They became a law unto themselves; there was nothing beyond them to check or control their caprices or their pleasure. All were accountable to them; they were accountable to none. This was certainly to make the people a God; and if it was not explicitly expressed that they could do no wrong, it was certainly implied that there was no tribunal to take cognizance of their acts. A foundation was thus laid for the worst of all possible forms of government — a democratic absolutism, which, in the execution of its purposes, does not scruple to annul the most solemn compacts and to cancel the most sacred obligations. The will of majorities must become the supreme law, if the voice of the people is to be regarded as the voice of God; if they are, in

fact, the only God whom rulers are bound to obey. It is enough, therefore, to look upon government as simply the institute of man. Important as this aspect of the subject unquestionably is, yet if we stop there, we shall sow the seeds of disaster and failure. We must contemplate people and rulers as alike subject to the authority of God. His will is the true supreme; and it is under Him, and as the means of expressing His sovereign pleasure, that conventions are called, constitutions are framed and governments erected. To the extent that the State is a moral person, it must needs be under moral obligation, and moral obligation without reference to a superior will is a flat contradiction in terms. If, then, the State is an ordinance of God, it should acknowledge the fact. If it exists under the conditions of a law superior to all human decrees, and to which all human decrees behoove to be conformed, that law should be distinctly recognized. Let us guard, in this new Confederacy, against the fatal delusion that our government is a mere expression of human will. It is, indeed, an expression of will, but of will regulated and measured by those eternal principles of right which stamp it at the same time as the creature and institute of God. And of all governments in the world, a confederate government, resting as it does upon plighted faith, can least afford to dispense with the Supreme Guardian of treaties.

Your honourable body has already, to some extent, rectified the error of the old Constitution, but not so distinctly and clearly as the Christian people of these States desire to see done. We venture respectfully to suggest, that it is not enough for a State which enjoys the light of Divine revelation to acknowledge in general terms the supremacy of God; it must also acknowledge the supremacy of His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds. To Jesus Christ all power in heaven and earth is committed. To Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess. He is the Ruler of the nations, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Should it be said that the subjection of governments to Jesus Christ is not a relation manifested by reason, and therefore not obligatory on the State, the answer is obvious — that duties spring not from the manner in which the relation is made known, but from the truth of the relation itself. If the fact is so, that Jesus Christ is our Lord, and we know the fact, no matter how we come to know it, we are bound to acknowledge it, and act upon it. A father is entitled to the reverence of his son, a master to the obedience of his servant, and a king to the allegiance of his

subjects, no matter how the relation between them is ascertained. Now, that Jesus Christ is the supreme Ruler of the nations, we know with infallible certainty, if we accept the Scriptures as the Word of God.

But it may be asked — and this is the core of all the perplexity which attends the subject — Has the State any right to accept the Scriptures as the Word of God? The answer requires a distinction, and that distinction seems to us to obviate all difficulty. If by “accepting the Scriptures” it is meant that the State has a right to prescribe them as a rule of faith and practice to its subjects, the answer must be in the negative. The State is lord of no man’s conscience. As long as he preserves the peace, and is not injurious to the public welfare, no human power has a right to control his opinion or to restrain his acts. In these matters he is responsible to none but God. He may be Atheist, Deist, infidel, Turk or Pagan: it is no concern of the State, so long as he walks orderly. Its protecting shield must be over him, as over every other citizen. We utterly abhor the doctrine that the civil magistrate has any jurisdiction in the domain of religion, in its relations to the conscience or conduct of others, and we cordially approve the clause in our Confederate Constitution which guarantees the amplest liberty on this subject.

But if by “accepting the Scriptures” it is meant that the State may itself believe them to be true, and regulate its own conduct and legislation in conformity with their teachings, the answer must be in the affirmative. As a moral person, it has a conscience as really and truly as every individual citizen. To say that its conscience is only the aggregate of individual consciences, is to say that it is made up of conflicting and even contradictory elements. The State condemns many things which many of its subjects approve, and enjoins many things which many of its subjects condemn. There are those who are opposed to the rights of property and the institution of marriage, yet the public conscience sanctions and protects them both. What, then, is this public conscience? It is clearly the sum of those convictions of right, that sense of the honourable, just and true, which legislators feel themselves bound to obey in the structure of governments and the enactment of laws. It is a reflection of the law of God; and when that law is enunciated with authoritative clearness, as it is in the Scriptures, it becomes only the more solemnly imperative. And as the eternal rule of justice, the State should acknowledge it. Considered in its organic capacity as a person, it no more violates the rights of others in submitting itself to the revealed will of God, than a Christian, when he

worships the supreme Jehovah, violates the rights of an Atheist or idolater. What the State does itself, and what it enjoins upon others to do, are very different things. It has an organic life apart from the aggregate life of the individuals who compose it; and in that organic life, it is under the authority of Jesus Christ and the restraints of His holy Word.

That, in recognizing this doctrine, the State runs no risk of trespassing upon the rights of conscience is obvious from another point of view. The will of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, is not a positive constitution for the State; in that relation it stands only to the Church. It is rather a negative check upon its power. It does not prescribe the things to be done, but only forbids the things to be avoided. It only conditions and restrains the discretion of rulers within the bounds of the Divine law. It is, in other words, a limitation, and not a definition, of power. The formula according to which the Scriptures are accepted by the State is: Nothing shall be done which they forbid. The formula according to which they are accepted by the Church is: Nothing shall be done but what they enjoin. They are here the positive measure of power. Surely the government of no Christian people can scruple to accept the negative limitations of the Divine Word. Surely, our rulers do not desire that they shall have the liberty of being wiser than God.

The amendment which we desire, we crave your honourable body to take note, does not confine the administration of the State exclusively to the hands of Christian men. A Jew might be our Chief Magistrate, provided he would come under the obligation to do nothing in the office inconsistent with the Christian religion. He would not be required to say that he himself believes it, nor would he assume the slightest obligation to propagate or enforce it. All that he would do would be to acknowledge it as the religion of the State, and to bind himself that he will sanction no legislation that sets aside its authority. The religion of the State is one thing; the religion of the individuals who may happen to be at the head of affairs is quite another. The religion of the State is embodied in its constitution, as the concrete form of its organic life.

Your honourable body will perceive that the contemplated measure has no reference to a union or alliance betwixt the Church and State. To any such scheme the Presbyterians, and, we think we can safely venture to say, the entire Christian people of these States, are utterly opposed. The State, as such cannot be a member, much less, therefore, can it exercise the function of settling the creed and the government, of a Church.

The provinces of the two are entirely distinct: they differ in their origin, their nature, their ends, their prerogatives, their powers and their sanctions. They cannot be mixed or confounded without injury to both. But the separation of Church and State is a very different thing from the separation of religion and the State. Here is where our fathers erred. In their anxiety to guard against the evils of a religious establishment, and to preserve the provinces of Church and State separate and distinct, they virtually expelled Jehovah from the government of the country, and left the State an irresponsible corporation, or responsible only to the immediate corporators. They made it a moral person, and yet not accountable to the Source of all law. It is this anomaly which we desire to see removed; and the removal of it by no means implies a single element of what is involved in a national Church.

The amendment which this General Assembly ventures respectfully to crave we have reason to believe is earnestly desired, and would be hailed as an auspicious omen by the overwhelming majority of the Christian people of these Confederate States. Is it not due to them that their consciences, in the future legislation of the country, should be protected from all that has a tendency to wound or grieve them? They ask no encroachments upon the rights of others. They simply crave that a country which they love should be made much dearer to them, and that the Government which they have helped to frame they may confidently commend to their Saviour and their God, under the cheering promise that those who honour Him He will honour. Promotion cometh not from the East, nor from the West, nor from the South. God is the ruler among the nations; and the people who refuse Him their allegiance shall be broken with a rod of iron, or dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel. Our Republic will perish like the Pagan republics of Greece and Rome, unless we baptize it into the name of Christ. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.... Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." We long to see, what the world has never yet beheld, a truly Christian Republic, and we humbly hope that God has reserved it for the people of these Confederate States to realize the grand and glorious idea. God has wooed us by extraordinary goodness; He is now tempering us by gentle chastisements. Let the issue be the penitent submission of this great people at the footstool of His Son.

