

# REPUBLICATION

*A Biblical, Confessional and Historical Defense*

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## INTRODUCTION

Fathers and brothers, from one perspective, we are happy to write this paper in order to speak about the proper place of the doctrine of republication in historic, confessional Presbyterian and Reformed theology. We stand downstream of a glorious work of our God in the Protestant Reformation wherein the great *solas* of our faith were set forth as never before. Republication is an aspect of that crystallization intended to guard, uphold, and undergird such important doctrines as the law-fulfilling work of our Lord Jesus Christ in His active and passive obedience, justification by faith alone, and the liberty and freedom we enjoy as the sons of God in the new covenant Christ ratified in His blood. We are thankful for the opportunity to do our best to address questions, concerns, and confusions regarding this historic doctrine.

On the other hand, it grieves us that this paper is written under a cloud of accusations, suspicion, contention, and fear. This is never a helpful context for good, edifying, and helpful theological dialogue among brothers and sisters in Christ. Our hope is that, whether or not one agrees with this Reformed insight, these unfortunate storm clouds will dissipate and allow the light of temperance, trust, understanding, and love to shine brightly as is fitting those united to Jesus Christ and bound in our common calling to serve the church.

We fully realize our own limitations in writing this paper. It is not comprehensive. It is not exhaustive. It certainly is not the only or even among the best papers written on this subject. We are very grateful for the opportunity the Lord has afforded us to study at Westminster Seminary in California under the special gifts of men like Dr. Meredith G. Kline, Dr. Robert Strimple, Dr. Steven Baugh, Dr. Michael Horton, Dr. Robert Godfrey, and Mr. James T. Dennison among others. However, we stand on our own in this paper. We believe the paper to be a faithful representation of Reformed orthodoxy from our earliest fathers all the way down to most of our beloved teachers at Westminster Seminary. We hope to prove false the charges that this teaching is Pelagian, heterodoxy, merit mongering, edgy heresy, and a new-fangled, revisionist doctrine designed by some hidden agenda for self-protection.

We are bound by our love for Christ and our desire to be faithful to His calling. We are bound by our commitment to the edification, peace, and purity of the church, which Christ purchased by His own blood. But most importantly, the Word of God, the only rule of our faith and practice, binds us.

We are only servants, and we hope this paper is a service to you, brothers, and to any in the church who might venture to read this paper.

## THESIS

The question before us can be stated in a couple ways. How does the Mosaic Covenant, with the prominence of God's Law so distinctly obvious, function within God's one, unfolding plan of salvation for his elect? Or, what type of a covenant did God make with our fathers at Mt. Sinai: A covenant of grace? A covenant of works? Both a covenant of grace and a covenant a works? A *tertium quid*; a third thing?

## INTRODUCTION

In order to answer this question, a helpful dictum applies here: good theologians make good distinctions. Our answer to this question will try and make the necessary qualifications and distinctions.

Our thesis is as follows: the doctrine of Republication teaches that, while there is one overarching covenant of grace, by which the elect are saved (by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone), that Covenant was administered differently under the Law than it was under the Gospel. Under the Mosaic Economy (the Law), the moral law given to Adam as a covenant of works, requiring perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience, threatening death and promising life, was republished and summarized in the Ten Commandments, not to give life but to 1) shut all men up under sin, showing them their need for the obedience of Christ, in order that they might seek grace in him, 2) show forth the obedience Christ would offer as the Mediator, and 3) show the regenerate, who have been delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, what the obedience of gratitude looks like.

Some might object to this thesis since it sounds like we are simply quoting the Westminster Confession of Faith. We readily affirm that is exactly what we are doing. While we admit that the term Republication is not found within the confessional standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, we believe the substance is. We believe Republication is squarely within the system of doctrine contained in the secondary standards of the OPC. It is one thing to say this; it is quite another to demonstrate this from the Scriptures, our Reformed tradition, and from the Standards themselves. That is our goal and aim.

A quick note about theological language. Republication is a question of systematic theology, which comes with certain liabilities. Agreement on the substance of a doctrine does not imply (or require) identity of language and articulation. The term “Republication” is the contemporary term to describe the substance that we are seeking to defend. However, it is not the only term or the oldest term. Historically other terms have been employed, such as “revival” or “re-enactment” to argue for the same teaching. Each term has its benefits and drawbacks, but for the sake of consistency we will use “Republication” throughout this paper.

# CHAPTER ONE

## *The Covenant of Works*

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*The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. – WCF 7.2*

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### DEFINING COVENANTS

Reformed theology has long believed that Scripture’s organizing principle is found in God’s covenants with man. Another name for Reformed theology is covenant theology because of its commitment to this central idea. God has acted and spoken and he has done so by way of covenants.

Before we begin, we should be clear on what a covenant is. In the history of Reformed theology, a covenant has been defined as an agreement or contract between two or more parties containing promises.<sup>1</sup> There has been a more recent emphasis on God’s sovereignty in establishing covenants. That is, covenants do not necessarily indicate mutuality of equal persons but rather can originate with God and be established by Him as the sovereign Lord.<sup>2</sup> We see this as a positive and necessary development. While much can be said about the definition of a covenant in Reformed theology there probably is not as much disagreement between older and more recent formulations as it might appear. Both aspects contain helpful considerations. We will say more below, but for now what this means is that covenants are objective and concrete. They can be written down and referred to. They are not abstract notions, but enacted pieces of legislation with binding authority over the parties involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Turretin explains: “a covenant among men is commonly called ‘a mutual agreement between two or more persons concerning the mutual formulation has been deeply affected by the idea that the covenant is a compact or agreement between two parties’ (The Covenant of Grace [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1988], 5).

<sup>2</sup> O Palmer Robertson defines a covenant as a “bond in blood sovereignly administered” (The Christ of the Covenants (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 4). This is not unlike what Vos had said, with covenants, “God in each case sovereignly, comprehensively, and effectually determines the results of the principle of religious procedure that is put into action” (“Covenant or Testament” in Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos [P&R: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1980], 408). Again he says that covenants, whether evangelical or legal, are “represented as the result of a divine disposition and the name *diatheke* employed with exclusive reference to this its source in the activity of God” (“Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diatheke” in *Shorter Writings*, 177). You can hear the emphasis on God’s sovereign action in John Murray’s formulations: “covenant in the purity of its conception as a dispensation of grace to men, wholly divine in its origin, fulfillment, and confirmation” (*Covenant of Grace*, 15, 19, 22, 30–31). Meredith G. Kline emphasizes something very similar when he says that in the broadest sense, “a covenant is a sovereign administration of the kingdom of God.” He continues, “God’s covenant with man may be defined as an administration of God’s lordship, consecrating a people to himself under the sanctions of divine law” (*By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968], 36; See also *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* [Overland Park: Two Age Press, 2000], 1 – 7).

## TWO KINDS OF COVENANTS

The Reformed tradition has long held that there are two *kinds* of covenants—covenants of works (or law) and covenants of grace (or promise). This bi-covenantal framework regarding the *kinds* of covenants makes up the heart of the doctrinal system contained within the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms.<sup>3</sup> The difference between the two kinds of covenants is *the principle of inheritance* or what Vos called, “their intrinsic law of operation.”<sup>4</sup>

A covenant of works holds out reward or inheritance upon the condition of obedience. The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) says: “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>5</sup> The key terms attached to a works covenant are *personal* (it is the individual’s responsibility to keep the terms; no mediator does the work for the person) and *perfect* (requiring absolute conformity to the covenantal stipulations/requirements). Works covenants are legal because they depend on the obedience of those under them to fulfill their terms. The covenant’s reward—the full blessing of the covenant of works—then, is received on the basis of works. It is not a gift to be received by faith but a reward to be received for works of the law (cf. Rom 4:4<sup>6</sup>).

Covenants of grace, on the other hand, operate on a different principle; an opposing principle. Under grace covenants inheritance is based upon the work of a Mediator and is received by faith alone. Justice and works are not denied or marginalized, but justice is satisfied and the necessary works are rendered by the Mediator who acts in others’ stead (Rom 3:26).<sup>7</sup> Under the covenant of grace, the reward is the same, but the vehicle by which it is received has changed from works to grace. It is received as a gift through grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. The Westminster Confession of Faith 7.3 summarizes:

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant [*of works*], 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>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> cf. WCF 7.1-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Shorter Writings*, p. 176. In context, Vos is stating that both covenants of works and covenants of grace ought to be referred to as covenants (as divine dispositions). The term “covenant” (Grk. *diatheke*), he says is ambiguous to what kind of covenant it is. The intrinsic law of operation determines what kind of covenant it is. “The form is the same, the content poured into it differs; and the form as such is indifferent to the distinction between grace and works” (*Ibid.*, 177).

<sup>5</sup> WCF 7.1 (emphasis ours); cf. 19.1; Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) 20, 93; Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) 12, 40.

<sup>6</sup> “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”

<sup>7</sup> All Scriptural quotations will be from the English Standard Version (Crossway: Wheaton, IL, 2002) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> See also WSC 20.

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This covenant's condition is faith not works (WLC 32). The works necessary for blessing are rendered by Jesus Christ and not by the sinner (WCF 8.4-5; WLC 95, 97). Works in the covenant of grace are the evidence of regeneration, faith and justification but not the condition of the covenant. Works by the human agent function in a completely different way in these two kinds of covenants. In the covenant of works, works are the condition of final blessedness, the basis for the full inheritance (WCF 7.2; WLC 20; WSC 12). Works in the covenant of grace are a gift from Christ's work, fruit of the Spirit, and the evidence of grace and faith (WCF 16.2-3; WLC 73).

We are going to rely heavily upon Robert Rollock (1555-1599) through out this paper due to his influence in the Reformed churches. He was a pastor and first principal of the University of Edinburgh. He trained ministers and is regarded by most as an early and influential covenant theologian. In his *Some Questions and Answers About God's Covenant*,<sup>9</sup> originally published in 1596, he speaks regarding the difference in the conditions of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace:

8. Q: What is the condition of the covenant of works?

A: The condition is good works, which ought to proceed from that good, holy, and upright nature upon which the covenant of works itself was based.

9. Q: What things are excluded by this condition?

A: By this condition, first, faith in Christ, and second, works proceeding from grace and regeneration, are excluded from the covenant of works (Rom. 11:6).

Now that we've briefly defined the two kinds of covenants, we will focus our attention the covenant of works.

## DIFFERENT NAMES FOR THE COVENANT OF WORKS

The covenant of works is known by different names which all refer to the same reality. It is called the "covenant of creation" as to the time of its making (Gen 1-2). It is called the "covenant of nature" as touching the law written on man's nature and in his heart as an image bearer of God, created to glorify and enjoy him for all eternity (cf. Rom 2:14-15; WLC 1, 17; WSC 1).<sup>10</sup> It is also called the "covenant of life" as to its reward, which was eternal life (cf. WLC 20; WSC 12). It is called the Adamic covenant, emphasizing Adam as the representative of the covenant (cf. WLC 22, 25; WSC 16, 18).

Each of these titles serve their own purpose but refer to the same reality, namely that in the Garden of Eden—at creation—mankind, represented by Adam, was under a covenant of works wherein he was required to bring forth perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience out of his own nature as made in the

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<sup>9</sup> "Robert Rollock's Catechism on God's Covenants," trans. Aaron C. Denlinger, *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 20 (2009): 105-129.

<sup>10</sup> Rollock, Q.6: What is the basis of the covenant of works? A.6: A good, holy, and upright nature, of the kind which was in man at creation. For if God had not made man, in the beginning, according to his own image—that is, wise, holy, and just by nature—then he could not, surely, have established with man this covenant, which has for its condition holy, just, and perfect works proceeding from [man's] nature (Gen. 1:26, 27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:9).

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image of God. He was offered eternal, eschatological life for success and threatened with the fullness of death for failure.

The covenant of works is not a redemptive covenant for no sin yet existed in the world therefore there was no need for redemptive grace. For this reason we must be clear in how we articulate its existence. On the one hand, God was under no obligation to create man or to offer him eternal blessedness for obedience. This was completely an act of voluntary condescension (WCF 7.1). In this sense it is a free act of kindness, benevolence, or grace. There is nothing inherent in man moving God to crown him with glory and honor. However, we must be careful to distinguish this expression of grace from the grace of a Mediator (i.e., redemptive grace) that we will see operating in the covenant of grace. To say that the covenant of works was instituted by an act of kindness or grace is not to suggest that it operates on the principle of grace (i.e., a free gift). We must be careful to distinguish its existence from its operating principle lest we confuse works and grace *within* the covenant. Our confessional documents guard any notion that the covenant of works was a mixed covenant—one of works and grace, obedience and faith.

Now that we've defined covenant and very briefly explored the two kinds of covenants, we turn to a deeper discussion of the covenant of works. First, we'll discuss the covenant of works in the Bible and then we'll move on to our Reformed fathers' insights.

## THE COVENANT OF WORKS IN THE BIBLE

### *The Old Testament*

It is going to be difficult to address the covenant of works, especially in early Reformed theology, without overlapping with republication. What we mean is this—when our Reformed fathers began to formulate the covenant of works, they worked from the Mosaic covenant back to Adamic Covenant. The proof texts for the Adamic covenant of works are primarily taken from the Mosaic covenant. We are not trying to prejudice the discussion here only to make a historical point.<sup>11</sup> Our fathers saw the covenant of works revealed in the Law given to Moses. This was the exegetical basis for their

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Muller makes the same point: "This theological setting of the doctrine is made clear by the exegetical emphasis of the various expositions of the mature federal theology on the problem of law and grace in its relation to the first and second Adam—Adam and Christ—in the epistle of Paul to the Romans, with collateral citation of the Pauline covenant language in the epistle to the Galatians. In other words, the Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who raised and developed the issue of the covenants did not understand their exegetical starting point to be the text of Genesis chapters two and three or such texts as Hosea 6:7 ('like Adam [or man] they have transgressed the covenant') and Job 31:33 ('If I covered my transgressions as Adam'). As noted above, the doctrine was a conclusion drawn from a large complex of texts, among them, Genesis 1:26-27; Leviticus 18:4-5; Matthew 19:16-17; 22:37-39; Romans 1:17; 2:14-15; 5:12-21; 7:10; 8:3-4; 10:5; Galatians 3:11-12; 4:4-5, with Hosea 6:7 and Job 31:33 offered only as collateral arguments" (*The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brakel* CTJ 29 (1994), 90). The article by Robert Letham that Muller is referring to is, *The Foedus Operum: Some Factors Accounting for its Development* (*The Sixteenth Century Journal* 14:4 [Winter, 1983]). Letham states: "From one perspective this new construction (*the covenant of works with Adam*) emerged from factors present in Reformed theology from the very start. Firstly, there was an initial stress amongst the Zurich reformers on the unity of the covenant of grace in all ages, in response to Anabaptism. Secondly, a correlative insistence was evident on the unity of law. Thirdly, the Decalogue soon began to be construed in covenantal terms. Fourthly, only a short step remained before the creation situation was viewed in an explicitly legal and covenantal framework" (460).

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understanding of the Adamic covenant. Texts including Exodus 19, 20, Leviticus 18:5, Deuteronomy 27:26, Galatians 3:10-12; 4:24-25, Romans 2:12-15, and Romans 10:5 are all consistently employed by our fathers to explain the covenant of works. These are the proof texts for the Westminster standards as well.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Covenant of Works in Genesis 1-3*

Genesis 1 and 2 present creation itself as a covenantal act. In the following paragraphs, we'll show how the covenantal nature of these chapters is apparent.

In Genesis 1:1 we have the absolute beginning point of creation, the creation of all things visible (on earth) and invisible (in heaven).<sup>13</sup> Before Genesis 1:1 nothing existed but the triune God. All things are created in Genesis 1:1. The Lord then begins to shape the earth into His kingdom.

We can say the Lord is revealing Himself as the Master Workman, carrying out His will and purpose as the covenantal Lord over all His creation. God enters the world, and He works and shapes His creation into His holy domain.

The final creation act is its pinnacle—the creation of the man and the woman in His image. Here, God's covenantal design of creation itself is clear. No inherent dignity resides in the dust of the earth. The triune God crowns them with dignity and honor.<sup>14</sup> The man and the woman are made in God's image by a unique act of creation. They are made in His likeness and in His image. They are God's children.<sup>15</sup> They are made in his image with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the

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<sup>12</sup> See WCF 6.6; 7.2; 15.4; 19.1, 5; WLC 17, 20, 24, 30, 89, 92, 93, 96, 152; WSC 19, 40, 84.

<sup>13</sup> Colossians 1:16 is very instructive for how to understand Genesis 1:1. Paul is reflecting on Jesus' work of creation in Genesis 1:1 and he does so in the shape of a chiasm matching 'things in heaven' with 'things invisible' and 'things on earth' with 'things visible':

A By Him all things were created  
    B Things in heaven  
        C Things on earth  
            C Things visible  
                B Things invisible (along with heavenly powers)

A All things were created through Him and for Him

The Genesis narrative makes this point long before Paul ever did. After "heaven" and "earth" are made in Genesis 1:1, attention is then turned to the state of "earth"—it is formless and void. The Spirit of God then begins to bring order and structure out of the "earth." From "earth" we can see the Lord then fashions the visible cosmos including light and dark / day and night (day 1), what we know as the visible heavens—the sky and space (day 2) and the stars set into the visible heavens and expanse of day 2 (day 4). From this narrative and the way it develops, it seems appropriate to see the heavens of verse 1 as the invisible heavens of God's dwelling place unseen by us at this stage in history and the earth as the visible cosmos known and seen by us.

<sup>14</sup> "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:3–5).

<sup>15</sup> Note the correlation of image and sonship both for Adam himself and his children in Genesis 5:2-3 as Adam's creation is juxtaposed with his child-bearing activity. The gospel of Luke makes this same point, "the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (3:38). The redemptive new-creational corollary to this is found in Romans 8. To be remade in the image of Jesus Christ as the Last Adam is to be a son of God and brother of Jesus (vv 28-30).

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creatures (WCF 4.2; WLC 17; WSC 10). They reflect their Father and Sovereign Lord. God is the Great King. Mankind is the servant king in a covenant relationship under God's absolute authority. God is no tyrannical despot. He is mankind's loving King and generous Benefactor. God's goodness, grace, and generosity shine through the creation narrative clearly and unambiguously. He is the Provider and Protector giving them all good things—crowning them with goodness and love. In fact, this is exactly what the serpent questions in the Genesis 3. Satan makes God out to be a cruel, self-protective, lying, manipulating tyrant who keeps good things from them. To the contrary, God has revealed Himself to be just the opposite.

Genesis 2 zeros in on the events recorded on the sixth day of Genesis 1. This literary feature is known as synoptic/resumption-expansion.<sup>16</sup> Genesis 1 gives us an overview of the whole story in synoptic form. Genesis 2 then telescopes onto a specific aspect of day 6 (the creation of mankind) and expands it. These are not contradictory accounts of creation. They are complementary records of the one day. In Genesis 2 we see the uniqueness of man's creation in the fact that God speaks the other aspects of creation into existence but man he fashions out of the dust of the ground and woman from the side of man with his hands as it were. He breathes into man the breath of life. Man is God's unique creation.

Often overlooked is that the Lord God creates man first and then plants a garden, in the east, in Eden. The Lord fashions man, breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, and then the Lord plants the garden. Adam watches God plant the garden. Adam observes. Adam learns. God is teaching and instructing His son in his coming duties as Adam is called to reflect and imitate his Lord. The Lord exercises dominion over His creation in planting the garden and calls Adam, as his son and servant king, to do the same. The Lord then sets man in the plentiful garden to be his habitation with God.<sup>17</sup> Adam is set in the garden as king and priest—a royal priesthood. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). When we put this verse together with Genesis 1, Adam is to rule over creation under God's authority and care while being called to work and serve in God's holy sanctuary as a priest.

So we see that even before the probationary command comes to Adam, he is firmly established in a covenant relationship with God as seen by:

- God as Master Workman shaping His creation into His kingdom.
- God creating man in His image with dignity and honor with the expectation that they reflect their great king.
- God creating the Garden of Eden as Adam watches, learning to reflect his father as he works and keeps it as a priest.

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<sup>16</sup> Mark D. Futato, "Because it Had Rained," *WTJ* 60 (1998): 12.

<sup>17</sup> For treatments of the Garden of Eden as God's holy temple and sanctuary see G. K. Beale *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004); M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Overland Park: Two Age Press, 2000).

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It is in this context of a covenantal relationship that the probationary command comes to Adam. God's first recorded words to Adam are the prohibition not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This command is not the whole covenant law; it is the test of the covenant. The covenant is engraved on his heart (Rom 2:15; WLC 17). Loving the Lord with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love his neighbor as himself summarizes the covenant. The covenant includes the commission given to him by special revelation in Genesis 1—be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and have dominion. The entirety of all Adam sees and hears is covenantal revelation to him from within and without.

We are belaboring this point because to be made in God's image, to be a son is to be in covenant with the Lord. No time exists in man's existence in which he is outside of the covenant. God sustains no bare, natural relationship with mankind where he can earn life and justification by obedience. There is only covenantal existence. God's covenantal law is written on his heart. God's actions are teaching him. God's word is directing him. The books of natural revelation and special revelation are covenantally coordinated together.

Our God is not only the God of generosity, goodness, and blessing. God is a God of justice and holiness. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne (Psalm 89:14). God is free in the exercise of His grace and mercy. God is not free in the exercise of His justice and holiness. God must be just. God must be righteous. The Lord's covenant of works with Adam expresses that justice and righteousness. The sanctions of life and death are an expression of that justice.

God's covenantal word to Adam truly reveals who God is according to His justice. We must avoid speculative notions about justice as if we can have any thoughts about God and His nature that are not mediated to us by way of covenant. The distance between God and man is so great that if God is going to speak to us He must condescend to us. Of necessity, God's speaks to us in a lisp—in the baby talk of accommodation (to use the image of Calvin).<sup>18</sup> However, while we do not and cannot know God as He is in himself (*en se*) we do have true, analogical knowledge.<sup>19</sup> We only know God as he has revealed Himself by way of covenant. This includes God's justice and righteousness. In terms of the covenant of works, man gets what he deserves according to God's justice.<sup>20</sup>

Life and death are at stake in this covenant. If Adam obeys the Lord, passes the probationary test, the Lord promises to reward Him with eternal, heavenly, and eschatological life. If Adam disobeys, rejects his Lord's authority and sins against Him, the Lord promises death—temporal, spiritual and eternal

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<sup>18</sup> "Who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to 'lisp' in speaking to us?" (Calvin, *Institutes* (1559 ed.), I.xiii.1; 121.

<sup>19</sup> Turretin uses the language of archetypal and ectypal knowledge. Archetypal knowledge and theology is "infinite and uncreated, which is God's essential knowledge of himself in which he alone is at the same time the object known, the knowledge; and the knower." Man does not nor can he possess this knowledge. Man's knowledge of God is limited to ectypal knowledge. Turretin defines ectypal as "finite and created, which is the image and ectype of the infinite and archetypal" (*Institutes*, I.ii.6).

<sup>20</sup> We realize that merit is a matter that will require additional comments but for now we cite this from the OPC's Justification Report, "Adam's obedience would have truly earned the reward of life, according to the terms of the covenant, as a matter of justice. A robust affirmation of God's justice in administering the covenant with Adam does not detract from the Creator-creature distinction" (*OPC Report on Justification*, 12, [opc.org/GA/justification2004.pdf](http://opc.org/GA/justification2004.pdf)).

death. The promise of life can be seen in three primary ways: the Sabbath, the tree of life, and the image of God.

### *The Sabbath Day*

The Sabbath Day, day seven of creation, the last day, is a unique day. It is set apart. It is holy. It is the original Lord's Day. On that day, the Lord rested from his labors and the works He performed in creation. It is helpful if we think of this rest not as though the Lord was tired and needed refreshment. This rest is rather the rest of completion, satisfaction, and royal session. It is God's delight in all he made having judged it very good (Gen 1:31). Heaven and earth was His royal temple and man was set in place to serve, worship, and commune with Him.<sup>21</sup> The Lord rejoices in the works of His hands and enjoys it with satisfaction. Like the creation of the garden, Adam is watching and learning. He sees what awaits him upon the completion of his work even as God finished his and rested. The Sabbath Day is a sign to Adam that history is not a meaningless string of days. Even as there was a beginning there will be an end. God is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. The Sabbath is an eschatological sign of eternal glory and rest among other things. History is inherently eschatological.<sup>22</sup> That is, it presses toward a final day, a final goal. If Adam works and obeys, he too will enter that rest even as God did (cf. Heb 4:9-10).<sup>23</sup> The weekly sabbatical cycle Adam observes is a weekly foretaste of that eschatological end and goal. Vos says,

Before all other important things, therefore, the Sabbath is an expression of the eschatological principle on which the life of humanity has been constructed...The Sabbath brings this principle of the eschatological structure of history to bear upon the mind of man after a symbolical and a typical fashion. It teaches its lesson through the rhythmical succession of six days of labour and one ensuing day of rest in each successive week. Man is reminded in this way life is not an aimless existence but a goal lies beyond. This was true before, and apart from, redemption. The eschatological is an older strand in revelation than the soteric. The so-called 'Covenant of Works' was nothing but an embodiment of the Sabbatical principle.<sup>24</sup>

Nothing short of eternal blessedness of satisfaction and joy in the presence of God is in view in the Sabbath as the goal of man's works. He works to enter God's rest. We are again confronted with the fact that creation is itself covenantal. Embedded into man's existence via the Sabbath Day is the eschatological reward offered to him as a result of fulfilling the covenant of works. In Genesis 2, man sees God rest, man hears God bless that day and that Day serves as sign of what can be Adam's. Meredith Kline comments,

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<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 66:1. Note that the Lord speaks there of heaven and earth as the house He created to "rest."

<sup>22</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath: the Controversy of Applying the Fourth Commandment* (Ross-Shire: Mentor, 1998), 150-157.

<sup>23</sup> "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" (Heb 4:9-10).

<sup>24</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 140. Gaffin adds, "That weekly cycle impressed on him that he, together with the created order as a whole, was moving toward a goal, a nothing less than eschatological culmination" (*Sabbath*, 155). Notice how they are drawing out the Westminster Larger Catechism's use of the Sabbath in its treatment of the covenant of works (WLC 20).

By the Sabbath ordinance God made covenantal commitment that man with his God-like endowment would move on in the way of obedience to a consummation of rest, indeed, to the glory of God's own Sabbath.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Tree of Life*

The second evidence that life is the reward to obedience is the tree of life. The tree is symbolic of the outcome of the probation (WLC 20). The life offered here is not that life Adam and Eve already enjoyed as some suppose. Like the Sabbath, it sets before man eternal life in God's presence. The tree of life is used in the Scriptures in eschatological contexts as a sign of reward awaiting those who now lay hold of Christ by faith and persevere in that faith.<sup>26</sup> For Adam, access to the tree of life would have been a reward for obedience as confirmation of that future blessedness that awaited him.<sup>27</sup> Vos writes,

...nothing is recorded concerning any prohibition which seems to point to the understanding that the use of the tree was reserved for the future, quite in agreement with the eschatological significance attributed to it later. The tree was associated with the higher, unchangeable, the eternal life to be secure by obedience throughout his probation. Anticipating the result by a present enjoyment of the fruit would be out of keeping with its sacramental character. After man should have been made sure of the attainment of the highest life, the tree would have appropriately have been the sacramental means for communicating the highest life.<sup>28</sup>

### *The Image of God*

Now we turn to one final consideration concerning man's hope in creation and the reward set before him in the covenant of works: the *image of God*. The image of God that mankind is includes a cognitive element, an ethical element, a judicial element and a physical element. The first three are made explicit in the WSC (10), which says, "God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge [cognitive], righteousness and holiness [ethical], with dominion over the creatures [judicial/royal]." The cognitive element is the knowledge of God's existence and attributes (cf. Rom 1:19-21).<sup>29</sup> The ethical element is man's ability to imitate God's character (cf. Eccl 7:29).<sup>30</sup> The judicial/royal element is tied not just to man's subjugation of the animals, but of his rendering of ability to make judgments (cf. Rom 2:14-15).<sup>31</sup> This certainly is not an exhaustive list of how man bears God's image. Man can reflect God's goodness, love, kindness and so forth. These elements that the WSC draws out are meant to distinguish man from the animals in his cognitive, moral, and judicial qualities.

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<sup>25</sup> Kline, *Prologue*, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Revelation 2:7; 22: 2, 14, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Note that Adam had not eaten from the Tree of Life at the end of Genesis 3. Because of his failed probation, access to the tree is barred from him by the flaming sword and the angelic guardians (Gen 3:22-24).

<sup>28</sup> *Biblical Theology*, 28. See also John Murray, 'The Adamic Administration' in *Collected Writings, 4 Vols* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 2:54; Turretin, *Institutes*, I.vii.5-6; Kline, *Prologue*, 93-96.

<sup>29</sup> "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom 1:19-21).

<sup>30</sup> "See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes" (Ecc 7:29).

<sup>31</sup> "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them" (Rom 2:14-15).

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One element of the image of God that's is not always addressed is the aspect of physical reflection of the divine glory. This is the exclusively eschatological aspect of the image of God. In the eschatological state, man will physically reflect God's glory and light and thus the image of God will be consummated.<sup>32</sup> Man will be perfected in knowledge (cognitive) and righteousness and holiness (ethical), ruling and reigning forever and ever (royal/judicial) and will shine like the stars in the heavens (physical). In the Old Testament, this is epitomized in Moses, the servant of the Lord. When Moses is invited into God's Glory to speak with Jesus face-to-face, Moses is physically transformed and begins to reflect His glory. Moses' activity within the Glory-Cloud is very much a picture of man's final state in the presence of God, beholding God face to face forever and ever.

In suggesting there is a physical element to the image of God is in no sense saying God has a physical body. God is a spirit and does not have a body like men. Nevertheless, even in this case, we do not know God as He is in Himself. He accommodates Himself to us in theophanies. Light and glory are common ways the Lord appears. This is what man will reflect in the end, like Moses did on Mt. Sinai and in the Tent of Meeting. Notice the connection between the image of God and glorification in Romans 8 (vv 29-30). Paul writes,

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

To be conformed to the image of God's Son is not only moral or ethical. Conformity to God's Son is fully realized in the final stage listed by Paul in verse 30—glorification. It is only when we are glorified in body and soul that our conformity to Jesus will be complete.<sup>33</sup>

This same connection can be seen in 2 Corinthians 3:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (vv 17-18).

We are being transformed into the image of the Spirit-Lord. The risen and glorified Christ is the Spirit-Lord who dispenses freedom and liberty from heaven. And we all, with unveiled face are beholding the glory of the Lord in the preaching of Christ's gospel (2 Corinthians 4:6). We have the glory-light of Jesus Christ in "earthen vessels", that is, vessels of weakness and suffering (vs. 7). But we are moving from this stage of glory to the final stage of glory. Paul says this is a transformation into the image of Christ and the final stage of that transformation will no longer be earthen vessels but vessels of glory.

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<sup>32</sup> "God gave to man the charge of His image, as the most excellent deposit of heaven, and, if kept pure and inviolate, the earnest of a greater good..." (Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity 2 Vols.* [Escondido: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990], 1.57)

<sup>33</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Co., 1987), 126, 134.

Finally, one cannot overlook 1 Corinthians 15:42–53 in this regard:

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven... Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

Notice again the fullness of image bearing is nothing less than glorification; a heavenly body fully transformed into the image of the risen and glorified Christ.<sup>34</sup> Christ as the Last Adam will do what the first Adam failed to do—bring us into the fullness of God's image, the glorification of our bodies made fit to dwell in the house of God forever and ever.<sup>35</sup>

It is this eschatological goal of glory in the presence of God forever and ever (communicated to Adam in the Sabbath, the Tree of Life, and the image of God) that the covenant of works was instituted to offer to Adam on the basis of His obedience (cf. WCF 7.1-2).

### *The Probation of the Covenant*

This covenant is narrowed down into one probationary command: "Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil." This command does not annul the entire law Adam is under. This command does not define the covenant. Rather, this is a unique command given to the unique figure in the covenant of works—the covenant or federal head.<sup>36</sup> The prohibition is a test of Adam's obedience. It is a probationary command that brings the entire covenant order to a crisis point and will determine the outcome of the covenant for the entire human race. The test is this: will Adam obey the Lord and submit to His absolute authority for the Lord's sake out of the purity of love and devotion? Vos says, "It was precisely the purpose of the probation to raise man for a moment from the influence of his own ethical inclination to the point of a choosing for the sake of personal attachment to God alone."<sup>37</sup> In other words, nothing inherently evil or poisonous resides in the tree. The tree was just a

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<sup>34</sup> "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

<sup>35</sup> Bavinck says, "Although Adam was created in God's image, he was not that image in the full sense...The image of God will only present itself to us in all of its many-splendored richness when man's destiny, both for this life and the life to come, is included into it...There is a very great difference between the natural and the pneumatic, between the state of integrity and the state of glory" (*Reformed Dogmatics 4 Vols.* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006], 2.564).

<sup>36</sup> This is made clear in WLC 92-93. Question 93 defines the "moral law" as in identical terms to the covenant of works (we will address this more below). Question 92 says that the "special command" not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was attached to the moral law.

<sup>37</sup> *Biblical Theology*, 32.

moment earlier declared to be “very good” (Gen 1:31). This tree is off limits simply because the Lord God says so as a test of Adam’s obedience, love, and personal attachment to Him.<sup>38</sup>

The Sabbath, the Tree of Life and the image of God in man are all covenantal commitments from God to man concerning the hope and promise of blessedness held out to him in the covenant of works. Adam has no knowledge of God that is not covenantal. God’s goodness, benevolence, love, kindness, generosity, holiness, righteousness, and justice are all communicated to Adam in one grand covenantal revelation. Adam is called to imitate his Lord and to obey the law within him and the special commands spoken to him. Obedience to the probationary command will bring life and blessing and confirm Adam and the human race in that life and blessing until the full realization of it in the new creation. Disobedience will bring death and curse. This is the covenant of works.

### *The Covenant of Works Outside Genesis 1-3*

The early chapters of Genesis are not the only places the covenant of works is revealed. Reformed theologians have long admitted the word *covenant* is not used in the Genesis narrative relating to Adam and Eve. However, the essential features of a covenant are found in Genesis 1-3, and our tradition has seen the theological necessity of affirming it as covenantal.

As we have seen, the Westminster Confession of Faith introduces the covenant of works in chapter 7.2.<sup>39</sup> What is interesting is that most of the proof texts come from outside of Genesis 1 and 2. The proof texts are Galatians 3:12 and Romans 10:5 (both quoting Leviticus 18:5). They also enlist Romans 5:12-20. Finally, concerning the curse of the law and failing to perfectly keep it, the proof text is Galatians 3:10 (quoting Deuteronomy 27:26). The one text that the confession sees as naming the covenant explicitly is Hosea 6:7.

The use of these passages to defend the covenant of works was not new at the time of the Westminster Assembly. It is an exegetical path well trod by those who came before. Our tracing of that path will begin with Calvin. However, what will become clear is that Calvin was not so much interested in the covenant in the Garden, but was dealing with the opposing principles of justification—namely works and grace / law and gospel. Calvin will use the language of the “moral law,” which, as we will see below, the confession will use as a synonym for the covenant of works. Then we will see how this exegetical strand is then picked up by others to defend and explain the covenant of works, culminating at the Westminster Assembly. For this reason, our treatment of Calvin at this point may appear to be moving into a discussion of republication proper. That will be dealt with more fully below. It is introduced here to establish the uses of these texts in the Protestant tradition that we find in Calvin in order to establish the interpretive context upon which the Westminster Standards were written.

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<sup>38</sup> Calvin remarks, “Adam was denied the tree of knowledge of good and evil to test his obedience and prove that he was willingly under God’s command” (*Institutes*, II.1.4.). Turretin comments, “God selected this tree then, to explore the obedience of Adam...By fulfilling it, he would have testified his uncorrupted love and obedience towards God; by violating it, he professed that he threw off the dominion of God and preferred his own will (yea even the voice of the Devil) to the divine will and voice” (*Institutes*, VIII.iv).

<sup>39</sup> “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.”

## JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564)

We know some might say we are standing on shaky ground by employing Calvin for any notions of the 1) the Adamic covenant of works or 2) republication. Historically it must be recognized that Calvin did not use the language of the covenant of works.<sup>40</sup> This, among other things, has been the basis for those who set Calvin against the Calvinists. However, a strong case can be made that Calvin has within his system what men like Fenner, Cartwright, Perkins, Ursinus, Olevianus, Howie, Rollock, and others leading to the Westminster Confession of Faith, will flesh out, refine, and add to. There's no need to set Calvin against the Calvinists. Instead we see theological trajectories in Calvin that are later embraced and refined by those who follow him.<sup>41</sup>

Calvin's comments on Leviticus 18:5, for example, clearly articulate what would be called the covenant of works and help us to see why the Westminster Assembly would use Leviticus 18:5 as a proof text for the covenant of works. Calvin states,

Although Moses introduces this passage, where he exhorts the Israelites to cultivate chastity in respect to marriage, and not to fall into the incestuous pollutions of the Gentiles, yet, as it is a remarkable one, and contains general instruction, from whence Paul derives his definition of the righteousness of the Law, (Romans 10:5) it seems to me to come in very appropriately here, inasmuch as it sanctions and confirms the Law by the promise of reward. 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>42</sup>

At once we can see the connection between Calvin's understanding and the use of Leviticus 18:5, Galatians 3:10-12, and Romans 10:5. Calvin here asserts the Law given to Israel through Moses on Mt. Sinai, considered in a strict, narrow sense, contained the promise of eternal life for obedience. Leviticus 18:5 teaches justification by works—if you keep the Law, you are rewarded with eternal life. He is quick to add that some misunderstand this verse as contradicting justification by faith alone.

<sup>40</sup> Calvin does use the language of a legal covenant as opposed to an evangelical covenant. See below.

<sup>41</sup> See the excellent work of Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> *Calvin's Commentaries 22 Vols.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996) 3.203-205.

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Calvin answers that, in one sense, it does. The Scriptures, he says, do not deny that men *should be* justified by works of the Law. What it denies is that men *can be* justified by the Law. The reason we cannot be justified by the Law is not found in some defect of the Law. The problem is in our depravity and sin. We cannot keep the Law and so obtain life by works. Calvin says that the moral Law, as given to Israel on Mt. Sinai through Moses, promises eternal life if one can keep it.

Commenting on Deuteronomy 27:26, Calvin says,

Although it was God's purpose to summon the consciences of all men before Him, and, in order that they might not only fear human judgments, He designedly threatened them with the punishment of secret sins, yet the conclusion, which is now added, extends the same judgment to all iniquities of whatever kind. Nay, He briefly declares, that whosoever shall not perform what the Law requires, are accursed. From whence Paul rightly infers, that "as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse" (Galatians 3:10). For let the most perfect man come forward, and, although he may have striven ever so diligently to keep the Law, he will have at least offended in some point or other; since the declaration of James must be borne in mind, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all;" for he that forbade murder and adultery, forbade theft also. (James 2:10-11) Paul indeed does not quote the very words of Moses, for he thus cites his testimony; "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) but there is no difference in the sense, since all are here condemned without exception, who have not confirmed the Law of God, so as to fulfill to the uttermost whatever it contains. Whence it is clear that, in whatever respect the deficiency betrays itself, it brings men under the curse; and to this the Israelites are commanded to assent, so as to acknowledge that they were all without exception lost, since they were involved in the curse. And now-a-days, also, it is necessary that we should all to a man be struck with the same despair, in order that, embracing the grace of Christ, we should be delivered from this melancholy state of guilt; since he was made accursed for us, that He might redeem us from the curse of the Law. (Galatians 3:13)<sup>43</sup>

This is negative aspect of the Law—its curse. Our confession will use this verse as indicating the threat against Adam in the covenant of works. Such a use by the standards comports with Calvin's understanding of this verse.

Calvin says similar things in his comments on Ezekiel 20:11:

Yet it is here asked how the Prophet testifies *that men should live by the works of the law*, when the law, on the testimony of Paul, can only bring us death. (Rom. 4:15; Deut. 30:15) He took this testimony from Moses, and we shall see immediately that he cites it in a different sense. Moses there pronounces that the life of man rests on the observance of the law; that is, — life was surely to be expected through satisfying the law. Some think this absurd, and so restrict what is said to the present life, taking *he shall live in them* politically or civilly: but this is a cold and trifling comment. The reasoning which influenced them is readily answered: they object, that we owe all things to God; that we ourselves and our possessions are all his by the right of possession; so that if we keep the law a hundred times over, still we are not, worthy of such a reward. But the solution is at hand, that we deserve nothing, but God graciously binds himself to us by this promise, as I have already touched upon. And from this passage it is easy to infer that works are of no value before God, and are not estimated for their intrinsic value, so

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.208-209.

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to speak, but only by agreement. Since, then, it pleased God to descend so far as to promise life to men if they kept his law, they ought to accept this offer as springing from his liberality. There is no absurdity, then, if men do live, that is, if they deserve eternal life according to agreement. But if anyone keeps the law, it will follow that he has no need of the grace of Christ. For of what advantage is Christ to us unless we recover life in him? But if this is placed in ourselves, the remedy must not be thought anywhere but in ourselves. Every one, then, may be his own savior if life is placed the observance of the law. But Paul solves this difficulty for us when he determines for us a twofold righteousness of the law and of faith. (Romans 10:5, 6) He says that this righteousness is of the law when we keep God's precepts. Now, since we are far distant from such obedience, nay, the very faculty of keeping the law is altogether defective in us: hence it follows that we must fly to the righteousness of faith. For he defines the righteousness of faith, if we believe Christ to be dead, and to be risen again for our justification. We see, therefore, although God promised salvation to his ancient people, if they only kept the law, yet that promise was useless, since no one could satisfy the law and perform God's commands. Here another question arises. For if this promise does not take effect, God vainly reckons that as a benefit to the Israelites, which we see, was offered them in vain: hence no utility or fruit would arise from it. But someone may say that the imagination was fallacious, when God promised life, and now by his Prophet blames the Israelites for despising such a benefit. But the reply is easy: although men are not endued with the power of obeying the law, yet they ought not on that account to depart from the goodness of God; for men's declension by no means hinders them from estimating the value of so liberal a promise: God is treating with men: he might then, as I have said, imperiously demand whatever he pleased, and exact it with the utmost rigor; but he treats according to an agreement, and so there is a mutual obligation between himself and the people. No one will surely deny that God here exhibits a specimen of his mercy when he deigns thus familiarly to make a covenant with men. "Ah! but this is all in vain: God's promise is of no effect, because no one is able to keep the law." I confess it: but man's declension cannot, as I have said, abolish the glory of God's goodness, since that always remains fixed, and God still acts liberally in being willing thus to enter into covenant with His people. We must then consider the subject simply, and by itself: man's declension is accidental. God then put forth a remarkable proof of His goodness, in promising life to all who kept His law: and this will remain perfect and entire.<sup>44</sup>

The same doctrines we observe in Calvin's commentaries are reiterated in his more systematic *Institutes*:

But, in order that our guilt may arouse us to seek pardon, it behooves us, briefly, to know how by our instruction in the moral law we are rendered more inexcusable. If it is true that in the law we are taught the perfection of righteousness, this also follows: the complete observance of the law is perfect righteousness before God. By it man would evidently be deemed and reckoned righteous before the heavenly judgment seat. Therefore Moses, after he had published the law, did not hesitate to call heaven and earth to witness that he had "set before Israel life and death, good and evil" (Deuteronomy 30:19). We cannot gainsay that the reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised. On the other hand, it behooves us to examine whether we fulfill that obedience, through whose merit we ought to derive assurance of that reward. What point is there to see in the observance of the law the proffered reward of eternal life if, furthermore, it is not clear whether by this path we may attain eternal life. At this point the feebleness of the law shows itself. Because observance of the law is found in none of us, we are excluded from the promises of life and fall back into the mere curse. I am telling not only what happens but what must happen. For since the teaching of the law is far above human capacity, a man may indeed view from afar the proffered promises, yet he cannot derive any benefit from them. Therefore this thing alone remains: that from the goodness of the promises he should the better judge his own misery, while with the hope of salvation cut off he thinks himself

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<sup>44</sup> Ezekiel, 297-299.

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threatened with certain death. On the other hand, horrible threats hang over us, constraining and entangling not a few of us only, but all of us to a man. They hang over us, I say, and pursue us with inexorable harshness, so that we discern in the law only the most immediate death.<sup>45</sup>

The natural question is this: How can God enact such a Law of works with those who cannot keep it? After the fall, man cannot attain life by the Law. So why does God give the Law again with the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience knowing full well Israel (and anyone else!) cannot keep it? Calvin anticipates our question and remarks,

Therefore if we look only upon the law, we can only be despondent, confused, and despairing in mind, since from it all of us are condemned and accursed (Galatians 3:10). And it holds us far away from the blessedness that it promises to its keepers. Is the Lord, you will ask, mocking us in this way? How little different from mockery is it to show forth the hope of happiness, to invite and attract us to it, to assure us that it is available, when all the while it is shut off and inaccessible? I reply: even if the promises of the law, insofar as they are conditional, depend upon perfect obedience to the law—which can nowhere be found—they have not been given in vain. For when we have learned that they will be fruitless and ineffectual for us unless God, out of his free goodness, shall receive us without looking at our works, and we in faith embrace that same goodness held forth to us by the gospel, the promises do not lack effectiveness even with the condition attached.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, in a shorter summary, one that will require additional comment below, Calvin says,

Hence, also, we refute those who always erroneously compare the law with the gospel by contrasting the merit of works with the free imputation of righteousness. This is indeed a contrast not at all to be rejected. For Paul often means by the term “law” the rule of righteous living by which God requires of us what is his own, giving us no hope of life unless we completely obey him, and adding on the other hand a curse if we deviate even in the slightest degree. This Paul does when he contends that we are pleasing to God through grace and are accounted righteous through His pardon, because nowhere is found that observing of the law for which the reward has been promised. Paul, therefore, justly makes contraries of the righteousness of the law and of that of the gospel (Romans 3:21ff; Galatians 3:10ff; etc.).<sup>47</sup>

While Calvin did not use the language of the covenant of works, he clearly saw Moses teaching Israel about a law which required personal and perfect obedience, promising eternal life for success and threatening eternal judgment for failure. His preferred term for this was “the moral law,” which was summarized in the Ten Commandments. The promise was eternal life and blessedness. The curse was death. The outcome, unlike what could have been for Adam, was death and curse because the righteousness required under the covenant cannot be found in man. It is not difficult to hear the echoes of the Westminster Standards and their use of the same verses in the way Calvin understood them.

