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*“vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo”—Col. 3:3*

**KERUX: THE JOURNAL**  
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## **Merit or ‘Entitlement’ in Reformed Covenant Theology: A Review<sup>1</sup>**

James T. Dennison, Jr., Scott F. Sanborn, Benjamin W. Swinburnson

For the past thirty years, a shift in Reformed covenant theology has been percolating under the hot Southern California sun in Escondido. Atop the bluff of a former orange grove, a quiet redefinition of the Sinaitic covenant administration as a typological covenant of works, complete with meritorious obedience and meritorious reward has been ripening. The architect of this paradigm shift was the late Meredith G. Kline, who taught at Westminster Escondido (WSCal) for more than 20 years. Many of Kline’s colleagues, former students (several now teaching in Escondido) and admirers (Mark Karlberg, T. David Gordon, etc.) have canonized his novel reconstruction of the Mosaic covenant—it is “not of faith”, but of works and meritorious works at that, albeit ‘typological’. What may now be labeled the “Escondido Hermeneutic” or “Kline Works-Merit Paradigm” has succeeded in cornering an increasing share of the Reformed covenant market in spite of its revisionism and heterodoxy. This newfangled paradigm has managed to fly beneath the radar of most Reformed observers, in part because of the aggressively militant demeanor and rhetoric of its advocates and defenders. Especially vitriolic have been attacks by the Kline acolytes upon Norman Shepherd and Richard Gaffin.

Now comes the book under review and what has flown beneath the radar is on the table with the sponsorship of WSCal—which necessarily includes

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009.

the members of its Board of Directors, Faculty and student body (“We are also thankful for the institutional support we received from Westminster Theological Seminary in California,” “Acknowledgements,” ix). We have now, in print, a volume of essays dedicated to the revisionist Kline paradigm, articulated on all the controverted points to define the Mosaic covenant “in some sense” as a covenant of works. But not just a covenant with “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” works codified; rather a covenant which “republishes” the Adamic covenant of works at Mt. Sinai. In other words, a major thesis of this book and the Kline reconstruction of the Mosaic covenant is a regression (as opposed to a progression) in the history of redemption—a regression to a prelapsarian works covenant. Kline and the advocates of the “Escondido Hermeneutic” consider Israel at Mt. Sinai as a re-embodiment of Adam before the Fall. That is, Mosaic Israel is in a covenant relationship with God as a probationary new Adam in the wilderness as the probationary old Adam was in the garden. Mosaic Israel (corrupted and polluted with Adamic transgression—for all are guilty of total depravity and total inability after Adam’s Fall, even all Israel under Moses at Sinai), according to this book’s theory of the covenant at Sinai, is to be viewed in the same light as sinless Adam in the garden—undergoing a desert probation on the basis of works and as capable of the (meritorious) reward of passing that probation as prelapsarian (unfallen) Adam in the garden.<sup>2</sup> Readers of this volume must not minimize the parallel between sinless Adam in the garden and Israel at Sinai; the authors and “support”ers of this book do not want you to misunderstand this fundamental thesis of the Klinean “Escondido Hermeneutic”. Repeatedly, the principle is enunciated, defended and made a test of orthodoxy in these pages. Even those essays which may seem unengaged with the major thesis (Waters) must be regarded as endorsing the thesis (“...the contributors...agreed to participate in this project... who submitted...their many theological insights into the Mosaic covenant,”

2 Kline even pushes merit earned from obedience back to Abraham and Noah. “...Abraham’s obedience functioned not only as the authentication of his faith for his personal justification but as a **meritorious ground that earned a reward** for others...” (Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven and Har Magedon* [Wipf & Stock, 2006] 102). “...in the case of some of these grantees, including Noah, their **righteous acts were the grounds for bestowing kingdom benefits** on others closely related to them . . . , just as in the case of Christ...” (ibid., 79) (our emphases). Cf. also Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Two Age Press, 2000) 113-14, 238-39, 325, all of which explain the works-merit paradigm fundamental to his construction of the pre-Patriarchal, Patriarchal and Mosaic eras. The architectural father of the thesis underlying and explicated by the book under review is clear: his primary documents explicitly claim works-merit for sinful persons in the OT era.

“Acknowledgements,” ix).

To clarify this Israel-as-a-typological-new-Adam thesis, the book contains a pivotal essay with the subhead “Entitlement”<sup>3</sup>. An entitlement is that which is due or owed to a subject because the subject is worthy of that entitlement. Deserving the benefit of an entitlement, the recipient is owed that privilege because the one granting the entitlement has pledged it as an obligation on his part to reward the status of the recipient on their part.

In other words, entitlement theology is works-merit theology.<sup>4</sup> And that works-merit paradigm for Israel under the Mosaic covenant is vigorously defended by this book. That Israel, on account of its inclusion in Adamic depravity and inability, is incapable of works-merit is glossed over. According to the inspired apostle (Rom. 5:12ff.; 1 Cor. 15:44, 45), there are only two persons in the history of redemption capable of works-merit: the prelapsarian protological Adam and the postlapsarian eschatological Adam. In between Adam the first (*protos*) and Adam the last (*eschatos*) no lapsarian human or nation of humans is capable of works-merit because every lapsarian (fallen) human or nation of humans is in a state of works-demerit. And that, of course, means that all such fallen humans and nations between Adam and Christ require grace to remit their demerit. Grace after the Fall, grace for Abraham, grace for Israel at the Exodus, grace for Israel at Sinai in the wilderness—grace, grace, always and ever the gracious covenant of God, in Christ, by his Spirit to the undeserving, to those entitled only to damnation, to those whose works are incapable of any merit, to those infected by Adamic demerit and whose works are paid with the wages of sin, which is death.

The construction of merit in the work under review skews and deconstructs this Biblical and Pauline paradigm. Deconstructs it in the interest of a novel hermeneutic which misreads primary documents,<sup>5</sup> perverts the plain teach-

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3 Bryan D. Estelle, “Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:1-14 in Biblical Theological Development: Entitlement to Heaven Foreclosed and Proffered,” 109-46.

4 “My thesis in this essay is...Lev. 18:5 and Deut. 30:1-14 . . . have the same *final* goal: entitlement to heaven” (ibid., 110, emphasis in the original).

5 “...like Calvin before him, Witsius believed that God set forth a legal covenant before the nation of Israel, one by which they could earn their salvation through their obedience” (J. V. Fesko, “Calvin and Witsius on the Mosaic Covenant,” 37).

ing of the Word of God, ignores the Augustinian-Calvinist tradition on grace and merit, translates all mention of a covenant of works at Sinai in previous Reformed theology into a Kline works-merit paradigm in spite of the fact that those writers never mention “covenant of works at Sinai” as a re-imagining of Israel as a prelapsarian Adam figure; pretends that the history of exegesis of Lev. 18:5 and related passages is only accurate where it agrees with their perverse exegesis.

We conclude that “in some sense” this book defends the thesis that Israel at Sinai was capable of works righteousness. Because the thesis of this book is Meredith G. Kline’s antithesis between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant (the Mosaic is not substantially or essentially a covenant of grace, *contra* Abraham), we can only conclude that Israel at Sinai is “in some sense” capable of works righteous and able to earn rewards from God on the meritorious ground of this works righteousness.<sup>6</sup> These merited blessings may be temporal, but they are works righteous blessings and deserving of those meritorious (temporal) blessings. Hence to deconstruct the Mosaic covenant as “in some sense” a covenant of works means for the Klinean advocates of the “Escondido Hermeneutic” that Israel in the Mosaic era was capable of works righteousness and meritorious reward. And that, interested reader, is not Reformed orthodoxy—it is not even Protestant orthodoxy. It is dangerous heterodoxy and confusion.

The merit formulations in this book are both dangerous and irresponsible. We are sounding an alarm to the Reformed community—this book is a revisionist redefinition of historic Reformed covenant theology. And it is not coincidental that Meredith G. Kline, T. David Gordon and others have called for the revision of the chapter on covenant theology (chapter 7) in the Reformed Confession of Faith composed at Westminster Abbey in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The revisionist thesis of this book is the key to a larger and more revolutionary hidden agenda—the revisionist redefinition of historic Reformed covenant theology and the reimagining of the Reformed Confessions in the Klinean paradigm of the “Escondido Hermeneutic”.

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<sup>6</sup> “...obedience plays a somewhat different role under the old covenant... in the old covenant there was the need for compliance so that this would be the meritorious ground for Israel’s continuance in the land...” (Estelle, *ibid.*, 136).

## An Augustinian-Calvinistic Primer

We begin with some fundamental principles of the Augustinian-Calvinistic system. Failure to understand these is, in our opinion, an essential aspect of the deviation which is endemic to the book under review. This deviation is the “elephant in the room” of this book, i.e., the presupposition which underlies the book’s thesis. Bryan Estelle clearly expresses it in his endorsement of the following statement by Jacob Milgrom: [Lev. 20:7-8 makes clear that] “Israel can achieve holiness only by its own efforts. YHWH has given it the means: Israel makes itself holy by obeying YHWH’s commandments” (116). Estelle further affirms that “in the context of the Old Testament itself, there is often the assumption that the law can be kept in some measure and indeed has been kept by certain generations, such as the generation of Joshua and Caleb” (118, n.45). Estelle and the authors of this volume affirm a typological works-merit paradigm. Estelle, in the quotes above, places that thesis plainly and succinctly before us: Israel is capable of “achie[ving] holiness only by her own efforts”; she “makes [her]self holy by obeying YHWH’s commandments,” showing “that the law can be kept in some measure and indeed has been kept by certain generations” of the OT. These remarks, in support of the works-merit pattern, raise the question of human ability as formulated in the classic Augustinian-Calvinistic paradigm.<sup>7</sup> Hence, we begin with a summary of that paradigm.

The umbrage with which the arch-heretic, Pelagius, greeted Augustine’s remark (“[Lord] give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt,” *Confessions*, 10.29.40<sup>8</sup>) lays down the gauntlet on the fundamental antithesis between pagan anthropology and Christian anthropology. In his “Letter to Demetrias”, Pelagius ridiculed this Augustinian dictum: “We assert that [the Lord] does not understand what he made and does not realize what he commands. We imply that the creator of humanity has forgotten its weakness and imposes precepts which a human being cannot bear . . . The just one did not

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<sup>7</sup> While we acknowledge that the authors of this book profess to believe the Augustinian doctrines of grace, we are arguing that their advocacy of a “meritorious works principle” in the Mosaic covenant is inconsistent with that profession and is built on a non-Augustinian view of the nature of obedience and reward after the Fall.

<sup>8</sup> The citation is based on the text in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (hereafter NPNF1); cf. 1:153. Augustine repeats the declaration in *Confessions*, 10.31.45 (NPNF1, 1:155) and in *A Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance*, 20.53 (NPNF1, 5:547).

choose to command the impossible; nor did the loving one plan to condemn a person for what he could not avoid.”<sup>9</sup> You will note that Pelagius, as all pagans, declares that what God commands, the creature is able to perform (‘Command what Thou wilt and I am able to do it’). In other words, “ought” implies “can”.<sup>10</sup> For Pelagius (as for all paganism), if God commands that the creature ought to do something, this is a clear demonstration that the creature is able to do the thing God has commanded him to do. For example, if God commands you to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, you are able to do this. Or if God commands you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ so that you will be saved, you are able to do this. The sinful creature is able, according to Pelagius, to perform the mandates of God. That is, performance of a hortatory or ethical command from God is fully within the ability of the sinful creature. “Do this” (says God to the sinner) “and you shall live.” And the sinner, according to Pelagius, replies, “Since you command me to do it Lord, I am able to do it and live.” For Pelagius, the demand of performing the condition of God’s command means the sinner is capable, in his sinful condition and nature, of performing the condition demanded. It is necessary to understand Pelagian or pagan anthropology in the matter of sinful man’s ability to perform divine mandates, to comply with divine conditions, to be able to do what God commands, in order to understand the Pelagian or pagan concept of merit, i.e., human deserving, even as a sinner, on the basis of performing what God commands. One will never understand Augustine on grace and merit, let alone the apostle Paul or John Calvin and the Reformed tradition for that matter, if one does not understand the Pelagian doctrine of human ability even in sinners to perform divine commands and, as a result, earn rewards (merits), earthly, temporal and eternal from God.

Thus, the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius over whether “ought” does indeed imply “can”; whether God’s commands require God’s grace for performance of those commands or whether human ability is sufficient for performance of God’s will; whether a sinful man, even a redeemed sinful man, is able to indebted God to his performance of the divine will as a meritorious ground

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9 Cf. Pelagius, “Letter to Demetrias,” in J. Patout Burns, *Theological Anthropology*, 53.

10 For Calvin’s Augustinian rejection of this formula, see the “Introduction” to John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (1996), xx-xxi (hereafter BLW).



of reward<sup>11</sup>; in short, whether what God requires, he himself must perform by his grace, i.e., the Lord God who requires the condition, must himself supply the condition by his grace<sup>12</sup>—this conflict is the bedrock of the biblical doctrine of God and man, of grace and merit, of ethical demand and human performance. The proper understanding of biblical-Pauline-Augustinian-Calvinistic anthropology and soteriology is reflected in the primary documents of the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy, as well as the Calvin-Pighius controversy. Failure to read and understand these texts will leave the student, the seminarian, the pastor, the theologian unprepared for the development of Augustinianism in Calvin, the Puritans, the Westminster Divines, Francis Turretin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, etc. and the development of Pelagianism in Julian of Eclanum, John Cassian, James Arminius, John Wesley, Charles Finney, Horton Wiley, etc. The student seminarian, pastor, theologian who has not worked through the primary documents of the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy is unprepared for the discussion of grace, merit and free will. This discussion is fundamental essentially; these documents must be assimilated passionately.

The documents in question include: Augustine, *Confessions*; his works against the Pelagians—*On Grace and Free Will* (NPNF1, 5:443-65); *On the Predestination of the Saints* (NPNF1, 5:497-519); *On the Spirit and the Letter* (NPNF1, 5:83-114); *On Nature and Grace, against Pelagius* (NPNF1, 5:121-51); Letter 194 *To Sixtus* (Augustine, *Letters 165-203* [Fathers of the Church/FC, v. 30 (1955)] 301-32); *On Rebuke and Grace* (NPNF1, 5:471-91); *De Questionibus Ad Simplicianum* (“Questions to Simplicianus,” in *Augustine: Earlier Writings* [Library of Christian Classics/LCC, 1953] 376-406); *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* (NPNF1, 5:217-55). And from the pen of Pelagius: his “Letter to Demetrias”; *Commentary on Romans* (1993); his *Four Letters* (1968) as well as another edition of his *Letters* which contains 18 epistles (1991); and his voluminous comments quoted in Augustine’s works. From the pen of John Calvin: *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (1996); *On the Eternal Predestination of God* (available as *Consensus Genevensis*,

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11 This is the very teaching espoused in the volume under review when it states that Israel’s obedience “would be the meritorious grounds for Israel’s continuance in the land, the typological kingdom” (136).

12 Calvin: “it is God’s work to fulfil through grace what he commands by the law” (BLW, 118).

in James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., *The Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation: Volume 1, 1523-1552* [2008] 693-820).

We continue with Augustine's famous declaration which provoked Pelagius's negative reaction: "[Lord] give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt." Augustine speaks here as a sinner, fallen and corrupt in Adam. He behaves as every sinner behaves in accordance with his Adamic nature. Augustine was personally intensely aware of his miserable sinner nature. Thus, God's commands, God's moral mandates, God's ethical conditions found him in his sinful estate/condition unable to perform what God commanded. His total inability was evident to and in himself. The condition God demanded, as by right of being Creator-Lord, was his just prerogative; the condition God demanded, sinful Augustine as sinful everyman, was not able to perform. The sinner was not able to obey God's command; the sinner was not able to perform the condition demanded by God. Therefore, the God who demanded the condition had himself to perform the condition which he required in the sinner.<sup>13</sup> Every sinner from Adam to the end of the world was unable to perform the condition God demanded. The sinner Adam was unable; the sinner Noah was unable; the sinner Abraham was unable; the sinner Moses was unable; all Israel at Sinai were sinners and unable to perform God's conditions, thereby equally unable to merit God's blessing through their obedience; the sinner David was unable; the sinner Paul was unable: every sinner at every stage and period of the history of redemption was under Augustine's paradigm—"Command what you will, O Lord and give what you command." From "walk before me and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1) to "do this and you shall live" (Lev. 18:5) to "go and sell all your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven" (Mt. 19:21)—all conditions demanded by God implied no ability in the sinners who were obligated by the conditions to fulfill or perform them. The passages show man his duty, not his ability. At every period of the history of redemption, every sinner was under divine obligation to perform the condition of God's demands; but at every period of redemptive history, every

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13 Calvin: "even if we cannot fulfil or even begin to fulfil the righteousness of the law, yet it is rightly required of us, and we are not excused by our weakness or the failure of our strength. . . . Therefore in issuing commands and exhortations God does not take account of our strength, since he gives that very thing which he demands and gives it for the reason that by ourselves we are helpless" (BLW, 41-42).

sinner was unable to perform the condition of God's demands.<sup>14</sup>

In support of this paradigm, Augustine marshaled three principle texts of Scripture: 1 Cor. 4:7; Rom. 11:35; Job 41:11. "What do you have that you have not received" (1 Cor. 4:7). The sinner has nothing except what he has received as a gift from God. No sinner has life from God which has not been received from God as a gift. There is nothing in what a sinner has that could be called merit (merit as what is due to the sinner from God because the sinner performed God's condition and earned God's reward) whether temporal or eternal, typological or eschatological. Such a paradigm contradicts what Paul writes in 1 Cor. 4:7. You, O sinner, have nothing—nothing earned by merit, by reward, by the ground of your obedience. You, O sinner, have anything you have from God by gift, by his favor, by his grace, by his performance of the condition in you. O sinner, there is in your sinful self no meritorious ground of reward from God either in this temporal life or in eternal life, for you have nothing that you have not received from God as a gift of his unmerited, undeserved, unearned grace. 1 Cor. 4:7 completely repudiates any merit paradigm for sinful sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, whether east of Eden, gathered at Hebron, camped at Mt. Sinai, basking in David's Jerusalem or sojourning in the church of Jesus Christ. The fundamental antithesis in anthropology from Adam to the consummation—the essential, categorical antithesis in mankind's history in every era from Adam to the new heavens and new earth is merit versus grace. Augustine does not craft a relative contrast between human merit and divine grace; he demonstrates from the Scriptures an absolute antithesis between merit and grace. If I may fast forward to a 20<sup>th</sup> century Augustinian, Cornelius Van Til, *the antithesis* in Christian theology is fundamentally merit versus grace. These are two absolutely antithetical categories and all claimants to Van Til's legacy ought to know, embrace, teach and preach this fact. Listen to Augustine: "grace . . . is not bestowed according to man's deserts; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. For grace is so designated because it is given gratuitously" (*On Grace and Free Will*, 21.43; NPNF1, 5:463). *Gratia gratis data* ("grace

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<sup>14</sup> Calvin: ". . . after God has commanded us to walk in his commandments, he promises that he will cause us so to walk, that is, he will give us the mind and feet. But all the law, all the commands, as well as all the exhortations, rebukes, and threats, direct us and as it were lead us by the hand to the promises, where God reduces all our goodness to nothing by attributing every portion of our good works to himself and his grace. So, therefore, he who measures human powers by the law and the commands betrays the fact that he does not yet grasp the first principles of the faith" (BLW, 138).

given gratis”)—grace given gratuitously, freely, unmeritoriously: that is the hallmark of the biblical, Pauline, Augustinian, Calvinist paradigm.

“Who has given to [God] that it shall be given to him again” (Rom. 11:35). What sinner from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Israel to Paul will give to God obedience, conformity to righteousness, performance of legal works—what sinner will give these to God and God will, in turn, give to him a reward? No sinner from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Israel to Paul will give to God so as to receive from God, on the meritorious ground of that sinner’s righteousness, a reward in this life or the life to come, for “who has given to me [says the Lord] that I should repay him?” (Job 41:11)? Who among the sinners of the world in the wide range of the history of redemption—who has given to me, the Lord, obedience which I should repay; who has given to me, the Lord, righteousness that merits my paying him with my favor; who has rendered to me deeds of merit and worth that I should reward him by repayment with my blessings either temporal or eternal? Who? Who has merited at my hand that I should repay him? No man; no one; no sinner in any era in the history of redemption where sin pervades sinful men, women and children.

All sinful men, women and children in every era of the history of redemption are a *massa perditionis* (“mass of perdition”), a *massa damnata* (“damnable mass”), a *massa peccati* (“mass of sin”). All descendants of Adam are a mass of perdition, a damnable mass, a mass of sin. This is Augustine’s doctrine of original sin and its consequences based upon Rom. 5:12-21 especially, but also formulated from the antithetical paradigm of grace and merit. The condition of mankind by nature as related to Adam their head and first father is the condition not only of inability,<sup>15</sup> not only the condition of no merit, but it is the condition of being damn worthy—worthy of damnation. All have sinned—all are worthy of, all deserve, all have merited damnation. There is no escape from this damnable condition; there is no remedy for the penalty earned through sin, original and actual. No act of a sinner will merit a removal of this penalty—even its temporal curses; no deed of a sinner will be the ground of remitting this sentence—even its temporal curses; no righteousness of a sinner will earn God’s payment of “no condemnation”—even its temporal curses. Only an act of grace; only an undeserved favor of God; only an act not arising from sinful

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<sup>15</sup> Calvin: “we affirm that it is impossible for man to keep the law . . . [for] the perfection which is there demanded of us far exceeds our natural strength” (BLW, 51).

demerit, sinful unrighteousness, sinful damnableness—only an act of God is able to remove the sinner’s penalty, to remit the sinner’s condemnation. Listen to Augustine: “grace bestows an undeserved honor, not for any privilege or merit” (Letter 194 *To Sixtus*). And Calvin: “. . . God is led by only one consideration. This is his own free goodness without respect for any merit at all, since in fact they can have no merit, either in their works or in their wills or even in their thoughts” (BLW, 136).

Augustine’s doctrine of grace emerges from his penetrating understanding of Paul’s doctrine of grace: “to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes . . . God imputes righteousness apart from works” (Rom. 4:4-6). The Augustinian antithesis is the Pauline antithesis: not human merit, human working, human earning, human deserving whether typological or eschatological, but God’s grace, God’s imputing, God’s justifying, God’s acting. “By grace are you saved . . . and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God. Not of works lest any one should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). The Augustinian antithesis is the Pauline antithesis: not yourself, not your works, not your deeds, not your obedience whether typological or eschatological, but grace, grace, God’s grace, God’s gift, God’s work, God’s doing, never yours ever.

Grace was not the place to begin for Pelagius, nor for his allies ever since. Pelagius began from man fully able to earn, merit, deserve the temporal and eternal rewards of God. In his commentary on Rom. 9:15, in which Paul cites God to Moses—“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion”—Pelagius writes: “This is correctly understood as follows: I will have mercy on him whom I have foreknown will be able to deserve compassion” (*Commentary on Romans* [1993] 117). The sinful one who “will be able to deserve”—to merit, to be worthy, to earn God’s compassion. Command what you will, O Lord (Pelagius says), I will perform it; I am able to do it; I am even able to deserve your favor by the merit of my doing what you ask. Since you tell me I ought to, I am able to. Ought means can and I preach a can do gospel. What is this insulting drivel about human inability, absolute necessity of divine grace. This language is an insult to man’s dignity, to his self-esteem, to his God-likeness. Do not demean me by theories of original sin, moral turpitude, necessity of supernatural grace. These are the foul broodings of a flawed and pessimistic human mind—a mind diseased with its

own failures and inhibitions. That is not Christianity—Christianity is freedom and the exercise of human potential and the full enjoyment of pleasure.

But Augustine, standing on the apostle Paul and revealed Scripture, said, “Human merits . . . perished through Adam” (*On the Predestination of the Saints*, 15.31; NPNF1, 5:513). Please observe what Augustine says here: human merit vanished, disappeared, perished, existed no longer with Adam. After Adam, no human merit—not in Noah, not in Abraham, not in Moses, not in Israel, not in David, not in Paul, not in Augustine, not in Pelagius.<sup>16</sup> When Adam sinned, sinful man was able to do only one thing from then on—demerit. For Augustine as for Paul as for Scripture as interpreted from itself, there is no merit in sinners in any way in any form in any dimension in any arena in any era—there is NO merit for sinners after Adam. “We must not imagine any meriting or deserving in any mortal creature” (“Sermon 68 on Dt. 9:25-29,” *The Sermons of John Calvin on Deuteronomy* [1583/1987] 418). There is only God’s grace. Command what you will, O Lord. And by your grace, O Lord, give what you command.

In the history of redemption, there are only two persons who could ever merit God’s reward: Adam the first and Adam the last (prelapsarian protological Adam and postlapsarian eschatological Adam). Only Adam and Jesus Christ were capable of merit—of earning the reward of God’s favor. No one between Adam and Christ or after Christ to his return has ever been able to merit anything from God except judgment and damnation whether typological or eschatological. Between Genesis 3 and the Second Coming, nothing but demerit for the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. No one born by ordinary generation between Adam and Moses, between Moses and the parousia—no one has ever merited anything but cursing because every one from Adam to Moses and from Moses to the parousia is dead in trespasses and sin. And dead men merit nothing but death.

