

## *Covenant Theology Tested*

Reformed covenant-theology and new-covenant theology are two very different ‘beasts’. Very different! In this article, <sup>1</sup> I want to play the spotlight of Scripture on covenant theology, and show that it cannot stand that searching light.

But I am not interested in merely proving a point. True, Reformed covenant-theology is a logical system imposed on Scripture – worse, it distorts Scripture – and this in turn means that covenant theology leads to very serious damage; not least, in the lives of those believers who are reared on it. So, in order to help those believers who are in bondage under the law as a result of Calvin’s system, a system which is bolstered by covenant theology, I need to show them the wrongness of that theology, thereby helping them to come into the liberty of the gospel under the law of Christ.

The law, say Reformed teachers, is binding on all men, and has been so since God gave it to Adam. In particular, it is binding on believers now; not for justification, of course, but as the perfect rule of their sanctification. The Reformed go further. It is the motive, the spur, the force, the driving power behind that sanctification. That is the Reformed claim. What is the buttress for it? What underpins their position on the law? It is something they call covenant theology. What is this? And what underpins covenant theology?

As I set out to answer these questions, reader, let me offer both an explanation and an apology. You will find what follows complicated, muddled, confused, even contradictory. I apologise for this, but there is little I can do about it. No matter how hard I try to make the Reformed theology for their claims on the law easy to follow, I am faced with an impossible task, and this because of the very nature of the arguments which they use. The confusion and contradiction is not of my making; it is theirs. And this will be even more apparent if you read their original works.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Which is the substance of chapter 6 of my *Christ*.

<sup>2</sup> In my *Christ*, I give extensive extracts.

The fact is, since they themselves are unable to sort it out, no wonder I cannot unravel the Reformed tangle! But I fear that this might well make some readers give up, and put my article aside. I trust not! I hope, reader, you might be prepared to grapple with the human *illogic* you find in what follows. Taking Paul as our example, just as he knew that he had to tackle the faulty theology of the Judaisers of his day, we have no choice. If we want to help believers who are locked – imprisoned – under the law – *and I use the word 'imprisoned' advisedly; see Galatians 3:23; 4:2-3* – and see them brought into freedom in Christ in the new covenant, we, too, have to expose the fault lines in Reformed covenant-theology in our time. Even so, since that theology is so complicated, it will inevitably prove rather a tortuous experience. You have been warned!

So, to start at the end and work backwards, covenant theology is the buttress of the Reformed view of the law, but what underpins covenant theology? This can be discovered by answering another question, a question of immense importance: Are the two Testaments continuous or discontinuous? To put it another way: Is every part of the Bible of equal weight and importance? Reader, do not be frightened by such questions. I am not for a moment suggesting that the Bible – all of it – is not equally inspired. It is! The entire Bible is the word of God – from Genesis to Revelation, including both! Nevertheless, the question must be asked, and answered: Does every verse of Scripture have the same weight in the life of the believer today?

### ***Are the two Testaments continuous or discontinuous?***

Let me summarise the scriptural position before I start this vital section. It is important that I do so since I intend to approach the Reformed, as it were, on their own terms, even though those terms are unscriptural. Indeed, if this summary were to be grasped, the continuity/discontinuity debate would be over. Alas, the Reformed will insist on imposing their covenant-theology template on Scripture. If only they would let Scripture speak for itself, shorn of their constructs! Here is the scriptural summary:

The two Testaments are strictly continuous (apart from the 400 year gap), but the two covenants are radically different, and have to be contrasted by us because they are contrasted in Scripture. The one, the Mosaic covenant, the old covenant, was the covenant of the flesh, outward, a shadow, ineffective, condemning, killing, a covenant of death, a temporary covenant which was fulfilled by Christ and abolished because it was weak and useless. The other covenant, the new covenant, is superior in that it is spiritual, of the Spirit, inward, the reality, effective, saving and permanent. While the Reformed want to talk in terms of the continuity of the two Testaments, this, in fact, is virtually irrelevant. What really matters is the fundamental disjoint of the two covenants. See John 1:17; Romans 8:3; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 7:12,18,22,28; 8:7-13. This is precisely what the Reformed will not face up to.<sup>3</sup>

Now for the continuity/discontinuity question.

God did not reveal his word all at once. Not only did he spread that revelation over hundreds of years, but he gave us his word in two Testaments. How are these Testaments related to one another? How should believers use them in formulating doctrine and practice? Do they draw principles equally from both, or from the New Testament only? Or... what? This is what I mean by asking if the Testaments are continuous or discontinuous.

It is dangerously simplistic, of course, to polarise such an important debate in this way – as though it must be one or the other. The Testaments are neither continuous nor discontinuous; they are both. The proper way to read the Testaments is to grasp their unity in their discontinuity. Christ is that unity. As Calvin said on Galatians 3:16:

‘Now to Abraham, and his seed’. Before pursuing his argument, [Paul] introduces an observation about the substance of the covenant, that it rests on Christ alone. But if Christ is the foundation of the bargain, it follows that it is of free grace; and this too is the meaning of the word ‘promise’. As the law has respect to men and to their works, so the promise has respect to the grace of God and to faith.

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<sup>3</sup> This represents a highly significant improvement on, refinement of, the equivalent passage in my *Christ*. I am grateful to some North American new-covenant friends for pointing me in the right direction to help me reach this important clarification. This summary is so important, I will re-state it at the end of this section.

‘He says not: “And to seeds”’. To prove that in this place God speaks of Christ, [the apostle] calls attention to the singular number as denoting some particular seed. I have often been astonished that Christians... pass it slightly... In proving... that this prediction applies to a single individual, Paul does not make his argument rest on the use of the singular number. He merely shows that the word ‘seed’ must denote one who was not only descended from Abraham according to the flesh, but had been likewise appointed for this purpose by the calling of God... As Paul likewise argues from these words, that a covenant had been made in Christ, or to Christ, let us inquire into the force of that expression: ‘In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed’ (Gen. 22:18)... Whoever... laying disputing aside, shall inquire into the truth, will readily acknowledge that the words here signify not a mere comparison but a cause; and hence it follows that Paul had good ground for saying that the covenant was made in Christ, or in reference to Christ.

Just so! The Old Testament (covenant) pointed to Christ, revealing him in prophecies and shadows. The New reveals him as the fulfiller of those prophecies, the reality of the shadows (Luke 24:27; John 5:46; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; *etc.*). As a consequence, when we read the Bible, we should be looking for Christ, and reading everything through Christ, whose person and work is the unifying factor of Scripture. Granting that, the debate, therefore, really hinges on where the *emphasis* should fall. Should it be on the continuity or the discontinuity?

There is no doubt – or shouldn’t be! Discontinuity! We have abundant scriptural evidence for emphasising the discontinuity of the Testaments. For now, take just one place, just one – Romans 3:20-22; note the vital *but now*. The passage reads:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. *But now* the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.

These verses show at once the difference between the two Testaments – that is, the discontinuity between them – but at the same time they show their continuity. As for the discontinuity, nothing could be plainer. The ages of law and grace are very different ages because law and grace are very different systems.

As for the continuity, grace was foretold and prefigured by the law and the prophets, but the emphasis of this passage in particular – and the New Testament in general – comes down firmly on the side of the discontinuity. I am not, of course, for a moment suggesting that there was no grace in the Old Testament, and that no sinner was saved in those days. But the fact remains, there is a discontinuity between the Testaments, and *that* is where the weight falls.

Note the contrast. Note the time factor: *now* Christ has come, *now* we are not under the law. The coming of Christ, and our coming to him in repentance and faith, has altered everything – in the former case, historically speaking; in the latter, in a personal sense. Because of the *but now*, all things are new. The coming of Christ is the great turning point, the momentous watershed of history, and the contrast between this age and the old age is written large across the pages of Scripture. And this discontinuity *must* be emphasised. While Paul in Romans 3:20-22 was safeguarding the continuity between the two Testaments, *this was not his primary purpose*. Far from it! Rather, he was setting out the discontinuity between the two. And it is this discontinuity which is of far greater importance than the continuity. Believers ought to recognise – and rejoice in – the differences between the two Testaments (better, covenants), the changes brought about by the eschatological ‘but now’. After all, their hope depends – absolutely – on the differences (1 Pet. 2:10)! In speaking of the discontinuity of the two Testaments (better, covenants), I have, in fact, been speaking of the differences between two ages, two systems, two covenants – especially this last; the discontinuity between the old and new covenants.

Scripture puts the weight on the new-ness of the new covenant – and when it says ‘new’ it does not mean something which was ‘old’ but is now renewed or amended. It really does mean a *new* covenant, accentuating the distinction between the age of the law and the age of the Spirit. Although it is an over-simplification to put it like this, in moving from the age of the Old Testament to the age of the New there was a fundamental change of covenant; the old gave way to the new (Heb. 7:11-12,18-22; 8:13; 9:15;

10:9; 12:18-24).<sup>4</sup> This is an over-simplification. We know that some people in the Old Testament belonged to the new covenant, and that the believers under the old covenant were looking forward to Christ (John 8:56; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Some sinners were justified in the Old Testament (see Rom. 4; Gal. 3:6-9), but the doctrine itself was not written so clearly as in the New. This would seem to be stating the obvious. If not, why do we have the New Testament? The position of Old Testament believers was anomalous. They were in the new covenant and therefore delighted in God's law (Ps. 119), but at the same time they were under its burden in the old covenant. But the basic truth stands. There was a fundamental change of covenant with the change of Testament. It did not take place at the first verse of Matthew, of course. It came into effect with the death of Christ; or, more particularly, with the glorification of Christ in his resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit (John 7:39; 12:16,23; 13:31-32; 16:7; 1 Pet. 1:10-12,21). A definite and irreversible change of covenant took place through Christ.