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<sup>45</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 2 Vols*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press) II.vii.3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, II.vii.4. It needs to be added that for Calvin, this is not the only use of the Law nor its primary use. He refers to this as the accidental use of it occasioned by the entrance of sin through Adam (*Commentary on Genesis 2:16*).

<sup>47</sup> *Institutes* II.ix.4.

## ROBERT ROLLOCK (1555-1599)

A consistency of thought regarding the covenant of works persists from Calvin to Rollock. The influence of Calvin will be obvious as well as indications that this stream of covenant theology empties into the ocean of the Westminster Standards.

1. Q: What is God's covenant?

A: It is that by which God promises man something of good under some certain condition, and man, moreover, accepts that condition.

2. Q: How many fold is the covenant of God established with man?

A: The covenant of nature or works, and the covenant of grace (Gal 4:24).

3. Q: What is the covenant of works?

A: It is the covenant of God in which he promises man eternal life under the condition of good works—works proceeding from the virtues of nature—and man, moreover, accepts that condition of good works (Lev 18:5; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12).

4. Q: Has no grave threat been added to the promise of this covenant?

A: One has been added.

5. Q: In what form?

A: "Cursed is the one who will not persist in doing all things which have been written in the book of Law, in order to do them" (Gen 2:17; Deut 27:26; Gal 3:10).

6. Q: What is the basis (*fundamentum*) of the covenant of works?

A: A good, holy, and upright nature, of the kind which was in man at creation. For if God had not made man, in the beginning, according to his own image—that is, wise, holy, and just by nature—then he could not, surely, have established with man this covenant, which has for its condition holy, just, and perfect works proceeding from [man's] nature (Gen 1:26, 27; Eph 4:24; Col 3:9).

7. Q: What is promised in the covenant of works?

A: A blessed life which should endure forever (Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12).

8. Q: What is the condition in the covenant of works?

A: The condition is good works, which ought to proceed from that good, holy, and upright nature upon which the covenant of works itself was based.

9. Q: What things are excluded by this condition?

A: By this condition, first, faith in Christ, and second, works proceeding from grace and regeneration, are excluded from the covenant of works (Rom. 11:6).

10. Q: Why are these things excluded?

A: Because the virtues of [man's] nature, and the works proceeding from those virtues, cannot coexist with the grace of Christ and works of grace.

11. Q: What are the principal divisions of this covenant's condition?

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A: They are contained individually in the discrete commands of the Decalogue. Hence, the tables upon which the law was written were called “the tables of the covenant” (Ex 19 and 20; 22:15; Heb 9:4).

12. Q: Is this condition of works one of merit?

A: Not at all. Rather, it is one as of duties which bear witness to [man’s] gratitude towards God the creator (Rom 11:35; Luke 17:10).

13. Q: But works proceeding from a holy and upright nature ought to be themselves perfectly holy and good.

A: It does not follow from this that they should be merits. For the rule of merit (*ratio meriti*), properly speaking, is that when some unrequired work (*opus indebitum*) has been done, wages are due to that work according to the order of justice. As Romans 4:4 says: “To the one who works (*operatur*)”—in other words, to the one who merits (*meretur*)—“wages are reckoned out of debt (*ex debito*).”

14. Q: Why is it called the covenant of works?

A: This name is taken from the condition of the covenant, which is one of works proceeding from a good and upright nature.

15. Q: When was this covenant established with man?

A: It was established from the first moment of man’s creation (Gen 1:27ff; Gen 2:15ff).

16. Q: In what manner and order was it established?

A: First, God engraved his law—that is, the principal divisions of his covenant’s condition—upon the heart of the man he had created; then God said, “Act and work according to the rule of my law (for it is written upon your heart), and you will live.” And man accepted the condition, and committed himself to keep it (Gen 2:15ff).

17. Q: So you mean that the moral law was engraved upon man’s heart in creation, and that hence, the principal divisions of this covenant’s condition were known [to man] through nature itself?

A: I do. And there is evidence of this in that surviving knowledge of the law (*notitia legis*) which still, after the fall, remains in [man’s] corrupt nature (Rom 1:19, 32; 2:14).

A few comments are in order here. 1) Rollock clearly affirms the covenant of works in contrast to the covenant of grace, which differ substantially. 2) His understanding of specific texts falls in line from what we have already seen in Calvin. Calvin’s influence on Rollock is obvious. 3) The primary proof texts for the covenant of works are taken from the Mosaic Covenant and this too follows Calvin. The primary texts are Leviticus 18:5 and its use in the New Testament, Deuteronomy 27: 26; Exodus 19-20 and Galatians 4:24 (these women are two covenants). 4) Rollock believed heavenly, eternal life is man’s eschatological goal. Set before Adam is eternal bliss and happiness in the presence of God forever and ever. 5) Creation is covenantal. There is no time in which man is outside the covenant of works. It is etched into his heart. It is the context in which he was created and lives. 6) The moral law is the covenant of works and is written on man’s heart. 7) Rollock denies any works man might perform are meritorious—even those not stained by sin. Merit is the intrinsic worth of a work, which God is obligated to reward. He rightly denies any notion of merit in that sense. All works are seen as flowing from gratitude for who God is and what God has done for man.

Rollock's theology of the covenant of works is thoroughly Reformed and Calvinistic and helps us to make the connection between Calvin and those who come after Rollock leading on to the Westminster Assembly.

## ZACHARIAS URSINUS (1534-1583)<sup>48</sup>

Ursinus is an important historical figure since he was the principal author of the Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>49</sup> In his Larger Catechism he asks,

10. Q: What does the divine law teach?

A: It teaches the kind of covenant God established with man in creation, how man behaved in keeping it, and what God requires of him after establishing the new covenant of grace with him. That is, what kind of man God created and for what purpose, into what state he has fallen, and how he must conduct himself, now that he is reconciled to God.<sup>50</sup>

Ursinus includes both the function of the Law as the covenant of works and the so-called third use of the law in the covenant of grace as the abiding moral standard of righteousness for those united to Jesus Christ.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

The covenant of works also plays a prominent role in the New Testament. The *locus classicus* is Romans chapter 5:12-19. Two aspects are prominent in this passage. The first is that Adam was a *public figure* who acted on behalf of all his posterity (by ordinary generation). Specifically we are told that all died in Adam because of his one trespass (v. 15, cf. v. 17) and that his one trespass led to condemnation for all men (v. 18). This is the doctrine of representation that lies at the heart of Augustine's debate with Pelagius and becomes the bedrock of Reformed covenantalism. As Charles Hodge said,

The covenant being formed with Adam, not only for himself, but also for his posterity (in other words, Adam having been placed on trial, not for himself only, but also for his race,) his act was, in virtue of this relation, regarded as our act... The principle here advanced, and on which the apostle's argument rests is, that the infliction of penal evil implies the violation of law. If men were sinners, and were treated as such before the Law of Moses, it is certain that there is some other law, for the violation of which sin was imputed to them...<sup>51</sup>

This is simply echoing Calvin's own thoughts on this passage. Calvin saw this passage as arguing that all were lost through Adam's sin. He says,

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<sup>48</sup> For a brief yet helpful summary of the Dutch tradition on the covenant of works see Shane Lems, "The Covenant of Works in Dutch Reformed Orthodoxy," *The Outlook* (June, 2007), Vol 57, No. 6, 13-18.

<sup>49</sup> Amandus Polanus would crystalize the language of the covenant of works as the *foedus operum* (Allistar McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986), 228.

<sup>50</sup> *Larger Catechism*

<sup>51</sup> Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 156-157.

Frivolous then was the gloss, by which formerly the Pelagians endeavored to elude the words of Paul, and held, that sin descended by imitation from Adam to the whole human race; for Christ would in this case become only the exemplar and not the cause of righteousness. Besides, we may easily conclude, that he speaks not here of actual sin; for if everyone for himself contracted guilt, why did Paul form a comparison between Adam and Christ? It then follows that our innate and hereditary depravity is what is here referred to.<sup>52</sup>

Calvin does not use the language of the covenant of works to describe this reality—that formulation would come later. However, he does two things that clearly pave the way for later articulations. He clearly argues for the substance of the covenant of works in his comments on Romans 5:13:

*For until the law, etc.* This parenthesis anticipates an objection: for as there seems to be no transgression without the law, it might have been doubted whether there were before the law any sin: that there was after the law admitted of no doubt. The question only refers to the time preceding the law. To this then he gives this answer,—that though God had not as yet denounced judgment by a written law, yet mankind were under a curse, and that from the womb; and hence that they who led a wicked and vicious life before the promulgation of the law, were by no means exempt from the condemnation of sin; for there had always been some notion of a God, to whom honor was due, and there had ever been some rule of righteousness. This view is so plain and so clear, that of itself it disproves every opposite notion.<sup>53</sup>

Here we clearly see Calvin acknowledge something in man's nature that tells him about God's justice that would later be revealed to Israel in the Law. He says that there has "always been some notion of a God, to whom honor was due, and there had ever been some rule of righteousness." And yet he does not limit this to man's nature and the image of God. In his comments on the following verse, he connects it with the oracles of God in Genesis 2. Contrasting those who came after Adam with their first father, Calvin says,

Hence they sinned not after the similitude of Adam's transgression; for they had not, like him, the will of God made known to them by a certain oracle: for the Lord had forbidden Adam to touch the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; but to them he had given no command besides the testimony of conscience.<sup>54</sup>

This connection is most explicit in his comments on verse 14 and the connection made between Adam and Christ:

But in saying that Adam bore a resemblance to Christ, there is nothing incongruous; for some likeness often appears in things wholly contrary. As then we are all lost through Adam's sin, so we are restored through Christ's righteousness: hence he calls Adam not inaptly the type of Christ. But observe, that

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<sup>52</sup> *Romans*, 201.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

## THE COVENANT OF WORKS

Adam is not, said to be the type of sin, nor Christ the type of righteousness, as though they led the way only by their example, but that the one is contrasted with the other.<sup>55</sup>

Calvin's point is simple: the connection between Adam and Christ is not their obedience or disobedience (for Adam had disobedience and Christ had obedience). The connection, rather, was their function as public figures. So Calvin saw Adam acting as a public individual and transgressing the law of God written on his heart and the oracles given in the Garden. We can find no substantive difference between Calvin and the covenant theologians who would come after him in their understanding of what the New Testament teaches regarding Adam's arrangement in the Garden.

This similarity continues in the strict legal nature of that arrangement. Having connected the substance of the law to Adam (as we have seen in Romans 5:12-14), we are more able to understand Calvin's strict dichotomy between the law and the gospel that he articulates elsewhere. So in his comments on Romans 2:13, he points out that the hearers of the law are not justified, but the doers:

This anticipates an objection, which the Jews might have adduced. As they had heard that the law was the rule of righteousness, (Deuteronomy 4:1) they gloried in the mere knowledge of it: to obviate this mistake, he declares that the hearing of the law or any knowledge of it is of no such consequence, that any one should on that account lay claim to righteousness, but that works must be produced, according to this saying, "He who will do these shall live in them (Leviticus 18:5). The import then of this verse is the following,—"That if righteousness be sought from the law, the law must be fulfilled; for the righteousness of the law consists in the perfection of works." They who pervert this passage for the purpose of building up justification by works, deserve most fully to be laughed at even by children.<sup>56</sup>

To Calvin these opposing principles of works and grace are most clearly articulate in Romans 10:5:

To render it evident how much at variance is the righteousness of faith and that of works, he now compares them; for by comparison the opposition between contrary things appears more clear...

*For Moses describes, etc.* Paul has γραφει writes; which is used for a verb which means to describe, by taking away a part of it [επιγραφει.] The passage is taken from Leviticus 18:5, where the Lord promises eternal life to those who would keep his law; for in this sense, as you see, Paul has taken the passage, and not only of temporal life, as some think. Paul indeed thus reasons, — "Since no man can attain the righteousness prescribed in the law, except he fulfills strictly every part of it, and since of this perfection all men have always come far short, it is in vain for any one to strive in this way for salvation: Israel then were very foolish, who expected to attain the righteousness of the law, from which we are all excluded." See how from the promise itself he proves, that it can avail us nothing, and for this reason, because the condition is impossible. What a futile device it is then to allege legal promises, in order to establish the righteousness of the law! For with these an unavoidable curse comes to us; so far is it, that salvation should thence proceed. The more detestable on this account is the stupidity of the Papists, who think it enough to prove merits by adducing bare promises. "It is not in vain," they say, "that God has promised life to his servants." But at the same time they see not that it

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 95. This is echoed again in his comments on Romans 7:10, "Two things are stated here—that the commandment shows to us a way of life in the righteousness of God, and that it was given in order that we by keeping the law of the Lord might obtain eternal life, except our corruption stood in the way" (*Romans*, 256).

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has been promised, in order that a consciousness of their own transgressions may strike all with the fear of death, and that being thus constrained by their own deficiency, they may learn to flee to Christ.<sup>57</sup>

For the sake of space, only a portion of this section is reproduced here and we commend those interested to take the time to read the broader context. No doubt its implications for republication are already apparent to the reader, and they will be addressed later. The reason we quote it here is to show that Calvin clearly understood two possible ways to eternal life—one of perfect and personal obedience and one of grace through faith. Calvin makes virtually identical comments in his commentary on Galatians 3:10, 12.<sup>58</sup>

One final note should be made regarding Calvin and the covenant of works.<sup>59</sup> While he does not use this verbiage, it is not difficult to see how his theological heirs made it explicit when they connected the dots Calvin left. We have seen that Calvin acknowledges that there exists two competing systems of righteousness given by God—one of works and one of grace. He further acknowledges that while this was made expressly clear at Sinai, that it was no less true of Adam in the Garden. Finally, we want to show that, for Calvin, this requires a covenant since works cannot be rewarded without a covenant. He says,

...Paul took into account what was certainly true, that, except by a covenant with God, no reward is due to works. Admitting, then, that the law justifies, yet before the law men could not merit salvation by works, because there was no covenant. All that I am now affirming is granted by the scholastic theologians: for they maintain that works are meritorious of salvation, not by their intrinsic worth, but by the acceptance of God, (to use their own phrase,) and on the ground of a covenant.<sup>60</sup>

Other Protestants saw the New Testament teaching the covenant of works elsewhere. William Perkins, for example, saw it set forth in Galatians 4:24-25.<sup>61</sup> He explains:

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 us inward and perfect righteousness, both for nature, and

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 386-387.

<sup>58</sup> See pages 88-91.

<sup>59</sup> "The notion of a prelapsarian covenant, whatever its precise origins, did take on a dual focus, indicated in the variety of terms used—such as *foedus naturalis* or *foedus naturale*, *foedus legalis* and *foedus operum*. As Letham has quite correctly noted, the virtually identical content of the natural and the Mosaic law also makes its contribution here: the covenantal understanding of the Mosaic law was, certainly, developed prior to the identification of the prelapsarian covenant of works, as was the identity of the Mosaic law with the law of nature. Both of these conclusions appear in the thought of Calvin without the corresponding doctrine of a *foedus naturale* in creation or a *foedus operum* in Eden: Calvin did not speak of the prelapsarian state as bounded by covenant, he certainly assumed that it was governed by law" (Muller, "Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brakel", 88-89).

<sup>60</sup> *Galatians*, 97.

<sup>61</sup> The reader will note that Perkins was not alone in this connection. As mentioned above, Rollock made the same use of this passage.

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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>62</sup>

The nature of the covenant of works was well established. It should be no surprise, then, that the Westminster Standards (both in their original form and in the form currently approved by the OPC) appeal to Romans 5:12-19; 10:5 and Galatians 3:10, 12 to defend and articulate the covenant of works. Galatians 3:12 and Romans 10:5 are simply quotations of Leviticus 18:5, which has already been treated and Galatians 3:10 is a quotation of Deuteronomy 27:26, which has also been treated. All that bears mention here is that the New Testament, through its use of the Old, continues to emphasize the works principle within the covenant of works.

## THE “MORAL LAW” AND THE HEARTS OF MAN

### *The Moral Law*

In order to understand our tradition’s literature regarding the covenant of works, we must also look at its use of the language of the “moral law.” This term carries prominence throughout our confessional standards. Chapter 19 of the Westminster Confession of Faith is titled “Of the Law of God” and begins with: “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.”<sup>63</sup>

This Law is elsewhere called “the moral law,” such as in Westminster Larger Catechism 92:

Q. What did God first reveal unto man as the rule of his obedience?

A. The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the estate of innocence, and to all mankind in him, besides a special command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was the moral law.

That the Confession affirms that the moral law is the same law given to Adam as a covenant of works is proved by three things. First, question ninety-two says that it was revealed to Adam.

Second, the terms of the moral law are identified with the covenant of works in the following question where it is defined:

Q. What is the moral law?

A. The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding everyone to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul, and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man: promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> William Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians* in *The Complete Works*, 2:299.

<sup>63</sup> WCF 19.1.

<sup>64</sup> WLC 93.

This definition is identical to that given elsewhere of the covenant of works.<sup>65</sup> In other words, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechism use the “moral law” and the “covenant of works” synonymously. This is what is meant by the law was given to Adam *as a covenant of works*.

Third, this is made explicit in chapter 19 of the WCF. Having said that a law was given to Adam “as a covenant of works” (19.1), it goes on to say that this law is “commonly called moral” (19.3).

This language is not new at the time of the Westminster Assembly. Calvin argues that the “moral law” makes merit or justification by works possible. This is demonstrated in comments on Romans 3:20.<sup>66</sup> He says that the law of which Paul is speaking cannot simply be the ceremonial law, for it is the moral law that gives rewards to works and makes justification possible. This is mirrored in the Calvinists like Ursinus, Perkins, Rollock and others leading to the Assembly. And this is precisely how the Westminster Standards would later articulate the moral law as being the vehicle to obtaining the righteousness of life in the Garden of Eden.<sup>67</sup>

Years later, Charles Hodge would continue to make these kinds of distinctions. In his commentaries on Romans and 2 Corinthians, he refers to the moral law as that which carries forth the principle of works and reward for obedience.<sup>68</sup> This is simply employing the language handed down over generations

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<sup>65</sup> “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (WCF 7.2; cf. WLC 20; WSC 12).

<sup>66</sup> “It is a matter of doubt, even among the learned, what the works of the law mean. Some extend them to the observance of the whole law, *while others confine them to the ceremonies alone... the law hath promises, without which there would be no value in our works before God*. You hence see the reason why Paul expressly mentioned the works of the law; *for it is by the law that a reward is apportioned to works*. Nor was this unknown to the schoolmen, who held it as an approved and common maxim, that *works have no intrinsic worthiness, but become meritorious by covenant*. And though they were mistaken, inasmuch as they saw not that works are ever polluted with vices, which deprive them of any merit, yet this principle is still true, that *the reward for works depends on the free promise of the law*. Wisely then and rightly does Paul speak here; for he speaks not of mere works, but distinctly and expressly refers to the keeping of the law, the subject which he is discussing...*we contend, not without reason, that Paul speaks here of the whole law*; for we are abundantly supported by the thread of reasoning which he has hitherto followed and continues to follow, and there are many other passages which will not allow us to think otherwise. *It is therefore a truth, which deserves to be remembered as the first in importance,—that by keeping the law no one can attain righteousness*. He had before assigned the reason, and he will repeat it presently again, and that is, that all, being to a man guilty of transgression, are condemned for unrighteousness by the law. And these two things—to be justified by works—and to be guilty of transgressions, (as we shall show more at large as we proceed,) are wholly inconsistent the one with the other” (*Romans*, notes on Rom 3:20; emphasis ours). See also his notes on Romans 2:13 and 3:31.

<sup>67</sup> WLC 94: “Q. *Is there any use of the moral law since the fall?* A. Although no man, *since the fall, can attain to righteousness and life by the moral law...*” (emphasis ours).

<sup>68</sup> “By the law here, is to be understood the moral law, however revealed. It is not the law of Moses, so far as that law was peculiar and national, but only so far as it contained the rule of duty. It is not the experience of men, as determined by their relation to the Mosaic dispensation, but their experience as determined by their relation to the moral law, that is here depicted...It sets forth the work of the law first in the work of conviction, vers. 7-13, and afterwards in reference to the holy life of the Christian. This is the Augustinian view of the bearing of this passage adopted by the Lutherans and Reformed, and still held by the great body of evangelical Christians” (*Romans*, 221-222). See as well as his comments on 5:20: “Paul having shown that our justification was effected without the intervention of either the moral or Mosaic law, was naturally led to state the design and effect of the renewed revelation of the one, and the superinduction of the other. The law stands here for the whole of the Old Testament economy, including the clear revelation of the moral law, and all the institutions connected with the former dispensation...The offence to *παράπτωμα* is in the context used of the specific offence of Adam...” (177). See also

seeking to articulate the legal principle delivered to Adam as a covenant of works. In his work, the moral law is that legal covenant made at creation with Adam, which obligates all mankind to obedience to God, holding out reward and threatening punishment.

### *Written on the Heart*

This moral law is that which is written on the hearts of all mankind, by nature. Romans 2:14-15 says,

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

The law spoken of here is something common to all man. It is part of his created nature, manifest in conscience that bears witness against him in his sin. The Westminster Larger Catechism (question 17) addresses this issue in its description of how man was created:

Q. How did God create man?

A. After God had made all other creatures, he created man male and female; formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground, and the woman of the rib of the man, endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal souls; made them after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; *having the law of God written in their hearts*, and power to fulfill it, and dominion over the creatures; yet subject to fall.<sup>69</sup>

In both the original and OPC versions, the proof-text cited is Romans 2:14-15 referring to the Mosaic covenant.

Again, this is picking up on language commonly used prior to the Westminster Assembly. We also saw this language above in the Perkins' commentary on Galatians 4:24-25 where the fifth key element of the covenant of works was that "the law was in nature by creation."<sup>70</sup> In his *Golden Chain*, Perkins elaborates,

The covenant of works is God's covenant, made with the condition of perfect obedience, and is expressed in the moral law.

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his use *Systematic Theology* (vol 2) in defining sin in the fall (147), the obedience of Christ as the second Adam (613), the duty of all men to God (642, 671). In his commentary on 2 Corinthians he says this, "Every reader of the New Testament must be struck with the fact that the apostle often speaks of the Mosaic law, as he does of the moral law, as considered as a covenant of works; that is, as presenting the promise of life on the condition of perfect obedience" (53).

<sup>69</sup> WLC 117 (emphasis ours).

<sup>70</sup> 299. Richard Muller notes, "Perkins did hold to a prelapsarian covenant made with Adam he also clearly *identifies the covenant of works both with the natural law and with the commandments of the Decalogue*; and he held that Adam, by nature, had the commands of the Decalogue in his heart prior to the fall" ("Divine Covenant, Absolute And Conditional: John Cameron And The Early Orthodox Development Of Reformed Covenant Theology" *MJT* 17 (2006) 11-56) (emphasis ours).

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The Moral Law, is that part of God's word, which commandeth perfect obedience unto man, as well in his nature, as in his actions, and forbiddeth the contrary.<sup>71</sup>

In summary, the Reformed tradition before and after the Westminster Assembly saw the covenant of works as being distinct from the covenant of grace. It was not a covenant of grace (or promise) with the condition being faith in Jesus Christ or even evangelical obedience (that is obedience granted by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit). The covenant of works had no Mediator who obeyed on behalf of mankind, but required personal, perfect and perpetual obedience. It is a law covenant and, thus, often referred to simply as “the moral law.”

### WHEN THE COVENANT OF WORKS WAS ENACTED

One final question of importance must be addressed: “When was the covenant of works enacted?” This question has been partly addressed above; here we want to address it directly and acknowledge the various answers given throughout history.

We have been clear from the beginning that all covenants are concrete acts of legislation. They are not vague notions that exist “out there.” With this in mind we must try to address when the covenant of works was enacted. As an act of legislation between two parties, certain things must be true before it can be enacted—namely the two parties must exist and there must be a realm in which it can be enacted. For this reason the Westminster Standards rightly distinguish the covenant from creation and call it an act of providence (cf. WLC 20; WSC 12). That is to say creation holds a logical priority over the covenant of works. Put another way, the covenant of works is not a work of creation. We cannot, for example, say the covenant of works was a thing made on day two or five of creation.

This does not mean, however, that creation itself is not covenantal. This is one of the great emphases of Cornelius Van Til. Man's knowledge of God is always mediated by way of the covenant. There is no ontological knowledge of God—for Adam, for us, now or ever. This is why Van Til argued that “voluntary condescension” of the Standards should be read as creation in covenant.<sup>72</sup> Again, good

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<sup>71</sup> William Perkins, *Golden Chain*, 32.

<sup>72</sup> He makes this point in relationship to General Revelation (creation) as being covenantal in character and providing the “playground” for Adam to live out his covenantal relationship to his creator. When Van Til, following Calvin, says that all communication between God and man is analogical or condescension, he means that it is covenantal. He says, “The philosophy of history that speaks to us from the various chapters of the Confession may be sketched with a few bold strokes. We are told that man could never have had any fruition of God through the revelation that came to him in nature as operating by itself. There was superadded to God's revelation in nature another revelation, a supernaturally communicated positive revelation. Natural revelation, we are virtually told, was from the outset incorporated into the idea of a covenantal relationship of God with man. Thus every dimension of created existence, even the lowest, was enveloped in a form of exhaustively personal relationship between God and man. The ‘ateleological’ no less than the ‘teleological,’ the ‘mechanical’ no less than the ‘spiritual’ was covenantal in character. Being from the outset covenantal in character, the natural revelation of God to man was meant to serve as the playground for the process of differentiation that was to take place in the course of time. The covenant made with Adam was conditional. There would be additional revelation of God in nature after the action of man with respect to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This additional revelation would be different from that which had preceded it. And the difference would depend definitely upon a self-conscious covenant act of man with respect to the positively communicated prohibition. We know something of the nature of this new and different revelation of God in nature consequent upon the covenant-breaking act of man. ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all

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distinctions are necessary. To affirm a logical priority is not to argue for a temporal priority. God can create man and enact the covenant simultaneously. We will see something similar in the following section. According to Galatians 4:4, Christ was born under the law, which is referred to as a covenant (Gal. 4:24). This does not confuse the covenant with creation in any way, but demonstrates that Christ did not need to first to be born *before* he could enter into the covenant.

There have certainly been those who have argued for this teaching throughout history. Geerhardus Vos saw the covenant of works as being embodied in the Sabbath.<sup>73</sup> This cannot be separated from the entire creation week that the Sabbath completes. As God labors six days and then rests on the seventh, he sets the pattern of the man under a covenant of works—work so as to obtain rest. Thus the entire week of creation, culminating in the Sabbath, reveals the covenant of works. Vos is not confusing the covenant with creation, only arguing for its presence at creation. This seems fully consistent with all that we read in the Westminster Standards. According to question 1 of both the Shorter and Larger catechisms, man was created to enjoy God for all eternity. It could not be any other way since man was created in the image of God. He was uniquely created for fellowship with God and to reflect God in creation (cf. Gen. 1:26-28). The Westminster Confession of Faith 7.1 says that obtaining this eschatological hope is not possible without a covenant, so it is fully rational to see man created within that covenant by which he might obtain that glorious hope for which he was created. This is further bolstered by the facts that we read in the WLC that moral law was “at first” given to Adam (WLC 92-93), that it was even written on his heart in creation (WLC 17). Van Til writes,

And on that point all should be equally anxious to maintain that God originally spoke plainly to man, both in the ‘book of nature’ and in the ‘book of conscience.’ Wherever man would turn he saw the living God and His requirements. Whether he reasoned about nature or whether he looked within, whether it was the starry heavens above or the moral law within, both were equally insistent and plain that God, the true God, stood before him.

It should also be recognized that man was, from the outset, confronted with positive, as well as with natural, revelation. Vos speaks of this as pre-redemptive special revelation. (*Biblical Theology*, pg. 27ff) God walked and talked with man. Natural revelation must not be separated from this supernatural revelation. To separate the two is to deal with two abstractions instead of with one concrete situation. That is to say, natural revelation, whether objective or subjective, is in itself a limiting conception. It has never existed by itself so far as man is concerned. It cannot fairly be considered, therefore, as a fixed quantity, that can be dealt with in the same way at every stage of man’s moral life. Man was originally placed before God as a covenant personality.

It is no doubt with this in mind that Calvin speaks of sinners as being covenant- breakers. The phrase has come into common usage among Reformed theologians. Common as the usage of the phrase may be, however, the point we have made perhaps needs stressing. All too easily do we think of the covenant relation as quite distinct and independent of natural revelation. The two should be joined

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ungodliness and unrighteousness of man’ (Rom 1:18)” (*The Infallible Word*, 3rd rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967) 286).

<sup>73</sup> “The fourth word has reference to the hallowing of the seventh day of the week. The duty is based in Exodus (but cp. Deuteronomy) not on something done to Israel in particular, but on something done in the creation of the world. This is important, because with it stands or falls the general validity of the commandment for all of mankind...The so-called ‘Covenant of Works’ was nothing but an embodiment of the Sabbatical principle” (*Biblical Theology*, 139-40).

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together. To speak of man's relation to God as being covenantal at every point is merely to say that man deals with the personal God everywhere. Every manipulation of any created fact is, as long as man is not a sinner, a covenant-affirming activity. Every manipulation of any fact, as soon as man is a sinner, is a covenant-breaking activity.<sup>74</sup>

Our Reformed brothers in the tradition of Heidelberg affirm this same formulation. Lyle D. Bierma says of Caspar Olevianus' doctrine of the original state of mankind:

It was a relationship...of perfect conformity: a conformity of holiness and righteousness between Creator and creature (the *imago Dei*) and a conformity of human mind, will, and affections, of faculties and all actions to that image.... It was a relationship in which Adam and Eve were "naturally," i.e., by nature as bearers of God's image, conformed to their Creator.<sup>75</sup>

Rowland S. Ward confirms the same understanding:

The authors of the great Heidelberg Catechism (1562), Zacharias Ursinus (1534–83) and Caspar Olevianus (1536–87), were important in the development of covenant thinking. Olevianus speaks of a "covenant of creation" [*foedus creationis*], being the obligation of obedience inherent in the human's status as God's image-bearer, hence the synonyms he uses—covenant of nature and covenant of law.<sup>76</sup>

In the words of Ursinus:

Q. 10. What does the divine law teach? A. It teaches the kind of covenant God established with man in creation, how man behaved in keeping it, and what God requires of him after establishing the new covenant of grace with him. That is, what kind of man God created and for what purpose, into what state he has fallen, and how he must conduct himself, now that he is reconciled to God.<sup>77</sup>

Moving down the historical lineage some, Herman Witsius says, "And thus, indeed, Adam was in covenant with God, as a *man*, created in the image of God, and furnished with sufficient abilities to preserve that image."<sup>78</sup>

This view that the covenant of works was enacted at the time of creation has its proponents within the Reformed tradition dating back to Rollock and Perkins. As has been noted above Perkins saw the covenant of works being written on man's heart in creation.<sup>79</sup> As we saw with Rollock, the covenant of works was made with man "from the first moment of man's creation."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley: P&R Publishing, 1972), 58.

<sup>75</sup> *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 112.

<sup>76</sup> *God and Adam: Reformed Theology and the Creation Covenant* (Melbourne: New Melbourne Press, 2008), 54.

<sup>77</sup> *Larger Catechism*.

<sup>78</sup> Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 1.58.

<sup>79</sup> Commentary on Galatians in Complete Works, 2.299.

<sup>80</sup> Rollock, *Catechism q. 15*.

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We therefore do not accept the claim that the Reformed tradition necessarily affirms an ontological or natural relationship of man with God after which God then condescends to make a covenant with him. Creation in covenant is itself condescension. There is no “M<sup>1</sup>” outside of covenant in a relationship with God and then “M<sup>2</sup>” added to creation in which man is in covenant with God. Man is created in covenant with God, and God does nothing and says nothing to man that is not covenantal.<sup>81</sup>

Cornelis Venema remarks,

It is true that, in both the WCF and in the reformulation of John Murray, there seems to be implicitly present a distinction between the original state of nature and the subsequent covenant of works that parallels the older, Medieval distinction between *nature* and *grace*. Since it is not clear that the covenant of works is original and native to man's circumstance as *covenant* creature, a state of nature is posited that antedates the state of "super-added" favor in the doctrine of the WCF and of John Murray. In my judgment, this is more true of Murray's revision of the doctrine of the covenant of works than it is of the WCF. The language of the WCF leaves some ambiguity here, but it could be read to teach that *the nature of the difference between Creator and creature requires covenant as the medium of communion or fellowship*. If this is the case, then the WCF ultimately does not separate between a state of nature and a state of covenant before the fall, but suggests that the covenant of works is a kind of administration or particularizing of that covenant relationship in and for which man was originally created...The parallels between the language used to describe the terms of man's original created state and calling, and that used to describe the re-establishment of man in communion with God in the covenant of grace, suggest that, biblically, man is to be understood as from the beginning *covenant creature*.<sup>82</sup>

As we have seen, this insight is consistent with how some of the early Reformers understood the covenant of nature as being inherent in the created order and not something added to a previous “natural” relationship with God.

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<sup>81</sup> We are not suggesting the view we are propounding is the only view in Reformed theology. That would be inaccurate. We do maintain, however, creation as covenant and creation as voluntary condescension is squarely within the tradition and do not determined whether one is inside or outside the Reformed tradition.

<sup>82</sup> “Recent Criticisms of the Covenant of Works in the Westminster Confession of Faith” in *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9/3 (1993), 165-198 (emphasis his). Venema is interacting with Mark Karlberg's claim that the Westminster Standards introduce a speculative element into biblical covenant theology not found in the earliest Reformers. This element is a nature/grace dualism along the lines of the Romish *donum superadditum*—grace superadded to Adam's original, natural state (“The Original State of Adam: Tensions in Reformed Theology” in *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 95-110. Karlberg's point is an interesting one especially in light of Van Til's helpful formulations of epistemology. Van Til would urge us to remember there are no “brute facts”, no uninterpreted facts but only what God reveals. There is no Biblical record of this “natural” state of man outside covenant and therefore it is, in the words of Karlberg, speculative to construct theological points on this supposed logical or temporal state. Venema's comments here seem more balanced regarding the Standards and summarizes well the point we have been trying to make—the creation of man in covenant is God's voluntary condescension.

## SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

### *No Mediation*

When we speak of the covenant of works we must keep a few things in mind. First no divine Mediator acts on behalf of those represented under the covenant. Under the covenant of works, personal and perfect obedience was required. Only such obedience would entitle him to the reward.

### *A Gift of Voluntary Condescension*

This does not mean that man was entitled in any absolute sense were he to bring forth such obedience. Quite the opposite. As our fathers have made clear from the earliest of days, God is only obligated to bless man when he obligates himself and does so through a covenant. Our confession uses the language of voluntary condescension to articulate this—God entered into such an arrangement willingly and voluntarily. We simply want to be careful not to demand, as some have, that this means that this act of voluntary condescension took place *after* creation. All of creation is voluntary. Man has God’s law written on his heart by nature. He is created for heaven, which he can only obtain by way of covenant.

This act of condescension is an act of kindness, benevolence, or grace. However, we must distinguish between the act of establishing the covenant and the terms within the covenant. To say that it was gracious of God to make the covenant does not mean that the covenant operates on a principle of grace. Such a notion has staunchly been rejected by Reformed covenantal theology. The covenant was of *works*—perfect and personal obedience.

### *Meritorious*

Therefore our fathers were correct to identify this covenant with the principle of *merit*. The covenant of works does not operate on a principle of strict or ontological merit, but covenantal merit (*meritum ex pacto*). As the *Justification Report* (of the OPC) states,

In the Westminster Standards, the context in which one could speak of merit without these connotations was that of the covenant. WCF 7.1 explains: “The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.” The relationship between God and Adam should be considered, not ontologically or abstractly, but covenantally. Reformed theologians have been helpful in making these important distinctions. Francis Turretin (1623–87), for example, affirms that the perfect obedience of Adam would have been meritorious of the reward of life. But he explains that this merit “must not be understood properly and rigorously.” Adam would have received this reward “not by condignity of work and from its intrinsic value,” but instead “from the pact [i.e., covenant] and the liberal promise of God (according to which man had the right of demanding the reward to which God had of his own accord bound himself).” In other words, Adam’s obedience would have truly earned the reward of life, according to the terms of the covenant, as a matter of justice. A robust affirmation of God’s justice in administering the covenant with Adam does not detract from the Creator-creature distinction.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Justification Report*, (Committee on Christian Education of the OPC: Willow Grove, PA, 2007), 28-29.

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This of course, was not new in Turretin's day. Calvin said nothing intrinsic in a good work brings a reward but that rewards are only introduced through a covenant and he did so quoting Augustine.<sup>84</sup> As Machen said, "There are two possible ways, says Paul, of attaining salvation—in the first place perfect obedience, and in the second place acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ."<sup>85</sup> "Works," Machen says is "the principle of merit" and is directly set against "divine grace."<sup>86</sup>

This remains true. Those who do not seek the grace of the Mediator remain under the broken covenant of works. They will be judged on the last day according to their works, when God will render to each according to what he has done (Romans 2:7-16; 5:12-19). You will find no grace in the covenant of works—you are either perfect or you are condemned.<sup>87</sup> For this reason we are all in desperate need of a second covenant, one of grace.

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<sup>84</sup> *Institutes*, II.xxvii.1.

<sup>85</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Notes on Galatians*, (Solid Ground Christian Books: Birmingham, AL, 2006), 229.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>87</sup> "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it" (Jam 2:10).

## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Covenant of Grace*

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*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. –WCF 7.3*

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### CHRIST'S MEDIATION

We turn our attention now to the second covenant between God and man, the covenant of grace. As we stated at the beginning, historical Reformed covenant theology is based upon a two-covenant system or “bi-covenantalism.” As the WCF (7.3) states,

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.

The goal of the present section is to unpack the nature and terms of this covenant as well as to defend a single unified covenant of grace that spans all of redemptive history. There are not two covenants of grace, but one, variously administered.

#### *Mediation*

The covenant of grace is one of mediation—there is a Mediator who acts on behalf of sinful man. The WSC introduces the covenant of grace by asking, “Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?” (WSC 20) It responds with, “God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer.”

There are a few things that are important to note from this answer. First, the covenant of grace, while decreed in eternity as the one plan and purpose of the Triune God (Eph 1:3-14), is *given as a response to the fall*. The covenant of grace is different from the covenant of works given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. The second covenant is given for the singular purpose of delivering fallen man out of the estate

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of sin and misery.<sup>88</sup> Second, the covenant of grace was given to bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer. This is the major distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Whereas the covenant of works depended upon personal obedience, the covenant of grace depends upon the work of the Divine Redeemer and Mediator.

The first echo of this purpose of deliverance and the covenant of grace is found in Genesis 3:15 and the promise that one of Eve's children will undo the terrible consequences of Adam's sin. They deserve death but will live. The Lord will establish enmity between His elect people (the seed of the woman corporately considered) and Serpent and his seed (those over whom Satan rules). He will sovereignly disrupt the alliance forged between mankind and Serpent in the fall. He will reconcile a people to Himself through a Champion who will arise from among the sons of Eve (the seed of the woman considered singularly). He will crush the head of the serpent (active obedience) but will suffer a wounded heel (passive obedience) in the accomplishment of deliverance.

Adam and Eve believe the gospel preached to them and they hope in the Redeemer to come. "The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20). It is easy to overlook the fact that Eve is not called Eve until this very point in the Genesis narrative. She is Woman (Heb. *isha*) until now. This is the first name change in the Bible indicating something of monumental significance has taken place.<sup>89</sup> Her name will now be Eve because she is the mother of the living by God's promise. Death will not have the final word for the seed of the woman. Adam lays hold of this promise and though he deserves death under God's holy Law according to God's justice, he will live. This is the grace and mercy of God. In the face of their demerits, God blesses them. In their sin and filth, in their rebellion and anarchy, the Lord pours down grace and mercy upon them. They have laid hold of Christ, the seed of the woman, and in Him they have found life.

These gospel promises are not ratified as a covenant until after Genesis 3:15. In fact, the word covenant does not appear until its connection to Noah and the flood. Nevertheless we can see in clearly the God of grace and mercy at work in saving a people for Himself, calling them out of sin and death and into a new life of blessing. To state the matter succinctly—there is and has been only way way of salvation for sinners—by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. That is true for Adam and Eve right after the fall and that is true for us and for any and all whom the Lord will call to Himself.

In Genesis 12,<sup>90</sup> the Lord comes to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans. In an act of sovereign election, the Lord comes to Abraham in his idolatry and calls Abraham to Himself announcing promises to him (vv 1-3). Abraham will be a great nation. He will be blessed. God will be his God. In Abraham and in His

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<sup>88</sup> We will return to this singular purpose in the following chapter when we look at the three purposes the Standards attribute to the moral law.

<sup>89</sup> The first of many name changes in the Scriptures indicating God's saving work and in the lives of His people: Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel and even down to each and every believer in Christ—"To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it" (Rev 2:17).

<sup>90</sup> For the sake of space we will pass over the Noahic covenant(s) and consider the Abrahamic covenant beginning in Genesis 12.

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seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed. The promise heard by Adam and Eve concerning the coming seed of the woman is narrowed to the seed of Abrahamic line.

In the Genesis narrative (and theologically) we are left with a nagging question: how can God, who according to His own law declared that sin deserves death, bless Abraham? Abraham is under God's curse as a descendant of Adam. Genesis 15 provides the answer in a remarkable display of God's commitment to bless Abraham. In Genesis 15 the imagery of mediation is made *visible* in the ratification ceremony recorded. The Lord renews His promises to Abraham. The first is that God will be Abraham's inheritance (v. 1). The second is for descendants as many as the stars of the sky (vv 2-5). The third is for an expansion of the land he possessed (vv 18-20). To these, a fourth promise would be added in chapter 17, namely that kings would come from him (v 6). What is striking is that these are the very things that were connected with the covenant of works, but in the form of stipulations. Adam was commanded to be a king (have dominion), to be fruitful and multiply (have descendants) and to expand his territory until it covered the earth (subdue and fill the earth). If he did these three things, he would receive God in consummated reward and blessing. But here, in Genesis 15, these are not stipulations or commands upon which obtaining the blessing depends, they all come in the form of a promise. God is promising that He will subdue the earth and fill it through Abraham and that He will be the very great reward Abraham will inherit. The difference between these two covenants cannot be overstated. What God commands in the covenant of works, God now promises to give to Abraham as a gift of grace to be received by faith alone (Gen 15:6). God will overcome any and all obstacles including human impotence, weakness, deadness, sin and rebellion.

To God's word of promise, the Lord now adds His covenant oath in Genesis 15.<sup>91</sup> Abraham comes to the Lord seeking confirmation and assurance regarding the things God has promised to him. How will Abraham know God will fulfill his promises? (Gen 15:2). God then ratifies (or "cuts;" Heb. *karat*) the covenant in a visible ceremony. God tells Abraham cut a collection of animals in half and lay their halves opposite each other so as to create a pathway of blood and death between the split animals (vv. 9-11). This was a common covenant making ceremony in the Ancient Near East. It is often found in ancient treaties between nations as international diplomacy. Nations cut covenants with other nations. Great kings known as suzerain kings would make covenants with other nations called vassals. The ceremony of oath taking and covenant making often included a gruesome portrayal of the consequences or curses of the covenant if violated. This included ceremonies where an animal was dismembered, its eyes gouged out, its tongue removed and so forth as a sign of what would happen to the vassal if they failed to do all the great king demanded of them. It was called a self-maledictory oath: "If I fail to do all that I have sworn today, may what has been done to these animals and more be done to me."

This is what is clearly in view in Genesis 15. The entire ceremony is arranged. Added to the gruesome nature of the ceremony is the terrifying features—the birds of prey,<sup>92</sup> the deep and dread darkness that

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<sup>91</sup> Heb 6:13-18

<sup>92</sup> This is a common way the Scriptures portray curse and forsakenness. See Deut 28:26; 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; Jer 7:33; Rev 19:17, 21.

overcomes Abraham as well as the theophanic appearance of God as a smoking fire pot and the flaming torch. It is impossible not to see the imprint of Genesis 3:24 on this scene. As a sign of God's curse and wrath, a flaming sword is stationed at east of the garden in Eden where Adam and Eve had been exiled. The knife has cut the animals and flaming torch appears.