Here is what Augustine, Calvin, the Puritans and all other orthodox Reformed theology has understood: the God who lays down the condition is the

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<sup>16</sup> “Search for merit, you will find nothing except punishment” (Augustine, “Sermo XXVII [alias “De verbis Apostolis,” 20], Migne, PL 38.181). For an English translation of this sermon (“Sermon 27”), cf. Augustine, *Sermons: Volume II (20-50) on the Old Testament* (New City Press, 1990) 104-08, where the Latin phrase *Quaere merita; non invenies, nisi poenam* is rendered “Look for deserts, and all you will find is punishment” (108).

God who performs the condition. This is true even with regard to Lev. 18:5, a central text to which our authors appeal to support their understanding of the works-merit paradigm in the Mosaic covenant (pp. 17, 19, 21, 109-18, 120-21, etc.). Clearly, Calvin's interpretation differs from theirs.

[I]t is written, he that does these things shall live in them (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5). Now then (says Saint Paul) let every man look into himself and examine his whole life: is there any man that is able to vaunt that he has fulfilled God's law? No, we are all disobedient. Seeing the case stands so, there is no more life in the law: but we must rather flee to the free forgiveness of sins and especially beseech God to give us power to do that which we cannot. And so whereas the Papists do make themselves drunken with their devilish imaginations of meritorious works and such other like things: let us understand that after our Lord has allured us by gentleness, he adds a second grace: which is, that albeit we are not able to perform his commandments thoroughly in all respects, yet he bears with us as a father bears with his children, and imputes not our sins unto us... (John Calvin, "Sermon 19 [Dt. 4:1-2]," *The Sermons of John Calvin on Deuteronomy* [1583/1987] 112-13).

"Do this and thou shalt live"—the God who makes the condition must perform the condition; hence all notion of merit is nonsense, the product of, to quote Calvin, "woodenheaded pettifoggers".

This is also the way Calvin interprets Deut. 30 (and related passages), another text appealed to by our authors in support of their construction of the distinctive features of the Mosaic and New covenants (pp. 122-29, 132-37). Consider how Calvin interprets this passage in terms of the Mosaic covenant.

True it is that here Moses exhorts the Jews to circumcise their hearts: but yet we shall see hereafter, how he will say, the Lord our God will circumcise your hearts (Dt. 30:6), it may well seem at the first sight that these two things stand not well together, but that there is some contrariety in them:

and yet they agree both together very well. For (as I have touched before) it is our duty to be circumcised; that is to say, to cut off all that is of our own nature, and to rid it quite away that God may reign in us. But do we discharge ourselves thereof? No: but God must be fain to supply our want. And therefore it is he that circumcises us. Why then does he command us to do it, seeing we have neither power nor ability to do it? It is to the end that we should be sorry at the sight of our own wretchedness, and that seeing we fail and are so blameworthy, we should on the other side resort unto our God condemning ourselves, and on the other side be encouraged to desire him to do that which we ourselves cannot. . . . But yet by the way we must understand that this serves not to magnify our own free will as the Papists have imagined. We have shown already that we are so little able by nature to come unto God that we draw clean back from him. Nevertheless to the intent to show us plainly what our duty is, he says unto us, do it: and although we are not able to set hand to the work, no, not to put forth a finger towards it; yet does he command us to do our duty, notwithstanding that we are utterly unable by any means to perform it. And that is to the end that we seeing our default, should be the more ashamed of it, and humble ourselves before God, and again that we should be provoked to pray him to work in us, seeing it is he that does all in us, notwithstanding that it is his will that we should be instruments of the power of his Holy Spirit. For as he is so gracious unto us as to impute his own doings unto us and to make us partakers of them: so also it is his will that we should acknowledge and take them for our own (“Sermon 72 [Dt. 10:15-17],” *The Sermons of John Calvin on Deuteronomy* [1583/1987] 441-42).

Calvin interprets the conditionality of the Mosaic covenant in terms of the Augustinian paradigm. God, who demands the condition, must supply the grace to fulfill the condition. He commands us to perform the condition that we might further see our need for grace—that we might cast ourselves upon him and his



unmerited mercy so as to supply what is necessary for us to obey him.

This is not only how Reformed Augustinians interpret the conditional obedience required in the Mosaic covenant, it is also how Reformed Augustinians interpret the conditional obedience required in the new covenant: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”—the God who makes the condition must perform the condition; hence any notion of human ability to act on the condition, apart from the regenerating grace of God, is nonsense or Pelagianism masking as Reformed theology. This is the fundamental Pauline-Augustinian-Calvinistic-Reformed doctrine that so many do not understand today. They reason like Pelagius who see divine mandates and consequent promises of blessing for meritorious obedience. They suggest that demand of the condition augurs an ability in the sinners obliged to perform the condition; and having performed the condition, to merit or earn blessings on the ground of their obedience. We remind our readers once more of the statement on page 136: Israel’s obedience “would be the meritorious ground for Israel’s continuance in the land, the typological kingdom.”

This is unwitting Pelagianism (calling it “typological” does not alter its essential and substantial character) and Augustinian Calvinists are correct to see it as a threat to *sola gratia* as Augustine saw it 1600 years ago. It is for this reason that the favorite church father of Calvin, Vermigli, Bullinger, the Puritans, Edwards, Hodge, Gerstner, Van Til was Augustine. For Augustine saw—saw clearly that if it is by human merit then it is not by grace. And if it is by grace and not ever by human merit, then it is because the Lord God who demands the condition of performance of his will also graciously performs the condition of that demand in the lives of the sons and daughters of his grace. “It is by grace that any one is a doer of the law” (Augustine, *Grace and Free Will*, 12.24 [NPNF1, 5:454]). “The merit of our sins, of course, is not reward, but punishment” (Augustine, “Sermon 293,” New City edition, p. 152). In other words, if you claim human merit, you are demanding not blessing but cursing—for that is all a sinful member of the race of Adam can ever earn whether typological or eschatological. For what do you have that you have not received?! “The Israelites dared to glory . . . in meritorious works [but] grace is not given as a due reward for good works. Works do not precede grace but follow from it” (Augustine, “Letter to Simplicianus,” Part B, 2 [LCC, 386]). Grace is “made void if it is not freely given but awarded to merit” (“Letter to

Sixtus”). “What God promises, no one but God performs” (ibid.).

But what of the rewards of the blessed about which the Scriptures speak? Augustine writes: “It is his own gift that God crowns, not your merits” (*On Grace and Free Will*, 6.15 [NPNF1, 5:450]). Not only is the performance of the condition of grace alone; any reward granted by grace to the performer is also graciously given, not meritoriously earned or deserved. The rewards described in Scripture are rewards of grace, gratuitous blessings, not meritorious performances. Remember, the *absolute* antithesis between grace and merit in Augustine, Calvin, the Reformed tradition, and above all Scripture: “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom. 11:6).

What emerges from Augustine’s battle with Pelagius and the Pelagians is a ringing biblical definition of God’s grace. Grace is a free, unmerited gift of God. It is free, that is, sovereignly dispensed. It is unmerited, that is no recipient is worthy of it nor can they perform any act deserving of it; it is a gift—what do you have that you have not received as a gift. Its source is God alone, no other. That Augustinian biblical notion of grace is the very antithesis of merit.

Hence, the precise state of the question is this: whether merit exists or is even possible for or in any sinner or body of sinners at any point after the Fall? The orthodox say “No” against the Roman Catholics and all other merit mongers.

No merit at all, at any time in the history of redemption, whether for eschatological, typological or purely temporal rewards. None period. Thus Augustine on Paul and the Scriptures. And after him, Calvin and the Reformed tradition. Thus merit and grace in orthodox perspective—a perspective that, at best, is substantially modified and even obscured in the formulations of this book regarding Israel’s obedience in the Mosaic covenant. The “elephant in the room” controls this book.

## **Background to the Controversy**

This book is clearly an attempt to respond to criticism. The fact that it begins with a six-page fictional account of an ordination exam in which a can-

didate articulates views similar to those described in this book makes this fairly clear. The editors' defensive posture is also evident in the following quote.

Recent evidence of this agitation in the church and elsewhere can be seen in the fact that the notion that Sinai republished a works principle has received much hostility in books, peer-reviewed journals, and trials in the courts of the church. Some are even calling for formal judicial discipline of ministers who hold to any view of the Sinaitic covenant that smacks of works being in place for pedagogical and typological purposes (17).

No specific examples of such hostility and criticism are cited by the authors. What exactly are they talking about? Where does such a view come from, and when did it first start receiving this kind of criticism?

Various answers can be given to this question, but in terms of the present debate, such criticism first arose in the early 2000s, especially in Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). The most important example, in our opinion, was the 2003 trial of the Rev. Lee Irons, who was convicted of doctrinal error in the OPC for his views regarding the moral law, which were related to his views of the Mosaic covenant as a republication of the covenant of works. At that General Assembly trial, as well as the trial in the Presbytery of Southern California that preceded it, a number of the authors of this volume either defended Irons from the floor, voted against his conviction, and/or signed a protest against the General Assembly's decision: J. V. Fesko, T. David Gordon, Bryan Estelle, S. M. Baugh, and Brenton Ferry. The names should be familiar to readers of this volume: they constitute nearly half of the authors in the volume under review. This (in itself) does not mean that they agreed with everything that Irons taught, but it does mean that they viewed him as being orthodox and within the bounds of the Reformed faith as summarized in the Westminster Standards (the doctrinal standards of the OPC). Clearly the Irons trial and its aftermath has put some of them on the defensive. Since the highest judicatory in the OPC found the views that they defended outside the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy, there is a danger that their own views may receive a similar evaluation as well.

It is also important to point out that the thesis of this book is essentially

the same as that of Lee Irons defending himself in his 2003 OPC trial. The record of his defense shows that he argued (with reference to the WCF and the Reformed tradition in general) that “the Mosaic Law was thus understood to be in some sense a covenant of works.”<sup>17</sup> Notice how the language that Irons uses is identical to that of this book: the Mosaic covenant is “in some sense” a covenant of works. There are other parallels between Irons defense and arguments in this book, which we cannot detail here. The important thing to note at this point is that the catalyst for the present hostility to the views expressed in this book is the 2003 trial of Lee Irons. Though the authors of the book don’t tell you this, this is likely one of the chief reasons (though perhaps not the *only* reason) it is being written.

The connection between this book and the Irons trial should be clear. Not only did many of these authors defend Irons, they also articulate historical and exegetical points that are essentially identical with his.

It is true that in the Irons trial, the charges and specifications of error did not deal *explicitly* with the idea of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works.<sup>18</sup> But as we have shown, this idea was a central (if not *the* central) basis upon which the Irons position on the Decalogue was formulated. As Irons himself argued:

It is true that I teach that “the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as the standard of holy living.” My reason for taking this position is, in a nutshell:

1. There is a close relationship between the Decalogue and the Mosaic covenant as a whole. The Decalogue is called “the tablets of the covenant” . . . the Decalogue contains a summary of the moral will of God enshrined in a particular covenantal form suited to Israel’s probation in the land of Canaan.

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.upper-register.com/irons\\_trial/irons\\_appeal.pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/irons_appeal.pdf) (page 9)

<sup>18</sup> The two charges dealt with at the General Assembly had to do with whether “the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as the standard of holy living,” and that “civil government must be religiously neutral, and therefore not subject to the binding authority of God’s special revelation in Scripture (including the Moral Law)” [http://www.upper-register.com/irons\\_trial/charges.pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/charges.pdf).

2. The Mosaic covenant is a typological republication of the covenant of works. The works-principle that informs the Mosaic covenant as a whole is evident in the Decalogue itself...<sup>19</sup>

Note well: one of the “reasons” for Irons “taking this position” that “the Decalogue is no longer binding on believers as a standard of holy living” is the fact that “the Mosaic covenant is a typological republication of the covenant of works.” In the mind of Irons, his teaching that the Mosaic covenant was a republication of the covenant of works, and his teaching that the Decalogue is no longer a standard of holy living are inextricably linked. The one serves as the “reason” for the other.

It is perhaps true that some of these authors might deny the connection that Irons maintains. They might hold to the “republication” view he describes and still affirm the abiding binding authority of the Decalogue. But this does not appear to be true of all of them. David VanDrunen’s essay formulates the doctrine of the Mosaic covenant that is very similar to Irons. In fact, he almost seems to suggest that the believer is no longer under the natural or Mosaic law “in regard to their conduct with one another” (although he insists that their basic moral obligations remain the same).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, T. David Gordon, in his

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<sup>19</sup> These quotations are taken from Irons’s “Response to Charge Two,” dated August 30, 2002, available online at: [http://www.upper-register.com/irons\\_trial/ResponsetoCharge2\(Irons\).pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/ResponsetoCharge2(Irons).pdf).

<sup>20</sup> David VanDrunen may be an exception, however, as his essay (“Natural Law and the Works Principle under Adam and Moses”) demonstrates. VanDrunen argues that the Mosaic law as “a particular application of the natural law for theocratic Israel” (301), “expresses and applies the natural law” (302), and that “the natural law must be substantively identical to the Mosaic law” (304); “In short, the Mosaic law expressed and applied the natural law to the unique situation of Old Testament Israel” (308). From this, VanDrunen concludes that: “if natural law proclaims the works principle...and if the Mosaic law expresses and applies the natural law...then we would expect to find the works principle operative in the Mosaic covenant” (308-9). VanDrunen’s position should be clear: natural law and the Mosaic law are substantially identical and both contain the “works-principle.” On the basis of this correspondence, VanDrunen concludes that “Insofar as they are called out of the world into the kingdom of Christ, Christians do not operate according to the natural law (though their basic moral obligations remain the same), for they are not under the works principle, either in regard to their justification before God or *in regard to their conduct with one another*” (313). What is this except a denial that the Decalogue (=Mosaic law, which is substantially identical with the natural law) is no longer binding upon believers as a standard of holy living? If the Christian (*qua* Christian) is no longer under the natural law because it contains the works-principle, then he is no longer under the Mosaic law (which contains the same works principle). Admittedly, VanDrunen wants to maintain that “the Christian’s basic moral obligations

public defense of Irons at the OPC General Assembly expressed his essential agreement with his position.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the fine points of distinction between Irons the authors in our present volume, it is still true that the Irons trial is an important element in the background behind this book. As noted above, their basic thesis on the issue is the same: the Mosaic covenant is “in some sense” a republication of the covenant of works. When Irons was convicted by the OPC General Assembly, it is no surprise that these supporters of his might be concerned that a similar judgment might be rendered on their views as well.

Since the Irons trial, debate and discussion over the republication issue has continued from a variety of voices. Perhaps the most noteworthy has been D. Patrick Ramsey’s article in *Westminster Theological Journal* (66:2 [2004] 373-400) entitled, “In Defense of Moses: A Confessional Critique of Kline and Karlberg.” Ramsey argues that Kline and Karlberg contradict the Westminster Confession in their mature teaching regarding the republication of the covenant of works in the time of Moses. His key historical-theological argument is that Kline and Karlberg articulate a position that is essentially identical to the “subservient covenant” view of John Cameron, Moise Amyraut, and the later “Amyraldians”—a view he maintains was explicitly rejected by the Standards.

A few months later, a response was written by Brenton Ferry, one of the contributors to this present volume, entitled “Cross-Examining Moses’s Defense” (67:1 [2005] 163-68). In it, Ferry defends Kline and Karlberg, arguing that they are not guilty of contradicting the Westminster Confession. Ferry’s key point is that in the 1968 publication, *By Oath Consigned*, Kline argues that the Mosaic covenant is renewed in the new covenant. As Kline writes:

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remain the same.” But it is at least clear that the Decalogue itself no longer functions as the binding authority that defines the nature of that obedience. At best, it seems that the difference between Irons and VanDrunen (at least on this particular point) is extremely difficult to discern. Given the apparent similarity of their views, the onus is upon him to demonstrate their differences.

21 The official record of the Presbytery trial summarizes Gordon as maintaining the following: “While not calling his and Mr. Irons’ views identical, he deems them nearly so. He affirmed Mr. Irons’ views on the Decalogue and Paul’s use of the term *nomos*.” Available online at: [http://www.upper-register.com/irons\\_trial/trial\\_record.pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/trial_record.pdf). This testimony was repeated at the General Assembly level. See the notes upon which his testimony was based, available online at: [http://www.upper-register.com/irons\\_trial/david\\_gordon\\_testimony.pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/david_gordon_testimony.pdf), and [http://www.upper-register.com/irons\\_trial/david\\_gordon\\_AC10A.pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/david_gordon_AC10A.pdf).

Hence, for Jeremiah, the New Covenant, though it could be sharply contrasted with the Old (v. 32), was nevertheless a renewal of the Mosaic Covenant.<sup>22</sup>

Thus Kline is vindicated from the charge of teaching an “Amyraldian” view of the covenant.

The problem with Ferry’s argument is that what Kline taught in 1968 is not what Kline taught twenty, or thirty, or forty years later. No less than Mark Karlberg himself (whom Ferry proposed to defend in his *WTJ* article) has critiqued Ferry for his failure to recognize this point.

And with respect to the Westminster controversy in particular, [Ferry’s] failure to acknowledge change and development in Kline’s thinking on the covenants only distorts an accurate reading of the history of Reformed interpretation, past and present.<sup>23</sup>

Karlberg points to an important principle in reading Kline’s works: the later works correct and revise the earlier works. Kline’s student, Lee Irons, has also noted this important principle, arguing that Kline’s position on the relationship between the Mosaic Covenant and the new covenant in *By Oath Consigned* is revised in his later work, *Kingdom Prologue*. Irons argues:

In other words, in KP [*Kingdom Prologue*] he no longer defines the New Covenant as a renewal of the Old/Mosaic Covenant (i.e., as a law covenant) and instead stresses the contrast between the Old and the New Covenants. The Mosaic Covenant was a covenant of works and was breakable. The New Covenant is a covenant of grace and is fundamentally unbreakable (although the sense in which it is unbreakable must be carefully defined).<sup>24</sup>

In other words, in *Kingdom Prologue*, Kline revises the position he articulated in *By Oath Consigned*, by arguing that “The New Covenant is not a renewal of

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22 *By Oath Consigned*, 75

23 *JETS* 52/2 (June 2009): 410

24 <http://www.upper-register.com/blog/?cat=26>

the Mosaic Covenant but the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.”<sup>25</sup>

But Ferry ignores this development, and (in Karlberg’s words), “distorts an accurate reading of the history of Reformed interpretation, past and present.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, prior to the publication of Ramsey’s article, Lee Irons had argued (both in his General Assembly defense and on his weblog) that the “subservient covenant” view of Amyraldianism does in fact provide the best precursor of the mature Kline’s position on the Mosaic covenant. Irons argued that the Amyraldian “Subservient Covenant” is “A 17th Century Precursor of Meredith Kline’s View of the Mosaic Covenant.”<sup>27</sup> In this respect, Irons argues that “Kline’s understanding of the Mosaic Covenant has significant links with 17th century developments in covenant theology.”<sup>28</sup>

This is exactly what Ramsey argued in his *WTJ* article. In other words, when Kline’s mature view on the Mosaic covenant is precisely articulated, both friend and foe alike have argued that it bears striking and substantial similarities to the Amyraldian view of the Mosaic covenant. The only difference is that the “friends” have argued this to support Kline’s version of the “replication” thesis, while his “foes” have used it to critique it in terms of its confessional fidelity. We will discuss the Amyraldian view of replication below.

Richard B. Gaffin Jr. has also raised some concerns about the “replication thesis.” In a recent review of Michael Horton’s *Covenant and Salvation*, Gaffin expressed his concern regarding

Horton’s view that under the Mosaic economy the judicial role of the law in the life of God’s people functioned, at the typological level, for inheritance by works (as the covenant of works reintroduced) in antithesis to grace.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, Gaffin sees this position as creating “an uneasy tension, if not polarization, in the lives of his people between grace/faith and (good) works/

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25 Ibid.

26 Karlberg, 410

27 [http://www.upper-register.com/papers/subservient\\_cov.pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/papers/subservient_cov.pdf) (pg. 1)

28 [http://www.upper-register.com/papers/subservient\\_cov.pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/papers/subservient_cov.pdf) (pg. 6)

29 [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=141](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=141)



obedience (*ordo salutis*), especially under the Mosaic economy.”<sup>30</sup> Gaffin’s comments do not directly address the relationship of Horton’s views to the Westminster Confession and the Reformed tradition in general, but they do express his general concern regarding not only the internal consistency of the position, but also how it may detract from an accurate reading of the Old Testament.<sup>31</sup>

Many other discussions have taken place regarding this issue. Some can be found on various blogs and internet discussion groups, often between ministers and elders in NAPARC denominations. As the editors note in their introduction to this volume, it has also become a point of contention in licensure and ordination examinations. Indeed, it is clear that this book is meant to function, in part, as a response to the concerned pastors and elders who appeared in fictional form in the introduction to this volume. Alternatively, this review should be read as an attempt to vindicate their concerns, and encourage them to continue asking precise and probing questions on this matter.

## A Coherent Thesis?

At the outset, we must reflect more directly on some problems related to the thesis of this book, namely, that the Mosaic covenant is “in some sense” a republication of the covenant of works. The problem, of course, is that this kind of thesis provokes an obvious question: in what precise sense is it a covenant of works? The thesis seems to be deliberately formulated to encompass a wide variety of views, as the authors of this book admit (20).

In our opinion, this imprecision creates a number of logical and theological problems with several of the positions propounded in the book. These particular problems are not necessarily exegetical or historical-theological, but are rather a matter of logical self-consistency. In other words, on careful analysis, several of the positions advanced in this book either fail to make logical sense, or

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30 Ibid.

31 To our knowledge, Gaffin has also extensively critiqued constructions of the Mosaic covenant as embodying a meritorious works-principle in both his classroom lectures and various public presentations on the doctrine of the covenant. The classroom lectures can be accessed online at [www.wts.edu](http://www.wts.edu).

utilize theological language in such an imprecise manner that they no longer carry their fixed theological meaning.

In order to make this clear, it is important to clearly define our terms. These authors maintain that the Mosaic covenant is “in some sense” a republication of the covenant of works. What precisely, then, is the covenant of works? The Westminster Confession of Faith makes this clear in at least two places:

WCF 7:2: The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

WCF 19:1: God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

These two statements clearly articulate an essential aspect of the covenant of works, namely, that it requires perfect, personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience. We call this an “essential aspect” of the covenant of works because this requirement is absolutely necessary to a covenant of works. Put negatively, without the requirement for perfect, personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, a covenant then ceases to be a covenant of works. In other words, we have only two options: either the covenant is a covenant of works, and requires perfect obedience, or the covenant is some other kind of covenant, and requires something other than perfect obedience (namely, the covenant of grace).

This is the fixed, accepted, confessional, and orthodox understanding of the covenant of works. So when we say that the Mosaic covenant is “in some sense” a republication of the covenant of works, then we are saying that the Mosaic covenant “in some sense” republishes the requirement for perfect, personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience. Is that what these authors mean when they speak of a “covenant of works” at Sinai?

The answer, for a number of them, seems to be a resounding “No.” We will focus on the position of two of the editors, Bryan Estelle and David

VanDrunen. Estelle insists that the Mosaic covenant created a unique need for “sincere obedience, relative obedience (albeit) imperfect” (137). David VanDrunen also says that in the Mosaic covenant “God did not enforce the works principle strictly, and in fact taught his OT people something about the connection of obedience and blessing by giving them, at times, temporal reward for *relative (imperfect) obedience*” (301, n. 30). Estelle and VanDrunen are very clear: the Mosaic covenant did not actually require Israel to obey the law perfectly to receive the blessings of the land; rather he accepted their sincere, imperfect obedience.

At the same time, both of these authors insist (both in the Introduction and in their respective essays) that this arrangement should be referred to as a republication of the covenant of works. But as noted above, an essential component of the covenant of works is the requirement for perfect, personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience to the law. Without this requirement, the arrangement is not and cannot be a covenant of works. Rather it must be some other kind of covenant. To say that it only requires sincere, imperfect obedience, and at the same time call it a republication of the covenant of works (unless some distinct qualification or redefinition is given) is a logically incoherent statement. Unless, that is, we radically redefine the traditional signification of the term “covenant of works.” Much greater precision is demanded, particularly if progress is to be made on this knotty issue.

Now we must ask ourselves, in what kind of covenant does God accept sincere, imperfect obedience as a part of the requirements of the covenant? Clearly, it cannot be the covenant of works. A survey of a few prominent Reformed covenant theologians reveals that the only covenant in which imperfect, sincere obedience can be accepted as a condition of the covenant is the covenant of grace.

John Ball, a covenant theologian who was very influential on the Westminster Assembly,<sup>32</sup> described in detail the kind of obedience required in the

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32 We will return to Ball often below, as our research has only confirmed the analysis of Geerhardus Vos, who wrote: “Because his treatise appeared during the sitting of the Westminster Assembly, just at the time when it set itself to framing the confession, and because it moreover borrowed from Ball in the standards, one naturally supposes that his influence can be detected in its formulation of the doctrine of the covenant” (*Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* [2001] 241).

covenant of grace:

Sincere, uniforme and constant, though imperfect in measure and degree, and this is so necessary, that without it there is no Salvation to be expected. The Covenant of Grace calleth for perfection, accepteth sincerity, God in mercy pardoning the imperfection of our best performances. If perfection was rigidly exacted, no flesh could be saved: if not at all commanded, imperfection should not be sin, nor perfection to be laboured after. The faith that is lively to imbrace mercy is ever conjoined with an unfained purpose to walke in all well pleasing, and the sincere performance of all holy obedience, as opportunity is offered, doth ever attend that faith, whereby we continually lay hold upon the promises once embraced. Actuall good works of all sorts (though not perfect in degree) are necessary to the continuance of actuall justification, because faith can no longer lay faithfull claime to the promises of life, then it doth virtually or actually leade us forward in the way of heaven [1 John 1:6-7]... (20-21).

