

APPENDIX

Points for Banner Readers to Ponder

A few words to *Banner* readers which might give them pause for thought. What are the consequences of Roberts' teaching? Let's drop the abstract. What are those consequences for *you*?

Although Roberts' article was short, he made large and sweeping claims, thereby raising an issue which almost certainly will have a far-reaching effect, not least for you *Banner* readers. I accuse no-one, but if I were a sympathetic reader of *The Banner of Truth*, I can well imagine that I might have one of two possible reactions to Roberts' article:

Smugness: 'Phew! I'm glad I'm not one of those pernicious "antinomians". I'll be rewarded by Christ, not like them – left on the edge of glory'.¹

Or:

Terror tinged with relief: 'Do I keep the ten commandments, really keep them better than the Pharisees of old? What if I don't? No reward. But, what a relief, I'm still going to saved'.

Let me take this back to the source, the Banner Trust.

Though it is not the most felicitous statement ever published by the Banner of Truth Trust, the meaning of the following is clear enough:

¹ If so, I'd rather have John Wesley's reply when asked if they would meet George Whitefield in heaven. No, he replied. He'll be too close to the throne.

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As an organisation, while being interdenominational in outlook and with our staffing, our doctrinal standards are best summed up by the Westminster Confession.

Actually, I think it would be fairer to say that the Banner Trust is Westminster through and through.

Maurice Roberts, of course, as a Presbyterian minister and erstwhile editor of *The Banner of Truth*,² is completely committed to the Westminster Confession.

In light of these facts, it is most interesting to read the Westminster Confession's 'infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture'; it certainly leaves no room for doubt:

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.³

² 1988-2003.

³ The 1689 Particular Baptist Confession – for political reasons, a virtual re-run of the Westminster (see my 'The Law and the Confessions') – put it this way: 'The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly. The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved'.

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Let me say that I agree absolutely with the Confession in that judgment. Unless we compare scripture with scripture we will find ourselves in trouble. Not only that, we must give priority to those passages that speak with the greatest clarity on any particular issue. Moreover, if we fail to take into account the big picture, we are in very dangerous territory; a single text can be twisted to make it teach almost anything. And if we depend on opinions and teachings and systems of men, disaster looms. Above all, if we impose our presuppositions on Scripture – and who is not in danger of it! – we only end up ‘proving’ our initial assumption!

No doubt the Reformed can congratulate themselves that, in this section of the Westminster Confession, the Westminster divines nailed down the coffin on Roman Catholics with their progressive revelation directly from God to Mother Church, with their dependence on Church councils, learned doctors of the Church, the curia, with the pope making absolute announcements from the throne. Very good! I agree.

Not only that! The Westminster Confession has dealt a devastating – fatal – blow at the ‘infallible revelations’ of every cult leader. Very good! I agree.

Just a minute! Sauce for goose, sauce for gander. Can’t the Reformed see that their own prized Confession has effectively shot them in the foot? My experience over years of trying – but trying in vain, I’m afraid – to get Reformed men and women to face Scripture on the law and the believer – face Scripture, unfiltered by the Westminster Confession or its equivalent⁴ – confirms me in my conviction that the advocates of the Westminster Confession invariably break their own rubric by placing unquestioning reliance upon the infallible (as they seem to regard them) divines of Westminster and their final (as

⁴ See my ‘The Law and the Confessions’ on my sermonaudio.com page.

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they seem to regard them)⁵ pronouncements in the 1640s.⁶

I feel bound to ask *Banner* readers: ‘Are you under the law of Christ or the law of Westminster?’

As we have seen, Roberts’ article published in *The Banner of Truth* failed the tests of Westminster.

Again, take the commentator, John Brown. I raise him because the Banner of Truth Trust published both Roberts and Brown – even though they flatly contradict each other! We have seen how Roberts interprets Matthew 5:17-20. Now for Brown. Perhaps the Trust might care to tell its readers which one they think has got the passage right. As I say, they have published both, after all! Indeed, they published Brown when Roberts was editor of the magazine! Brown :

Many interpreters... consider [Matthew 5:17-20] as a declaration that it was not our Lord’s intention to abrogate the moral law. [Roberts, for one!] *There are, however, insuperable objections to this mode of exposition. We have no right to restrict the term ‘law’ to the moral part of the Mosaic institution:* and there can be no doubt with a careful reader of the New Testament, that our Lord *did* come to abrogate the law of Moses. It belonged to the temporary, as well as a typical, economy. [From Galatians 3:19,25, Ephesians 2:14-15 and Colossians 2:14, the law] having served its purpose, it was to cease... [Christ did not come to destroy (*kataluō*) the law and the prophets; that is] to invalidate, to represent as of no authority, or of diminished

⁵ See my ‘A Thanksgiving-Day Thought’.

⁶ Even in this, though, there was – and is – a problem for Presbyterians. The handful of Independents at the Assembly were a bit of a nuisance, and they effectively put some spokes in the wheel and stopped the Presbyterians having it all their own way. But at least those despicable antinomian-dippers were excluded! See my *Battle* and my ‘The Law and the Confessions’.