However, what is surprising here is that it is not Abraham who walks between the severed animals, which is what we would expect. Abraham, after all, is not the Sovereign, but the vassal. He should be the one subject to death if there is any failure to keep the terms of the covenant. However, it is not Abraham, but God, who in the form of a familiar theophany, that walks between the split animals.<sup>93</sup> God as the one, passing between the split animals, is the one taking the threat of the curse upon himself. It is an oath of self-malediction. God is the one saying, "Abraham may what has been done to these animals and more be done to me if I fail to keep all the promises I have made today. As Murray says,

It is perhaps the most striking sanction that we have in the whole of Scripture, particularly if we interpret it as a self-maledictory oath in which, anthropomorphically, God calls upon Himself the curse of dismemberment if He does not fulfil to Abraham the promise of possessing the land. The second distinctive feature is the reference to keeping and breaking the covenant (Gn. 17: 9, 10, 14)... It is not Abraham who passes through between the divided pieces of the animals; it is the theophany... Abraham here does not pledge his troth to God by a self-maledictory oath but God condescends to pledge troth to His promise, a fact which advertises the divine sovereignty and faithfulness as brought to bear upon and as giving character to the covenant constituted.<sup>94</sup>

This means that God is now "on the hook" to do everything necessary in order to reward Abraham with what had originally been offered to Adam under the covenant of works. Another way of saying this in keeping with God's faithfulness is this: "Abraham, I am willing to give my life in order to bless you and to give all I have promised." As we will see in this section, these are more than words of bravado. For it would be precisely in offering his own life that He will bless Abraham with all these things. God will walk the path of dereliction. God will face His own judgment; His own just wrath due to Abraham (cf. Gen 2:16-17; Rom 6:23). He will be cut off completely in order to ensure the full blessings promised to Abraham. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith." (Gal 3:13–14) In the words of Dr. Kline,

Graphically symbolized by the slain and halved animals, soon to be consumed by the birds of prey (Gen 15:11; cf. Jer 34:20), was the curse of dereliction and destruction. To pass through the way between the rows of severed carcasses was to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The frightful horror of this death-curse was overwhelmingly communicated to Abraham in his experience of the abyss of sleep

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<sup>93</sup> The imagery of a flaming torch and smoking fire-pot or oven conjures the image of a flame and a column of smoke passing through the split animals. The pillar of fire and pillar of smoke would become the signs of God's presence with Israel during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (cf. Ex 13:21; 19:18; Isa 4:5). Here, these images are introduced, showing that it was God, not Abraham, who walked between the split animals.

<sup>94</sup> *Covenant of Grace*, 16-17.

## THE COVENANT OF GRACE

and the terrors of unnatural darkness (cf. Job 10:21; Ps 55:4, 5). Such was the malediction that the Lord conditionally invoked upon himself.<sup>95</sup>

This is what is meant by *mediation*. It means the Son of God coming to do anything and everything necessary to gain the reward. The blessed outcome of God as his very great reward was not dependent upon Abraham achieving it, but upon God achieving it for him. This is what the WSC means when it says that God will deliver sinful men out of the estate of sin and misery and bring them into an estate of salvation *by a Redeemer*.

### *Prophet, Priest and King*

The WSC goes on to identify the *only* Redeemer of God's elect as being the God-man Jesus Christ (WSC 21). Then, in question 23, it asks what offices Christ fulfills as our Redeemer. The answer given is, "Christ, as our redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation."<sup>96</sup> The catechism locates the work of Christ *as redeemer* in these three specific categories or offices. The importance of this is found in two aspects. The first aspect is how it relates to his work as a redeemer. The second is found in the goal of his work and how that relates back to man in the Garden.

These three categories correspond to the three invisible aspects of the image of God in man. The prophetic office is one of the *knowledge* of God, the priestly office is connected to *righteousness and holiness* and the kingly office is connected to *dominion* and rule (cf. WCF 4.2; WLC 17; WSC 10). It is these three aspects that are corrupted in fallen man. For example, we are told in Romans, that sinful man suppresses the *knowledge* of God in *unrighteousness* (1:18)<sup>97</sup> and is *enslaved* to sin (6:16-17).<sup>98</sup> It is these three categories, then, that Christ must restore within us (cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; Matt 19:28).<sup>99</sup> Put simply, the fall of man is set directly at attacking the image of God. It is these attacks that Christ must deal with as our Redeemer. He must restore and perfect true knowledge, true righteousness and holiness and true dominion.

In order to do this, he had to come as Prophet, Priest and King. As prophet he reveals to us the will of God for our salvation (WSC 24). As priest he satisfies divine justice in the sacrifice of himself and

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<sup>95</sup> *Kingdom Prologue*, 296. See also Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 40ff.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. WCF 8.1; WLC 42

<sup>97</sup> "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

<sup>98</sup> "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed."

<sup>99</sup> Colossians 3:10: "and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

<sup>99</sup> Ephesians 4:24: "and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

<sup>99</sup> Matthew 19:28: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'"

makes continual intercession for us (WSC 25). As king he subdues us to himself and then restrains and conquers all his and our enemies (WSC 26).

This sets the ministry of Jesus in context of man's created goal. Christ came to achieve the goal for which man was created—to glorify and enjoy God forever. We argued that one of the things that made the covenant of works necessary was the *imago Dei*. If man was created to fellowship with God for all eternity in his heavenly home, the covenant of works became necessary since man cannot achieve that goal except by way of covenant (WCF 7.1). The covenant of grace, then, is not given for some new purpose, but to accomplish that for which Adam was created, that which he hoped to attain through the covenant of works. It is no wonder, then, that both the Scriptures and our Confessional Standards refer to Christ as the second or last Adam.<sup>100</sup>

## THE SECOND / LAST ADAM

This means that Christ had to go through a probationary test similar to that of Adam. This connection is drawn out when we compare Genesis 3:1-7 and Matthew 4:1-10. These are the temptation narratives of the two Adams.

We can briefly note the similarities between the two accounts:

- 1) They are both temptation narratives ordained by God as tests for blessedness. God declared the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to be off limits as a test. The Spirit of God drives the true Son of God into the wilderness in order to be tested.
- 2) Both have Satan as the tempter. Suitable to the purpose of deceit Satan approaches Adam in the guise of a snake. To Jesus he comes disguised as a helper, a friend and one who truly desires Jesus' best.
- 3) Both narratives are a test of obedience to the Word of God. Will Adam or Jesus be faithful to the covenantal Word spoken to them from the Father? Will they be true sons or false?

Perhaps it is the differences between the two narratives that is so striking and informative.

- 1) The location of the temptations could not be more different. Adam is set in a garden of plentiful provisions of food and drink. Jesus is driven into a wilderness without food for 40 days.

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<sup>100</sup> "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45). "Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come" (Rom 5:14). "Q. With whom was the covenant of grace made? A. The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed" (WLC 31).

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2) Adam is not alone. God makes for Adam as helper in the woman—an equal companion. Jesus is alone. There is no one with Him. There are no disciples. He has no wife. What Jesus does, he does by himself.

3) The condition of Adam and the condition of Jesus are opposites as well. On the one hand, Adam is created to eat and drink. Adam is created without lack. From any of the trees he could eat freely except one. Jesus on the other hand is just about dead. He is wasting away. He has not eaten in 40 days. He is withering in a desert. Adam is tested out of a condition of fullness and Jesus is tested out a condition of almost complete lack.

Why are these tests so drastically different? The answer lies in the fall. Jesus must enter into the cursed place Adam left the human race—outside of the garden, without the original provisions of God and exiled into the wilderness. This is our condition in Adam and Christ enters into the extremities of our existence in Adam. What Jesus does, He does by himself but not for himself. What he does, He does as a new Adam come to undo the devastation of the first Adam.<sup>101</sup>

The nature of the temptation is specifically catered to Jesus' mission and the will of His Father. Matthew 3 ends with the amazing declaration from the Father in heaven concerning the person and work of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (vs 17). Jesus is then driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tested. After 40 days and nights, Jesus is famished. Into this condition comes the first test: "If you are the Son of God..." It is no surprise the devil attacks the very words just announced from heaven concerning Jesus. Satan is also attacking the divine goodness behind those words and trying to cast doubt upon the Father. There seems to be an incongruity between Jesus' sonship as announced by the Father and the condition Jesus is in. If Jesus truly is the Son of God, would the Father's will include suffering, destitution and death? That was not the case with Adam. That was not the case with Israel either in her 40 year journey. God supernaturally provided for Israel's lack from heaven. What about Jesus? If he truly is the Son of God, would he be in this situation?

Satan comes to Jesus in his state of destitution and argues, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matt 4:3). Satan attacks the seeming incongruity between the announcement of the voice from heaven concerning Christ's Sonship and his present experience of suffering. Satan is suggesting that if Jesus is truly the Son of God, he deserves better than this. The temptation to make stones into bread is a temptation that strikes right at the heart of Christ's mission and His status as an obedient faithful Son. He is being tempted to forgo the will of His Father, to ease His suffering and to provide for Himself what is lacking. To widen the scope just a bit, Satan is tempting Jesus to create plenty in the wilderness and to make the wilderness like the promised land and to end His needless suffering not by obedience to the test but by providing for Himself and forgoing his sufferings.

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<sup>101</sup> Luke's account of the temptation narrative comes on the heels of a genealogy instead of the baptism of Jesus. That genealogy ends with "the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (3:35). This clearly connects Jesus' sonship with being the last Adam come to undue works of the first son, Adam.

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Jesus, even in his state of humiliation and destitution, will not give in to the temptation. Jesus' heart is set upon His Father. Jesus' food and drink is to do the will of His Father. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4; cf. Deut 8:4).<sup>102</sup> Jesus asserts His loving submission to the will and purpose of His Father who brought Him into the wilderness to be tested. He will not forgo his sufferings in order to prove His sonship. He will remain obedient. He will not live by bread but by every Word spoken by God—including the seeming contradiction between the word that Jesus is God's Son and his estate of humiliation and deprivation.

Satan has failed! The last Adam has prevailed. The true Son has persevered in the test. However, Satan is not easily dismayed. He pursues the issue with another temptation. This temptation is designed to call into questions God's goodness. They are no longer in the wilderness but now on the pinnacle of the temple—the place of God's presence. Satan attempts to incite Jesus to test the Lord's goodness and faithfulness by throwing Himself from the pinnacle of the temple. If Jesus is truly the Son of God like the voice from heaven said, then God will not allow harm to come to Him but will protect him. The Lord will not allow Jesus to die. Angels will be dispatched to catch Jesus and no harm will come to Him.<sup>103</sup> He is God's Son, after all. He does not have to suffer. Satan calls Jesus to test the Lord and see what happens.

It is not hard to see that Satan is up to his old tricks. With Adam and Eve, Satan employed the same tactic. Instead of the loving, gracious, good, faithful, generous God of creation, Satan made God out to be tyrannical, power-hungry, manipulative and selfish. "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5) and God does not want what is best for you!

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<sup>102</sup> The nature of the temptation can be seen clearly through the Scripture Jesus recites—Deuteronomy 8:4. Deuteronomy 8 is a chapter concerning temptations from keeping the greatest commandment (8:1)—loving Yahweh with the whole heart, mind, soul and strength. For Israel, the change from the wilderness to the promised land will bring with it new temptations not to remain completely the Lord's. The wilderness was a time of humbling and testing to see if they would keep the Lord's commandments (8:2). For a time they lacked but the Lord provided for them in order that they might learn that they do not live by bread alone but by every word from Yahweh's mouth (8:4). The Lord disciplined his son, Israel (vs 5) that they might keep His law and love Him above everything else. This point of this lesson will not change once Israel enters the promised land. New temptations will arise within the land which could lead them away from life by God's word. It is important to note that when the Lord describes the promised land in Deuteronomy 8, it is exactly the opposite of the wilderness (vv 7-10). Of particular interest is verse 9, "a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing..." In Matthew 4, when Satan tempts Jesus with making bread, Satan is tempting Jesus to forgo the wilderness and enter the provisions of the promised land without obedience to the greatest commandment and obedience to His Father's will.

<sup>103</sup> Satan (mis)quotes from Psalm 91 in an attempt to ensnare Jesus. The Psalm begins with the statement that those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, abide in His shadow and put their trust in the Lord will not be defeated nor harmed but the Lord will be a refuge and fortress. Others may fall, but this one will not. Angels will be dispatched and will bear the trusting man. Satan does two things. First, the Psalm speaks for those who trust in the Lord's goodness and faithfulness not question it and put it to the test. Satan twists it all around. Second, it is really too bad he did not quote the next verse, "You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot" (91:13). If Jesus perseveres in His confidence in the Lord's goodness, he will trample on the serpent.

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Jesus will not give in! Jesus remains obedient and trusting. You will not put the Lord your God to the test (Matt 4:7; cf. Deut 6:16).<sup>104</sup> Jesus trusts in the goodness of the Father, not in the absence of suffering, but through suffering. The proof of the Father's goodness is not in plenty or in easing pain. The proof of the Father's goodness is in His promise, His intentions and the goal of His will for Jesus. He will not be delivered by testing the Lord but by trusting the Lord even with His life.

In the final phase of the temptation Satan's intentions are made explicit and he contradicts the most fundamental call upon man's life. Jesus and Satan stand atop a "very high mountain" (vs. 8). This communicates exaltation and power. Satan, by some means, shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth and makes the false claim, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." The father of lies spews forth deception. He promises disobedience will lead to a better situation than obedience. He spoke essentially the same lie to Adam and Eve. He said if they ate from the forbidden fruit, not only would they not die as God said, but that they would actually advance in their situation. In regards to Jesus, Satan has no authority of the kingdoms of this world to actually make good on his claims. Besides that, worship of Satan is death, not life. It is to be under God's wrath and curse, not be an heir. Satan has come to steal, kill and destroy and not to give life (Jn 10:10).

We are again forced to see a little deeper into the temptation. In terms of the mission and purpose of the true Son of God, Satan is offering a kingdom to Jesus apart from suffering. Satan tempts Jesus with glory without suffering and death.<sup>105</sup> Jesus knows the will of His Father is to come and give His life for His people. He is called to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of His people. He has come to bear guilt for all the times they have not loved the Lord God with all they are and have and to bear the wrath of God's justice in their place. But He has the Father's promise to Him as well. He will be exalted and crowned with glory. He will be an heir of the new creation and consummate kingdom of God. But it will only be through suffering that glories will follow.

Jesus declares his obedience in the face of Satan's lies, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (4:10; cf. Deut 6:13). The heart of Jesus will not be swayed. Jesus remains firm in love and obedience to His Lord. What Adam failed to do, Jesus has done! He has been tested. He has been tried. He has been victorious in the decisive test the Lord put Him through.

There are two final considerations that need to be made. First of all, we have the immediate proof of obedience of this true Son, the last Adam. It is found in that curious detail Matthew finishes this story with—the presence of the angels ministering to Jesus. If we are correct in our observation that this

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<sup>104</sup> It is no coincidence that Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6 in this temptation. Deuteronomy is the place where the Lord declares the great Shema calling Israel to love Yahweh their God with all they are and have. The chapter then outlines three warnings for Israel to remain faithful. When they come into the promised land and have many blessings, affluence, comfort and ease, they are to love the Lord. Second, they are not to be enticed by the false gods and succumb to their allure. They are not to mix false worship with the worship of God. Finally, they are to cling to the Lord's goodness not put the Lord to the test. Instead of grumbling, questioning the Lord's faithfulness and His Word by putting him to the test, they are trust Him and his provisions for them. Jesus remains faithful, clinging to the Lord's goodness, obeying Him in all things knowing God will prove Himself faithful and just.

<sup>105</sup> It is not surprising that when Peter rebukes Jesus for embracing the cross as necessary for His mission and purpose, Jesus calls him Satan (Matt 16:23).

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temptation narrative is to be set alongside the Genesis temptation narrative, then this detail should not escape our notice. In Genesis, when our first parents fell into sin, the angels of God were dispatched to be the instruments of God's justice *against* them (Gen 3:24). In Matthew 4, the angels are dispatched as a sign of God's approbation for His Son's obedience. They come to minister to Jesus in His severe need and lack demonstrating God's fatherly care for His Son.

Second, the consequences of this successful probationary test within Matthew's gospel need to be mentioned. The obedience of Jesus obtained the life and kingdom Adam forfeited by his sin. Therefore, when Jesus moves out of the wilderness, he enters Galilee and begins to preach: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (4:17).<sup>106</sup> The shift from Jesus being by himself to Jesus preaching and declaring the kingdom to others should not be missed. This is the shift of the covenant of grace. What Jesus does for us, He must do by himself under His own covenant of works. However, the rewards and gifts Jesus merits by His obedience as the Last Adam, He is now dispensing and inviting others to share in by faith. For Jesus, it is a matter of obedience *in our place* as the Last Adam. For us, it is a matter of resting and trusting in Jesus and in His work. This is clear as one moves into chapter 5 and the beginning of the sermon on the mount. Jesus, having forsaken the false mountain (4:8), now takes His seat on a new mountain and invites his disciples to be with Him (5:1). He opens his mouth in kingdom blessings upon His people.<sup>107</sup> The sermon on the mount begins with a grand indicative of Christ's obedience as the last Adam, the obtaining of the kingdom of heaven, the sharing of that kingdom and its blessings with His disciples as it then explains what life in that kingdom looks like for those united to Jesus Christ.

This is one of the ways Jesus is presented to us in the gospels as the Last Adam, the true and obedient Son. This reality is presented to us in a way different than Paul in Romans 5:12-19 or 1 Corinthians 15 but the message rings loud and clear. This leads us to consider a bit closer the way the New Testament develops this outside the gospels.

The consequence then of the last Adam's obedience is eternal life. This is drawn out by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says, "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being;' the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (vs 45). By virtue of his obedience, resulting in his resurrection, Christ obtained the right to give eternal life to his posterity. What this means is that Christ fulfilled the *moral Law* that was given to Adam.

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. Mark 1:15, "'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"

<sup>107</sup> Matthew's construct in verse 2 is intentionally odd. He does not simply state that Jesus began to teach or started to say this or that. Matthew says Jesus opened his mouth and taught them. A good case can be made that what lies behind Matthew's choice of language (besides the fact that one has to open one's mouth to speak) is the charge Proverbs give to king Lemuel in Proverbs 31. The charge to the king is to shut his mouth to strong drink and wine (thankfully, this is not a general rule but a specific charge to the king) otherwise his rule might be compromised and he might not do things kings should do for the poor, the needy and the afflicted. Rather, the charge to king Lemuel is "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (vv 8-9). Incredibly(!), the first words out of the mouth of Jesus is the pronouncement of blessings for the poor, the mourning, the meek and the hungry and thirsty.

***Christ Fulfills the Law (Galatians 4:4; Romans 5:12-21)***

Christ's fulfillment of the law is central to our Confession's understanding of the work of Christ. In chapter 8 ("Of Christ the Mediator") we read, "This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it..." (WCF 8.4). This phrase "made under the law" comes from Galatians 4:4-5—"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." This language of Christ offering obedience, or fulfilling the law, in our place shows up repeatedly through the Confessional Standards, both in reference to the law and to justification. For example chapter 19.6 says that true believers are freed from the law as a covenant of works because Christ has obeyed it for them. This is repeated in WLC 95 and 97 (to which we will return later).

This use of Galatians 4:4 in reference to the obedience of Christ is not new at the time of the Westminster Assembly. In his *Commentary on Galatians*, Calvin said,

Subjected under the law. The literal rendering is, Made under the law; but in my version I have preferred another word, which expresses more plainly the fact that he was placed in subjection to the law. Christ the Son of God, who might have claimed to be exempt from every kind of subjection, became subject to the law. Why? He did so in our room, that he might obtain freedom for us. A man who was free, by constituting himself a surety, redeems a slave: by putting on himself the chains, he takes them off from the other. So Christ chose to become liable to keep the law, that exemption from it might be obtained for us; otherwise it would have been to no purpose that he should come under the yoke of the law, for it certainly was not on his own account that he did so.<sup>108</sup>

The obedience of Christ is explicitly likened to Adam's condition in the Garden in under the covenant of works in Romans 5:12-19. This passage, which looked at the consequences of Adam's disobedience, draws out the consequences of Christ's obedience.

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. (vv 17-18)

The apostle makes a comparison between Adam and Christ. Adam's one act of disobedience led to condemnation for all men (who are in Adam) and Christ's one act of obedience leads to justification for men (who are in Christ). This is why Adam was a type of Christ (Rom 5:14). Adam set the pattern of covenantal representation on behalf of a people where his obedience carried consequences for all whom he represented.

It is Christ's obedience that is then imputed to believers in their justification. WLC 70 says that,

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<sup>108</sup> *Galatians*, 118-119.

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Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone (cf. WSC 33).

To support this claim that it is the obedience of Christ imputed to us as righteousness, the catechism cites Romans 5:17-19. The WCF says that Christ accomplished all of this “in the fullness of time” citing Galatians 4:4.<sup>109</sup> Thus his subjection to the law was necessary for our salvation that he might obey its requirements in our place and grant to us the rewards of his obedience—eternal life.

According to the Westminster Standards, the subjection of Christ to the law was an act of *humiliation*, a part of his incarnation (cf. WSC 21, 27; WLC 36-37, 39, 48). This is not a surprising understanding since it is the point of Galatians 4:4 itself. Christ has not always been “under the law,” but was *born* under it in the fullness of time. It is an estate he takes on *as a man* (WCF 8.1-4). This does not mean that his deity is removed from his work as the Redeemer at all. Our Confession points out that his human nature was strengthened and enabled to do the work for which he came by his divine nature.

The Lord Jesus, in his human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator, and surety. Which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father, who put all power and judgment into his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same.<sup>110</sup>

The two natures are not pitted against each other in his work of redemption but seen as working together in perfect harmony. His human nature was necessary in order for him to be born under and subject to the law but it was his divine nature that strengthened and enabled him to keep it. This relationship between his two natures is made explicit in the WLC:

Why was it requisite that the mediator should be man? It was requisite that the mediator should be man, that he might advance our nature, perform obedience to the law, suffer and make intercession for us in our nature, have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities; that we might receive the adoption of sons, and have comfort and access with boldness unto the throne of grace.<sup>111</sup>

The Mediator had to be a man in order to perform obedience to the law and to perform intercession in our nature. The same reason that bulls and goats cannot take away sins (Heb 10:4) is the same reason Jesus had to be a man—only a man could act on behalf of a man. This is why when Paul refers to the obedience of Christ he refers to him as the “*man* Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17). However, notice the preceding question:

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<sup>109</sup> WCF 11.4

<sup>110</sup> WCF 8.3

<sup>111</sup> WLC 39

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Why was it requisite that the mediator should be God? It was requisite that the mediator should be God, that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death; give worth and efficacy to his sufferings, obedience, and intercession; and to satisfy God's justice, procure his favor, purchase a peculiar people, give his Spirit to them, conquer all their enemies, and bring them to everlasting salvation.<sup>112</sup>

His deity was required to strengthen him in his work as human and give efficacy to it. The Westminster Standards present a beautiful harmony between his two natures in his work as our Redeemer. He had to be a man in order to submit to the law and obey where Adam failed and he had to be God in order to strengthen him to this work and grant efficacy to it. No mere man could have come and redeemed fallen mankind. As the WLC goes on to say, "It was requisite that the mediator, who was to reconcile God and man, should himself be both God and man, and this in one person, that the proper works of each nature might be accepted of God for us, and relied on by us, as the works of the whole person."<sup>113</sup>

This tells us that Christ had to become man in order that he might submit to the law on our behalf and bring forth the obedience. However, it does not fully tell us what Christ's obedience looked like.

### *Active Obedience*

The obedience of Christ has often been divided into two aspects—*active* and *passive*. The active obedience of Christ refers to his perfect keeping of the moral law. This is what Adam failed to do. Adam was given the moral law as a covenant of works wherein he was required to bring forth personal, perfect and perpetual obedience and, thereby, obtain eternal life for those whom he represented (WLC 92-93; cf. WCF 7.2; 19:1). Heaven is not possible for God's people without someone fulfilling this law. So the Westminster Standards labor to show us that Christ has kept that law for us (WCF 7.5; 8:4-5; 19.6; WLC 95, 97). This is the same law that was first given to Adam (WLC 92-93). God's justice demands that it not be done away with but fulfilled by another.

This explains why the Scriptures are careful to relate Adam to Christ. These are the only two men in history able to merit eternal life. Our *Justification Report* saw the connection between these two essential to justification:

If Adam, as a human being, was unable to earn or merit eschatological life by his perfect obedience, then Christ, as a human being, is unable to earn or merit eschatological life by his perfect obedience. "Since the works principle is thus foundational to the gospel, the repudiation of that principle ... stands condemned as subversive of that gospel."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> WLC 38

<sup>113</sup> WLC 40

<sup>114</sup> *Justification Report of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, (Committee on Christian Education of the OPC, 2006), 20.

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In other words, the connection between the first and the second Adam is so essential, that the work of Christ is predicated upon Adam's situation in the Garden. What is said of Adam must be said of Christ and vice-versa. The Report goes on to quote Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711):

Acquaintance with this covenant is of the greatest importance, for 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. This is to be observed with several parties who, because they err concerning the covenant of grace, also deny the covenant of works. Conversely, whoever denies the covenant of works, must rightly be suspected to be in error concerning the covenant of grace as well.<sup>115</sup>

One cannot undermine the meritorious situation of Adam under the covenant of works and not undermine the gospel that is based upon the meritorious obedience of Christ. The difference between Adam and Christ was not between the type of law or covenant they were under but the difference was in that Adam failed and Christ succeeded. This is what is meant by the active obedience of Christ.

Such statements are not new to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Every young minister quickly becomes familiar with J. Gresham Machen's dying words to his friend and colleague John Murray, "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it."

There are some who wish to say that the system of merit that Christ was under was radically different than that of Adam. As Richard Muller points out, there was an issue of disagreement between Calvin and Turretin:

A third view [on Christ's merit] was stated by Calvin, most probably as an intensification of the Scotist view. The value of Christ's merit rests upon the divine decree (Institutes, II.xvii.1). Unlike the Scotist view, Calvin's doctrine argues the infinite merit or all-sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction, but on the same basis as the Scotist acceptance, the absolute will of God. Although Calvin's view is probably more in accord with the Reformed teaching concerning the *communicatio idiomatum*, or communication of proper qualities, in the person of Christ, the orthodox Reformed tend not to follow Calvin, but rather to agree with the Lutheran scholastics in grounding the infinite worthiness of Christ's satisfaction in the divinity of Christ's person (Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae* XIV.xii.7).<sup>116</sup>

What Muller points out is that Calvin saw the merit of Christ as being rooted in the arrangement he was under. Here is what Calvin said:

There are certain perversely subtle men—even though they confess that we receive salvation through Christ—cannot bear to hear the word "merit," for they think that it obscures God's grace. Hence, they would have Christ as a mere instrument or minister not as the Author or leader and prince of life, as Peter calls him (Acts 3:15). Indeed, I admit, if anyone would simply set Christ by himself over against God's judgment, there will be no place for merit. For no worthiness will be found in man to deserve

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>116</sup> Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, (Baker: Grand Rapids, MI, 1985), 191.

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God's favor. Indeed, as Augustine very truly writes: "The clearest light of predestination and grace is the Man Christ Jesus, the Savior, who brought this to pass by the human nature that was in him, through no preceding merit of works or of faith. Answer me, I beg you, whence did that man deserve to be the only-begotten Son of God, and to be assumed into unity of person by the Word co-eternal with the Father? We must therefore recognize our Head as the very foundation of grace—a grace that is diffused from him through all his members according to the measure of each. Everyone is made a Christian from the beginning of his faith by the same grace whereby that Man from his beginning became the Christ." Likewise, in another passage: "There is no more illustrious example of predestination than the Mediator himself. For he who made righteous this man of seed of David, never to be unrighteous, without any merit of his will preceding, of unrighteous make righteous those who are members of that Head," etc. In discussing Christ's merit, we do not consider the beginning of merit to be in him, but we go back to God's ordinance, the first cause. For God solely of his own good pleasure appointed him Mediator to obtain salvation for us.

Hence it is absurd to set Christ's merit against God's mercy. For it is a common rule that a thing subordinate to another is not in conflict with it. For this reason nothing hinders us from asserting that men are freely justified by God's mercy alone, and at the same time that Christ's merit, subordinate to God's mercy, also intervenes on our behalf. Both God's free favor and Christ's obedience, each in its degree, are fitly opposed to our works. Apart from God's good pleasure Christ could not merit anything; but did so because he had been appointed to appease God's wrath with his sacrifice, and to blot out our transgressions with his obedience. To sum up: inasmuch as Christ's merit depends upon God's grace alone, which has ordained this manner of salvation for us, it is just as properly opposed to all human righteousness as God's grace is.<sup>117</sup>

Calvin refused to see the merit of Christ as something that was intrinsically his own (because of his deity). Following Augustine, he saw the merit of Christ as arising from God's condescension to allow him to achieve it in his incarnation. Calvin would explain his view of merit elsewhere, saying that it is dependent upon a covenant that attaches reward to obedience. He says, "works are meritorious of salvation, not by their intrinsic worth, but by the acceptance of God...on the ground of a covenant. Consequently, where no divine covenant, no declaration of acceptance is found,—no works will be available for justification."<sup>118</sup>

Nevertheless Calvin's and Augustine's voices are not the only ones in the Reformed tradition. The Lutherans did not always radically distinguish between the human and divine natures of Christ. This explains, for example, how they can see Christ as being physically present wherever the Lord's Supper is served. This union of the two natures of Christ has led many to see root the efficacy of the work of Christ in his divine nature. Muller points out that many have followed this path including Francis Turretin who says,

Now that such was the perfection of this satisfaction many arguments prove. First, the dignity of the person satisfying; this was not only holy and most pure, but also truly divine in which all fulness dwells (Col 1:19)—a fulness of the divinity, a fulness of office, a fulness of merit and graces. We cannot doubt that the satisfaction and therefore of such fulness and all-sufficiency that nothing can be added to it. For although his human nature (which was the instrument in the obedience and sufferings) was finite,

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<sup>117</sup> *Institutes*, II.xxvii.50.

<sup>118</sup> *Galatians*, 97.

yet the satisfaction itself does not cease to be infinite (relative to the person, which here the efficient cause and to which they ought to be attributed). They ought to be attributed because action and suffering belong to the subsisting substances.<sup>119</sup>

Turretin's emphasis in the merit of Christ emphasizes his deity—he was “truly divine.” For this reason Turretin argued that the merit of Christ was “strict” or “ontological” as opposed to “covenantal” (as with Calvin). However, we must be careful not to make Turretin to say more than he does. Turretin does not suggest that Christ did not need to become man or need to fulfill the law that Adam failed to keep. Without Christ's obedience and sufferings in his humanity, there is no salvation. Thus Turretin does not locate the redemptive work of Christ solely in his deity, but he does emphasize that deity. Locating the merits of Christ solely in his deity can lead to a most serious problem. If Christ's passive obedience is offered up in his deity and not humanity, then it would mean that God died. This, of course, is an impossibility for God is life. That is not to say that his deity could not “uphold” and “sustain” in his humanity (as our Confession points out), but it should guard us from removing his obedience completely from his finite humanity.

Calvin, Augustine and Turretin are hardly fringe voices in our tradition and yet there was a divergence of opinion on this issue. One can hear echoes of both positions in our Standards. They state clearly that Christ had to become man in order to render obedience, consistent with our natures (WLC 39). Furthermore, our Standards clearly refuse to remove the obedience of Christ from the moral law that was given to Adam as a covenant of works (WLC 92-93, 95, 97; WCF 7.2; 19.1, 3, 6). Nevertheless, there is a clear emphasis on the efficacy rendered to his obedience because of his deity, which sufficiently strengthened him for the work wrought in his humanity (WLC 38). The *Justification Report* of the OPC (quoted above) follows Augustine and Calvin and predicates the merit of Christ on the ability of Adam to merit righteousness (pg. 20) and defines merit in terms of the covenant (pgs. 28-29).

What is clear is that there is no consensus on this issue within the Reformed tradition as to where to place the emphasis. Nevertheless, whether one side with Augustine and Calvin or with Turretin and the Lutherans, where one lands must not cause him to see what is happening with Adam and what is happening with Christ as radically different. It is the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul who tells us that Adam was a type of Christ (Rom 5:14). He was given, in God's providence, to teach us about the obedience that Christ would render. It is to no little purpose that our primary and secondary Standards call Christ the last Adam. We must be clear on this point, Christ is rewarded for doing what Adam failed to do (obedience), not for being what Adam failed to be (divine). Put another way, Christ has always been divine, but it is not until he comes and obeys on our behalf that he accomplishes salvation for us and is rewarded with salvation on our behalf.

### *Passive Obedience*

However, there is something more needed. As John Murray points out,

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<sup>119</sup> *Institutes*, XIV.xii.7.

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The obedience Christ rendered fulfilled the obedience in which Adam failed. It would not be correct to say, however, that Christ's obedience was the same in content or demand. Christ was called on to obey in radically different conditions, and required to fulfil radically different demands. Christ was sin-bearer and the climactic demand was to die. This was not true of Adam. Christ came to redeem, not so Adam. So Christ rendered the whole-souled totality obedience in which Adam failed, but under totally different conditions and with incomparably greater demands.<sup>120</sup>

What Murray so helpfully points out is that Christ had to do *more* than Adam would have. The world into which Adam was created had no sin, no impediment to eternal life. All that was required of Adam was to bring forth positive (active) obedience. The world into which Christ was born, on the other hand, was very different. Christ came to man, not in the estate of innocence and purity, but in a fallen condition, under God's wrath and curse. Christ had to come and not only bring for the the obedience Adam failed to render, but also suffer the consequences Adam's disobedience deserved.

This is commonly referred to as *passive obedience*, coming from the Latin *passivus* (to suffer). If every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God (WSC 84), then Christ would have to suffer that wrath and curse in order to redeem us from sin (WSC 27). This language of debt bearing is used in WCF 11.3,

Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

Therefore, whenever the Westminster Standards speak of justification they not only mention Christ's righteousness (active obedience), but also mention the pardon of sin wrought through Christ's death on the cross (passive obedience; cf. WLC 70; WSC 33). This he did in order to "satisfy divine justice" (WSC 25). It is for this reason that Christ is called "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29).

This work of passive obedience is also referred to as atonement and prefigured through the sacrifices and typical ordinances of the law (WCF 19.3; WLC 34, 97). Throughout the history of redemption God gave many pictures of a substitutionary death on behalf of another. This was seen each year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) and through the various sin sacrifices. It was also seen through the Passover Lamb who died in the place of Israel's firstborn sons (Ex 12).

The language the Bible uses is that of the curse due to one (death) being transferred to the other—hence, "substitution." This is what is being addressed in Galatians 3:13 when it says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" The same reality is being dealt with in 2 Corinthians 5:21, which says "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Paul is not saying that Christ became *sinful*, but that our sin was imputed to him (credited to him as if

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<sup>120</sup> *Collected Writings*, 2:58.

it were his own) and he bore the consequences due to sin under the covenant, namely death (cf. WCF 7.2; WLC 92-93). In this way he paid the debt we owed to God for our sin under the broken covenant of works ( Cf. WCF 11.3; 19.6; LC 49, 97; WSC 27).

The death of Christ, then, is the foundation of pardon for sin. It is there that God's justice is satisfied and the requirements of the curse of the covenant of works is satisfied. Sin requires to be punished with death. Christ willingly submitted to that death in order to deliver from the curse of the law. As Machen said of Galatians 3:13, "That is only a more forcible way of saying that Christ bore a curse for us, or that He became accursed for us."<sup>121</sup> This is what is meant by the passive obedience of Christ and why it is equally necessary to the active obedience of Christ.

It is rightly called obedience because the Bible describes his death as a command given to him by the father. In John 10, Jesus says, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge [command] I have received from my Father" (vv. 17-18). As we have pointed out, the word translated "charge" in most translations is really the Greek *entole*, which simply means command. In order to redeem his sheep, Jesus needed to obey the Father's command to lay down his life on their behalf. The converse of this statement would be that if Jesus had not followed his Father's command perfectly, the elect would not be redeemed. Here we see his death as an act of law-keeping. This underscores how our redemption is based upon Jesus fulfilling the terms of the covenant that he was under. Jesus even goes so far as to base the Father's love for him on his obedience to this command. We must resist all temptations to see this in an ultimate-eternal sense. The Father has always loved Son. This is a statement qualified by the context. It is of one fabric with other statements of the Father being well-pleased with his Son (cf. Matt 3:17; 17:5; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22). This is a love between the Father and the Son that is limited to the arrangement set up between them in order to redeem the elect—it is a covenantal love.

In fact, just seven chapters later, Jesus would plead his obedience before the Father on behalf of those for whom he obey the commands. Thus the "High-Priestly Prayer" of John 17 opens with, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you...I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (vv 1, 4-5). Jesus predicates his return to glory on having accomplished the work that he was sent to do. As the prayer unfolds we see that he did this work on behalf of those whom the Father has given him (vv 6, 9, 15-24). In other words he sees his return to glory as the firstfruits of their joining him in glory, which he has the right to see because of his obedience to all the Father gave him to do.

### ***Conclusion***

The active and passive obedience, then, ought both to be seen as Christ fulfilling the law. The moral law has two sanctions—positively, eternal life for obedience, and negatively, death for disobedience

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<sup>121</sup> *Notes on Galatians*, 180.

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(WLC 93). In his actively keeping the law perfectly, Christ earned the positive reward, eternal life. However, because Adam had sinned under the moral law, the negative sanction of death still hung over fallen man. Christ could not release man from that sentence without satisfying it with his own death. In this sense, it his death is a satisfaction of the law as well. Thus, positively and negatively, it is impossible to understand the work of Christ apart from the covenant of works (the moral law) given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. For this reason Christ is the Second or Last Adam.

### THE CONDITION OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

Beyond the difference of personal obedience versus the obedience of a Mediator, our Confessional Standards also contrast the conditions of the two covenants. As we saw in WCF 7.2 the condition of the covenant of works was “perfect and personal obedience” (cf. WCF 19.1; WLC 20, 92-93; WSC 12). However, the condition of the covenant of grace is faith, not perfect and personal obedience.<sup>122</sup> This is further drawn out in WSC 85 (cf. WLC 153):

What doth God require of us that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us for sin? To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption.

The classic text appealed to by the apostles to defend faith alone was Genesis 15:6, which should not surprise us.<sup>123</sup> In response to God's promise to not only bless Abraham, but to do everything necessary to bless him, even if that meant dying, what more could Abraham do but trust God? Thus the only response we see from Abraham in Genesis 15 is that he believed God, which was credited to him as righteousness.

The Standards work diligently to make sure there is no confusion here that faith leads to, but does not include works. For example, the next question in the WSC clarifies what saving faith is—“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” (WSC 86). But perhaps the clearest statement is found in WCF 11.1:

Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the

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<sup>122</sup> “The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which he hath appointed them to salvation” (WLC 32).

<sup>123</sup> “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’” (Rom 4:3); “just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’” (Gal 3:6); “and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God” (Jam 2:23).

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obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

Here the Confession is clear to say that evangelical (Spirit-wrought) obedience wrought is not the condition of the covenant of grace. Thus the *only* condition of the covenant of grace is faith—*faith alone*. Obedience, whether originating within the sinner or granted through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, is not a condition of the covenant of grace.

We realize that this understanding has fallen on hard times recently. While we would all agree with Luther's famous statement that "Faith alone justifies, but not the faith which is alone," we must be careful to not mix the evangelical obedience with the faith so as to create a twofold condition that our Confessional Standards eagerly guard against. Faith, not works or obedience, is the sole condition of the covenant of grace.

### THERE IS ONE COVENANT OF GRACE

As we have seen, there is but one covenant of grace since the fall. Beginning in Genesis 3 and extending to the end of the world there is only one and not many covenants of grace. This one covenant is variously administered in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. The substance of this covenant remains the same between the two administrations. To us one of Calvin's most well known quotes, "The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation."<sup>124</sup>

What have the Reformed understood as the unity of the covenant of grace and what is meant by its various modes of dispensation? Another way of asking the question is: what is the essential unity of the Old and New Testaments (broadly considered) and what are the differences? The full answer to that question has been debated and in fact is being debated as a reason for this paper. But this is where all Reformed have agreed. This is where we are united.

First, the Reformed tradition believes that Christ is the same in both testaments. The Old and New Testaments are united in that the same Christ is given to God's people from beginning to end. There is no other Mediator, there is no other salvation, there is no other faith than that which is directed at Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The OT saints look forward to Christ and the NT saints look back. The testimony of Scripture makes this clear. John's gospel testifies, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Paul writes,

"For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Institutes*, II.x.2.

<sup>125</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:1–4.

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You can see that the elect under Abraham and the elect under Moses lay hold of the same spiritual realities that we do, namely, Jesus Christ. There is no substantial difference.

The same saving promises are received by faith alone. The Old Testament is not a combination of works and grace for salvation and neither is the New Testament. Immediately following Adam's plunge into sin and misery, salvation by faith alone in Christ alone is provided by the Lord. We have already seen Adam's faith expressed in the changing of his wife's name from Woman to Eve. Hebrews 11 records for us the "Hall of Faith" and begins with Abel and moves down through Old Testament history. Faith is the instrument of the covenant of grace as it lays hold of unseen, heavenly realities. In Galatians 3, Paul sees Abraham as the paradigm believer for both Jews and Gentiles (vs 9).

The blessings of the covenant of grace are substantially the same as well. The Old Testament believers were justified—they had their sins remitted and were reckoned righteous as a gift of God's grace by faith alone. In Galatians 3:6-9, Paul speaks about justification by faith alone in regards to Abraham, and in Romans 4:5-9, Paul speaks about David who lived under the Law. Justification is the same under the Promise and under the Law. The Law does not substantially alter any of the saving benefits of Christ's mediation.

The OT saints were engrafted into God's one family and were his household—they were underaged sons kept under the custody and pedagogy of the Law for a time (Gal 3-4). To them belonged the adoption as sons (Rom 9:4) and they were God's household (Heb 3:2). These same blessings in substance belong to the New Covenant believers without the tutelage of the Law.

Finally, the same gospel was preached to them as it is to us. Christ was presented to them through the gospel and was received by faith alone. Paul's gospel concerning Jesus Christ, God's Son was first revealed to the prophets in the Holy Scriptures (Rom 1:1-4). The gospel was preached to Abraham (Galatians 3:8) and he believed God and was justified. The events of the gospel being known already in the OT is proved by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says that Christ died, was buried and rose again "in accordance to the Scriptures" (vv. 3-4). Paul is not reading one of the synoptic gospels when he makes this statement. The Scriptures in view are the oracles of God entrusted to Israel.

This is how our Reformed fathers articulated the unity of the one covenant of grace in contradiction to the Anabaptists and even in distinction from the Lutherans. In our day and age, we argue for the unity of substance in contrast to Dispensationalism, New Covenant Theology, as well as continuing forms of Anabaptist and Lutheran theologies.

### *The Testimony of Our Tradition*

#### **John Calvin (1509-1564)**

As we already noted, Calvin's view of the unity of the covenant of grace is well known. To fill out the quote above,

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The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in mode of dispensation. . . . Here we must take our stand on three main points. First, we hold that carnal prosperity and happiness did not constitute the goal set before the Jews to which they were to aspire. Rather, they were adopted into the hope of immortality; and assurance of this adoption was certified to them by oracles, by the law, and by the prophets. Secondly, the covenant by which they were bound to the Lord was supported, not by their own merits, but solely by the mercy of the God who called them. Thirdly, they had and knew Christ as Mediator, through whom they were joined to God and were to share in his promises.<sup>126</sup>

Despite, or maybe better, through the earthly/typological nature of the revelation set before the Jews, true believers were not content with earthly promises but laid hold of eternal life and were assured by God of their possession of it through Scriptures.<sup>127</sup> They were saved and justified by grace alone through faith alone.<sup>128</sup> And finally, they had and knew Christ as their mediator.<sup>129</sup>

### Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583)

Ursinus was an avid student and follower of Calvin and this is reflected in his teaching regarding the unity of the covenant of grace from his Larger Catechism.<sup>130</sup>

30. Q Where then do you get your hope of eternal life?

A From the gracious covenant which God newly established with those who believe in Christ.

31. Q What is that covenant?

A It is the reconciliation with God gained by the mediation of Christ in which God, because of Christ, promises those who believe in him that he will always be a gracious father and will give them eternal life. They in return respond to him by accepting his blessings in true faith and, as is fitting for thankful and obedient children, by glorifying him forever. And both parties publicly confirm this mutual promise by visible signs which we call sacraments.

33. Q What is the difference between the Old and the New Testament?

A It is the same testament or covenant of God with all the elect from the first promise given in Paradise, concerning the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent, to the end of the world. But they are called Old and New Testaments because some of the circumstances and signs of the covenant were changed.

First, in the Old they believed in the Christ who was still to come; in the New we believe in the Christ who has been revealed.

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<sup>126</sup> *Institutes*, II.x.2.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, II.x.3; 7-23. Calvin takes pains to demonstrate over and over again the hope of true believers in the OT was heavenly life and not earthly prosperity and life. They hoped for immortality and eternal life and God assured them this is exactly what He promised them. "Let us therefore, boldly establish a principle unassailable by any stratagems of the devil: the OT or Covenant that the Lord had made with the Israelites had not been limited to earthly things, but contained a promise of spiritual and eternal life" (II.x.23.).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, II.x.4.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Large and Small Catechisms with the Heidelberg Catechism*, Translated by Fred H. Klooster and John Medendorp (pdf version from [christreformedinfo.org](http://christreformedinfo.org)).

## THE COVENANT OF GRACE

Second, the Old contained the promise of the preservation of the nation of Israel until the time of Christ; in the New we have only the general promise of the preservation of the church under various governments.

Third, the Old had levitical ceremonies, for which, having been abolished in the New, Christ instituted baptism and the Lord's supper.

Fourth, the Old was more obscure; the New is clear.

### Robert Rollock (1555-1599)

78 Q: Why is the covenant called "gratuitous"?

A: Because the condition of the covenant is either nothing, or is truly and entirely free.

79 Q: When was this gratuitous covenant first established with man?

A: It was established immediately after the fall of man (Gen. 3:15).

80. Q: Was it, at that time, established in explicit words?

A: No. Rather, a certain obscure promise regarding the seed of the woman—that is, Christ—and his benefits was made in the beginning (Gen. 3:15).

Q: 81 Was this gratuitous covenant renewed afterwards?