The whole substance of what we desire may be expressed in the

following or equivalent terms, to be added to the section providing for liberty of conscience:

Nevertheless we, the people of these Confederate States, distinctly acknowledge our responsibility to God, and the supremacy of His Son, Jesus Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords; and hereby ordain that no law shall be passed by the Congress of these Confederate States inconsistent with the will of God, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

**Appendix Six:**  
**Church and State:**  
**A Response to James Henley Thornwell**  
by Thomas Ephraim Peck

The fundamental relations implied in the distinction between “the things which are God’s, and the things which are Cæsar’s,” have been recognized, more or less clearly, from the beginning of the history of our race. These relations are that of man to man in a state of society, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, that of man to God. They have been designated by different names, and have been the objects of divers kinds of legislation, according to the diversities of age and country; but, whether known by this name or that, whether, in practice, partially separated or totally confounded, the relations themselves have been, and could not but be, apprehended. The relation of man to man would force itself upon the notice by the necessities of every day’s existence; the relation of man to God would be developed in the operations of conscience, arraiging the offender before an invisible tribunal, and pointing him to a coming retribution. Yet it cannot be denied that in reference to few objects of human thought have attempts at articulate exposition been more unsuccessful than in reference to this; or that the wisdom of the wisest man has still more signally failed, by any kind of political machinery, to realize perfectly the theories which make the most plausible approximations to the truth.

It is only in modern times, indeed, that the philosopher has undertaken to grapple with these relations with a view to the practical separation of the spheres of the temporal and the spiritual, the civil and the ec-

clesiastical, the Church and the State. In the ancient forms of civilization, in its leading types, the Oriental, the Greek, and the Roman, we look in vain for any discrimination between these powers. In the East, the cradle of the human race, and the seat of vast empires, where the patriarchal idea and the patriarchal sentiment pervade and mould the whole fabric of society, the monarch is not merely the highest religious functionary, but a divinity, the object of worship to his subjects. In Greece, the cradle of philosophy, and the scene of the proudest triumphs of speculative thought, we find a similar, though not so complete an identification of the civil and the religious. The miraculous subtlety of Aristotle was as unequal to this discrimination as it was to the discovery of the fact and the necessity of a physical creation *ex nihilo*. Among the Romans, whose extraordinary genius for government made them the masters of the world, we find a still larger infusion of orientalism than among the Greeks, and far less of a speculative tendency, and, consequently, a more complete confusion of the relations which belong to man as a sojourner on earth with the relations which belong to him as the subject of a supreme invisible power. In illustration of this point we take the liberty of quoting a paragraph or two from an essay on Roman legislation by that able lawyer and accomplished scholar, Hugh S. Legaré, of South Carolina. We offer no apology for the length of the quotation, as it is the legislation of Rome, more than all other causes combined, which has determined the posture of all christendom for ages upon this great question:

The legislation and history of Rome are altogether unintelligible without a distinct apprehension of the causes, the extent, and the consequences of this extraordinary influence — (the influence of the class of the hereditary priests and jurists of the republic, the ulema behind the throne greater than the throne itself). All nations are governed more by manners and opinions than by laws, and the Romans above all other nations. But their manners and opinions were formed and directed by this caste of lawyer-priests, an institution quite oriental, transmitted to them through Tuscany, at once by inheritance and by education. In every part of their annals, from the earliest struggles of the plebs, in the freshness and vigor of youthful health and enthusiasm, under their immortal tribunes, down to periods of degeneracy and servitude, the same spirit is everywhere visible. Religion, law, subordination, or all these names in one, discipline, civil and military, at home and abroad — “this was their sorcery.” Created to teach the law to all coming time, they regarded it with instinctive awe, approached its oracles as those of their gods, and



yielded to it a devoted, yet magnanimous and enlightened obedience. Hence it was that revolution after revolution occurred; that the assemblies of the *curiæ* were superseded by those of the centuries, and these in turn overshadowed by those of the tribes; that the veto of a single tribune, clothed himself in no armor but that of religion (inviolable, *sacrosanctus*), could bring on universal anarchy by preventing all elections, and leaving every office vacant; that repeated secessions of the plebs to the mountain appropriately called sacred, or to the Janaculum, took place; that for centuries together the story of Roman politics, omitting the wars altogether, is, in the hands of Livy, and even of Dionysius, by far the most thrilling and sublime of historical romances; and yet that, in the midst of so many elements of disorder and violence, not one drop of blood was shed in civil war, and the glorious commonwealth, "Rising in clouded majesty, at length, apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light."

Again, speaking of the *libri rituales* (to the Romans what the Mosaic ritual was to the Hebrews), Mr. Legaré says, after Festus: "They teach the rites with which cities are to be founded, and altars and temples dedicated; the holiness of the walls of towns; the law relating to their gates; how tribes, wards, and centuries are to be distributed; armies organized and arrayed; and other, the like, things relating to peace and war." Then adds:

We see the same influence extending itself over the very soil of the Roman territory, and making, in the technical language of their augury, one vast temple of it. It was consecrated by the auspices; it could become the property only of one who had the auspices, that is, a patrician or Roman, properly so-called; once set apart and conveyed away, it was irrevocably alienated, so that sales of the domain were guaranteed by religion, and it was sacrilegious to establish a second colony on the place dedicated to a first. Auspices could be taken nowhere else but on some spot which they had rendered sacred. The city, by its original inauguration, was also a temple; its gates and walls were holy; its *pomœrium* was unchangeable, until higher auspices had suspended those under which it was first marked out. Every spot of ground might become, by the different uses to which it was applied, sacred (*sacer*), holy (*sanctus*), religious (*religiosus*). To the assembly of the *curiæ*, the presence of the augurs was, of course, indispensable; that of the centuries could not be held, unless the augurs and two pontiffs assisted at it, as it was dissolved instantly at their bidding, on the occurrence of any sinister omen. The

first agrimensor, says Niebuhr, was an augur, accompanied by Tuscan priests or their scholars. From the foundation of the city, the sacredness of property was shadowed forth in the worship of the god Terminus, and that of contracts protected by an apotheosis of faith. In short, the worthy Roman lived, moved, and had his being, as the Greek writers observe, in religion.

We have, as yet, made no allusion to the history of the Old Testament, because, while, as to its subject, it belongs to the East, it is, as to its origin, the word of God, and therefore cannot be expected to contain any merely philosophical views upon this or upon any other question; and further, because the dispensation which is its main purpose to reveal and to illustrate was altogether peculiar, and was designed to be temporary. But the very fact that it contains the history of an oriental people makes it specially instructive, if found to present or to imply views of the connection of the civil and ecclesiastical powers different from those generally prevailing in the East. And the additional consideration that we have, in those venerable records, the primæval history of our race, will furnish an ample apology, if any apology be necessary, for a brief notice of it.