Ball is clear: the covenant of grace accepts an obedience that is “uniforme and constant, though imperfect in measure and degree.” Indeed, it “calleth for perfection,” but “accepteth sincerity” through the forgiving grace of Christ. This kind of obedience is absolutely necessary for salvation, and is not in any way unique to the Mosaic covenant.

In another place, he expands upon this point and addresses the obedience of the Old Testament governors like Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Nehemiah and others. Ball argues:

Without question, they understood, that God of his free grace had promised to be their God, and of his undeserved and rich mercy would accept of their willing and sincere obedience, though weake and imperfect in degree; which is in effect, that the Covenant which God made with them and they renewed was a Covenant of grace and peace, the same for substance that is made with the faithfull in Christ in time of the Gospel (108).

Note the logic of Ball's argument. Because the obedience conditioned in the Mosaic covenant was sincere, imperfect obedience, this covenant must therefore be a covenant of grace.

This is not just the view of Ball, but the testimony of the Reformed confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. We will limit ourselves to three representative examples. First, the Scots Confession, chapter 15, says that in Christ, God "... accepts our imperfect obedience as if it were perfect, and covers our works, which are defiled with many stains, with the justice of his Son." Second, chapter 16 of the Second Helvetic Confession teaches that:

...God gives a rich reward to those who do good works, according to that saying of the prophet...However, we do not ascribe this reward, which the Lord gives, to the merit of the man who receives it, but to the goodness, generosity and truthfulness of God who promises and gives it, and who, although he owes nothing to anyone, nevertheless promises that he will give a reward to his faithful worshippers... Moreover, in the works even of the saints there is much that is unworthy of God and very much that is imperfect. But because God receives into favor and embraces those who do works for Christ's sake, he grants to them the promised reward.

Finally, the Westminster Confession teaches that although our works "...as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment" (16:5), "Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in Him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreproveable in God's sight; but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections" (16:6). Clearly, since this is addressing the obedience and good works of believers in Christ, it is also addressing believers in the covenant of grace.

This is the uniform testimony of the Reformed confessions, which is confirmed by its explication in prominent Reformed covenant theologians. The specific nature of the obedience required/operative in the covenant of

grace is that it is imperfect, although sincerely offered. It is only in a covenant of grace that such obedience can be accepted and rewarded by God, because it is only in such a covenant that the believer's sins are covered and forgiven by the blood of Christ.

Yet the authors of this present volume insist that such obedience in the context of the Mosaic covenant functions in a way essentially different from the Abrahamic or new covenants. As Estelle put it, the new covenant has “essentially changed matters here” (136). Indeed, the editors together insist that “the covenant of works was republished at Sinai,” although not “as the covenant of works per se, but as part of the covenant of grace” (11). They then go on to insist (in the introduction) that this republication brought “the requirement for *perfect obedience* before the fallen creature, forcing him to turn to the only one who has been obedient” (11). In virtually the space of a few sentences, these writers (1) argue that the Mosaic covenant republishes the covenant of works, then (2) argue that it really wasn't the covenant of works (because it didn't require perfect obedience and functioned as part of the covenant of grace), and then (3) reverse themselves again and insist that in the Mosaic covenant the “requirement for perfect obedience” is brought before them, thus making it in some sense a true covenant of works. As we have shown, this same kind of inconsistency is evident throughout the argumentation of the book. Greater precision is necessary if we are to make sense of the specific proposals set forth in this book.<sup>33</sup>

So the reader (and the reviewer) is faced with a rather troublesome dilemma when seeking to evaluate their position. On the one hand, the authors use language that suggests that the Mosaic covenant is *really* a covenant of works that is actually applied to the life of Israel. But on the other hand, in

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<sup>33</sup> A similar argument can be made regarding the second essential element of the obedience required in a covenant of works, namely, *personal* obedience (cf. WCF 7:2, 19:1; LC #20). The obedience required was to be performed by the individual person, and not by another in his stead (as in the covenant of grace). Thus, for a covenant to be a covenant of works, it must require personal-individual obedience from those in the covenant. However, in several places the authors under review speak of the Mosaic covenant requiring *national-corporate* obedience to the law. In this construction the personal obedience of each individual Israelite is wed to the obedience of all other Israelites that make up that corporate entity. Indeed, it even appears that some Israelites may have been faithful to the covenant, yet sent into exile-judgment with the rest of the nation. However the details of this situation are worked out, it is clear that on our authors' construction the Mosaic covenant requires not simply *personal*, but *national-corporate* obedience. As such, it cannot be properly construed as a covenant of works, which requires specifically *personal* obedience.

their expositions they describe the unique obedience required in the republished “covenant of works” in a way that only makes sense if it is simply a covenant of grace (relative, sincere, imperfect obedience). To add more confusion into the mix, at times they also seem to indicate that the obedience required in the Mosaic covenant was indeed perfect obedience (not just imperfect and sincere). These formulations, without further nuance, qualification, or explanation, are mutually self-contradictory. They represent *distinct positions* that cannot logically coexist in the same manner in the same covenant arrangements.

Therefore, our authors are faced with a choice.<sup>34</sup> They must either discontinue their use of the language of “covenant of works” and “works principle,” to describe the Mosaic covenant, because it does not require perfect obedience. Or, they must alter their teaching that the Mosaic covenant actually did require perfect obedience, in which they can continue to accurately refer to it as a republished covenant of works. To call it a republication of the covenant of works, and insist that it only requires imperfect obedience is as confusing as that “black” is “white,” and “up” is “down.” They are mutually incompatible positions. Though we lay down this general criticism at the outset, we will return at times to it below.

## **Fesko and Ferry on the Mosaic Covenant in the Reformed Tradition**

*The Law is Not of Faith* begins with several historical articles. While D. G. Hart’s discussion of Old Princeton and the Law is worthy of comment, space requires that we limit our reflections to the heart of the debate about the historical-theological aspect of the book. Therefore, we will focus our attention on the contributions of J. V. Fesko and Brenton C. Ferry. These essays help set the tone for the entire article, as they seek to position the views of the authors within the mainstream development of Reformed theology from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century. A careful analysis of them is therefore central to evaluating the

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<sup>34</sup> In keeping with the editors’ insistence that “No particular view expressed by one contributor should be automatically imputed to any other contributor” (20), collective references in this review to the “authors” views on a particular matter should be read primarily as literary shorthand for those authors who teach (or approve) the specific position under consideration (unless otherwise specified). They should not be taken as an effort to impute one author’s position onto another.

views propounded in this book.

J. V. Fesko opens the volume with an analysis of John Calvin and Herman Witsius on the Mosaic covenant. In this chapter, Fesko aims to “take a comparative historical-theological snapshot of two continental Reformed theologians on this issue” (26). That is about as close as he comes to giving a clear thesis. It seems safe to assume, however, that the implicit thesis of the article, in keeping with the broader thesis of the book as a whole, is that both Calvin and Witsius believed that the Mosaic covenant was “in some sense” a covenant of works (6). It is in terms of Fesko’s contribution to this broader thesis that we will be examining his article below.<sup>35</sup>

Fesko begins by noting what has become a chief problem in many historical-theological treatments of this issue, particularly those of a more “Barthian” orientation. He states his hearty agreement with recent critiques of Barthian historians for being “more interested in vindicating their monocovenantal understanding of Scripture rather than doing accurate contextualized historical theology” (27). Well said. The problem (in our opinion) is that Fesko is guilty of the same error, only from another angle. In the final analysis, Fesko seems more interested in vindicating his own view of the Mosaic covenant than in doing “accurate contextualized historical theology.” It doesn’t matter whether this comes from a Barthian or a Klinean orientation: if you unwarrantedly see your own views in the men you are studying, you are committing the same error. We admit that Fesko is accurate in describing some aspects of Calvin and Witsius’s view (particularly their views concerning the substantial unity of the one covenant of grace). For this we give thanks to Fesko, and are grateful for his contribution. But in terms of the key issue set before us in the thesis of this book (that the Mosaic covenant is “in some sense” a covenant of works), Fesko’s treatment is flawed.

First of all, let us note how Fesko is guilty of anachronism in summarizing Calvin and Witsius on the Mosaic covenant. This is especially evident in the language Fesko uses to describe their views. He states that Calvin maintained that “the Mosaic administration of the law sets forth a *principle of works*”

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<sup>35</sup> The reader must remember (as we have noted above) that Fesko was a lead defender of Lee Irons at his OPC trial. This essay must be read in part as an outgrowth of his defense of Irons, which involved his understanding of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works. It is not a purely disinterested study of two figures in the history of Reformed doctrine on the Mosaic covenant.



(30), and that “the Mosaic covenant was governed by a *works principle*” (32; cf. 33). This language of “works-principle” does not appear in Calvin. It does, however, figure prominently in his own view of the Mosaic covenant as well as that of Meredith G. Kline.<sup>36</sup> It makes sense that Fesko would use this language to describe Calvin’s view. It allows him to draw a direct (linguistic) line of connection between Kline and Calvin. Furthermore, he unhelpfully utilizes the terms *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis* in analyzing their theology. While these terms may serve a useful purpose, in our opinion, since the subject of his analysis is so hotly disputed, it would have been better for him to leave them to the side, and stick to the language indigenous to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> As Fesko has pointed out, one must always be cautious of reading one’s own theological position back onto the writers you are analyzing. One way to guard against this is avoiding anachronistic language.

What then, does Fesko say is Calvin’s view of the Mosaic covenant? According to him, “Calvin explains that in the dispensation of the Mosaic covenant there are *two separate covenants*” (30). What evidence does Fesko provide to support this view? He appeals to Calvin’s linguistic distinction between a *foedus legale* and a *foedus evangelicum*, arguing that there is “a sense in which Calvin sees these two covenants in an antithetical relationship to one another” (30). The primary difference, for Fesko, is that the *foedus legale* “sets forth a covenant governed by a works principle, namely, eternal

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<sup>36</sup> Fesko has used this language in a recent interview in response to a question about his views on the Mosaic covenant. The interview can be accessed online at <http://reformedforum.org/cfc78/>. See also Fesko’s sermons (especially those on Deuteronomy), available online at: <http://www.genevaopc.org/content/view/66/40>.

<sup>37</sup> In fairness to Fesko, on page 27, n. 6, he does notes the following: “. . . the use of the term *historia salutis* is not intended to imply that Reformed theologians of the 16th century through 18<sup>th</sup> century employed it, as it is of recent origins. . . Rather, it is being used to describe the unfolding of redemptive history, something the Reformers materially acknowledge, though they formally do not use the term.” Still, we believe it would have been better, for the sake of clarity, to avoid this anachronistic language in his analysis of Calvin and Witsius. The danger is that it tends to read more advanced theological formulations back upon the theological tradition. While it may be true that they materially acknowledged this category, part of our historical-theological interest also consists in the ways in which their formal categories may have differed from later theologians (though they may have agreed in substance). Only by first understanding a theologian in terms of *his own* categories of thought can he then be understood in relationship to the later development of his thought. As we have noted, this is a fundamental problem with Fesko’s analysis. It operates along the lines of formal categories that are foreign to both Calvin and Witsius. In a word, it is our opinion that he seems to be committing the same error Mark Karlberg committed. He appears to be reading Klinean categories back on to the Reformed tradition.

life through obedience” (30).

However, there is a problem with Fesko’s analysis. The terms *foedus legale* and *foedus evangelicum* are almost always (for Calvin) terms used to describe the various administrations of the covenant of *grace*, not a “separate covenant,” characterized by a “works principle” operative in the Mosaic administration. This is clearly the case in 2.11.4 of the *Institutes* (which Fesko cites to defend his analysis), where Calvin writes (commenting on Heb. 7-10):

Here we are to observe how the covenant of the law (*legale*) compares with the covenant of the gospel (*evangelicum*), the ministry of Christ with that of Moses. For if the comparison had reference to the substance of the promises, there would be great disagreement between the Testaments. But since the trend of argument leads us in another direction, we must follow it to find the truth.

For Calvin, the *foedus legale* and *foedus evangelicum* are not “two separate covenants” as Fesko states, but they are in fact two names for two different administrations of the same covenant. The comparison between the *foedus legale* and the *foedus evangelicum* does not refer to the “substance” of the covenants. Rather as Calvin goes on to explain in the same section, the two terms only refer to a twofold way of administering the same covenant:

Let us then set forth the covenant that he once established as eternal and never-perishing. Its fulfillment, by which it is finally confirmed and ratified, is Christ. While such confirmation was awaited, the Lord appointed, through Moses, ceremonies that were, so to speak, solemn symbols of that confirmation. A controversy arose over whether or not the ceremonies that had been ordained in the law ought to give way to Christ. Now these were only the *accidental properties of the covenant*, or *additions and appendages*, and in common parlance, accessories of it. Yet, because *they were means of administering it*, they bear the name “covenant,” just as is customary in the case of the other sacraments. To sum up, then, in this passage “Old Testament” means the solemn manner of confirming the covenant, comprised in

ceremonies and sacrifices (2.11.4).

In 2.11.4, Calvin is not teaching that the Mosaic covenant should be viewed as a “separate covenant” governed by a works-principle. In fact, Calvin makes the *opposite point* in this very passage, namely, that the Mosaic covenant is essentially a covenant of grace, though differently administered.

Fesko also appeals to Calvin’s *Institutes* 2.11.7 to support his interpretation of the *foedus legale*. The reader should note the jump: the first quote comes from 2.11.4, while the second comes three sections later. The two are then woven together in a way that makes them appear like a seamless garment. But in 2.11.7, Calvin is not speaking of a “separate covenant” during the Mosaic administration, but rather of “the mere nature of the law” abstracted from that covenant. Calvin is analyzing the words of Hebrews and Jeremiah, whom he says “consider nothing in law, but what properly belongs to it.” As the very next section (2.11.8) clearly demonstrates, Calvin understands Jeremiah to be speaking simply of the moral law itself, not of a “separate covenant” operative in the Mosaic administration: “Indeed, Jeremiah even calls *the moral law* a weak and fragile covenant [Jer. 31:32].” In other words, Fesko’s error is that he applies what Calvin says about the moral law to a separate covenant in the Mosaic administration. This is very strange, considering that he himself had told us at the start of the article that—“When one explores Calvin’s understanding of the function of the law, he must therefore carefully distinguish whether he has the moral law or the law as the Mosaic covenant in mind” (28). Well said. But when it comes to one of the most crucial points in his reading of Calvin, he chooses to ignore that distinction and applies what Calvin says about the moral law to the Mosaic covenant itself.

The significance of this mistake cannot be underestimated. It is the *only primary document evidence* that Fesko gives to support this key aspect of his thesis. On page 33, he summarizes in six points his thesis regarding Calvin’s view of the Mosaic covenant. To points 1-4, we say “Amen.” But for the reasons outlined above we cannot agree with points 5-6.

(5) The Mosaic administration of the law is specifically a *foedus legale* in contrast to the *foedus evangelicum*, the respective ministries of Moses and Christ; and (6) the *foedus legale* is based upon a works principle but no one is able to

fulfill its obligations except Christ (33).

What Fesko should have said is that for Calvin, the *moral law*, narrowly considered, promises eternal life for perfect obedience. To say that the “*Mosaic covenant* is characterized by a works principle” (32) is only to confuse what Calvin keeps clear. The *moral law itself* may promise life for perfect obedience, but Calvin does not speak this way about the *Mosaic covenant* or the *foedus legale*.

Now, we must ask the question, *why* does Calvin consider the law in this narrow sense? Is it because during the Mosaic administration there was a “separate covenant” that was governed by a principle of works (as Fesko states)? By no means. Calvin must be allowed to interpret Calvin. Why is it that Paul (and the other New Testament writers) sometimes speak of the law in this “narrow sense?” Calvin explains:

He was disputing with perverse teachers who pretended that we merit righteousness by the works of the law. Consequently, to refute their error he was sometimes compelled to take the bare law in a narrow sense, *even though it was otherwise graced with the covenant of free adoption* (2.7.2).

Note well: the law is taken in the narrow sense when Paul is refuting the Judaizers, who maintained that we “merit righteousness by works of the law.” He makes the same point in his commentary on Rom. 10:4.

The Apostle obviates here an objection which might have been made against him; for the Jews might have appeared to have kept the right way by depending on the righteousness of the law. It was necessary for him to disprove this false opinion; and this is what he does here. He shows that he is a false interpreter of the law, who seeks to be justified by his own works...It hence follows, that the wicked abuse of the law was justly reprehended in the Jews, who absurdly made an obstacle of that which was to be their help: nay, it appears that they had shamefully mutilated the law of God; for they rejected its soul, and seized on the dead body of the letter. For though the law promises reward to those who

observe its righteousness, it yet substitutes, after having proved all guilty, another righteousness in Christ, which is not attained by works, but is received by faith as a free gift. Thus the righteousness of faith (as we have seen in the first chapter) receives a testimony from the law. We have then here a remarkable passage, which proves that the law in all its parts had a reference to Christ; and hence no one can rightly understand it, who does not continually level at this mark.

Note how Calvin interprets Paul on the law. He often takes the law “in a narrow sense” to refute “perverse teachers who pretended that we merit righteousness by works.” These Jews “rejected its [the Law’s] soul, and seized on the dead body of the letter,” and thus “shamefully mutilated the law of God.” Its true purpose was not only to promise “reward to those who observe its righteousness,” but also to substitute “after having proved all guilty, another righteousness in Christ, which his not attained by works, but received by faith.”

Cornel Venema has noted this important aspect of Calvin’s teaching on the “legal covenant.”

For Calvin, these legal promises were never intended to play an independent role with regard to the evangelical promises... That the apostle Paul or other biblical authors should ever speak of the law in this narrow sense, wrested from its evangelical setting, is only owing to the false claim of some that salvation can be gained through keeping the law.<sup>38</sup>

Though Venema includes a blurb on the back cover of the book under review “recommending” the volume, he also notes that “I am not persuaded by every formulation here.” This must have been one of the points of which he was not persuaded.<sup>39</sup>

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38 Cornel Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ* (2007) 234

39 Venema’s recommendation of the book seems somewhat strange, considering the fact that he commends the book as deserving special attention for “anyone who prizes the biblical teaching that the believer’s justification rests not on any works of his own, but solely on the full obedience of Christ.” Surely, the author’s insistence on the necessity of the imputation of Christ’s full obedience in justification is commendable. But that is not really what this book is about. Rather its main point is to deal with the issue of the republication of the covenant of works in the Sinaitic

In his clearest and most direct statements, Calvin affirms not only the essential continuity, but also the identity of the old and new covenants. Commenting on Jeremiah 31, Calvin writes:

Now, as to the *new* covenant, it is not so called, because it is contrary to the first covenant; for God is never inconsistent with himself, nor is he unlike himself, he then who once made a covenant with his chosen people, had not changed his purpose, as though he had forgotten his faithfulness. It then follows, that the first covenant was inviolable; besides, he had already made his covenant with Abraham, and *the Law was a confirmation of that covenant*. As then the Law depended on that covenant which God made with his servant Abraham, it follows that *God could never have made a new, that is, a contrary or a different covenant*... These things no doubt sufficiently shew that *God has never made any other covenant than that which he made formerly with Abraham, and at length confirmed by the hand of Moses* (emphasis ours).

Here Calvin explicitly rejects, in so many words, the very position Fesko imputes to him, namely, that Moses introduced a contrary, separate covenant in the life of the people of Israel. Compare again the two statements. Fesko says “Calvin explains that in the dispensation of the Mosaic covenant there are *two separate covenants*” which are in some sense in an “antithetical relationship to one another” (30). Calvin says that “God could never have made a new, that is, a contrary or a different covenant” with the people of Israel. God did not bring in anything substantially different through the Mosaic covenant; it was essentially the same as the Abrahamic: “God has never made any other covenant than that which he made formerly with Abraham, and at length confirmed by the hand of Moses.” How can this be true if Calvin teaches that the Mosaic covenant introduces a “separate covenant” governed by a “works principle” that is in an “antithetical relationship” to the Abrahamic covenant?

Fesko misinterprets and misrepresents Calvin’s position by suppressing the above-mentioned aspects of his teaching. In so doing, Fesko makes Cal-

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covenant. The issue of justification is a separate (albeit important) issue.

vin sound more like one of his (and the other authors) favorite contemporary covenant theologians: Meredith G. Kline. In fact, in our opinion, he appears to be doing nothing more than Mark Karlberg did before him: reading a form of Kline's view onto Calvin.<sup>40</sup> Kline taught that in the Mosaic administration there were two separate covenants: one of works, and one of grace. The former was superimposed upon the underlying substratum of the Abrahamic covenant of grace. Again, Fesko's interest in vindicating his own view (Kline's) of the Mosaic covenant seems to have created a roadblock in his efforts for an "accurate contextualized historical theology."

Interestingly, this same strand of Calvin's teaching on the Mosaic covenant reappears in Herman Witsius.

Having premised these observations, I answer to the question. The covenant made with Israel at Mt. Sinai was not formally the covenant of works... However, the carnal Israelites, not advertent to God's purpose or intention, as they ought, mistook the true meaning of that covenant, embraced it as a covenant of works, and by it sought for righteousness. Paul declares this [Witsius references both Rom. 9:31-23 and Gal. 4:24-25]... For in that place [Gal. 4:24-25] Paul does not consider the covenant of Mt. Sinai as it is in itself, and in the intention of God, offered to the elect, but as abused by carnal and hypocritical men (Witsius, 2:184-85).

Witsius then goes to quote Calvin from his commentary on Gal. 4:24.

Let Calvin again speak: "The apostle declares, that, by the children of Sinai, he meant hypocrites, persons who are at length cast out of the church of God, and disinherited. What therefore is that generation unto bondage, which he there speaks of? It is doubtless those, who basely abuse the law,

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<sup>40</sup> In fairness to Fesko and Ferry, we are encouraged that they have recognized many of the historical-theological errors in Karlberg's analysis (78-79)—one that has played a large role in shaping many Klineans' understanding of the Reformed tradition. Still, they do not seem to be as forthright as they might have been about the source of many of these basic errors, namely, Karlberg's attempt to vindicate Kline's construction of the Mosaic covenant. Although (relatively speaking) their analysis is an improvement on Karlberg, they still do not seem to have moved beyond his basic commitment to reading the tradition in light of or in reference to Kline.

and conceive nothing in it but what is servile. The pious fathers who lived under the Old Testament did not so. For the servile generation of the law did not hinder them from having the spiritual Jerusalem for their mother. But they, who stick to the bare law, and acknowledge not its pedagogy, by which they are brought to Christ, but rather make it an obstacle to their coming to him, these are Ishmaelites (for thus, and I think rightly Marlorat reads) born unto bondage.” The design of the Apostle, therefore, in that place, is not to teach us, that the covenant of Mount Sinai was nothing but a covenant of works, altogether opposite of the gospel-covenant; but only that the gross Israelites misunderstood the mind of God, and basely abused his covenant; and all such do, who seek for righteousness by the law (ibid.).

Witsius concludes by referencing Calvin again, from his commentary on Rom. 10:4, which we have provided above.

This aspect of Calvin and Witsius’s teaching is crucial for understanding their doctrine of the Mosaic covenant. Both Calvin and Witsius appeal to it lest the Scriptures be misunderstood as teaching that the Mosaic covenant was (as Witsius puts it) “nothing but a covenant of works, altogether opposite of the gospel-covenant.” Yet Fesko only briefly mentions, in truncated form, this aspect of their teaching on the Mosaic covenant, and does not let it substantially affect his analysis.<sup>41</sup> Why? He has obviously read through these sections of their works. Is it because it doesn’t fit his polemical agenda? Fesko, as with many of the other authors in this book, seems more interested in legitimizing some form of the views of Meredith G. Kline, rather than doing “accurate, contextualized historical theology.”

Let us now turn our attention directly to Fesko’s analysis of Witsius on the Mosaic covenant. Before we begin our analysis of Fesko’s treatment, it will

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41 “Citing Calvin, Witsius argued that it was only the ‘crass Israelites’ who misunderstood the purpose of the Sinai covenant, thinking that they could secure their salvation by their obedience rather than through the work of Christ.” Fesko’s analysis subdues the real point of Calvin and Witsius’s arguments. Fesko maintains that the misinterpretation of the “crass Israelites” applies only to the “*purpose* of the Sinai covenant.” However, as the quotes we have provided above show, their misinterpretation goes even farther than that. It applies not only to the purpose of the Sinai covenant, but also to the nature of that Sinai covenant as well.



be good for us to set Witsius in his historical-theological context. McClintock and Strong say this about him.