A: It was perpetually repeated from the fall of man up until the manifestation of Christ, at which time it began, at last, to be expressed most clearly and openly; for at that time it began to be said: 'Whoever will believe in Christ crucified will be justified and will live' (John 3:18; Rom. 10:9, 10).

82. Q: Then the substance of that covenant of grace established with the ancient people is the same as that covenant of grace which was established at the advent of Christ with his Church?

A: It is the very same both in reality and substance (*re et substantia*), but different in its circumstances (*accidente*). By reason of the difference in circumstances one is called the old covenant or Old Testament, but the other is called the new covenant or New Testament (Heb. 8:8ff).

83. Q: Then by the name 'Old Testament' you understand the covenant of grace

A: The broader title 'Old Testament' extends equally to the law, or covenant of works, and to the covenant of grace which was joined to the law. The Apostle to the Hebrews teaches that the title 'Old Testament' should be accepted in this way (Heb. 8 & 9).<sup>131</sup>

You can here in Rollock the similarities with Calvin's understanding. There is continuity in Christ as the Mediator of the covenant of grace. The covenant has eternal life as its gift and goal. The way in which Christ and eternal life are obtained under the covenant of grace is by faith alone. Rollock also employs the distinction between substance and accidents to explain the relation of the Old Testament (broadly speaking) and the New Testament. The substance is the same though the covenant of grace is administered differently in each testament. He does not go into the same detail in his catechism that Calvin does in his *Institutes* regarding the nature of the accidents. He speaks about the rare, veiled and obscure ways in which the covenant of grace was revealed in the time of the Law.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *Some Questions and Answers about God's Covenant.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, Q. & A.: 24, 34, 86, 87, 102.

### **William Perkins (1558-1602)**

One of Perkins most famous works is his *Golden Chain*.<sup>133</sup> The format of this work reads like a confession of faith. Chapter 31 deals with the covenant of grace. We will highlight a few items so as to demonstrate the similarities between Calvin, Rollock and Perkins. He defines the covenant of grace as, “that whereby God freely promising Christ, his benefits, exacts again of man, that he would by faith receive Christ, and repent of his sins (Hos 2:18-20; Ez 36:25-27; Mal 3:1).”

He then employs the common distinction between the substance and accidents/administrations of the one covenant of grace. “The Covenant, albeit it be one in substance, yet it is distinguished into the old and new testaments.”<sup>134</sup>

What is the difference between the two administrations of the covenant of grace? Again, employing accepted terminology Perkins writes, “The old testament or covenant is that, which in types and shadowes prefigured Christ to come, and to be exhibited. The New Testament declareth Christ already come in the flesh, and is apparently showed in the Gospel.”<sup>135</sup>

Calvin, Rollock, Perkins and other men are consistent in their articulation regarding the unity of the covenant of grace despite the different accidents or administrations of that covenant in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>136</sup> For Perkins, this means that Christ and His benefits were sufficiently communicated to the elect in the Old Testament as Christ and His benefits are to us under the Gospel. There is no substantial difference in the gospel preached, the singularity of faith in receiving Christ, the Christ that is received and the benefits that flow from Christ.<sup>137</sup>

### **James Ussher (1581-1656)**

James Ussher and *The Irish Articles of Faith* (1615)<sup>138</sup> articulate the unity of the covenant of grace in this way,

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<sup>133</sup> *The Works of William Perkins, 3 Volumes* (London: John Haviland, 1631), 1.12-114. (pdf version from [www.digitalpuritan.net/williamperkins.html](http://www.digitalpuritan.net/williamperkins.html))

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>136</sup> It is necessary to note that one of the primary ways the unity of the one covenant of grace was established was in the sacraments. Not that the testaments have the same sacraments but that the same Christ was the substance of the sacraments in either the Old or New Testaments. This provided footing for seeing the continuity of the place of children in the covenant of grace and therefore of infant baptism.

<sup>137</sup> Andrew Woosley, in his excellent work, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: a Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012) reminds us that the fullness of Perkins thought on the unity of the covenant of grace is found in his commentary on Hebrews 11 (Kindle locations, 12219-12220). Perkins *Commentary on Hebrews 11* can be found in his *Works, Volume 3*.

<sup>138</sup> The “Irish Articles” are more fully known as the “Articles of Religion agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops and the rest of the clergy of Ireland in the Convocation held at Dublin in the year of our Lord God 1615, for the avoiding of Diversities of Opinions, and the establishing of consent touching true Religion.”

## THE COVENANT OF GRACE

81. In the Old Testament the Commandments of the Law were more largely, and the promises of Christ more sparingly and darkly propounded, shadowed with a multitude of types and figures, and so much the more generally and obscurely delivered, as the manifesting of them was further off.

82. The Old Testament is not contrary to the New. For both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. For they looked for all benefits of God the Father through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ, as we now do: only they believed in Christ which should come, we in Christ already come.

83. The New Testament is full of grace and truth, bringing joyful tidings unto mankind that whatsoever formerly was promised of Christ is now accomplished; and so, instead of the ancient types and ceremonies, exhibiteth the things themselves, with a large and clear declaration of all the benefits of the Gospel. Neither is the ministry thereof restrained any longer to one circumcised nation, but is indifferently propounded unto all people, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. So that there is now no nation which can truly complain that they be shut forth from the communion of saints and the liberties of the people of God.

### **The Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643-1649)**

By the time we get to the Westminster Standards, the language of unity of the One covenant of grace has long be established.

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.

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>139</sup>

Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed,

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<sup>139</sup> WCF 7.3, 5-6

and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever.<sup>140</sup>

### Francis Turretin (1623-1687)

We are moving beyond the Westminster Standards a little by looking at Francis Turretin's understanding of the unity of the covenant of grace. His understanding on this issue and the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the one covenant of grace will be valuable for us as we move forward.

In his Fifth Question of the Twelfth Topic, which deals with the unity of the covenant of grace, which begins with a statement of what the Reformed have argued against. The Socinians, Anabaptists and Remonstrants (among others then and now) "hold that the fathers of the Old Testament were not saved by the gratuitous mercy of God in Christ, the Mediator (God-man, *theanthrōpō*) through faith in him about to come."<sup>141</sup> For Turretin, the question is a matter of substance. Was Christ the mediator in both testaments? Was faith in Christ the same in both and did God promise the same spiritual and heavenly blessings? Was reconciliation and salvation the same in both?<sup>142</sup>

He gets even more specific. He admits that his "adversaries" do not deny that Old Testament saints were forgiven, had any hope of eternal life or even whether Christ was predicted to them. They affirm these things. The issue is this: was it faith in Christ specifically? Was the promise God made to them spiritual having heavenly blessings and was the Holy Spirit given to them as He is to us? They deny these specificities.

Turretin's reasons for affirming what the Reformed believed are as follows:<sup>143</sup>

1. The covenant of grace made with us in the New Testament is the same as the covenant of grace made with Abraham (Lk 1:68, 70, 72, 73; Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8; Rom 4:3; Gal 3:17).
2. There is the unity of the parts of the covenant of grace in both testaments. God will be God to us and the God of our children: Abraham (Genesis 17:7), Moses (Exodus 3:15), confirmed in the captivity and after it (Ezekiel 36:28).
3. The identity of the Mediator is the same in both testaments. He is the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15), the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), the angel of Jehovah's presence (Is 63:9), the angel of the covenant (Mal 3:1), a covenant to the people and to the Gentiles (Isa 42:6). In the New Testament, Christ is the Mediator between God and men (I Tim 2:5), the Mediator of better covenant (Heb 8:6; 9:15); the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8) by whose grace the father were saved (Acts 15:10,11) and the sole name by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12); the Way, the Truth and the Life, so that on one can come to the Father except by Him (Jn 14:6).

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<sup>140</sup> WCF 8.6

<sup>141</sup> *Institutes*, XII.v.2 (2:192).

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, XII.v.5-6 (2:194).

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, XII.v.7-23 (2:194-200).

## THE COVENANT OF GRACE

4. Faith is the same in both testaments (Genesis 15:6 compared with Romans 4:11 and Galatians 3:6-8). Hebrews 11 celebrates their faith. Habakkuk declares the just will live by faith (2:4).
5. The same spiritual promises are given by God in both testaments (Acts 13:12). Eternal life, justification, sanctification and the hope of glory in the city to come.
6. The substance of the sacraments was the same in both testaments (circumcision, Romans 4:11; passover, 1 Cor 5:7; baptism, 1 Cor 10:1, 2 and I Peter 3:20; the same spiritual food, 1 Cor 10:4).
7. From the Law of Moses which instructed them concerning the covenant of grace and prepared and stimulated them to embrace it. The moral law—convincing them of sin and subjecting them to the divine curse (Rom 3:19-20; Gal 3:10, 19). The civil law (what he calls forensic) insofar as prepared Israel for the coming kingdom of Christ. The ceremonial as types and figures of Christ to come (Col 2:17; Heb 9-10).

## CONCLUSION

What has been briefly outlined above is a Reformed distinctive. There is an overarching covenant of grace whereby God calls His elect people out of sin and death through faith in Jesus Christ, the Mediator, and brings them into an estate of life and salvation. The Scriptures teach this is the one way of salvation from beginning to end and it makes no difference whether God's people are in the Old or New Testament eras. One Christ, one faith, one hope—one overarching covenant of grace in both Testaments.

In terms of this debate, no one on either side of the republication issue disagrees with this Reformed distinctive. Naturally, the question is this: what is the crux of the issue then? What is the precise issue under debate? The precise issue under debate is not the substance of the covenant of grace but the differences in the administration of that covenant between the two Testaments. What does the Confession mean when it says the covenant of grace was administered differently “in the time of the Law/under the Law” and “in the time of the gospel/under the gospel”?<sup>144</sup>

We believe a case can be made that “under the Law” means that to Israel, the Lord led the elect within Israel to faith in Jesus Christ, the Mediator of covenant of grace, and His eternal blessings by republishing the covenant of works/moral Law at Mt. Sinai. The Law was a schoolmaster leading Israel to faith. The Law did not do this by offering eternal life but by being a ministry of death and condemnation so as to force them to flee from their own works to Christ's perfect righteousness and the promises made to Abraham, which were also reaffirmed through the broader ministry of Moses.

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<sup>144</sup> WCF 7.5

## CHAPTER THREE

### *The Mosaic Covenant and Republication*

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

*The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments, which were delivered by the voice of God upon mount Sinai, and written by him in two tables of stone; and are recorded in the twentieth chapter of Exodus; the four first commandments containing our duty to God, and the other six our duty to man.*

–WLC 98

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### SETTING THE DISCUSSION

With the foundational distinction laid between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, we are now able to turn to the issue at hand—the Mosaic covenant and what place it occupies in God's unfolding plan of salvation. There are a host of positions on this issue.

On the one end of the spectrum, there are the (historic) dispensationalists who argue that the Mosaic covenant offered (and delivered) salvation for works from the time of Moses to the time of Christ—*eternal life was obtained by works*.<sup>145</sup> On the other end of the spectrum are those that argue that the Mosaic covenant is simply a greater exposition of the grace offered to Abraham in Genesis 12 and following. Proponents of this view argue that, at Sinai, the terms of grace offered to Abraham are expanded and clarified. Between these two views is the position that the Mosaic covenant strictly speaking is a works covenant (that is, it offers life for obedience), but that broadly speaking it falls

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<sup>145</sup> This older form (propounded by John Nelson Darby, C.I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer and Charles Ryrie) is to be distinguished from newer forms of Dispensationalism, such as Progressive Dispensationalism (represented by Darrell Bock, Craig Blaising and Robert Saucy), which believes that since the fall all salvation has been by grace through faith.

within and serves the ongoing covenant of grace.<sup>146</sup> This third position has been called various things<sup>147</sup> and articulated differently over the years but each of these articulations bears a few unifying elements in common:

1. The Mosaic covenant *operates on a principle of works*—it requires obedience in order to gain the reward offered.
2. The Mosaic covenant *is unable to give life or salvation to any man* because of fallen man's sinfulness.
3. The Mosaic covenant *functions as an administration of the covenant of grace*—it was given to further the covenant of grace, not compete with it. It does this by:
  - a. Prefiguring the obedience of Christ to come.
  - b. Showing sinful man his need for Christ.
  - c. Showing redeemed believers what God-honoring obedience of gratitude looks like.

Thus according to this third view, the Mosaic covenant clearly reflects the covenant of works made with Adam but is not a mere repetition of it (as with Dispensationalism). Instead, it is an appropriated restatement of it for the sake of the covenant of grace. As Vos states,

From the above we can also explain why the older theologians did not always clearly distinguish between the covenant of works and the Sinaitic covenant. At Sinai it was not the “bare” law that was given, but a reflection of the covenant of works revived, as it were, in the interests of the covenant of grace continued at Sinai.<sup>148</sup>

Vos’ words here get at the heart of what he calls the view of the “older theologians,” namely, that a reflection of the covenant of works was revived in the interest of the covenant of grace. There are differences between theologians on just exactly what is promulgated at Sinai. John Calvin and those who followed him believed it was eternal life for obedience.<sup>149</sup> Vos seems to be arguing that it was not eternal life, but a reflection of it (i.e. long life) and there are certainly those who follow this line of thinking. What parties on both sides agree on is that there is a connection between the Edenic covenant and the Sinaitic covenant and that its purpose is to serve the covenant of grace.

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<sup>146</sup> We are being purposely vague here about what kind of life is being offered. Within this camp there are differences of opinion as will be shown below. What unites these various positions is the principle of “life for obedience.”

<sup>147</sup> The language of a “revival of the covenant of works” was employed by Geerhardus Vos (*Shorter Writings*, 255), John Owen (*An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. 6, pg. 80-81), and William Pemble (*A Treatise on the Covenant of Works*). Charles Hodge preferred to call the Mosaic covenant a “re-enactment of the covenant of works” (*2 Corinthians*, pg. 53). Herman Witsius use the language of “repetition” (*Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, 4.4.48) as did Amandus Polanus (*Syntagma* (1609), Lib. 6, cap. 33, col. 321). James Buchanan preferred “re-exhibition” (*Doctrine of Justification*, 28). Others have used similar terms meaning the same thing. For whatever reason the term “republication” seems to have won dominance in the current theological discourse.

<sup>148</sup> “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology” in *Redemptive History*, (P&R: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1980), 255.

<sup>149</sup> For Calvin see *Leviticus*, 203-205, *Ezekiel*, 297-299, and *Romans*, 386-387. For Hodge see *2 Corinthians*, 53-55.

While there are other articulations of the Mosaic covenant they all fall somewhere on this spectrum and can be addressed under one of the three major views put forth here. The questions that we must address are “What do the Scriptures say?” and “What do the Westminster Standards say?” That is the goal of this present chapter.

At the outset we can make a few declarations. Since the rise of Dispensationalism in the mid-nineteenth century, the Reformed tradition has always been clear that it sees it as incompatible with the Scriptures and the Confession. In other words any notion that man is able to merit salvation after the fall through his own obedience is rejected at the outset. This leaves us with the seeing the Mosaic covenant as either a either a gracious covenant promising eternal life upon faith in a Mediator or that it bears some formal correspondence to covenant of works, not for salvation, but to further the covenant of grace by driving sinful men to despair of any notions of personal righteousness.<sup>150</sup>

Proponents of both views strongly affirm the language of the Confession that:

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. (WCF 7.5)

On this point there is no disagreement. The disagreement lies not in *that it is true*, but in *how it is true*. Does God accomplish this by simply declaring the same promises given to Abraham more fully and clearly? Or by way of showing his people the terrifying alternative and, thereby, driving them to call out for the promises of His grace? The problem is that the Confession does not give us a simple answer in language we would prefer. It does not say, “The Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace,” nor does it say, “The Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works.” However, no such statement exists so it requires us to carefully examine what is and is not said in the Confession alongside the Scriptures it quotes in order to understand what is meant by its chosen language.

So we must ask questions of the Bible and the Confessional Standards.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> We have intentionally tried to be broad here. The tradition has *many* variations and articulations within these boundaries. Some call the Mosaic covenant a works covenant, some say that formally it is a works covenant, but substantially a covenant of grace, some say it is a mixed covenant. All we want to say here is that all of these fall within a spectrum that says on the one hand it is simply a gracious covenant and has nothing to do with the covenant of works and on the other hand that says it reflects or resembles the covenant of works for the sake of the covenant of grace.

<sup>151</sup> The following questions are informed by chapters 1 and 2. The reason that we spent so much time seeking to carefully articulate the differences between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace was so that we would have clear and concrete categories under which to substantively evaluate the Mosaic covenant. In the simplest of terms, in its concrete legislation, is it a covenant of personal obligation requiring perfect obedience, promising life and threatening death? Or is it a covenant of grace, requiring faith in a Mediator?

- Is the Mosaic covenant presented as a covenant of personal obligation or of faith in a Mediator?
- Do the Bible and the Confession treat the Mosaic covenant in conjunction with the covenant of works or the covenant of grace?
- Who is under the oath of obligation in the Mosaic covenant?
- How does Christ relate to the Mosaic covenant? As Lord who imparts gracious rewards to his elect or as Servant who submits to its demands and undergoes its curses?

We believe all of these questions have helpful and cogent answers, agreed upon by our primary and secondary standards. Along the way we will also see that that the language employed in the writing of the Confession has a heritage that will be helpful to us in understanding what is and is not being said.

## THE TWOFOLD DISTINCTION OF THE LAW (BROAD AND NARROW)

### *John Calvin (1509-1564)*

As we move forward, it will be important to make one more distinction that will help us understand where our Reformed forefathers are coming from. It has to do with the distinction between the broad and narrow/strict view of the law. This will be important since it will pinpoint the potential area of disagreement. Calvin is the place we will begin since he set so many of the theological and exegetical trajectories of our tradition. Calvin makes the following observation in his comments on Romans 10:5,

The law has a twofold meaning; it sometimes includes the whole of what has been taught by Moses, and sometimes that part only which was peculiar to his ministration, which consisted of precepts, rewards, and punishments. But Moses had this common office—to teach the people the true rule of religion. Since it was so, it behooved him to preach repentance and faith; but faith is not taught, except by propounding promises of divine mercy, and those gratuitous: and thus it behooved him to be a preacher of the gospel; which office he faithfully performed, as it appears from many passages... But as evangelic promises are only found scattered in the writings of Moses, and these also somewhat obscure, and as the precepts and rewards, allotted to the observers of the law, frequently occur, it rightly appertained to Moses as his own and peculiar office, to teach what is the real righteousness of works, and then to show what remuneration awaits the observance of it, and what punishment awaits those who come short of it... And whenever the word law is thus strictly taken, Moses is by implication opposed to Christ: and then we must consider what the law contains, as separate from the gospel.<sup>152</sup>

Calvin states that in a broad sense, one can refer to Moses and mean all that he had to say and refer to that as “the law.” Moses was God’s prophet sent to direct his people to faith in the coming Messiah, which he did faithfully by setting before the people the good, gracious and evangelical promises of God. Therefore, Moses teaches the gospel of grace alone through faith alone. This broader use of the law refers to the whole ministry of Moses and his witness to Christ. For the elect, the Old Testament was effectual in leading them to faith in Christ, full remission of sins in Him and the hope of eternal life. However, Calvin says that the law can also be used in a narrow or strict sense to refer to the

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<sup>152</sup> *Romans*, 386-87.

covenant of which Moses was a mediator who instructed Israel in the real righteousness of works. The promises of grace are only found scattered in the writings of Moses and are obscure compared to the requirements of law with its sanctions of blessings and curses which do frequently occur. What is most striking about Calvin's understanding is that the strict view of the law serves the covenant of grace and is not, in the end, contrary.<sup>153</sup>

It is not surprising then that in his *Institutes*, he makes the same distinction:

Hence, also, we refute those who always erroneously compare the law with the gospel by contrasting the merit of works with the free imputation of righteousness. This is indeed a contrast not at all to be rejected. For Paul often means by the term "law" the rule of righteous living by which God requires of us what is his own, giving us no hope of life unless we completely obey him, and adding on the other hand a curse if we deviate even in the slightest degree. This Paul does when he contends that we are pleasing to God through grace and are accounted righteous through his pardon, because nowhere is found that observance of the law for which the reward has been promised. Paul therefore justly makes contraries of the righteousness of the law and of that of the gospel [Rom 3:21ff.; Gal 3:10ff.; etc.].<sup>154</sup>

Calvin acknowledges that there is a contrast between Law and Gospel, or Moses and Christ, to be seen in the Scriptures. But this is not the entire picture and the only way in which Law is used. From a number of Scriptures, Calvin concludes, "From this we infer that, where the whole law is concerned, the gospel differs from it only in clarity of manifestation."<sup>155</sup> Calvin makes the distinction between the Law narrowly considered and the Law broadly considered (or what he calls the whole Law). Narrowly, the Law is contrasted with the gospel. Broadly, the Law is simply another way of administering the grace of Christ to the Old Testament saints.

### ***Robert Rollock (1555-1599)***

Rollock employs this same distinction regarding a broad understanding of Law and the Old Testament in his *Catechism* for pastors.

83. Q: Then by the name 'Old Testament' you understand the covenant of grace?

A: The broader title 'Old Testament' extends equally to the law, or covenant of works, and to the covenant of grace which was joined to the law. The Apostle to the Hebrews teaches that the title 'Old Testament' should be accepted in this way (Heb. 8 & 9).<sup>156</sup>

Notice that Rollock is addressing this very issue. In the broad sense, the Old Testament is understood as the covenant of grace encompassing everything from Genesis 3:15 onward. This includes the

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<sup>153</sup> "It was now the duty of the people to consider in how many ways they drew curses on themselves, and how far they were from deserving anything at God's hands by their works, that being thus led to despair as to their own righteousness, they might flee to the haven of divine goodness, and so to Christ himself. This was the end of the Mosaic dispensation" (*Ibid.*)

<sup>154</sup> *Institutes*, II.ix.4

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Some Questions and Answers About God's Covenant, Q&A, 83*

administration of the covenant of grace under the covenant of works renewed with Israel in the law. Law in this last sense is narrowly defined.

***Francis Turretin (1623-1687)***

Francis Turretin, who writes after the Standards were completed, employs the distinction between the broad and narrow use of the term Law or Old Covenant. He says,

The old covenant is taken in two ways: either for the covenant of works or the legal covenant strictly understood, made with our first parents before their fall and afterwards renewed in the desert; or for the second covenant, of grace, made with our first parents after the fall and confirmed in the Mosaic economy.<sup>157</sup>

Turretin sees the Old Covenant in its broadest sense to be the entire revelation of the covenant of grace mediated through the Scriptures of the Old Testament. In this broad sense, he comments about the discontinuity and continuity between the two testaments, as being only “as to the accidents or the accidental mode of dispensation, if taken with the second (broad) meaning.”<sup>158</sup> With that said, there is also the strict use of the term that refers to the covenant of works with Adam which was renewed in the desert at Mt. Sinai. Both have to be accounted for in understanding our Reformed fathers.

Turretin explains more fully,

In this sense, the Old Testament is taken most especially in two ways, either broadly or strictly. Broadly, it denotes in general the whole dispensation under which the fathers lived from the beginning of the world until Christ. It contained the doctrine of grace delivered to the ancients, promising salvation and life to the people openly...Strictly, however, it denotes the covenant of works or the moral law given by Moses...We readily grant<sup>159</sup> that the Old Testament and the Mosaic covenant taken strictly and absolutely as to the legal relation differ in entire substance from the New. Hence the law and Moses are opposed to grace and to Christ (Jn. 1:17) and by Paul the letter and the Spirit, the ministration of of condemnation and of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:6, 7). So we maintain that taken broadly and with the other evangelical relation (clothed, namely, with its pedagogical circumstances), it did not differ as to substance, but only as to manner of dispensation.<sup>160</sup>

***Charles Hodge (1797-1878)***

By the time Hodge wrote his commentary on Romans in 1835 this sort of understanding of the term law was well established. Notice how he employs the various meanings in order to understand Romans 3:31—“Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.”

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<sup>157</sup> *Institutes*, XII.v.33, (2.202-03).

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, XII.v.33, (2.203).

<sup>159</sup> Turretin is referring to the agreement between the Reformed and Lutherans at this particular point.

<sup>160</sup> *Institutes*, XII.vii.3-8, (2.233-35). It is this second part of this statement which marks what is unique of the Reformed in distinction with the Lutherans, namely, the overarching covenant of grace being administered under the Law.

## THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND REPUBLICATION

As Paul uses the word law in so many senses, it is doubtful which one of them is here principally intended. In every sense, however, the declaration is true. If the law means the Old Testament generally, then it is true; for the gospel method of justification contradicts no one of its statements, is inconsistent with no one of its doctrines, and invalidates no one of its promises, but is harmonious with all, and confirmatory of the whole. If it means the Mosaic institutions specially, these were shadows of which Christ is the substance. That law is abolished, not by being pronounced spurious or invalid, but by having met its accomplishment, and answered its design in the gospel. What it taught and promised, the gospel also teaches and promises, only in clearer and fuller measure. Law can also mean the moral law, which no doubt was prominently intended, still it is not invalidated, but established. No moral obligation is weakened, no penal sanction disregarded. The precepts are enforced by new and stronger motives, and the penalty is answered in Him who bore our sins in his own body on the tree... After showing that the law cannot save, that both justification and sanctification are by the gospel, he is wont to state in a sentence what is the true end of the law, or that the law and the gospel being both from God, but designed for different ends, are not in conflict.<sup>161</sup>

Hodge lists out three ways the term law might be employed here. It may mean: 1) “the Old Testament generally;” 2) “the Mosaic institutions especially;” or 3) “the moral law.” This threefold distinction differs only slightly from Calvin’s twofold paradigm. Calvin typically uses the “moral law” to refer to the covenantal aspect of the Mosaic institutions, whereas Hodge sees it referring more directly to the covenant of works that was re-enacted within the Mosaic covenant.<sup>162</sup> This explains why Hodge separates these into two uses where Calvin would have just had one. Nevertheless, this is no substantive difference between the two theologians.

### THE CONFESSION’S BROAD USE OF “LAW”

This understanding of the law in a “broader” and “narrower” sense is carried forward by those who come after Calvin. This twofold understanding of the law accounts for various uses of “the law” that we find in the Confessional Standards. The broader use of the term, for example, is employed in WCF 7.5

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.

Here the phrase “the time of the law” is meant to convey the whole Old Testament, not any specific covenant within it. This is made undeniable by virtually the identical language found in the WLC where only the word “law” is replaced with “the Old Testament.”

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<sup>161</sup> *Romans*, 101-02. Hodge makes similar statements in his comments on Romans 5:20: “Paul having shown that our justification was effected without the intervention of either the moral or Mosaic law, was naturally led to state the design and effect of the renewed revelation of the one, and the superinduction of the other. The law stands here for the whole of the Old Testament economy, including the clear revelation of the moral law, and all the institutions connected with the former dispensation...” (*Ibid*, 177).

<sup>162</sup> See *2 Corinthians*, 53-55.

## THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND REPUBLICATION

33. Q. Was the covenant of grace always administered after one and the same manner?

A. The covenant of grace was not always administered after the same manner, but the administrations of it under the Old Testament were different from those under the New.

34. Q. How was the covenant of grace administered under the Old Testament?

A. The covenant of grace was administered under the Old Testament, by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover, and other types and ordinances, which did all foreshadow Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised messiah, by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation.

Again, this use of the term law to refer to the Old Testament was not new at the time of the Confession. It comes from what Calvin explicitly called the twofold use of the term. It is a designation that became more clear and widely employed after Calvin and for centuries to come.

Our tradition is reflecting the Scriptures themselves at this point. The Scriptures often use the term law and Old Testament to refer to the entire Old Testament as it bears witness to Christ and to the eternal blessings found only in Him.<sup>163</sup> The Scriptures can also use the term law to refer narrowly to the covenant of works given to through Moses.

This is the precise issue at stake; this is heart and soul of Republication. Are we, following Calvin, warranted in taking the Law in a narrow, strict sense as the covenant of works renewed to Israel on Mt. Sinai and confirmed throughout her history? Both sides agree on the legitimacy of the broad use of the term law to mean the entire Old Testament revelation concerning Christ and the grace found only in Him; this is not the debate. The question that must be answered is: "Is there historic, Confessional and Biblical warrant for including this narrow and stricter understanding of the law?"

### THE LAW AND THE COVENANT OF WORKS RENEWED IN ISRAEL

In attempting to answer this specific question, we will forgo Calvin for a bit, simply for the fact that we have employed him at nearly every point, thus making his views plain and we will again below in our consideration of the New Testament.

#### *Robert Rollock (1555-1599)*

In Rollock's *Catechism* for pastors regarding the covenants we have seen him affirm clearly and unambiguously the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. At the same time, he affirms the republication of the covenant of works with Israel at Mt. Sinai.

Regarding the covenant of works, he asks and answers:

18. Q: Was this covenant of works renewed afterwards?

A: It was continually renewed right from the creation and fall of man up until the advent of Christ: first, it was delivered by word of mouth; then, it was engraved by God's own finger upon the tables of stone;

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<sup>163</sup> For example, Luke 24:27, 44-45 and Romans 3:21.

afterwards, it was delivered and written by Moses; finally, it was repeated and written by the prophets, each in his own place and order, and so it is known [to us] from the Old Testament.<sup>164</sup>

Here Rollock affirms the covenant of works was renewed in the life of Israel beginning at Mt. Sinai and carried through her life by the ministry of the prophets. Israel is under the covenant of works revived and renewed at Mt. Sinai.<sup>165</sup>

Rollock continues in his *Catechism*,

19. Q: In what manner and order was it renewed?

A: You have the order in Exodus 19 and 20. First, God says through Moses, “If you will observe my covenant (that is, my law), certainly you will be my own peculiar possession.” Then, the people said together, “Whatever Jehovah says we will do.” When Moses had reported the people’s counter-obligation (*restipulatione*) to God, God promulgated his law—that is, the principal divisions of his covenant, which should be observed by the people—from Mount Sinai.<sup>166</sup>

Rollock sees the two sides of the covenant evident in Exodus 19 and 20. The Lord declares His covenant in His law along with His promises—if you obey me and keep my Law, you will be my special people. Israel pledges herself to the Lord by swearing allegiance to the Lord and to keep all that He has commanded them in His Law.

This of course brings up the natural question concerning the justice God. Can God make such a covenant with sinners? What business does God have making a covenant of law like this with blessings and curses, life and death, contingent upon obedience and works?

21. Q: In what manner and order was it renewed?

A: It was not repeated chiefly with the end that men should, by means of it, be justified and live, but to the end that men, convicted in their consciences and overwhelmed by that impossible condition of good works proceeding from nature, might flee to the covenant of grace (Deut. 10:16; Rom. 3:19; 7:7ff).<sup>167</sup>

Two things are worth noting in connection with what Rollock writes. First, strictly speaking, the Mosaic covenant and law is not the covenant of grace. To use the common nomenclature, it is a covenant of a different substance. Second, Rollock clearly affirms the works covenant was renewed with Israel for the sake of the covenant of grace.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> *Some Questions and Answers About God’s Covenant*

<sup>165</sup> Q. 30 contains nearly an identical statement regarding the renewal of the covenant of works. In language which is clearly echoed in WCF 19.2, he asks: “30. Q: In what place do you find the doctrine of this covenant of works? A: In the Old Testament; that is, it has been handed down at length in the writings of Moses and the Prophets (which to a large degree have been arranged to explain the law and covenant of works), but it is contained in summary in the Decalogue.”

<sup>166</sup> *Some Questions and Answers About God’s Covenant*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, “22. Q: So you mean that the covenant of works was renewed with the ancient people chiefly with the end that they should be prepared for the covenant of grace? A: I do. 23. Q: But not all were prepared,

While we might be uncomfortable with Rollock's formulations, it is important to recognize that he did not see this conflicting in any way with the continuity of the one covenant of grace which stretched from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

83. Q: Then by the name 'Old Testament' you understand the covenant of grace?

A: The broader title 'Old Testament' extends equally to the law, or covenant of works, and to the covenant of grace which was joined to the law. The Apostle to the Hebrews teaches that the title 'Old Testament' should be accepted in this way (Heb. 8 & 9).<sup>169</sup>

24. Q: Was the covenant of grace, then, also established with the ancient Church and people?

A: It was, albeit there only obscure mention of it in the doctrine of the covenant of works and of the law (Gen. 3:5; 49:10; 22:18; 26:4).<sup>170</sup>

Rollock sees both covenants operating at the same time with one purpose and plan in the wisdom of God—the salvation of the elect. The covenant of grace is joined to the covenant of works in the Mosaic economy—to drive the elect away from their own righteousness and one to save them.

### *William Perkins (1558–1602)*

William Perkins is another foundational Reformed theologian who saw the covenant of works renewed with Israel on Mt. Sinai as the moral law was republished and summarized in the Ten Commandments. In his *Golden Chaine* he states,

Again, there are two kinds of this covenant. The covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. Jeremiah 31. 31, 32, 33. *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, I made with their fathers, when I tooke them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; the which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband to 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.*

The covenant of works, is God's covenant, made with condition of perfect obedience, and is expressed in the moral law.

The Moral Law, is that part of God's word, which commandeth perfect obedience unto man, as well in his nature, as in his actions, and forbiddeth the contrary.

The Law hath two parts. The Edict, commanding obedience, and the condition binding to obedience. The condition is eternal life to such as fulfil the law, but to transgressours, everlasting death.

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neither did all flee to the covenant of grace. A: True. But the elect were prepared. The reprobate, indeed, were reduced at length to desperation (Rom. 11:7)."

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND REPUBLICATION

The Decalogue, or ten commandments, is an abridgement of the whole law, and the covenant of works. Exod. 34. 27. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words, for after the tenour of these words, I have made a covenant with thee, and with Israel. And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights, and did neither eate bread, nor drinke water, and he wrote in the tables the words of the covenant, even the ten commandments.* 1. King. 8. 9. *Nothing was in the Arke, save the two tables of stone, which Moses had put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.* Mat. 22. 40. *On these two commandments hangeth the whole law and the prophets.*<sup>171</sup>

A few notes are in order. First, like Rollock,<sup>172</sup> the moral law is the covenant of works and as such it was given by God on Mt. Sinai. Second, the Mosaic covenant was different in substance from the covenant of grace insofar as it was a renewal of the covenant of works. His use of Exodus 34:27 and Jeremiah 31 make this clear.

In Perkins' comments on Galatians 4:24-25<sup>173</sup> the same points are made,

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: the covenant of grace, or the Gospel, reveals both the justice and mercy of God, or the justice of God giving place to his mercy. Secondly, the law requires us inward and perfect righteousness, both for nature, and action: the Gospel propounds unto us an imputed justice resident in the person of the Mediator. Thirdly, the law promises life upon condition of works: the Gospel promises remission of sins and life everlasting, upon condition that we rest our selves on Christ by faith. Fourthly, the law was written in Tables of Stone, the Gospel in the fleshly tables of our heart, *Jer 31.33. 2 Cor 3.3.* Fifthly, the law was in nature by creation: the Gospel is above nature, and was revealed after the fall. Sixthly, the Law has Moses for the Mediator, *Deut. 5. ver 27.* but Christ is the Mediator of the new Testament, *Heb. 8.6.* Lastly, the law was dedicated by the blood of beasts, *Exo. 24.5.* and the new Testament by the blood of Christ *Heb. 9.12.*<sup>174</sup>

Perkins here undeniably blends together the original covenant of works with Adam in creation and its renewal at Mt. Sinai with Israel, Moses being the mediator. They are almost indistinguishable.<sup>175</sup> He also articulates that the two covenants are different in substance following Rollock. The Mosaic covenant belongs on the covenant of works side of the ledger.

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<sup>171</sup> *Golden Chaine*, 32.

<sup>172</sup> *Catechism* Q. 16 & 17.

<sup>173</sup> "Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children."

<sup>174</sup> Galatians in *Works*, 2.299.

<sup>175</sup> "From the above we can also explain why the older theologians did not always clearly distinguish between the covenant of works and the Sinaitic covenant" (Vos, *Shorter Writings*, 255).

It is important to keep in mind that Perkins, while stating the covenant of works was renewed to Israel on Mt. Sinai, sees no contradiction in also affirming the one covenant of grace in both Testaments—it is the same in substance but differs in its administrations/accidents. He follows Rollock in seeing both covenants operating at the same time for very different reasons and yet unto one divine purpose—the salvation of the elect. He adds,

Hitherto concerning the covenant of works, and of the Law, now followeth the covenant of grace.

The covenant of grace, is that whereby God freely promising Christ, his benefits, exacts again of man, that he would by faith receive Christ, and repent of his sins...

...in this covenant we do not so much offer, or promise any great matter to God, as in a manner only receive: even as the last will and testament of a man, is not for the testators, but for the heires commodity.

The Covenant, albeit it be one in substance, yet is it distinguished into the old and new testament.

The old testament or covenant is that, which in types and shadowes prefigured Christ to come, and to be exhibited.<sup>176</sup>

### *Francis Turretin (1623-1687)*

We have already seen that Turretin holds to the broad/narrow distinction in defining the law. Following Calvin on this point, there is a form of contrast that Turretin holds where Law and Gospel are antithetical. However, it is not as simple for Turretin as it is for Rollock and Perkins. For Turretin, though in a narrow and strict sense, the Mosaic law and the new covenant are to be contrasted, the overarching covenant of grace forces Turretin to see and maintain continuity between the covenants at the most fundamental aspect. In other words, the covenant of grace so conditioned the context of the renewal of the law that it was better to speak of the covenant of grace legally administered.

However, it is important see that the law and gospel are operating simultaneously for Turretin. He argues that one cannot reduce the covenant of grace as it was administered under the law to mere grace.

And hence we can clearly gather what is to be determined about a question here agitated by some—whether the Decalogue promulgated on Mount Sinai contained nothing except the covenant of grace and its pure stipulation. For since from what has already been said, it is evident that the manner of this lawgiving was terrific, smiting with fear their consciences and by the severity of its threatenings removing them from the sight of God, everyone sees that this was not the manner or the genius of the covenant of grace (which exhibits God as appeased and recalls sinners to itself by the sweetness of its promises). Besides, the Law (contained in the Decalogue) is of natural right, founded on the justice of God; while the covenant of grace is of positive and free right, founded on his good pleasure and mercy. The latter sets forth a surety, promises remission of sins and salvation in his satisfaction; not only demands but also effects obedience. But in the Decalogue, no mention either of a surety, promises of salvation to be given to sinners occurs; but a bare promise of life to those doing and threatening of

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<sup>176</sup> *Golden Chaine*, 70.

death to transgressors. Hence the law of works (comprised in the Decalogue) is everywhere contrasted from the law of faith and the promise of grace for as the law is not of faith, so neither is faith of the law.<sup>177</sup>

Turretin does not want to be misunderstood. The Decalogue is not all that God is enacting through Moses since the covenant of grace has the priority. Even the giving of the law serves the covenant of grace. In the context of sin, it was impossible for the Lord to renew the covenant of works by itself or for itself. He says,

For since the law was made weak in the flesh after sin (Rom 8:3), the way to life by it became altogether impossible for man. Hence Paul testifies that the law was not given that it might give life (Gal 3:21) or that the promise first given to might be abrogated (Gal 3:17), but ‘on account of transgressions,’ that sin being uncovered by it, the necessity of grace might be the more clearly seen.<sup>178</sup>

Turretin concludes that though the law by itself is a covenant of works, because it was given in the context of sin and the fall, it serves the covenant of grace. The law so serves and is part of the covenant of grace that he favors defining the entire covenant transaction as the covenant of grace. Turretin follows his previous comments with,

Thus it is rightly said that the decalogue belonged to the covenant of grace; yea, in a measure flowed from it inasmuch as it was promulgated from the counsel of God that it might serve him—both antecedently as a schoolmaster, by convincing of sin, bringing to it men smitten with fear of death and despairing of themselves; and consequently as a rule, prescribing the measure of obedience and holiness demanded by God in the covenant of grace. Thus there should be in the decalogue various connections with the covenant of grace...<sup>179</sup>

It is here we learn what Turretin prefers to call his view—the covenant of grace legally administered or administered under a rigid legal economy. He is trying to hold the broad and narrow aspects of the law together as the Scriptures do. In other words, while the covenant of works is promulgated anew, it is not promulgated by itself and for itself, but in service to and under the covenant of grace. He tries to hold onto both covenants at the same time. He says,

A twofold relation ought always to obtain: the one legal, more severe, through which by a new promulgation of the law and the covenant of works, with an intolerable yoke of ceremonies, he wished to set forth what men owed and what was to be expected by them on account of duty unperformed. In this respect, the law is called the letter that kills (2 Cor 3:6) and the handwriting which was contrary to us (Col 2:14)... The other relation was evangelical, sweeter, inasmuch as the “law was a schoolmaster unto Christ” (Gal 3:24) and contained “the shadow of things to come” (Heb 10:1), whose body and express image is Christ. Hence as much of trouble and vexation as that economy brought in its former relation, so much of consolation and of joy it conferred in the latter upon pious men attending to it and

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<sup>177</sup> *Institutes*, XII.vii.28, (2.226).

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, XII.vii.29, (2.226).

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, XII.vii.30, (2.226-227).

seeking under that bark and veil the spiritual and evangelical truth (which the Holy Spirit taught them by a clearer revelation).<sup>180</sup>

“Broad and strict definitions of the law.” “A twofold relation of law and gospel in the one Mosaic economy.” “The covenant of grace in a rigid legal economy.” “The law added as accidental to the covenant of grace.” These are the ways Turretin explains the fact that two covenants are operating at the same time—the covenant of works and covenant of grace—and yet are not in conflict with one another in the plan and purpose of God for leading the elect to salvation in Christ in the Old Testament.

It is one thing for the old covenant strictly taken to differ essentially from the new. The apostle had this in view in the allegory of Sarah and Hagar (Gal 4:24), the former generating to freedom, the latter to bondage. He disputes against the false who confounded the law and gospel, which is referred to in 2 Cor 3:6, 7, in the antithesis between “the letter” and “the Spirit,” “the ministration of condemnation” and of “righteousness.” It is however another thing (when broadly considered as to economy) to be opposed as to the substance, which we deny.<sup>181</sup>

### *Conclusion*

How are we to evaluate our Reformed fathers on this matter? We have Rollock and Perkins (and others) who emphasize that the Old Covenant and the New Covenant differ as to substance. They are two covenants and not one covenant in two administrations. On the other hand, our equally Reformed fathers such as Turretin (along with Calvin and others) emphasize the broader use of the Law and make the Old and New Testaments the same in substance only differing in administration. Are these men and their views at odds with one another? Can each of these views reside within the Reformed communion? What of the other men who see no republication of the covenant of works at all? We defer to Turretin’s thoughts on these questions,

Those of our party (as Rollock, Pisactor, Trelcatius and others) who make two covenants diverse in substance, take the old covenant strictly, not only separating the promise of grace from it, but opposing the one to the other. In this sense, Paul seems to take it frequently (as 2 Cor 3; Gal 4), so that the old covenant is the covenant of works and the new the covenant of the gospel and of faith. On the other hand, they who maintain only one (as Calvin, Martyr, Ursinus) take the word covenant more broadly, as embracing also the promise of grace (although somewhat obscurely). Because the promise was dispensed in different ways before and after Christ, they distinguish it into two—old and new—by a distribution not of genus into species (as the former), but of subject according to accidents (which the other do not deny); thus they differ only as to the different use of words of terms, but not as to the thing itself...<sup>182</sup>

Turretin can find no substantial difference between his own views (covenant of grace administered through the covenant of works) and the views of Rollock and others who hold to two covenants differing in substance operating at the same time in the Old Testament. To find differences is to

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, XII.vii.31, (2.227).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, XII.viii.12, (2:236).

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, XII.vii.6, (2.234).

quibble over words and not over anything substantial. It is because, in the end they all affirm: 1) The one covenant of grace administered in both testaments; 2) The Law taken strictly is different in substance from the covenant of grace; is a covenant of works; 3) The renewal of the covenant of works was not given for salvation and justification but in service to the covenant of grace; 4) Therefore, there is a broader use of the term law to refer how the Lord led His elect to faith in Jesus Christ in the Old Testament by administering the covenant of grace either legally or alongside the covenant of law.

Father and brothers, it seems to us that this is nothing less than republication. No more. No less. Though it is expressed in different ways, these are the basic points affirmed by republicationists. It is not that there were not those who believed that the Mosaic Covenant was simply and only a covenant of grace. All we are saying here is that was not the view of these men, who are some of the most influential figures in our tradition.

## TRAJECTORIES WITHIN THE REFORMED TRADITION

Thus far we have tried to do two things. We have tried to establish the consistent pattern set by Calvin of understanding two covenants at work in the Old Testament - one of works and one of grace. We have also tried to acknowledge that there has been a variety of language employed in an attempt to articulate this dichotomy. We would now like to follow a few different trajectories that have emerged in an attempt to explain just what God was doing through this twofold structure.

### *J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)*

J. Gresham Machen's view very closely aligns with Calvin and Turretin. For Machen, "the Pauline doctrine of justification is absolutely unintelligible except upon the basis of a strict view of law..."<sup>183</sup> The contrast offered between Sinai and Abraham is nothing less than "two conceivable ways of salvation. One way is to keep the law perfectly, to do the things which the law requires."<sup>184</sup> The giving of the law, while intended to serve the covenant of grace, was not itself an act of grace. In his critical review of Ernest De Witt Burton's commentary on *Galatians*,<sup>185</sup> he says,

It is rather difficult to make out of the writer of Galatians 2 and 3 a complacent believer in the religion of modern naturalism, who uses the term "justification" to designate the mere acceptance by God of a lower goodness than that which His law requires, and who regards faith itself as a meritorious work. With regard to the religion of modern liberalism as with regard to the teaching of the Judaizers in Galatia, the real Paul would have said: "I do not make void the grace of God: for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nought" (Gal. 2:21). But it is useless to quote individual verses to Professor Burton, no matter how plain they may seem. *The ingenuity of our commentator is equal*

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<sup>183</sup> *Notes on Galatians*, 228.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>185</sup> *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, in *The International Critical Commentary*, (Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, NY, 1920). Burton was Professor of New Testament Interpretation in the University of Chicago and was a Modernist/Liberal.