We learn, then, that the whole race was once confined to the limits of a single family, and that all the intricate and manifold relations of human society which have been developed in the progress of civilization once lay here in the germ. The family was the nursery, both of the secular and of the spiritual power. But these powers were combined in the person of the *paterfamilias*, who was both king and priest, governing and ordering his household in regard to the things of this life, and instructing them and leading them in the knowledge and worship of God. In process of time, even after the visible Church had been formally set up in the family of Abraham, we meet with that mysterious person, Melchizedek, who was at once king of Salem and priest of the most high God. In him the powers of these twin ordinances of God, the Church and the State, appear still united, but discernible as distinct and separable. Then, under the institute of Moses, we find the sacerdotal functions given to a separate order of officers, and the whole ministry of the tabernacle to a particular tribe; while the elders, the representatives of the patriarchal system, seem to have continued the exercise of civil functions. We do not pretend that there was an entire separation of the secular and the spiritual. It is possible that the synagogue, with its mingled jurisdiction over civil and ecclesiastical affairs, may even then have existed, as that jurisdiction was

based on the patriarchal principle upon which the whole Hebrew commonwealth was organized. But we assert that we have here in the books of Moses what we find nowhere else in the East, a class of high and honorable functions in the matter of divine worship, with which the highest officer in the State dared not intermeddle. It is certainly a striking circumstance that, in a theocracy like that of Israel, its public forms should recognize to so great an extent the distinction between civil and sacred functions. As a theocracy, it could not easily admit of their entire separation; and it must be borne in mind that, as the State was organized with a view to the interests of the Church as supreme, if any argument be drawn from Judaism in support of the union of Church and State, it is rather in favor of the ultramontane than of the Erastian theory. In this respect paganism presents a strong contrast to Judaism in giving supremacy to the civil. But in both, as also in Mahometanism, the two powers are so combined that their history cannot be separately written. There is no history of the synagogue, or the mosque, or the pagan temple, as there is of the Church.

So thoroughly rooted had the union of the two powers become by immemorial custom and tradition in the thinking, feeling, and entire life of mankind, that there can be little doubt of the wisdom and love of that dispensation by which the Christian Church was exposed, almost from the beginning of its existence and for the first three hundred years of its career, to the bitter persecution of the civil power. The line was thus clearly drawn between God and Cæsar, and it was demonstrated that the Church could live, not only without alliance with the State, but in spite of all its power and hate. But no sooner did Cæsar profess himself the friend of Christ and his cause, than the old idea of union was revived, and Cæsar assumed once more the exercise of power in the Church of God. Then came the reaction of the human mind, too violent to rest in the centre of truth, and swinging to the opposite extreme, still holding to the union, but making the civil subordinate to the ecclesiastical. The popery of Hildebrand, of Innocent III., and Boniface VIII., was the Nemesis of the Erastianism of Constantine, Theodosius, and Justinian. The doctrine, however, of these emperors was only the old Roman doctrine of the first centuries of the republic, with the change of Christianity for paganism. After the desperate struggle between the popes and the emperors, which kept the world in an uproar during the Middle Ages, came the earthquake of the Reformation. Even that great revolution did not dissolve the union of Church and State. It continued to exist in some countries, as in Ger-

many, Holland, England, and even in Scotland, to hinder the progress and mar the purity of the work of God, and in others, as in France, to extinguish it almost altogether.

It was in the Church of Scotland that the independence of the spiritual power was first proclaimed in modern times. John Erskine of Dun declared to the Regent Mar, "There is a spiritual jurisdiction and power which God has given unto his kirk, and to them that bear office therein; and there is a temporal jurisdiction and power given of God to kings and civil magistrates. Both the powers are of God, and most agreeing to the fortifying one of the other, if they be rightly used." Andrew Melville dared to say to King James: "There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland; there is King James, the head of the commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member." "For the space of more than a century," says Mr. Robinson, "this noble army of the martyrs attested the spiritual freedom of Christ's kingdom in the face of every effort of Cæsar to crush out the truth. But the seduction and arts of power at length accomplished what the violence of power could never do; and in the act of settlement of the Scottish kingdom under Queen Anne, the only testimony for this great truth was silenced, and, in consequence, the Scotch Church of the eighteenth century degenerated even to the point of spiritual death. Nothing could more forcibly illustrate the power of current and generally-admitted error in blinding the eyes of intelligent men against the plainest results of their own principles than the fact that, when the slavery of the Church to the power of the State could no longer be endured, and the memorable exodus of the Free Church of Scotland occurred, even then Chalmers and his compeers could not go all the length of the apostolic idea of church freedom, but clung, as, indeed, their disciples still cling, to the idea (while they practice voluntarism) that the State should support the Church, as though it were possible for the Church to depend upon the State for support and still be independent."

Such being the history of the case, it ought not to create surprise, if the public mind, even in the freest and most enlightened nations of modern times, should not appear to have a clear comprehension of the principles which control this subject, or that, in practice, there should be so great a neglect of those principles. Momentary glimpses of the truth may be discerned along the ages, even in the darkest ages, under the pres-

sure of persecution, when the weak were compelled to take refuge from brute force under the ramparts of sound principles; but the light which shines clearly in the darkness is lost again in the blaze of recovered power, and the persecuted of yesterday are the persecutors of today. Decrees of councils, bulls of popes, rescripts of emperors, decisions of jurists, opinions of publicists, dogmas of the civil and dogmas of the canon law, all conspire to join together what God has put asunder — the things that are his and the things that are Cæsar's. And now, in the middle of the nineteenth century, and in America, we who have been accustomed to boast that it was our mission as a people to teach the world the truth upon this subject have witnessed among ourselves, if not the revival of the maxims of the canonists and civilians, at least the adoption of measures which can only be acquitted of atrocious wickedness and folly by the truth of those maxims. "So far," says Vattel, "as religion is seated in the heart, it is an affair of the conscience, in which every one should be directed by his own understanding; but so far as it is external and publicly established, it is an affair of the state." It is upon this maxim that the officers of the usurper at Washington have proceeded, when they have dragged from their pulpits and banished from their churches the ministers of Christ because their prayers sinned against political orthodoxy, either in the way of omission or of commission. And on the other hand, the Church, forgetting that her power is strictly a power only to declare and do her Master's will, as revealed in His word, has usurped the functions of the State, and fulminated its curses against all who hold the heresy of State sovereignty. Then, among ourselves of the Southern Confederacy, there are those who seem ambitious to revive the absurdities of the Fifth Monarchy fanatics, and to exclude from the councils of the State all except the saints; and others, who speak as if a particular form of religion were destined to be the religion of the Southern Confederacy, or, at least, of its army and navy. And doubtless there are among us, as in the old Union, tender-conscienced atheists also, who are shocked at the recognition of a God at all in the administration of the government.

All these facts go to show the importance of standing and looking for the old paths, that we may walk therein. The revolutionary temper of the public mind prompts us to look for something new; but we want nothing new. We are not Jacobin destroyers, despising the wisdom of the past; but like William the Silent and the Dutch, like Hampden and Sydney and Somers, like Washington and the and the glorious fathers of the

first war for independence, it is our mission to “maintain” and to restore, We need no new principles: but we do need to review and remember the old, to refresh ourselves and renew our youth at the fountain of truth. This is our apology, for asking the attention of our countrymen once more to the principles which constitute a true theory, or an approximation to a true theory, because there is room for doubt whether a scientific expression can be given to the nature and limitations of either Church or State, so clearly and so sharply defined as to afford rules of universal application. One of the factors of the problem still waits for a thorough analysis and construction; and the political history of this country would seem to demonstrate that we do not comprehend the nature of the State. But we may approach the truth by considering the points in which the Church and the State agree, and then the points in which they differ.

I. The Church and the State agree in these three points:

1. That they are ordained of God. 2. That they are ordained for his glory. 3. That they are ordained for the good of mankind. These statements will not be disputed by any of our readers; and we shall not stop to argue them.

II. They differ in the following points:

1. That the State is an ordinance of God considered as the creator, and, therefore, the moral governor of mankind, while the Church is an ordinance of God considered as the saviour and restorer of mankind. The State is ordained for man as man; the Church for man as a sinner in a condition of inchoate restoration and salvation. The State is for the whole race of man; the Church consists of that portion of the race which is really, or by credible profession, the mediatorial body of Christ.