And here is the nub of the debate. Many Reformed people do not accept this discontinuity, or at least its emphasis. They read their Bibles through very different spectacles. Very different!

This was a (the?) bone of contention between the Anabaptists and the Reformers, at the very heart of their disagreements. The Anabaptists rightly put the differences between the old and the new covenants, and the consequent distinction between the Testaments, at the centre of the debate. The Reformers, on the other hand, stressing the continuity of the two Testaments, were confused over the two great biblical covenants, often arguing for their one-ness, and much of their practical theology flowed from it.<sup>5</sup>

Rejecting human logic, the Anabaptists' rule of faith and practice was the Bible alone, especially the New Testament. God has revealed himself in the Bible in a progressive way, they said;

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<sup>4</sup> Melchizedek collected the tithe from Levi, and this showed his superiority over Levi (Heb. 7:4-10). Similarly, Christ and his law are superior to Moses and his law.

<sup>5</sup> Although Michael Servetus was not an Anabaptist, in some respects he was close – and Calvin lumped him with them.

the Old Testament is not on a parity with the New; the new covenant is supreme; believers are not the children of the Old Testament or covenant, but of the New; the weapons of their warfare are of the New, not the Old. Arguing out these principles, they stressed the differences in the two ages. Believers, they argued, are under the authority of the Old Testament, but only as far as it testifies of Christ, only insofar as he did not abolish it, and only insofar as it serves the purpose of Christian living. In short, believers are under the authority of the law insofar as it does not contradict the gospel. In this way they distinguished between the Testaments. In about 1544, for instance, Pilgram Marpeck produced a massive book of more than 800 pages contrasting the two Testaments on many topics including forgiveness, rest, faith, sword, offerings, *etc.* The Old Testament, the Anabaptists argued, was temporary; the New, abiding. The Old is symbol; the New, fulfilment. The Old was preparatory and partial; the New is final and complete. The Old speaks of Adam, sin, death and law; the New speaks of Christ and redemption through him. All Scripture must be interpreted Christologically; that is, it must be seen in and through him and his work. If the Old Testament is given the wrong place or status in church and theology, all sorts of dire consequences follow, as could be seen in both Münster and Geneva. Yes, both! Such were the views of most Anabaptists. A few did not see it entirely this way, however; some were sabbatarians who sought to apply Old Testament laws to believers.

The Reformers, on the other hand, propounding a continuous history encompassing one age since the covenant with Abraham, saw only minor differences between the two Testaments – arising out of their time sequence. The Reformers saw no difference in substance between the Testaments. As a result, they responded bitterly to the Anabaptists. Not giving sufficient weight to the relevant passages in Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, they made the mistake of saying (when it suited them) that the Testaments were continuous and not discontinuous, and viewed the Bible as a flat revelation, with every passage having the same authority, regardless of its place in the Bible. Thus Israel and the church

became one, and the government of Israel was made to serve as a guide for the State Church in the 16th century.

Here were two distinct approaches to Scripture, still with us. Not all go as far as those reconstructionists who talk of the *Older* and not the *Old* Testament, but those who come down on the continuity side talk about the *Jewish* church as the infant form of the *gospel* church. Further, they base infant baptism on Jewish circumcision, *etc.* All this has large and dire consequences. Reader, to cope with it you will need to be nimble in sorting out the logic and language of covenant theology – the double covenant, the external and the internal covenant, the elect and the church seed, the visible godly, federal faithfulness, and so on. Having done that you will have to come to terms with church members who are acknowledged to be profane and chaffy hypocrites, but, nevertheless, remain glass-eyed ornaments to the church.<sup>6</sup> And so on.

So, how do the Reformed cope with the biblical evidence? Here we reach the heart of the debate. Many Reformed people do not accept the clear discontinuity; or, at least, deny its emphasis. When they read their Bibles, they look down the wrong end of the telescope, viewing the New Testament through the Old. All sorts of troubles follow. In particular, how does it affect their interpretation of Romans 3:21-22? Some think that the words ‘but now’ signal a mere change of paragraph, or simply a small matter of timing. They do not! To enfeeble the ‘but now’ in such a way is tragic. The ‘but’ and the ‘now’ must be emphasised, the ‘but’ as a contrast, and the ‘now’ in its historical sense. And it is far more than mere history. Paul was speaking of the great eschatological ‘now’, the time of the new epoch, the ‘but now’ of the new era – the time of the gospel instead of the law, the age of the gospel contrasted with the age of the law, the age and realm of the Spirit and not law, the age of faith and not works. No wonder these two words ‘but now’ have been justly called the

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<sup>6</sup> Words used by men like John Cotton and Thomas Shepard in 17th-century New England.

<sup>7</sup> I repeat: I am not saying there was no grace or faith in the Old Testament. I am, I say again, talking about emphasis, overwhelming emphasis.

most wonderful words in the entire Bible. Lloyd-Jones, for one, did. Quite right, too! As Paul thundered elsewhere: ‘Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation’ (2 Cor. 6:2). Now! But now!

If anybody should try to dismiss this by saying I am making a mountain out of the mole-hill of one passage, in addition to Romans 3:21, he ought to weigh Romans 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; 11:30; 11:31 (second ‘now’ in NIV, NASB); 16:26; along with John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Corinthians 15:20; Galatians 4:9; Ephesians 2:12-13; 5:8; Colossians 1:26; Hebrews 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Peter 2:10.

Note the contrast between the two ages, the two systems, in Romans 4:13-17. The promise to Abraham ‘was not... through the *law*, but through... *faith*. For if those who are of the *law* are heirs, *faith* is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the *law* brings about wrath; for where there is no *law* there is no transgression. Therefore it is of *faith* that it might be according to *grace*... not only to those who are of the *law*, but also to those who are of the *faith* of Abraham’. Paul’s argument collapses if law is not contrasted with grace and faith. This would seem to be obvious. Sadly, not all can see it. On justification, the Reformers were clear about the distinction between law and gospel, but otherwise they were confused about the two. While they rightly forsook the legal ground for justification, they kept to it for sanctification. And where we find this muddle, we find believers who are virtual ‘Mosesians’ instead of Christians. In their covenant theology, over-emphasising the *continuity* as they do, they fail to do justice to the revealed *discontinuity* of the two covenants.<sup>8</sup> This I will prove, first by glancing at the biblical teaching on the covenants, and then trying to set out the arguments used by Reformed covenant-theologians.

In all this, a nice point of translation from the Greek arises – should we be talking about *covenant* or *testament*? Almost certainly, the former. The Testaments should have been called the Old and New *Covenants*. And in the text itself, *covenant* should have almost always have been used instead of *testament*, since it

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<sup>8</sup> Dispensationalists err the other way.

would have more truly conveyed the (almost-universal) meaning of the word to readers of the English Bible.<sup>9</sup> And this in itself might well have prevented much of the trouble addressed in this article.

In closing this vital section, I repeat that earlier note: The two Testaments are strictly continuous (apart from the 400 year gap), but the two covenants are radically different, and have to be contrasted by us because they are contrasted in Scripture. The one, the Mosaic covenant, the old covenant, was the covenant of the flesh, outward, a shadow, ineffective, condemning, killing, a covenant of death, a temporary covenant which was fulfilled by Christ and abolished because it was weak and useless. The other covenant, the new covenant, is superior in that it is spiritual, of the Spirit, inward, the reality, effective, saving and permanent. While the Reformed want to talk in terms of the continuity of the two Testaments, this, in fact, is virtually irrelevant. What really matters is the fundamental disjoint of the two covenants. See John 1:17; Romans 8:3; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-9; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 7:18,22; 8:13. This is precisely what the Reformed will not face up to.

### ***Biblical teaching on the covenants: 1. The covenant within the Godhead***

Let me start with Scripture, and let me begin at the beginning, where I and Reformed writers are agreed. In eternity past, the triune God determined and decreed to save the elect. This is written large in Scripture. For instance, Paul said he was ‘a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgement of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God,

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<sup>9</sup> Heb. 9:16-17 is the *only* place where *testament* is the right translation; the NIV happily uses *will*. In 2 Cor. 3:14, I disagree with NKJV and AV; see NIV, NASB. Gal. 3:15 could be either – but ‘covenant’ is the better. Speaking historically, the original use of ‘new testament’ was for the new covenant. It was only in the 3rd century that ‘New Testament’, as we now use it, became widespread. Indeed, my AV consistently uses small case for both ‘old testament’ and ‘new testament’.

who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested his word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Saviour' (Tit. 1:1-3). Since God 'promised before time began', he could not have promised to any created being. Therefore he must have promised to himself, within the Godhead. In other words, because of his sovereign grace, love and will, all within himself, God agreed, within the Godhead, to save his elect through his Son, Jesus Christ, by the effectual working of his Holy Spirit. I am willing to call this a covenant – the covenant of grace, no less, except this term is not used in Scripture, but is an invention of covenant theologians. Not only that, their use of the term is far more complicated than the way in which I would want to use it. Leaving that aside, as I say, throughout the word of God there is abundant evidence of this agreement within the Godhead, but since I and Reformed writers are of one mind on this – except on the use of the phrase 'the covenant of grace' – I will say little more on it.<sup>10</sup> This determination, compact, agreement, or promise within the Godhead is not at issue here. It has nothing to do with man. It is an agreement, a decree, a promise within the Godhead. It has nothing to do with the question of the believer and the law. If this was all that covenant theology amounted to, I would have no quarrel with it. But it isn't, and I do.