*to any task. Thus the verse just quoted, the key verse of the Epistle, coming though it does after a glorious passage where even one who is unprepared to accept the gospel of Paul might be expected to understand something of what it meant to him, our commentator actually makes "the grace of God" refer to the giving of the law to Israel. Paul, he says, is answering an attack of the opponents to the effect that he was making of no account "the special grace of God to Israel in giving them the law." In the presence of such exegesis the reader may well stand aghast. Paul has poured out his soul before us. But all to no purpose.*<sup>186</sup>

Machen says the key verse in Galatians (2:21) is meant to teach us that Sinai cannot give us salvation, because it is of works or, as he prefers to call it, merit. Machen is not denying that the giving of the law does not ultimately serve the covenant of grace, he is denying Burton's argument that it is advocating the way God intends his people to find salvation. This, Machen says, is Paul's heart and soul, which has fallen on deaf ears in Burton.

At no place in his *Notes on Galatians* does Machen employ the traditional language of "re-enactment" or "revival" of the covenant of works, nor does he use the language of a covenant of grace legally administered. However, the substance is there when he connects it to the law written on the hearts of the Gentiles.<sup>187</sup> His formulations of Sinai offering eternal life for perfect obedience are most clearly aligned with Calvin and Turretin.

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 228, (emphasis ours). This is taken from a review on Burton's commentary on Galatians. We comment the entire review to the reader. His point here was that Burton (a Modernist) was trying to join the law of Moses to the gospel and thus make salvation part works and part grace.

<sup>187</sup> "This interpretation does not, however, do away with the application of this glorious text to all of us today. Nothing could be further from Paul's thought than to hold that although Christ redeemed Jewish Christians from the curse of the Mosaic law there was no divine curse from which He redeemed all Christians. On the contrary, in Rom. 2:14f. Paul says that even the Gentiles have the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness" (*Ibid.*, 179). Machen tips his hand regarding his school of interpretation when he says, The Epistle to the Galatians, "the Magna Charta of Christian liberty," has fallen again upon evil days. It had fallen upon evil days at the close of the middle ages. It was buried then under the Roman Catholic system of merits, and under the trivialities of medieval exegesis. And now again, in the pages of Professor Burton's commentary, it is buried under the neo-legalistic slavery of the modern "liberal" Church. But the message of the Epistle is essentially plain, and cannot permanently be obscured. It was discovered by Luther at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Will some man of God discover it again, and set humanity free? (*Ibid.*, 229-230). Here Machen admits that he sees Luther's understanding of Galatians as essentially accurate. We commend Luther's commentary. Machen is clear, over and over again, that the problem with the Judaizers was not that they saw a works principle in the Mosaic covenant, but that they thought they could keep it. Put more simply the error that Paul argues against is that Judaizers thought they could find life in the covenant given at Mt Sinai. He warns, "Finally, Paul concludes the central section of the epistle by emphasizing the gravity of the crisis. Gal. 5:1-12. Do not be deceived. Circumcision as the Judaizers advocate it is no innocent thing; it means the acceptance of a law religion. You must choose either the law or grace; you cannot have both... Try to keep the law in your own strength and you will fail, for the flesh is too strong" (*Ibid.*, 205). "The Judaizers are dead and gone, but not the issue that they raised. Faith or works—that is as much as ever a living issue. "Salvation by character" is just a modern form of Judaizing, and a modern form of bondage to the law" (212).

### ***National Covenant of Works (Typological Republication)***

There were others in the tradition who agreed with Calvin and Turretin on the foundational works principle in the Mosaic covenant, but located it as operating on a national level.

### **Herman Witsius (1636-1708)**

Turretin's contemporary Herman Witsius agreed with this understanding of the Mosaic covenant. As with Perkins, the connection between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of works is made explicit.

We more especially remark, that, when the law was given from mount Sinai or Horeb, there was a repetition of the covenant of works.... And the apostle in this matter, Heb 12:18-22, sets mount Sinai in opposition to mount Sion, the terrors of the law to the sweetness of the gospel.<sup>188</sup>

Witsius is not a dispensationalist. He follows Calvin and the others in seeing the Sinaitic Covenant as being distinguished from, but attached to the covenant of grace. He says,

As the covenant of grace, under which the ancients were, is not to be confounded with, so neither is it to be separated from, the Sinaitic covenant: neither are we to think that believers were without all those things which were not promised by the Sinaitic covenant, and which the typical covenant, because of its weakness and unprofitableness, could not bestow; as they were likewise partakers of the Abrahamic covenant, which was a pure covenant of grace: and hence were derived the spiritual and saving benefits of the Israelites.<sup>189</sup>

Here is his distinction between the law broadly speaking and strictly speaking. There are two covenants operating simultaneously. Salvation comes not through Sinai, but through the Abrahamic covenant of grace. Sinai is given to serve this reality, not compete with it and thus they must not be separated. In fact, Witsius develops this typical language when he says that the Mosaic covenant should be understood as a

...national covenant between God and Israel, whereby Israel promised to God a sincere obedience to all his precepts, especially to the ten words; God, on the other hand, promised to Israel, that such an observance would be acceptable to him, nor want its reward, both in this life, and in that which is to come, both as to soul and body.<sup>190</sup>

### **Robert Shaw (1776-1853)**

Robert Shaw articulated the law as a "subservient covenant." That is he believed that it was joined to the covenant of grace to serve it. For this reason, he calls the Sinaitic Covenant a mixed covenant. Yet in the giving of the law in the Ten Commandments he says that it was a covenant of works.

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<sup>188</sup> Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, (P&R: Phillipsburg, NJ, 1990), IV.iv.48, (2:183)

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.xii.26, (2:336-37).

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, IV.iv.54, (2:186).

It may be remarked, that the law of the ten commandments was promulgated to Israel from Sinai in the form of a covenant of works. Not that it was the design of God to renew a covenant of works with Israel, or to put them upon seeking life by their own obedience to the law; but the law was published to them as a covenant of works, to show them that without a perfect righteousness, answering to all the demands of the law, they could not 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 their justification is graciously provided. The Sinai transaction was a mixed dispensation. In it the covenant of grace was published, as appears from these words in the preface standing before the commandments: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;" and from the promulgation of the ceremonial law at the same time. But the moral law, as a covenant of works, was also displayed, to convince the Israelites of their sinfulness and misery, to teach them the necessity of an atonement, and lead them to embrace by faith the blessed Mediator, the Seed promised to Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. The law, therefore, was published at Sinai as a covenant of works, in subservience to the covenant of grace. And the law is still published in subservience to the gospel, as "a schoolmaster to bring sinners to Christ, that they may be justified by faith."—Gal. iii. 24.<sup>191</sup>

It is clear that Shaw is wrestling with the same tension that Calvin and others wrestled with. The law by itself has a clear works principle. Its covenantal form is one of works. Yet it was given as a part of and in the interest of (or in subservience to) the covenant of grace.

### **Charles Hodge (1797-1878)**

Witsius' language of the national covenant was picked up by Charles Hodge. He said, "The Mosaic system was also a national covenant; that is, it presented national promises on the condition of national obedience. This aspect also was purely legal."<sup>192</sup> Here, Hodge picks up on Witsius' distinction. He saw the Mosaic covenant dealing with Israel as a corporate person.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, when the nation did well it prospered together. Likewise, when it failed all suffered together.<sup>194</sup> It is this language of a national covenant that Witsius attached to the notion of typology. Hodge, following Witsius, saw the works principle as functioning differently than the original covenant of works. Seen this way, Israel functioned as a corporate person as it re-enacted Adam: receiving a wonderful Garden-land, receiving a works covenant, failing in disobedience, and being expelled to the east. Israel was a typological recapitulation of Adam's failure and provided a clear picture of what Christ as the Last Adam would need to do in order to deliver his people. This leads to Hodge's third point that the law reveals the gospel, which will be dealt with in the following chapter.

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<sup>191</sup> Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (Inverness: Christian Focus, 1974), 195.

<sup>192</sup> *2 Corinthians*, 54.

<sup>193</sup> This language is familiar in the Old Testament. Cf. "Israel is my firstborn son" (Ex 4:22); "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me" (Hos 6:7); "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos 11:1).

<sup>194</sup> For example when David sinned by counting the army, seventy thousand people died for his sin (2 Samuel 24). Also, when Israel failed to keep the seven-year sabbaths for the land, everyone went into exile even Daniel and his friends (Dan 1).

*James Buchanan (1804-1870)*

James Buchanan was similar to Witsius in that he said the Mosaic covenant “had a mixed character,—the ‘Law’ which came by Moses being ‘added’ to the ‘Promise’ which had been given to Abraham. It was neither purely Evangelical, nor purely Legal.”<sup>195</sup> What he meant by this was similar to Hodge’s third point about the covenant, namely that it preached the gospel. Therefore, he employs the language of those who went before him as seeing it added in the interest of the covenant of grace. He says,

The addition of the Law was not intended to alter either the ground, or the method, of a sinner's justification, by substituting obedience to the Law for faith in the Promise; for the Law which was originally 'ordained unto life' was now found, by reason of sin, 'to be unto death;' but it was now 'added,' and promulgated anew with awful sanctions amidst the thunderings and lightnings of Sinai, to impress the Jews, and through them the Church at large, with a sense of the holiness and justice of Him with whom they had to do,—of the spirituality and extent of that obedience which they owed to Him,—of the number and heinousness of their sins,—and of their utter inability to escape the wrath and curse of God, otherwise than by taking refuge in the free promise of His grace.<sup>196</sup>

So for Buchanan, as for Calvin and the others, the competing principle of works at Sinai was not ultimately opposed to the covenant of grace because it was not intended to function as a competing way to obtain eternal life. This is made clear when he says, “Believers were justified, therefore, under the Law, not by works, but by faith: by faith, they were ‘the children of Abraham,’ and ‘heirs with him of the same promise.’”<sup>197</sup> Notice his language of “believers under the law” and how it mirrors the Confession’s and how it comports with this historic use of the law understood broadly.

What, then, is Buchanan’s resolution for the competing principle of works in the Mosaic covenant? He follows Witsius and Hodge and identifies with the national covenant.

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.<sup>198</sup>

On this national level Buchanan understood the retention of the outward blessings and possession of the land as being contingent upon the obedience of the nation. This was not an issue of individual obedience and blessing. The effect on the individual, Buchanan says, is from the lesson learned through the national covenant.

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<sup>195</sup> *Doctrine of Justification*, 27.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus considered,—as a reexhibition 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. But when the Gospel, which had been preached beforehand to Abraham, was known and believed, so as to impart a lively apprehension of ‘the forgiveness which is with God,’ then conviction of sin might become genuine contrition,—remorse might be turned into repentance,—and the more thoroughly the Law had done its work in the conscience, the more gladly would the promise of a Saviour be received into the heart.<sup>199</sup>

This benefit, which will be treated in further detail in the following chapter is, of course, the very benefit Calvin articulated years earlier. The themes that remain consistent is seeking to understand how not to pit the Mosaic covenant against the covenant of grace in terms of salvation, while, at the same time, being honest with its legal character and requirement for obedience in exchange for reward. Buchanan, as with Witsius and Hodge, continues to see the benefit of addressing this in terms of the corporate nation or, as Witsius called it, its “typical” (or typological) character.

### *Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)*

Geerhardus Vos’ understanding of the Mosaic covenant comes out in comments he makes on 2 Corinthians 3 (which was Hodge’s key passage). Vos says,

...in 2 Corinthians 3 the two *diathekai* [covenants] compared, that of the letter and that of the Spirit, represent two great systems and methods of religious procedure, working themselves out through two corresponding ministries, that of Moses and that of Paul, and thus inevitably shaping the result of human destiny and experience according to their intrinsic law of operation. The old *diatheke* is the system of legal administration: it issues into bondage, condemnation, and death. The new *diatheke* is the system of spiritual procreation and endowment prevailing through Christ: it produces liberty, righteousness, and life... The form is the same, the content poured into it differs; and the form as such is indifferent to the distinction between grace and works.<sup>200</sup>

We need to remember this in the context of what we saw earlier from Vos. Commenting on why the older theologians did not always radically distinguish between the covenant of works and the Sinaitic covenant, he says, “At Sinai it was not the ‘bare’ law that was given, but a reflection of the covenant of works revived, as it were, in the interests of the covenant of grace continued at Sinai.”<sup>201</sup> This is following in the trajectory of Witsius, Hodge, and Buchanan. What he calls “a reflection of the covenant of works” is fully consistent with what Witsius calls its typical character. All of this is done “in the interest of the covenant of grace continued at Sinai.” Vos is simply repeating what theologians had been articulating for centuries. None of these men saw the works principle published at Sinai as being ultimately competitive with the covenant of grace. Far from it—they saw it as serving that covenant.

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<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Shorter Writings*, 176-177.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

*Louis Berkhof (1873–1957)*

This articulation of the works element in the Mosaic covenant was common by the early 20th century and its formulation more precise along these lines. Louis Berkhof echoed these men in his *Systematic Theology* published in 1939

The Sinaitic covenant 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. But the covenant of Sinai was not a renewal of the covenant of works; in it the law was made subservient to the covenant of grace.... It is true that at Sinai a conditional element was added to the covenant, but it was not the salvation of the Israelite but his theocratic standing in the nation, and the enjoyment of external blessings that was made dependent on the keeping of the law (Deut 28:1-14).<sup>202</sup>

Berkhof agrees the Law was reinstated at Mt. Sinai in subservience to the covenant of grace. It pertained, not to individual salvation, but to the national retention of the external blessings. In this way, it reminded the people of the covenant of works.

*Summary*

The trajectory set by Calvin was not universally adopted or embraced. There was a breadth to the historical articulations of the Mosaic covenant. To suggest that there was a univocal Reformed view would be dishonest.

Nevertheless, we contend that the Republication view has a long and continuous history from Calvin to our present day. While the nuances of articulation regarding the Mosaic covenant change over time, the substance remains the same from Calvin to Machen. It should not surprise us that each generation clarifies certain points that the previous generation wrestled with. As Murray aptly said, "when we use the term 'covenant theology,' however, we must not restrict this evaluation to the more fully developed covenant theology of the seventeenth century."<sup>203</sup> One ought to expect development in articulation. The understanding of the Mosaic covenant did not come fully formed in the 16th century but the trajectories are clearly there.

It is not hard to trace those trajectories from Calvin to Ursinus, Cartwright, Rollock, Fenner, Perkins, Ames, and Pemble, and then to Owen and Turretin, and onto Witsius, Boston, Edwards, and Shaw, which are then embraced by Hodge, Buchanan, Bavinck, Vos, Berkhof, and our own Machen. Each of these men agree that the Old Testament (the 'law' broadly speaking) testifies both to God's grace (expressed in the covenant of grace) as well as his justice (which offers life for obedience) and that this was conveyed in the form of a works covenant (the 'law' strictly speaking) given at Mt Sinai by the hand of Moses. Each of these men agree that this covenant gave life to not one normal man due to his fallen and sinful nature, which he inherited from Adam. Each of these men agree that the law was

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<sup>202</sup> Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI), 298-299.

<sup>203</sup> *Covenant of Grace*, 3.

given in order to promote the covenant of grace by shutting men up under sin and directing them to Christ.

## REPUBLICATION IN THE BIBLE

While the language of “strict” or “narrow” uses of the law is a systematic construction, the substance behind it was deeply rooted in exegesis. Our fathers were men of the Word, committed to a high view of Scripture and so their comments on the law were saturated in biblical references and reflection. Space does not allow a full treatment of all the places that have been appealed to throughout the Scriptures. Therefore, we will limit ourselves to those most commonly cited in the tradition and within the Westminster Standards.

(A quick word of introduction is necessary for what follows. We confess that in the treatment below we have many citations, often of a lengthy nature. We made the decision to include these because we believed that it is important to see that the exegesis of these passages that we are propounding is not new or novel, but has a long and thoroughly Reformed pedigree. We did not simply want to claim agreement with the fathers, we wanted to demonstrated it. We thank you for your patience in advance.)

### *Genesis 15 and Exodus 24*

A good place to start will be to contrast the two ratification ceremonies of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. This has been briefly touched on above by some of our Reformed fathers making what follows not entirely new.

Genesis 15 records for us the formal ratification ceremony of the Abrahamic covenant. We saw the Lord’s surprising footsteps through the slain animals as an oath of self-malediction. He was calling down curses upon Himself while pledging His own life for the blessedness of Abraham and His true children. This is is the pure covenant of grace. It is important to note that Abraham does not pass through the slain animals. Abraham can only rest and trust in what the Lord is doing in his place (Gen 15:6).<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> It is important to distinguish between the ceremony that ratifies the covenant (Gen 15) and subsequent oaths which publically unite a person to the covenant already established. Circumcision is just such a subsequent oath on the part of Abraham and his children. Genesis 15 and 17 are clearly connected theologically/sacramentally in a similar fashion to the way the death and resurrection of Christ and baptism are connected. However, Genesis 17 is not a ratification ceremony. It is a sign and seal of the covenant blessings but not the covenant itself (Rom 4:11). Genesis 15 is the ratification of the Abrahamic covenant and is founded upon God’s oath of malediction. For this reason, the covenant itself cannot fail or be broken. People can be added or removed from the covenant (Esau) but the Abrahamic covenant is never broken since it is squarely founded on what God pledges to do. In other words, they can break covenant with God and fail to rest and trust in His work but the covenant remains firm even though they are broken off.

## THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND REPUBLICATION

The scene in Exodus 20-24 is similar to and yet very different from Genesis 15. The similarities are found in the theophanic presence of God as fire and smoke, the proclamation of the covenant, the swearing of an oath, and the fact that both are covenant ratification ceremonies.

Unlike Genesis 15, Exodus 24 records Israel's oath of malediction as the ratification of the covenant. This brings into sharp focus the difference between the two covenants (Gal 4:24). The Abrahamic covenant is ratified by God's self-maledictory oath while the Mosaic covenant is ratified by Israel's self-maledictory oath. In Exodus 24, Moses reads aloud the book of the covenant, even the Ten Commandments (24:7). In keeping with Ancient Near East practices, the covenant is ratified over the symbolic curse and death of the one swearing the oath.<sup>205</sup> This is the meaning of the sprinkled blood. The sacrifices are cut and their blood spilled. Then this blood is sprinkled upon the people as they swear the oath of allegiance,

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."<sup>206</sup>

It is clear what is being ratified here—the two parts of the covenant. On the one hand, we see the stipulations of the covenant, and on the other, we see the oath of the people. The blood binds these together and ratifies them as a covenant. As the blood is sprinkled upon the people, the message is this: "let our blood be spilled if we fail to do all the Lord has commanded us today." In other words, they are walking the pathway of death through the slain animals—they are making the maledictory oath.

Not only do we have the Pentateuchal contrast between Genesis 15 and Exodus 24 but we have further light shed on the Sinai covenant through Jeremiah's later word. The prophet comes against the people because they fail to keep the covenant that they swore by not letting the Jewish male and female slaves go free (34:8-9). The people initially keep the oath but then take back the men and women as slaves (34:10). The Lord then reminds them of the covenant of Sinai which lays behind the command to let the slaves go free.

Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I myself made a covenant with your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, saying, 'At the end of seven years each of you

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<sup>205</sup> It is important to note the Lord is not passive here like Abraham was passive in Genesis 15. The Lord swears his own fidelity in this covenant to administer the sanctions of the covenant and even calls heaven and earth to bear witness to the covenant transaction enacted between Him and the Israelites. He will be faithful to His word and covenant to bless and curse, even if that means pouring out his wrath upon His people and executing the curse sanctions of the covenant. In what must be one of the most terrifying verses in the entirety of the Scriptures, the Lord says "And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it" (Deut 28:63; cf. Deut 32 and the Song of Moses).

<sup>206</sup> Exodus 24:7-8.

must set free the fellow Hebrew who has been sold to you and has served you six years; you must set him free from your service.<sup>207</sup>

This was the basis for the command. This is what the people in Jeremiah's day were pledging themselves to remember and do. But like their fathers, they "did not listen to me or incline their ears to me" (v. 14). God's name has been profaned. The liberty and freedom the Lord accomplished in the exodus for all his people is not being perpetuated as men and women are enslaved again within Israel. Because they did not keep the Law and uphold the covenant by proclaiming liberty and freedom to the slaves the Lord now proclaims liberty over the ones who transgressed the covenant—liberty "to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine, declares the LORD. will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (v. 17). Justice and equity will be administered in the curse sanction. The Lord speaks about the covenant,

And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts—the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf. And I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their lives. Their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.<sup>208</sup>

First, note that the covenant-making in Jeremiah's day is simply enforcing the covenant the Lord made with Israel on the day they came out of Egypt at Mt. Sinai. Second, the Lord will make them like the animals between which they passed. Finally, their bodies will be as food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth (remarkably similar to Genesis 15 when Abraham scared off the birds ready to eat the carcasses of the slain animals in that ratification ceremony).

What is clear is the connection between Mt. Sinai and the covenant-making ceremony in Jeremiah's day. Israel passed through the slain animals and the blood was sprinkled on them. Israel invoked the curses of the covenant upon herself should she fail to do all the Lord commanded. This is a Law Covenant—a covenant in which blessings and curses are suspended upon the obedience and disobedience of the people.<sup>209</sup>

Without taking into consideration the larger plan and purpose of God concerning the covenant of grace, strictly speaking, Genesis 15 and Exodus 24 are contrasting covenants of Promise and Law (Gal 3

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<sup>207</sup> Jeremiah 34:13–14.

<sup>208</sup> Jeremiah 34:18–20.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. "19. Q: In what manner and order was the covenant of works renewed? A: You have the order in Exodus 19 and 20. First, God says through Moses, "If you will observe my covenant (that is, my law), certainly you will be my own peculiar possession." Then, the people said together, "Whatever Jehovah says we will do." When Moses had reported the people's counter-obligation (*restipulatione*) to God, God promulgated his law—that is, the principal divisions of his covenant, which should be observed by the people—from Mount Sinai" (Rollock, *Catechism*).

& 4).<sup>210</sup> To say this is not to say everything about Exodus 24 and all that God is doing with a sinful people. Yahweh, the God of Israel is the God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, but also the God of wrath and justice. This is the God Israel is in covenant with through the law and so to reduce all that God is doing to one facet is a truncating of God's character revealed to Israel.

*Israel is a Typological Adam in a New Eden*

Another angle of divine revelation we have to account for is the correlation between the Adamic situation in Eden and the situation of Israel in the Promised Land. As we noted in our section on the covenant of works, Adam receives divine honor and blessedness in being made in the image of God. What is man that the Lord should be mindful of him? There is nothing inherently worthy within Adam to move God to do what he does and yet God bestows such benevolence and kindness upon him. The Lord sets Adam within the Garden of Eden where God will dwell with His people and be their blessedness. However, Adam is also under probation. Set before him is life and death in blessing and curse. If he obeys the Lord, he is blessed. If he disobeys the Lord, he will be cursed. Sadly, Adam fails and disobeys. His exile to the east from the Garden of God is the sign of his being under God's judgment as God places the angelic guardians to stand watch with the flaming sword turning in all directions. If Adam is going to return and have life, he must pass through the flaming sword of God's justice now mounted against him and any others who might approach.<sup>211</sup>

It is difficult to miss the way the Lord re-enacts the Adamic pattern in Israel and the Promised Land. The Lord chooses Israel and sets His love upon them for no inherent reason within Israel. There is nothing in Israel that warrant's God's grace, favor and blessing. He bestows great honor on them for the reason that He is a God who loves to take and love the weak and small things of this world and make them recipients of His grace.

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you

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<sup>210</sup> Murray is worth noting here, not because he agrees with the contrast between Genesis 15 and Exodus 24 (obviously). Rather, because he makes the point concerning the distinctive feature of the Abrahamic covenant of promise as God walking through the slain animals and swearing the oath. He says, "It is perhaps the most striking sanction that we have in the whole of Scripture, particularly if we interpret it as a self-maledictory oath in which, anthropomorphically, God calls upon Himself the curse of dismemberment if He does not fulfil to Abraham the promise of possessing the land... It is not Abraham who passes through between the divided pieces of the animals; it is the theophany... Abraham here does not pledge his troth to God by a self-maledictory oath but God condescends to pledge troth to His promise, a fact which advertises the divine sovereignty and faithfulness as brought to bear upon and as giving character to the covenant constituted" (*Covenant of Grace*, 16-17). He is correct in identifying the unique character of this ceremony as determinative for the nature of the Abrahamic covenant. But as we have seen, Israel walks through the slain animals in Exodus 24 and swears the self-maledictory oath and therefore that ceremony indicates the Mosaic covenant is different than the Abrahamic covenant as a law covenant.

<sup>211</sup> The scene of Genesis 3:24 is what lies behind parts of the imagery of Genesis 15. When the Lord passes through the slain animals, **He** is undergoing the knife of His own justice so that Abraham and all the elect might enter into the presence of God and all blessedness from which they are barred from in Adam. They do so through the new and living way of the blood of the Son of God who passess through the slain animals in Genesis 15 and then is completely cut off in cross (Col 2:10-11 & Heb 10:19-22).

## THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND REPUBLICATION

were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.<sup>212</sup>

He makes Israel His unique possession by redeeming her and bringing her to His holy mountain. He gives His Law to Israel as a great blessing. He sets His name upon Israel. Israel learns who Yahweh is.

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?<sup>213</sup>

As they march through the wilderness to the Promised Land, it is important to see the Promised Land set alongside the book of Genesis. It is not without importance that Eden and the Promised Land are compared in Genesis. Abraham comes out of Egypt in Genesis 13 (just like his children will do one day) and comes to Bethel to the west of the Jordan River. There Abraham and Lot survey the Promised Land: "And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD..." (Gen 13:10). Yet one is also reminded of this land's characterization for Israel as well: "The land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for. The eyes of the LORD your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (Deut 11:11–12).

If the Promised Land is presented in connection to Eden, a land the Lord loves and uniquely cares for, it is no coincidence that when the Israelites approach Canaan on its eastern border they encounter the same Angel of the Lord with his sword drawn who was ready to slay Balaam since the Lord's anger was kindled against him and his intentions.<sup>214</sup> Forty years later after the wanderings of Israel are over, Joshua is now poised to lead the people into the Promised Land through its eastern border. Once again, the Angel of the Lord stands guard at the eastern border with a sword drawn in His hands.

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.<sup>215</sup>

The nation of Israel, having been circumcised (Joshua 5:2-9) by going under the knife is now ready to face the Angel with His sword drawn. Joshua's first question is totally misplaced (v. 13). The issue is not

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<sup>212</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6–8.

<sup>213</sup> Deuteronomy 4:6–8.

<sup>214</sup> Numbers 22.

<sup>215</sup> Joshua 5:13–15.

what side the Angel of the Lord is on but rather whether or not one is aligned with the Angel. He is the captain of the army of the Lord and is ready to do battle against all those under God's judgment. The parallels between Genesis 3:24 and these two occurrences of the Angel with the sword drawn is manifest. The same direction Adam is exiled from Eden is the same direction from which Israel enters the Promised Land by God's grace and faithfulness.

Once they are in the special land of God's dwelling, they are placed under the law where blessing or curse—life and death—is made conditioned on their obedience. Like Adam (Hosea 6:7), they are under the covenant of works ratified at Mt. Sinai, but now in force since the law looked forward to their entrance into the land. This is the context for the entire book of Deuteronomy—what life looks like under the law in the Promised Land.

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.<sup>216</sup>

Like Adam who was God's son, Israel is God's son (Ex 4:22; Hos 11:1; Matt 2:15) on probation under the law within the Promised Land. If Israel obeys, he is blessed. If Israel disobeys, he will die as he is exiled to the east like Adam. Then God's sword of justice will be unleashed against Israel and His wrath poured out upon him (Lev 26:25, 33, 36; Deut 28:15ff; 32:40-42; 2 Chron 36:16).<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Deuteronomy 30:15–20.

<sup>217</sup> This layer within the Scriptural revelation of God's works and ways seems to us too much to ignore. In fact, we now return to a point we made earlier in our comments of the temptation narrative of Jesus. We clearly saw the connections between Jesus and Adam. Jesus is being set before us as the Last Adam come to undo the sin and misery caused by the fall of the first Adam and to do what Adam failed to do as God's son. However, those same temptation narratives have the traces of Israel's history too. Adam and Israel are overlaid as they come to Jesus. He is the Last Adam and True Israel. There are features of the story which mirror not Adam but Israel: the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness, the 40 days Jesus is in the wilderness, the scriptural quotations Jesus counters Satan's temptations with all find their referent point in Israel's history. Jesus is being presented as the Last Adam and True Israel. He is doing what Adam and Israel did not and could not do. The typology of Israel as a new Adam and son under a renewed covenant of works provides the background and context to much imagery of Christ's life as the true Israel. In other words, what we have in Matthew 4 is a dramatic portrayal of Galatians 4:4-5. Jesus, God's Son, is born of a woman and born under the law in order to redeem those who are under the law. His birth as an Israelite under the law provides the legal context for His work as the Last Adam.

However, this is where things become complicated. God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which Israel is inheriting are not given all at once. The promise included kings, land and people (i.e. the kingdom of God). This is one of the reasons<sup>218</sup> that despite being under the law, the Lord does not execute the curse of the law upon his people as a whole. His faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is keeping his wrath at bay.<sup>219</sup> The kingdom of Israel reaches its apex under the early rule of Solomon. First Kings 4:20-34 present the kingdom of Israel in its perfected and idyllic stage. All of the promises made to Abraham are fulfilled in their typological and earthly form (but not in their eschatological fulfillment). Israel is as numerous as the sand on the seashore (Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:6; 22:17). Solomon is the great king ruling over all the territory promised to the patriarchs (Gen 12:1; 15:18-21; 17:8). Solomon is the wise king who has brought peace, rest, safety and security to the land and to the people (Gen 17:6; 49:8-10). It is difficult to read 1 Kings 4 without thinking about the Garden of Eden and what life was supposed to be like—Israel is fruitful and has multiplied, Solomon has dominion, and each of God's people has his own vines and fig trees. This is exactly what the Lord promised to Abraham. He has been faithful to His word. Not even Israel's sin could prevent the Lord from performing the oath sworn to the patriarchs.

However, things are not as perfect as they might seem. King David had already sinned and incurred God's wrath against the nation. His son was killed by the Lord (2 Sam 12). Nathan the prophet declares that David's house was to be under the Lord's sword of judgment (2 Sam 12:10) and what was done in secret would be repaid in public as David's house was ripped apart. The division within David's house will soon overtake the nation under his son's and grandson's rule. In other words, as soon as God keeps his oath to give Israel all He promised the fathers, it is like the beginning of the end for the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. They incur the curse and not the blessing. There are brief times of respite but by in large Israel and her kings spiral down into sin and misery. The Lord is patient. The Lord has compassion on His people. He relents over and over again providing many opportunities for Israel to do the right thing but in the end she never does.

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem.

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<sup>218</sup> This is not the only reason. God reveals Himself as the God of wrath and mercy and justice and grace. This is Israel's Lord, Yahweh, the name proclaimed to Moses in Exodus 34:5-7.

<sup>219</sup> See the story of Exodus 32-34 for example. Israel breaks the covenant as soon as it is made by worshipping the golden calf (evidenced by the breaking of the tablets of the covenant). The Lord's anger burns against Israel and He tells Moses he's going to wipe them out and start over with Moses. Moses intercedes for Israel. He pleads with the Lord and appeals to the Lord's faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (32:13). "And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people" (Ex 32:14).

## THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND REPUBLICATION

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy."<sup>220</sup>

God's patience and compassion can only hold back His judgment against Israel for so long. It is no surprise that Israel is exiled from the land to the east, like Adam and Eve, completing the circle as it were. The covenant is broken and is made void by Israel's disobedience. Israel will die under the curse of the law as the Lord will depart from the temple and the land. The faithful and elect remnant within Israel will suffer the same fate as the nation. They struggle to come to grips with all that God is doing.<sup>221</sup> Habakkuk and Jeremiah undergo severe wrestling matches with the Lord because they do not understand the wisdom of God. God will kill Israel but will also bring her back to life. After death, life will come—another way in which Israel's history takes the shape of Jesus Christ who suffers death under God's law for his people.<sup>222</sup> A new covenant will be established after exile. God will bring Israel back, not because they are righteous. He will act for His Name's sake—for the demonstration of His power, His grace and redeeming love.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

Israel broke the covenant. She was not just cut off from the covenant. The covenant was terminated and made void by her law-breaking. Yet the Lord promises a better covenant, that is, a new covenant. Like most prophecies, there is a near and a far referent. In its immediate sense, this promise concerns Israel's return from exile—God will bring them back to the promised land. But ultimately this promise is concerned with Jesus Christ. After death, life will come along with a new covenant and a new creation. God will slay Jesus in His justice and will raise Him from the dead and in Him a new Israel

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<sup>220</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:11–16.

<sup>221</sup> We are only discussing one aspect of the exile—the judicial. It is an important aspect but not the only aspect. God is also leading His elect people to greater faith through the exile as he disciplines them in order to wean them from the earthly to embrace the invisible blessings of heaven. The prophet Habakkuk experiences such discipline as his prophecy moves from his earthly perspective at the beginning to his magnificent confession of laying hold of the blessings beyond judgment (3:17–19). He had to come to grips, like all of us, with God's wisdom, His works and ways (1:5), that we are not righteous by the law (1:13), but rather we are righteous by faith (2:4), and those who are righteous by faith will live even though heaven and earth will be sent into convulsions by the Lord's coming (3:2–16).

<sup>222</sup> "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (Hosea 6:1–2).

will be born. In Christ's death and resurrection a new covenant will be ratified (Heb 8-10)—an eternal covenant—and this covenant cannot be broken since it will be ratified in the righteousness and blood of Jesus Christ and not on the oath of the people. It is a covenant that has already been operating in the Old Testament bringing eternal and heavenly blessings to Christ's people from the very beginning but enters a new stage of history in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>223</sup>

Republication seeks to do justice to the complexity of what the Lord was doing in Israel as Israel points beyond herself to Jesus Christ as the true Israelite, the faithful law-keeper and Servant of the Lord who suffers the curse of the Law in exile for His people that they might have life under God's ever-renewing blessings. Republication seeks to see the important Adamic imagery in Israel's history not as a regression in redemptive history but as a progression in the revelation of what Jesus Christ must do for His people in his active and passive obedience. Our brief investigation into the New Testament below will reveal the same truths.

***Leviticus 18:5; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12***

Without a doubt, Leviticus 18:5<sup>224</sup> is of great significance. The apostle Paul quotes it two times in his treatment of the law (Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12).<sup>225</sup> Generally, speaking there are two views offered on how Paul is using Leviticus 18:5. There are those who assert that Paul is arguing that the Judaizers (a legalistic sect in the first century) have misunderstood Leviticus 18:5 to mean that salvation is by works, and Paul is simply quoting it as an example of the legalistic misunderstanding of the law which really is of faith.<sup>226</sup>

We, on the other hand, argue that Paul is not quoting some legalistic misunderstanding of Leviticus 18:5, but its God-intended meaning. It is not that the Judaizers are not legalists—they are. It is not that their understanding of the purpose of the Mosaic covenant is not wrong—it is. The difference lies in locating their misunderstanding. Was it in seeing works as being required in the Mosaic covenant? Or

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<sup>223</sup> “The new covenant is also taken in a twofold manner either broadly, inasmuch as it stands for the covenant of grace in general made with sinners, which existed under the Old Testament as well before Christ appeared as under the New after he had been manifested; or strictly, for the covenant of grace promulgated after the manifestations of Christ in the flesh, which should continue to the end of the world” (Turretin, *Institutes*, XII.vii.5, (2.234) - see also XII.v.33, (2.203)).

<sup>224</sup> “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.”

<sup>225</sup> “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them” (Rom 10:5). “But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them’” (Gal 3:12).

<sup>226</sup> For example Vos says, “With equal clearness the comparative viewpoint as introducing the emergence of the conception can be observed in Galatians 4. Here Paul speaks of two contrasting *diatheke*, i.e., two great religious systems operating by diverse methods and with opposite results, the one a *Hagar-diatheke*, geographically associated with Mount Sinai, the other a *Sara-diatheke*, having its local center in the heavenly Jerusalem. There is a difference between this and 2 Corinthians 3 insofar as there the old and the new were contrasted in their original God-willed and God-given character, whilst here in Galatians the Sinaitic-Hagar diatheke is the old system as perverted by Judaism. But the comparative manner of handling the idea is the same in both passages and in both cases is alike responsible for its introduction” (*Shorter Writings*, 163).

was it in thinking that they could keep it and that such an approach was compatible with seeking Christ by faith? The answer lies in Paul's corrective, which comes in the form of contending that Sinai presents a completely different system from that which he gave to Abraham, one where life is found not in faith in a Mediator, but in personal obedience—"the one who does these things shall live by them."

There is nothing in Galatians 3 or Romans 10 to suggest that the law (strictly speaking) does not offer life for obedience on its own terms. If that were the case, Paul would have said something along the lines of "where does Moses speak of a righteousness of the works? For the law says, 'Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" But this is not what Paul says. He quotes Genesis 15:6 as operating differently than the law. Commenting on Romans 10:5, Calvin says,

...it rightly appertained to Moses as his own and peculiar office, to teach what is the real righteousness of works, and then to show what remuneration awaits the observance of it, and what punishment awaits those who come short of it. For this reason Moses is by John compared with Christ, when it is said, "That the law was given by Moses, but that grace and truth came by Christ" (John 1: 17). And whenever the word law is thus strictly taken, Moses is by implication opposed to Christ: and then we must consider what the law contains, as separate from the gospel. Hence what is said here of the righteousness of the law, must be applied, not to the whole office of Moses, but to that part which was in a manner peculiarly committed to him... The passage is taken from Leviticus 18: 5, where the Lord promises eternal life to those who would keep his law; for in this sense, as you see, Paul has taken the passage, and not only of temporal life, as some think. Paul indeed thus reasons,—"Since no man can attain the righteousness prescribed in the law, except he fulfills strictly every part of it, and since of this perfection all men have always come far short, it is in vain for any one to strive in this way for salvation: Israel then were very foolish, who expected to attain the righteousness of the law, from which we are all excluded." See how from the promise itself he proves, that it can avail us nothing, and for this reason, because the condition is impossible.<sup>227</sup>

Calvin is rigorously consistent on this point. His comments on the use of Leviticus 18:15 in Galatians 3:12<sup>228</sup> are equally clear.

The contradiction between the law and faith lies in the matter of justification. You will more easily unite fire and water, than reconcile these two statements, that men are justified by faith, and that they are justified by the law. "The law is not of faith;" that is, it has a method of justifying a man which is wholly at variance with faith... The difference lies in this, that man, when he fulfils the law, is reckoned righteous by a legal righteousness, which he proves by a quotation from Moses. (Leviticus 18:5)... the

<sup>227</sup> *Romans*, 386-387. Calvin's use of Leviticus 18:5 in this way is not limited to those passages where Paul quotes it. Commenting on Romans 2:13, he writes, "This anticipates an objection which the Jews might have adduced. As they had heard that the law was the rule of righteousness, (Deut 4:1,) they gloried in the mere knowledge of it: to obviate this mistake, he declares that the hearing of the law or any knowledge of it is of no such consequence, that any one should on that account lay claim to righteousness, but that works must be produced, according to this saying, 'He who will do these shall live in them'[Lev 18:5]. The import then of this verse is the following,—'That if righteousness be sought from the law, the law must be fulfilled; for the righteousness of the law consists in the perfection of works.' They who pervert this passage for the purpose of building up justification by works, deserve most fully to be laughed at even by children" (*Romans*, 95).

<sup>228</sup> "But the law is not of faith, rather *The one who does them shall live by them.*"

present question is not, whether believers ought to keep the law as far as they can, (which is beyond all doubt,) but whether they can obtain righteousness by works, which is impossible.<sup>229</sup>

Calvin asserts that Leviticus 18:5 presents a strict contrast in terms of justification. The law justifies those who keep it perfectly—what he calls a “legal righteousness.” Thus, for Calvin, the misunderstanding of the Judaizers in Galatia was not in locating a works principle in the Sinaitic covenant, but in thinking that they have sufficiently kept it.

But since God promises life to the doers of the law, why does Paul affirm that they are not righteous? The reply to this objection is easy. There are none righteous by the works of the law, because there are none who do those works. *We admit that the doers of the law, if there were any such, are righteous; but since that is a conditional agreement, all are excluded from life, because no man performs that righteousness which he ought. We must bear in memory what I have already stated, that to do the law is not to obey it in part, but to fulfill everything which belongs to righteousness; and all are at the greatest distance from such perfection.*<sup>230</sup>

Calvin states in no uncertain terms that this is really and truly the offer of the law. In its own terms, the law offers life for perfect obedience. Its only problem is that it can find none who are righteous enough to fulfill its conditions.<sup>231</sup>

Nearly three hundred years later, Charles Hodge would be making the same arguments from the same passages.

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<sup>229</sup> *Galatians*, 91.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, (emphasis ours). That Calvin understood Paul to be accurately describing what the law really offered is also made unavoidable in other places such as his comments on Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 27:26; Romans 10:5, etc. Also see the appendix by David Inks which addresses this in more detail.

<sup>231</sup> Calvin argues the same thing looking at Galatians 3:17: “From ceremonies, accordingly, he takes occasion to discuss the whole subject of faith and works. If the point in dispute had no connection with obtaining righteousness, with the merit of works, or with ensnaring the conscience, ceremonies would be quite consistent with the promise” (*Galatians*, 96-96). Compare his comments on Romans 4:4: “It is not he, whom he calls a worker, who is given to good works, to which all the children of God ought to attend, but the person who seeks to merit something by his works: and in a similar way he calls him no worker who depends not on the merit of what he does. He would not, indeed, have the faithful to be idle; but he only forbids them to be mercenaries, so as to demand any thing from God, as though it were justly their due... I agree with Bucer, who proves that the argument is not made to depend on one expression, but on the whole passage, and formed in this manner, ‘If one merits any thing by his work, what is merited is not freely I imputed to him, but rendered to him as his due. Faith is counted for righteousness, not that it procures any merit for us, but because it lays hold on the goodness of God: hence righteousness is not due to us, but freely bestowed.’ For as Christ of his own good-will justifies us through faith, Paul always regards this as an evidence of our emptiness; for what do we believe, except that Christ is an expiation to reconcile us to God? The same truth is found in other words in Galatians 3:11, where it is said, ‘That no man is justified by the law, it is evident, for the just shall by faith live: but the law is not by faith; but he who doeth these things shall live in them.’ Inasmuch, then, as the law promises reward to works, he hence concludes, that the righteousness of faith, which is free, accords not with that which is operative: this could not be were faith to justify by means of works—We ought carefully to observe these comparisons, by which every merit is entirely done away” (*Romans*, 158).

*For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law.* That is, concerning the righteousness which is of the law, Moses thus writes. In the last clause of the preceding verse it was clearly intimated that faith was the condition of salvation under the gospel. ‘To everyone, without distinction, that believeth, is justification secured.’ On this the apostle connects his description and contrast of the two methods of justification, the one by works and the other by faith... *The righteousness which is of the law.* The word righteousness has here its common and proper meaning. It is that which constitutes a man righteous, which meets the demands of the law, or satisfies the claims of justice. The man who is righteous, or who possesses righteousness, cannot be condemned... We must either have a righteousness of our own, or receive and trust in a righteousness which is not our own, but which has been wrought out for us, and presented to us, as the ground of our acceptance with God. The quotation is from Lev. xviii. 5, ‘The man that doeth those things shall live by them.’ Those things are the things prescribed in the law. It is the clear doctrine of the Scriptures, that obedience to the law, to secure justification, must be perfect. For it is said, ‘Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them;’ [Deut 27:26] and, he that offendeth in one point, is guilty of all. It is not necessary that a man who commits murder should also steal, in order to bring him under the penalty of the law. The legal system, then, which demanded obedience, required perfect obedience. Those, and those only, who were thus free from sin, should live, i.e., shall enjoy that life which belongs to him as a rational and immortal being. It is a life which includes the whole man, soul and body, and the whole course of his existence, in this world and in that which is to come... But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, *Say not, &c.* Moses says one thing; the righteousness of faith says another thing. The same kind of personification occurs in Gal. iii. 23, 25. The phrase righteousness of faith, or as it is here, which is of faith... [means] the righteousness which is received by faith... it is Christ’s righteousness, his obedience, blood, or death, which is the ground of our acceptance with God, and which it receives and rests upon.<sup>232</sup>

Just as Calvin had done 300 years earlier, Hodge see Paul simply unpacking the Mosaic covenant’s own understanding of itself. Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 27:26 again play an integral place in defending this premise. If one would seek justification through the Mosaic covenant, then he must obey the law perfectly or else face the wrath and curse of God.

Hodge, like Calvin, calls this the principle of *merit*. Commenting on Romans 4:4,<sup>233</sup> he says,

*Now to him that worketh*, that is, either emphatically ‘to him who does all that is required of him;’ or ‘to him who seeks to be accepted on account of his works.’ The former explanation is the better. The words then state a general proposition, ‘To him that is obedient, or who performs a stipulated work, the recompense is not regarded as a gratuity, but as a debt.’ The reward, ο μισθος, the appropriate and merited compensation. Is not imputed, *κατα χριστιανισμω* *αλλα κατα οφειλημα*, not grace, but debt, which implies that a claim founded in justice is the ground and measure of remuneration. Paul’s argument is founded on the principle, which is so often denied, as by Olshausen, (p. 172,) that man may have merit before God; or that God may stand in the relation of debtor to man. The apostle says expressly, that τω δε εργαζομενω to him that works, the reward is a matter of debt. If Adam had remained faithful and rendered perfect obedience, the promised reward would have been due to him as a matter of justice; the withholding it would have been an act of injustice. When, therefore, the apostle speaks of Abraham as having a ground of boasting, if his works made him righteous, it is not to be understood simply of

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 337-338.