We say that civil government is designed for man as man. We find it existing in the germ, when the race consisted of one man and one woman. The woman was in a state of subordination to the man. This subordination was not the penal consequence of transgression, as is evident from 1 Timothy ii. 11-14; where Paul argues that the transgression was the consequence of the violation, by the woman, of the order established by heaven; of her ambitiously forsaking her condition of subordination, and acting as if she were the superior or the equal of the man. If it should be asked where was the necessity or the propriety of an order implying subordination in beings who were created in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, the answer is, that the propriety was founded upon the diversities of capacity in intellect and

other endowments of human nature, which it pleased God should exist in the man and the woman. If man had not fallen, it would have been his duty still to bring up his children in the knowledge of God, and to direct them in the way in which they should glorify their Maker, albeit these children, by the terms of the supposition, would all have been holy and without inclination to go astray; nay, more, in no danger at all of apostasy from God. In other words, if all creatures, because they are creatures, need direction from God, there is not only no absurdity in making some of them the instruments of directing others, but there are traces of the wonderful wisdom and goodness of the creator in such an arrangement. Society is not an unison, but an exquisite harmony; a grand instrument of various chords for the harping of hymns and hallelujahs to the God and Father of all. Even among the unfallen angels, we have reason to believe, there are thrones, dominions, and principalities, and powers — order in the form of a celestial hierarchy. Man having fallen, however, and the love which constituted the very spirit and temper of his mind having given place to enmity, something more than direction was now necessary. He needed restraint — his appetites must be bridled and coerced. The law of the two tables, which, in his state of innocence and uprightness, had been written upon his heart, summarily, in the positive form of love, must now be written externally, in detail, upon tables of stone, and in a prohibitory form — “thou shalt not.” And in reference to the second table, which prescribes the duties growing out of the relations of man to man, it became necessary that overt acts of transgression, which were not only morally wrong, but injurious to society, should not only be discountenanced by prohibition, but restrained and prevented by punishment. Hence arose a government of force.

The case, then, stands thus: In any condition of our race, the social nature of man must have given rise to the secular power. In a state of innocence it would have been simply a directing power, a constitution designed merely to carry out and fulfil, without confusion, the blind instincts or impulses of love, love of self and love of “neighbor.” In a fallen state, it has become, of necessity, a restraining and punishing, as well as a directing power. But in both conditions and in both forms it is an ordinance of God, “the author of the constitution and course of nature.” It is the nature of man to exist in society, and society is necessary to his existence. But society cannot exist without order and law of some sort. Therefore, government is necessary to man as society, and, for this reason, is

as natural to man as society. It may not be an original endowment of man, but it is natural; and if natural, then the ordinance of God. The perception of distance by the eye is not an original endowment of man, but the organ is so constituted that, in the course of time, it necessarily acquires it; and it is, therefore, natural to man, and therefore the ordinance of God. Civil government, then, is a branch or department of the moral government of God, the creator and ruler over man. God governs man by mechanical laws, by chemical laws, by vital laws, and he governs him by civil laws. He who leaps from a precipice, or drinks a glass of poison, and dies, dies under a law of God which executes itself. He who murders his brother, and dies on the gallows, dies under a law of God, executed by the hand of man. In all these cases, death is a penalty inflicted by God for the violation of a rule of his government, physical or moral.

Once more: If this be a just view of the subject, civil government is a great moral institute, not a mere expedient of human sagacity and wisdom for the prevention of evil. It is this low, wretched, utilitarian view which has contributed its full share to the ruin of the late United States government, in which the criminal law was fast becoming as pure an affair of utilitarian regulation as the civil. But the government of God, as creator, is a government of justice; and the civil magistrate, who is his minister, servant (*διάκονος*; *diakonos*), has no right to inflict any punishment which justice does not sanction, and is bound to inflict the punishment which justice requires. This remark is made for the sake of one important inference, and that is, that every civil government on earth is bound explicitly to recognize its responsibility to God as the moral governor of mankind. It is perfectly monstrous that the power which bears the sword and assumes the awful prerogative of taking human life, either in peace or war, should not acknowledge itself to be the servant of the sovereign Lord of life and death; that the power which represents the majesty of justice should not recognize its responsibility to him who is the eternal fountain and standard of all righteousness. One of the sins, doubtless, for which the vengeance of God descended upon the Federal government, was the atheism of its fundamental law; and it is a matter of devout thanksgiving unto God that the people of the new Confederacy have had the grace given to them explicitly to acknowledge their dependence upon him, both in their Confederate Constitution and in their Confederate escutcheon. We have written *Deo vindice* upon the flag which our noble countrymen have borne aloft on a hundred bloody and victorious battle-



fields. Let us never forget that God, our *Vindex*, is the punisher of our sins, as well as the protector of our rights, and the avenger of our wrongs. Let us also remember that it is not enough to bear this solemn truth upon our banners; we must bear it upon our hearts, lest we meet the fate of those of old, who “flattered him with their mouths, and lied unto him with their tongues.”

So much for civil government as the ordinance of God, the creator, preserver, and moral governor of mankind. The Church differs from it in this, as has been said, that it is the ordinance of God, as the Saviour of men, in the person of Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son. It contemplates man, not as upright, in his original condition of innocence, nor simply as a fallen being, but as “the prisoner of hope”; or, more strictly still, as the “heir of salvation,” really or by credible profession. Its great function is to teach, to convince, to persuade, “to bear witness to the truth.” Its triumphs are the triumphs of love; it drags no reluctant captives at the wheels of its chariot; the design of its ordinances, its oracles, its ministry, is, through the efficacious operation of the Holy Ghost, to bring its captives into hearty sympathy with its King, and so to give them a share in the glory and exultation of the triumphs of the King. It has nothing to do with the power of the sword; its symbol is the keys. Its discipline is not the discipline of avenging justice, asserting the unbending majesty of the law, but the discipline of a mother, whose bowels yearn over the wayward child, and who inflicts no pain except for the child’s reformation and salvation. The authority of her King is spiritual. His voice is, “Son, give me thy heart”; and by the power of his Spirit he sweetly and powerfully constrains those whom he chooses for members of his kingdom “to call him Lord.” They who are his, or profess to be his, have, or make a credible profession of having, the great law of love written upon their hearts, and, therefore, need more the directing than the restraining power of the law.

The difference in this point between the civil and the ecclesiastical power may throw some light on the question which has been agitated in our church of late as to the duty of recognizing the kingly office of Christ our Lord in the civil constitutions of the country. Christians are all agreed that Jesus, their Saviour, is King of kings and Lord of lords, not only in the sense that he is the greatest of kings, but in the sense that all earthly kings and lords are subject to his authority. But the question is, whether civil rulers derive their authority from him as mediator, or

whether they derive their authority from God as moral governor of mankind. The latter seems to us to be the truth. Christ says that his kingdom is “not of this world.” This is his solemn testimony before a civil magistrate whose authority he recognizes. (See John xix. 10, 11; Rom. xiii. 1, *etc.*) Now, was Pilate, as a representative of the Roman government, acting as an officer of the kingdom of Christ? If so, to what perplexity are we reduced in the interpretation of such a text as John xviii. 35-37! If any authority is “of this world,” it certainly is the authority of the civil magistrate. If it should be said that, as Christ is “head over all things unto the church,” his supreme headship should be acknowledged by all “powers that be”; we answer, first, that it ought to be done where it can be honestly and truly done; and we doubt not that the day is coming when all “all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him.” But how is it now? “No man calleth Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost,” says Paul in 1 Cor. xii. 1. Are there more than a very small minority of the people of the Confederate States who are, in the judgment of charity, persuaded by the Holy Ghost that our blessed Saviour is Lord and King? What then? Will the acknowledgment of Christ in the constitution make us a “Christian nation”? Have not the kings of France enjoyed the titles of “eldest sons of the church” and “most Christian kings”? What shall we say of Henry VIII. and Philip II.? O Christ! what crimes have been committed in thy name!

No; there is no magic in the name of Christ emblazoned in our Constitution and on our banners to transform us into a Christian people. Many a foul heart has beaten under the “cross” of the crusader; far fouler than beat under the crescent of the Saracen. To make the change proposed in our constitution would have one of two effects: Either to make us a nation of hypocrites, or to exclude from our public service every sort of ability which was not found associated with a cordial reception of Christ as king, or, at least, with a sincere recognition of his authority. Are we prepared for either alternative? We believe that, as civil government was ordained for all men and not for the saints only; as there is a moral constitution in all men which responds to the authority of God as moral governor, and they can recognize him as such without the saving power of the Holy Ghost; and as God, the God of nature and providence, has endowed men with capacity for government who are not Christians; all that is necessary in the way of an explicit acknowledgment of responsibility is the acknowledgment of our responsibility to God as the governor of na-

tions. But we shall have more to say on this subject under the next head.