To move on: the need for salvation arose out of Adam's fall. Through Adam, sin entered the world, and in Adam all the human race sinned and fell. In accordance with God's own determination within the Godhead, at the right time Christ came into the world and earned salvation for all his elect. All in Adam die, and all in Christ live (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-23,45-49). In all this I am sure there is no difference between me and the Reformed.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> From the plethora of other passages which could be cited, see Ps. 2:8; 40:6-8; 89:3; John 17:6; Eph. 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 13:20. See below for a 'little more'.

<sup>11</sup> Having said that, many Reformed writers push the comparison between Christ and Adam too far. Other Reformed teachers have dissented (see, for instance, John Murray: *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume 2: Systematic Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1977 pp49-50,58).

## ***Biblical teaching on the covenants: 2. God's covenants with men***

Down the ages, God has made various covenants with men. He made a covenant with Noah, with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, with Israel at Sinai, with Phinehas, with David, and so on. He also made a covenant which he calls the new covenant.

## ***Biblical teaching on the covenants: 3. The two great covenants with men***

The two great covenants which God has made with men are the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant (Gal. 4:21-31; Heb. 7:18-22; 8:6-13; 9:11-28; 10:1-10; *etc.*). In saying this, I do not dismiss the Abrahamic covenant. Certainly not! The fact is, that covenant had two strands to it. One concerned Abraham's physical seed, Israel; the other, his spiritual seed, the church. The first strand was encompassed in the Mosaic covenant; the second in the new covenant. So, as I say, the two great scriptural covenants are the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant.

The Mosaic law is called the old or first covenant. This includes, but is not confined to, the ten commandments (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 4:13; Jer. 31:31-33; Heb. 8:7-9) – those ten commandments being delineated as the 'words of the covenant': 'And [God] wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments' (Ex. 34:28). 'So [God] declared to you his covenant which he commanded you to perform, the ten commandments; and he wrote them on two tablets of stone' (Deut. 4:13). The ten commandments constituted God's covenant given on Sinai.<sup>12</sup> But the fact is, the old covenant was *all* the law,

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<sup>12</sup> 'The ten commandments' – as a phrase – comes only three times in all the Bible, but is synonymous with the law on 'the tablets of stone' (Ex. 24:12; Deut. 4:13; 9:10; 1 Kings 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:3), 'the tablets of the testimony' (Ex. 31:18; 34:29), 'the testimony' (Ex. 25:15-16; 40:20), 'the words of the covenant' (Ex. 34:28) and 'the tablets of the covenant' (Deut. 9:9-11; Heb. 9:4). Whether this synonymity is strictly true in every case, is debatable.

and not merely the ten commandments.<sup>13</sup> To despise any of God's statutes, to abhor any of his judgements, to fail to perform all his commandments, was to break his covenant (Lev. 26:15). The 'book of the covenant' contained 'all the words of the LORD', all his judgements or ordinances, commandments, testimonies and statutes (Ex. 24:3-7; 2 Kings 23:2-3; 2 Chron. 34:30-32; see also, for instance, 1 Kings 2:3; 6:12; 8:58,61; 9:4; 11:11,33-38; 2 Kings 17:13-16,19,34-38; 18:6,12). So the first or old covenant is the law, the law of Moses.

What is the second or new covenant? It is grace in Christ, the gospel (Heb. 7:18-19,22,28; 8:6-13; 9:15; 10:1,8-9,16-17,28; 12:22-24).

Now we are expressly told that Christ removed the old covenant that he might set up the new. He brought in 'the time of reformation' (Heb. 9:10), 'the time of the new order' (NIV). 'He takes away the first that he may establish the second' (Heb. 10:9), 'having abolished in his flesh the enmity; that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances' (Eph. 2:15), 'having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross' (Col. 2:14). Having annulled 'the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness', he brought in 'a better hope, through which we draw near to God' (Heb. 7:18-19). Christ is 'mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises... He has made the first obsolete' (Heb. 8:6-7,13). 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17).

These are the two covenants which lie at the heart of this debate. While there is some continuity between the old covenant and the new,<sup>14</sup> the Bible speaks of vast differences between them.

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<sup>13</sup> The 'even' of Deut. 4:13 (AV) is in italics; the translators added it because they thought it made the meaning clear. I am not saying they were wrong to do it, but just pointing out the fact. The NKJV translators did the same with 'that is' in Eph. 2:15, which I quote immediately below.

<sup>14</sup> God wrote both; love for God, love for neighbour, honour for parents, faithfulness in marriage, truthfulness, and so on, are common to both.

The old was temporary,<sup>15</sup> it was a ministry of death and condemnation (Rom. 7:7-11; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:17,19,23-25; 4:1-7,21-31; Heb. 7:18-22; 8:6-13), and was introduced with ‘blackness and darkness and tempest... [so that] they could not endure what was commanded... And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said: “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling”’ (Heb. 12:18-21). The new covenant, however, is permanent, the ministry of life, of the Spirit, of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:6-11). ‘But you have come to... Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel’ (Heb. 12:22-24). In short, the old required man’s obedience; the new is God’s promise. The old was external ritual and ceremonial; the new, inward and spiritual. The old was ruled by fear; the new, by love. The old was bondage, slavery to law and works; the new, freedom, liberty in Christ. The old was for the Jew; the new, for the elect throughout the world. The old said: ‘Stay away’; the new says: ‘Come’. The old was breakable – and was broken by every man under it except Christ; the new is unbreakable.

This, in brief, is the biblical doctrine on the covenants. As I have noted, some Reformed teachers disagree with what I have said about the two great covenants, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. Covenant theology, I contend, diverges markedly from Scripture, being a logical system<sup>16</sup> invented by men,<sup>17</sup> and

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<sup>15</sup> This must not be glossed. The law, the old covenant, was temporary. God always intended it to be so. See Rom. 7; 2 Cor. 3; Gal. 3; Hebrews.

<sup>16</sup> The Reformers and the Puritans, depending far too much on human logic, were not always *biblical* in their reasoning. In too many cases they became Reformed schoolmen, where logical distinctions and terms drawn from rationalism and philosophy, based on Aristotle’s logical system, came to be regarded as authoritative as Scripture. This led to scholasticism among the Puritans and their followers. It was a sad mistake.

<sup>17</sup> Although Johann Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) was probably the first to publish a work containing the concept of federal salvation, Kaspar Olevianus (1536-1587) was its inventor, in Germany, when he and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) drafted the final version of the Heidelberg Catechism (1562). William Ames (1576-1633) was the leading British exponent of covenant theology, which dominated the

imposed on Scripture. But since it underpins the Reformed view of the law, we must look at it, and try to get to grips with it. A word of warning, however! It is like wrestling in a fog with an octopus which has been liberally smeared in Vaseline!

### ***Covenant theology: 1. The covenant of works and the covenant of grace***

What is the Reformed idea of a covenant? They say it is an agreement between two or more parties, whether or not the parties are equal.

Covenant theologians say God made a covenant with Adam. But where are we told this in Scripture? They go on to say God made a covenant with all men in Adam. Where are we told this in Scripture? Further, they give this so-called covenant a name, a name which looms large in their writings; namely, ‘the covenant of works’. But you will not find this in Scripture.<sup>18</sup> I am not being silly or pedantic. I am well aware that the word ‘trinity’ does not appear in the Bible. For the moment, I am simply stating a fact. ‘The covenant of works’ does not appear in Scripture as a term. My contention is, of course, neither does it appear as a concept.<sup>19</sup>

As I have already mentioned, the Reformed have also invented another covenant – ‘the covenant of grace’ – which is far more complicated than the covenant of works (which is problematical enough), so I will leave further explanation of it until we come across it. Just to say, this covenant of grace – as covenant theologians have developed it – does not appear in Scripture either – either in name or concept. What is more, it is impossible to speak of *‘the Reformed idea of the covenant of*

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Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians (1643-1646) and the Savoy Declaration of the Independents (1661).

<sup>18</sup> Nor will you find it in Calvin, most Reformed creeds, the 39 Articles or the Heidelberg Catechism. This may surprise some Reformed readers.

<sup>19</sup> To try to justify this by reference to ‘trinity’ is fruitless. The difference is patent. The Bible does not use the word ‘trinity’, so we have to invent it. But the Bible does use the word ‘covenant’, and we should not stray from the way it uses it.

grace'. The simple fact is, covenant theologians do not see eye to eye with each other on what this so-called covenant of grace is.