<sup>233</sup> “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”

boasting before men. He would have had a ground of boasting in that case before God. The reward would have been to him a matter of debt.<sup>234</sup>

Hodge goes so far as to assert that the whole argument of Paul from chapter 2 through 10 regarding the Mosaic covenant versus the Abrahamic covenant is to drive home this point. If salvation could be obtained through the Mosaic covenant, it would be by merit— reward for obedience. But this is impossible in a fallen world. He writes,

*Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?* This is not to be confined to giving counsel or knowledge to God, but expresses the general idea that the creature can do nothing to place God under obligation. It will be at once perceived how appropriate is this thought, in reference to the doctrines which Paul had been teaching. Men are justified, not on the ground of their own merit, but of the merit of Christ; they are sanctified, not by the power of their own good purposes, and the strength of their own will, but by the Spirit of God; they are chosen and called to eternal life, not on the ground of anything in them, but according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. God, therefore, is the Alpha and the Omega of salvation. The creature has neither merit nor power. His hopes must rest on sovereign mercy alone.<sup>235</sup>

Hodge expresses nuances that were not present in Calvin. Hodge makes the explicit connection between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of works, which was only implicit in Calvin (who never explicitly articulated the Adamic covenant of works). While it is true that Hodge also picked up on Witsius articulation of the Mosaic covenant as a typological-national covenant, his basic foundational understanding of the Mosaic covenant is simply what Calvin espoused.

J. Gresham Machen also spoke of the Mosaic covenant in its strict legal sense. He speaks at length on this issue in what would become his *Notes on Galatians*. The problem that Machen sees happening in Galatia is that the Judaizers are not misunderstanding the nature of the Mosaic covenant (i.e., the law). The problem, he argues, is that they are trying to supplement faith with works in order to obtain salvation.<sup>236</sup> However, the point of Galatians 3-5 is to show that “being justified by faith and being justified by works are mutually exclusive.”<sup>237</sup> Machen calls these two ways of being justified “grace and merit”<sup>238</sup> and he sees them summarized in Galatians 3:10-14, about which he writes,

But that in the law [practically the same as ‘by means of the law’] no one is justified before God is plain, because [as Scripture says, Hab. 2:4] ‘the just shall live by faith.’ But the law is not of faith [does not partake of the nature of faith], but [as Scripture says, Lev. 18:5] ‘he who has done them [the

<sup>234</sup> *Romans*, 113. See also his summary of Romans 3:9-20 (pg. 87) and his comments on Romans 3:27 on (pg. 100).

<sup>235</sup> *Romans*, 379.

<sup>236</sup> “Now we turn to the second main division, embracing the central portion of the Epistle from Gal. 3:1 to Gal. 5:12, in which Paul defends the content of his gospel of free grace as over against the Judaizers’ contention that faith, in the attainment of salvation, must be supplemented by works” (*Notes on Galatians*, 162).

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

commandments] shall live in [or 'by'] them.' These words, 'he who has done them shall live in them,' Paul means to say, 'describe the nature of the law. It requires doing something... There are two conceivable ways of salvation. One way is to keep the law perfectly, to do the things which the law requires. No mere man since the fall has accomplished that. The other way is to receive something, to receive something that is freely given by God's grace. That way is followed when a man has faith. But you cannot possibly mingle the two. You might conceivably be saved by works or you might be saved by faith; but you cannot be saved by both. It is 'either or' here not 'both and.' But which shall it be, works or faith? The Scripture gives the answer. The Scripture says it is faith. Therefore it is not works.

Such is Paul's argument. The law, far from bringing the blessing, brought only a curse. Far from being an aid to salvation, the law in itself was a stupendous obstacle to salvation. It was not merely that salvation had to be obtained in a way that was independent of the law. That is no adequate statement of the case. No, the stupendous obstacle which the law interposed against salvation had to be overcome before salvation could be obtained.<sup>239</sup>

Machen says the law is a system of "merit"—salvation by works. This is exactly how Calvin understood this passage.<sup>240</sup> Notice Machen does not follow Vos, but Calvin in seeing what is being described here as the original intent of Leviticus 18:5.<sup>241</sup> The law (strictly speaking) is of works and not faith, which is why it can bring only a curse. For Machen, Paul was driving a wedge between the system proffered to Abraham and the system proffered at Sinai:

In the second main division, Gal. 3:1 to 5:12, Paul defends his gospel against the perversion of it attempted by the Judaizers. *The Judaizers said: 'You are saved by faith and by works. You need Christ's help, but part of your salvation you must earn by keeping the law.'* 'No,' said Paul, 'you must take your choice. Earn your salvation if you can. Then you must keep the whole of the law; which is impossible. Or else, trust unreservedly in Christ. He will do everything or nothing. By his death he has paid the penalty imposed by the law upon our sins. If, therefore, by faith we are united with him, the law has nothing more to say to us. It is as though we had died. We can start fresh. We can begin a new life, free from the law and free from the wrath of God. Salvation is not something we can earn by keeping the law. It is a free gift.'<sup>242</sup>

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-179 (brackets are Machen's).

<sup>240</sup> On Galatians 3:11, Calvin said, "But that no man, is justified by the law. He again argues from a comparison of contradictory schemes. If we are justified by faith, it is not by the law: but we are justified by faith therefore it is not by the law... The law justifies him who fulfils all its precepts, while faith justifies those who are destitute of the merit of works, and who rely on Christ alone. *To be justified by our own merit, and to be justified by the grace of another, are two schemes which cannot be reconciled: one of them must be overturned by the other*" (*Galatians*, 89-90, emphasis ours).

<sup>241</sup> Machen makes this abundantly clear in his comments on Galatians 5:14: "Paul is speaking about 'works of the law'—that is, works which are intended to earn salvation by fulfilling the law through human effort" (*Ibid.*, 221). This is made further evident by his comments on Galatians 3:1-5, where he says, "He [Paul] proves it first by an argument from experience. Gal. 3:1-5. You received the Holy Spirit, in palpable manifestation, before you ever saw the Judaizers, before you ever thought of keeping the Mosaic law. You received the Spirit by faith alone. How then can you now think that the law is necessary? Surely there can be nothing higher than Spirit" (*Ibid.*, 204).

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 211 (emphasis ours). This is but an amplification of what he said a page earlier, "The false teachers were 'Judaizers,' and seem to have been very much like the Judaizers who are described in Acts 15:1, 5, 24. They insisted on observance of the Mosaic law, in addition to faith in Christ, as necessary to salvation" (*Ibid.*, 210). If the Mosaic Law is simply the covenant of grace, this does not make sense. Machen is clearly articulating Calvin's view of the Mosaic covenant (strictly speaking) as offering

As we have shown, this was Calvin’s understanding of Leviticus 18:5 and its uses in Galatians 3:12 and Romans 10:5. It was also Machen’s understanding of this passage as well as the understanding of many Reformed leaders in between. Furthermore, it is the way that these passages are employed by our Confessional Standards (cf. WCF 7.2; 19.1; WLC 20, 24, 30, 92, 93; WSC 40). In none of these sections is the Confession saying that the covenant of works / the moral law operated on the basis of legalistic misunderstanding of the Judaizers. The Standards simply take these words at face value as articulating the principle of works—life for obedience.

***Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10-11***

This same reality is operating in Paul’s use of Deuteronomy 27:26.<sup>243</sup> Paul quotes this verse in Galatians 3:10 to demonstrate the reality that any who want to be justified by works, must keep the law perfectly.<sup>244</sup> The thrust is the same as his use of Leviticus 18:5. He is telling his audience to read the law carefully—it requires absolute perfection. That is why he says any who rely upon it for salvation are under a curse. This a common theme for him; he says the identical thing in Romans 3:20. Again, Paul is not saying that the Judaizers were mistaken in thinking that the law requires perfect obedience, rather he was saying they were mistaken in thinking that they could satisfy that requirement. Calvin writes,

The argument is drawn from the contradictory nature of the two schemes; for the same fountain does not yield both hot and cold. The law holds all living men under its curse; and from the law, therefore, it is in vain to expect a blessing... Now, we know that the controversy here relates to righteousness. All who wish to be justified by the works of the law are declared to be liable to the curse... The sentence of the law is, that all who have transgressed any part of the law are cursed... This argument of Paul would not stand, if we had sufficient strength to fulfill the law; for there would then be a fatal objection to the minor proposition. Either Paul reasons badly, or it is impossible for men to fulfill the law.<sup>245</sup>

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salvation through works. Finally, Machen says, “[The Judaizers] believed that in addition to the law it was necessary to have the grace of Christ, but that human merit, though not sufficient, was necessary. And it was against such a position that the Epistle to the Galatians was written. There are two possible ways, says Paul, of attaining salvation—in the first place perfect obedience, and in the second place acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ. But the whole Epistle is directed against any mingling of the two” (*Ibid.*, 228-229). Machen cannot say this if he adopts a legalistic misinterpretation view. Paul is not saying “the law never intended or offered this” but “if life is to be obtained *at all* by the law, it requires perfect obedience.”

<sup>243</sup> “‘Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen’” (Deut 27:26).

<sup>244</sup> “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, *Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.* Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for *The righteous shall live by faith*” (Gal 3:10–11).

<sup>245</sup> *Galatians*, 88-89. See also his comments on Romans 4:15: “This is a confirmation of the last verse [4:14], derived from the contrary effect of the law; for as the law generates nothing but vengeance, it cannot bring grace. It can indeed show to the good and the perfect the way of life: but as it prescribes to the sinful and corrupt what they ought to do, and supplies them with no power for doing, it exhibits them as guilty before the tribunal of God” (*Romans*, 171).

The reason that law grants justification to no man has to do with its operative principle. Sinners may be justified by grace, but they cannot be justified by the law.<sup>246</sup>

This too was Calvin's understanding of Paul's use, as we have seen above. Furthermore, it is the way the Westminster Assembly used it in their proof-texts. The Standards cite Galatians 3:10 in WCF 19.1 and WLC 24, 30 and 93. In each case it is to defend the works principle in the covenant of works / the moral law or in the definition of sin (in conjunction with the covenant of works; cf. WLC 24).

### ***Galatians 3:10-24***

We believe that these uses of these passages (to articulate the operative principle in the covenant of works) is fully consistent with the tradition and the intention of those passages. However, it needs to be stated that in their direct context Paul is addressing the Mosaic covenant. As we briefly examine Galatians 3:10-21, it will be clearly seen that Paul uses "law" there to speak of what the Fathers called the "strict sense" (i.e., the Mosaic covenant). There he discusses it according to its God-given intentionality in order to refute the legalism of the Judaizers.

That Paul is referring to the Sinaitic covenant should be beyond debate. He writes that "the law came 430 years after Abraham" (v 17) which is when Sinai took place. He adds that it was "put in place through angels by an intermediary" (v 19). In verse 15 he compares it with a man-made covenant. In verse 18 he contrasts principles of inheritance (law/works and promise/grace). This only makes sense in terms of covenants. However, all doubt is removed in chapter four when he espouses that Sarah and Hagar is an allegory of two covenants, Hagar being Mt Sinai. For Calvin, it was the presence of the covenant in this passage that makes sense out of the language works-righteousness. Commenting on Galatians 3:17, he writes,

...Paul took into account what was certainly true, that, except by a covenant with God, no reward is due to works. Admitting, then, that the law justifies, yet before the law men could not merit salvation by works, because there was no covenant. All that I am now affirming is granted by the scholastic theologians: for they maintain that works are meritorious of salvation, not by their intrinsic worth, but by the acceptance of God, (to use their own phrase,) and on the ground of a covenant. Consequently, where no divine covenant, no declaration of acceptance is found,—no works will be available for justification: so that Paul's argument is perfectly conclusive. He tells us that God made two covenants with men; one through Abraham, and another through Moses. The former, being founded on Christ, was free; and therefore the law, which came after, could not enable men to obtain salvation otherwise than by grace, for then, 'it would make the promise of none effect.' That this is the meaning appears clearly from what immediately follows.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Calvin goes on to say, "[Paul] again argues from a comparison of contradictory schemes. If we are justified by faith, it is not by the law: but we are justified by faith therefore it is not by the law... The law justifies him who fulfils all its precepts, while faith justifies those who are destitute of the merit of works, and who rely on Christ alone. To be justified by our own merit, and to be justified by the grace of another, are two schemes which cannot be reconciled: one of them must be overturned by the other... As we had occasion to expound this passage where it occurs in the Epistle to the Romans" (*Galatians*, pg. 89-90).

<sup>247</sup> *Galatians*, 97-98. This is virtually identical to his comments on Romans 3:20: "It is a matter of doubt, even among the learned, what the works of the law mean. Some extend them to the observance of the whole law, while others confine them to the ceremonies alone... the law hath promises, without which

English Puritan, William Perkins was also influenced by Calvin in his reading of the Mosaic covenant. We noted above that Perkins identifies the covenant of works in Paul's statement in Galatians 4:24—that Sarah and Hagar were two covenants. He asserts that “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: the covenant of grace, or the Gospel, reveals both the justice and mercy of God, or the justice of God giving place to his mercy.”<sup>248</sup>

Here then falls to the ground the main pillar in Popish religion, which is, that the law of Moses, and the Gospel, are all one law for substance: and that the difference lies in this, that the law of Moses is dark and imperfect and the Gospel, or the Law of Christ more perfect: because he has (as they say) added counsels to precepts. Again, the Law (they say) without the Spirit, is the law properly and with the spirit, is the Gospel: But all this is false which they reach. For the two Testaments, the Law and the Gospel, are two in substance, or kind: and the difference lies not in the presence or absence of the Spirit.<sup>249</sup>

Perkins says that the papists end with the very thing that Calvin claimed the Judaizers sought—a justification mixed of works and grace.<sup>250</sup> Perkins then goes on to echo Calvin that the “law” is identified with the Sinaitic covenant and that it can only bring death when sinners are involved.<sup>251</sup> The

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there would be no value in our works before God. You hence see the reason why Paul expressly mentioned the works of the law; for it is by the law that a reward is apportioned to works. Nor was this unknown to the schoolmen, who held it as an approved and common maxim, that works have no intrinsic worthiness, but become meritorious by covenant... Wisely then and rightly does Paul speak here; for he speaks not of mere works, but distinctly and expressly refers to the keeping of the law, the subject which he is discussing.... we contend, not without reason, that Paul speaks here of the whole law; for we are abundantly supported by the thread of reasoning which he has hitherto followed and continues to follow, and there are many other passages which will not allow us to think otherwise. It is therefore a truth, which deserves to be remembered as the first in importance,—that by keeping the law no one can attain righteousness. He had before assigned the reason, and he will repeat it presently again, and that is, that all, being to a man guilty of transgression, are condemned for unrighteousness by the law. And these two things—to be justified by works—and to be guilty of transgressions, (as we shall show more at large as we proceed,) are wholly inconsistent the one with the other” (*Romans*, 130-133).

<sup>248</sup> *Galatians*, 299.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> “And whereas the Papists make two justifications, the first merely by grace, the second by works: besides the two Testaments, they must establish a third Testament composed of both: and it must be partly legal, and partly Evangelical, otherwise the twofold justification cannot stand. For the Law propounds only one way of justification, and the Gospel a second. The doctrine therefore that propounds both, is compounded of both” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>251</sup> “Here again Paul lets down two properties of the Testament of works, or of the law. The first is, that it came from mount Sinai. And here lies the difference between the law and the Gospel: the Law is from Sinai, the Gospel from Zion or Jerusalem. For there it was first to be preached, and from thence conveyed to all nations, Mich. 4.1. Ezech 47.1. The second property of the Law is, that it genders to bondage: because it makes them bondmen, that look to be saved and justified thereby. And this it does, by revealing sin and the punishment thereof, which is everlasting death, and by convincing all men of their sins, and of their deserved condemnation. In this respect, it is called the ministry of death, 2 Cor. 3.6. and Paul says, that after he knew his sins by the law, he died, and the law was the means of death to him, Rom. 7.10” (*Ibid.*).

option for Perkins was the same as Calvin—Christ or the law but not both. He ends his comments on Galatians 4:24 with the sad acknowledgement that most of the world, including those who are Isaac’s descendants by the flesh, are the spiritual heirs of Ishmael who think they have good works to offer God.

Again, as Hagar signifies the law so does Ishmael all beneficiaries, that look to be saved by the law. Here then we see the condition of the world the greatest part where are Ishmaelites. The Turk, and the Jew, look at this day to be saved by their works. The papists describe this conversion not wholly to grace, but partly to grace, and partly to nature, or to the strength of man well help by grace. And thus are they born after, as Ishmael was. And our common people, though in show they preferred reformed Religion, yet in deed a great part of them are Ishmaelites. For they look to be saved by their good serving of God, and by their good deeds: and they little think on Christ and his merits. And thus they deprive themselves of all title to eternal life. Therefore it stands them in hand to condemn nature and the strength thereof and to renounce their own works and to rest only on the promise of mercy for eternal salvation: thus shall they be the Children of the promise, and Heirs of God.<sup>252</sup>

These men have understood the use of “law” in this passage to mean the God-given intention of the law, not some legalistic misunderstanding. This passage holds together and makes sense because Paul is contrasting the two God-given ways of life. The only way his citations of the Mosaic covenant (and his statements concerning God giving the law and it not being opposed to the promise) work is if he is asserting, “Yes the Judaizers see works here and they are correct—their problem is that they think they can keep them” (because it was not intended to give life, but shut men up under sin).

Machen ended up giving a more direct critique of the misunderstanding view when he reviewed Burton’s commentary on Galatians. It is against this dialogue partner that Machen’s views on Galatians become succinct and crystal clear. His first challenge is to Burton’s notion that it is ceremonialism that Paul is addressing in Galatians. Paul, Machen argues, is contrasting merit with grace:

Professor Burton regards the Epistle to the Galatians as directed against ceremonialism and externality and a piecemeal morality which divides the Law of God into separate rules. There is of course a certain measure of truth in this opinion. In one passage, somewhat obscure it is true, Paul does apparently characterize the Jewish forms which the Galatians were adopting as belonging to the period of childhood from which the Christian man has emerged, but in the Epistle as a whole the thought of externalism, as against spiritual religion, is entirely subordinate. The real point of the Epistle is quite different. What Paul is really attacking in Galatians is not ceremonialism in religion, or a divisive morality, but the principle of merit. The real controversy in Galatia was not between outward works and inward works, but upon human merit however attained and the divine grace.... Modern liberalism is clearly a religion of merit, which brings satisfaction to its adherents only because they hold a lax view of sin and of the law.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>253</sup> *Notes on Galatians.*, 226-227.

Having established that it is justification that is at stake and this from two competing “principles,” Machen proceeds finding great fault with Burton’s argument that what Paul argues against is simply a legalistic misunderstanding of the law rather than the original intention of the law itself.

It is true, Professor Burton repudiates the ‘law in the legalistic sense,’ and believes that Paul repudiated it. But he believes that there is a higher sense of the word ‘law,’ in accordance with which it designates a complete expression of the will of God including mercy, and that Paul maintained the law when it is so considered. The meaning seems to be that Paul supposed God to look with complacency upon the transgressions to which all men are subject if only there be a true effort on man’s part to obey God’s will. In other words, God is content with a relative goodness, and the mistake of the Judaizers was to suppose that he dealt with men on the basis of strict justice. There could be no greater error. *As a matter of fact, the whole of Paulinism is founded not upon a lax interpretation of the law of God, but upon a strict interpretation.* The demands of the Law could not be set aside in the interests of practical religion. And all were under the curse. But Christ took the curse upon Himself, and paid the Law’s penalty for us. Such is the teaching of Paul. *The Pauline doctrine of justification is absolutely unintelligible except upon the basis of a strict view of law; it is absolutely unintelligible upon the basis of ‘liberalism.’* It is because Paul was not a liberal Jew that he could be the apostle of Christian liberty.<sup>254</sup>

Here Machen sides with Calvin—that Paul is referring to the law as God intended it, with a strict demand for perfect obedience. The mistake of the Judaizers was not in finding a principle of works at Sinai, but in thinking they could keep it. We believe that Calvin’s reading was the most consistent and satisfying. For this reason it has been adopted by so many within the Protestant tradition since him. It is this reading that accounts for the Westminster Standards’ use of Galatians 3 and 4 in its proof-texting.

### ***Romans 2:12-14***

The connection between the Mosaic covenant and the law given at creation becomes especially clear in Romans 2 and 5. First, we read in Romans 2:12-14

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.

Paul, here, is dealing with two opposing groups in the church in Rome. The Gentile believers and the Jewish believers are pitting themselves against each other. In Romans 1:18 through 3:20 Paul is driving them to see that they both stand condemned before God if they are judged on the basis of their own works.

In verse 12 he says that they are equally condemned—the Jews under the law and the Gentiles without the law. This is clearly not the broad use of law. Paul is not saying that the Old Testament will condemn believing Jews because they have not done everything required in it. Nor is he saying that

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<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-228 (emphasis ours).

the Gentiles do, by nature, all the things written in the Old Testament (circumcision, etc). Rather he is appealing to the standards of God's righteousness at Sinai that promises life to those who perfectly keep it. It is this that Gentiles know about, because it was written on their hearts. Man was created with an understanding of the obedience he owed to God (WLC 17).

Paul is asserting that the law given at Sinai (i.e., the Mosaic covenant) reiterated the law given at creation, under which all men—Jew and Gentile—stand condemned in their own works. The Gentiles can stand condemned without the Sinaitic covenant, because they had something virtually identical in creation and their consciences bear testimony to this fact.

### ***Romans 5:12-14***

This argument is further developed in chapter 5. Paul writes,

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come (vv. 12-14).

Again, Paul is referring to the Gentiles who did not have the law given by Moses. His question is simple, how can they be held liable if there was no law (i.e., covenant)? He asserts that sin (breaking God's law; WSC 14) is only imputed or accounted to a man where there is a law—something that attaches consequence for obedience or disobedience. If a man does something that displeases God, but there is no legal arrangement (i.e., legislation) that attaches consequences to it, then he cannot be punished. Thus, Paul's question: "How can man, prior to the giving of such a law at Sinai stand condemned? Surely all who died before Sinai are not 'off the hook,' are they?"

Paul affirms that is impossible since man died before Moses. The implied argument is that death is the legal consequence of sin (Romans 6:23; WSC 84). In other words, there must have been a legal arrangement like that given to Moses before the time of Moses. His solution is in Adam. Adam's one transgression plunged all men into death meaning Adam must have had a death-sanctioned law (or legal arrangement) that served the same retribution the Mosaic covenant did, namely punish sin with death. This is how death could be meted out on mankind prior to Sinai.

As noted above, Calvin sensed something like this taking place but only went as far as asserting that Adam had something similar to the Mosaic covenant in the Garden. He did not have a fully articulated doctrine of the covenant of works. However, by the time of the Westminster Assembly the connection between Romans 5 and the covenant of works was clear since Romans 5:12ff is cited in conjunction with the covenant of works / moral law (WCF 6.2, 3; 7.2; WLC 23, 25, 30, 84, 93; WSC 16, 18). It is this covenantal reality that the WLC then claims was rearticulated in the Ten Commandments (WLC 98).

### ***Romans 6:14; 7:1-10***

This covenantal relationship between sin and death explains what Paul writes in the following chapter: "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace"

(Romans 6:14). The point here is the same—sin is only legally punished where a law is in place. If the believer is not under the law with its legal sanctions (i.e., “as a covenant of works”), it cannot have dominion over him. This is the same thing that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law” (v 56). Paul is not claiming that the law is sinful or that it empowers sin, but that it gives the legal basis for punishing sin since it attaches the sanction of death to disobedience (cf. Genesis 2:16-17; Leviticus 18:5). The Westminster Standards see this as Paul’s argument and quote Romans 6:14 to defend the statement that the believer has been “delivered from the law as a covenant of works” (cf. WCF 19.6; WLC 97). The Standards are not alleging that the believer has been delivered from the covenant of grace as a covenant of works, but rather the moral law given to Adam and then again at Sinai which attaches the punishment of death to sin. The believer is no longer held under the dominion of the law and its sanctions. He has been delivered from its threatenings because Christ has bore its punishment (sanctions) on his behalf.

Paul even goes so far as to stress that the believer has died to law through the body of Christ (i.e., his sanction-bearing death on the cross; Rom 7:1-6).<sup>255</sup> It was on the cross that Christ bore consequences for our sin. It was on the cross that he, in his body, paid the “wages of sin” (cf. Gen 2:16-17; Rom 6:23) and died a cursed death (Deut 21:23). Having done this, he has set his people free from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13). Because he has paid the legal debt that we owed under the law, it can no longer threaten us, condemn us or have dominion over us. We have been set free from the law. However, Paul is not arguing that we have been set free from it as a rule of obedience (cf. Gal 5:21-22), but as a covenant that punishes personal disobedience with death.

Were we to say that the law is not covenantal—that it was simply the covenant of grace or that it was only a “rule of righteousness”—this passage would become quite troubling. For in which of these senses would we be comfortable saying the believer has died to the law? Has the believer been delivered from the covenant of grace? Has the believer delivered from God’s rule of obedience? Not at all. He has only been delivered from the legal arrangement where personal sin is punished with death (i.e., the law as covenant). Paul’s point is simple—the believer has been delivered from the covenant which attaches sanctions to personal obedience and has been placed under a covenant where he is rewarded on the basis of the obedience of the Mediator.

Within the context of Romans, this law is the covenant given at Mt Sinai (cf. Rom 10:5). It is cut from the same cloth as the covenant of nature (cf. Rom 2:12-14) and paralleled by what was given to Adam

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<sup>255</sup> “Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

<sup>255</sup> Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (Rom 7:1–6).

(cf. Rom 5:12-14). For these reasons, Paul can refer to it as a “ministry of death” in 2 Corinthians 3:5-7.<sup>256</sup> It is for this reason that Calvin saw the work of the law to be one of condemnation declaring no man just. In his comments on Romans 7:10,<sup>257</sup> he connects the offer of eternal life and the perfect standard of righteousness of the law and then moves to the only possible consequence that can spell for a sinner.

Two things are stated here—that the commandment shows to us a way of life in the righteousness of God, and that it was given in order that we by keeping the law of the Lord might obtain eternal life, except our corruption stood in the way. But as none of us obey the law, but, on the contrary, are carried headlong on our feet and hands into that kind of life from which it recalls us, it can bring us nothing but death. We must thus distinguish between the character of the law and our own wickedness. It hence follows, that it is incidental that the law inflicts on us a deadly wound, as when an incurable disease is more exasperated by a healing remedy. I indeed allow that it is an inseparable incident, and hence the law, as compared with the gospel, is called in another place the ministration of death; but still this remains unaltered, that it is not in its own nature hurtful to us, but it is so because our corruption provokes and draws upon us its curse.<sup>258</sup>

The problem with the law is not in the law itself or thinking that it offers life for perfect obedience. The problem with the law is found squarely within the sinners who are under it.

Paul clearly declares that our sins were expiated by the death of Christ, because it was impossible for the law to confer righteousness upon us. It hence follows, that more is required by the law than what we can perform; for if we were capable of fulfilling the law there would have been no need to seek a remedy elsewhere. It is therefore absurd to measure human strength by the precepts of the law; as though God in requiring what is justly due, had regarded what and how much we are able to do.... That no one might think that the law was irreverently charged with weakness, or confine it to ceremonies, Paul has distinctly expressed that this defect was not owing to any fault in the law, but to the corruption of our flesh; for it must be allowed that if any one really satisfies the divine law, he will be deemed just before God. He does not then deny that the law is sufficient to justify us as to doctrine, inasmuch as it contains a perfect rule of righteousness: but as our flesh does not attain that righteousness, the whole power of the law fails and vanishes away. Thus condemned is the error or rather the delirious notion of those who imagine that the power of justifying is only taken away from ceremonies; for Paul, by laying the blame expressly on us, clearly shows that he found no fault with the doctrine of the law.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:5–6).

<sup>257</sup> “The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me” (Rom 7:10).

<sup>258</sup> *Romans*, 256. Space does not permit us to quote Calvin’s comments on 2 Corinthians 3:6-7. The death dealing function of the law is dealt with in much more detail and we commend it to the interested reader (*2 Corinthians*, 170-176).

<sup>259</sup> *Romans*, 279-280. Compare this to what he says commenting on Romans 7:7: “sin then dwells in us, and not in the law; for the cause of it is the depraved lust of our flesh, and we come to know it by the knowledge of God’s righteousness, which is revealed to us in the law” (*Ibid*, 252).

*Second Corinthians 3:5-6*

It is clear that the “law” in 2 Corinthians 3 refers to the Mosaic covenant, summarized in the Ten Commandments, because Paul says it was written on tablets of stone (v 3).<sup>260</sup> In context, Paul is addressing our sufficiency before God. It comes, he states, from God by way of a *new covenant*, which he identifies with the Spirit (vs 6). In the New Covenant, God supplies our needs (by way of a Mediator). It is this covenant that Paul claims he ministers under (vs 6). He is not a minister of the letter (i.e., “the law”) for that only kills.

This is nothing new in Paul’s thought. This is simply another way of stating what he has said elsewhere—that the law attaches the punishment of death to personal disobedience. That is why it is the power of sin and a ministry of death.

Calvin’s comments on this passage are virtually identical to those found in his commentary on Romans 10:5. He says, specifically of 2 Corinthians 3,<sup>261</sup>

Paul here takes into view what belonged peculiarly to the law; for although God then wrought by his Spirit, yet that did not take its rise from the ministry of Moses, but from the grace of Christ, as it is said in John 1:17—The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. True, indeed, the grace of God did not, during all that time, lie dormant, but it is enough that it was not a benefit that belonged to the law. For Moses had discharged his office, when he had delivered to the people the doctrine of life, adding threatenings and promises. For this reason he gives to the law the name of the letter, because it is in itself a dead preaching; but the gospel he calls spirit, because the ministry of the gospel is living, nay, lifegiving.<sup>262</sup>

For Calvin, the ministry of Moses emphasizes the doctrine of life with the added threatenings and promises. He has, at several points, limited this to the Mosaic covenant, which he does here again. He says that the life-giving ministry of the Spirit was not dormant during this time, but that it was not *through Moses*. The ministry of Moses was to show the people what life through the law would mean. Calvin goes on to say,

...there is, notwithstanding of this, a great difference between [the law and the gospel]; for although the gospel is an occasion of condemnation to many, it is nevertheless, on good grounds, reckoned the doctrine of life, because it is the instrument of regeneration, and offers to us a free reconciliation with God. The law, on the other hand, as it simply prescribes the rule of a good life, does not renew men's hearts to the obedience of righteousness, and denounces everlasting death upon transgressors, can do nothing but condemn. Or if you prefer it in another way, the office of the law is to show us the disease, in such a way as to show us, at the same time, no hope of cure: the office of the gospel is, to bring a remedy to those that were past hope. For as the law leaves man to himself, it condemns him, of necessity, to death; while the gospel, bringing him to Christ, opens the gate of life. Thus, in one word,

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<sup>260</sup> As noted earlier, Dr. Vos says, “The palatia diatheke [old covenant] of 2 Corinthians 3 is the principle of legal administration applied under the Sinaitic arrangement. It issues into condemnation and death” (*Shorter Writings*, 407).

<sup>261</sup> *2 Corinthians*, 169-176.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

we find that it is an accidental property of the law, that is perpetual and inseparable, that it killeth; for as the Apostle says elsewhere, (Galatians 3:10,) *All that remain under the law are subject to the curse.* It does, not, on the other hand, invariably happen to the gospel, that it kills, for in it is *revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith,* and therefore it is the *power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.* (Romans 1: 17, 18.)

It remains, that we consider the last of the properties that are ascribed. 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*—(Matthew 11: 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. (Jeremiah 31: 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>263</sup>

Here Calvin harmonizes the law and the gospel, not in their substance, but in their complementary purposes. The law (i.e., the Mosaic covenant) can identify the disease, but cannot cure it. The gospel, on the other hand, can cure the disease. In this sense they are mutual handmaidens in the ministry of converting sinners, but not to be confused with one another. We will have more to say on this in the following chapter.

Charles Hodge followed Calvin in his understanding of this passage. He writes,

Every reader of the New Testament must be struck with the fact that the apostle often speaks of the Mosaic law, as he does of the moral law, as considered as a covenant of works; that is, as presenting the promise of life on the condition of perfect obedience. Paul represents the law as saying, 'Do this and live'—as requiring works, and not faith, as the condition of acceptance (Rom 10:5-10; Gal 3:10-12). He calls it a ministry of death and condemnation. He denies that it can give life (Gal 3:21). He tells those who are of the law (that is, Judaizers) that they had fallen from grace—that is, they had renounced the method of salvation by grace—and that Christ would not benefit them at all (Gal 5:2,4). In short, when he uses the word 'law' and says that the law brings a knowledge of sin, that it can only condemn, that by its works no one can be justified, he includes the Mosaic law; and in the letter to the Galatians all these things are said with special reference to the law of Moses.<sup>264</sup>

Notice that he first connects the "moral law" with the covenant of works and then with the Mosaic covenant. Hodge cites the same verses that Calvin uses to argue the same point. Hodge then goes on to make it clear that he is not advocating salvation by works during this period. He proceeds,

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<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-178.

<sup>264</sup> *2 Corinthians*, 52-53.

## THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND REPUBLICATION

On the other hand, however, he teaches that the plan of salvation has been the same from the beginning; that Christ was the propitiation for the sins committed under the old covenant; that people were saved then, as now, by faith in Christ; that this mode of salvation was revealed to Abraham and understood by him and was taught by Moses and the prophets. This view is presented repeatedly in Paul's letters and is argued out in due form in Romans 3:21-31, Romans 4, and Galatians 3.<sup>265</sup>

One can hear echoes of the older broad and strict understanding of the law in these words. That sort of distinction was made a few pages earlier.<sup>266</sup> Hodge sees three specific characteristics of the Mosaic covenant. The first was that:

The law of Moses was, in the first place, a reenactment of the covenant of works. A covenant is simply a promise that depends on a condition. The covenant of works, therefore, is nothing more than the promise of life dependent on the condition of perfect obedience. The phrase is used as a concise and convenient expression of the eternal principles of justice on which God deals with rational creatures and that underlie all dispensations—of Adam, of Abraham, of Moses, and of Christ. Our Lord said to the lawyer who asked what he should do to inherit eternal life, 'What is written in the law? How do you read it?' He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live' (see Luke 10:26-28). This is the covenant of works. It is an immutable principle that where there is no sin there is no condemnation, and where there is sin there is death. This is all that those who reject the Gospel have to fall back upon. It is this principle that is made prominent in the Mosaic system so as to give it its character of law. When we look at this aspect, it is condemnation and death.<sup>267</sup>

Hodge's starting point was to connect the Mosaic covenant to the Adamic covenant of works. Notice that he arrives at this conclusion through the simple understanding of the operating principle present in the covenant. A works covenant simply offers a reward for the fulfillment of a condition. Hodge affirms that this reality underlies all eras from the beginning of creation until the end. He is not saying that true believers are under a covenant of works, but that all sinners stand condemned under the broken Adamic Covenant. The Mosaic covenant, then, is an ongoing revelation of God's justice and what sin deserves. We will return to this in chapter five.

This view was later echoed by Geerhardus Vos, who said,

Thus in 2 Corinthians 3 the two *diathekai* [covenants] compared, that of the letter and that of the Spirit, represent two great systems and methods of religious procedure, working themselves out through two corresponding ministries, that of Moses and that of Paul, and thus inevitably shaping the result of

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<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>266</sup> "The covenant formed between God and the Hebrews at Mount Sinai is called the old covenant; the Gospel dispensation as distinct from the Mosaic one is called the new covenant (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 8:8-9; etc.). However, as the promises of the Gospel, and especially the great promise of redemption by the blood of Christ, underlay both the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, the plan of salvation or the covenant of grace is also called the new covenant, although older than the Mosaic covenant, to distinguish it from the covenant of works formed with Adam" (*Ibid.*, 51).

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

human destiny and experience according to their intrinsic law of operation. The old diatheke is the system of legal administration: it issues into bondage, condemnation, and death. The new diatheke is the system of spiritual procreation and endowment prevailing through Christ: it produces liberty, righteousness, and life.<sup>268</sup>

### *Galatians 4:4-5*

There are many other passages we could visit to discuss the Mosaic covenant if space permitted. However, we constrain ourselves to just one more. In chapter two, we discussed Galatians 4:4-5<sup>269</sup> in conjunction with the obedience of Christ as our Mediator who satisfies the requirements of God's law on our behalf.

Here we want to revisit it to make one important point. Reformed Theology is univocal on the importance of the obedience of the Mediator in order to redeem his people—Christ is the author of grace, not the recipient of grace. He is not justified in the sense of having an alien righteousness imputed to his account, but he is declared righteous because such a declaration accords with reality—he is the “just and the justifier” (Rom 3:26). The danger with equating the law given at Mt Sinai (strictly speaking) with the gospel or the covenant of grace is it would mean then that Christ would have been born under the gospel and what he receives he would receive by faith in a Mediator.

We have already seen that “law” in Galatians refers to the covenant given at Mt Sinai (cf. Gal 3:15-19; 4:24-25). When we read that Christ was born “under the law, to redeem those who were under the law,” we must be careful which path we choose. Christ came to bear the burden of the works covenant so that we might not have to. However, if we read the law (the Mosaic covenant) here as the covenant of grace, we find ourselves arguing for the exact opposite. Christ would then be born under the covenant of grace in order to deliver those who were under it. Christ did not come to receive grace, but to obtain it. He did not come to trust a Mediator, but to be the Mediator.

It is of no small significance that when the Westminster Standards state that believers are delivered from the law as a covenant of works (WCF 19.6; WLC 97), they cite Galatians 4:4-5. They see the redemption of believers from the Mosaic covenant as a deliverance from it as a covenant of works. When this passage is cited in reference to Christ on the other hand, it is done so with reference to his obedience and fulfillment to the law as our Mediator (WCF 8.4). We find the Confession's use of this passage to be consistent with the flow of Paul's argument in Galatians 3-5 and his uses of the language of the “law.”

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<sup>268</sup> *Shorter Writings*, 176-177. We have dealt with the context of this quotation above. Vos employs 2 Corinthians 3 as an opportunity to show that covenants are indifferent to the content “poured into” them. Whether it is works (as with Moses) or grace (as with Christ/Paul), both are sovereign administrations. We simply cite it here to show that Vos agreed with Calvin and Hodge on the substance of the Sinaitic covenant.

<sup>269</sup> “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

### *Summary*

From surveying these passages, we can see that Calvin’s insight regarding the narrow/strict understanding of the law was not his own. He was simply echoing what the Bible itself does. The Bible clearly presents an operative principle of obedience in Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 27:26. Paul’s use of these verses simply seeks to assert that the law-covenant given at Mt Sinai was given to teach God’s people about the nature of what it would mean to pursue righteousness and life through human works (i.e., on the principle of merit; Gal 3:10-20). The goal was not to establish man in his sense of personal righteousness, but to humble him that he might seek after the obedience of another who would be born under that law and keep it perfectly on behalf of those whom he represents (Gal 3:21-24; 4:4; cf. WCF 8.4; WLC 39, 95, 97). Those who look to Christ, who fulfills the law for them, are delivered from its curses (Gal 3:13, 25) and the obligation of satisfying its demands on their own (Gal 4:4-5). This does not mean that it no longer guides them as a rule of obedience (Gal 5:13-15), it just means that they are delivered from it as a covenant of works (cf. WCF 19.6; WLC 97).

## THE COVENANT OF GRACE ADMINISTERED “UNDER THE LAW”

### *Two Covenants Simultaneously Operating*

Establishing the the antithetical principle of inheritance in the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of grace is only part of the job. When we began we stated that Republication differs from Dispensationalism in that it does not see the Mosaic covenant as ultimately competing with covenant of grace. In Paul’s language, the Mosaic covenant does not “annul” or set aside the Abrahamic covenant of grace previously ratified 430 years earlier (Gal 3:17). The two concurrently operate in their own respective ways. The Westminster Standards introduce this reality by saying that the covenant of grace was administered both during the time of the law and the time of the gospel (WCF 7.5). The “time of the law” here is that broad use of the term to refer to the Old Testament period when the covenant of grace was operating and the law of Moses was added to it.

What this means is that the two were operating at the same time—both are taking place in the Old Testament. This was a common way of speaking for our Fathers. True believers, argues Calvin, were justified by grace through faith even in the time of the law. Calvin writes,

*These are the two covenants.* I have thought it better to adopt this translation, in order not to lose sight of the beauty of the comparison; for Paul compares the two διαθηκαι [*diathekai*], to two mothers, and to employ *testamentum*, (a testament,) which is a neuter noun, for denoting a mother, would be harsh. The word *pactio* (a covenant) appears to be, on that account, more appropriate; and indeed the desire of obtaining perspicuity, as well as elegance, has led me to make this choice.

The comparison is now formally introduced. *As in the house of Abraham there were two mothers, so are there also in the Church of God.* Doctrine is the mother of whom we are born, and is twofold, Legal and Evangelical. The legal mother, whom Hagar resembles, gendereth to bondage. Sarah again, represents the second, which gendereth to freedom; though Paul begins higher, and makes our first mother Sinai, and our second, Jerusalem. The two covenants, then, are the mothers, of whom children unlike one another are born; for the legal covenant makes slaves, and the evangelical covenant makes freemen...

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By the children of Sinai, it will afterwards be explained, are meant hypocrites, who are at length expelled from the Church of God, and deprived of the inheritance. What, then, is the gendering to bondage, which forms the subject of the present dispute? It denotes those who make a wicked abuse of the law, by finding in it nothing but what tends to slavery. Not so the pious fathers, who lived under the Old Testament; for their slavish birth by the law did not hinder them from having Jerusalem for their mother in spirit. But those who adhere to the bare law, and do not acknowledge it to be 'a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ,' (Galatians 3:24,) but rather make it a hinderance to prevent their coming to him, are the Ishmaelites born to slavery.<sup>270</sup>

The time of the law, then, is that time when "two covenants," with divergent operating principles, were in place "within the house of God." Calvin's whole understanding of the division between the two covenants is intended to guard true believers from attempting to mix the two, finding salvation in a blend of works and grace.

To deprive them of every kind of subterfuge, he [Paul] comes forward with the assertion, that salvation by the law, and salvation by the promise of God, are wholly inconsistent with each other. Who will dare to explain this as applying to ceremonies alone, while Paul comprehends under it whatever interferes with a free promise? Beyond all doubt, he excludes works of every description. 'For,' says he to the Romans, 'if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect' (Romans 4:14)... Let us carefully remember the reason why, in comparing the promise with the law, the establishment of the one overturns the other. The reason is, that the promise has respect to faith, and the law to works. Faith receives what is freely given, but to works a reward is paid...<sup>271</sup>

His fear in misunderstanding the Sinaitic covenant was that it would lead those who misunderstand it, not to salvation by works alone, but a blend of works plus faith—Christ plus the law. This is an impossibility and the one who seeks to join the two, will only find himself having the law, but not Christ.

We must observe, that Paul's reasoning is directed not so properly against the outward rite or ceremony, as against the wicked doctrine of the false apostles, who pretended that it was a necessary part of the worship of God, and at the same time made it a ground of confidence as a meritorious work. These diabolical contrivances made Christ to profit nothing; not that the false apostles denied Christ, or wished him to be entirely set aside, but that they made such a division between his grace and the works of the law as to leave not more than the half of salvation due to Christ. The apostle contends that Christ cannot be divided in this way, and that he 'profiteth nothing,' unless he is wholly embraced...The tendency of their whole doctrine is to blend the grace of Christ with the merit of works, which is impossible...

What he now advances is proved by the contradiction involved in the opposite statement. He who is a debtor to do the whole law will never escape death, but will always continue to be held as guilty; for no man will ever be found who satisfies the law. Such being the obligation, the man must unavoidably be condemned, and Christ can render him no service. We see then the contradictory nature of the two propositions, that we are partakers of the grace of Christ, and yet that we are bound to fulfill the whole law...

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<sup>270</sup> *Galatians*, 137-138. (Emphasis ours)

<sup>271</sup> *Galatians*, 98.

If ye seek any part of righteousness in the works of the law, Christ has no concern with you, and ye are fallen from grace. They were not so grossly mistaken as to believe that by the observance of the law alone they were justified, but attempted to mix Christ with the law. In any other point of view, Paul's threatenings would have utterly failed to produce alarm. 'What are you doing? You deprive yourselves of every advantage from Christ, and treat his grace as if it were of no value whatever.' We see then that the smallest part of justification cannot be attributed to the law without renouncing Christ and his grace.<sup>272</sup>

All of this is to say that between Moses and Christ, there were two covenants in existence—one legal (works) and one evangelical (grace). The purpose of the legal covenant was to guide those within the house of God to the evangelical covenant. Two dangers must be avoided. First, neither can be ignored or denied to be from God; both must be rightly guarded in God's house. Second, the two must not be mixed in justification, lest Christ become of no benefit (Gal 5:1-4).

### *The Strict Use of the Law in the Westminster Standards*

This language is continued in the Westminster Standards. They affirm, as we have seen that the covenant of grace was administered in the time of the law (WCF 7.5), thereby disallowing Dispensationalism. This is equivalent to what Calvin calls the broad sense. It is equally true that the Westminster Standards employ the term "law" in the stricter sense and cite the same passages as Calvin and his successors.

This is most clear in the WLC 91-98. This section begins with the simple question of "What is the duty which God requires of man?" and answers, "...obedience to his revealed will" (WLC 91). Then in question 92 the WLC tells us how God first revealed his will to man. It answers that, "The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the estate of innocence, and to all mankind in him, besides a special command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was the moral law."<sup>273</sup> It is in question 93 that the catechism defines the moral law for us.