2. The next point of difference between Church and State is in the rules by which they are to be respectively regulated in the exercise of their functions. The rule of the Church is the word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This is the statute book of the visible kingdom of Christ. The rule for the State is the "light of nature," or human reason. The power of the Church is, strictly and only, "ministerial and declarative"; the power of the State is magisterial and imperative. The Church has no power to make laws, but only to declare the law of God. All her acts of government are acts of obedience to her Head and King. The State has the power to make laws as well as to declare them; has a legislative as well as a judicial power. Hence, the form of government for the Church, the regulative and the constitutive principles of her organization, are not matters to be determined by human reason, but to be derived from the Bible as the constitution and statute-book: while, in the State, these are matters to be settled by the history and condition of political communities. The life of the State is natural, and it is left to assume an organization for itself. The life of the Church is supernatural, and God prescribes an organization for it.

If it should be asked, whether the Bible is no rule for the civil power — whether the secular magistrate may proceed, in all cases, as if God had not revealed his will in writing — the answer is, assuredly not. In the first place, the light of nature is made much more clear by the revealed will of God. For example, in respect to the justice and expediency of capital punishment for the crime of murder, the Bible not only gives its sanction to this penalty, but it makes it the duty of the magistrate, as the sword-bearer, to inflict it. So, also, as to the lawfulness of defensive war. The sword-bearer is bound to wage such a war. According to the light of nature, interpreted by the Bible, the Quaker theory of war is not merely a sickly sentimentalism, but a rebellion against the organic law of society and government. The law of marriage is another example. In the second place, the erroneous teaching of the light of nature is rectified by the Bible. In the case of a weekly rest, for example, the word of God demonstrates that such a rest belongs to man as man, was ordained before his fall, and is necessary to his well-being. Reason and experience have amply demonstrated the same truth, that "the Sabbath was made for man"; but it is doubtful whether the fact would have been recognized by the light of nature alone. In the third place, every man who has received

this revelation is bound to accept it as a revelation from God, and to regulate his faith and practice by its authority, either in a positive or in a negative way. In some of his duties the Bible is a positive rule; in others, it is a negative rule. Touching the whole matter of the method of salvation, the whole question as to what is necessary to be believed or done in order to obtain eternal life, the Scriptures are a positive guide, teaching what is to be believed or done, and all that is to be believed or done to that end. Touching the life that now is, the avocations necessary to sustain the being or promote the well-being of society, agriculture, commerce, manufactures, civil and criminal laws, the man, if he be a civil magistrate, or whatever else, is to be governed by the negative authority of the Bible. He can do anything the Bible does not forbid. The principle contended for by Hooker and the court party, in the time of Elizabeth, against Cartwright and the Puritans, for the regulation of the Church, though a false one for the Church, was true in application to the State — that anything may be lawfully ordained which is not forbidden in the word. We say false in its application to the Church, because contrary to the injunction that “nothing be added to the requirements of God”; the word being a positive charter, and therefore signifying prohibition by silence. It is true in its application to the State, because the Bible is not, for the State, a positive rule.

Let us now, for a moment, return to the question which has been discussed, and consider it in the light of those principles. Should the supremacy of Christ, as King of kings, and the supreme authority of the Bible, be formally and explicitly acknowledged in our civil constitutions? We answer, again:

1. By all means, if it can be truly and honestly done. If all the sovereign people could say “amen” as heartily, or even as sincerely, to such an addition to the section on “liberty of conscience” as they do to the section as it now stands in the constitution, there would be no objection to it, except that it was not necessary — that it was not an essential function of a civil constitution to make such a declaration. If the body that framed the constitution had been able sincerely to declare, in presenting it to the States for their ratification, that they, the members of that body, had felt their responsibility to Christ as king in framing that document, such a declaration would have been a noble testimony from individual citizens, and a happy augury for the people. But, evidently, the value of such a testimony would depend upon its sincerity; and to have introduced

it into the constitution itself as the solemn utterance of “we, the people,” when it was notorious that not one-half of the people even professed to believe it, what were this but to incorporate hypocrisy in the fundamental law? Would to God that our statesmen who profess to be Christians might be more courageous, as individuals, in bearing their testimony for Christ!

2. As the doctrine of the supremacy of Christ is a doctrine of pure revelation, it forms no part of the essential functions of civil government to teach it or profess it. The supremacy of Christ is founded upon his work as a priest for the salvation of his elect. The State is a branch of the moral government of God as the righteous judge of all, and is bound to recognize God only in this capacity. The Church, which is the body, or professes to be the body of the saved, is bound to recognize the Saviour, prophet, priest and king. This is her very vocation, to be a witness-bearer, and the Bible regulates her testimony and her profession. The State must not contradict her testimony, and that is all the State is bound to do. What is the definition of the Church visible in the Westminster Confession of Faith? “The visible church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ,” *etc.* Now, if our brethren could carry their point, the State and Church would be, at least logically, confounded; for the same definition would answer, in a great degree, to both of them. They both profess the true religion, that is, the revealed religion of salvation, with mercy and not justice as its prominent feature. Nor is the proposed profession of the State a meagre one. Implicitly, it is the whole gospel; explicitly, it is as full as was the profession of the Church for hundreds of years. And if the State begins to make a profession of the Christian religion, it is impossible to predict where it will stop. The only safety for liberty and for religion is in rigidly enforcing the maxim that the Bible is, in the sense already illustrated, a positive rule for the Church, a negative rule for the State.

But we are asked, if the State is bound to respect the negative authority of the Scriptures, where is the impropriety in her professing that respect? We answer, that it is one thing to be bound to perform a duty, and quite another thing to be prepared to perform it. Every man who hears the gospel is bound to confess Christ before man; but we are in the habit of warning men against coming to the Lord’s table unless they are believers. We repeat, that the Church is the body whose vocation it is to

profess faith in Christ and in his word; and any other doctrine will have the effect of confounding the Church and the State. If any legislator, or judge, or governor, chooses to profess his responsibility to Christ for his own public acts, a responsibility he really feels, let him do it. We should render our hearty thanks to God for every judicious public act of this kind. But let it be remembered that it is his own personal responsibility he is confessing, and that he is not speaking for those who feel no such responsibility.

It may be added, that we have not intended, in anything that has been said, to deny that the State is a moral personality; that there is an "organic life," or a "public conscience" belonging to political communities. All this is freely admitted. But it has been shown, we think, that this moral personality is subject to the government of God as a government of justice, of natural justice; that this public conscience and organic life are to be regulated and controlled by the light of nature, interpreted and corrected by the word of God, when the State is in possession of that word.

The view advocated by some of our brethren, of the personality of the State, which makes it something totally different at once from the administration at any given time, and from the whole body of the people, so that the State may be Christian, while the administration and the people are Jews, Turks, or atheists, is a view which passes our comprehension. Such a theory might, with some color of plausibility, be maintained under a despotism like that of Louis XIV. of France, who boasted that he was the State. But what is the State, according to the Confederate Constitution? What is the State, according to the terms of the proposed amendment to the article on liberty of conscience? These are the terms: "Nevertheless, we, the people of these Confederate States, distinctly acknowledge our responsibility to God, and the supremacy of his Son, Jesus Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords; and hereby ordain that no law shall be passed by the Congress of these Confederate States inconsistent with the will of God, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures." What can be clearer than that the State, here, is the "people of the Confederate States"? Not the whole mass of the population — women, children, foreigners, slaves — but the political corporation, the *populus*, the *demos*, the body of voters — a minority of the whole population.