The principal work of Witsius...was published in 1677, and originated in his desire to meliorate the acrimonious spirit apparent in the controversies between the orthodox and the Federalists. His plan involved no true mediation between the opposing systems, however, but merely the knocking-off of a few of the more prominent angles on the Federal hypothesis; and he succeeded only in raising a storm among the Federalists against himself, without conciliating the opposing party.

The last point is probably the most important to emphasize. It constitutes what is perhaps the most important difference between Calvin and Witsius in the history of theology. Calvin was part of the foundation from which all later Reformed theology developed. Nearly everyone in the Reformed tradition looked back to him as a precedent. Witsius, on the other hand, appears at the end of long years of theological development, and only in a context plagued by intramural Reformed debate that he failed to mediate. Witsius's work, for all its strengths, must be seen for what it really is: a failed attempt to bring together two factions within the church in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. His views are hardly representative of the Reformed consensus in the way that Calvin's are. That does not mean his work is unimportant, or unworthy of study (quite the contrary). Rather it means that the precedent Witsius sets for the orthodox Reformed consensus on the matter of the Mosaic covenant is in an entirely different category from Calvin.

First of all, we must note that Witsius is not afraid to say that the Mosaic covenant is a renewal of the covenant of grace. In book 3, chapter 3, Witsius describes the "different economies or dispensations of the covenant of grace" (1:307). After surveying the economies of the covenant of grace from Adam to Noah, Noah to Abraham, and Abraham to Moses (313-14), he deals with the period from Moses to Christ. Though he notes that the administration of the covenant of grace was "quite different" under the ministry of Moses, he nevertheless argues that it contained a renewal of the covenant of grace: "...all the institutions of former ages were renewed under the direction of Moses, and

enlarged with very many additions, and reduced to a certain form of worship, and as it were, into one body or system; and *the covenant was solemnly renewed with Israel...*” (1:314). What covenant is he talking about? The same covenant he has been describing in this entire chapter: the covenant of grace.

Now, interestingly, Fesko never seems to affirm that Witsius believes this. He always seems to distinguish between the covenant of grace and the Mosaic covenant in Witsius’s thought. Note the following statements by Fesko:

While the covenant of grace is of the same substance throughout both the old and new economies, Witsius is nevertheless prepared to say that the Mosaic covenant is legal in nature because the Mosaic covenant was primarily an administration of the law (36).

Recall that Witsius believes that the covenant of grace is the same in substance in both the old and new testaments. At the same time, however, Witsius can argue that the Mosaic covenant is a repetition of the covenant of works (*ibid.*).

In both of these quotations, Fesko draws a distinction between the covenant of grace, which he says Witsius believes is “the same in substance” in both the old and new testaments, and the *Mosaic* covenant, which he says is “primarily an administration of the law” and “a repetition of the covenant of works.” Notice what he does not affirm: that the Mosaic covenant is (in some sense!) a renewal of the covenant of grace. In order to accurately reflect Witsius’s views, Fesko must state that he believes that the Mosaic covenant *itself* is (in some sense!) in substance a covenant of grace. But he doesn’t do this.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, Fesko at times blatantly (and confusedly) misstates Witsius’s view of the Mosaic covenant. On page 37, he writes that “like Calvin before him, Witsius believed that God set forth a legal covenant before the nation of Israel, one by which they could *earn their salvation through their obedience.*”

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<sup>42</sup> Please note: we are not saying that Fesko doesn’t accurately state that Witsius believes that the covenant of grace is always the same in substance under every administration. Rather he fails to state (as Witsius does) that the Mosaic covenant is essentially a renewal of the covenant of grace. Instead, he tries to distinguish between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of grace. He picks and chooses the quotes that fit what he wants his readers to see, and suppresses those that don’t fit his thesis.

That statement does not square well with Witsius's own words.

... We are not, however, to imagine, that the doctrine of the covenant of works was repeated, in order to set up again such a covenant with the Israelites, in which they were to seek for righteousness and salvation (2:183).

Indeed, have not all the Reformed always believed (against the Papists) that it is utterly impossible for sinful man to (as Fesko says) "earn their salvation through their obedience?" As Witsius himself writes: "we have already proved... that this could not possibly be renewed in that manner with a sinner, on account of the justice and truth of God, and the nature of the covenant of works, which admits no pardon of sin" (2:183).

Another problem with Fesko's interpretation of Witsius's understanding of the Mosaic covenant is the way in which he describes it as embodying a "works principle" (39). We have noted the anachronistic nature of this language above. What precisely does he mean by it? The closest we come is a side comment on page 30 regarding Calvin's (alleged) view: "... Calvin is not afraid to say that the Mosaic administration of the law sets forth a covenant governed by a works principle, namely, eternal life through obedience." Even here Fesko's language is vague (the phrase "eternal life through obedience" lacks a verb, and is thus grammatically incomplete). Later he clarifies things a bit more when he says: "Calvin... sees the Mosaic covenant characterized by the promise of eternal life which can be obtained by Israel's obedience" (30). Still, the question remains, what kind of obedience is Fesko talking about? Is it sincere (albeit imperfect) obedience in thankfulness to Christ's grace (which is obviously required in the covenant of grace)? Or is it rather personal and perfect obedience, as in the Adamic covenant? Fesko doesn't really tell us. However, his quotations from Calvin, who speaks of "complete obedience" (30) and the need to "fulfill all that is contained" in the law, lend weight to the latter (perfect obedience).

Is this really Witsius's view? Does he really teach that the Mosaic covenant, considered as a covenant, is really governed by a "works principle" that offers life upon condition of perfect obedience? Consider what he actually says.

What was it [the Mosaic covenant] then? It was a *national*

*covenant* between God and Israel, whereby Israel promised to God a sincere obedience to all his precepts, especially the ten words (2:186).

Note what Witsius's primary document says: the Mosaic covenant required *sincere obedience*, not perfect obedience. Strangely, on page 38, Fesko notes this as well:

...Witsius is prepared to say that the Sinai covenant is a national covenant of 'sincere piety' which presupposes both [the covenant of works and the covenant of grace]. This covenant of sincere piety did not require perfect obedience, but sincere obedience, which for the godly Israelite was the fruit of his faith.

So which one is it? Is the Mosaic covenant governed by a works principle of strict obedience, or only sincere obedience? Fesko (contradicting himself) seems to say both. Witsius, however, denies the former and affirms the latter.

On page 36, Fesko also subtly misrepresents Witsius's view when he says: "Witsius can also argue that the Mosaic covenant is a repetition of the covenant of works," citing 4.4.48 of Witsius's *Economy* (36). Note particularly the language Fesko uses: "...the Mosaic covenant *is* a repetition of *the covenant* of works." This is not what Witsius says at all. Allow me to quote from 4.4.47-48 to show what Witsius actually says.

Now concerning this covenant, made upon the ten commandments, it is queried, Whether it be a covenant of works, or a covenant of grace? We judge it proper to premise some things, previous to the determination of this question. And, *first*, we observe, that, in the ministry of Moses, there was a repetition of *the doctrine concerning the law* of the covenant of works...*Secondly*, We more especially remark, that, when the law was given from mount Sinai or Horeb, there was a repetition of the covenant of works (182-83).

Witsius affirms two things here. First of all, in the "ministry of Moses" there was a "repetition of the doctrine concerning the law of the covenant of works."

The law given at Sinai (considered as law) is the same in substance with the law of the covenant of works: “For both the very same precepts are inculcated, on which the covenant of works was founded” (182). Second, Witsius maintains that “when the law was given at Sinai or Horeb, there was a repetition of the covenant of works.” Notice, he does not say (as Fesko tells us he said) that “the Mosaic covenant *is* a repetition of the covenant of works.” Rather he simply says that when the law was given at Sinai, there was, alongside of it, a repetition of the covenant of works, which is especially evident in the thunder, lightening, smoke, and darkness that struck Israel with great terror. He does *not* say that the Mosaic covenant *is* a repetition of the covenant of works. That is something Witsius, careful theologian that he is, plainly denies: “. . . The covenant made with Israel at Mt. Sinai was not formally the covenant of works” (184); “However, the carnal Israelites, not advertent to God’s purpose or intention, as they ought, mistook the true meaning of that covenant, embraced it as a covenant of works, and by it sought for righteousness” (184-85). While it may be accurate to say that for Witsius, in the ministry of Moses there was a repetition of the law of the covenant of works, and that when the law was given from Mt. Sinai, there was a repetition of the covenant of works evident in the manner of and circumstances surrounding its delivery,<sup>43</sup> he never says (as Fesko maintains) that the “Mosaic covenant is a repetition of the covenant of works.” In fact, Witsius seems to take pains to explicitly deny that which Fesko imputes to him.

The difference between these two interpretations may seem insignificant, but it is really the whole point of Witsius’s argument. As Brenton Ferry’s essay (which we will examine below) demonstrates, there are a variety of ways in which the relationship between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of works can be described. In contrast to Fesko, Ferry accurately describes Witsius’s position: “Witsius calls the Mosaic covenant a national covenant, which is neither the covenant of grace, nor the covenant of works” (86). Note again how this contrasts with Fesko’s summary: “Witsius can also argue that the Mosaic covenant is a repetition of the covenant of works” (36).

Towards the end of the essay, Fesko seems to reveal his primary interest in focusing on Witsius, namely, his alleged typological correlation between

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<sup>43</sup> Francis Turretin makes a similar point in his *Institutes* in his treatment of the same topic (*Institutes*, 12.7.27; 2:226).

the obedience of Israel and the obedience of Christ, in which the former is said to foreshadow the latter. However, there is no evidence to support his contention that the purpose of the national covenant was “not so that Israel would earn the land through their obedience, but rather so that as a nation they would foreshadow the person and work of Christ” (38). Later he repeats this claim when he states that “Witsius sees the Promised Land both in terms of the Promised Land and also in terms of the foreshadow of Christ’s obedience, that which secures eternal life” (39). It is true that Witsius sees many types and shadows in the OT that point forward to Christ. However, he never says that Israel’s obedience is one of those types. That may be Fesko’s (as well as the other editors, along with Meredith G. Kline’s) construction, but it is not found anywhere in Witsius. Nor does Fesko cite any evidence from Witsius where he affirms this, but simply asserts it. Fesko’s citation of *Economy*, 3.3.5 proves nothing relative to this point, as it fails to address the precise point at issue (namely Israel’s obedience as a type of Christ’s obedience), and deals only with typology in a broad, general sense.

It is clear from the rest of the book that this first article is important for understanding many of the formulations that follow, as many of the authors seek to clothe their own proposals in Witsius’s language. For example, Estelle refers to the need for “sincere obedience, relative obedience (albeit imperfect) would showcase an appropriate measure of readable obedience before the surrounding nations” which has now passed away in the new covenant (137). This is clearly an attempt on his part to utilize the language of Witsius (whom he references on footnote 118 of the same page).<sup>44</sup> Likewise, Baugh appeals to Witsius to defend his idea of “the Mosaic law more narrowly considered embodies what can only be described as a works principle” (260). Likewise, VanDrunen qualifies his own understanding of the strict works principle in the Mosaic economy by stating that “...God did not enforce the works principle

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<sup>44</sup> Estelle’s attempt to appeal to Witsius as a precedent for his opinion is hamstrung by Witsius himself at several points. The most pointed incompatibility between the two positions consists in the fact that Witsius maintains that after the fall the law can no longer “be the condition by the performance of which man may require a right to the reward” (1:159). Meritorious law-obedience no longer functions as the legal ground of reward. However, for Estelle Israel’s obedience “would be the ground for Israel’s continuance in the land, the typological kingdom,” and “the meritorious grounds for Israel’s continuance in the land, the typological kingdom” (136). Furthermore, Estelle makes clear that for Israel “temporal blessings of life... would ensue following the fulfillment of the stipulations” (ibid.). What is this, except a conditional performance by which Israel requires a right (meritoriously!) to a reward—a position that Witsius explicitly rejects.

strictly and in fact taught his OT people something about the connection of obedience and blessing by giving them, at times, temporal reward for relative (imperfect) obedience” (301, n. 30). Again, the language reflects that of Witsius. The strategy here is clear: if our position is in accord with that of Witsius, surely our position is within the bounds of historic Reformed orthodoxy. But it is still not clear to us that Fesko (as well as his fellow authors) has accurately grasped Calvin or Witsius, and even less clear if their position is within orthodox, confessional bounds. As we have noted above, it is more accurate to say that Witsius’s national covenant embodies what we might call a “sincerity-principle” (rewards are promised for sincere, imperfect obedience) rather than a “works-principle” (rewards are promised for perfect obedience). These two distinct ideas are conflated throughout this volume.

For Witsius, the relative obedience required in the Mosaic covenant of sincere piety “supposed a covenant of grace” (2:186). Indeed, the fact that an imperfect obedience should be acceptable to God is “wholly owing to the covenant of grace” (ibid.). In other words, the nature of the condition of the Mosaic covenant of sincere piety (imperfect obedience) did not essentially differ from the condition/requirement of the covenant of grace. Both covenants demand sincere (albeit imperfect obedience). For this reason, the Mosaic covenant cannot be a covenant of works: “...God did not require perfect obedience from Israel, as a condition of this covenant, as a cause of claiming the reward; but sincere obedience, as an evidence of reverence and gratitude” (2:184). As Witsius says elsewhere: “sincere obedience to the Divine law is a proof and an evidence of unfeigned faith, of Christ dwelling in us by his Spirit, of regeneration and renovation, according to the image of God, and of our adoption and glorious inheritance...in fine, it is not only useful to obtain the possession of salvation, but also so necessary, that without it no man shall see God.”<sup>45</sup> As he says later: “the works performed by sanctifying grace of the Spirit, though imperfect, are sincere, and so far [Christ’s grace] approves of them as agreeable to it [the Law]” (ibid.). Contrary to Estelle, it is clear that Witsius sees this demand for sincere (albeit imperfect obedience) as continuing for those in the covenant of grace. Furthermore, Witsius does not see such a covenant of sincere piety as being unique to the Mosaic covenant: “A like

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<sup>45</sup> Herman Witsius, *Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain, under the Unhappy Names of Antinomians and Neonomians* [1803] 183.

agreement and renewal of the covenant between God and the pious is frequent; both national and individual” (2:186). The covenant of sincere piety thus has a condition that is only possible in the covenant of grace—indeed, one that is in essence identical to the obedience that is always (according to Witsius) required of those in the covenant of grace (as the necessary evidence of their thankfulness and the genuineness of their faith).

It is true that Witsius teaches that this covenant of sincere piety “supposes both” the covenant of grace *and* the covenant of works. We have seen how this is true with regard to the covenant of grace. What about the covenant of works—in what way did the covenant of sincere piety suppose it? This is what Witsius says: “It also supposed the doctrine of the covenant of works, the terror of which being increased by those excited to embrace that covenant of God” (ibid.). In other words, the covenant of works was “supposed” by this covenant only in the sense that it was declared to help Israel see that the national covenant of sincere piety was a good deal for them (contra the claims of Gordon, p. 251). The covenant of works did not in any way constitute the essential nature of the condition of the covenant. In other words, the covenant of works served only a negative function with regard to the covenant of sincere piety—it drove them away from the covenant of works to the gracious covenant of sincere piety. Fesko (along with the other authors who utilize Witsius’s language) make a fundamental interpretive error when they equate Witsius’s national covenant of sincere piety with their idea of a republication (in some sense!) of the covenant of works. Witsius is painstakingly clear that the national covenant is not a republication of the covenant of works, yet throughout this work, these writers continually (in some sense!) equate the two.

Finally, we must also return to a point (previously made above) regarding Witsius’s place in the Reformed tradition. His views were hardly representative of later orthodoxy. Even a brief perusal of the works of Wilhemus a Brackel<sup>46</sup> and Johannes Vanderkemp show that not everyone was satisfied with Witsius’s construction.<sup>47</sup> In fact, several writers have recognized that Witsius’s view is

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46 Wilhelmus a Brackel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service: Volume 4* (1995).

47 Vanderkemp (*The Christian Entirely the Property of Christ, in Life and Death: Exhibited in Fifty-Three Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism* [1810] 2:199-200) says: “Others will have that it was a national covenant, that is, a covenant made with a whole people, which required a sincere obedience, according to the moral law, with the promise of a reward in this life, and that to come;



rather idiosyncratic, and is not representative of the mainstream consensus of Reformed theology.

In conclusion, despite Fesko's attempt at "accurate contextualized historical theology," his summary of the views of Witsius and Calvin is full of careless inaccuracies which obscure their true meaning. He often suppresses evidence that doesn't fit his thesis, and often describes their position in ways contrary to the plain statements of Witsius and Calvin on the matter. While some aspects of Calvin and Witsius's views are described accurately, the work as a whole is characterized by his attempt (conscious or subconscious) to read his own views onto Calvin and Witsius. The result is a great deal of confusion for the reader. Of course, if your goal is to create a climate in which a variety of opinions on the nature of the Mosaic covenant are accepted as being within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy, then Fesko has succeeded. Even if his interpretation is inaccurate, it will at the very least slow any criticism that is leveled against their views. Seminary students, pastors, and licentiates can simply footnote Fesko's article as another weapon in their historical-theological arsenal. But the weapon misfires when measured against the primary documents.

## **Brenton Ferry's Taxonomy**

Many have noted the necessity of a helpful taxonomy of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century opinions regarding the Mosaic covenant. Many historical treatments of the subject are unhelpful simply because they fail to accurately classify each position in terms of its unique nuances. Indeed, as our authors point out, the position of several individual theologians have been continually misrepresented

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which was, notwithstanding, neither the covenant of grace, nor of works, but presupposed both; but the word national doth not describe nor explain the nature or kind of the covenant, but only saith that it was a covenant established with that nation and that people. If it should be rejoined, that it is neither the covenant of grace nor of works, the matter remains equally obscure: it is as though it were said, we have no offensive nor defensive alliance, or covenant, but an alliance with the nation or people of England. If it be said that it was a covenant of sincere obedience, neither doth this define the nature of the covenant; for the covenants of works and of grace require also a sincere obedience. The covenant that requireth sincere obedience, with the promise of this life, and of that which is to come, is a covenant of works, or a covenant of grace. . . . Since then the covenant, which was made at Sinai, was not a legal servile covenant, nor a national covenant, distinct from the covenant of works and of grace, nor a mixed covenant, composed of the covenant of works and of grace, nor an outward, shadowy covenant, nor a covenant of works, it follows that it was the covenant of grace itself."

in the secondary literature, thus adding further confusion to an already bewildering topic. Brenton Ferry's essay comes close to providing the necessary taxonomy of the debate. He himself helpfully recognizes the need to clarify the "precise sense" in which the Mosaic covenant "republishes" the covenant of works in order to avoid a "verbal debate."

In general, his taxonomy provides some helpful guidance. However, its biggest inadequacy lies in the fact that Ferry refuses to tell us the precise sense in which he believes that the Mosaic covenant "republishes" the covenant of works. He also refuses to distinguish between the orthodox and unorthodox senses in which this was articulated by 17<sup>th</sup> century theologians. Interestingly, the fact that some of these options are, in fact, unorthodox is recognized by the writers of the preface: "As chapter 3 in this present volume shows, there are a number of different formulations, *some unorthodox*, that have been offered over the years" (11). However, since Ferry does not place the distinctively Reformed view of the Mosaic in the context of the broader 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century debate, he does not allow it to stand out distinctively. Of course, clearly defining the consensus position of Reformed orthodoxy is not his primary concern. Ferry's chief goal, with the other writers in this volume, is simply to convince the Reformed churches that the idea that the Mosaic covenant is "in some sense" a covenant of works is and always has been an orthodox option for confessional Reformed theologians. As he puts it:

Is the Mosaic covenant antithetical to the new covenant?  
My purpose is not to answer the question but to survey the  
Reformed tradition's field of discussion. Most of the writers  
say yes and no at the same time (90).

Now, if these writers are really interested in defending the orthodox character of their views, they would want to define very clearly the way in which they believe the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works. They could then go to the tradition, and carefully define which views were orthodox and which ones were not. Then there would no longer be any question, debate, or controversy. But that is not what Ferry does. He deliberately refuses to draw clear lines between orthodox and unorthodox formulations. In our opinion, this is a deliberate strategy. His goal is simply to convince the reader that there were a wide variety of confusing options in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, just as there are today. Therefore, we shouldn't make a big deal about differences on this matter.

At this point, we must note again the essential problem with the thesis of this book, particularly as it is defended in this article. This book seeks to argue, over against various modern developments (particularly John Murray and Norman Shepherd), that the Mosaic covenant was “in some sense” a covenant of works. The trouble is, as Ferry demonstrates, even Murray and Shepherd could say that the Mosaic covenant was “in some sense” a covenant of works (89). Granted, they appealed to the “misinterpretation principle” and/or “the principle of abstraction” to explain this (see below). But they nevertheless could assent to the thesis of this book that the Mosaic covenant was in some sense a covenant of works. Unless we conceptually clarify what is meant by those words, they carry absolutely no significant theological meaning.

There are two criticisms that we have to make against Ferry. The first has to do with the way in which he has misrepresented some of the individual theologians he treats. The second has to do with his analysis of the historiography regarding the Reformed doctrine of the Mosaic covenant. Let us deal with these in turn.

First of all, we must note the ways in which Ferry has misrepresented or obscured the views of several of the individual theologians he treats. Our survey below is at times somewhat harsh in its evaluation. The reader should be alerted to the reason for this. Ferry himself notes in the beginning of the essay that previous analyses of this 17<sup>th</sup> century debate are full of “very basic errors of representative persons” (78). Furthermore, Ferry’s stated goal is to correct these basic errors and “[replace] such confusion with some proper categories of categorization” (80). He directly challenges the analyses of Mark W. Karlberg, Jeong Koo Jeon, Rowland Ward, and Peter Golding, pointing out their blatant misreading of many important Reformed writers. Ferry believes that his essay will bring the needed clarity. In fact, he states that his “taxonomy is needed because nothing like it exists to my knowledge” (78). Apparently, Ferry believes he is the first to accurately outline the contours of the 17<sup>th</sup> century debate. In doing this, we believe Ferry has set a very high standard for himself. How well does he meet the standards of accuracy and clarity that he sets for others in this essay? Let us examine his analysis of a few of the key figures that he treats.

First of all, we must note his analysis of a contemporary theologian,

Meredith G. Kline. Ferry argues that Kline views the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace (102). We have outlined the erroneous character of this assessment above (pp. 22-24), to which we refer the reader.

Second, Ferry also subtly misrepresents the view of Samuel Rutherford and John Ball. After providing very clear quotes from each writer in which they soundly reject the idea that the Mosaic law/covenant was given to Israel as a covenant of works, he then qualifies them by stating: “But even blunt statements like these are not without nuance and qualification elsewhere, so as to grant a measure of continuity between the covenant of works and the Mosaic covenant” (91). Ferry provides no quotation from a primary document to justify this qualification to either Ball or Rutherford’s statements. The other statements Ferry provides from Ball and Rutherford (93-94) do not in any sense qualify their teaching that the Mosaic covenant, as God gave it to Israel, was nothing less and nothing more than a covenant of grace (they are dealing with a rather different point). Neither do they in any way teach that there is “a measure of continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.” That very idea is explicitly denied in their teaching—even in the very quotes Ferry provides! But again, Ferry’s goal is not to draw a clear picture distinguishing between orthodox and unorthodox formulations of the Mosaic covenant, but merely to confuse the reader with the variety of views present in *individual* theologians. Thus, the rhetorical strategy of the book serves its ultimate purpose: to make it appear as if the Reformed tradition has tolerated a great variety of opinion on the Mosaic covenant, and therefore it should not be made a point of confessional orthodoxy.

Third, Ferry misrepresents the views of William Bridge. He quotes Bridge as follows: “...you have the difference between the Law and the Gospel; the excellency of the state of the church under the new testament above the state of the church under the old testament” (81). This is cited to prove the following assertion: “The transition from the old covenant to the new covenant was in some way like the transition from the covenant of works to the covenant of grace” (ibid.). But this is not Bridge’s point at all. As the rest of the sermon makes clear, his main point is to *distinguish* the differences between the transition from old covenant to new covenant and from the covenant of works to the covenant of grace.

Fourth, Ferry misrepresents the views of Edmund Calamy. In his chart on page 104, he argues that Calamy viewed the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace. He references (without a quotation) page 8 of Calamy's *Two Solemn Covenants*. However, Calamy says nothing on that page about the Mosaic covenant being an administration of the covenant of grace. In fact, he clearly states his position:

Some object and say that the Law at *Mt. Sinai* was a covenant of grace, and others say it was a covenant of works, but I shall prove that it was neither, but only given to those that were in covenant as a rule of obedience (8).

In this context, Calamy is speaking specifically about the Law given at Mt. Sinai. He argues that it was neither a covenant of works nor a covenant of grace. In fact, it wasn't a covenant at all, but rather "a rule of obedience" "to those that were in covenant." But Ferry states that Calamy believes Sinai to be an administration of the covenant of grace. This is the very position that he denies in the quote above. If it was not a covenant of grace, it certainly cannot be said to be an administration of the covenant of grace (unless we completely redefine the language of 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed orthodoxy). If we were going to accurately summarize Calamy's view, we would have to say that he believed that the Mosaic law was not a covenant at all, nor was it an administration of a covenant (he never uses that language). Rather Calamy believed that the Mosaic law was a rule of life given to those already in covenant with God. Strangely enough, Ferry seems to note these things on page 92, but when it comes to his taxonomic chart at the end of the article, he forgets what he said and confuses the issue.