Let me summarise so far. Most Reformed writers argue on the basis of a logical system they have invented ('covenant theology'), and in the process they have coined two phrases<sup>20</sup>, 'the covenant of works' and 'the covenant of grace'. These phrases – and the principles behind them – are fundamental, pivotal to covenant theology, and are, so it is said, the heart of Calvinism.<sup>21</sup>

Sadly, this logical contrivance – the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace – invented by Reformed theologians, dominating their theology, has greatly complicated the simplicity of the Bible, and muddied the waters dreadfully<sup>22</sup>. Things have got worse in the past five hundred years as covenant theologians have continued to elaborate and embellish their system, piling confusion upon confusion.

I remind you, reader, the Bible speaks of two covenants – the Mosaic and the new. Notice how the Bible and covenant theology are beginning to diverge already. They sound similar – both are based on two covenants – but they are very different covenants!

## ***Covenant theology: 2. The covenant of grace***

Since it is the so-called covenant of works which is the cardinal point, I will say only a few words about the so-called covenant of grace. As I hinted, Reformed teachers are themselves far from clear about it – which some will admit to. They are not sure, for instance, about who is in the covenant of grace – some think even

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<sup>20</sup> 'Coining' does not mean, as so often it is assumed to mean, 'copying'. It means, 'inventing'. Inevitably, therefore, they are unbiblical phrases, even though they have a biblical air about them.

<sup>21</sup> Calvin was not a covenant theologian – he died before the notion had been invented. Apparently, therefore, Calvin would have failed his examination paper on Calvinism!

<sup>22</sup> And not only in a doctrinal sense. The antinomian controversy in New England in the 1630s arose out of it, and preparationism came from it. Antinomianism and preparationism were linked in the New England crisis.

the unregenerate may be in it. Some think there is not one, but two covenants of grace – one called ‘the covenant of redemption’ to distinguish it from ‘the covenant of grace’. It makes one wonder – as one of their most influential teachers recognised in print – why ever the notion of the covenant of grace caught on. Other problems exist. In addition to who is the second party of the covenant, is the covenant conditional or unconditional? Is it internal or external? What about the difference between the essence and the administration of the covenant? Is it an absolute covenant? Is it a legal question or does it involve life? These are not my questions, I hasten to add. I have culled them from Louis Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*, widely distributed over several decades by the Banner of Truth Trust. All such questions have perplexed Reformed theologians for centuries, and still do. But they are of their own making.

And what about the covenant of redemption which I mentioned in passing a moment ago? What is this? What about the problems Reformed logicians love to invent and try to solve concerning *this* covenant? Problems such as: On what basis do some Reformed theologians speak of a covenant between the Father and the Son, with no place for the Holy Spirit? Is this non-trinitarian covenant a threat to the doctrine of the trinity or not? Or is it a trinitarian covenant after all – even though it doesn’t look like it? What is the connection between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace? Are they different or one and the same? These, too, are questions of their own making. Reformed teachers might try to say that their terminology need not confuse us, but the fact is they are themselves confused and divided. They may say it all can be ‘put simply’, but experience proves otherwise. Leading Reformed theologians disagree among themselves, saying they cannot understand each other’s scheme – so what hopes for the average believer under Reformed teachers? The truth is, covenant theology solves nothing. Although those who started it wanted to avoid scholastic definitions, that’s where it has ended up, openly ambiguous.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See below for more on the idea of one covenant, but different *administrations*.

The supreme problem for covenant theologians, however, does not concern the so-called covenant of grace. No! The main problem is with what they call ‘the covenant of works’. The great question is, was the Mosaic covenant (the one I am concerned with in this book) the covenant of grace or the covenant of works? Opinions are sharply divided, self-contradictory and, at best, muddled among Reformed teachers. They might wonder why covenant theology has not caught on outside their own circle, but the answer would seem self-evident.

### ***Covenant theology: 3. The biblical covenants, covenant theologians claim, are one and the same covenant***

It is at this point that we run into massive trouble. As I said, Reformed teachers say that the various covenants in Scripture are really one and the same – just different administrations of the one covenant of grace. In particular, the Mosaic covenant was essentially the same as that covenant which was established with Abraham.

Judged by Scripture, the suggestion – that all the covenants are one and the same – is incredible. For one thing, the word ‘covenant’ really speaks of discontinuity, a change, something different, so whatever covenant theology deals with, it must deal with change. ‘For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law’ (Heb. 7:12). Do not miss the ‘of necessity’!

Take the covenants Reformed teachers try to synthesise. Genesis 3:15 was a promise, not a covenant at all; the covenant with Noah was a covenant with all mankind; the covenant with Abraham, as I have explained, had two aspects, one applicable to his physical descendants, and the other to his spiritual descendants; the Mosaic covenant at Sinai was a covenant of law-works which concerned Israel; the new covenant concerns believers. And there were other covenants down the ages besides these. One would think, judging by Reformed writers, that Paul spoke of the *covenant* (singular) in both Romans 9:4 and Ephesians 2:12. He did not! Take the latter. He spoke of ‘the

covenants of promise’!<sup>24</sup> Note the plural! The Bible makes much of an ‘s’ on the end of a word (Gal. 3:16).

But many Reformed writers claim that the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant are virtually one and the same, and all are covenants of grace and not works. This is staggering. If the covenant of Sinai did not demand law-works, what did it demand? I will have much more to say about this. There again, how can references to the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant all apply to *the* covenant? After all, the Jeremiah passage could not be plainer. The new covenant is the *new* covenant, and is expressly said to be ‘not according to’ the Mosaic covenant (Jer. 31:32). These two, at least, cannot be the same covenant, can they? Let me stress once again the new-ness of the new covenant. Christians are under the new covenant, that covenant which is expressly said to be unlike the Mosaic covenant, the old covenant. Yet Calvin accused the Anabaptists of madness for what he dismissed as the ‘pestilential error’ of questioning the one-ness of the covenants!

Are we not plainly told that the old covenant has been abolished and the new has come? that believers are not under the law? (See Rom. 6:14-15; 7:1-6; 8:2-11; 2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:11-19; 8:6-13; 9:15;<sup>25</sup> 10:16-20). We know the Mosaic covenant has been abolished (2 Cor. 3:7-11). What is more, as the old covenant was abolished and the new covenant came in, a comparison, even a stark contrast, was drawn between the two. Far from being

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<sup>24</sup> It is not unknown for covenant theologians, and Baptists who wish to go as far as they can with covenant theology, to misquote Eph. 2:12 as ‘the covenant of promise’. As for such Baptists, they should recall the bad and far-reaching effect covenant theology will have on church life. Sadly, some of them, even though they admit differences in the covenants – especially the greatest of all – namely, that the new covenant is new! – attribute panic and some sort of dispensationalism to those of us who will not take the same route as they; that is, we will not opt for covenant theology.

<sup>25</sup> Christ ‘is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant’ (Heb. 9:15). Brown thought that these were the sins which were not expiated under the old covenant (Brown, John: *An Exposition of Hebrews*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1961 p413).

altogether one and the same covenant, they are very, very different. How different can be easily seen in Paul's words:

God... made us... ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious (2 Cor. 3:5-11).

This is vital. The Bible contrasts the two covenants, the old and the new, and contrasts them very sharply indeed. In the following quotations, please observe the use of the words *but*, *yet* and *on the other hand*. These are words of contrast. Powerful words! Words which must not be glossed! Nor should we miss the apostle's hyperbole: 'glorious... glory... more glorious... glory... exceeds much more in glory... glorious... glory... the glory that excels... glorious... more glorious'. And on which covenant does the weight of glory resoundingly fall?

The two covenants are clearly contrasted in the following passages:

For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

You are not under law *but* under grace (Rom. 6:14).

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law: 'The man who does those things shall live by them'. *But* the righteousness of faith speaks in this way... If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:4-9).

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them'. *But* that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith'. *Yet* the law is not of faith, *but* 'the man who does them shall live by them'. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us... that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:10-14).

For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children – *but* the Jerusalem above is free... (Gal. 4:24-26).

For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; *on the other hand*, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God (Heb. 7:18-19). *But* now<sup>26</sup> he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second (Heb. 8:6-7).

Are these quotations not sufficient to prove that the old and new covenants are very different? Do they not show that the new is far superior to the old, and plainly so? How can they be the same? If they are, how could Paul say: ‘For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom. 8:2-3)? Here we have it; two laws, two systems, two economies, two covenants. The old, the law of sin and death; the new, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The contrast, I say again, could not be greater. The old was a covenant of death, the new is a covenant of life. There is no greater contrast than between death and life! No wonder we are told: ‘In that [God] says: “A new covenant”, he has made the first obsolete’ (Heb. 8:13), and that Christ has taken ‘away the first that he may establish the second’ (Heb. 10:9). Some Reformed teachers censure those of us who dare assert that the old covenant is abolished. But the letter to the Hebrews says it is!

Christ draws a very clear contrast between the old and the new covenants (Mark 2:18-22), illustrating this in two ways: it is futile both to sew a piece of new cloth on to an old garment, and to put new wine into old wineskins. The two covenants are very different. They cannot be cobbled together. Although covenant theologians claim the covenants (the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and

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<sup>26</sup> Note the ‘now’. It is the eschatological key to all this argument.

the new, the last two in particular) are one covenant, they are mistaken.