Now, of this minority a large majority are rebels against Christ. Yet this is the body whose religion, it is insisted, must be the Christian

religion, whatever the religion or no-religion of the people may be! It is the body, at least, which must profess the Christian religion! Or shall we say that the constitution itself, the parchment roll on which the fundamental law is written, is the State, whose religion is Christian, although “the people” who ordain it are not? We confess that all this sounds to us very much like the old realism of the schools, which asserted for abstract ideas a substantive existence, different from and independent of the concrete things in which they were manifested and exemplified. We say this with a veneration amounting to awe for the memory of that great genius and noble man of God, whose illustrious name gives support to this movement for an amendment of the Confederate Constitution.

The two points of difference, which we have attempted to illustrate, between the civil and the ecclesiastical power, comprehend some others, which, although already incidentally referred to, are worthy of an articulate statement. For example:

3. The Church and the State differ in their sanctions, as well as in their authority and their rule. The sanction of ecclesiastical government is moral, appealing to the faith and the conscience, a parental discipline, designed for the good of the offender. Its symbol is the “keys.” The sanction of civil government is force, appealing to the bodily sensibilities of the subject or the citizen; a penal administration, designed to vindicate the majesty of justice and the supremacy of law, with a very incidental, if any, reference to the good of the transgressor. Its symbol is the “sword.” It is so perfectly obvious that the employment of force is abhorrent, from the whole nature and genius of the Church, that even the fiends of the “holy office” were compelled to profess the greatest horror of shedding the blood of heretics, and piously turned them over to the secular arm.

4. “The scope and aim of civil power is only things temporal; of the ecclesiastical power, only things spiritual. Religious is a term not predicable of acts of the State; political and civil, not predicable of acts of the church.” (See Robinson, *ut supra*.) The proclamation of the president in regard to days of fasting and prayer is a religious act; but then it is not an act of government. It is merely an invitation or request addressed by a citizen in high place to his fellow-citizens. If it were done as an act of government, it would be an usurpation of the prerogatives of the Church. On the other hand, if the Church does a political act, it is guilty of an usurpation of the prerogatives of the State. Rebellion (which, by the

way, is a totally different thing from revolution, the latter always implying the existence of a civil government under whose authority the revolutionists are acting, and thereby excluding the very idea of treason) — rebellion is always a sin as well as a crime; and a church member may be disciplined for rebellion, but the fact must first be found by the civil authority and accepted by the Church. Nothing can be more presumptuous and absurd than the decision by a church court sitting in the city of Philadelphia as to the allegiance of one of its members, who is a citizen of Virginia. If he is obeying the laws of the State of which he is a citizen, no power on earth can convict him of the crime either of treason or rebellion. One more illustration may be added. The act by which ministers of the gospel, as such, are excluded in some of the States of this Confederacy, perhaps in all, from civil office, is an usurpation by the civil power of the functions of the Church. If it be a sin, an infraction of solemn vows, for ministers to hold civil office, as we believe it is, it is, nevertheless, a sin which it is the function of the Church, not of the State, to rebuke. As to the grounds of expediency upon which this disfranchisement of ministers has been defended, we only say that the history of the world, if candidly studied, will show that the Church is in much greater danger from the ambition or the stupidity of politicians than the State is from the ambition or avarice of ecclesiastics.

But enough. The theory of Church and State illustrated in the foregoing pages is the Virginia doctrine as we understand it — the doctrine of the Presbytery of Hanover in their memorials to the legislature of that grand old commonwealth from 1775 to 1785, in which last year Mr. Jefferson's Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom became a law. It has been called the "American" theory; but the history of the Northern States has shown that the current theory there has been rather the "semi-theocracy" of New England, according to which, as Mr. Robinson observes, "the church becomes an agency for keeping the proper party in power, a congress-managing society, a public-opinion-manufacturing society. Hence, its three thousand clergymen's memorial to congress, its religious press devoted to Fremontism, and its treasury of religious funds to carry the election in Pennsylvania."

Whether the views expressed in this article be sound or not, there can be but one opinion among intelligent men as to the necessity of reviewing these old controversies, and of feeling once more for our foundations. If what we have written should contribute in the smallest degree to



a safe and satisfactory conclusion, we shall be amply rewarded for our trouble.



## **Appendix Seven:**

### **An Amillennial Response to Dispensationalism**

by Greg Loren Durand

#### The Differences in Hermeneutics

The Dispensational hermeneutical principle rejects or at least discourages any allegorization of the Old Testament and Origen of the ante-Nicene patristic period is often pointed to as the source of the allegorical principle of interpretation. The oft-repeated claim of those of the Dispensational tradition is that they interpret the Scriptures “literally” whereas those of the Reformed Amillennial tradition are frequently criticized for “spiritualizing” the Scriptures. In reality, the difference is really that the former tradition generally understands the Old Testament from an earthly (carnal) perspective, while the latter insists that the doctrines, rituals, and events of the Old Testament were intended by God to provide a living picture to His people of the greater spiritual truths which are more clearly taught in the New Testament.

Because of the sharp distinction he makes between national Israel and the Church, the Dispensationalist will mainly confine his interpretation of Old Testament soteriology to the Old Testament text itself, and will likewise restrict his interpretation of New Testament soteriology mainly to the Pauline epistles. In fact, the consistent Dispensationalist will deny that the Gospel and the Christian Church are found in the Old

Testament.<sup>1</sup> The Reformed expositor, however, sees the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and will interpret the types and shadows of the Old in light of the clear revelation of the New. There is therefore a continuity between the two Testaments: the Old Testament serves as the foundation of God's revelation, each successive covenant is the addition of another floor to the building, and the New Testament serves as the roof of the completed structure:

But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.... Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste (Isaiah 28:13, 16; cf: Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17).

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God

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1. This essay deals with the classic Dispensationalism originally expounded in the *Scofield Reference Bible* and somewhat modified in the writings of John F. Walvoord, Lewis Sperry Chafer, and Charles Ryrie. Significant changes were later made by the so-called "progressive Dispensationalists" which brought their system closer to historic Covenant theology.

through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Hebrews 3:1-6).

Contrary to Dispensationalism, the New Testament makes free use of the allegorical method of interpreting the Old Testament. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote:

For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free (Galatians 4:22-31).

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul pointed to Hagar and Ishmael as a type of national Israel under the bondage of Sinai, which was to be “cast out,” and to Sarah and Isaac as a type of the Church (Zion), the members of which “are the children of promise.” It should be noted that Paul clearly stated in verse 21 that this allegory was the true meaning of the law: “Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?” In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul again referenced the true

spiritual meaning behind the Old Testament, focusing specifically on the ceremonial laws: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 9:7-12 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Paul gave the Mosaic case law against muzzling an ox a spiritual interpretation and applied it to Christian ministers. The writer of Hebrews likewise wrote that the temple was a type of “the true tabernacle” (Hebrews 8:2) and that the sacrifices were a “shadow of heavenly things” (verse 5). Two chapters later, we read that the law was “a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things” (Hebrews 10:1). Again, the true interpretation of the Old Testament, according to the New Testament writers, is a spiritual one, not a natural or carnal one. It was because the Jews failed to discern the spiritual meaning of “the law and the prophets” that they were unable to receive their Messiah when He walked among them:

But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him (John 12:37-41).

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:9-14).

[God] also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not

of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: but their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away (2 Corinthians 3:6-16).

With all the above scriptural evidence in mind, it is clear that any system which adopts the hermeneutical principle of the Jews — a principle which caused them to reject and crucify the Son of God and thus to be severely judged by God — has to be rejected by the Christian, for surely it will have a negative effect on his faith and understanding of the true nature of the Gospel.

### The Alleged Distinctiveness of Israel

In his review of John Gerstner's book, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*,<sup>2</sup> John A. Witmer of Dallas Theological Seminary wrote, "In Scripture Israel's distinctiveness rests in God's choosing the nation as a special people for Himself (Deut. 7:6)... This choice was based on God's oath to the forefathers (Deut. 7:8), which oath is the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17:1-8), the token of which is circumcision of every male Israelite (vv. 9-14)."<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that the Abrahamic covenant was actually

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2. John Gertsner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991).