Fifth, Ferry misrepresents the views of Thomas Collier. He does this not so much by misquoting him, but by mis-categorizing him. The subtitle to the chart on page 104 reads: "A Reformed Taxonomy of the Order of the Covenants." The trouble is, Collier wasn't Reformed (at least in the generally accepted sense of the term). He was a 17<sup>th</sup> century Baptist—a strange figure to include in an essay that seeks to "survey the *Reformed* tradition's field of discussion" (90) and "profile *Reformed* thought on the unique function of works in the Mosaic covenant by creating a taxonomy of views" (77). Ferry seems to be operating with a very loose definition of "Reformed" here. This hardly helps

to “replace...confusion with some proper categories of organization” (80).

Further, Ferry’s chart at the end of the article also misrepresents the views of a number of Reformed theologians. Though the chart has its strengths, it also has a number of weaknesses that make it more confusing than useful as a guide to sorting out orthodox from orthodox views on the Mosaic covenant. Though it is helpful in some, it fails to articulate the real issue in the 17<sup>th</sup> century debate. This is evident in several ways.

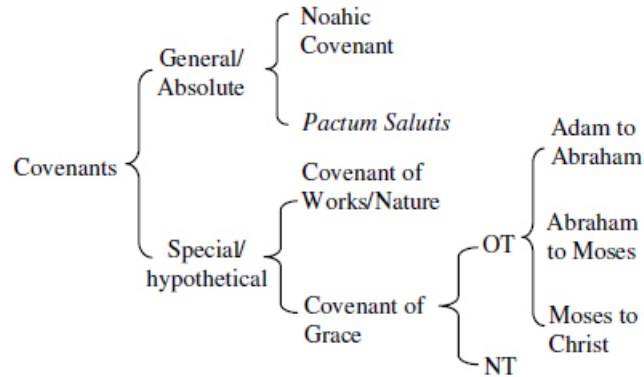
Ferry’s chart attempts to classify Reformed theologians according to the number of covenants they believe in. The first row of Ferry’s chart deals with this aspect of their teaching. While this is a helpful question to ask, Ferry’s answer leads to confusion. The reason is that Reformed theologians could answer that question differently, depending on what kind of covenant you were talking about. In order to make this clear, we must briefly outline the different ways in which the Reformed could speak of the number of covenants.

To begin with, we must note that many theologians made a fundamental distinction between what they called “General” and “Special” or “Absolute” and “Hypothetical” covenants. The former (General/Absolute) had no condition whatsoever. Examples of this kind of covenant would include (at least for some) the *pactum salutis* and the Noahic covenant. The latter (Special/Hypothetical) had a condition. For the Reformed, there were two kinds of special/hypothetical covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Thus, in this most fundamental sense, there were two kinds of covenants.

On the other hand, if we were to zoom in on the special/hypothetical covenants, the Reformed orthodox would insist on a two covenant position: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Others, following John Cameron and Moise Amyraut, would also argue for a third, but this was widely rejected in both individual theologians and the Reformed confessions.

Furthermore, if we were to zoom in on the “covenant of grace,” the Reformed could then further subdivide the various administrations of the covenant of grace. Some preferred a twofold subdivision (Old Testament, New Testament), others preferred a threefold subdivision (Abraham, Moses, and Christ), while still others spoke of as many as a six-fold subdivision (Post-fall, Patriarchal, Mosaic, Davidic, Exilic, and New covenants). The following chart

will help to illustrate this more clearly:



Now, Ferry's taxonomy does not note these crucial distinctions. Again, the result is confusion. To take just one example, both Turretin and Cameron are taxonomized as believing in "three covenants." Turretin believes in the covenant of redemption, the covenant of nature and the covenant of grace. Cameron, on the other hand, is said to believe in the covenant of nature, the covenant of grace, and the subservient Mosaic covenant. Thus Ferry's taxonomy places them as being in agreement.

However, Cameron himself stated in his *Theses* on the covenant that he embraced a teaching concerning the *pactum salutis*. Thus, if Ferry's chart were to be accurate as it stands, he would have to taxonomize Cameron as embracing a four-covenant position. As it is, Ferry makes Cameron and Turretin appear to agree as to the number of covenants.<sup>48</sup> However, if the issue is stated correctly and precisely, the real issue regarding the Mosaic covenant concerning the number of covenants was whether it was essentially a covenant of grace, or rather a different kind of covenant, substantially distinct. Lutherans, Amyraldians, Anabaptists, Socinians, Roman Catholics, and Arminians all said "Yes," it was a different kind of covenant, substantially distinct. The

<sup>48</sup> In a word, Ferry ends up committing the same kind of error he imputes to Rowland Ward, on whose construction (according to Ferry) "one ends up with people in the same category who actually have different views on the mosaic covenant's relationship to the covenant of works" (79). On Ferry's construction, Turretin and Cameron end up agreeing on the number of covenants, even though they explicitly differ on that point.

confessional Reformed consensus said “No.” In other words, the debate focused very narrowly on two things: (1) the number of special/hypothetical covenants; (2) whether the Mosaic covenant was essentially a covenant of grace. The Reformed answered “Two,” and “Yes” to those questions, respectively.

A whole host of other errors appears in Ferry’s chart. Space does not permit us to note them all. Jeremiah Burroughs is mistakenly identified as maintaining that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works. His actual position is really much closer to Cameron and Bolton, who maintained that it was a subservient covenant, distinct in kind from both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.<sup>49</sup> Ferry’s mis-identifications stem from his failure to consult the primary documents. He depends completely on the secondhand summary of Edmund Calamy—a figure Ferry had previously identified as one who had falsely summarized the views of his other contemporaries. Regarding Calamy’s description of Anthony Burgess’s position, Ferry writes: “Burgess, however, seems to be misrepresented by Calamy...In other words, Burgess does not belong in this category, though Calamy infers that he does” (100). Why then does he rely on Calamy to summarize Burroughs position, if he has already shown that he can’t accurately summarize his other contemporaries?

Furthermore, Ferry’s taxonomy gives one a very imbalanced impression of how prevalent many of these views were. The only person who is described as holding to the classic two-covenant schema (covenant of works and covenant of grace) is John Calvin. And even he is mistakenly taxonomized as believing that the Mosaic covenant (rather than the Adamic) was a covenant of works (is there anyone, besides Fesko and Karlberg, who has ever tried to make that argument?! If the chart were to quantitatively represent the views of Reformed theologians who maintained that the Mosaic covenant (yea, even the law itself) was a covenant of grace, this category would run on for pages. As it is, we have a lopsided emphasis on many variations of some minority views. This leaves the reader with a very imbalanced impression of the lay of the land regarding the Reformed debate on the Mosaic covenant. Everyone in the 17<sup>th</sup> century debate admitted that the view of the vast majority of mainstream Reformed theologians held that Sinai was a covenant of grace. Again, Ferry’s (hidden)

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<sup>49</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Conversation* (1653), 47ff. A careful analysis of this sermon shows that Burroughs (with several other independents) has great sympathy with Cameron’s construction.



polemical goal skews the way he presents the data. His interest seems to be in maximizing diversity at the expense of clarifying orthodoxy.<sup>50</sup>

Despite his valiant effort to navigate these confusing waters, Ferry's taxonomy of "Reformed" views of the Mosaic covenant will be of little help to the Reformed church in this present debate.<sup>51</sup> Not only is it plagued by various individual errors, misrepresentations, and misquotations, it also fails in general to give the reader a sense of where the lines of Reformed orthodoxy can be rightly drawn in terms of sorting out the issue. This is not just our expectation, but is Ferry's stated goal: "I hope to provide a tool to assess modern developments and trends within the Reformed community regarding the Mosaic covenant" (78). How are we to assess modern developments (in terms of the tradition) when we are not told what views have been excluded by our Reformed confessions? We are not saying that he has not (in some respects) provided a useful service—only that one must check the quotations carefully. Don't be afraid to check the primary documents!

Indeed, the greatest problem with Ferry's taxonomy is that it fails to adequately distinguish between orthodox and unorthodox formulations of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>52</sup> It presents the reader with a dizzying array of the various formulations among several *individual* theologians of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which

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50 The reader should remember that Lee Irons, following Mark Karlberg, made the same basic argument in defense of his own views on the Mosaic covenant ([http://www.upper-register.com/irons\\_trial/ResponsetoCharge2\(Irons\).pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/ResponsetoCharge2(Irons).pdf) [pg. 35]). In short, he argued that because there was great diversity in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Reformed church, we should tolerate that same diversity today. Ferry is simply attempting to develop Karlberg's and Irons's arguments in a more detailed fashion. Finally, the reader should also remember that he was among those ministers who signed a protest against Irons's conviction ([http://www.upper-register.com/irons\\_trial/GA\\_debate.pdf](http://www.upper-register.com/irons_trial/GA_debate.pdf) [pg. 22]).

51 That is not to say that it is of absolutely no value, but only that it must be used very critically with an eye to the primary documents.

52 The only view Ferry deems unorthodox is the view of the reputed antinomian, Tobias Crisp (100), whose view is indisputably rejected by the Westminster Confession (7:6). Even here, however, Ferry seeks to limit the confession's affirmation that the old and new covenants are a single covenant ("one and the same") to simply a question of continuity in the *ordo salutis*. It is true that the confession believes in one postlapsarian *ordo salutis*, but its statements cannot be reduced to that. Lutherans and Amyraldians could essentially agree that there is only one way of salvation (*ordo salutis*) in the old and new testaments, but come to a very different understanding of the nature and relationship of the Mosaic and New covenants. See below for further argumentation regarding the precise contours of the WCF on the Mosaic covenant in contrast to the Lutheran and Amyraldian formulations.

will very likely only confuse the reader unfamiliar with the hard-to-obtain primary documents he is consulting.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, this seems to be Ferry's goal, along with the book as a whole. If he can convince the reader that this 17<sup>th</sup> century debate was incredibly confusing, and that it is difficult even to figure out what one a single individual writer is saying, let alone whether his view was orthodox, then there is little point in making this a point of orthodoxy in the contemporary Reformed church. We should, as they did, tolerate a variety of formulations, even if we sharply disagree with one another. As he put it: "The Reformed tradition suggests a number of interpretive approaches to this, which are listed below" (82). Ironically, Ferry tells us that his purpose is really to "replace such confusion with some proper categories of organization" (80).

Ferry neglects to tell the reader when a particular writer explicitly departs from the Reformed consensus. We do not have the space to show this in detail. One example will suffice. Ferry includes the great Independent theologian, John Owen, in his "Reformed Taxonomy of the Order of the Covenants" (104). What he neglects to tell you is that this Calvinistic theologian was actually taking an essentially Lutheran view of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>54</sup> Read what Owen says in his commentary on Hebrews:

The judgment of most reformed divines is, that the church under the Old Testament had the same promise of Christ, the same interest in him by faith, remission of sins, reconciliation with God, justification and salvation by the same way and means, that believers have under the new. And whereas the essence and the substance of the covenant consists in these things, they are not to be said to be under *another covenant*, but only a *different administration* of it. But this

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<sup>53</sup> Many of these documents have been placed online at the following website: [sites.google.com/site/themosaiccovenant/Home](http://sites.google.com/site/themosaiccovenant/Home).

<sup>54</sup> Let us be clear: we are not arguing that Owen's view, *in every respect*, reflects that of the Lutherans. Rather (as we will make clear below), Owen agrees with the essence of the Lutheran position, namely that the Old (Mosaic) and New covenants are not a twofold administration of the same covenant, but two covenants that are substantially distinct. Though we want to recognize a uniqueness and complexity to Owen's views, he is self-conscious that he sides with the Lutherans on the previous point.

was so different from that which is established in the gospel after the coming of Christ, that it hath the appearance and name of another covenant... See Calvin. Institut. lib. 2:cap. xi.; Martyr. Loc. Com. loc. 16, sect. 2; Bucan. loc. 22, etc.

The Lutherans on the other side, insist on two argument to prove, that not a twofold administration of the same covenant, but that two covenants substantially distinct, are intended in this discourse of the apostle (710, 712).

Note how Owen accurately summarizes the difference between the Lutheran and the Calvinist position. The Calvinists say that the Mosaic covenant is the same as the New covenant, only administered differently. The Lutherans, on the other hand, reject that teaching, and maintain that the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant are “two covenants substantially distinct.”

Now, let us look at what Owen himself believes.

...Wherefore, we must grant two distinct covenants, rather than a twofold administration of the same covenant, to be intended (714).

Let the reader note carefully what Owen has just told you: even though I know that my position is in disagreement with the Reformed position, and in substantial agreement with Lutheranism, I still maintain that Scripture teaches that the Mosaic covenant was not an administration of the covenant of grace, but was rather a distinct covenant. This is an honest (and honorable) admission on Owen’s part that he is departing from the Reformed consensus, represented in Calvin, Bullinger, Bucanus, and a whole host of others.

Interestingly, Owen himself apparently recognized the tension between his unique view and that of the Reformed confessions of his day. As an Independent, he refused to accept the Westminster Confession of Faith, and instead had a hand in writing the *Savoy Declaration*. A comparative analysis of these two documents can be found below (pp. 88ff.), to which we direct the reader. Suffice it to say that the two documents have significantly different declarations regarding the historical administrations of the covenant of grace.

## **Concluding Comments on Ferry and Fesko**

The goal of Ferry and Fesko's contributions was to position the idea that the Mosaic covenant is in some sense a covenant of works within the mainstream Reformed tradition. However, because of their misquotations, misrepresentations, and (at times blatant) misreading of the primary documents, their essays are both significantly flawed. Far from providing the Reformed churches a definitive, settled word on the matter, they have only further muddied the already murky historical-theological waters of the Mosaic covenant in the Reformed tradition. Though both authors attempt to write with a detached, objective, and "historical" tone, careful analysis reveals that both authors are governed far more by their polemical interests than they let on. Their chief interest seems to be in legitimizing their own views on the Mosaic covenant, rather than faithfully representing the consensus position of Reformed orthodoxy. Often suppressing this mainstream consensus of Reformed theologians on the Mosaic covenant—a consensus clearly embodied in the Reformed confessions—they amplify a small minority of theologians who actually (at times) self-consciously depart from that consensus position. As both Fesko and Ferry are among those who protested the OPC General Assembly's decision to convict Lee Irons for his views on the Mosaic law and covenant, their studies are clearly written with an (unspoken) historical-theological goal in view: to legitimize the idea that the Mosaic covenant is "in some sense" a covenant of works as an orthodox, Reformed option. While in places these authors have provided some helpful analysis, the reader will best benefit from these essays only by checking every statement and quotation against the primary documents—an exercise we encourage the reader to do for this review as well.

## **John Murray and the Mosaic Covenant**

Standing directly in the cross-hairs of this book are the views of John Murray, the late professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. T. David Gordon explicitly states that his essay as a whole is "to function as a counterargument to Murray" (240). Bryan Estelle also takes a shot at Murray when he insists that "the necessity for obedience plays a somewhat different role under the old covenant," insisting that Israel's

obedience functioned as “the meritorious ground for Israel’s continuance in the land” (136).

But the polemic against Murray is not limited to these individual authors. In fact, his views remain in view (at least implicitly) throughout the whole book. This is evident from that fact that the editors devote three pages to accounting for how his teaching has skewed the Reformed tradition. In that introduction, the editors also express “sadness” at Murray’s views, particularly his position that “the demand for obedience in the Sinaitic covenant was principally the same in the new covenant of the Gospel age” (16). According to the editors, such a view made Murray “stand against many of his Reformed predecessors” and “break with many in the Reformed tradition” (ibid.). The editors argue that “a great many in the Reformed tradition had taught that a principle of works did exist and was operative in the covenant of Sinai” in which “Israel was like another Adam in some sense” (ibid.). In sum, Murray’s view that there was “continuity between the Sinaitic and new covenants with respect to the demands of each” “released a clutch” which “set in motion a chain of events that would produce deleterious injuries for confessional Reformed theology and beyond,” particularly the views of Norman Shepherd (16). Thus, Murray’s construction of obedience in the Mosaic covenant not only abandons the Reformed tradition in general, it has also laid the groundwork for substantial departures from the Reformed system of doctrine. Murray’s construal of the Mosaic covenant thus becomes like a “Jerusalem below,” bearing heterodox children unto slavery.

As mentioned above, the basic issue of these authors with Murray has to do with his teaching that the obedience required in the Mosaic covenant was not principally different from the obedience required in other administrations of the covenant of grace. As Murray writes in his short study, *The Covenant of Grace*:

What needs to be emphasized now is that the Mosaic covenant in respect of the condition of obedience is not in a different category from the Abrahamic... In reality, there is nothing that is principally different in the necessity of keeping the covenant and of obedience to God’s voice, which proceeds from the Mosaic covenant, from that which is

involved from the Abrahamic (22).

A few ‘exegetical’ comments are in order here in order to precisely grasp Murray’s point, before we examine the criticisms leveled against it.<sup>55</sup>

First, Murray is concerned primarily with the basic “category” to which these two covenants belong with respect to the obedience required within them. As Murray discusses elsewhere, he does not deny that there are unique elements in the Mosaic economy that cause it to differ from the Abrahamic. Rather his concern is whether those differences constitute some kind of substantial or “categorical” shift. Second, Murray also does not seem concerned to argue that there is absolute identity in every respect between the obedience required in the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants. For example, it is quite obvious that the obedience is offered in a quite different redemptive-historical context. Abraham was called to obey as a sojourner in the Promised Land, while Israel was called to obey as those who would be its actual possessors. In other words, Israel’s “rewards” for obedience were tied to her context in particulars of the Mosaic economy and were inextricably bound up with it.<sup>56</sup> Rather Murray’s concern is with that which is “principle” in each covenant’s requirement of obedience. For him, there is no substantial, essential, or principle difference. The two require obedience in principally the same way.

Several questions are raised in this book in regard to Murray’s position. Our interest in this section of the review is purely historical-theological. Do

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55 The reader should note that when the term “condition” is used in this review with reference to the covenant of grace, we are using that term in its received, orthodox, and confessional sense (cf. *Westminster Larger Catechism* #32, which speaks of the covenant of grace “requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him”). Space does not permit us to provide a full and precise explanation of the Reformed understanding of “conditions” in the covenant. In a word, the Reformed denied that the covenant of grace was (properly speaking) conditional in the sense that there was no “action, which, being performed, gives a man a right to the reward” (Witsius, 1:284). When they spoke of “conditions” in the covenant, they understood the word “consequently and *a posteriori* for the instrumental cause, receptive of the promises of the covenant and for the disposition of the subject, admitted into the fellowship of the covenant (which flows from grace itself)” (Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:185; cf. 184-89). For another representative example of how the Reformed orthodox understood conditionality in the covenant of grace, see: Francis Roberts, *Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible* (1657) 111-32.

56 Murray often speaks of the distinctiveness of the “Mosaic economy” in terms of its “pedagogical tutelary bondage” (*Principles of Conduct*, 190). In this sense, Murray is happy to argue that the believer is no longer under the law (that is, its Mosaic tutelary bondage). A careful reading of Murray reveals that his conception of the obedience required in the Mosaic covenant is actually quite more nuanced than this volume suggests.

Murray's views stand in line with the Reformed tradition? The answer of our authors is clear: Murray's teachings on this matter "stand against many of his Reformed predecessors" and "break with many in the Reformed tradition" (16). While the pronoun "many" seems to suggest that these authors are aware of certain writers in the Reformed tradition with whom Murray stands in line, such a group would certainly be among a minority (only a "few" as opposed to "many"). The overall emphasis, however, is that Murray's teaching on this particularly point constitutes a marked break with the Reformed tradition—one that is significant enough to lead to substantial deviations from the Reformed system of doctrine. As to the second question, these authors seem equally convinced that Murray's position is completely out of accord with Scripture. They are convinced that this difference (manifested through the "republishing" of the covenant of works at Sinai) "grows organically from [the Scriptures]" (9), and is "part of the warp and woof of Scripture" (6).

But is this an accurate reading of either Scripture or the Reformed tradition? While it is certainly true that Murray clearly and self-consciously broke with the majority of the Reformed tradition on several points of doctrine, his teaching on the nature of the obedience required in the Mosaic covenant was not one of them. In fact, a strong case can be made that his position on the essential nature of the obedience required in the Mosaic covenant represented the mainstream consensus of Reformed theologians. Furthermore, some of Murray's key exegetical observations (which, incidentally, these authors simply pass over rather than critically engage) lend his thesis strong support. But before establishing these points, we must examine a little more closely a few ways in which these authors have failed to grasp what Murray actually taught on this subject

## **Gordon and Estelle on John Murray**

As mentioned above, Gordon and Estelle take special aim at Murray's teaching on the Mosaic covenant. The former seems particularly concerned to show that Murray was not only mistaken in his view of the Mosaic covenant, but systematically avoided entire books of the Bible (namely, Galatians) that contradicted his thesis. Gordon's essay, "Abraham and Sinai Contrasted in Galatians 3:6-14," is perhaps the most provocative essay in the entire book.

His “exegesis” of Gal. 3:6-14 is simply an extended diatribe against John Murray. As he states in the preface: “. . . this essay intends, in large measure, to function as a counterargument to Murray” (240). In fact, he does not hesitate to challenge Murray’s competency as a New Testament scholar, arguing that to his knowledge, John Murray “never wrote so much as a paragraph about the Galatian letter” (253). In a footnote on the same page, Gordon says this:

...Murray wrote 221 reviews, articles, essays, and books. Not one of these addressees Galatians generally, nor a particular passage within Galatians specifically. Considering that Murray was both a New Testament scholar and a professor of systematic theology, it seems odd that he would publish nothing about what many consider to be one of Paul’s most important theological letters. Luther, for instance, was less squeamish than Professor Murray, and was quite willing to write a lengthy commentary on the letter. But then Luther was willing to recognize the covenantal contrasts in Galatians, and so was happy to write about it.

He even states that Murray “could have made no sense of the letter, and anything he might have written about it would therefore have been obfuscatory in the highest degree. . . I like to think that he was aware of his incapacity to make any sense of it. . . I like to think that he was entirely flummoxed by Paul’s reasoning, and that he therefore determined not to write anything about the matter until he could make some sense of it” (253). In another place he says: “anything [Murray] might have ventured to say about the central part of the Galatian letter, or specifically 3:6-3:22, could only have contributed substantially to exegetical confusion.”<sup>57</sup> Again, rather than engage his actual arguments, Gordon is convinced *before even reading them* that they could not have possibly made any sense.

But Gordon’s mockery of Murray doesn’t end there. In another work he likens Murray and his biblical theology to an “uncle who gets drunk every Thanksgiving and makes passes at the women-folk.”<sup>58</sup> Whatever the point of

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.tdgordon.net/theology/auburntheology.doc>. As Gordon notes, this essay appeared in *By Faith Alone*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters (2007) 113-125.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*



this analogy, this is hardly a respectful way of dealing with someone with whom you disagree.<sup>59</sup> At best, it was poorly chosen. At worst, it is defamatory.

But these words are not only disrespectful, they are also completely inaccurate. Surely Dr. Gordon is aware that Murray devoted nearly two lectures of his *Systematic Theology* class at Westminster Seminary to expounding the very chapter of Galatians that Gordon analyzes in this essay.<sup>60</sup> If he were really interested in critiquing Murray's views, he would not only have mentioned that these lectures exist (and are widely and publicly available on the internet), but he would have actually interacted with the substance of his argument. As it is, Gordon simply paints Murray as a blundering ignoramus and ideologue who is unable to exegetically engage difficult portions of Scripture.

However, let us survey Murray's published works and see if none of them "addresses Galatians generally, nor a particular passage within Galatians specifically," as Gordon maintains. In his *Principles of Conduct*, Murray deals with some key texts in Galatians in his chapter entitled "Law and Grace" (181-201). Texts from Galatians are treated on pages 181, 184, 185, and 188, including Gal. 3:10, 19, 21, 23, and 5:4. Interestingly, in this chapter Murray is dealing with a subject very similar to that in Gordon's essay: "the place of the law in the economy of grace" (182). Rather than engaging Murray's exegesis and arguments, Gordon simply chooses to ignore them and pretend that they were never written. Volume 4 of Murray's *Collected Writings* contains an essay entitled "Paul's use of 'Nomos.'" His exegesis of Galatians figures prominently in it (cf. pp. 134-35, 138-39). Again, Gordon chooses to ignore these passages

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<sup>59</sup> Here we must take serious exception to the blurb on the back of the book under review which states that "the authors... treat differences among Reformed theologians in a respectful and non-condemnatory manner." On the contrary, even a cursory reading of both the introduction and Gordon's essay reveals that their treatment of Murray is neither respectful nor non-condemnatory. Murray is certainly not beyond critique (no one is!), but it is self-evident that any fruitful and constructive interaction with his views should evidence some careful research and actual engagement with his exegesis. As it is, Gordon chooses to simply to mock him with *ad hominem* attacks that have nothing to do with his actual position.