#### ***Covenant theology: 4. The covenant of works***

But what of the Reformed covenant of works? Though its advocates have to admit its development is ‘something of a mystery’, those of us who reject the concept are dismissed as thinking unbiblically. This, of course, needs proof, not mere assertion. Advocates of the covenant of works, aware of the need to be clear about its biblical basis, have to admit its name cannot be found in the first three chapters of Genesis. But why worry about the non-mention of its name? There are bigger problems with it than that! Neither the name – *nor the concept itself* – is found in the entire Bible! Even so, the lack of the term – while this, I freely concede, is not conclusive – should give pause for thought. Yes, if the principle can be found in Scripture, the absence of its name is not important. But is the principle in Scripture? This *is* the question!

Romans 5:12-21, so it seems, is the only passage which, at first glance, can be used to establish the covenant of works, the covenant said to be made with all the human race in Adam. If this is right, and Romans 5:12-21 does speak of the covenant of works, it can only mean that the law is not this covenant of works – since John 1:17, Romans 5:13-14 and Galatians 3:10-29 teach that the law was not given to men until Sinai, 430 years after Abraham, let alone Adam! It could not, therefore, have been given to Adam and the patriarchs. This, in turn, can only mean that the law is the covenant of grace – which, as I will show, is nonsense.

So what about Romans 5:12-21? Reader, as I have made clear, I fully accept – I am convinced, biblically – that in eternity past the triune Godhead agreed to save the elect in Christ. I am also convinced that in Adam all the human race fell into sin. Both Adam and Christ acted as representative heads, acting for all their descendants – that is, in Adam, all the human race; in Christ, all the elect. Adam fell; all the human race fell in and with him. Christ was born under the law, kept the law, died under the law, and was raised from the dead; all the elect are constituted and

accounted righteous by God in him, they receiving all the benefits he earned for them by his life, sufferings and resurrection. I find these truths unmistakably taught in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-23,45-49.

But this is a far cry from the covenant theology invented by Reformed scholars. If truth be told, not all of them accept the usual deductions made by covenant theologians from the passages.

Romans 7:10 is another passage which is sometimes called on to justify the covenant of works. But this verse, according to the immediate context, clearly speaks of the ten commandments (in truth, the law) which, on Sinai, had been addressed to Jews, all of whom, naturally, were sinners. Even so, some Reformed writers claim that, in Romans 7:10, Paul was speaking of the covenant of works given to Adam before he fell. In other words, the law was given to a man who had not sinned. Allowing it to be so for the moment, what Adam made of prohibitions against murder and adultery, and so on, *before he had sinned*, I simply cannot comprehend. And what of 1 Timothy 1:9? ‘The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers...’. In which of these categories did Adam find himself *before he fell*?

The main confusion concerning the Reformed covenant of works, as can be seen, arises over the Mosaic covenant. Was the Mosaic covenant the covenant of works or was it the covenant of grace? I mean, of course, in Reformed terms. The Bible knows nothing of either. But this is a fundamental question for covenant theology. Was Sinai a works covenant or a grace covenant? Covenant theologians ought to be able to give us a clear, unequivocal answer to that question. Can they? Will they? The Bible does. Let me prove it.

### ***Covenant theology: 5. Sinai – was it a works covenant or a grace covenant?***

Take Galatians 4:21-31. In the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, <sup>27</sup> we are expressly told that the law on Mount Sinai was a covenant of bondage, in contrast to another covenant (Gal. 4:21,24-27), the two women representing these two covenants. What covenant did Sarah represent? The answer is patent. The Abrahamic covenant fulfilled in the new covenant. How do we know? Well, how would the Galatians have understood Paul's allusion? Not having the benefit of 2 Corinthians 3 or Hebrews 8, and limited to what they knew from the apostle's letter they were reading (or having read to them), nevertheless their minds would have leapt to the covenant with Abraham, and for two reasons. First, Paul had already stressed the Abrahamic covenant of promise (Gal. 3:6-9,14-19,29). Secondly, the allegory itself contains the explicit reference to Abraham, Hagar and Isaac, and the implied reference to Sarah (Gal. 4:21-31). Paul, in referring to Sarah, was speaking of the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled in the new. *That* is how the Galatians would have read the apostle. That is how we must read him.

Now whatever view is taken of the covenant represented by Sarah, the covenant represented by Hagar is the law, the Mosaic covenant. Paul was writing to those who desired 'to be under the law'. The allegory spoke of 'two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is [represents] Mount Sinai... and corresponds to... bondage' (Gal. 4:21-25). And this covenant is expressly called a covenant of bondage. In other words, it was a works covenant which no sinner could keep, but which enslaved those under it. Note further, *contrast* was Paul's theme; contrast between law, bondage and flesh, in the one covenant – and promise, freedom and the Spirit, in the other. Paul's argument was directed against the Judaisers who wanted believers to go under the Mosaic covenant. Indeed, as I have shown, they argued that the

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<sup>27</sup> 'Allegory' (AV), 'allegorically speaking' (NASB), 'are symbolic' (NKJV), 'taken figuratively' (NIV). From *allēgoreō*, 'to speak allegorically or in a figure' (Thayer).

Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants were one and the same. Not for a moment would he countenance the thought! The Mosaic covenant, being a covenant of bondage, Paul would have none of it. This puts covenant theologians on the side of the Judaisers, and, therefore, against Paul.

Let me prove it. Many Reformed writers will not have it at any price. In one respect, they have the same faulty theology as the Judaisers. Flying in the face of Scripture, they say there are not two covenants here in Galatians 4, but one; the two women do not represent two covenants, but two *aspects* of one covenant; the slavery of the Mosaic covenant was not really a part of that covenant at all; it was all a misunderstanding, a Jewish misinterpretation of the covenant. So it is claimed. But Paul said no such thing. He said it was the covenant itself which enslaved! It was no misunderstanding! The Mosaic covenant was based on a slavish principle, ‘do and live’ – with its corollary, ‘fail and die’. Those under it, the Jews, ‘were held prisoners by the law, locked up’ by it (Gal. 3:23, NIV).

The law could bring life (Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 18:19; 20:11-25; Matt. 19:17; Luke 10:28; 18:18-20; Rom. 7:10; 10:5), yes, but the obedience had to be perfect (Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10). Now, since all men (apart from Christ) are sinners (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8; 3:4-5), no man can be saved by law (Acts 13:39; Gal. 2:16; 3:11). If he could, ‘if righteousness comes through the law’ – that is, through a sinner keeping the law – ‘then Christ died in vain’ (Gal. 2:21)! But no sinner can be saved by law. The fault, however, is not with the law, for the law is ‘perfect’ (Ps. 19:7), ‘good’ (1 Tim. 1:8), ‘holy and just and good’ (Rom. 7:12). The fault is with man (Rom. 7:14; 8:3; Heb. 8:7-8). ‘If there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law [of God]’ (Gal. 3:21).

The law *itself* was a works covenant. It was not a case of the Jews turning a grace covenant into a works covenant! Even so, many Reformed teachers continue to insist the law *was* a (indeed, the) covenant of grace. To confuse the Mosaic covenant with the covenant of works – to deny it is the covenant of grace – is, so it is alleged, the most common error in interpreting the allegory! The ‘first covenant’ and ‘old covenant’ are said to refer, not to the

Mosaic covenant, but to the whole age between Adam's fall and Christ's [first] coming; the Mosaic covenant and Abrahamic covenant being one and the same.

This is quite wrong. In Galatians 4:21-25, Paul was speaking of two covenants – the old and the new (within the Abrahamic covenant). Those under the law are slaves, those under grace are saints. The two covenants, and those under them, are chalk and cheese. These two covenants cannot be the same covenant. 2 Corinthians 3:6-17, Galatians 3:10-29 and many other places, utterly refute it.

In fact, Reformed theologians themselves deep down – despite their seemingly confident assertions – have a real problem, a massive problem, an intractable problem, with the Mosaic covenant, and are guilty of double-speak. Some admit the Mosaic covenant certainly looks as though it is the covenant of works, but even so, they claim, it is, after all, the covenant of grace. But, reader, the law did not merely look like the law – it was the law; the word of God says so! Other Reformed teachers say the law was the covenant of grace 'more legally defined' at Sinai. But how can *grace* be 'legally defined', let alone '*more* legally defined'? Another writer wants it both ways. The law was the covenant of works – a 'modified' version of the Abrahamic covenant – but also a 'renewal' of the single covenant of grace spanning all time from Adam to the eternal state to come. Grace, law, gospel and curse all jumbled together, it seems! Some grace! Some muddle! There have been many versions of the theme. Some argue the point from the two givings of the law. The first, so they say, was a works covenant, whereas the second was as a rule to those who are in Christ.

Let Thomas Boston speak for them. (I quote from his republication – with extensive Notes – of Edward Fisher's *The Marrow Of Modern Divinity*. Let us ask Boston the question raised by Fisher: "Were the ten commandments, as they were delivered to [the Israelites] on Mount Sinai, the covenant of works or not?")