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

This language is identical to the Westminster Standards' definition of the covenant of works, thus equating the two. For example we read in the WCF 7.2, "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of

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<sup>272</sup> *Galatians*, pg. 148-151.

<sup>273</sup> WLC 92. cf. "After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures" (WCF 4.2).

perfect and personal obedience.”<sup>274</sup> For the Westminster Standards the moral law is *covenantal*—it attaches the reward of life to obedience and threatens death. We saw above that this was Calvin’s language.<sup>275</sup> For this reason, WCF 19.1 states the moral law was given to Adam “as a covenant of works” and WCF 19.6 and WLC 97 says that true believers are delivered from it “as a covenant of works.”<sup>276</sup>

The natural question becomes, “Is there any of use of this moral law since the fall?” (WLC 94). The logic is simple—if the moral law holds out eternal life for perfect obedience, what possible function could it serve in a world where no man can attain to perfection?<sup>277</sup> The answer given in WLC 94 is, “Although no man, since the fall, can attain to righteousness and life by the moral law; yet there is great use thereof, as well common to all men, as peculiar either to the unregenerate, or the regenerate.” Two things should be noted here. First, this question further shows the correspondence between the moral law and the covenant of works. The moral law is more than simply a statement of right and wrong. It includes a mechanism by which righteousness and life can be obtained—it is, again, *covenantal*. The second thing is that it benefits all men regardless of whether they are regenerate or unregenerate—there is a universal aspect to the moral law. It is that which is written on all men’s hearts in creation (cf. WLC 17; WCF 4.2).

The three basic uses of the moral law are listed out in questions 95-97. We will deal with these more extensively in the following chapter. Here we simply want to see how the formal contrast between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of grace are drawn out in our confessional standards through their purposes or uses. The three uses of the law given at Mt Sinai are as follows:

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<sup>274</sup> Cf. “Q. What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created? A. When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death” (WSC 12). “Q. 20. What was the providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created? A. The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created, was the placing him in paradise, appointing him to dress it, giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth; putting the creatures under his dominion, and ordaining marriage for his help; affording him communion with himself; instituting the Sabbath; 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 evil, upon the pain of death” (WLC 20).

<sup>275</sup> See Calvin’s comments on Romans 3:31.

<sup>276</sup> We saw this understanding above in William Perkins’ *Golden Chain* (1.19), “The covenant of works, is God’s covenant, made with condition of perfect obedience, and is expressed in the moral law. The Moral Law, is that part of God’s word, which commandeth perfect obedience unto man, as well in his nature, as in his actions, and forbiddeth the contrary. The Law hath two parts. The Edict, commanding obedience, and the condition binding to obedience. The condition is eternal life to such as fulfil the law, but to transgressours, everlasting death. The Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, is an abridgement of the whole law and the covenant of works.”

<sup>277</sup> “Q. Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God? A. No mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word and deed” (WSC 82; cf. WLC 149).

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1. *Common to all Men*: To teach us of the duty requires of mankind and his inability to keep it and so lead him to an understanding of the perfect obedience that Christ would render for his people under the law, without which there is no salvation (WLC 95; cf. 97).
2. *Peculiar to the Unregenerate*: To awaken the conscience of the unbeliever and drive him to Christ, leaving him without excuse and under the curse of the law (WLC 96).
3. *Peculiar to the Regenerate*: Having been delivered from it as a covenant of works it continues to reveal to them what the obedience of gratitude should look like in the believer's life (WLC 97).

Compare these three purposes with the singular purpose the Westminster Standards give to the covenant of grace. The WLC says,

Q. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery? A. God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer.<sup>278</sup>

The purpose of the covenant of grace is to “deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery.” Notice that this purpose of the covenant of grace is not the same as any of the three purposes listed above for the giving of the law at Mt Sinai. The law is explicitly said to be incapable of doing this very thing (WLC 30; 94; 97; 149; WCF 7.3; 16.5; 19.5; cf. Rom 8:3-4; 3:20; Gal 3:11). To conflate the two runs into the danger of seeing the Sinaitic covenant as a failure. The covenant delivered on Sinai does not, nor was it intended to, deliver man out of an estate of sin and misery and bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer.<sup>279</sup> The WCF and the WLC are both quick to point out that these uses of the law are not contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it (WCF 19.7). The Westminster Standards see the Sinaitic covenant as a handmaiden to the covenant of grace, but not the covenant itself strictly speaking.

Having laid out all of these benefits to the moral law after the fall, WLC 98 resumes what it began in question 94. If there are benefits to revealing the moral law (the covenant of works), after the fall, where is it revealed? WLC 98 answers,

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<sup>278</sup> WSC 20 (emphasis ours). See also WLC 30: Q. 30. Doth God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery? A. God doth not leave all men to perish in the estate of sin and misery, into which they fell by the breach of the first covenant, commonly called the covenant of works; but of his mere love and mercy delivereth his elect out of it, and bringeth them into an estate of salvation by the second covenant, commonly called the covenant of grace.”

<sup>279</sup> One cannot separate the giving of the moral law in the Ten Commandments from the Sinaitic covenant. The first proof-text that WLC 98 uses identified as the Ten Commandments with the covenant: “And he declared to you *his covenant*, which he commanded you to perform, *that is, the Ten Commandments*, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone” (Deut 4:13; emphasis ours).

## THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND REPUBLICATION

The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments, which were delivered by the voice of God upon mount Sinai, and written by him in two tables of stone; and are recorded in the twentieth chapter of Exodus; the four first commandments containing our duty to God, and the other six our duty to man.

Terminology on how to characterize this will vary, however it is plain that the WLC is affirming a few key points:

1. The same moral law given to Adam, as a covenant of works, which requires perfect and personal obedience promising life and threatening death, was later written down at Mt Sinai in the Ten Commandments (WLC 92-93, 98; WCF 19.1-3).
2. In republishing the moral law, the Ten Commandments require perfect and personal obedience, promising life upon the fulfilling and threatening death upon the breach of it. (WLC 93, 98; cf. WCF 19.1-3)
3. Christ's obedience fulfills the moral law given in the Ten Commandments. (WLC 39, 95, 97; cf. WCF 8.4; 19.3, 6)
4. The Ten Commandments teach the unregenerate about the broken covenant of works, under which they deserve the wrath and curse of God (WLC 92-93, 96, cf. WCF 19.5; WLC 17, 20, 149; WSC 12, 40-41, 82).
5. It is only true believers who are delivered from the Ten Commandments "as a covenant of works" (WLC 97; cf. WCF 19.6).

This is not new and novel at the time the Westminster Standards were written. This language had been in regular use since Calvin. It is particularly telling that the Westminster Standards use all the same proof-texts to defend this point that Calvin and his successors did.<sup>280</sup>

Chapter 19 of the WCF teaches the same thing. It says that the moral law, given to Adam as covenant of works, continued to be that rule by which all men were bound and, because of this continuation, it was delivered in the Ten Commandment on Mt Sinai (WCF 19.1-3). This is just a positive way of affirming the same thing that WLC 92-94 and 98 stated. What God delivered in the covenant of works continues to be of great benefit to all men after the fall and for this reason God took the care and effort to record it for us on tablets of stone. Then, in WCF 19.7, we find the same statement regarding its

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<sup>280</sup> Gen 2:17; Ex 34:1-4; Deut 5:1-3 31, 33; 10:4; Rom 1:20; 2:14-15; 3:20; 5:12; 6:14; 7:4-6, 12, 24-25; 8:1, 3-4; 10:4-5 [Lev 18:5]; Gal 2:16; 3:10 [Deut 27:26], 12 [Lev 18:5], 13-14, 21-22, 24; 4:-5; Jam 2:10-11.

ultimate purpose that we have been hearing since Calvin—that these uses of the law are not “contrary to the gospel of grace [the covenant of grace], but do sweetly comply with it.”<sup>281</sup>

It should be clear that, while the Westminster Assembly does not use the language of “strict use” to refer to the law here, it is how they are using it in substance. They are not referring to law here in its broad sense. They are not asserting that the Old Testament was given to Adam as a covenant of works (WLC 92-93; WCF 19.1). They are not asking whether the Old Testament was of any use after the fall (WLC 94; WCF 19.2). They are not affirming that the Old Testament was given at Mt. Sinai (WLC 98; WCF 19.2). They are not saying that true believers are delivered from the Old Testament as a covenant of works (WLC 97; WCF 19.6). They are simply using the distinction between the law broadly and the law strictly that had been in use for nearly a century. This was the standard distinction in the Reformed church at the time.

What we see in all of this is there is no break in the historical trajectory at the Westminster Assembly. The divines employed the same language and cited the same passages that Calvin had a hundred years earlier. Where the Westminster Standards differed from Calvin was in their use of passages from the Mosaic covenant to articulate the doctrine of the Adamic covenant. The only place Calvin explicitly used the language of a works covenant was the Mosaic covenant. He acknowledged that Adam must have had something similar to the covenant given at Sinai (Adam was governed by the moral law written upon his heart) but he does not have a robust doctrine of the covenant of works itself. It is Rollock, Cartwright, Fenner and others who begin to work from Calvin’s understanding of Sinai back to the covenant in the Garden of Eden. The Westminster Assembly simply followed that practice when it did the same.<sup>282</sup>

### **THE COVENANT OF GRACE ADMINISTERED “UNDER THE GOSPEL”**

It is this understanding that helps us to understand the distinction the Westminster Standards make between the “time of the law” and the “time of the gospel” (WCF 7.5). However we understand law here, it must be able to account for a time when it was in force and a time when it is not. Galatians 3:23 says, “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.” This means that there was an aspect of the law that was temporary. It was added until Jesus Christ would come (Gal 3:19). So Paul can assert in Romans 6:14, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

It is this reality that the Westminster Standards wrestle with when they state that the single covenant of grace is administered differently in the time of the law (during the Old Testament) and the time of the gospel (the time of the New Testament forward).

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<sup>281</sup> We gladly admit that this language does not originate with Calvin, but with Paul (Gal 3:21). Our point here is simply to point out that this is the historical way the Reformers understood and employed Gal 3:21 and that the Westminster Assembly agreed.

<sup>282</sup> See for example the texts cited for WCF 7.2; WLC 20; WSC 12 (Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12-20; 10:5 [Lev 18:5]; Gal 3:12 [Lev 18:5]).

We believe Turretin summarizes the difference between the covenant of grace administered under the gospel from its administration under the law just about as succinctly as one can—“the new succeeds, the administration of the covenant [of grace] without the law and ceremonies after the appearance of Christ.”<sup>283</sup> The legal economy of the law under which the of the covenant of grace was administered has come to an end and now is just the pure covenant of grace. It is important to say a few things about Turretin’s summary:

1. “Without the law” does not mean without the moral demands of God’s holiness, righteousness and purity upon the people of God. The moral standard of the covenant of grace is now revealed in the moral law, not as a covenant of works, but as a guide in sanctification. This is the so-called third use of the law.
2. Without the presence of the legal covenant running alongside the covenant of grace, the fear, bondage, rigor, severity, terror and weakness of the time of the covenant of law are no more.<sup>284</sup>
3. Easiness, sweetness and freedom in the covenant of grace have replaced the effects of the law.

Our Confession highlights the simplicity, clarity and efficacy of the new covenant in comparison to the old covenant. That is, the ceremonies, the blood, the legal relation, the temple, the polity and so forth have all been done away with. The new covenant is marked by the simplicity of preaching, the sacraments, less outward glory and the movement out to all nations.<sup>285</sup> It is the same substance and doctrine of the Old Testament regarding Jesus Christ, faith in Him, forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life but the New Testament brings never before seen clarity and efficacy.

Put simply, the covenant of grace under the gospel is that period of time between Christ’s first and second advents when the Mosaic covenant is no longer *en force as a covenant*—it’s sanctions are removed. It continues under that time to instruct us and be of great use to us in all the same ways it was always intended to be. Perhaps Calvin says it best,

As the wisdom of the flesh is ever clamorous against the mysteries of God, it was necessary for the Apostle to subjoin what might anticipate an objection: for since the law is the rule of life, and has been given to guide men, we think that when it is removed all discipline immediately falls to the ground, that restraints are taken away, in a word, that there remains no distinction or difference between good and evil. But we are much deceived if we think, that the righteousness which God approves of in his law is abolished, when the law is abrogated; for the abrogation is by no means to be applied to the precepts which teach the right way of living, as Christ confirms and sanctions these and does not abrogate them;

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<sup>283</sup> *Institutes*, XII.vii.46, (2.232).

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid*, XII.vii.34-42, (2.228-30).

<sup>285</sup> “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” (WCF 7.6).

## THE MOSAIC COVENANT AND REPUBLICATION

but the right view is, that nothing is taken away but the curse, to which all men without grace are subject. But though Paul does not distinctly express this, yet he indirectly intimates it.<sup>286</sup>

So what are those purposes for which it was given and continue under the gospel? It is to those that we turn our attention in the final chapter.

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<sup>286</sup> *Romans*, 234. cf. Hodge, *Romans*, 205.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Reason for Republication*

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*Although no man, since the fall, can attain to righteousness and life by the moral law; yet there is great use thereof, as well common to all men, as peculiar either to the unregenerate, or the regenerate. –WLC 94*

*Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done. –WCF 19.5*

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### THE PRESSING QUESTION

Having answered the question: “What did God deliver to Israel at Mt Sinai in the Ten Commandments?” This question still remains: “Why did God deliver the moral law (which requires perfect and personal obedience, promising life and threatening death) at Mt Sinai?” This is the question that puzzles many, for if personal (let alone perfect) righteousness is impossible after the fall, what possible use could it serve for God to institute a covenant that demands it? Delving into these answers has been unavoidable in the previous sections. However, here, we want to more clearly layout how the Bible, the Confession and the tradition see the giving of the law as not being contrary to the covenant of grace, but a handmaiden to it.

The WLC gives three specific reasons. The first reason falls into what we would categorize as relating to the historical accomplishment of salvation, also known by the Latin phrase *historia salutis*. The second two relate to the individual and the personal application of redemption, known as the *ordo salutis*. However, as will be made clear that neither of the last two actually see the law itself as being redemptive or applying redemption to the believer. Rather the first drives the sinner to faith in Christ as he is offered in the gospel and the second teaches the believer how to respond with a life of gratitude. We will take these each in turn.

## TYOLOGICAL OF THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST (*HISTORIA SALUTIS*)

### *Active and Passive Obedience*

One of the questions that one must wrestle with is where is man informed of what is required of the Mediator in order to redeem his people. As a confessing church we acknowledge that two things are necessary in order for sinners to be delivered out of the estate of sin and misery and brought into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer—they must be pardoned of all sin and they must be accounted as perfectly righteous (cf. WSC 20, 33; cf. WLC 30; 70; 174). Without both of these aspects sinful man remains lost in his sins and trespasses. Murray aptly makes the necessary distinction,

The obedience Christ rendered fulfilled the obedience in which Adam failed. It would not be correct to say, however, that Christ's obedience was the same in content or demand. Christ was called on to obey in radically different conditions, and required to fulfil radically different demands. Christ was sin-bearer and the climactic demand was to die. This was not true of Adam. Christ came to redeem, not so Adam. So Christ rendered the whole-souled totality obedience in which Adam failed, but under totally different conditions and with incomparably greater demands.<sup>287</sup>

In other words, we confess that as the Second or Last Adam, Christ would need to come and accomplish what Adam failed to do, namely bring forth perfect-positive obedience to the covenant of works. However, with the introduction of sin, a new problem arises. It would not be sufficient to do merely what Adam failed to do—the Redeemer would also need to undo what Adam actually did—namely sin. Genesis 1-3 records the original condition of eschatological blessedness and the cursed consequences of sin, but it does not unpack what would be required to reverse man's sinful condition and bring him into the blessed estate where God is his everlasting reward in heaven.

These two aspects of Christ's one obedience is his active and passive obedience. Active obedience refers to Christ's fulfillment of the positive demands of the law, that which Adam should have done in the Garden. Passive obedience, on the other hand, refers to his bearing the curse of the law (death). The necessity of passive obedience is a consequence of the fall. This is a key reason for the introduction of a works-covenant by God at Mt Sinai—it was instituted to teach us what Christ would need to do in order to deliver his people from sin and misery. WLC 95 summarizes,

Q. Of what use is the moral law to all men? A. The moral law is of use to all men, to inform them of the holy nature and will of God, and of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly; to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives: to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, and thereby *help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and of the perfection of his obedience.*<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> *Collected Writings*, 2.58.

<sup>288</sup> Emphasis ours. Cf. also, WLC 34, "Q. How was the covenant of grace administered under the Old Testament? A. The covenant of grace was administered under the Old Testament, by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover, and other types and ordinances, which did all foreshadow Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised messiah, by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation."

This is repeated in WLC 97 and echoed in other places throughout the Standards. WCF 7.5 states, “...under the law, [the covenant of grace] 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...*”<sup>289</sup> WCF 8.4 says that Christ, as our Redeemer was made under the law so that he might perfectly fulfill it for us.<sup>290</sup> In fact, WLC 39 affirms this is why Jesus had to be man, in order that he might be made under the law and fulfill it on our behalf.<sup>291</sup>

All of this shows the Westminster Standards see the law as something that Christ must perfectly obey in order to obtain eternal life for his people. Furthermore, it is in the law given at Mt Sinai that the second aspect of obedience (passive) is revealed to us. It is in the Sinaitic covenant that we learn how atonement operates (cf. Lev 17:11). It is there that we learn the principle of *lex talionis* (i.e., “a life for a life;” cf. Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21), which forms the basis of substitution. The Sinaitic covenant differed from the covenant in the Garden of Eden in that it joined passive obedience to active obedience as dual stipulations in anticipation of what Christ would need to do to deliver his people out of condemnation.

This approach to the Old Testament is not unique or new to the Westminster Standards. Our Lord was clear in his earthly ministry that all the Scriptures speak of him (cf. Lk 22:24-26; Jn 5:39-40). This was later echoed by the apostles (cf. e.g., 1 Pet 1:10-12; Col 2:16-17). The Confession says that this was done through “promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come.” We believe that this language is key for understanding the idiom of Scripture. Let us, then, explore the theme of typology.

## *Typology*

### **Typology Defined**

Geerhardus Vos lays out the nature of typology in his *The Teaching of the Epistle of the Hebrews*.<sup>292</sup> A type is something that comes to prefigure a greater reality yet to come. The type is not the reality.

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<sup>289</sup> Emphasis ours.

<sup>290</sup> “This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it; endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day he arose from the dead, with the same body in which he suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world.”

<sup>291</sup> “Q. Why was it requisite that the mediator should be man? A. It was requisite that the mediator should be man, *that he might advance our nature, perform obedience to the law, suffer and make intercession for us in our nature*, have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities; that we might receive the adoption of sons, and have comfort and access with boldness unto the throne of grace” (emphasis ours).

<sup>292</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1956), 55ff. Cf. also Patrick Fairbairn, *Typology of Scripture*, (Kregel: Grand Rapids, MI, 1989), 42ff. Fairbairn qualifies typology this way, “Understanding the word *type*, then, in the theological sense,—that is, conceiving its strictly proper and distinctive sphere to lie in the relations of the old to the new, or the earlier to the later, in God’s dispensations,—there are two things which, by general consent, are held to enter into the constitution of a type. It is held, first, that in the character, action, or institution which is

Thus, the Confession refers to the paschal lamb and other types. The paschal lamb was not Christ, but it prefigured Christ, the true Lamb of God. The paschal lamb was intended to teach God’s people about the substitution of the blood (the death) of one in the place of another.

**Typological Legibility**

This causes a tension within the language of typology. Because the type is not the reality, no type can truly be what it claims to be. Consider the following passages,

Type (Picture)	Limitation in Reality
<p>“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Lev 17:11).</p>	<p>“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4).</p>
<p>“Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling” (2 Sam 7:5–6).</p>	<p>“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!” (1 Kgs 8:27); “For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:24).</p>
<p>“The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, “To your offspring I will give this land...” (Gen 24:7).</p>	<p>“For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb 11:10).</p>

In each of these couplets, the type (on the left) is described in the terms of what it represents (on the right). So the animals of the sacrificial system are said to make atonement (Lev 17:11), something we are told that they cannot actually do (Heb 10:4); God is said to dwell in the tabernacle (2 Sam 7:5-6), which cannot begin to contain him (1 Kg 8:27), but is a copy of heaven (Heb 9:24); and the land of Canaan is

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denominated the *type*, there must be a resemblance in form or spirit to what answers to it under the Gospel; and secondly, that it must not be *any* character, action, or institution occurring in Old Testament Scripture, but such only as had their ordination of God, and were designed by Him to foreshadow and prepare for the better things of the Gospel... ‘to constitute one thing the type of another, something more is wanted than mere resemblance. The former must not only resemble the latter, but must have been *designed* to resemble the latter...” (46). Fairbairn (1805-1874) was a minister in the Free Church of Scotland and Professor of Theology at the Free Church Theological College in Aberdeen. Later he became Principal and Professor of Church History and Exegesis of the Free Church College in Glasgow in until his death. *Typology of Scripture* was written in 1845 and considered by many to be one of the most important theological works of the day.

said to be Abraham's inheritance (Gen 24:7), even though it is heaven that Abraham was really promised (Heb 11:10).

This little exercise gets at a fundamental reality of typology. Typology operates on the same principle as other pictures—the picture, which is not the reality, is described in terms of the reality.<sup>293</sup> Thus the blood of bulls and goats, which cannot make atonement is said to make atonement and so on. This may be described as “typological legibility.” If the picture is described in contrasting language to the reality, it loses its ability to function as a picture. This is also true when God uses human figures as pictures of the Redeemer to come. Whether it is Joshua, David or someone else, such figures are at times described, not in terms of their frailty, but in terms of their Messiah-like imagery.

For example, when God rebukes the leaders of Israel in Ezekiel 34 he tells them, “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd” (Ez 34:23). This is a promise to send the Messiah, who is a David-like figure. God is not promising to resurrect David the sinner from the grave and send him back to Israel—he is drawing a parallel between the Messiah and David. This does not mean that all that was true of David would be true of the Messiah. He is not saying that the Messiah would commit adultery or murder the husband of his lover. Rather the comparison is the kind of shepherd David had been (a good one) will be reflected in the Messiah, in contrast to those whom God is rebuking.

Similar things can be said about other men. Joseph and Job both served as pictures of what it was like for a man to suffer though he had done nothing wrong (righteous sufferers). In neither case are we to suppose they were actually without sin. In fact, the book of Job ends with a rebuke to Job for his presumption. Nevertheless the message of both events is that God may allow a man to suffer for no apparent sin in order to do something good (the righteousness sufferer). Thus when Job is twice described as “... blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1; cf. 2:3). This is not meant to suggest that Job (the type) has no sin or is truly blameless. Rather it is creating a context in which his suffering can be seen as not resulting from personal sin—a picture of the coming of Messiah. Were God to present Job as he is, not as a picture, but as he was in reality, all correspondence to the Messiah would be lost, or worse—it would mean that the Messiah had personal sin.

Genesis does something similar with Noah who is given the privilege of delivering his posterity safely through a judgment that is a picture of the final judgment (2 Pet 2:4-10). Noah's qualifications are listed out in Genesis 6:8-9 where we read “Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, *blameless in his generation*. Noah walked with God” (emphasis ours). One only need to keep reading to learn that Noah was in fact a wretched sinner like we are (cf. Gen 9:20).<sup>294</sup> However, Noah served a greater purpose in the Scriptures than to simply show

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<sup>293</sup> The common use of pictures is to refer to it according to the reality. One looks at a photograph and says, “This is my family,” or points to a place on a map and says, “We're here.”

<sup>294</sup> It is important to note that this is only one aspect of God's word we are referring to. The text contains depth dimensions which defy exhaustion. If we were to talk about Noah and the *ordo salutis* this section

us what an individual sinner looks like. God recorded his story in such a way so as to be a positive picture of the Messiah to come. Thus, in Noah a relative righteousness (greater than that of his contemporaries) is presented in absolute terms.

This explains the language commonly applied to King David. Long after David had walked the earth he was held up as the example of a good king. When 2 Kings describes Josiah's reign it says, "And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and *walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left*" (2 Kgs 22:2; emphasis ours, cf. 2 Chr 34:2). Here David is held up as the picture of a righteous and unwavering king. Yet anyone who has read the record of his reign knows that David turned aside to the right and left many times. But the Bible is doing something here in the realm of typology where his reign is constructed as a picture of devotion to God and deliverance of the people from their enemies.

In typology a few things must be kept in mind.

1. The type is not the reality—it is a picture constructed (by God) to resemble the reality in some way.
2. The (relative) resemblance between the type and the reality is presented as an absolute (according to the reality it prefigures).
3. The type is usually employed to teach one reality and should not be pressed beyond that point.
4. A person who functions as a type of the Righteous One to come will often later have a story of great moral failure to make it clear that he is a picture and not the reality in whom the people of God are to place their hope (e.g., Noah, Job, David, Solomon).

With these things in mind, we want to look at how the lens of typology helps us understand the giving of the law at Sinai.

### **Adam as Type of Christ**

It is helpful first to remember what we saw in Romans 5:14.<sup>295</sup> There the apostle Paul referred to Adam as a type of Christ. Paul was not suggesting that Christ would sin just like Adam. Rather he was saying

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of our paper would be very different. We are not here talking about how Noah is justified by faith alone in Christ alone and how the Spirit of God is at work in Noah's life producing the character of Jesus Christ. That would be appropriate and fruitful in its own right. We are dealing with how the Scriptures present Noah and other figures as pictures or types of Jesus Christ in the accomplishment of redemption for his people (not in the application of redemption). The work of Christ can be summarized by active and passive obedience (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1955), 25ff. Therefore, it's necessary that the Lord uses certain sinful figures to set before us the perfection of Christ's obedience because that's all God has to work with.

<sup>295</sup> cf. Fairbairn, *Typology*, 43.

that in the way that Adam represented his people under the covenant of works and plunged them into sin and death through his disobedience, that Christ would represent his people through a similar covenant and give them life through that obedience (Rom 5:16-19).

Here the parallel is simple and defined. The issue is that of covenantal representation under the law and the consequences of the actions of one for the many. In other words Adam can serve as a type of Christ even though he was a failure and Christ was a success. Adam does not need to be a success in order to serve as a biblical picture.

### **Israel as Transitional Type Between Adam and Christ**

As we saw above (chapter 3) Israel is presented in language similar to Adam. The land that God brings them into is described as a Garden (Deut 11:10; cf. Gen 2:8, 15). As they enter in from the east they pass an angel holding a sword, like the one left at the east of the Garden of Eden (Josh 5:13; cf. Gen 3:24). That imagery is picked up in the architecture of the tabernacle.

The similarities do not end with geography, angels and architecture. Israel's failure to keep the law they had been given was likened by the prophet to Adam's disobedience. God says, "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me" (Hos 6:7)<sup>296</sup> This comparison between Adam and Israel makes great sense out of several features in Israel's history. First, Israel was corporately called God's firstborn son (Ex 4:22-23), a title also attributed to Adam (Lk 3:38). More importantly, this explains why it was Israel who took the requirement of personal responsibility onto themselves in Exodus 24:3, 7, as was true of Adam in the garden of Eden. It explains why when they did, they passed between the split animals (Ex 24:8; Jer 34:18) rather than God as he had when he enacted the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. Finally, it explains why when God's patience ran out, he drove them out of his Garden to the east as he had done with Adam.

What this means is that the fate of the nation was held together. This is what Witsius, Shaw, Hodge, and Buchanan meant when they said that the Mosaic covenant was a *national covenant*. It means that the nation was blessed or cursed together. So James Buchanan (1804-1870) affirms,

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.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> We acknowledge that there has been a wide divergence of opinion on the exegesis of this passage and whether *adam* (Heb) is referring to our first father, man in general or the city of Adam. Ultimately the first two reduce to the same solution, for what covenant was all mankind under but the Adamic covenant of works? Nevertheless, WCF 7.2 quotes Hos 6:7 in reference to the Adamic covenant of works (in the OPC's version, not the original). We find ourselves in agreement with this exegetical decision.

<sup>297</sup> *Doctrine of Justification*, 27-28.

For this reason, when God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to punish Judah, faithful followers of God like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, were taken away into exile with the disobedient nation (cf. Dan 1:6). They were able to be both personally justified under the covenant of grace and under the corporate curse of the national covenant.

This also shows why when David or Solomon pursued the Lord, the whole nation was blessed. First Kings 4 presents a view of Israel at the time of blessing, peace and prosperity. Contrast that with the drought and death that accompanied Ahab's rebellion against the Lord (1 Kings 17-18). Perhaps the clearest example of this national covenant structure appears in 2 Samuel 24. There David sinned against the Lord by choosing to number his army. What is significant is that the punishment for his sin was that 70,000 men of Israel died (vs 15). Here we see David acting as a representative for the people under a national covenant and it is the people he represents who suffer death for his sin. This is a clear picture of the very reality described in Hosea 6:7 and Israel being treated like a corporate Adam, represented by their king.

Being good Augustinians, it is easier to see people like David being cursed for their sinfulness, for we know that all men, save Christ, are conceived and born in sin. It is when they are rewarded for obedience that our Augustinian sensitivities go on high alert. What are we to make of this? Is this suggesting that they are not born in sin? If they are enabled to obey by God's grace, does this mean that they are under a covenant of grace? What are we to do with this?

We must be clear here. The obedience they brought forth was both imperfect and Spirit wrought. Yet within the understanding of typology already delineated, this can still serve as a picture of Christ as it does with Noah, Joseph, Job and others. What makes this possible with David and Solomon is the national covenant that they are under. Because it is meant to reflect the failed covenant of works with Adam and that which the Redeemer will fulfill, the operative principle is life for perfect obedience (Lev 18:5; Dt 27:26). However, as with all types, the picture can never obtain to the reality. Bulls cannot atone for men and mere men cannot perfectly obey. But they can be recorded in such a way as to serve as a picture of the greater reality.<sup>298</sup>

Therefore corporate Israel can also be used as picture of Christ to come. Theologians have long commented that when Christ came to earth he was presented in terms of Israel. Matthew, for example presents Christ as being hidden in Egypt because of a mass infanticide, then coming up out of Egypt, passing through waters, spending a time of testing in the wilderness, and then ascending a mountain to declare the law. This pattern is clearly modeled on Israel's history. Punctuating that reality is Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1, "and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the

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<sup>298</sup> It is this reality that has led some in the history of the church, such as Herman Witsius, to refer to the obedience required under the law as "sincere obedience." We acknowledge that this is part of the historical vernacular. However, we would prefer to let Deuteronomy 27:26 stand with his requirement of perfect obedience and understand the reward for less than perfect obedience as being a necessary aspect of typological legibility (imperfect obedience presented in perfect terms).

Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”<sup>299</sup> Here the language of corporate Israel as the son of God (cf. Ex 4:22-23) is clearly attributed Christ.

Seen this way, Israel serves as a pivotal picture between the two Adams, recapitulating the failure of the first and setting the stage for the second.<sup>300</sup> Under the law Israel helps to historically prepare the way for Christ, the better Adam. Israel does this in a way that Adam could not because, as already noted, he lived in a context in which there was no need for death and atonement. The law of Moses joins the need for sacrifice and atonement to the already existing standard of perfect obedience. What Christ would have to do in order to redeem his people looked more like the law of Moses than the law in the Garden because of the introduction of sin.<sup>301</sup> Israel as a nation had a constant picture in the law of what their Redeemer would perfectly embody.

### *Christ the Law-Keeper*

Witsius says this of Christ’s obedience,

As an instrument of the covenant they [the Ten Commandments] point out the way to eternal salvation; or contain the condition of enjoying that salvation: and that both under the covenant of grace and works. But with this difference; that under the covenant of works, this condition is required to be performed by man himself; under the covenant of grace it is proposed, *as already performed, or to be performed by a mediator.*<sup>302</sup>

It is of small wonder, then, that Paul would attach his statement that Christ was born under the law (Gal 4:4) to his discussion of the Mosaic covenant and its need for perfect obedience (Gal 3:10) and Christ’s willingness to bear the curse of the law on behalf of his people (Gal 3:13). Calvin made this connection when he said,

*Subjected under the law.* The literal rendering is, Made under the law; but in my version I have preferred another word, which expresses more plainly the fact that he was placed in subjection to the law. Christ the Son of God, who might have claimed to be exempt from every kind of subjection, became subject to the law. Why? He did so in our room, that he might obtain freedom for us. A man

<sup>299</sup> Matthew 2:15; cf. Fairbairn, *Typology*, 109, 380.

<sup>300</sup> This pivot is demonstrated, for example, in Psalm 8, which was written by David, and has clear Adamic allusions (cf. e.g., vs 4), is attributed to Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22; Heb 2:6-8) and once quoted in reference to God’s judgment on national Israel (Matt 21:14-22). Psalm 2:7 has similar implications in that the statement made to David as later attributed to Christ.

<sup>301</sup> Many within the Reformed tradition have referred to a covenant between the persons of the Trinity where the Father and the Son agree that the son will obey on behalf of his people and die in their place to redeem them (cf. e.g, Jn 10:17-18). Our Reformed fathers referred to this intra-Trinitarian covenant as the *pactum salutis* or the covenant of redemption. In many ways it might be more helpful to see the Mosaic covenant as a type of the *pactum salutis* since it better embodies the active and passive obedience of Christ, the servant in the *pactum salutis*. Nevertheless, because the tradition has seen the *pactum salutis* as that covenant where Christ, the Second Adam accomplishes what Adam failed to do, the connection to the Adamic covenant of works is appropriate. Thus the historic language of republishing or re-enacting the covenant of works is fully warranted.

<sup>302</sup> *Economy of the Covenants*, IV.iv.57, (2:187), emphasis ours.

## THE REASON FOR REPUBLICATION

who was free, by constituting himself a surety, redeems a slave: by putting on himself the chains, he takes them off from the other. *So Christ chose to become liable to keep the law, that exemption from it might be obtained for us; otherwise it would have been to no purpose that he should come under the yoke of the law, for it certainly was not on his own account that he did so... To redeem them that were under the law. We must here observe, the exemption from the law which Christ has procured for us does not imply that we no longer owe any obedience to the doctrine of the law, and may do whatever we please; for the law is the everlasting rule of a good and holy life. But Paul speaks of the law with all its appendages. From subjection to that law we are redeemed, because it is no longer what it once was.*<sup>303</sup>

Between the Ten Commandments and the sin offering, the Mosaic covenant had a fitting picture of what would be required of the Redeemer.

Going back to where we began, the covenant of grace is not founded on the absence of the law, but on the fulfillment of the law by a Mediator. In this sense, law has priority—it serves as the legal foundation for salvation through it being fulfilled by another in our place. It is this reality that allows Charles Hodge to declare what he calls the third characteristic of the Mosaic covenant:

As the Gospel contains a renewed revelation of the law, so the law of Moses contained a revelation of the Gospel. It presented in its priesthood and sacrifices, as types of the office and work of Christ, the method of salvation by grace through a Redeemer. This necessarily supposes that faith and not works was the condition of salvation. It was those who trusted, not those free from sin, who were saved. Thus Moses wrote about Christ (John 5:46); and thus the Law and the Prophets witnessed to a righteousness of faith (Romans 3:21). Therefore, when the apostle spoke of the legal aspect of the old covenant, and especially when speaking to those who rejected the Gospel and clung to the law of Moses as law, then he says it kills or brings condemnation. But when viewing it, and especially when speaking of those who viewed it, as setting out the great doctrine of redemption through the blood of Christ, he represented it as teaching his own doctrine. The law in every form—moral or Mosaic, natural or revealed—kills. In demanding works as the condition of salvation, it must condemn all sinners. But the Gospel, whether as revealed in the promise to Adam after his fall or in the promise to Abraham or in the writings of Moses or in its full clarity in the New Testament, gives life. As the old covenant revealed both the law and the Gospel, it either killed or gave life according to the light in which it was viewed. And, therefore, Paul sometimes says it does the one, and sometimes the other.<sup>304</sup>

These quotations from Calvin and Hodge emphasize the active obedience of Christ. With that said, our fathers did not miss the Mosaic covenant's unique appreciation of the passive obedience of Christ. Commenting on Galatians 3:13, Calvin affirms,

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<sup>303</sup> *Galatians*, 118-119 (emphasis ours)

<sup>304</sup> *2 Corinthians*, 53-54. The reader will remember from earlier that the first characteristic is that it was a re-enactment of the covenant of works and the second was that it was national covenant. See also his comments on Romans 8:4: "But if ver. 3 is understood of the sacrificial death of Christ, and of the condemnation of sin in him as the substitute of sinners, then this verse must be understood of justification, and not of sanctification. He condemned sin, in order that the demands of the law might be satisfied. This is the view of the passage given even by the majority of the early Fathers, and any almost all evangelical interpreters, including the Reformers... this is the true meaning of the passage..." (*Romans*, 254).

*It is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.* Now, Christ hung upon the cross, therefore he fell under that curse. But it is certain that he did not suffer that punishment on his own account. It follows, therefore, either that he was crucified in vain, or that our curse was laid upon him, in order that we might be delivered from it... It was not unknown to God what death his own Son would die, when he pronounced the law, "He that is hanged is accursed of God" (Deuteronomy 21:23)... how would he have freed us from the wrath of God, if he had not transferred it from us to himself? Thus, "he was wounded for our transgressions," (Isaiah 53:5)...<sup>305</sup>

Machen confirms this in writing,

Christ bore a curse when He hung there on the cross. But what curse was it? Paul makes the answer perfectly plain. It was not merely the curse of some human law; but it was the curse of God's law... Here we come to the very heart of Paul's teaching. The curse which Christ bore upon the cross was not a curse that wrongly rested upon Him; it was not a curse pronounced upon Him by some wicked human law. No, it was the curse of God's law; it was a curse, therefore,—we tremble as we say it, but the Scripture compels us to say it—it was a curse which rightly rested upon Him.<sup>306</sup>

It is the doctrine of Republication that helps us to understand how the WCF (19.6) and WLC (95, 97) can assert that the first thing we learn from the deliverance of the moral law in the Ten Commandments is our need for Christ's perfect obedience under it.<sup>307</sup> The covenant of grace is premised upon such obedience on our behalf. Such an understanding of the Mosaic covenant leads to glorying in the law-keeping Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

To say that the first use described in the Westminster Standards is a historical category—the accomplishment of redemption in history by Jesus Christ (*historia salutis*)—is not to say that there are not personal implications in the life of the believer. We would categorize the second two uses as relating to the personal application of redemption to the believer (*ordo salutis*). However, we want to be clear that this does not mean that the Standards ever imply that the Mosaic covenant delivers a sinner from death to life as the covenant of grace does (cf. WLC 30; WSC 20). Rather as a handmaiden

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<sup>305</sup> *Galatians*, 91.

<sup>306</sup> *Notes on Galatians*, 181.

<sup>307</sup> Hodge sees the phrase "the righteousness of God" in Romans 3:21 referring to this reality. He says, "The words righteousness of God, are subjected here to the same diversity of interpretation that was noticed in the passage just cited, where they first occur. They may mean, 1. A divine attribute, the justice, mercy, or general rectitude of God. 2. That righteousness which is acceptable to God, which is such in his estimation. 3. God's method of justification; compare i. 17... But for the reason stated above, in the remarks on i 17, the interpretation which best suits both the force of the words and Paul's usage is, 'The righteousness of which God is the author, which comes from Him, which he gives, and which consequently is acceptable in his sight.' The word righteousness is employed to designate that excellence which the law demands, or which constitutes a man righteous in the sight of the law, and the genitive (you *theou*) of God, indicates the source or author of that righteousness... This righteousness, which, so to speak, had long been buried under the types and indistinct utterances of the old dispensation, has now in the gospel been made clear and apparent" (*Romans*, 88).

to the covenant of grace, the Mosaic covenant leads the unregenerate to seek mercy in Christ and then speaks to the regenerated believer and informs him what Christian obedience ought to look like.<sup>308</sup>

## PEDAGOGICAL PURPOSE (*ORDO SALUTIS*)

The second purpose of the giving of the law in the Mosaic covenant is recorded in WLC 96,

Q. What particular use is there of the moral law to unregenerate men? A. The moral law is of use to unregenerate men, to awaken their consciences to flee from the wrath to come, and to drive them to Christ; or, upon the continuance in the estate and way of sin, to leave them inexcusable, and under the curse thereof.

As a reflection of the law given at creation, the Sinaitic covenant speaks to all sons of Adam. Its purpose is to tap into their conscience upon which the work of the law has already been written (cf. Rom 2:12ff; WLC 17). As Romans 1 says, man consistently suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). The law comes into this suppression as a tutor to speak the truth of God's perfect justice and righteousness and remind man of what he truly deserves. This second use is known as the "pedagogical" use or purpose.<sup>309</sup>

This only makes sense if it works on the same operative principle as the covenant under which fallen man stands condemned. It is there to teach sinful man what happens when he seeks to stand before God in his own works and righteousness. Thus Calvin asserts,

To render it evident how much at variance is the righteousness of faith and that of works, he now compares them; for by comparison the opposition between contrary things appears more clear. But he refers not now to the oracles of the Prophets, but to the testimony of Moses, and for this reason,—that the Jews might understand that the law was not given by Moses in order to detain them in a dependence on works, but, on the contrary, to lead them to Christ. He might have indeed referred to the Prophets as witnesses; but still this doubt must have remained, 'How was it that the law prescribed another rule of righteousness?' He then removes this, and in the best manner, when by the teaching of the law itself he confirms the righteousness of faith.<sup>310</sup>

The point is clear, the law of Moses describes the righteousness of works, not to make them dependent upon works, but to lead them to Christ and the righteousness of faith. Understood *this way* the law

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<sup>308</sup> Hodge makes this point explicit when commenting on Romans 7:13: "Not the law, but sin is the cause of death... God has so ordered it, that the sinfulness of sin is brought out by the operation of the law. Such is the design of the law, so far as the salvation of sinners is concerned. It does not describe the conditions of salvation. We are not obliged to be sinless; in other words, we are not obliged to fulfil the demands of the law, in order to be saved. Neither is the law the means of sanctification. It cannot make us holy. On the contrary, its operation is to excite and exasperate sin; to render its power more dreadful and destructive, so that instead of being the source of life, it is the instrument of death. By it we are slain. The construction of this passage, given above, is that which the words demand, and which almost all modern commentators adopt" (*Romans*, 226).

<sup>309</sup> This language comes from Galatians 3:24 and the Greek word *paidagogos*, translated "guardian," "schoolmaster," or "tutor."

<sup>310</sup> *Romans*, 385-86.

confirms the righteousness of faith by proving the impossibility of the contrary. Calvin says that it is actually by showing the futility of the opposite way that the true way is made more clear. The weakness of the law is not its own weakness, but our sinfulness. Commenting on Romans 8:3, Calvin affirms,

But further, understand the weakness of the law according to the sense in which the Apostle usually takes the word ἀσθενεία, weakness, not only as meaning a small imbecility but impotency; for he means that the law has no power whatever to justify. You then see that we are wholly excluded from the righteousness of works, and must therefore flee to Christ for righteousness, for in us there can be none, and to know this is especially necessary; for we shall never be clothed with the righteousness of Christ except we first know assuredly that we have no righteousness of our own. The word flesh is to be taken still in the same sense, as meaning ourselves. The corruption then of our nature renders the law of God in this respect useless to us; for while it shows the way of life, it does not bring us back who are running headlong into death.<sup>311</sup>

Calvin fully acknowledges that this pedagogical purpose is not the only use of the law, but one that Paul is particularly interested in.<sup>312</sup> Calvin joins this use to the first use when he says,

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<sup>311</sup> *Romans*, 280. Cf. The similar comments made by Robert Shaw: "It may be remarked, that the law of the ten commandments was promulgated to Israel from Sinai in the form of a covenant of works. Not that it was the design of God to renew a covenant of works with Israel, or to put them upon seeking life by their own obedience to the law; but the law was published to them as a covenant of works, to show them that without a perfect righteousness, answering to all the demands of the law, they could not 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 their justification is graciously provided. The Sinai transaction was a mixed dispensation. In it the covenant of grace was published, as appears from these words in the preface standing before the commandments: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;" and from the promulgation of the ceremonial law at the same time. But the moral law, as a covenant of works, was also displayed, to convince the Israelites of their sinfulness and misery, to teach them the necessity of an atonement, and lead them to embrace by faith the blessed Mediator, the Seed promised to Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. The law, therefore, was published at Sinai as a covenant of works, in subservience to the covenant of grace. And the law is still published in subservience to the gospel, as "a schoolmaster to bring sinners to Christ, that they may be justified by faith."—Gal. iii. 24" (*The Reformed Faith*, pg. 195).