3. John A. Witmer, "A Review of *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 149 (April-June 1992), page 15.

made in Chapter 15, when Abraham cut the sacrifices and God Himself passed through the pieces. Chapter 17 is just a reaffirmation of the same promises made in Chapter 15. Were these promises for national Israel alone, or were they ultimately for someone else? The Apostle Paul gave the answer in the third chapter of Galatians:

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.... That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or added thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.... (Galatians 3:7-9, 14-18, 28-29).

Thus, while the immediate promise in the Abrahamic covenant was the possession of the land of Palestine, the ultimate spiritual reality behind that promise was really entrance into the "heavenly country" (Hebrews 11:16): regeneration through faith in Christ Jesus, the Seed to whom the covenant pointed and with whom it was actually made. The writer of Hebrews used the promised land as a figure of the Gospel itself and cautioned his Jewish readers not to provoke God to anger by unbelief just as their forefathers had done. He wrote:

While it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest.... Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying to David, To-day, after so long a time; as it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus [Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not af-



terward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God (Hebrews 3:15-4:1-3, 7-9).

If the Abrahamic covenant was a promise that God would “justify the heathen through faith,” and if the promised land was a type and shadow of the spiritual rest of regeneration, then there is no longer any reason for a distinction between natural Israelites and Gentiles under the New Testament: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28-29).

Witmer wrote, “Since this covenant, confirmed through Isaac (vv. 19, 21) instead of Ishmael (vv. 9-14), was an “everlasting covenant” (vv. 7, 13, 19), God’s choice of Israel ethnically as a special people also is everlasting. This truth is confirmed by God’s promise through Jeremiah that Israel will continue as a nation as long as the sun, moon, and stars endure (Jer. 31:35-37, 33:19-26)...”<sup>4</sup> We have already quoted Paul’s allegorical reference to Isaac and Ishmael in Galatians 4:22-31. Here, he equates the Christian Church — made up of believing Jews and Gentiles — with Isaac, the “son of promise” and he equates the natural and unbelieving Jews with Ishmael, stating that they are “cast out.” This is exactly the opposite of what Witmer was attempting to prove by referring to the two sons of Abraham. Witmer’s error is further demonstrated in Romans 9:6-8: “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” Again, both Jews and Gentiles are equally the “children of the promise” and are “counted for the seed” if they “be Christ’s.” Nothing could be clearer than that God is finished with ethnic distinctions and that His chosen people are now “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (Revelation 7:9).

Witmer did not fare any better in referring to God’s promise in Jeremiah 31:35-37. This is seen when the preceding verses are considered:

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4. Witmer, *ibid.*, page 14.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The parallel passage to the above is found in Ezekiel 36:24-28:

For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Turning again to the New Testament, we find this “new covenant” the main topic of discussion at the Last Supper. Holding forth the Passover elements to His Jewish disciples, Jesus said, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28; cf. Mark 14:24). That this was the same covenant prophesied by Jeremiah and Ezekiel is clear from Christ’s discourse with Nicodemus:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time in-

to his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.... Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? (John 3:1-10)

Nicodemus should have understood what Christ was referring to, for in speaking of the new birth "of water and of the Spirit," He obviously had in mind the promise of God to the Jews that He would "sprinkle clean water" upon them and put "a new spirit" within them. Christ was telling a Jewish leader that it was not enough to be a physical descendent of Abraham ("that which is born of the flesh is flesh"); it was necessary to be regenerated (baptized by the Holy Spirit) in order to "enter into the kingdom of God." A few verses later is the well-known proclamation of the universal Gospel (verses 16-18). This all corresponds to the Apostle Paul's aforementioned distinction between Israel "after the flesh" and the spiritual Israel which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. According to both Christ and Paul, it is the latter, and not the former, which has inherited the Kingdom of God. The Church, therefore, is the "nation" which continues as long as the sun, moon, and stars endure: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9; cf. Exodus 19:5-6).

Witmer wrote:

This separate identity of Israel in distinction from the Gentiles and from "the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32) continued in the New Testament. It was recognized by Paul (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:3-5; 10:1-3), who insisted that "God has not rejected His people" (11:1-2a). Paul supported this conclusion of God's continuing choice of Israel with two arguments: (a) "At the present time [there is] a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (v. 5), including Paul himself, that becomes part of the body of Christ, the church (Eph. 2:13-18). (b) Later after "the fulness of the Gentiles has come in... all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:25-26) because "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (v. 29). This final salvation of Israel is seen at least in part in the "one hundred and forty-four

thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel” (Rev. 7:4-8) and in the repentance of Israel at the Lord Jesus’s return to earth (Zech. 12:9-13:1, 9).<sup>5</sup>

Witmer completely misunderstood Paul’s point in Romans 9:6-8: “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” Paul then responded to the hypothetical objection, “Hath God cast away his people?” (Romans 11:1) by noting that God’s covenant was always with the remnant of Israel — the true seed “according to the promise” — not with the unbelieving Jews. To this remnant have now been added believing Gentiles (verses 15-19). To be reckoned once again as God’s people and to be grafted back into Israel, the unbelieving Jews must become Christians: “And so [οὕτως; *houtôs*; “in this way”] all Israel shall be saved” (verse 26). This same doctrine is taught in John 1:12-13: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Inclusion in Israel under the New Testament is strictly by regeneration, not by physical descent from Abraham.

Witmer also erred in speaking of a “final salvation of [national] Israel” at the “Lord Jesus’ return to earth.” No such post-second advent salvation is taught anywhere in the Bible, but quite the opposite. According to Paul’s doctrine in 1 Corinthians 15:24, when Christ returns, “then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.” Those, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, who have not believed by that time will have no more opportunity: “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe... in that day” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

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5. Witmer, *ibid.*

That having been said, let us look at Witmer's selected proof-text in Zechariah: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zechariah 12:9-10). A parallel passage is found in Joel 2:28-30: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit." Both prophecies referred to a future time when the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon the Jews resulting in a mourning for their part in the crucifixion of Christ and their salvation according to the New Covenant promise of Ezekiel 36. However, we need not look for this momentous event in the future when Christ allegedly returns to set up an earthly kingdom, for, according to no less an authority than the Apostle Peter himself, the fulfillment of the prophecy is found in Acts 2:14-18:

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

Peter was speaking to the very crowd referred to in Zechariah 12:9: "the inhabitants of Jerusalem." What followed was the first sermon of the Christian Church in which he expounded upon the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ, proving that it was "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" that the Jews would take and kill their own Messiah. In concluding his sermon, Peter said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (verse 36). The reaction of his audience was exactly as Zechariah prophesied it would be: "Now

when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (verse 37) Peter responded by instructing them to be "baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (verse 38) — another clear reference to the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36. Peter continued: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (verse 39). What promise was he referring to? The promise given to Abraham: entrance into the "land" of regeneration. Was this promise for ethnic Israel only? No, it was also "to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" — the Gentiles who were once "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Ephesians 2:12) and who were once "afar off" but now "are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (verse 13).

Witmer quoted Romans 11:29 in an attempt to prove that unbelieving Jews still have a covenant relationship with God based, not on faith, but upon blood, which, as we have already seen, is directly contrary to Paul's point in Romans 9:8 that "the children of the flesh... are not the children of God." This corresponds to Christ's discourse with the scribes and Pharisees in the Gospel of John:

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. They [those Jews who did not believe on Him] answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever commiteth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father.

Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.

Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love

me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God (John 8:31-47).

Here we see the unbelieving Jews clinging to the very same error now held by Dispensationalists such as Witmer: that God is the unconditional covenantal Father of the physical descendants of Abraham. Jesus responded by calling them instead children of their father, the Devil, who is the father of lies. Again, we see that faith in Christ is what makes one "the seed of Abraham," not blood.