Boston replied:

As to this point, there are different sentiments among orthodox divines... It is evident to me that the covenant of grace was delivered

to the Israelites on Mt Sinai... But that the covenant of works was also... delivered to the Israelites on Mt Sinai, I cannot refuse.

And Fisher: ‘The covenant of grace and... the covenant of works... the ten commandments were the [substance] of both covenants’.

Boston again:

I conceive the two covenants to have been both delivered on Mt Sinai to the Israelites... [both] the covenant of grace... [and] the covenant of works... There is no confounding of the two covenants of grace and works... According to this account of the Sinai transaction, the ten commands, there delivered, must come under a twofold notion or consideration; namely, as the law of Christ, and as the law of works... The transaction at Sinai... was a mixed dispensation; there was the promise or covenant of grace, and also the law; the one a covenant to be believed, the other a covenant to be done.

But, of course, as Fisher noted: ‘The Lord never delivers the covenant of works to any that are under the covenant of grace’, to which he himself replied: ‘Indeed it is true’, but...! Boston himself ‘answered’ the question: Since God gave the commandments twice on Sinai, this means it ‘is not strange’ that the ten commandments fulfil these two contradictory roles. Even so, Boston realised he was clutching at straws: ‘Whether or not... some such thing is intimated, by the double accentuation of the decalogue, let the learned determine’.<sup>28</sup>

Reader, learned or not, can you ‘determine’ what Boston was on about? If you are a Reformed believer, which covenant are you under? As you know, according to your teachers and your Confessions, you are under the law – but are you under it as the covenant of works or the covenant of grace? Are you under the law as given to Moses the first time, or the second? Do you know? Does it matter? Where does the New Testament talk like this?

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<sup>28</sup> Edward Fisher: *The Marrow of Modern Divinity: in two parts. Part I. The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. Part II. An Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, with notes by Thomas Boston, Still Waters Revival Books, Edmonton, Canada, reprint edition 1991 pp53-59,76-77.

Boston again:

The law of works is the law [which is to] be done, that one may be saved [whereas]... the law of Christ is the law of the Saviour, binding his saved people to all the duties of obedience... [Yet] the law of works, and the law of Christ, are in substance but one law, even the ten commandments... [There is] a difference [however]... between the ten commandments as coming from an absolute God out of Christ to sinners, and the same ten commandments as coming from God in Christ to them. [But it is] utterly groundless [to say] that the original indispensable obligation of the law of the ten commandments is in any measure weakened by the believer's taking it as the law of Christ, and not as the law of works. [The ten commandments as the law of works come] from... God... out of Christ, [while the ten commandments as the law of Christ come] from God in Christ. The law of the ten commandments, [remaining the same throughout, issued by the same God, was first] the natural law... written on Adam's heart on his creation, while as yet it was neither the law of works nor the law of Christ... Then it became the law of works... The natural law of the ten commandments (which can never expire... but is obligatory in all possible states of the creature...) is, from the moment the law of works expires as to believers, issued forth to them [again]... in the channel of the covenant of grace... Thus it [now] becomes the law of Christ to them; of which law also the same ten commandments are likewise the [substance]... In the threatening of this law [the law of Christ, that is] there is no revenging wrath; and in the promises of it no proper conditionality of works; but here is the order of the covenant of grace... Thus the ten commandments stand, both in the law of works and in the law of Christ at the same time... but as they are the [substance]... of the law of works, they are actually a part of the law of works; howbeit, as they are the [substance]... of the law of Christ, they are actually a part, not of the law of works, but the law of Christ. And as they stand in the law of Christ... they ought to be a rule of life to a believer... they ought [not, however] to be a rule of life to a believer, as they stand in the law of works.<sup>29</sup>

Schizophrenic nonsense!

But what about Hebrews 8:13 and 9:15? Do these passages have any bearing on the so-called covenant of works said to be

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<sup>29</sup> Fisher pp24-27,155-171. Incidentally, Boston made a mistake which is all too common. The believer has died to the law; the law has not died or, to use his word, 'expired', to the believer.

given to Adam? Certainly not! When God says he has made ‘a new covenant’, and thus, as the writer immediately adds by way of deduction and explanation, ‘he has made the first obsolete’ (Heb. 8:13), it does not mean that after Adam fell, God instituted a ‘new covenant of grace’ with him. The writer to the Hebrews was not talking about Adam at all! There is not the remotest possibility of it! Why, he does not even mention Adam in his entire letter! And in Hebrews 8:13, he was not saying that an old covenant with Adam was replaced by a new covenant with Adam. Nor was he declaring that an old covenant with Adam was replaced by a new covenant with Moses. Nor was he saying that an old covenant of grace was replaced by a new covenant of grace. When the writer to the Hebrews spoke of the old covenant, the first covenant which was made old and replaced, he was referring not to Adam and Eden, but to Moses and Sinai. And when speaking of the new covenant, that altogether different covenant, he was not referring to Moses and Sinai, but to Christ and Calvary. He was asserting that the old covenant of Moses – the law – given at Sinai, has been replaced by the new covenant – a grace covenant – made by Christ on Calvary. This is the simple, undeniable and stubborn (and glorious) fact about Hebrews 8:13. The entire context of Hebrews is incontestable proof of it.

The Puritans, the masters of (or mastered by) covenant theology, certainly showed confusion over all this. They simply could not agree as to what the New Testament means when it refers to the first and second covenants, the old and new covenants. They could not agree as to, in their terms, how many covenants of grace there are. In particular, some said the Mosaic covenant was the covenant of works. Others thought it subservient to the covenant of grace. Others, a mixed covenant of works and grace.<sup>30</sup> Yet others, the majority, thought it was the covenant of grace. And since the Puritans played (and are still playing) such an important role in this debate on the law in general, and covenant theology in particular, this obvious flaw

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<sup>30</sup> How that can be reconciled with the apostle’s declaration baffles me: ‘And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work’ (Rom. 11:6).

and glaring confusion which lies at the very foundation of their case should give their earnest advocates pause for thought. As covenant theologians have to admit, such divisions and differences of interpretation are ‘discouraging’; and so they must be – for those who want to follow the Puritans in their views on the law. Perhaps the edifice Reformed teachers have erected, though outwardly very impressive, might in fact be totally unstable right from the start? Shaky foundations, it seems to me.

Covenant theology is confused – right at its heart. Is the Mosaic covenant the covenant of grace or works, neither or both, or one looking like the other? Is it all to do with the two givings of the law? Is it all a Jewish misunderstanding? Or what? This much is clear: Reformed theologians are able, apparently, to live with this tangle of illogicality, and they seem more-than happy to castigate those (the Jews in their time, and now, me and others like me) who cannot. The truth is, of course, their logic, and its conundrums, are not found in the covenant of Sinai, and have nothing to do with the Jews, but are entirely the province of covenant theologians themselves.

Let me give just one example of the sort of thing I am talking about. Listen to Boston:

The unbelieving Israelites were under the covenant of grace made with their father Abraham externally... but under the covenant of works made with their father Adam internally... Further, as to believers among them, they were internally... as well as externally, under the covenant of grace; and only externally under the covenant of works, and that, not as a covenant coordinate with, but subordinate and subservient to, the covenant of grace.<sup>31</sup>

So said Boston. Did you get it, reader? Did you get it when you re-read it? Do you think you will ever really get it? I wonder if Boston got it?

The consequences did not stop with Israel, of course. Every adherent of covenant theology today has to sort out such matters – that is, if they want to be sure about how they and their offspring stand. Are their infant children in the covenant of grace or works? If they are in the covenant of grace, are they in it

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<sup>31</sup> Fisher p54.

externally? Or internally? I know from sad experience how an unbeliever can rebuff the call of the gospel, and push aside its warnings, by saying he is (or his father was) ‘in the covenant’. I wonder, however, does such an unbeliever know which covenant he is talking about?

The question remains, according to Reformed theologians, was the Mosaic covenant the covenant of grace, or of works, or of grace looking like works, or... what? Since it is fundamental to covenant theology, we have a right to know, surely! Reader, I think I have provided evidence<sup>32</sup> enough to justify my claim: Reformed theologians are divided and confused over the Mosaic covenant. Some think it was the covenant of grace. Some think it was the covenant of works. Some think it was both. Some think it was the covenant of grace looking like the covenant of works. In short, there is no such thing as *the* Reformed view of the Mosaic covenant. They simply cannot tell. As I have observed, this would not matter so much, but according to their own statements, the covenant of works is pivotal to their system. If so, and if *they* cannot decide whether or not the law is the covenant of works, what confidence should others place in their arguments on the believer and the law?

Of far greater importance, what does Scripture say about the Mosaic covenant? Was the law a works covenant? Note, I did not say ‘the covenant of works’. I hope I have said enough to make it plain that it was nothing to do with Adam and the Reformed notion of *the* covenant of works. The answer is, of course, the law *was* a works covenant. After all, the Bible speaks of ‘the works [or deeds] of the law’ (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:2,5). But there are two principal passages which prove the point. I refer to Romans 10:5-6, and Galatians 4:4-5. This last I regard as the clinching argument.