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authority, those former revelations of the divine will... I apprehend the word 'fulfil' is used in the sense of 'complete', 'fill up', 'perfect'... Our Lord came to complete divine revelation, both inasmuch as he came to do and suffer those things which were to form the subject of that part of the divine revelation which yet remained to be given, and inasmuch as, by his Spirit, through the instrumentality of his apostles, he actually made that revelation. [In effect, Christ was saying:] 'I do not come to demolish' [the former revelation;] 'my purpose is to carry forward and complete [it]'. Hence 'the law', the Mosaic institution, ceased to be of obligation; it had served its purpose; it entirely, as a system, passed away. 'The middle wall of partition' was completely taken down.⁷

In saying all this, I am not trying to score points in a semantic chess game. Far from it! Roberts' article leads to serious pastoral consequences for his readers, very serious consequences. Let me remind you of what he said:

The Lord Jesus Christ not only teaches us the way to heaven. He also makes clear to us how, as his disciples, we shall be rewarded in the day of judgment. Our Lord, in the Sermon on the Mount, makes a statement which is not often enough thought about or meditated on by believers: 'Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be great in the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:19).

And:

How are we to interpret [Christ's] words? In this way. As Christians, we are justified by Christ's atoning death on the cross. Our 'good works' have no place whatever in our justification. But the believer who is now justified has it as his duty to keep the ten commandments. We, as

⁷ John Brown: *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1990, Vol.1 pp168-172, emphasis mine.

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God's believing people, are not saved by the moral law. But when we are saved by grace, it is our duty carefully to keep the moral law. The measure in which [the]⁸ believer observes God's moral law is the measure in which, as Christians, we have been obedient in this life to the ten commandments.⁹ Our wisdom as God's people, therefore, is to teach ourselves and others who are converted to keep the ten commandments carefully and conscientiously. There is surely no other way in which the words of our Lord here, in Matthew 5:19, can be understood. In a word, it is clear he is teaching us that, though we are justified by faith without obedience to the moral law, once we are justified, the rule of life for us all as its people is to keep his moral law.

The words of Christ here in the Sermon on the Mount tell us that, as saved sinners, we need to live to the glory of God. The more we do so, by obeying the ten commandments, the greater will be our reward. It is our wisdom, therefore, to 'do and teach them' (Matt. 5:19). As our reward, we will, in the day of judgment, 'be called great' in the kingdom of heaven.

Well, that's clear enough! But the *Banner* readers who agree with Roberts (and, therefore, disagree with Brown) had better be sure that he – Roberts – has correctly understood Christ's teaching and presented it to them. They need to be sure. After all, according to Roberts, breaking any of the commandments – even the least of them – spells disaster as far as rewards go. His readers need to ask themselves: 'What is the least commandment? What is it for me? And do I always – without fail – keep this commandment? And what about all the rest?' After all, James could not have put it any clearer:

Whoever keeps the whole law [let alone most of the decalogue] but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said: 'Do not commit adultery',

⁸ Original 'this'.

⁹ I allow Roberts' confused use of pronouns to stand. His meaning is clear.

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also said: ‘Do not murder’. If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (Jas. 2:10-11).

Paul found the tenth commandment floored him (Rom. 7:7-12). I put it to *Banner* readers: ‘Which one does the same for you? Is that the only one?’

Roberts’ readers also need to watch out for what I can only call his glib assurance – at least, his very strongly-implied assurance:

As sinners we [obviously implying that his readers are included, since his ‘as his disciples, we...’] are justified by faith only, and not by our good works.

Of course, there is truth in that statement, yes. But just as we should be careful with the superficial assurance ‘once saved, always saved’, so, I say, should Roberts’ readers take care with his assurance. Christ, after all, could not have made it plainer:

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20).

Do not fail to notice how Roberts wanted to confine Christ’s words to rewards for believers. Not so! While Christ was including rewards, he was going much further: ‘You will never enter the kingdom of heaven’ is far, far more serious than getting lesser rewards.

The fact is, the outcome of the biblical argument in Matthew 5:17-20 – as worked out, according to Christ’s promise, by the post-Pentecost writers – is far more penetrating and powerful and far-reaching than Roberts allowed, as I tried to show in the body of the book.¹⁰

¹⁰ As an aside – but an important aside – notice the difference in the ways God treats men before Christ and after Christ. Compare Acts 14:16; 17:30; Rom. 3:25 with Acts 17:30-31. Note the eschatological ‘but now’ in Acts 17:30-31 with its unmistakable echoes of John 1:17.

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Take just one of those commandments which Roberts requires believers to keep; namely the fourth. I choose the fourth because the Reformed seem to make it the acid test for deciding who is or who is not an antinomian, even though God gave the sabbath to Israel, and only Israel, as a special sign under old covenant, marking them out as his special people in that era, sabbath observance being nothing to do with believers in the days of the new covenant.¹¹ Moreover, it is probably the easiest commandment against which to measure the level of obedience of professed decalogue-keepers. Having said that, it is not so easy as it might seem, as Reformed teachers would like it to seem. God requires more than mere external observance of the sabbath (though that is difficult enough):

If you turn back your foot from the sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the LORD... (Isa. 58:13-14).