<sup>60</sup> These lectures have been available for many years at the library of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, as well as on the internet (<http://www.thirdmill.org>). Recently they have been transcribed and made publicly available as well (<http://sites.google.com/site/hemosaiccovenant/john-murray>). Both the taped and online versions of the lecture are clearly labeled as dealing almost exclusively with Gal. 3. Gordon has publicly lectured at WTS several times, and given his intense interest in Murray's views on the covenant, it seems more than reasonable that he could have taken a few minutes to access them.

rather than engage them. In his book, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Murray deals not only with Galatians, but specifically with Gal. 3:6-14 and the surrounding context. While discussing the atoning work of Christ, Murray discusses the way in which Christ's redemptive work relates to the law. On pages 44-45, he explicitly discusses Gal. 3:10, 13, 23-24, 25-26, 4:2, and 4-5. Gordon also seems to forget Murray's commentary on Romans, in which he not only discusses passages in Romans in detail, but also integrates them with the parallel passages in Galatians (cf. 140-44).

These are just a few examples: more could certainly be cited. But it should be enough to demonstrate the utterly erroneous character of Gordon's claim that none of Murray's writings "addressees Galatians generally, nor a particular passage within Galatians specifically." Obviously, Murray has read and wrestled with Galatians (as well as a great many other passages of Scripture). But all this raises a question: has Gordon really read Murray? Obviously he is aware of the one quote in which he disagrees with him (from Murray's little study, *The Covenant of Grace*). But has he really wrestled with and engaged Murray's exegesis of Gal. 3:6-14, widely available both in written form and in audio format? His ignorance of the content of Murray's corpus, in addition to his failure to engage the matter of his analysis, provides strong evidence in favor of a "No" answer. Considering that Gordon is "a New Testament scholar," it seems odd that he would not actually read an author whom he not only critiques but even belittles and ridicules (cf. Gordon's comments about Murray on 253, n. 18).

## **Reformed Theologians on the Conditions of the Mosaic, Abrahamic, and New Covenants**

What did the Reformed tradition teach regarding the relationship of the obedience required in the Mosaic and Abrahamic (or new) covenants? While certainly allowing for some diverse forms of expression, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Reformed tradition as a whole viewed the condition of obedience under each covenant to be principally the same. Allow us to cite a few representative examples to demonstrate this point. Johannes Wollebius argued that: "The New and Old Testament agree in substance: for in both

Christ is the same Testator; in both is the same Promise of Grace in Christ; *in both is required the same obedience of faith and life.*<sup>61</sup> Note well: the Old and New Testament require “the *same* obedience of faith and life.” That is not to deny that the covenant of grace is administered differently, but it is to affirm (as does Murray) that substantially and principally the obedience required in each covenant is *the same*.

Anthony Burgess, an influential member of the Westminster Assembly, also addressed this question in his battles against Antinomianism. He argues that “there is onely a gradual difference in the manifestation of the duties, no specisicall difference of the duties themselves.”<sup>62</sup> Again, he states that there is “no specisicall difference of the duties in the old Testament, from those of the new, but only graduall in their manifestation” (ibid.). This is a 17<sup>th</sup> century way of saying that the obedience God requires in the Old Testament is essentially the same (or as Murray put it, “principally” identical) as the obedience required in the new covenant (or Abrahamic covenant). Likewise, Patrick Gillespie declared that “the Covenant of Grace hath not taken away the substance of that same Covenant which was given in Mount *Sinai*, neither in the commands, promises, nor threatnings thereof, though it doth change the manner of administration thereof, *Rom. 3.31...Matth. 5.17.*”<sup>63</sup> They do not differ in species (substance or essence) but only gradually in terms of the form or manner in which they were manifested.

Wilhemus a Brackel argued, that “the covenant made at Horeb was the same covenant made with Abraham is...evident from the fact that it contained the same promises, had the same rule of life, and had the same manner of worship.” As he explains later, God gave Abraham the command “to love the Lord, and to fear, believe, and trust Him,” which “is comprehended in the command: ‘Walk before Me, and be thou perfect’ (Gen. 17:1).” “At Mount

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61 Johannes Wollebius, *The Abridgment of Christian Divinitie* (1660) 172-73.

62 Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae legis, or, A vindication of the morall law and the covenants, from the errors of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and more especially, Antinomians* (1647) 171.

63 Patrick Gillespie, *The ark of the testament opened, or, The secret of the Lords covenant unsealed in a treatise of the covenant of grace, wherein an essay is made for the promoting [sic] and increase of knowledge in the mysterie of the Gospel-covenant which hath been hid from ages and generations but now is made manifest to the Saints* (1661) 153.

Horeb, God gave the identical command to Israel by way of the law of the ten commandments annunciated there.”<sup>64</sup>

Thomas Blake argues that the old and new covenants agree “*in the conditions annexed,*” because “Both these covenants have one and the same conditions.”<sup>65</sup> On the part of man, the condition was “Faith and Repentance” (204). This is because “*This covenant delivered by Moses to the people of Israel, was a covenant of Grace, the same in substance with this, under which we live in Gospel-times*” (210). Indeed, with the mainstream Reformed consensus (embodied in the Westminster Confession), Blake argues that “the ten commandments, which are called the covenant of God, *Deut. 4.13. 2 Chron. 6:11.* (all that *Moses* delivered to *Israel*, there being epitomized) holds forth a covenant of Grace, and not of Works” (212).

John Ball, who (as we have previously noted) had a significant influence on the formulations of the Westminster Assembly, argued the same thing. According to Ball,

...the Covenant that God made with *Abraham* was the Covenant of grace, as it is acknowledged: but the covenant made with *Abraham* is for substance the same with the Covenant made with Israel upon Mount Sinai: the promise is the same, and the things required the same... It that covenant [the Abrahamic covenant] he requireth of *Abraham*, that they should obey his voice, and keep his commandments. And what is it to walk with God or before God, but to walk in the Law (*Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 108-109).

Ball is clear: the requirement/condition of the Abrahamic covenant, with respect to obedience is “the same.” In other words, they are (as Murray maintains) *principally identical* with one another. As he argues later (speaking of the Mosaic law), “...the Law requireth faith as well as love and obedience, and doth build these upon it as a foundation” (109).

Finally, Francis Roberts argues that the Mosaic covenant must be a

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<sup>64</sup> This is cited from an electronic version of the text without pagination.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae foederis; or a treatise of the covenant of God entered with man-kinde* (1658) 203.

covenant of grace because “the mutual Stipulation betwixt the Foederates in this Sinai-Covenant, is in Substance one and the same with the Stipulation in the Covenant of Faith” (*Mysterie and Marrow*, 762). Roberts lists four such stipulations on the part of Israel:

1. To be his people
2. To believe in God and in Jesus Christ
3. To love God
4. To obey the Lord sincerely and fully in all things which he commanded them (763).

Roberts concludes: “These and like stipulations betwixt God and Israel in this Sinai-Covenant are purely Evangelical: therefore the Sinai-Covenant itself must needs be a Covenant of Faith” (*ibid.*). Note well: for Roberts these are the common, essential conditions of every Covenant of Faith, whether it be under its Abrahamic, Mosaic, or New administrations.

This consensus is also implicitly recognized and embodied in the Reformed Confessions to which Murray subscribed. Nearly every Reformed catechism and confession draws directly from the Mosaic covenant to direct the life of the believer in Christ—a life defined by the Decalogue. This is especially true of the Westminster Confession, but is also transparently evident in the Heidelberg Catechism. The Larger Catechism, in its exposition of the preface to the Decalogue (Sinai-covenant) states that “he is a God in covenant, as with Israel of old, so with all his people” (LC #101). Because of this gracious covenant-relation, we are therefore “bound to take him for our God alone, and to keep all his commandments.” According to the catechism, the duty defined for Israel in the Ten Commandments is the duty defined for all of God’s covenant people in every age. Put another way, the condition of obedience is *principally the same* in each covenant, whether old or new. This is the consensus position of confessional Reformed orthodoxy. But according to our authors, as it is articulated by Murray, it was a serious error that “released a clutch” which “set in motion a chain of events that would produce deleterious injuries for confessional Reformed theology and beyond” (16).

These are but a few examples of the consensus position of mainstream

Calvinism. Many more could be supplied. But this should be sufficient to show that the difficulty of our authors is not so much with Murray, but with the mainstream consensus of Reformed orthodoxy. Murray may have developed that tradition in a unique way in other areas—developments that surely must be subject to both historical-theological and exegetical scrutiny. But his insistence that the obedience required in the Mosaic covenant was principally identical to that of the Abrahamic and new covenants was no development at all. It was simply an articulation of the mainstream consensus of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century orthodox Calvinism. Other minority positions may have been articulated by in the Protestant tradition, but it is hardly correct to argue that Murray’s position on this point marked a substantial deviation from the historic Reformed position, let alone one that paved the way for greater errors. If what we have argued is correct, it is not Murray’s views on this point that should be considered suspect, but those that have recast the Reformed tradition in other directions.

## **The Reformed Confessions on the Mosaic Covenant**

Put simply, the Reformed confessions as a whole view the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace, the same in substance with both the Abrahamic and new covenants. It is true that while there is a diversity of language used to describe the administrative uniqueness of the Mosaic covenant, there is broad agreement and a general consensus that it remains essentially a covenant of grace. We maintain that this is not only an element of confessional Reformed teaching, but that it is also an integral part of the system of doctrine taught in those confessions.

The authors of this present volume seem very aware of the confessional contours of the debate. In fact, many seem jealous to show that their formulations are in harmony with this confessional guideline. For example, S. M. Baugh argues that

...the Mosaic covenant in its typological priestly embodiment of mediation (the ceremonial law) must be viewed as *an administration of the covenant of grace*. Nevertheless,

the Mosaic Law more narrowly considered embodies what can only be described best as a works principle. This is what others and I mean by “republication” of the covenant of works in Moses (260).

In a footnote on the same page, Baugh insists that Paul clearly “includes the Mosaic covenant as one of the ‘covenants of promise’ and therefore covenant of grace” (260). Likewise, Bryan Estelle insists that though he acknowledges an “operative principle of works,” in the Mosaic covenant, yet “with the confession I maintain that the Sinaitic covenant should be called an administration of the covenant of grace” (132). Likewise Gordon seems to qualify his own construction of the radical differences between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant when he argues that “Paul did not address here the later distinction between “covenant of works” and “covenant of grace” of Reformed dogmatics,” in terms of which “the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants would both be *parts of* the ‘covenant of grace,’ though ‘administered differently’ (Westminster Confession of Faith 7:5) ‘under various administrations’” (7.6) (258, n. 27). The editors, in their joint introduction, also argue that “to affirm the doctrine of republication does not entail the view that the Mosaic covenant is not *part of* the covenant of grace” (14). While others may have “separated the Mosaic covenant and argued that there are two separate covenants of grace, the vast majority of those who hold to the doctrine of republication affirm that the Mosaic covenant is *a part of* or *connected to* the covenant of grace” (ibid.). The testimony of our authors seems clear: the Mosaic covenant is in some sense *part of* or *connected to* covenant of grace. Are we therefore to conclude that their formulations are entirely in harmony with the Reformed confessions? Are they not explicit in their affirmation that the Mosaic covenant is the same in substance with the Abrahamic and new covenants, as well as the fact that the Mosaic covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace? Indeed, would it not be dishonest and even slanderous to assert that they deny this point and teach something different?

Though much of this *language* is clearly in line with the confessional formulations, it is not entirely clear to us that it accurately reflects its traditional and accepted *meaning*. There is a marked ambiguity that runs throughout all of these formulations—it is not always entirely clear in what precise sense the Mosaic covenant is to be considered a covenant of grace, or at least “part

of” or “connected to” the covenant of grace. The latter two formulations are themselves inherently vague, and capable of multiple interpretations. There is virtually no one (in the Lutheran, Amyraldian, Arminian, or Reformed traditions) who would argue that the Mosaic covenant is not in some sense “part of” or “connected to” the covenant of grace. The issue before us, however, is whether the Mosaic covenant is in substance a covenant of grace (essentially the same as the Abrahamic and new covenants), and whether it actually positively administers the grace of that covenant to God’s people.

Likewise, although these authors attempt to utilize traditional, orthodox language regarding the Mosaic covenant (“administration of the covenant of grace”), it is not entirely clear the precise sense this language carries in their formulations. Again, there is marked ambiguity, tension, and even self-contradiction in some of their formulations. A brief survey of the formulations of Gordon, Baugh, and Estelle make this clear.

First, Gordon insists that the Mosaic covenant is “a different covenant, different in kind” from the Abrahamic covenant (258), but at the same time insists that both are “parts of the ‘covenant of grace,’ though differently administered” (Westminster Confession of Faith 7:5) ‘under various administrations’” (7.6) (258, note 27). In classic orthodoxy, these are two distinct positions: either the Mosaic covenant is different in kind from the covenant of grace, or it is an administration of the covenant of grace (as even Ferry’s article demonstrates). But Gordon seems unaware of the incompatibility, historically-theologically speaking, of these two positions.

Second, S. M. Baugh argues that in terms of “its typological priestly embodiment of mediation (the ceremonial law),” the Mosaic covenant must be viewed as an administration of the covenant of grace,” yet also insists that within that covenant there was an embodiment of the works-principle (a republication of the covenant of works) that consisted specifically in an unmediated administration of law to the life of Israel (260, cf. 262). In terms of the ceremonies, the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace. But in terms of the Mosaic Law, narrowly considered, it was a republication and application (administration) of the covenant of works. In some places, Baugh distinguishes the Mosaic Law from the Mosaic covenant, but at same time refers to the administration of the Mosaic Law in Israel as “a republication of the *covenant* of



works” (260). Law is first distinguished from covenant, and then (without any sense of contradiction) law is identified with covenant. Furthermore, though Baugh argues that in terms of the ceremonial law, the Mosaic covenant was an administration of covenant of grace (260), he elsewhere argues that circumcision (a ceremony of both the Abrahamic and Mosaic periods) “brought with it the obligation to keep the law” such that it imposed an obligation “for personal performance of the covenant obligations” (267; cf. 275). In other words, the ceremonies (in some sense!) also embodied a principle of works. So on the one hand, the ceremonial law is an embodiment of grace, while on the other hand it is also the embodiment of the works-principle. No attempt is made to explain this complex (contradictory?) interrelation of grace and law in the ceremonial law.

Finally, as noted above, Bryan Estelle states that “with the confession I maintain that the Sinaitic covenant should be called an administration of the covenant of grace” (132). But he also argues that the conditions of the Mosaic covenant are essentially different from the Abrahamic and New Covenants (of Grace!) (136). But as Reformed orthodoxy has insisted (see below), when the essential conditions of the covenant change, the nature of the covenant changes as well.

All of these formulations place clearly before us the confusing and even (apparent) self-contradictory nature of many of these proposals. The Mosaic covenant is said to be different in kind from the Abrahamic covenant, but they are both administrations of the covenant of grace (Gordon); the Mosaic covenant is to be distinguished from the Mosaic law, but in the next sentence the latter is defined specifically as a “republication of the *covenant* of works” (Baugh); the ceremonial law is said to administer the covenant of grace (260), but later circumcision (a ceremony) is said to impose a personal obligation to perfect obedience (267) (Baugh). The Mosaic covenant is to be called an administration of the covenant of grace, but it sets before Israel a condition that is essentially different from the (Abrahamic and new) covenants of grace (Estelle). At worst, these formulations are self-contradictory. At best, they are very imprecise and confusing.

Here we must step back for a moment and attempt to define more precisely the traditional meaning of the words “essence” or “substance” and “administra-

tion” with reference to the Bible’s unfolding covenant history. Traditionally speaking, the “substance” of the covenant had reference to the essential elements without which a covenant would cease to be a certain kind covenant (be it the covenant of works or the covenant of grace). In Reformed orthodoxy, the substance of the covenant consisted primarily in the nature of its mutual conditions, both on the part of God and on the part of man. For example, as John Ball writes, the “essence of the Covenant properly consisteth in the Promise and stipulation” (*Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, 4). Johannes Wollebius put it another way: “The matter [or “substance”] of the covenant of grace, are the things conditioned on both sides; to wit, of God and man. God promiseth that he will be our God in Christ; man promiseth the obedience of faith and life” (*The Abridgement of Christian Divinity*, 171 [1660 ed.]). Likewise, Zacharias Ursinus argues that the “substance of the covenant” is “the principal conditions” of the covenant.<sup>66</sup> The covenant of grace is one in substance because in each covenant “God promises to those that repent and believe, the remission of sins; whilst men bind themselves, on the other hand, to exercise faith in God, and to repent of their sins” (*ibid.*). Francis Turretin refers to the “...substance and essential parts of the covenant, i. e., both as to the covenanted themselves and as to the federal pact consisting in *the mutual obligation* of the parties” (2:194). Finally, we note the formulation of Francis Roberts:

*The Inward and Essential Form* of this Covenant, is That *Mutuell Stipulation* herein betwixt the Parties Covenanting... This reciprocall Stipulation, either *Explicit* or at least *Implicit*, is so necessary to the Constitution and making up of the essence and being of this Covenant, that properly, formally and compleatly it cannot be a Covenant without it.<sup>67</sup>

In other words, as a covenant’s promises and stipulations differ from one another, so also they will differ from one another in substance.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 99

<sup>67</sup> *Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible*, 97

<sup>68</sup> For the sake of simplicity, we are omitting other things that might be said to constitute essential differences between covenants. For example, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace differ substantially because of the difference in the nature of the parties. In the covenant of works, man is sinless. But in the covenant of grace, man is a sinner. In the first, God is considered as Creator. But in the second, God is considered as an offended Creator who graciously redeems

According to Reformed orthodoxy, there are two substantially or essentially distinct covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. These covenants differ substantially or essentially because their stipulations are substantially distinct. According to the Westminster Standards, the substance of the covenant of works consists in the fact that “personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience” was required of Adam as the condition of obtaining the promise of life (WCF 7:2, 19:2; LC 20; SC 12). On the other hand, the substance of the covenant of grace consists in the fact that in it God “freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved...” (WCF 7:3; LC 30-32; SC 20). Thus, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace essentially differ in that the former requires perfect and personal obedience, whereas the other requires faith. The one promises Adam life upon condition of his obedience, whereas the other promises both life *and* salvation to sinners upon condition of faith.<sup>69</sup> A covenant that does not require perfect and personal obedience is not a covenant of works, and a covenant that does not promise salvation through faith is not a covenant of grace. These are essential or substantial elements of that covenant.

However, the Reformed Confessions also speak of the “administration” of the covenant, particularly with reference to the covenant of grace. What precisely do they mean by this term? The term “administration” (with respect to the covenant of grace) has to do with the different ways in which the eternal salvation promised in the covenant is differently applied to the elect. As such, it applies only to the “adjuncts” (Wollebius, 172). As Ursinus says, “This covenant [of grace]...is one as it respects the general conditions upon which God enters into an engagement with us and we with him; and it is two as it respects conditions which are less general, or as some say, as it respects the mode of its administration.” This “mode of administration” is entirely accidental to the substance of the covenant, and consists only in external arena. For example, the WCF compares the Old and New Testament administrations

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his people. Still, these are implied in the basic conditions of each covenant, namely, perfect obedience as opposed to faith, repentance, and new (albeit imperfect) obedience. It is simply not necessary to burden the reader with too many fine distinctions on this point.

<sup>69</sup> This is not to deny that the Reformed orthodox affirm that faith is required in the covenant of works, and that works are required in the covenant of grace. Rather it is to affirm that they function differently in each covenant with reference to the way of attaining the promise of life.

in terms of the types, shadows, and promises of the OT, with the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments. The confession clearly sees the latter as the “outward [external] means” by which God communicates to us our redemption.

First of all, we must note that both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace can be said to have a particular form of administration. In his critique of Amyraldian covenant theology, Francis Turretin notes that the Sinaitic covenant “as to mode of dispensation” is different from the administration of the covenant of works (2:263).<sup>70</sup> Francis Roberts, the Puritan covenant theologian, describes in detail how the covenant of works is differently administered from the covenant of grace:

1. The *Covenant of works* was Administred by a *Natural Inscription* of it in the heart. The *Covenant of Faith* by a *Supernatural Inscription* of it in the mind & heart. 2. That was Administred by Divine voice, without Scripture: This both by Divine voice and Scripture. 3. That was administred *Conditionally*, Promising life upon Condition of obedience: which Condition being performed, *Adam* should have had life as a due debt in some sense, and boasting would not have been then excluded. (Although *Adam* even in innocency could not in a strict sense have merited any thing from God: he having all of Gods meer bounty.) But this *Covenant of*

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<sup>70</sup> This is especially important to note, as our editors have summarized Turretin as teaching that “the form of the Mosaic covenant was the covenant of works, but its substance was the covenant of grace” (12). This muddles Turretin’s otherwise careful distinctions regarding the administration of the covenant of grace under Moses, and oversimplifies his rather complex formulation. It is true that Turretin argues that the Mosaic administration contained a restatement of a “form of the covenant of works” to remind Israel of the broken covenant of works and to lead them to Christ (2:263). But Turretin later clarifies that by “form of the covenant of works,” he is referencing “the law in itself” apart from the Mosaic covenant (2:269). This he distinguishes from “the Mosaic covenant itself, in which the law was enacted” (ibid.). This administration included not only this “legal relation” but also an “evangelical relation,” which was “sweeter” in that it led them to Christ (2:227). Thus, Turretin calls this administration a “mixture of both the law and the Gospel” (2:263). As he says elsewhere: “And thus in sweet harmony the law and the gospel meet together in this covenant. The law is not administered without the gospel, nor is the gospel without the law. So that it is as it were a legal-gospel and an evangelical-law; a gospel full of obedience and a law full of faith” (2:268). In short, our editors summary of Turretin’s view of the Mosaic covenant is at best severely truncated, and at worst, misleading. It fails to grapple with Turretin’s own stated definitions, and oversimplifies Turretin’s complex (though very precise) views.

*Faith* is administered more *absolutely*. That is, It promiseth not eternal life to any person for any Merit, work, worth, disposition or intention under any sense or Notion in him; but only to Faith accepting Jesus Christ. Otherwise *Faith* is required herein as *a Condition*: Nor is this Covenant so absolute as to exclude all Repentance, New obedience and walking worthy of God: which are herein required under other Notions (179).

As can be seen, the covenants of works and grace would thus differ not only in substance but also in administration. They are thus different on all levels. Thus, it would not be accurate to call the substance of the Mosaic covenant a covenant of grace, and its form or manner of administration a covenant of works.<sup>71</sup> A covenant of grace cannot administer a covenant of works, and a covenant of works cannot administer the covenant of grace.

But our authors seem to formulate things in a quite different way. On the one hand, they seem to insist that in some particular sense the Mosaic covenant is a distinct covenant, substantially different from the Abrahamic covenant. But on the other hand, they also want to insist that this covenant nevertheless continues to be an administration of the covenant of grace. The formulation of Bryan Estelle succinctly encapsulates this tension (though it is evident throughout the book). On the one hand, he asserts that: “Although the *substance* of the covenant of grace is the same in both testaments...the new covenant has *essentially* changed matters” with respect to the obedience (the conditions) required in each covenant (136). How is it that the new covenant is the same in substance (essence!) with the old covenant, while at the same time producing an essential (substantial) change in the condition of obedience? This formulation, as it stands, is self-contradictory. Either the difference between the obedience required is non-essential or accidental, or the Mosaic covenant constitutes a substantially different covenant. As noted above, the substance of the covenant consists primarily (though not entirely) in the nature of the

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<sup>71</sup> The editors seem to impute this view to Turretin (12), but as noted above, this formulation is contrary to his express statements elsewhere in his writings (*Institutes*, 2:263). For him, the Mosaic covenant and the Adamic covenant clearly differ in administration. While it may be orthodox to say that the Mosaic administration contains a reminder of the broken covenant of works, it is not accurate to say that the substance of the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace, while its administration (*simpliciter*) is a covenant of works.

mutual conditions of the covenant. If the obedience (condition) required in each covenant differs essentially, then the covenants themselves also differ essentially. We cannot have it both ways.

As we have noted above, the editors' comments on this point evidence the same ambiguity. They assert that "the vast majority of those who hold to the doctrine of republication affirm that the Mosaic covenant is a part of or connected to the covenant of grace" (14). However, the precise issue is not whether the Mosaic covenant is merely "part of" or in some way "connected to" the covenant of grace. Rather the issue is whether the Mosaic covenant *is* in its *essence* a covenant of grace which administers grace. Again, the question (in terms of Reformed orthodoxy) is whether the Mosaic covenant is essentially a covenant of grace, and thus also an administration of that same covenant of grace. The language of the editors is markedly ambiguous, and in reality does little to calm those who are concerned about their formulations of the Mosaic covenant.

Likewise, Baugh's formulations are hampered by the same kind of incongruity. On the one hand, he distinguishes (correctly) between the Mosaic *covenant* more broadly, and the Mosaic *law* more narrowly (260, n. 4). But he continues to refer to this Mosaic law (more narrowly considered) as the "republication of the *covenant of works* in Moses" (260). Elsewhere he distinguishes between the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace (in terms of its ceremonies) and also as it "administered law" in a (apparently) raw, unmediated fashion (262). While Baugh labors to clarify things with these distinctions, little attention is given as to how they can compatibly coexist in the same covenantal administration. How can a covenant that is an administration of the covenant of grace to sinners, at the same time actually administer *unmediated law* to sinners? Not only is the latter construction difficult to square with Gal. 3:19 ("...the law was put in place by angels through a mediator"), it is not clear to us how Baugh's formulation is logically consistent with itself. If the Mosaic Law was administered in an unmediated fashion, then it was administered not as a covenant of grace, but (by his own stipulated definition) as a covenant of works. Indeed, for Baugh, it is of the essence of the covenant of grace that there is mediation in the covenant. It follows that if the law was administered in an unmediated fashion, it was therefore administered as a covenant of works.