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<sup>32</sup> I am referring here to the extensive extracts given in my *Christ*. Some readers may well be astonished to read what men, with (Reformed) household names, published by top Reformed publishing houses, have been prepared to write.

## ***Proof that the law was a works covenant: 1. Romans 10:5-6***

Let me quote the verses: ‘Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law: “The man who does those things shall live by them”. But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way...’.

Paul speaks of two ways of attaining righteousness – ‘the righteousness which is of *the law*’, and ‘the righteousness of *faith*’. But the apostle more than *speaks* of two ways. He *contrasts* them: ‘The righteousness which is of the law... *but* the righteousness of faith’. Moreover, Paul contrasts them very strongly. In truth, he opposes them. Justification by law, by works, he sets against justification by grace, through faith. Thus it is clear, the law is a works covenant, opposed to grace.

All this is to do with justification. I quite accept the fact. I go further. It is essential for what I want to say. On the question of justification, law and faith (grace) are contrasted. I stress this once again, even though it is obvious, and for the same reason as before; namely, some teachers want us to believe that law and grace go hand in hand. As a matter of fact, some of them, it seems to me, see hardly any difference between the two; and some say they are one and the same. Clearly they are not!

But there is an even bigger point to be made. To which law was Paul referring? The passage, of course, has very close links with Galatians 3:12. Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5 in both places. ‘The law’ in question, therefore, is the Mosaic law. The upshot? The law of Moses was a works covenant. The law of Moses, I stress. All of it.

This is not the only place where justification is linked with obedience to the law: ‘The doers of the law will be justified’ (Rom. 2:13). True, because of sin, ‘the commandment, which was to bring life’, brought ‘death’ (Rom. 7:10), <sup>33</sup> cursing those under it (Gal. 3:10,13), and ‘therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified’ (Rom. 3:20). Consequently, ‘a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ... No

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<sup>33</sup> And the law was made only for sinners (1 Tim. 1:9) – sinners before and after their receiving the law. Israel certainly proved it (Deut. 4:1 – 6:25; Neh. 9:13-37; Ezek. 20:11-44; Rom. 9:30 – 10:5).

one is justified by the law... the law is not of faith' (Gal. 2:16; 3:11-12).<sup>34</sup> Yes, all this is true. *But the fact that Paul needed to say it shows that perfect obedience would have earned salvation.* Paul would never have needed to make such statements, nor written Romans 4:1-5, Ephesians 2:8-10 or Philippians 3:9, if law and justification had not been linked. <sup>35</sup> The law required works, which if accomplished, would have earned salvation. Note the connection between the law, the doing of the law – note the various 'doing' words, such as *practice, do, obey, deeds, works, keep* – and life, eternal life, in Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11,13; Matthew 19:16-17; Luke 10:25-28; 18:18-20; Romans 2:13,17-25; 10:5-10, for instance.

The law, if kept perfectly, would have merited salvation. Indeed, in one case, the law *was* kept and justification *was* earned – by Christ for his people (Gal. 4:4-5). If perfect law-keeping could not have brought righteousness, then Christ could never have earned salvation for his people through the law (Gal. 4:4-5). This is the 'bigger point' I noted a moment ago. The man Christ Jesus, and only the man Christ Jesus, has attained life by keeping the law. *This* is the point. Perfect obedience to the law brought the reward, because the law demanded works, and promised righteousness for obedience. It is the core of Paul's argument in Romans 4:4; 11:6. The principle applies precisely in Christ's case (Gal. 4:4-5). Christ coming under the law amounts to far more than saying Jesus was a Jew. Of course, 'born under the law' does mean that Jesus was a Jew, but it means far more than that. When

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<sup>34</sup> See Ps. 143:2; Gal. 3:21. But the fact that no sinner could keep the law has no bearing on the issue. The fact remains: perfect obedience would have brought righteousness. Indeed, if Reformed teachers push the point, I would observe how once again they destroy their case by inadvertently exposing yet another difference between law and grace. The law could not bring salvation for any sinner without exception, but grace brings salvation for all the elect without exception! And, of course, the way of salvation has *always* been by faith: 'The just shall live by faith' was first stated in the Old Testament, and thereafter quoted in the New (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

<sup>35</sup> I admit the principle is of wider application than the law, but Rom. 4 comes immediately after Rom. 2 and 3; Eph. 2:11-18 after Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 3:9 is explicit; as is Rom. 4:13-16.

combined with the following verse, the purpose of Christ's coming, and his being under the law, is spelled out: Christ came to set elect Jews (and Gentiles) free from being confined and condemned under the law, 'to redeem those who were under the law' (Gal. 4:5). Nor must we forget, Paul has already told us that Christ bore the curse of the law in his death (Gal. 3:13). The curse of the law, I repeat, the curse of the entire Mosaic law!

In short, Romans 10:5-6 proves that the law was a works covenant.

Reference to Galatians 4 leads me on to what I have called 'the clinching passage' to prove that the law was a works covenant. Before I come to that, however, let me repeat what I said at the start. I realise this article is involved and difficult. At the risk of being wearisome, let me pause to explain, once again, what I am trying to do. In face of Reformed opposition, I am trying to show that the law was a works covenant. It was not the gospel. To this end, I am providing evidence to support my claim that the law promised the Jews justification for perfect obedience. And it really did promise justification. It was not a figment of Jewish imagination (though, of course, justification by the law was in practice not possible to fallen man – no sinner can keep the law perfectly).<sup>36</sup> Perfect obedience to the law would merit justification. That is what the Bible teaches. And this establishes that the law was a works covenant. It was not the gospel. All this has considerable bearing on the way Reformed theology speaks of 'the covenant of works', and what part the law plays in that covenant, itself a pillar of covenant theology, which in turn leads to the idea that sanctification is by the law. And this is why I am tackling it here. Many Puritans, however, were in a muddle over this. Even though they could argue that Christ earned and merited and worked righteousness for his people by keeping the law and dying under the curse of God, they also argued that justification could not come by the law. This is true, of course, in the sense that nobody, but Christ, could or did keep it, but the fact is, *perfect obedience to the law would have brought justification.*

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<sup>36</sup> Nor is it a figment of (some) Reformed imagination, contrary to advocates of the New Perspective. Perfect obedience to the law would merit justification.

Indeed, Christ's perfect obedience *did* earn righteousness for all his people. Not all Reformed writers give Romans 7:10 its proper weight. Indeed, not all Reformed writers refer to the verse or even quote it in their books on the law. This is very odd, or worse, since at first glance it has something to say in contradiction of the Reformed claim that the law was a grace covenant.

Now for 'the clinching passage'.

### ***Proof that the law was a works covenant: 2. Galatians 4:4-5***

Let me quote the verses:

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.

Let us begin by reminding ourselves that a sinner is justified by faith without the works of the law:

Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:21-22,28).

As I have shown above, however, perfect obedience to the law would bring justification; but it would have to be perfect! If a man offends in one point, he brings the entire system crashing about his ears (Jas. 2:10-11). Paul felt the sting of his breaking the tenth commandment – but in the breaking of the tenth, he broke all the law (Rom. 7:7-12). Perfect obedience, in all points, at every turn, is required!

A sinner, therefore, who seeks justification 'by the works of the law' (Rom. 9:32), is attempting an utter impossibility. *But Jesus Christ, the sinless one, could and did keep the law, and thus establish righteousness for the elect!* As a consequence, justifying righteousness, accomplished by the works of Christ, is imputed to the sinner through faith without his works:

To him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness... There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not

walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 4:5; 8:1-4).

God's law demanded works; Christ provided them. The law demanded perfection; Christ provided it. The law demanded atonement by blood (Heb. 9:22); Christ died as a sin offering under the law, shedding his blood on the cross (Rom. 3:25; 4:25; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). 'By one man's obedience many will be made righteous' (Rom. 5:19). This is what enabled Paul to exclaim: 'We establish the law' (Rom. 3:31).<sup>37</sup> And this is the teaching of Galatians 4:4-5.

God sent Christ his Son into the world to redeem those who were under the law. Consequently, the Lord Jesus came as a man (John 1:14), to redeem men (Heb. 2:14). But not only did the Son of God become human. He became a Jew – which meant he was born under the law – born, 'taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men' so that he might be 'obedient to... death, even the death of the cross' (Phil. 2:6-8), 'having become a curse for us', cursed by the law, so that he might redeem us from it (Gal. 3:13). What law is this? The same law as throughout Galatians 3, of course. Let me summarise the position: Christ was born under the very law which the Jews were under prior to the coming of Christ; that is, the Mosaic law. And Christ, by keeping that law, and suffering the curse of that law, redeemed the elect who were under it. In other words, Christ accomplished salvation by works. By the works of the law, he earned it.

*This can only mean that the law was a works covenant.* If not, how did Christ redeem those under the law by going under the law? Would Reformed teachers say Christ was born under what they call the covenant of grace? Was he cursed by the covenant of

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<sup>37</sup> What is more, the grace of God in the gospel inevitably moves the believer to sanctification; that is, obedience to all God's revelation – thus honouring God in his entire word, including the law.

grace? Some try to avoid this by saying the curse is to do only with the ceremonial law. This distinction is without biblical warrant, as I will show. But allowing the distinction for sake of argument, is the curse attached to this so-called ceremonial law, or to the law itself? Was Christ made under, and cursed under, the ceremonial law only? Of course not!