Calling ‘the sabbath a delight’ amounts to far more than mouthing the words, repeating a catechism, or ticking the boxes in a Confession. God requires heart-delight in sabbath observance, as well as a punctilious observance of all its scriptural – note the word, scriptural – requirements! Now that’s a thought!

Furthermore, remember that the consequences of disobedience are severe:

Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the sabbath day (Ex. 35:2-3).

¹¹ See my *Essential; Horne; Sabbath Notes; Sabbath Questions*.

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Well, *Banner* reader, how are you matching up? Or are you already reaching for one of the many Reformed get-out schemes to let you off the hook? If so, remember the words of Christ, words which Roberts chose to expound and apply for your ‘benefit’:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore ***whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven***, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-20).

And you know that God leaves no room for doubt about the hours of the seventh day:

...beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your sabbath (Lev. 23:32).

What is more, if you are calling on Reformed-escape clauses to help you get round that requirement, you need to keep in mind what Christ said about such a practice:

You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said: ‘Honour your father and your mother’; and: ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die’. But you say: ‘If a man tells his father or his mother: “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God) – then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do (Mark. 7:9-13).

In case the penny has got stuck in the mechanism and failed to drop: *Banner* readers need to face the fact that Moses said the seventh day, sunset to sunset, but their teachers assure them one-day-in-seven, midnight to

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midnight, will do. It won't! In fact, it is equivalent to 'Corban'!

Who's the real antinomian now? Who chops up the law, and tweaks scriptures to fit a system?

And so it goes on. Is it not amazing what can be 'justified' on the sabbath in Reformed circles? And all under 'works of necessity' or whatever. If modern day puritans were to be transported back to the 1640s in Old England, or to the 1700s in New England, they would have a salutary shock. Today's acceptable sabbath observance would have got short shrift in those days! The divines of Westminster would not have been so tolerant as their advocates today!

Once again, Roberts and his readers need to remember Christ's words:

Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

Banner reader, if you follow Roberts' teaching, you will find that you have been entered into a life-long race against Pharisees and Sadducees: will you or they show greater obedience to the law of Moses?

Roberts insists that believers must keep the ten commandments and this will be the standard by which their rewards will be distributed. Does obeying Christ's command to be dipped as a believer and remember him in the Lord's supper not count? Which of the ten commandments deal with these matters? Does obedience to Christ's command to go into all the world to preach the gospel, having been equipped by the Spirit (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8), not count? Which command of the ten is this? Does the exercise of

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the priesthood of all believers not count?¹² Which command of the ten is this?

If I may, I would like to put William Gadsby's point to Maurice Roberts (and to all who agree with him that the ten commandments are the believer's rule by which he will be judged as to rewards):

You will read 2 Corinthians 3, and let me know how it is that administration of death, written and engraven on stones, is the living man's rule of life, and how this can be consistent with what the apostle observes in verse 11, where he says, 'it is done away', and in verse 13, where he says, 'it is abolished'. Now, my dear sir, you are to tell me how that law which is done away with and abolished still remains the believer's perfect rule of life.

How can the believer's rewards depend on his obedience to a law which Paul describes as 'weak' (Rom. 8:1-4)?

Take:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night (Ps. 1:1-2).

Does Roberts meditate on the ten commandments day and night? Really? *Banner* reader, do you?

The words of Paul E.G.Cook and Graham Harrison in the 'Preface' of the 1977 *Christian Hymns* are apposite; addressing those who sing nothing but psalms, they wrote:

When the psalmist said: 'Sing unto the Lord a new song', we find it difficult to believe that what he really meant was: 'Only sing unto the Lord an old psalm'.

My point runs along the same lines: How can Moses' law (or a part of Moses' law) for Israel in the days of the old

¹² See my *The Priesthood of All Believers*.

covenant be Christ's law for believers in the days of the new covenant?

C.H.Spurgeon:

Where you have no command from Christ, your teaching is nothing. Stand away, sir! You have no place here! Where you have no teaching of Christ at your back, your word is the word of man [man?], and nothing more! It is not a word before which the subjects of King Jesus can bow themselves. If Christ is King, we receive both laws from him and the force which makes the law – its dominion over our consciences. If he is King, my brethren, it should be our joy to obey him. We have nothing to do with setting up our opinions and views, and thoughts and tastes where he alone is supreme. When we turn to this good and blessed old statute book, we must do what he bids us do in it. We are not to cut, and pick, and choose, and take this and leave the other – for the royal imprimatur is put upon every page of the Bible, and it is our part, like little children, obedient to a gentle parent, to subject our wills at once. We should, like Mary, sit at Jesus' feet to learn, and then rise and carry into practice what we have learned in so good a school.¹³

¹³ C.H.Spurgeon sermon 752.