<sup>312</sup> "*Because of transgressions*. The law has manifold uses, but Paul confines himself to that which bears on his present subject. He did not propose to inquire in how many ways the law is of advantage to men. It is necessary to put readers on their guard on this point; for very many, I find, have fallen into the mistake of acknowledging no other advantage belonging to the law, but what is expressed in this passage... 19. Because of transgressions. The law has manifold uses, but Paul confines himself to that which bears on his present subject. He did not propose to inquire in how many ways the law is of advantage to men. It is necessary to put readers on their guard on this point; for very many, I find, have fallen into the mistake of acknowledging no other advantage belonging to the law, but what is expressed in this passage. Paul himself elsewhere speaks of the precepts of the law as profitable for doctrine and exhortations. (2 Timothy 3:16.) The definition here given of the use of the law is not complete, and those who refuse to make any other acknowledgment in favor of the law do wrong. Now, what is the import of the phrase, because of transgressions? It agrees with the saying of philosophers, that "The law was made for restraining evil-doers," and with the old proverb, "From bad manners have sprung good laws." But Paul's meaning is more extensive than the words may seem to convey. He means that the law was published in order to make known transgressions, and in this way to compel men to acknowledge their guilt. As men naturally are too ready to excuse themselves, so, until they are roused by the law, their consciences are asleep. "Until the law," says Paul, "sin was in the world:but sin is not imputed where there is no law"

*Till the seed should come...* The word till, (ἄχρις οὗ,) signifies so long as the seed is expected: and hence it follows, that it must have been intended to occupy not the highest, but a subordinate rank. It was given in order to rouse men to the expectation of Christ. But was it necessary that it should last only until the coming of Christ? For if so, it follows that it is now abolished. The whole of that administration, I reply, was temporal, and was given for the purpose of preserving among the ancient people an attachment to the faith of Christ. And yet I do not admit that, by the coming of Christ, the whole law was abolished. The apostle did not intend this, but merely that the mode of administration, which for a time had been introduced, must receive its accomplishment in Christ, who is the fulfillment of the promise...<sup>313</sup>

Assigning a subordinate rank to the law he sees it as a servant. It prepares the way for Christ and it prepares the hearts of men to receive Christ when he does come.<sup>314</sup> This further explains the Confession's acknowledgement that the law was temporary (WCF 7.5)—given by Moses until Christ should come.<sup>315</sup>

The second benefit that the Westminster Standards see for a revelation of God's perfect law, subsequent to the fall, is a glorious benefit. If pride comes before the fall, the law is the recipe for

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(Romans 5:13). The law came and roused the sleepers, for this is the true preparation for Christ. "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Why? "That Sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (Romans 7:13). Thus, "the law was added because of transgressions," in order to reveal their true character, or, as he tells the Romans, that it might make them to abound. (Romans 5:20)..." (*Galatians*, 99-100).

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> "*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster.* This is the second comparison, which still more clearly expresses Paul's design. A schoolmaster is not appointed for the whole life, but only for childhood, as the etymology of the Greek word παιδαγωγός implies. Besides, in training a child, the object is to prepare him, by the instructions of childhood, for maturer years. The comparison applies in both respects to the law, for its authority was limited to a particular age, and its whole object was to prepare its scholars in such a manner, that, when its elementary instructions were closed, they might make progress worthy of manhood. And so he adds, that it was our schoolmaster (εἰς Χριστὸν) unto Christ. The grammarian, when he has trained a boy, delivers him into the hands of another, who conducts him through the higher branches of a finished education. In like manner, the law was the grammar of theology, which, after carrying its scholars a short way, handed them over to faith to be completed. Thus, Paul compares the Jews to children, and us to advanced youth" (*Galatians*, 107-108).

<sup>315</sup> Cf. also Calvin's comments on Galatians 3:25, "*But after that faith is come...* He affirms that, under the reign of Christ, there is no longer any childhood which needs to be placed under a schoolmaster, and that, consequently, the law has resigned its office,—which is another application of the comparison. There were two things which he had undertaken to prove,—that the law is a preparation for Christ, and that it is temporal. But here the question is again put, Is the law so abolished that we have nothing to do with it? I answer, the law, so far as it is a rule of life, a bridle to keep us in the fear of the Lord, a spur to correct the sluggishness of our flesh,—so far, in short, as it is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that believers may be instructed in every good work," (2 Timothy 3:16, 17,)—is as much in force as ever, and remains untouched" (*Galatians*, 109-110). Machen writes similarly: "In the third place, by the use of various figures, Paul contrasts the former bondage with the present freedom. Gal. 3:23 to 4:7. The life under the law was a period of restraint like that of childhood, preliminary to faith in Christ. The law was intended to produce the consciousness of sin, in order that the resultant hopelessness might lead men to accept the Saviour. Vs. 23-25... how can we think of returning to the miserable bondage of an external and legalistic religion? Gal. 4:1-11" (*Notes on Galatians*, 204).

humility, bringing a clear revelation of that standard that we cannot keep. Before any sick man is willing to receive the cure a doctor prescribes, he must first be convinced of his dire estate without such a cure. Praise God that the law was given to convince us of the very sin and misery that we need to be delivered from. It teaches us to look outside ourselves and place our faith in the only One who could be under the law and keep all its terms on our behalf.

## **RULE OF OBEDIENCE FOR THE BELIEVER (*ORDO SALUTIS*)**

As wonderful as the benefit is of tutoring sinners to look to the obedience of another, the Westminster Standards rightly point out that the benefits do not end there. Once believers have embraced Jesus to fulfill the law for them as a covenant of works, they themselves are then delivered from it as such. WLC 97 asks and answers,

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

This use of the law is specific only to the regenerate. They alone are bound to Christ for his fulfilling of the law on their behalf and have, therefore, been delivered from it “as a covenant of works” so as to be justified or condemned. Still as a revelation of the character and will of God and what is good and pleasing to Him, it continues to instruct God’s people, who should be all the more eager to please God. The moral law describes what the obedience of gratitude ought to look like, but does so stripped of the sanctions found at Sinai. Jonathan Edwards put it this way,

If we regard the law given at mount Sinai—not as a covenant of works, but—as a rule of life, it is employed by the Redeemer, from that time to the end of the world, as a directory to his people, to show them the way in which they must walk, as they would go to heaven: for a way of sincere and universal obedience to this law is the narrow way that leads to life.<sup>316</sup>

When the Bible insists that believers are not under the law, but under grace (Rom 6:14-15), it nowhere suggests that the believer is delivered from a call to righteousness and conformity to Christ. Rather, believers are freed from the threatenings attached to that standard of righteousness—the promise of life and the threat of death for fulfilling or breaking that law.<sup>317</sup> For this reason Galatians 5 unites the fruit of the Spirit to the righteousness the law describes.

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<sup>316</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards: With a Memoir of His Life*, Volume 3, 211-212.

<sup>317</sup> What the WLC does here is similar to what Calvin does historically. Speaking of the abrogation of the Sinaitic covenant at the first advent of Christ, he says, “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 offenses. It does not openly exhibit Christ and his grace, but points him out at a distance, and only when hidden by the

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.<sup>318</sup>

The apostle deftly points out that the believer is not under the law and yet, led by the Spirit, will seek to walk in a way that is perfectly harmonious with the righteousness described in the law.

More than this, he notes that the deeds of the flesh are all sorts of lawlessness. That is, the unregenerate man is in bondage to sin, under its yoke as a slave controlled by a master (cf. Rom 6:16). The law describes the very kind of obedience those freed from slavery to sin will come to exhibit. In this sense, then, the commandments represent a sort of Bill of Rights of the redeemed revealing to them what life in the Spirit looks like (though stripped of the attending curses and threats present in the law as a covenant of works).<sup>319</sup> The commandments represent the liberties and freedoms of God's people in light of redemption; they positively state what it means to be delivered from slavery to sin.

Machen summarizes this reality well:

True faith, says Paul, is a faith that works itself out through love. And love is nothing else than the fulfilling of the whole moral law. The law, therefore, is fulfilled by the very man who is free from the law. Only, by him it is fulfilled not by obedience, through his own strength, to a set of external commandments, but by submission to a mighty inward impulse... "Faith working through love" is the key to an understanding both of Paul and of James... Paul is fully as severe as James against a faith that permits men to continue in sin.<sup>320</sup>

This third use is important. The believer does not discard the law once he has professed faith, but continues to learn from it for the rest of his life. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable—it is all Christian Scripture. For this reason, we classify this third use under the category of *ordo salutis*. Again, it does not produce salvation, but falls under the category of the individual believer and the life of the redeemed. In God's wonderful economy, something as sweet and precious as his law can serve multiple purposes. The same law which can speak death, condemnation and wrath to the unregenerate can actually speak of liberty and freedom to the believer and guide him in his life of gratitude.

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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 a covenant of grace" (*Galatians*, 110).

<sup>318</sup> Galatians 5:18–23.

<sup>319</sup> Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics and the People of God*, (IVP Press: Downers Grove, IL, 2004), 262-263.

<sup>320</sup> *Notes on Galatians*, 211-212, 220-221.

## SWEET COMPLIANCE OF THE LAW AND THE COVENANT OF GRACE

We hope that it is clear by this point that the last thing that we would ever want to say about the Mosaic covenant is that it is contrary to or competitive with the covenant of grace. A covenant that can foreshadow the perfect obedience of the Redeemer, humble sinners driving them to salvation, and guide believers in the freedom of the gospel is a sweet companion to the gospel of grace. As Johannes Vos articulates in his commentary on the WLC:

As the way of earning eternal life for the elect by obedience to God's law on the part of Christ, the divine-human Mediator and second Adam, the covenant of works was incorporated into, and became a part of the covenant of grace, and so is still in effect today. In the case of those who have not yet come to Christ and received the benefits of the covenant of grace, they are still under the condemnation of the broken covenant of works, and such people often make a desperate and futile attempt to earn eternal life on the basis of the covenant of works, that is, by personal obedience to the moral law.<sup>321</sup>

For this reason the WCF (19.7) ends its treatment on the law with these words,

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

Of course the proof-text one expects the Confession to use at this point is Galatians 3:21 as Paul asks and answers, "Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law." The Assembly does not disappoint us. This is exactly what was running through their minds as they penned this paragraph. Thus the only way that the Mosaic law would be contradictory to the grace of the gospel in the covenant of grace would be if it was able to do what the covenant of grace does—deliver sinners "from an estate of sin and misery and bring them into an estate of salvation." The solution to harmonizing the Sinaitic covenant with the covenant of grace, for the apostle (as well as the Westminster Assembly), comes in seeing each as having its distinct purpose. Calvin's notes on this verse are sobering and helpful:

*Is the law then against the promises of God?* The certainty and steadiness of the divine purpose being admitted, we are bound equally to conclude that its results are not contrary to each other. Still there was a difficulty to be resolved, arising from the apparent contradiction between the Law and the covenant of grace...

Before answering the question, he expresses, in his usual manner, a high disdain of such folly; thus intimating the strong abhorrence with which pious men must regard whatever brings reproach on the Divine character. But another instance of high address, which claims our notice, is found in this turn of expression. He charges his adversaries with the offense of making God contradict himself. For from him the Law and the promises have evidently proceeded: whoever then alleges any contradiction between them blasphemes against God: *but they do contradict each other, if the Law justifies*. Thus does Paul most dexterously retort upon his adversaries the charge which they falsely and calumniously

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<sup>321</sup> *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 237.

brought against him...

*The law would be opposed to the promises, if it had the power of justifying; for there would be two opposite methods of justifying a man, two separate roads towards the attainment of righteousness. But Paul refuses to the law such a power; so that the contradiction is removed. I would admit, says he, that righteousness is obtained by the law, if salvation were found in it.*<sup>322</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Herein lies the prescription to the errors of Dispensationalism. Republication is able to take the negative aspects of the law fully into account and see them as sweetly complying with the ultimate goals of the covenant of grace. Republication finds its heart and soul rooted in the clear language of the Scriptures while also in its articulation by Calvin and his successors and embraced in the Westminster Standards.

We end where we began. Good theology is about good distinctions. What interests us here is the substance of the teaching rather than territorial wars over vocabulary. We are not married to one particular label. Whether one calls it a “revival of the covenant of works” alongside Owen, Vos, and Pemble, a “re-enactment of the covenant of works” with Hodge, a “repetition of the covenant of works” in the manner of Witsius and Polanus, a “re-exhibition of the covenant of works” like Buchanan, a “covenant of grace legally administered” akin to Calvin and Turretin, or just a straight “covenant of works” like Rollock and Perkins, the end result is the same—God introduced the works principle at Sinai to further the covenant of grace by foreshadowing the obedience of Christ, to humble sinners, and to guide God’s children in the obedience of gratitude. We pray that this historic understanding continues to flourish within God’s church and bless his children.

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<sup>322</sup> *Galatians*, 104-105.

## APPENDIX

### *What John Calvin Really Said*

Rev. David Inks

Did John Calvin teach that the law functioned, in some sense, as a covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant in contrast to the covenant of grace? Or did he teach that the only contrast between law and grace consisted by way of an argument of the Apostle Paul, wherein by siding with the legalists, he sought to show the futility of their efforts and certain obtaining of the curse? (The Jewish misinterpretation view). The answer one renders to this question has direct bearing upon the meaning of Paul's quote of Leviticus 18:5 in Romans and Galatians. And vice versa, the exegesis of Lev.18:5 and its appearances in Paul has direct bearing upon the theological question of the covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant.

Dr. Cornelis Venema, of Mid-America Seminary, argues that Calvin taught the Jewish misinterpretation view. He states:

However, when the apostle Paul draws a contrast or speaks of an antithesis between the "law" and the "gospel", he is not teaching that the Mosaic administration in some sense republished the covenant of works and is, in this respect, contrary to the gospel. Rather, the apostle is opposing a kind of "legalism" that appeals to the "law" as an instrument for pursuing righteousness and justification before God upon the basis of works of the law. In the interpretation of Calvin...Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 aims to remind his legalistic opponents that the law, narrowly and abstractly considered, could never serve as an instrument of self-justification before God.<sup>323</sup>

I would wish to take the reader on a guided tour through Calvin's commentaries and *The Institutes* focusing on his understanding of Lev.18:5 and his view of the law in the Mosaic covenant. I hope that the open minded reader will see that Dr. Venema has seriously misunderstood Calvin on this question. I do not intend to map out a detailed and comprehensive picture of Calvin on the Mosaic covenant. But I do wish to establish, that however one goes on to construct this map, for it to be complete and accurate, he must correctly understand what Calvin is saying about this key text and its contribution to the presence of a works principle in the Mosaic covenant of law.

Immediately prior to and then in his exposition of Leviticus 18:5 Calvin states the following:

We come now to the conclusion of the Exposition of the Law, wherein we are to treat of the sanctions of it contained both in the promises and threats. For, although God might in His own right simply require what He pleased, yet such is His kindness to men, that He chose to entice them by promises to obey Him freely. Since, therefore, we are naturally attracted by the hope of reward, we are slow and

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<sup>323</sup> Cornelius P. Venema, "The Mosaic Covenant: A "Republication" of the Covenant of Works?", in *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, Vol.21, 2010, 79.

lazy, until some fruit appears. Consequently God voluntarily promises, in order to arouse them from their sloth, that if men obey His Law, he will repay them. Nor is this an ordinary act of liberality that He prefers to *agree with us* for the payment of a recompense, rather than simply to command by His sovereignty. For we must bear in mind the declaration of Christ, that when we have fulfilled the whole Law, we still deserve nothing; since God claims for Himself our entire services. (Luke xvii, 10) However we may strive, therefore, even beyond our strength, and devote ourselves entirely to keep the Law, still God lies under no obligation to us, except in so far as He has Himself voluntarily *agreed*, and made Himself our spontaneous debtor. And this has been pointed out even by the common theologians, that *the reward of good works does not depend upon their dignity or merit, but upon His covenant*. We now perceive how the authority of the Law was confirmed by the *promises*; but because we are not only indolent but also refractory, He added on the other side *threats* which might inspire terror, both to subdue the obstinacy of the flesh and to correct the security in which we are too apt to indulge. It will be expedient to treat of both. LEV. XVIII.5 Ye shall therefore keep my statutes. Although Moses introduces this passage, where he exhorts the Israelites to cultivate chastity in respect to marriage, and not to fall into the incestuous pollutions of the Gentiles, yet as it is a remarkable one, and contains general instruction, from whence Paul derives his definition of the righteousness of the Law, (Rom.x.5) it seems to me to come in very appropriately here, inasmuch as *it sanctions and confirms the Law by the promise of reward*. *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, (Rom.x.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 fulfils 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. (Rom.viii.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. The pratings of the Popish theologians about partial righteousness are frivolous and silly, who is there that can boast of having thoroughly fulfilled them? If, then, none was ever clear of transgression, or ever will be, although God by no means deceives us, yet the promise becomes ineffectual, because we *do not perform our part of the agreement*.<sup>324</sup>

From this starting point a string of observations will be drawn from this text and most of them will be found to be repeated elsewhere.

First, when Calvin uses the word “agree”, “agreed” and “agreement” he means “covenant”. This is born out by way of contextual use and especially in the connection between “agreed” and “covenant” in consecutive sentences.

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<sup>324</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony, Vol.III* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 202-205.

Second, Calvin in speaking of the promises and threats of the law as sanctions interprets them as “the payment of a recompense” for obedience or disobedience. Interestingly, he sides against typical ontic speculation on the “dignity or merit” of those works by noting that their “reward...depend...upon His covenant”. Works have no decipherable ontic dignity for Calvin. God voluntarily covenants/agrees to reward them. One might even reasonably deduce from this that covenant for Calvin is “a relationship under sanctions”!

Third, Calvin will not limit the recompense here to “this earthly and transitory life”. Those who do so “are mistaken”. We will see later that Calvin employs typology to make this extension from the earthly sanctions to the eternal sanctions.

Fourth, this law covenant is contingent upon works, it is about the “righteousness of the Law” not “the righteousness of faith”. The “hope of eternal life is, therefore, given to all who keep the Law”, becomes the point of Lev.18:5. Calvin assures us regarding this covenant of works that “God by no means deceives us, yet the promise becomes ineffectual, because we do not perform our part of the *agreement*”.

Fifth, these observations stand in stark contrast to Dr.Venema’s interpretation of Calvin. Rather, Calvin in a calculating fashion, takes pains to explain that the Mosaic law here is understood as a covenant of works. And Lev.18:5 is actually understood to promise justification and eternal life to the keepers of the law. This is not the law as a rule of life in a covenant of grace climate. This is not an *abstracted* misinterpretation of the law by legalists. This is *concretely* what the law actually sets forth here, by Moses, according to Calvin.

We move on now to the quotation of Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 and Calvin’s comments thereon in his Romans commentary.

5. For Moses, &c. To render it evident how much at variance is the righteousness of faith and that of works, he now compares them; for by comparison the opposition between contrary things appears more clear. But he refers not now to the oracles of the Prophets, but to the testimony of Moses, and for this reason,—that the Jews might understand that the law was not given by Moses in order to detain them in a dependence on works, but, on the contrary, to lead them to Christ. He might have indeed referred to the Prophets as witnesses; but still this doubt must have remain, “How was it that the law prescribed another rule of righteousness?” He then removes this, and in the best manner, when by the teaching of the law itself he confirms the righteousness of faith. But we ought to understand the reason why Paul harmonizes the law with faith, and yet sets the righteousness of one in opposition to that of the other:—The law has a two-fold meaning; it sometimes includes the whole of what has been taught by Moses, and sometimes that part only which was peculiar to his ministration, which consisted of precepts, rewards, and punishments. But Moses had this common office—to teach the people the true rule of religion. Since it was so, it behooved him to preach repentance and faith; but faith is not taught, except by propounding promises of divine mercy, and those gratuitous: and thus it behooved him to be a preacher of the gospel; which office he faithfully performed, as it appears from many passages. In order to instruct the people in the doctrine of repentance, it was necessary for him to teach what manner of life was acceptable to God; and this he included in the precepts of the law. That he might also instill into the minds of the people the love of righteousness, and implant in them the hatred of iniquity,

promises and threatenings were added; which proposed rewards to the just, and denounced dreadful punishments on sinners. It was now the duty of the people to consider in how many ways they drew curses on themselves, and how far they were from deserving anything at God's hands by their works, that being thus led to despair as to their own righteousness, they might flee to the haven of divine goodness, and so to Christ himself. This was the end or design of the Mosaic dispensation. But as evangelic promises are only found scattered in the writings of Moses, and these also somewhat obscure, and as the precepts and rewards, allotted to the observers of the law, frequently occur, it rightly appertained to Moses as his own and peculiar office, to teach what is the real righteousness of works, and then to show what remuneration awaits the observance of it, and what punishment awaits those who come short of it. For this reason Moses is by John compared with Christ, when it is said, "That the law was given by Moses, but that grace and truth came by Christ." [John1:17] And whenever the word law is thus strictly taken, Moses is by implication opposed to Christ: and then we must consider what the law contains, as separate from the gospel. Hence what is said here of the righteousness of the law, must be applied, not to the whole office of Moses, but to that part which was in a manner peculiarly committed to him. I come now to the words.

For Moses describes, &c. Paul has (*graphei*), writes; which is used for a verb which means to describe, by taking away a part of it (*epigraphai*). The passage is taken from Lev.xviii.5, where the Lord promises eternal life to those who would keep his law; for in this sense, as you see, Paul has taken the passage, and not only of temporal life, as some think. Paul indeed thus reasons,-"Since no man can attain the righteousness prescribed in the law, except he fulfils strictly every part of it, and since of this perfection all men have always come far short, it is in vain for anyone to strive in this way for salvation: Israel then was very foolish, who expected to attain the righteousness of the law, from which we are all excluded." See how from the promise itself he proves, that it can avail us nothing, and for this reason, because the condition is impossible. What futile device it is then to allege legal promises, in order to establish the righteousness of the law! For with these an unavoidable curse comes to us; so far is it, that salvation should thence proceed. The more detestable on this account is the stupidity of the Papists, who think it enough to prove merits by adducing bare promises. "It is not in vain," they say, "that God has promised life to his servants." But at the same time they see not that it has been promised, in order that a consciousness of their own transgressions may strike all with the fear of death, and that being thus constrained by their own deficiency, they may learn to flee to Christ.<sup>325</sup>

What does Dr. Venema derive from this? In claiming to represent Calvin, he insists, as already noted, that Paul's contrast is not between "law" and "gospel" as covenants but is a contrast between the gospel and his opponents who abstract or "wrest" the law from its proper context to become an instrument of self-justification. "Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 is interpreted within the context of his polemic with the legalism of his opponents."<sup>326</sup> Dr. Venema also states that "God's design in giving the law through Moses was also "pedagogical," since the law serves to expose human sinfulness and inability in order to drive its recipients to Christ, who is the "end" and "fulfillment" of the law".<sup>327</sup>

Two responses are in order.

First, contrary to what Dr. Venema wishes to find, Calvin does make a covenantal contrast between law and gospel. We found this contrast in his comments on Lev.18:5 in the Harmony as already noted.

<sup>325</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 385-387.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

We find the same comments with further elaboration here in the Romans commentary. Calvin notes a distinction in Moses regarding law; “the whole” and “the part that was peculiar to his ministration” also called the law as “narrowly” understood. This “peculiar part” had to do with “promises and threatenings...which proposed rewards to the just, and denounced dreadful punishments on sinners”. In contrast to this exist the “evangelic promises” which “are only found scattered in the writings of Moses, and these also somewhat obscure, and as the precepts and rewards, allotted to the observers of the law, frequently occur, it rightly appertained to Moses as his own and peculiar office, to teach what is the real righteousness of works, and then to show what remuneration awaits the observance of it, and what punishment awaits those who come short of it.” We have here the standard of God’s law with sanctions following upon condition of works. This is nothing less than a covenant of works arrangement. Calvin goes on to say, “The passage is taken from Lev.xviii.5, where *the Lord promises eternal life to those who would keep his law*; for in this sense, as you see, Paul has taken the passage, and not only of temporal life, as some think.” Like Calvin’s first comments on Lev.18:5 there is no mention of teasing out the meaning of this in response to legalists in order to really get at what the text means in either context. It is “the Lord” who promises eternal life if his law is kept. This is not a misunderstanding or an unnatural “wresting” of the law out of its proper setting according to Calvin. Rather this is part and parcel of Moses’ very own ministry to bind everyone, not just legalists, over to the curse, that they might seek righteousness elsewhere, even in Christ. The point of misunderstanding comes in for both Jews and Papists in thinking that their obedience will cut the mustard of the law’s requirements. As Calvin says, “But at the same time *they see not* that it has been promised, in order that a consciousness of their own transgressions may strike all with the fear of death, and that being thus constrained by their own deficiency, they may learn to flee to Christ”.

Second, Dr. Venema’s view on the first use of the law in Calvin is inadequate, though granted, in support of his thesis. Dr. Venema’s view sees the first use of the law as a means to “expose human sinfulness and inability in order to drive its recipients to Christ, who is the “end” and “fulfillment” of the law”. This view rightly sees the law as a divine standard but falls short of coming full circle with Calvin’s covenantal perspective that also binds over those who are under the law to its sanctions. (A law with sanctions does a covenant make!)<sup>328</sup> Notice Calvin’s emphasis in the following quotations.

The first part is this: while it (the moral law) shows God’s righteousness, that is, the righteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns every man of his own unrighteousness.<sup>329</sup>

The law is like a mirror. In it we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both...After the sin forthwith comes the curse...of itself the law can only accuse, condemn, and destroy...The more surely it *confirms the reward of life* and salvation as dependent upon righteousness, the more *certain it renders the destruction of the wicked*...by our

<sup>328</sup> Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity with Notes by Thomas Boston*, (Seoul, NY: Westminster Pub. House, date?), 350. “Query III.—Doth the annexing of a promise of life, and a threatening of death to a precept, make it a covenant of works?”

<sup>329</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeil, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), II.vii.6, 354.

wickedness and depravity we are prevented from enjoying the blessed life set openly before us by *the law*<sup>330</sup>

Notice that Calvin's first use of the law has to do not only with its standards but with its sanctions. As such this coincides in Calvin with what it means that Christ has "fulfilled the law". Christ fulfills it as a covenant of works in our behalf. The law demands works for righteousness and life. Christ did it. The law demands a curse for disobedience. Christ bore it for our forgiveness. We receive what the law promised because of Christ's obedience to it in our behalf. Christ fulfills the law. Christ fulfills Lev.18:5.<sup>331</sup>

At this point something should be said about Calvin's pedagogical use of the law. A thesis could be written on this subject. I will offer some passing remarks, and make some connections that are pertinent to the discussion at hand. In the same vicinity as his exposition of Lev.18:5 Calvin sums up his discussion with Deuteronomy 11:26. He states:

He now embraces the two points at once, vis, that they would be blessed if they earnestly apply themselves to the keeping of the Law, and cursed, if they shake off its yoke and revel in their lusts. But, when he says that he here sets before them a blessing and a curse, it is as much as to declare, that he does not merely tell them what is right, but that the reward is prepared if they obey; and if not, that the punishment is also at hand.<sup>332</sup>

In the next section on Leviticus 26 Calvin draws together two unlikely components of the law under a common label of "the elementary instruction of the Law". He states:

The restriction of the recompense, which is here mentioned, 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 also both to rewards and punishments*.<sup>333</sup>

The Mosaic law's earthly sanctions as played out in the promised land were typological according to Calvin here. And yet the sanctions were not to be restricted only to this sphere as Calvin earlier argued but had the eternal in view. Calvin makes this same point in *The Institutes*.

And to urge us in every way, he promises both blessings in the present life and everlasting blessedness to those who obediently keep his commandments. He threatens the transgressors no less with present calamities than with the punishment of eternal death. For that promise ("He who does these things shall live in them" [Lev.18:5]) and its corresponding threat ("The soul that sins shall itself die" [Ezek.18:4,20] without doubt have reference to either never-ending future immortality or death.

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<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, II.vii.7, 355-356.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, II.vii.5, 533; 2.7.2-4, 351-352.

<sup>332</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony, Vol.III* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 210.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

Wherever God's benevolence or wrath is mentioned, under the former is contained eternal life, under the latter eternal perdition.<sup>334</sup>

The Mosaic's law covenant of works, whose sanctions played out in the earthly plane of the promised land is joined by Calvin to the same typological sphere as the symbolic and ceremonial. Thus, what we have here is a typological covenant of works. But the two are distinguished. Why? The answer is simple. The law's sanctions, though intersecting with the typological sphere in temporal blessings or cursings, pressed into the eternal realm which the temporal prefigured.<sup>335</sup> *The law was given by way of a covenant of works, demanding perfect righteousness and pressed in on Israel with the curse. The ceremonies, on the other hand, pictured Christ in the covenant of grace.* These two pedagogical tools worked therefore in tandem; in fulfilling the law as a covenant of works--Christ redeems as the spotless Lamb.

What Calvin calls "elementary instruction" in the prior Old Testament commentary he identifies as the "schoolmaster". He states in his Galatians Commentary: "'The comparison applies in both respects to the law, for its authority was limited to a particular age, and its whole object was to prepare its scholars in such a manner, that, when *its elementary instructions* were closed, they might make progress worthy of manhood. And so he adds, that *it was our schoolmaster.*"<sup>336</sup>

Calvin goes on to ask precisely what was the instruction of this school master. You guessed it, the law as a covenant of works with promises for life via works and threatening of wrath and curse. Such an arrangement Calvin says leads us to reflect the following: "If you cannot obtain life by works but by fulfilling the law, some new and different method must be sought"<sup>337</sup> Along with this covenantal right arm of the schoolmaster came the ceremonial left arm.

Calvin proceeds to consider then what is meant by the abolishing of the law as schoolmaster. He says:

There were two things which he had undertaken to prove,--that the law is a preparation for Christ, and that it is temporal. But here the question is again put, Is the law so abolished that we have nothing to do with it? I answer, the law, so far as it is a rule of life, a bridle to keep us in the fear of the Lord...remains untouched. 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 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 a covenant of grace.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> *Institutes.*, II.viii.4, 370.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, II.xi.2-3, 451-452.

<sup>336</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, (Grand Rapids; Baker Books, 2009), 108.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110.

Calvin also says the same thing, in a bit different manner, in *The Institutes*.<sup>339</sup> So whether in his OT commentaries, or his NT commentaries, or in *The Institutes* Calvin repeats this same two-fold approach: the law carries the covenant of works, and the ceremonies carry the covenant of grace.

The point? The first use of the law for Calvin was more than as a mirror. It was also a hammer. The law for Calvin meant not just a *standard* but *sanctions* conditioned on works. This he says over and over in many different places. Calvin distinguished between the Mosaic covenant law as a whole and the narrow/peculiar sense of it. (Peculiar meaning, “distinctive to” not “strange” or “unfitting”!) The whole encompassed the covenant of grace. The distinctive part of its ministry was a covenant of works. Calvin states this in some way shape or form in a myriad of ways though granted he doesn’t always call it a covenant. However, what is a covenant? A relationship under sanctions? A promise suspended on a condition? Take your pick, Kline or Hodge. Either way, Calvin’s construct walked like, waddled like, and quacked like a covenant in spades, even though only a few times he came right out with it feathers and all! The one-two punch here is that the covenant of works operative in the law was for Calvin not only an exegetical point but a comprehensive theological and hermeneutical tool. As such, it excludes the misinterpretation view of Paul which Dr. Venema seems to think is a stock and trade commodity in the Reformed world starting with Calvin. Quite simply, Calvin did not employ it, but employed a far simpler method which yielded a coherent law-grace dynamic explicated by his covenant theology. But this tour is not quite over. Let’s look at six more references in *The Institutes*. What we will find is nothing really new, just more of Calvin’s coherent approach.

With regard to the Ten Commandments we ought likewise to heed Paul’s warning: “Christ is the end of the law unto salvation to every believer” [Rom.10:4]. Another: Christ is the Spirit [II Cor.3:17] who quickens the letter that of itself is death-dealing [II Cor.3:6]. By the former statement he means that righteousness is taught in vain by the commandments until Christ confers it by free imputation and by the Spirit of regeneration. For this reason, Paul justly calls Christ the fulfillment or end of the law. For it would be of no value to know what God demands of us if Christ did not succor those laboring and oppressed under its intolerable yoke and burden. Elsewhere he teaches that “the law was put forward because of transgressions” [Gal.3:19]; that is, in order to humble men, having convinced them of their own condemnation. But because this is the true and only preparation for seeking Christ, all his variously expressed teachings well agree. He was disputing with perverse teachers who pretended that we merit righteousness by the works of the law. Consequently, to refute their error he was sometimes compelled to take *the bare law in a narrow sense*, even though it was otherwise graced with the covenant of free adoption. But, in order that our guilt may arouse us to seek pardon, it behooves us, briefly, to know how by our instruction in the moral law we are rendered more inexcusable. If it is true that in the law we are taught the perfection of righteousness, this also follows; the complete observance of the law is perfect righteousness before God. By it man would evidently be deemed and reckoned righteous before the heavenly judgment seat. Therefore Moses, after he had published the law, did not hesitate to call heaven and earth to witness that he had “set before Israel life and death, good and evil” [Deut.30:19]. We cannot gainsay that the reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, as the Lord has promised. On the other hand, it behooves us to examine whether we fulfill that obedience, through whose merit we ought to derive assurance of that reward. What point is there to see in the observance of the law the proffered reward of eternal life if, furthermore, it is not clear whether by this path we may attain eternal life? At this point the feebleness of the law shows itself. Because

<sup>339</sup> *Institutes*, II.vii.14-17, 362-366.

observance of the law is found in none of us, we are excluded from the promises of life, and fall back into the mere curse. I am telling not only what happens but what must happen. For since the teaching of the law is far above human capacity, a man may indeed view from afar the proffered promises, yet he cannot derive any benefit from them. Therefore this thing alone remains: that from the goodness of the promises he should the better judge his own misery, while with the hope of salvation cut off he thinks himself threatened with certain death. On the other hand, horrible threats hang over us, constraining and entangling not a few of us only, but all of us to a man. They hang over us, I say, and pursue us with inexorable harshness, so that we discern in the law only the most immediate death.<sup>340</sup>

Dr. Venema interprets “to take the bare law in a narrow sense” as part of Paul’s “disputing with perverse teachers” to be grounds for seeing him employing the Jewish misinterpretation view, wherein the law is “wrested from its evangelical setting and misappropriated”<sup>341</sup> To “wrest” is to twist from its true meaning violently or to distort. This is not derived from Calvin’s writings, it is itself a “wresting” of Calvin’s meaning of the law in its “narrow sense”. Calvin explains himself in this text and elsewhere what he means. The law in its narrow sense is a covenant of works according to Calvin. As he says, “We cannot gainsay that the reward of eternal salvation awaits complete obedience to the law, *as the Lord has promised*...Because observance of the law is found in none of us, we are excluded from the promises of life, and fall back into the mere curse”. Again, what do we have here? A relationship under sanctions. A promise suspended on a condition. A covenant. And in this case, obedience to the law, that is, works is the conditional hinge. Strangely Dr. Venema quotes from *The Institutes* on this very page but fails to bring forward what it says and how it collides with his own view on the “narrow sense” of the law or the “bare law”.

Both Jeremiah and Paul, because they are contrasting the Old and New Testaments, consider nothing in the law except what properly belongs to it. For example: the law contains here and there promises of mercy, but because they have been borrowed from elsewhere, they are not counted part of the law, when only the nature of the law is under discussion. They ascribe to it only this function: to enjoin what is right, to forbid what is wicked; to promise a reward to the keepers of righteousness, and threaten transgressors with punishment; but at the same time not to change or correct the depravity of heart that by nature inheres in all men<sup>342</sup>

“Promises of mercy” do not “properly belong” to it “when only the nature of the law is under discussion”. What does belong to it? Read the quote. It’s the same as the prior quote from Calvin. It is the law as a covenant of works. Such is not a wresting of the law from its natural climate of grace. Rather, this is what “*the Lord has promised*”. Not to belabor the obvious but let us look at one other passage in Calvin.

For Paul *often means by the term “law”* the rule of righteous living by which God requires of us what is his own, giving us no hope of life unless we completely obey him, and adding on the other hand a curse if we deviate even in the slightest degree. This Paul does when he contends that we are pleasing to God through grace and are accounted righteous through his pardon, because nowhere is found that observance of the law for which the reward has been promised. Paul therefore justly makes contraries

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.7.2-3, 351-352.

<sup>341</sup> Venema, *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, Vol.21, 2010, 63.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

of the righteousness of the law and of that of the gospel [Rom.3:21ff; Gal.3:10ff]. But the gospel did not so supplant the *entire law* as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather, *it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised, and gave substance to the shadows.*<sup>343</sup>

Again note the distinction that Calvin employs. We have the “narrow sense” here as a covenant of works on the one hand, and the “entire” law which includes the “shadows” on the other. The gospel does not “supplant the entire law” (because of its gracious elements) but it has “satisfied whatever the law promised” (ie demands of obedience for life/disobedience for death), and also “gave substance to the shadows”. Again, this is Calvin’s two stroke formula; the law is fulfilled and abolished by Christ in its covenant of works and in its ceremonies. Calvin’s grand finale in summarizing the work of Christ in Book II is accomplished by showing how Christ has fulfilled the demands of the law in his obedience, bearing the curse sanction, securing the blessing sanction (which the law held out in its covenant of works) therein meriting favor for us, the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness the law required and we could not render. This final glorious gospel seamlessly flows from the correct understanding of covenant and law in Calvin to its fulfillment in Christ and the New Covenant. Imbedded in the midst of this conclusion is not Dr.Venema’s mistaken views on Paul’s interpretation of Lev.18:5 but Calvin’s correct views wherein the law as a covenant of works is fulfilled in Christ as the grounds to the covenant of grace. Calvin concludes:

For this reason the apostle defines the redemption in Christ’s blood as “the forgiveness of sins” [Col.1:14]. It is as if he were saying, “We are justified or acquitted before God, because that blood corresponds to satisfaction for us.” Another passage agrees with this: “In the cross he canceled the written bond which stood against us” [Col.2:14]. He notes there the payment or compensation that absolves us of guilt. And these words of Paul’s are very weighty: “If we are justified through the works of the law, then Christ died for nothing” [Gal.2:21]. *From this we infer that we must seek from Christ what the law would give if anyone could fulfill it; or, what is the same thing, that we obtain through Christ’s grace what God promised in the law for our works: “He who will do these things, will live in them” [Lev.18:5, cf. Comm.].* This is no less clearly confirmed in the sermon delivered at Antioch, which asserts that by believing in Christ “we are justified from everything from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses” [Acts 13:39]. For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ, merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon himself, he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law? What he afterward taught the Galatians has the same purpose: “God sent forth his Son...subject to the law, to redeem those who were under the law” [Gal. 4:4-5]. What was the purpose of this subjection of Christ to the law but to acquire righteousness for us, undertaking to pay what we could not pay? Hence, that imputation of righteousness without works which Paul discusses [Rom. Ch.4], For the righteousness found in Christ alone is reckoned as ours.<sup>344</sup>

In this next section from Calvin we find again Lev.18:5 as the distinction between law and gospel. The law stands opposite to the gospel not by way of an unnatural wresting but by way of it own inherent promises. Calvin says:

For in comparing the law and the gospel in the letter to the Romans he says: “the righteousness that is of the law” is such that “the man who practices these things will live by them” [Rom.10:5]. But the

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<sup>343</sup> *Institutes.*, II.ix.4, 426-427.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, II.xvii.5, 533.

“righteousness that is of faith” [Rom.10:6] announces salvation...Do you see how he makes this the distinction between law and gospel: that the former attributes righteousness to works, the latter bestows free righteousness apart from the help of works?

Now, to be sure, *the law itself has its own promises*. Therefore, in the promises of the gospel there must be something distinct and different unless we would admit that the comparison is inept. But what sort of difference will this be, other than that the gospel promises are free and dependent solely upon God’s mercy, *while the promises of the law depend upon the condition of works?*<sup>345</sup>

Not desiring to weary the reader, but confirm the truth, I conclude with this last quote from Calvin which is quite telling. Herein we find Calvin’s same, consistent understanding of Lev.18:5 which stands in stark contrast to how Dr.Venema represents Calvin’s use. We also see again the contrasting methods in the promise of the law and the promise of the gospel. More importantly we see Calvin using the word “covenant” with regard to the law as a works arrangement in contrast to the gospel. Granted, Calvin does not litter his writings with the word “covenant”, but he does use it enough in conjunction with the law and certainly describes its qualifying components often, especially when describing the law in its narrow sense as we have seen. Here’s the good Doctor:

Thus the renowned promise: “I have given you good precepts” [cf.Ezek.20:11], and “he who does them, shall live in them” [Lev.18:5]. The apostle teaches that this promise is of no importance [Rom.10:5; Gal.3:12]; if we stop there, it will benefit not a whit more than if it had not been given. For it does not apply even to God’s most holy servants, who are far from fulfilling the law, hemmed in as they are by many transgressions. But when the promises of the gospel are substituted, which proclaim the free forgiveness of sins, these not only make us acceptable to God but also render our works pleasing to him. And not only does the Lord adjudge them pleasing; he also extends to them the blessings *which under the covenant were owed to the observance of his law.*<sup>346</sup>

## Final Summary

### *What Calvin Did Say*

*So What Did John Calvin Really Say? What was Calvin’s view of the Old Covenant law?*

First, there is no contention over the fact that a single covenant of grace is to be detected in Calvin binding together the Old and New Testaments. Prior to Christ it was differently administered under the law (entire/whole), the major difference being the symbols and shadows which vaguely encased and anticipated Christ to come.

Second, and here’s where folks get off track with Calvin, the law in its narrow sense, which was a peculiar part of Moses’ ministry was a covenant of works wherein the sanctions of the law, its blessings and cursings, were contingent upon works. The temporal blessings and cursings were anticipatory of the eternal and thus functioned as types. Therefore, it is certainly correct to say that

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<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, III.xi.17, 746-747.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, III.xvii.3, 805.

Calvin taught a typological covenant of works. But it gave way to the eternal for the whole human race.

Third, these two tracks, covenants of grace and works, find their fulfillment in Christ, though in different ways. In explaining how the law is abolished (fulfilled, come to an end) in Christ, Calvin speaks of the law's temporary pedagogy/ as schoolmaster. In the first track fulfillment is by way of "reality" replacing "symbols/ceremonies". In the second track, fulfillment is also by way of the temporal in its sanctions, such as the promised land, giving way to the reality of heaven and the Spirit, but it is administered/sanctioned by works. The covenant of the law, sanctioned with its correlative works of obedience or disobedience, finds fulfillment directly in Christ's righteousness meriting life on the one hand and His curse bearing securing forgiveness on the other. For Calvin the law, as a covenant of works, undergirds the doctrine of justification. These two tracks then, converge on and magnify Christ, our wisdom, our righteousness, our redemption and our sanctification.

Fourth, how do these two competing tracks co-exist in the concrete world of the Old Testament? I will not try to unravel that one here! The answers vary. But "in some sense" we have an operative works covenant alongside a covenant of grace. Later Calvinists reflect upon this phenomenon differently. Boston proposes two covenants being contracted on Sinai. Hodge speaks of different aspects under which the Old Testament is viewed. A more recent contributor, Meredith Kline, has offered a two layered distinction between the *ordo salutis* and the *historio salutis*. Kline and Hodge both resonate with James Buchanan's view which is surprisingly advanced and nuanced.<sup>347</sup> (Buchanan's work, as a 19<sup>th</sup> century organizational effort of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, should give great pause to anyone adopting Venema's thesis regarding Kline's questionable pedigree). The fact that we find within the Reformed tradition an array of "senses" in charting out the details of the law as a covenant of works should slow down hasty generalizations and create some breathing room for differences of formulation.

#### *What Calvin Did Not Say*

My purpose in this paper was to set forth Calvin's view of the Mosaic law as a covenant of works, as what John Calvin really said.

My reference to Dr.Venema served only as a foil to further that understanding. I feel obliged, nonetheless, for emphasis sake, to rehearse, despite Dr.Venema's beliefs, what Calvin *did not say*. There really isn't ambiguity here, and anyone wishing to forge ahead in reading Calvin for himself, should do so with as much of a tabula rosa as he can muster.

First, Calvin did not interpret Lev.18:5 as a part of, or coextensive with the covenant of grace, but rather as a covenantally antithetical method of justification and life. Dr.Venema argued that, "Leviticus 18:5 can hardly be read to be a republication of the covenant of works which obliges Israel to a perfect obedience as a basis for her blessing in the land of promise."<sup>348</sup> Calvin can only be made to

<sup>347</sup> James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, (Grand Rapids ; Baker Book House, 1977), 37-40.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

agree with such a notion by way of “wresting” his words out of their plain meaning. (Calvin, of course, was not a “re-publicationist”, given his vague views on Adam, but he was firmly a “publicationist”, which at the end of the day is a bit of a moot point.) Lev.18:5 for Calvin, is hermetically sealed in the covenant of works as its distinctive operating principle. Period.

Second, Calvin did not employ, anywhere, the Jewish misinterpretation view of Lev.18:5.

Third, Calvin’s view of the law “narrow” was not the law as a mere standard to induce guilt, or as a kind of abstraction from Moses’ covenant of grace arena. Rather, the law as narrow brings it alongside of the covenant of grace and the “whole law” as a sanctioned covenant of works. As such Calvin distinguished this peculiar component of Moses’ ministry, but he never “wrested it”, or taught that Paul did, for the sake of argument.

Fourth, Calvin did not limit his view of the difference between the Old and New Covenants to an administrative difference between “symbol/shadow” and “reality” within the confines of a solo covenant of grace. He was more nuanced than that, as I have argued in this paper. Calvin’s bi-covenantal approach ultimately provides the grounds to preserve a critical Reformed tenant known as the law-gospel antithesis. Unfortunately, this bedrock hermeneutic, gets somewhat suppressed in Dr. Venema’s treatment.

## **Conclusion**

I have attempted to follow Calvin’s views and set forth what he “really said”. I am convinced that his views do not lie in antiquated obscurity or are buried in convoluted arguments and expressions. Rather, for those who wish to drink along with him, his vintage remains “on tap” after half a millennium. Thus, I urge the sincere to seek his unaccommodated thought in the list, consisting in 80 pages, which I’ve provided, that they too might know “what John Calvin really said”.

APPENDIX: WHAT JOHN CALVIN REALLY SAID

For the Interested Readers Who Want to Know

*Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Vol. III:* 202-205; 208-211; 287-289

*Commentary on Romans:* 385-387

*Commentary on Galatians:* 88-92; 108-110

*The Institutes* (McNeil version):

- 348-358 - Having to do with the law
- 449-460 - Difference between the Testaments
- 528-533 - Christ Merited God's Grace for Us
- 743-754 - Righteousness by Faith and by Works
- 780 - Another ref. to Lev.18:5
- 802-820 - Agreement of Promises of Law & Gospel

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