Christ came into the world, born a Jew under the law, a works covenant, in order to earn, work, deserve and merit salvation for his people. Did he *earn* it by *works* under a *grace* covenant? The answer is self-evident. The believer's righteousness is an earned righteousness, earned by Christ, earned by keeping the law, earned by suffering under the law, *but only if the law is a works covenant*. Which it is! Of course, no sinner could keep the law and so earn salvation. As Horatius Bonar put it:

*Not what these hands have done  
Can save this guilty soul;  
Not what this toiling flesh has borne  
Can make my spirit whole.*

*Not what I feel or do  
Can give me peace with God;  
Not all my prayers, and sighs, and tears  
Can bear my awful load.*

But Christ could and did, and there the believer rests his soul for ever:

*On merit not my own I stand;  
On doings which I have not done,  
Merit beyond what I can claim,  
Doings more<sup>38</sup> perfect than my own.*

*Upon a life I have not lived,  
Upon a death I did not die,  
Another's life, another's death,  
I stake my whole eternity.<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> I take this to be poetic licence. Nothing can be *more* perfect! In this matter, how could God accept anything less than *perfect* obedience under the law? What commandment did Christ not keep? What shadow of himself did he not fulfil? What penalty did he not suffer?

Believers are justified by resting on this finished work of Christ (John 19:30), the one who did all the doing which the holy God required under his law. As a result: ‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Rom. 10:4).

‘What must I do to be saved?’ is the question. As we have seen: ‘Work’, the law thunders. ‘Keep me perfectly’. What does the gospel say? ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved’ (Acts 16:30-31). ‘Trust the Redeemer, who, under the law, by his works, earned salvation (see Gal. 4:4)’. If the law was not a works covenant... bang goes our salvation!

Think of the precious promise John gives to all believers: ‘If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9). It is, I say, precious. But it is more. It is truly amazing, staggering. One would expect John to have said something like: ‘If we confess our sins, [God] is kind, merciful, loving to forgive us our sins’. But he did not say that! Rather, he spoke of God’s faithfulness and justice. Why did he say that God is ‘*faithful and just* to forgive us our sins’? Faithful? Just? The answer is, of course, God *is* faithful and just to forgive us; he is not only *kind* to forgive us. It is his faithfulness and justice which *demand and ensure* forgiveness. Why? Because Christ has earned it, because Christ has merited it. In that great, eternal agreement, of which I spoke at the beginning of this article, God demanded obedience, promising life for that perfect obedience. ‘Do and live’ was the essence of God’s commandment and promise (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 7:10; 10:4-6; Gal. 3:12). It is impossible for God to affirm black is white. He cannot acquit the wicked: ‘I will not justify the wicked’ (Ex. 23:7; Nah. 1:3). To do so would be to break his own law: ‘He who justifies the wicked... [is] an abomination to the LORD’ (Prov. 17:15). *But he must justify the righteous!* Just as he cannot justify the wicked, so he must justify the righteous. He can only justify on the basis of righteousness, however, on the basis of work, on the basis of merit, on the basis of perfect obedience. And all this Christ freely accepted in that agreement

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<sup>39</sup> Both hymns by Horatius Bonar. Some versions have: ‘Upon a life I did not live’. Horatius Bonar entitled the hymn: ‘Christ for us’. As he put it in his hymn, ‘Complete in him’: ‘He [Christ] did the work!’.

made within the Godhead in eternity past. And so, in time, at the appointed time, having come into the world, having been made under the law, Christ died under the law in order to accomplish this eternal purpose of God.

Christ said: ‘Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled’ (Matt. 5:17-18). Let me emphasise this. Christ did not come to destroy the law or the prophets; that is, ‘to invalidate, to represent as of no authority, or of diminished authority, those former revelations of the divine will’. In addition to not ‘invalidating’ the law, Christ did not destroy it, demolish it, dismantle it, or repeal it for the law now plays the role of a paradigm in the believer’s sanctification.<sup>40</sup> Rather, speaking of the law in particular, Christ came to fulfil it; that is, he came in order to obey it to the full, and complete it.<sup>41</sup> This he did to the letter, to the jot and to the tittle! And in keeping this works covenant in its entirety, he merited the everlasting salvation of all his people.

‘Wait a moment’, says an objector. ‘Look at Romans 4:5: “[God] who justifies the ungodly”’. How can this be reconciled with what you have just said? You have been arguing that justification under the law comes by works. How, then, can God justify the ungodly, since no ungodly person can produce the necessary law-works?’ What is the answer, the explanation? Just

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<sup>40</sup> Note that Christ fulfilled both the law and the prophets, which means, of course, that we must now regard the law in the same way as we regard the prophecies of Christ’s first coming.

<sup>41</sup> It will not do to try to limit Matt. 5:17-18 to ‘the moral law’. Christ came to fulfil and abrogate the law of Moses – the law of Moses entirely – not some artificially designated subsection of the law. The law was both temporary and typical. From Gal. 3:19,25; Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14, it is clear that the law, having served its purpose, ceased. The word ‘fulfil’ means ‘complete’, ‘fill up’, ‘perfect’. Christ came to complete divine revelation, carry it forward. So much so, the law, the entire law, having served its purpose, ceased to be of obligation. As a system, it passed away in its entirety. That ‘middle wall of partition’ was completely taken down. Christ brought the law to its maturity as it found its realisation in him.

this: Romans 4:5 is speaking about justification under the gospel, not the law. And *this* is the gospel: Christ came under the old covenant, and kept the law (Gal. 4:4-5), thus earning the salvation of the elect, earning it by his works. This is the principle that Christ came under: ‘Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as [according to] grace but as debt’ (Rom. 4:4). Christ obtained redemption for the elect, earning it, not by grace (‘earn’ and ‘grace’ are a contradiction in terms, Rom. 4:4; 11:6), but by his law-works, in order to grant it, by grace, to the elect upon their believing, that they might be ‘justified freely by [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness... that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus’ (Rom. 3:24-26). In this way God ‘justifies the ungodly’; that is, justifies ‘him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly’ (Rom. 4:5). He did this ‘that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus’ (Rom. 3:26). But this justification had to be earned by law work. Under the gospel, God justifies the sinner, who does not do the work, who cannot do the work, when the sinner trusts the Christ who, under the law, did the work.

Christ did all this in perfect obedience to the will of his Father. Christ came into the world with the express purpose of saving sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), in order to complete the work given him by the Father: ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work’ (John 4:34). To the Jews, he said: ‘I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me... I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me’ (John 5:30; 6:38). He could speak of ‘the works which the Father has given me to finish – the very works that I do’ (John 5:36). These works included the miracles, yes, but, above all, they included the work of salvation. The Lord Jesus could say to the Father: ‘I have finished the work which you have given me to do’ (John 17:4). And, above all, his final shout of triumph on the cross: ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30); it is accomplished. This is the gospel – God’s ‘eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Eph. 3:11). In the person and work of Christ, God can declare: ‘It pleased the

LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious' (Isa. 42:21, NIV). Christ was born a Jew and lived under the Mosaic law (Luke 2:21-24,27,39; Gal. 4:4). He obeyed the Mosaic law (Matt. 8:4; 19:17-19). He was cursed under the law (Gal. 3:13). In all this, Christ established and magnified the law (Rom. 3:31). He honoured his Father in the law, and in so doing merited the salvation of his people. 'Amazing grace', indeed!

Thus, while forgiveness is an act of God's grace towards the sinner, it is based entirely and only upon the merit, the work, the obedience of Christ. God, therefore, *is* faithful and just to forgive the one who believes and confesses his sin. Why? Because if God did not, he would be unjust, he would be unfaithful. He would fail to keep his promise. Unthinkable! Impossible! Under the law, he promised life upon obedience. It was the will of God that Christ should come under the law, obey it, keep it and fulfil it (Matt. 5:17-18). This demand Christ met. As a consequence, when the sinner cries out to God through faith in Christ, trusting the person, merit and work of Christ, God *must* forgive. Do not misunderstand me, reader, when I say *must*. Very near the start of this article, I reminded you that 'God, who cannot lie, promised before time began' (Tit. 1:2), promised the Son that he would justify all the elect on the basis of the Son's obedience. And since God has promised, he has tied himself to his word. And because he has tied himself to his promised word, God must keep his promise. 'He remains faithful; he cannot deny himself' (2 Tim. 2:13). This is the *must*. Under the law, he said: 'Do this and live'. Christ did the doing, and God keeps his promise.

All this proves that the law was a works covenant, a very different covenant to the new covenant. Not only that. It means that the two Testaments, though having a certain continuity, are discontinuous. In short, not only are Calvin's second and third uses of the law wrong, but so is the covenant theology on which those uses are defended and argued.

A few Reformed theologians have seen this. That covenant theology needs correction, modification, and explanation, even recasting, has been admitted by some Reformed teachers, John Murray for one. I would go further. Recasting? Rejecting, more

like. Sadly, however, most Reformed theologians do not seem willing even to rethink or recast their covenant theology but have, instead, developed a system of escape routes to get round awkward passages of Scripture. To these escape routes I now turn...

That is, I turn to them in my *Christ Is All*.