Finally, T. David Gordon is passionate and emphatic in asserting that the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are entirely different in substance and essence:

Some may not like Paul's opinion on the matter. What we must not do is evade the plain teaching of Paul that the Sinai covenant itself, as it was delivered by the hand of Moses 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant, was a different covenant, different in kind, characteristically legal, Gentile-excluding, non-justifying because it was characterized by works, and therefore cursing its recipients and bearing children for slavery. If this doesn't sound like any bargain, recall that the original Israelites did not consider it a bargain either, and they resisted Moses' efforts to engage them in it. All things considered, many of the first-generation Israelites, who received this covenant while trembling at the foot of a quaking mountain and then wandered in the wilderness, preferred to return to Egypt rather than to enter the covenant with a frightening deity who threatened curse sanctions upon them if they disobeyed. I do not blame them; their assessment of the matter was judicious and well considered, albeit rebellious. The Sinai covenant-administration was no bargain for sinners, and I pity the poor Israelites who suffered under its administration, just as I understand perfectly well why seventy-three (nearly half) of their psalms were laments. I would have resisted this covenant also, had I been there, because such a legal covenant, whose conditions require strict obedience (and threaten severe curse-sanctions), is bound to fail if one of the parties to it is a sinful people (251).

Gordon couldn't be clearer, the Mosaic covenant is a "different covenant, different in kind" from the Abrahamic. He even is so audacious as to say that he "would have resisted this covenant also," because of its harsh, legal character. But at the end of the essay, he goes on to argue that this "different covenant, different in kind" should also be considered "part of the covenant of grace" (258). How is it that two antithetical covenants—entirely different in their basic essence and substantial characteristics—can both be called administrations of

the covenant of grace? As these authors point out time and time again, the two principles, absolutely considered, are antithetical and incompatible with one another. How then can they both be called administrations of grace?

Of course, it may be argued that in the Mosaic covenant there were two different covenants operative simultaneously. On one level, the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace, offering sinners life and salvation through Christ. But on another level, the Mosaic covenant is a legal covenant of works (in some sense!). This is the view Fesko imputes to Calvin (30), though it really reflects the formulations of Meredith G. Kline. How would such a view (if this is their position) stand with regard to the Reformed tradition?

Francis Turretin deals with this issue in his examination of Amyraldian covenant theology. The Amyraldians, following John Cameron, argued that the Mosaic covenant was a “subservient covenant” distinct in essence from both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. It promised a blessed life in Canaan to Israel upon condition of obedience to the moral, ceremonial, and judicial law. At the same time (according to Cameron), Israel was also under the Abrahamic covenant for salvation through Christ. Against this view, Turretin insists that no one can be under two different covenants at the same time:

...the Israelites with whom God stipulates were already under the Abrahamic covenant (which was a covenant of grace). By it, they were saved in Christ. Therefore they could not be under a legal covenant. For no one can be at the same time under two covenants distinct in their whole species (2:265).

Thomas Blake also makes the same kind of argument:

...this covenant (delivered by *Moses* and epitomized in the Decalogue) being a covenant of Grace, it could by no means be, in the whole and entire nature of it, a covenant of Works. This is plaine, God doth not at once, with the same people enter covenant upon so opposite termes. These are *asusato*, either of them destructive of the other. We may argue concerning the covenant, as the Apostle doth concerning election, *If by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise*



*grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.*<sup>72</sup>

Blake and Turretin are pointing to what Richard Gaffin has referred to as the “uneasy tension, if not polarization, in the lives of his people between grace/faith and (good) works/obedience (*ordo salutis*), especially under the Mosaic economy.”<sup>73</sup> The mainstream Reformed tradition, represented in Turretin and well-articulated by Gaffin, is very uneasy with any construction that places God’s people simultaneously under two different antithetical principles of obedience. It is either works, or it is faith. It is either grace, or it is merit. It cannot be both at the same time.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) deals with the topic of the Mosaic covenant in only a few places. The most famous is WCF 7:5:

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

The WCF thus includes the Mosaic covenant under the broader rubric of the Old Testament administration of the covenant of grace. In terms of the covenant of grace, the confession clearly adopts a dichotomous as opposed to a trichotomous division of redemptive history.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Blake, 212

<sup>73</sup> [http://www.opc.org/os.html?article\\_id=141](http://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=141)

<sup>74</sup> Ferry’s assertion that WCF 7:5-6 illustrates the “problem” of the transition between the old and new covenants being like the transition from the covenant of works and covenant of grace (81) is at best vague, and at worst obscures the real point of the passage. Further, his claim that the “Confession describes the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant in terms of a law-gospel contrast” conflates the “broader” and “narrower” senses of both “Law” and “Gospel.” Here the confession is clearly using the terms as purely administrative designations for the different dispensations of the covenant of grace. In other words, the “Law” here does not refer to the

WCF 7:6 compares the New Testament administration of the covenant of grace, and concludes with the following statement:

There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.

The confession thus states the orthodox view of the relationship between old and new testament in two ways: negatively and positively. Negatively, the confession rejects any view that makes the Mosaic covenant distinct in substance, kind, or essence from the covenant of grace: “there are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance...” The view immediately in view here appears to be that of Tobias Crisp,<sup>75</sup> but it should not be limited to him.<sup>76</sup> This is clear from that fact that the confession supplements its negative rejection of this view with a positive affirmation: “...but one and the same, under various dispensations.” In other words, the confession not only rejects a specific error with regard to the Mosaic covenant, but lays down an affirmative axiomatic principle with respect to every proposal. The confession draws attention not simply to the unity, but also the *identity* (“one and the same”) between the two covenants (old and new). Thus, not only Crisp’s view, but any view that makes the Old Testament (or Mosaic covenant) a separate, distinct covenant is not in harmony with the confession.

To confirm this point, we must turn to the Larger Catechism’s exposition of the Ten Commandments. Question 101, which deals with the preface to the Decalogue, states:

The preface to the ten commandments is contained in these words, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Wherein God manifests his sovereignty, as being JEHOVAH, the eternal, immutable, and almighty God; having his being in and of himself, and giving being to all his words and works:

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covenant of works at all, but to the covenant of grace administered through Moses.

<sup>75</sup> Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted* (1690) 247-248. In this volume, Crisp discusses this issue in a sermon entitled “The Two Covenants of Grace.”

<sup>76</sup> This volume seems to do just that at several places (14, 78-79).

*and that he is a God in covenant, as with Israel of old, so with all his people; who, as he brought them out of their bondage in Egypt, so he delivers us from our spiritual thralldom; and that therefore we are bound to take him for our God alone, and to keep all his commandments (emphasis ours).*

This question is particularly relevant, as it serves to exposit the Decalogue, which all will acknowledge is an integral part of the Mosaic covenant. According to the catechism, the preface to the Decalogue teaches us that he is a “God in covenant, *as with Israel of old, so with all his people*” (emphasis mine). A direct line is drawn between his covenantal relationship with Israel under Moses and his covenantal relation with all his people at every other time. Furthermore, the essentially gracious nature of that covenant relation is further underscored in terms of Exodus-typology: “. . . as he brought them [Israel] out of their bondage in Egypt, so he delivers us from our spiritual thralldom.” Finally, the essential identity of the conditions or obligations of that covenant is also highlighted: “and that therefore we are bound to take him for our God alone, and to keep all his commandments.” We note in passing how this last point is essentially the same as that of John Murray, who argued that the conditions of the Mosaic covenant are principally identical with that of the Abrahamic (and implicitly, the new) covenant. The confession is clear: the covenant made with Israel in the Decalogue declares the same salvation and imposes the same obligation to obedience as those in the new covenant.

Finally, we must also address WCF 19:1-2, which deals with the moral law. This text is especially important, as it is (mistakenly, in our opinion) appealed to as proof that the WCF teaches that the Mosaic covenant is “in some sense” a republication of the covenant of works (10-11, 43). R. Scott Clark, a colleague of the editors, has also made this argument.<sup>77</sup> This section teaches:

<sup>77</sup> He writes: “The phrase “covenant of works” in WCF 19.1 is appositive to the noun *law*. Thus the law is reckoned here as a covenant of works. Thus, when 19.2 establishes “this law” as the subject of the verb “was delivered,” the antecedent can be none other than the law defined as a covenant of works in 19.1” (*Covenant, Justification, and the Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California* [2007] 357 [note 87]). Clark’s grammatical analysis misses the clear point of WCF 19.1-2, which is to distinguish the law give to Adam “as a covenant of works” and the law given to Israel “[as] a perfect rule of righteousness.” This distinction is explicit in 19.1-2, and is further developed in 19.6: “Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works . . . it is of great use to them, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God and their duty . . .” Ironically, the confession’s point is to reject the very position Clark forces upon it: the law at Sinai is not delivered as a covenant of works, but as a perfect rule of

I. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

II. This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.

This section clearly distinguishes between the law as it was given to Adam, and the law as it was delivered to Israel. To Adam, it was given “as a covenant of works.” But to Israel, it was delivered as “a perfect rule of righteousness.” Indeed, the law given to Adam continued to be such a perfect rule, and “*as such*, was delivered on Mount Sinai, in ten commandments.” Note the parallel prepositional phrases: the law was given to Adam “*as a covenant of works*,” while it was given to Israel “*as... a perfect rule of righteousness*.”

This distinction is part of the substance of the confession’s teaching on the moral law. In 19:6, the distinction is utilized to explain the way in which the moral law is still binding upon the believer. There we are told that “Although true believers be not under the law, *as a covenant of works*, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, *as a rule of life* informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly...” Furthermore, the section concludes by stating that “the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God’s approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by *the law as a covenant of works*.” Again, the distinction between law as covenant of works and law as rule of life controls and governs the confessional formulations.

The position of the catechism and confession is the position of the ma-

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righteousness to those already in the covenant of grace (cf. WLC #101).

majority of Reformed theologians at the time of the Assembly. John Ball, who wrote a very influential treatise on the covenant just prior to the Westminster Assembly, states:

Some divines hold that the old testament, even the Law, as it was given upon *Mount Sinai*, to be the Covenant of Grace for substance, though propounded in a manner fitting to the state of that people, time and condition of the Church... This I take to be the truth, and it may be confirmed by many and strong reasons out of the word of God (102).

Even Samuel Bolton, who disagreed with this position, and advocated an Amyraldian “subservient covenant” view, admits that Ball’s position is the majority position of orthodox divines:

...there is a second opinion, in which I find the greatest *Number* of most *Holy* and *learned* Divines to concur, and that is, that though the Law be called a covenant, yet was it not a *Covenant* of works for salvation: nor was it a third covenant from Workes and Grace: but it was the same Covenant for *nature* and *kinde* under which we stand in the Gospel.<sup>78</sup>

Note well: Bolton admits that the “greatest *Number*” of divines concur that the Mosaic covenant (even the “Law”) is in substance a covenant of grace. There may have been a minority report from a smaller number of theologians, but it was not the majority consensus of Reformed theologians. As we have shown above, it was this majority consensus which was explicitly embodied in the Westminster Confession.<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, that this is the teaching of the confession with regard to the law at Sinai is illustrated by some early expositions of the confessions and catechisms, which take the language in the same way. Thomas Vincent, the famous 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed catechist, demonstrates that this is the church’s received interpretation of the Westminster Standards.

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<sup>78</sup> Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome* (1645) 146.

<sup>79</sup> This point is noted in passing by Ferry (83), but he does not allow it to substantially affect his analysis.

Q. 14. *Was the covenant which God made with the children of Israel of old, a covenant of work, or a covenant of grace?*

A. The covenant which God made of old with the children of Israel, was not a covenant of works, but the same covenant of grace, as to the substance of it, which is made known in the gospel. For, 1. It was impossible that any of the fallen children of Adam should be justified and saved by the covenant of works. Gal. ii. 16...2. The children of Israel had the same Mediator of the covenant, and Redeemer, which the people of God have now, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was typified by Moses, and by the sacrifices under the law. 3. They had the same promises of remission and salvation. 4. They had the same condition of faith required to enable them to look to, and lay hold on Christ, held forth to them in types and figures (*An Explanation of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* [1805] 61-62).

In this explication of the confessional document, Vincent flatly denies that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works: "The covenant which God made of old with the children of Israel, was not a covenant of works." On the contrary it is "the same covenant of grace, as to the substance of it, which is made known in the gospel." For Vincent, it is impossible that God could relate to sinners by virtue of the covenant of works, which demands perfect obedience. Furthermore, this covenant had the same mediator (Jesus), the same forgiveness, and the same obligation to embrace their covenant God in true faith.

Furthermore, early American Presbyterian John Thomson dealt with this question in his *Explication of the Shorter Catechism*.<sup>80</sup> He writes:

Q. 4. *How many Ways may the moral Law be considered?*

A. It may be considered four ways: first as it is *only a Law requiring Obedience to God as a Law-giver*; as it was to our first Parents before the Covenant of Works was made; 2dly, It may be considered *as a Covenant of Works*; thus it was to

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<sup>80</sup> John Thomson, *An Explication of the Shorter Catechism, Composed by the Assembly of Divines, Commonly called, the Westminster Assembly* (1749).

our first parents, after the Covenant was made, and before they fell; 3dly, It may be considered *as a broken Covenant of Works*, requiring Satisfaction or Suffering for the Breach of it, as well as perfect Obedience to its Precepts; under this Consideration all mankind are under it by Nature; 4thly, It may be considered *as an Appendage to the Covenant of Grace, as a Directory or Rule to the Believer, to direct him in a holy Walk*, without obliging him to suffer Punishment for the Breach of it (p. 89, emphasis ours).

Thus, the moral law can be considered: (1) as a law of obedience (creation); (2) as a covenant of works (first parents after creation); (3) as a broken covenant of works (all men by nature); or (4) as a rule of life to the believer to direct him in a holy walk.

Thomson then asks in what way this law was delivered to Israel under Moses:

*Q. 6. Under which of these Considerations was it given on Mount Sinai? A. The giving of the Law, on Mount Sinai, being an Administration of the Covenant of Grace to a People externally in Covenant with God; the Law was then, undoubtedly given, under the fourth Consideration, viz. as an Appendage to the Covenant of Grace explicitly yet implicitly taking in the first Consideration, viz., as the Law of the sovereign Law-giver. So much the Preface to the Ten Commandments doth plainly imply; for, as it was then given, it imply'd a conditional Offer, to free every one of them from the Law under the third Consideration, viz. as a broken Covenant of Works, and to receive them in, under the fourth Consideration, viz. as an Appendage to the Covenant of Grace: So much his declaring himself to be their God, that is, their covenanted God, and Redeemer, doth import (91).*

Here we have an explicit reflection on the language of the Westminster Confession 19:1-2. The confession states that the law was given to Adam under Thomson's second consideration, namely, "as a covenant of works." However,

in 19:2, the confession states that this law “continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai...”

More light is shed on the precise contours of the Westminster Confession by comparing it to an early attempt at confessional revision by a group of Independents in 1658 known as the Savoy Declaration. While the most marked difference between the two documents consists the latter’s embrace of a congregational as opposed to a Presbyterian form of government, other important differences appear throughout. Interestingly, some of the most significant changes appear in the chapters concerning the covenant and the law. In the preface, the authors note that there is “nothing that tends more to heighten Dissensions among Brethren, than to determine and adopt the manner of their difference, under so high a Title, as to be an Article of our Faith.” Apparently they were concerned that some disputed points were elevated to too high a position, and should not have been included in the confession. Thus, they declare that in their declaration “there are two whole Chapters, and some Paragraphs in other Chapters in their Confession, that we have upon this account omitted.” Note well: the authors have omitted things from the confession that they felt should not have been made explicit articles of faith, and were (in their estimation) elevated to too high a position. Several of these omissions appear in the sections on the covenant and on the law.

Our particular interest is in the way John Owen and the other writers (Goodwin, Nye, Bridge, Caryl, and Greenhill) altered chapter vii, sections 5-7.<sup>81</sup> As we will show below, they excised the entire section dealing with the unity and twofold administration of the covenant of grace in the time of the law and the time of the Gospel. Why? What were their views on the Mosaic covenant? If the Westminster Confession already allowed for a variety of views on this subject, why did they change it? We have primary document evidence of Owen’s view (see above): he argued (siding with the Lutherans against the Calvinistic consensus) that the Mosaic covenant was distinct in substance from the New Covenant. Furthermore, we have similar evidence

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<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, Goodwin seems to agree with Owen and Cameron that the Mosaic covenant is a specifically distinct covenant from the covenant of grace. In fact, he even positively endorses Cameron’s language that the Sinaitic covenant was a “subservient covenant” (*Works of Thomas Goodwin*, [1863] 6:354ff.) Sympson also seems to have taken a similar position (Calamy, 1)—but the reader should remember that this is based only on Calamy’s secondary summary, who himself does not always accurately summarize the views of others (as we have noted above).



that Goodwin adopted Cameron’s “subservient covenant” view. And we have secondhand testimony that Sympson thought that it was a covenant of works. This fairly clearly demonstrates that they demurred from the “majority view” (i.e., that Sinai is a covenant of grace). Did this affect the way in which they altered the WCF?

First, let us examine their modification of the Westminster Confession on the covenant. The following table is provided for ease in comparison:

WCF	Savoy
<p>5. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the Gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.</p>	<p>5. Although this covenant hath been differently and variously administered in respect of ordinances and institutions in the time of the law, and since the coming of Christ in the flesh; yet for the substance and efficacy of it, to all its spiritual and saving ends, it is one and the same; upon the account of which various dispensations, it is called the Old and New Testament.</p>
<p>6. Under the Gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.</p>	

The most marked and obvious difference is the brevity of the Savoy Declaration compared to the WCF. Much of what Savoy says subtly modifies the WCF. Both attempt to affirm the essential unity of the covenant of grace, but Savoy omits the important declaration of the WCF that “there are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.” In other words, the Savoy declaration refuses to exclude various views of the Mosaic covenant which construe it as a substantially distinct covenant.

Likewise, subtle differences appear in the chapter on the Law of God. Phrases in the WCF that are omitted in Savoy will be placed in bold, whereas additions in Savoy that are not in the WCF will be placed in italics.

WCF	Savoy
<p>1. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.</p>	<p>1. God gave to Adam a law <i>of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil</i>, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.</p>
<p>2. This law, after <b>his</b> fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, <b>as such</b>, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.</p>	<p>2. This law, <i>so written in the heart</i>, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after <i>the fall of man</i>; and was delivered by God upon mount Sinai in ten commandments, and written in two tables; the four first commandments containing our duty towards God, and the other six our duty to man.</p>

Savoy’s addition in 19:1 merely draws out in more detail the nature of the law given to Adam, as well as the probationary command in which that obedience was concentrated. However, in 19:2, the Savoy declaration omits the important

phrase “as such,” referring to the way in which the law was given to Israel (namely, as a perfect rule of righteousness).

While subtle, this omission is important. WCF clearly defines the manner in which the law was given to Israel. In contrast to Adam (who was given the law as a covenant of works), Israel received the law as a perfect rule of righteousness for those in covenant with God. The Savoy declaration, however, leaves open the possibility that the law may have been given to Israel in some other way. In other words, Savoy leaves open the possibility that the Mosaic law was given to Israel as a covenant of works, a subservient covenant, or some other covenant.

When we compare this formulation with the various proposals of its authors, the reason for this omission becomes clear. Nearly half of the authors of the Savoy Declaration took a minority view of the Mosaic covenant. As noted above, the majority of divines viewed the law given at Sinai as a covenant of grace, that is, as a rule of righteousness for those already in covenant with God.

We underscore that the reading of the Westminster Confession outlined above is not unique or idiosyncratic. Scholars from both sides of the world have affirmed it. Ernst Kevan states that “The outcome of the debate [concerning the Mosaic covenant] was that, on the whole, it was agreed that the Mosaic Covenant was a form of the Covenant of Grace; and this view was embodied in the *Confession of Faith*.”<sup>82</sup> Won Taek Lim concurs with Kevan: “Despite its outward resemblance to the covenant of works, the majority of Puritans viewed the Mosaic covenant as a genuine part of the covenant of grace. This view is embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith.”<sup>83</sup>

## **Amyraldian, Lutheran, or Reformed?**

In our estimation, what we end up with in this volume is not a clear presentation of the mainstream Reformed position on the Mosaic covenant, but a muddled, pan-confessional combination of a Lutheran and Amyraldian posi-

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82 Ernst Kevan, *The Grace of the Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (1993) 117.

83 Won Taek Lim, *The Covenant Theology of Francis Roberts* (2002) 145.

tion. Highlighting these divergent Protestant views is extremely important, as it will throw into sharper relief the central features of the mainstream Reformed position. This is something the present volume fails to do.

The classic Lutheran position on the Mosaic covenant first took clear shape in the theology of Philip Melanchthon. Philip Melanchthon, in his *Loci Communes* of 1555, wrote concerning the difference between the Old and New Testaments:

I consider the Old Testament a promise of material things linked up with the demands of the law. For God demands righteousness through the law and also promises its reward, the Land of Canaan, wealth, etc. [Deut. 29:10-13]...By contrast, the New Testament is nothing else than the promise of all good things without regard to the law and with no respect to our own righteousness.<sup>84</sup>

For Melanchthon, the Old Testament concerned only earthly blessings, rewarded for obedience to the law. It applies only to the temporal arena and is governed by a legal principle. Furthermore, in contrast to the Reformed (particularly Calvin), Melanchthon argues from Jer. 31:31ff. and Heb. 8:8ff. that “that part of the law called the Decalogue has been abrogated by the New Testament” (121).

Martin Chemnitz, Melanchthon’s successor, also self-consciously opposed Calvin and Bucer’s view that the Old Testament (and specifically the Mosaic covenant) was essentially a covenant of grace.<sup>85</sup> With his polemical finger pointed directly at Calvin and Bucer, Chemnitz writes: “...it is clearly evident that the matter and substance of these two covenants are not the same. For the teaching of the old covenant is the Law, but of the new the Gospel” (2:662). He concludes: “...shall I follow Calvin when he says there is actually only one covenant? Or shall I follow Scripture which testifies that the new

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84 Wilhelm Pauck, ed., *Melanchthon and Bucer* (LCC, 1969) 120.

85 Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Communes* (trans. J. A. O. Preus; 1989) 2:661. Chemnitz accurately summarizes their position: “Thus, in fact, insofar as it pertains to the matter or substance of the covenant, they assert that there are not two different covenants but the old and the new are one and the same, but there is a difference only insofar as the mode or form of revelation and its completeness and the extent of the blessings is concerned” (ibid.).

covenant is better than the old” (ibid.)? Although Chemnitz’s work predates the use of the term *foedus operum*, it is not difficult to see how his formulations clearly adumbrate the later Lutheran view that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works.<sup>86</sup>

Philip Quenstedt states the issue between the Lutherans and the Calvinists in this way:

The question is not, whether of old and at the present time there is one way of salvation, one promise of grace, one God of the covenant, so much as the work unto justification and salvation (*quantam ad justificationis & salutis negotium*), and finally one faith and eternal life. This is in all respects, as it were, certain, and greatly conforms to Sacred Scripture, which is admitted by all. But between us and the Calvinists the controversy comes to these two questions: (1) Whether the Old Testament anywhere in sacred Literature (*Literis*) is taken for the covenant of grace, which God made with the Fathers, Adam, Abraham, etc. (2) Whether that covenant of grace which God made with the Fathers, is the same in substance with the New Testament. The Calvinists affirm this, and we deny it.<sup>87</sup>

Later he argues that the controversy does not concern “whether the Fathers were saved under the Old Testament by another way, than by grace alone in Jesus Christ.” The Lutherans agree with the Calvinists that the “covenant of grace from the time of the first fall was made with the Fathers, the substance

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<sup>86</sup> Compare the works of Johann Gerhard (*Locorum Theologicorum* [1639] 3:291-92) and Jesper Brochmand (*Universæ theologiæ systema in quo omnes ac singuli religionis Christianæ articuli ita pertractantur* [1638] 2, Q. 4) and their explicit differences from the Reformed on this point. For a Reformed critique of Brochmand, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:234-236. Quenstedt is clear that his position is the unanimous position of the Lutherans over against the Calvinists, and includes a long list of Lutheran dogmaticians who have argued the point: “Propugnantes: B. Chemnitius P.2 Loc. Com. a. de diser. V. & N.T. D. Hutterus in Loc. Com. a. 15. de Diser. V. & N.T. qv. 2. D. Gerhardus L. de Evangelio T. 3. Loc. §. 120 se1. Theologi Wittebergens. T. 2. Disp. Theol. Disp. 9. Theorum. 1. p. 640. seq. Giessenses T. 4. Disp. Theol. Disp. 18. D. Menzerus 1. c. D. Brochmannus in Syst. A. 20. c. 1. 4. p. 114. seq. Eckhardus in Fasciculo c. 12. qv. 1.” (1334).

<sup>87</sup> Philip Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, sive Systema Theologicum* (1715) 1331-34.

or thing itself is the same with the New Testament.” Rather the issue has to do with the Mosaic covenant: is it essentially a covenant of grace? The Calvinists affirm this, but the Lutherans deny it.