Jesus again addressed these same unbelieving Jews in Matthew 21:33-43:

Hear another parable: there was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Jesus continued speaking to the same Jews in Matthew 23:32-36:

Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

This all seems to be very strange language for the Son of God to use in addressing His Father's chosen people. Witmer insisted that God's covenant with the physical house of Israel has never been revoked, but what did Jesus say? "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (verse 38). This was not just a reference to the Temple only, but to the very covenantal status of the nation of Israel itself. As Jesus said to the fig tree (a type of Israel), "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever" (Mark 11:14).

Before we leave this subject of the cutting off of unbelieving Israel, let us return again to Witmer's proof-text from the prophecy of Zechariah:

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God (Zechariah 13:7-9).

The context of the above prophecy shows that it refers to the time of Christ's crucifixion, not His second advent. The two parts that "shall be cut off and die" are the unbelieving Jews to whom Jesus was speaking and to whom Paul referred to as "branches broken off" in Romans 11:17.



The “third part” which is brought “through the fire,” is the “remnant according to the election of grace,” also referred to by Paul in Romans 11:5, and addressed by Peter in 1 Peter 1:1-7:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Witmer wrote, “In addition to Israel’s continuation as God’s chosen people and her continuing title to the promised land is her continuation as a political entity, a nation. This involves God’s covenant with David concerning the everlasting establishment of David’s house (lineage), kingdom, and throne (2 Sam. 7:16; cf. vv. 24-25; Ps. 89:19-37). God stated that sin by David’s descendants would bring divine chastisement (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:30-32), but that His mercy would not depart from them as He had removed it from Saul (2 Sam. 7:15; Ps. 89:28-29, 33-37).”<sup>6</sup> First of all, his claim that God promised that Israel would continue as a nation is contradicted by Genesis 49:10: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” That this is a prophecy of Christ is beyond dispute. Also indisputable is the declaration that the sceptre (symbolic of a kingdom) would indeed “depart from Judah” when the Messiah began to gather the people: the “third part” remnant of Israel along with the believing Gentiles (cf. Matthew 21:43).

Furthermore, God’s promise that David would never lack a descendant to sit upon his throne was and continues to be fulfilled in Jesus

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6. Witmer, *ibid.*, page 15.

Christ, the “son of David.” He is not waiting for His second advent to sit upon this throne, but sat upon it when He was resurrected and ascended to the “right hand of the Father” (Psalm 2; cf. Matthew 28:18; Acts 13:22-23; Ephesians 2:4-7).

Witmer concluded his section on the distinctiveness of Israel by citing a string of proof texts which he believes prophesy “the future kingdom for Israel and its character (*e.g.*, Isa. 2:1-5; 4:2-6; 9:6-7; 11:1-12:6; 14:1-3; Zech. 8:1-8; 14:1-21; Acts 1:6-7; 3:20-32; 1 Cor. 15:20-26).” Upon examination, however, none of these passages support his claim, but rather find their fulfillment in the preaching of the Gospel in Jerusalem by the Apostles and its acceptance, first by the Jewish remnant, and then by the believing Gentiles. The “future kingdom for Israel” is actually the present kingdom of Christ and His Church.

### The Alleged Distinctiveness of the Church

Witmer then moved on to discuss the logical conclusion of his thesis regarding Israel: that the Christian Church is a completely unique entity which was unknown in the Old Testament era. We need not spend as much time on this subject since his claims regarding the distinctiveness of the Church depend upon the veracity of his claims regarding the distinctiveness of Israel, which have already been disproved above. Witmer wrote, “The distinctiveness of the church rests in its identity as ‘the body of Christ’ (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12; cf. Rom. 12:5; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23-30; Col. 1:18, 24). The formation of the church as Christ’s body is based on the Lord Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven (Eph. 1:20-23; 4:7-16; Col. 1:18). As a result no redeemed person before Jesus’ ascension to the right hand of God in heaven could be a member of that body.”<sup>7</sup>

We have already seen from the third chapter of Galatians that New Testament Christians are fellow-partakers of the very same promises that were given to Abraham. According to verse 7, “they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” Paul went on in verses 19-25 to teach that the Mosaic law, which was “four hundred and thirty years after” the Abrahamic covenant (verse 17), was “added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made”

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7. Witmer, *ibid.*

was made” (verse 19). Its purpose was to “conclude all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (verse 22) and it was the Jews’ “schoolmaster to bring [them] unto Christ, that [they] might be justified” (verse 24). Clearly then, the ultimate intent of the Mosaic covenant was not to grant national Israel possession of the land of Palestine, but to cause them to turn from attempting to establish their own righteousness and instead place their faith in the coming Messiah. In verse 8, Paul wrote, “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.” Consequently, “ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.... There is neither Jew nor Greek.... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (verses 26, 28-29). Paul further expounded on this subject in Romans 11:24 when he spoke of the Church as a “good olive tree” into which Gentiles have been grafted. The root of this olive tree is in Abraham, not in the New Testament; therefore, the believing remnant of Old Testament Israel is of the same body as the believing Jews and Gentiles of the New Testament Church. This was the point of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews in chapter 11, especially in verse 40: “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” The Old Testament saints only saw the coming heavenly Kingdom of Christ by faith (verse 16), but that they were saints and belonged to Christ is clear. In fact, in Hebrews 12:1, they are described as “so great a cloud of witnesses” — witnesses to Christ (cf. Isaiah 43:10; Acts 1:8).

Moreover, the sermon preached by Stephen prior to his death is a thorough rebuttal of Witmer’s claim that “no redeemed person” in the Old Testament was a member of the Church: “This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: to whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt” (Acts 7:37-39). Witmer wrote, “The church... constituting all individuals ‘in Christ,’ where ‘neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation’ (Gal. 6:15), was never envisioned in the Old Test-

ament....”<sup>8</sup> If all this were true, then Stephen erred in calling the saints of the Old Testament “the church in the wilderness.” Witmer’s statement is directly rebutted by Galatians 3:8-9: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”

Again, in Romans 4:11-16, Paul wrote:

And [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, through they be not circumcised; that the righteousness might be imputed unto them also: and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.... Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.

Witmer quoted Charles Ryrie, ““This relationship was unknown in Old Testament times....” and then added, “Abram was justified on the basis of his faith in God’s promise of a son, not a conscious, explicit faith in Jesus Christ.””<sup>9</sup> However, according to Galatians 3:16, the object of the Abrahamic covenant was Christ Himself. Moreover, Paul began his epistle to the Romans with these words: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures” (Romans 1:1-2). How then can it be said that faith in Christ was “not possible” prior to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and that a relationship with Christ was “unknown in Old Testament times”? Though it was displayed in types and shadows, and thus obscured from the view of the unbelieving, it was nevertheless seen by the believing remnant: “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized un-

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8. Witmer, *ibid.*, page 16.

9. Witmer, *ibid.*, pages 16, 23.

to Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

Paul also wrote in Romans 10:16-21:

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

Witmer has taken the unbelief of the majority of Old Testament Israel as the proof of his claim that the Gospel was unknown at that time, but Paul’s point is exactly the opposite: they were disobedient because they would not believe the Gospel. The presupposition was that the Gospel was indeed preached to them:

While it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest.... Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying to David, To-day, after so long a time; as it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus [Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God (Hebrews 3:15-4:1-3, 7-9).

Witmer claimed that “the object of faith in every age is the promise of God; the content of God’s promise changes in various dispensa-

tions. This takes into account the distinction between God's promise to Abram accepted by faith and God's promise to believers in this age of grace."<sup>10</sup> To the contrary, the object of faith in every age is none other than Christ Himself and the content of the promise remains precisely the same throughout the various "dispensations": regeneration, or entrance into the spiritual Kingdom of Heaven by faith:

Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust (Romans 15:8-12).

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:16, 29).

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it (Hebrews 4:1-2).

And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee (Hebrews 6:11-13).

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10. Witmer, *ibid.*, page 23.

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