Anthony Burgess, writing at the time of the Westminster Assembly, also evidences a keen awareness of the divergence of Lutherans and Calvinists on this point:

And, first, *you must know that the difference is not essential, or substantial, but accidental*: so that the division of the Testament, or Covenant into the Old, and New, is not a division of the *Genus* into it's opposite *Species*; but of the subject, according to it's severall accidentall administrations, both on Gods part, and on mans. It is true, the Lutheran Divines, they do expresly oppose the Calvinists herein, maintaining the Covenant given by *Moses*, to be a Covenant of works, and so directly contrary to the Covenant of grace. Indeed, they acknowledge that the Fathers were justified by Christ, and had the same way of salvation with us; only they make that Covenant of *Moses* to be a superadded thing to the Promise, holding forth a condition of perfect righteousness unto the Jews, that they might be convinced of their own folly in their self-righteousness. But, I think, it is already cleared, that *Moses* his Covenant, was a Covenant of grace...<sup>88</sup>

Note well: the issue was not the essential continuity of the “covenant of grace” (particularly that made with Abraham) in terms of the way of salvation. Both Lutherans and Calvinists affirmed this. Rather the issue concerned the precise nature of the Mosaic covenant. Was it also an administration of the covenant of grace and thus substantially identical to it? This the Calvinists affirmed, but the Lutherans denied. The Lutherans only argued that a covenant of works was superimposed (or “superadded”) upon the underlying substratum of the Abrahamic covenant (or “the Promise”) to convince them of their own unrighteousness. It was, as Melancthon put it (cited above), “a promise of material things linked up with the demands of the law. For God demands righteousness

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<sup>88</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae legis, or, A vindication of the morall law and the covenants, from the errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and more especially, Antinomians* (1647) 251.

through the law and also promises its reward, the Land of Canaan, wealth, etc.” In this sense, they would not deny that it is in some sense “a part of or connected to” the covenant of grace. At the same time, their formulations would end up being quite different from mainstream, consensus Calvinists (by their own testimony!).

What appears from our brief survey is a clear recognition on both sides as to the characteristic positions of each tradition. In other words, both Lutherans and Calvinists agree that the Calvinist position is that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of grace, while the Lutheran position was a covenant of works. It is true that there were some among the Reformed who took a more “Lutheran” position. But in so doing, they were departing from the mainstream consensus of their own tradition and implementing Lutheran elements within it.

A figure like John Owen was self-conscious in doing this very thing. Commenting on Hebrews 8, Owen states the question pointedly:

Here then ariseth a difference of no small importance, namely, whether these are indeed two distinct covenants, as to the essence and substance of them, or only different ways of the dispensation and administration of the same covenant.<sup>89</sup>

This, therefore, we must inquire into...*whether two distinct covenants, or only a twofold administration of the same covenant, be intended* (VI:70-71).

Each position agrees that the way of salvation (through Christ alone) was always the same; that the Old Testament teaches justification by faith alone; that no one was saved by the Mosaic covenant when abstracted from its “figurative relation” to the covenant of grace (VI:70); and that the old ceremonies directed and led to Christ. Rather the question is whether or not the old Mosaic covenant differs in substance from the covenant of grace.

Owen admits that “most reformed divines” teach that the Mosaic covenant is simply a “different administration” of the covenant of grace, and that the Lutherans uniformly agree that the Old (Mosaic) and New covenants are “not

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<sup>89</sup> John Owen. *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1960) VI:69.

a twofold administration of the same covenant,” but rather “two covenants substantially distinct” (VI:73).<sup>90</sup> Even though his position is in the minority, and is (by his own admission) in substantial agreement with Lutheranism, Owen nevertheless insists that the Mosaic covenant differs in substance from the covenant of grace:

This is the nature and substance of that covenant which God made with that people; a particular, temporary covenant it was, and not a mere dispensation of the covenant of grace (VI:86).

Owen then gives several reasons for his position (VI:77-86), and then provides a lengthy elucidation of the differences between the two covenants (VI:86-100). Though Owen is by no means a follower of Cameron in every respect, they clearly hold to the same position regarding the Mosaic covenant: it is not an administration of the covenant of grace, but is a substantially distinct covenant. Its condition is purely legal (do this and live), and its promise is purely earthly (blessedness in Canaan).<sup>91</sup>

In addition to the classic Lutheran position, mainstream Reformed theology also opposed the Amyraldian view of the Mosaic covenant. Following John Cameron, the Amyraldians affirmed three distinct covenants: (1) a covenant of nature, made with Adam in the garden; (2) a subservient covenant, made with Israel at Sinai; and (3) a covenant of grace.<sup>92</sup> For Cameron and the Amyraldians, these three covenants differ in their essence or kind—they are substantially distinct covenants. As Ferry notes, this position is somewhat similar to that of

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<sup>90</sup> It is interesting to note that Owen self-consciously references the positions of Calvin, Vermigli, and Bucanus cited above and distinguishes his position from theirs: “Sundry other things are usually added by our divines unto the same purpose. See Calvin. Institut. lib. 2:cap. xi.; Martyr. Loc. Com. loc. 16, sect. 2; Bucan. loc. 22, etc.” (VI:73).

<sup>91</sup> “Nor had this covenant of Sinai any promise of eternal life annexed unto it, as such, but only the promise inseparable from the covenant of works which it revived, saying, ‘Do this, and live’” (VI:78). “Also as unto what it had of its own, it was confined unto things temporal” (VI:85).

<sup>92</sup> An English translation of Cameron’s *Theses* on the covenant can be found in: Robert Bolton, *The true bounds of Christian freedom: or a treatise wherein the rights of the law are vindicated: the liberties of grace maintained, and the severall late opinions against the law are examined and confuted. Whereunto is annexed a discourse of the learned Iohn Camerons, touching the threefold covenant of God with man* (1645) 353-401.



Herman Witsius, though it would not be accurate to say that the two positions are identical. While Cameron's formulations are complex, his position basically boils down to the fact that Israel was under a distinct, separate covenant that promised a blessed life in Canaan upon condition of a legal obedience to the moral, ceremonial and judicial law. According to Cameron, this did not mean that the Israelites were not also under the (Abrahamic) covenant of grace. It only meant that the covenant made with Israel through Moses was a substantially distinct covenant that differed in some ways from both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Perhaps we could describe it in the language these authors use to describe their own proposal: it is "in some sense" a republication of the covenant of works that is actually applied to Israel in terms of her life in the land. While not a covenant of works *per se*, its condition is purely legal, though administered in the interests of the ongoing covenant of grace made with Abraham.<sup>93</sup>

A whole host of Reformed theologians opposed this position. Francis Turretin devotes an entire question to its refutation in his *Institutes* (2:262-269). Samuel Rutherford, John Ball, Patrick Gillespie, Francis Roberts, Thomas Blake, William Bridge, Melchoir Leydekker, and others include extended refutations of this position in their works on the covenant.<sup>94</sup> More theologians (both British and Continental) can certainly be added to this list, but a careful reading of their critique of Cameron will demonstrate that he did not (on the whole) receive a happy reception among Reformed theologians.

This position is also rejected by the language of the Westminster Confession (7:5-6), as well as the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*. The WCF maintains that the Old and New Testaments as a whole do not differ in substance, but are "one and the same under various dispensations." Moreover, it clearly af-

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<sup>93</sup> As noted above, the similarities between Kline's and Cameron's views have been noted by friend and foe alike. Lee Irons has appealed to Cameron and Amyraut as a precedent for Kline's views. D. Patrick Ramsey (as noted above) has also made this connection.

<sup>94</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *The covenant of life opened, or, A treatise of the covenant of grace* (1655) 58-60. John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1645) 92-142. Francis Roberts, *Mysterium & medulla Bibliorum* (1657) 748-53. Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae foederis; or a treatise of the covenant of God entered with man-kinde* (1658) 203-204. Patrick Gillespie, *The ark of the testament opened* (1661) 153-60. William Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant: the Work and Way of Meditation*, (1667) 54-63. Melchoir Leydekker, *Melchioris Leydeckeri S.S. Theol. Doctoris & Professoris de veritate religionis reformatae seu evangelicae, libri VII, quibus doctrina Christiana de oeconomia S.S. Trinitatis in negotio salutis humanae explicatur* (1688) 281-300.

firms only a two-covenant position (covenant of works and covenant of grace) over against a three covenant position. Moreover, as noted above, Larger Catechism's exposition of the preface to the Decalogue makes clear that they view it as an expression of the covenant of grace. The *Formula Consensus Helvetica* contains an entire article devoted to refuting the error of Cameron and the Amyraldians on this point:

We disapprove therefore of the doctrine of those who fabricate for us three Covenants, the Natural, the Legal, and the Gospel, different in their entire nature and essence, and in explaining these and assigning their differences, so intricately entangle themselves that they greatly obscure and even impair the nucleus of solid truth and piety. Nor do they hesitate at all, with regard to the necessity, under the OT dispensation, of knowledge of Christ and faith in him and his satisfaction and in the whole sacred Trinity, to speculate much too loosely and dangerously.<sup>95</sup>

The Genevan church required all their pastors and teachers to subscribe to it using this formula: *sic sentio, contrarium non decebo, pacem ecclesiae non turbabo* ("thus I believe, I will not teach to the contrary, nor will I disturb the peace of the church").<sup>96</sup> It thus became a required standard of orthodoxy for those in the Geneva and in the other Swiss Reformed churches.<sup>97</sup>

95 Martin I. Klauber, "The Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675): An Introduction and Translation." *Trinity Journal* 11 (Spring 1990): 103-123.

96 Martin Klauber, *Between reformed scholasticism and pan-Protestantism: Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1671-1737) and enlightened orthodoxy at the Academy of Geneva* (1994), 146. Cf. also: Donald Davis Grohman (*The Genevan Reactions to the Saumur Doctrines of Hypothetical Universalism*, (Ph. D. Dissertation: Knox College, 1971).

97 Indeed, it was widely recognized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* was "made authoritative throughout Switzerland" and "all ministers, teachers, and professors were bound to subscribe to it; and it was ordained that no candidate for the ministry should be admitted except upon declaration that he received it *ex animo*." James Strong & John McClintock, eds., *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (1883) IV:179. McClintock and Strong were only reiterating the words of Johannes Jacobus Hottingerus, who wrote in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century describing the mandate of the Magistrates concerning the *Consensus*, "*ut statim omnes Ministri ac Praeceptores Classici, quin imo et Professores, eidem subscribant, ac imposterum ad S. Ministerium nemo admittatur, quin absque omni exceptione mentem suam de his declaraverit, his subscripserit, et servanda juramento foverit, et si quis subscribere renueret, ad Ministerium nullatenus admittatur*" ("That immediately all Ministers and Classical Instructors, indeed the Professors also, subscribe the same, and that no one be admitted as a candidate to the sacred

Again, this reading of these confessions is not unique or idiosyncratic. Jan Rohls has argued that “the Westminster Confession and the Helvetic Consensus Formula oppose the thesis advanced by John Cameron and the school of Saumur, which holds that there are three substantially different covenants of God with humanity.”<sup>98</sup>

Finally, we must also note another view that bore similarities to the Amyraldian position, namely, the Arminian and Socinian positions on the Mosaic covenant. Several 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed theologians noted the similarity between the Amyraldian and the Arminian positions, among whom are Samuel Rutherford and Patrick Gillespie.<sup>99</sup> In modern times, no less than Richard Muller pointed this out nearly twenty-five years ago, arguing that the Arminian, “exclusion of the Mosaic law from the postlapsarian covenant of salvation not only departs from the usual Reformed pattern, but also adumbrates the Amyraldian series of a *foedus naturale*, *foedus legale*, a *foedus gratiae*.”<sup>100</sup> As for the similarities between the Amyraldian and Socinian positions, Francis Roberts critiqued the former position by arguing that it “entrenches too near the borders of *Socinianism*, *That under Moses the fathers had only earthly and temporal blessings*” (753). Statements like these can be multiplied. But they are sufficient to show that the Amyraldian view was not happily received among the majority of Reformed Churches and theologians.

The mainstream, orthodox, confessional consensus of Reformed theology is that the Mosaic covenant is essentially a covenant of grace, and a distinct administration of the same. This testimony is *explicitly* contrary to the published positions of Horton, Gordon, and Estelle who each argue that the Mosaic cov-

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ministry, lest without any exception he has declared his mind concerning this, has subscribed to this and supports it by keeping his oath, and if anyone refuses to subscribe, by no means is he to be admitted to the ministry”). Cited in Johann Christian Wilhelm Augusti, *Corpus librorum symbolicorum qui in ecclesia reformatorum auctoritatem publicam obtinuerunt* (1827) 646.

98 Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (1998) 90.

99 Samuel Rutherford, *The covenant of life opened, or, A treatise of the covenant of grace* (1655) 64. Patrick Gillespie, *The ark of the testament opened, or, The secret of the Lords covenant unsealed in a treatise of the covenant of grace, wherein an essay is made for the promoting [sic] and increase of knowledge in the mysterie of the Gospel-covenant which hath been hid from ages and generations but now is made manifest to the Saints* (1661) 153.

100 Richard A. Muller, “The Federal Motif in Seventeenth Century Arminian Theology.” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkeschiedenis* 61:1 (1982): 104.

enant is distinct in kind from the covenant of grace.<sup>101</sup> This testimony is also *implicitly* contrary to many other formulations in this book, particularly those that would make the conditions of the Mosaic covenant differ essentially from those of the Abrahamic or new covenant. Where this testimony is formally affirmed in this volume, it is accompanied by several other formulations that (in our opinion) either seem to take with the left hand what is given with the right, or significantly confuse matters.

In summary, it is not clear to us that the formulations of this present volume square well with the testimony of the mainstream consensus of the Reformed tradition, either with regard to the majority of its individual theologians, or its confessional documents. At several points, the formulations of this book seem to bear similarities to both Lutheran and Amyraldian “republication” positions. If our writers believe this assertion is inaccurate, the onus is upon them to carefully distinguish their position regarding the Mosaic covenant from that found in Lutheran and Amyraldian traditions.<sup>102</sup> As it is, the volume under review fails to adequately distinguish the distinctive Reformed position from that of Lutherans and Amyraldians, and in so doing only further muddies the already murky waters of this present debate.

This book begins with a “fictional” account of a licentiate being thoroughly questioned with regard to these matters by concerned pastors and elders. In our opinion, far from alleviating these concerns, this book provides plenty of evidence to suggest that the church should continue to do just that—carefully question those who advocate such views to assure their full commitment to the historic Reformed consensus as embodied in our confessions and catechisms.

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101 Michael Horton, *God of Promise* (2006) 53, 88, 176.

102 We emphasize again that the question is not whether certain individual theologians in what we broadly refer to as “the Reformed tradition” can be found who are in basic agreement with the Lutheran or Amyraldian position on the Mosaic covenant (we have cited Owen above as one who borrows, in some respects, from that tradition). Rather the question has to do with the mainstream, confessional, majority consensus of Reformed theologians—what we might refer to as the *distinctive* Reformed position that sets it apart from the mainstream consensus of the other above-mentioned traditions. We happily and freely admit that several individual writers can be found in (what may be broadly referred to as) the “Reformed tradition” whose positions bear formal resemblance to the views propounded in this book. But even here great care must be taken to read each writer on his own terms, and not to vindicate one’s own views on the matter. Our focus throughout has been on what we have continually referred to as the mainstream Reformed consensus that is embodied in the Reformed confessions and catechisms.

In short, with regard to these particular proposals, we must agree with the judgment of Johannes Wollebius, the great 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed Systematician:

They are deceived then who make parallel distinctions of the Old and New Testament; of the Covenant of Works, and of Grace; of the Law, and Gospel: for in both, the Testament or Covenant is the Covenant of Grace; in both, the Law and Gospel are urged.<sup>103</sup>

This is the testimony of the majority consensus of Reformed theologians against Lutheranism, Amyraldianism, and Antinomianism; and this is the testimony of the Reformed confessions, as evidenced in the Westminster Standards and the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*. Despite their efforts to utilize orthodox language from Reformed covenant theology, it is still far from clear that these formulations in the book under review consistently express that accepted meaning.

## **Exegetical Section: Definitions and Introduction**

In this section of our review, we will give greater attention to exegetical considerations, giving special attention to the articles of Bryan Estelle and T. David Gordon. At the same time, this exegetical critique applies to the book as a whole insofar as the latter argues that the Mosaic covenant contains a *meritorious* works principle by which Israel merited her blessings in the land. To set the stage for our discussion, we will first examine a few definitions for clarification.

### **Two Views of Merit**

There are two views of Lev. 18:5 and merit in this book: one is hypothetical, which promises eternal life for perfect obedience (which Israel cannot accomplish, Waters). The second is actual, in which Israel actually merits temporal blessings on the basis of her obedience, albeit imperfect (Estelle). We might refer to the first as hypothetical merit and the other as actual merit.

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103 *Abridgement of Christian Divinity*, 173

## Real and Typological Merit

It is sometimes asserted that what we have called actual merit above (i.e., Israel's actual obedience) is typological merit and not real merit. However, when Klineans are asked to clarify what they mean by this distinction, the only difference given between the two is that "real merit" (with Adam) was capable of meriting eternal life while "typological merit" is only capable of meriting the blessings of Canaan. Thus, it is never denied that both are *substantially* meritorious or what might traditionally be called real merit. This is consistent with both the descriptive title "typological merit" and with Westminster Seminary in California's (hereafter WSCal) failure to affirm (and sometimes outright denial of) the fact that the Mosaic covenant itself administered the blessing of eternal justification<sup>104</sup> to the elect of Israel.

Readers should note that references to the "WSCal faculty" or "WSCal" should be taken as a shorthand reference to those members of the faculty who teach the position under consideration. We find this a fitting abbreviation since the editors acknowledge that the book was published with the "institutional support" of "Westminster Seminary California" (ix). Even if some of the editors of this book disagree with using the term "merit" to describe Israel's obedience, by including an article of a fellow faculty member that utilizes this formulation, they clearly approve of it as an orthodox option. The same argument applies to their inclusion of T. David Gordon's essay, which affirms that the Abrahamic covenant and the Sinaitic covenant are substantially "different in kind" (251) and have "substantial differences in kind" (253). These things should also be considered as we address the issue of typological merit as propounded by one of the authors in this book (136). To this issue we now turn.

First, in our view, the phrase "typological merit" does *not* deny the substantial nature of Israel's "merit" (as they call it), but rather affirms it. For "typological" is here used simply as an *adjective* to describe "merit". In

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<sup>104</sup> Our use of this term is not to be confused with Abraham Kuyper's view of eternal justification, in which, according to Kuyper, the elect have been justified for all eternity. Instead, we are using the phrase "eternal justification" the same way Meredith G. Kline used the term "eternal salvation." Dr. Kline asserted that the Mosaic covenant did not administer "eternal salvation" to the elect, only the Abrahamic covenant did that. We are disagreeing with Kline and making the point more specific, focusing on a specific aspect of the *ordo salutis*, namely justification. The Mosaic covenant administers eternal justification rather than simply "typological" or temporal justification.

traditional metaphysics and linguistic usage, an adjective simply qualifies the noun it modifies. It does not change its essential nature. That is, a “white horse” and a “black horse” are both horses, one simply has the accidental quality of being black and other one has the accidental quality of being white. Yet substantially they are both horses. Putting the word “white” in front of “horse” does not change its substantial nature. It is still a horse. Thus, those who speak of “typological merit” have simply affirmed that Israel’s obedience was substantially meritorious and that it functioned in a typological way as well. The phrase does not of itself deny (but rather affirms) the substantial nature of Israel’s “merit”. It is still “merit”.<sup>105</sup>

Second, WSCal’s failure to affirm (and sometimes outright denial of) the fact that the Mosaic covenant itself administered the blessing of eternal justification to the elect saints of Israel demonstrates that they are ascribing to Israel *substantially* real merit. For the Reformed tradition has claimed that only by affirming forensic justification can we deny substantial merit. (The Roman Catholics, who refused to affirm forensic justification, were merit mongers.) And consistently Reformed theologians have also affirmed that the Mosaic covenant administered eternal justification to the elect in Israel. These two premises together show that the Reformed believed that only by affirming that the Mosaic covenant administered forensic justification could they deny that Israel substantially merited the blessings of Canaan. That is, it was necessary to affirm that the Mosaic covenant administered justification in order to deny that Israel merited anything substantially.

In this book, the WSCal faculty (and its colleagues) never explicitly affirms that the Mosaic covenant administered justification directly to the elect.<sup>106</sup> In fact, the article by T. David Gordon denies it outright. Silence on

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105 We admit that we have not found the phrase “typological merit” in the book under review. However, we are here seeking to anticipate a common rejoinder given by many Klineans when they are accused of believing in real merit. At the same time, we are suggesting that the book’s claim that *a typological element of the Mosaic covenant is meritorious* leaves it open to the same substantive critique that applies to the phrase “typological merit”.

106 Some may argue that we are making an argument from silence, claiming that the book denies that justification was administered by the Mosaic covenant, when it makes no such explicit claim. It simply was not dealing with that question, we might be told. You are making an argument from silence. And we hear the objections coming: ‘arguments from silence are always invalid.’ “Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence,” we are told. However, we would suggest that this is not always the case. In fact, a book on the Trinity that left out a discussion of the deity of

this issue (in light of the history of Reformed theology) shows WSCal's inability to reliably deny substantial merit to Israel. The book's outright denial of the fact that the Mosaic covenant administered justification (consistent with Dr. Kline's theology) is a positive assertion that Israel substantially merited the blessings of the land. By failing to include any article affirming that the Mosaic covenant administered justification and by including an article that denies it forthrightly, the editors of this book show that they do not believe in Turretin's distinction between the substantial and the formal (which they appeal to at the beginning of the book).

Even if we affirm that Israel's obedience functioned as a type of Christ's obedience, we can never affirm that Israel's obedience was substantially meritorious. And we are required to affirm several essential necessary theological truths to guard against this error (i.e., that the Mosaic covenant administered both justification and sanctification to the elect). Further, to affirm any typological function to Israel's obedience should require us to deny any substantial merit to that obedience just as affirming the typological function of the animal sacrifices requires us to deny any substantial propitiation to those sacrifices. The writer of Hebrews says: "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). That is, it was impossible for animal sacrifices to propitiate for our sins; therefore they were types—something had to come after them. Thus, it is also impossible for Israel's obedience to merit anything before God; therefore they were (at best) types—something had to come after them, namely Christ. Christ alone can propitiate sin and Christ alone can merit anything for sinners. Animal sacrifices were not substantially propitiatory; so

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Christ would be making a statement (a strange one indeed, a trinity but no person in it incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth). Such glaring exceptions speak volumes, especially when their simple affirmation would clear up much possible confusion. Omissions are telling in many areas of life. An architect who builds a house without a kitchen is making a statement. He may not be saying that kitchens are inappropriate to houses, but he is saying that a kitchen is inappropriate to this house. And thus he will be giving a message about the house's nature and function. It is not for a family that wishes to cook at home. And so when the editors of this book do not include one article claiming that the Mosaic covenant administered justification to the elect in Israel, they are making a statement: Their system can do without this affirmation. At the very least, it is unimportant to them. However, as we will see, this section of our review does not simply depend on this legitimate form of the argument from silence, it relies on explicit positive claims, such as the claim that Israel merited her blessings in the land. On our analogy, not only does this house lack a kitchen, the only doors in the house are doors leading directly outside. This house is obviously a motel. And the editors clinch this by sticking the motel sign up right in the middle of the book. For they include an article by T. David Gordon, in which he claims that the Mosaic covenant did not administer justification (248-49).



neither could Israel's obedience be substantially meritorious.

### **Substantial and Formal**

Here we will see that the authors of this book use this language of orthodoxy but interpret it quite differently. They use the categories of the covenant of grace in its substantial and formal dimension and misinterpret this as Dr. Kline's separation between the upper and lower registers. In the "Introduction" to this book, Estelle, Fesko, and VanDrunen try to argue that the view expressed herein is similar to that of Turretin, who distinguished the substance of the covenant from its formal administration (12). Turretin taught, along with other Reformed theologians, that the Mosaic covenant was clothed in the form of the covenant of works.

However, this comparison with Turretin is disingenuous. Estelle, Fesko, and VanDrunen are trying to suggest that the teaching and system of Meredith G. Kline (which is defended by this book) is essentially the same as Turretin's position. But this is not the case. First, for Turretin, the Mosaic covenant administered individual salvation (justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification). However, this is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) denied by the contributors of this book. Second, while Turretin believed that the formal administration of the Mosaic covenant reflected the covenant of works, he never asserted that this formal administration embodied a *meritorious* principle. Instead he opposed merit at every turn. Merit (by any classic definition whether condign or congruent) was never grounded in perfect forensic justification. However, since Turretin believed that the Mosaic covenant administered the grace of justification<sup>107</sup> (contrary to this book), he believed that the commandments of the law (as administered to believing sinners and thus dependent on justifying grace) could not have been meritorious. When this book asserts that Israel's actual deeds were meritorious, this is consistent with their view that the Mosaic covenant did not administer the grace of justification. Turretin held

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107 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:231. "To these spiritual promises pertain (1) remission of sins and justification." Just prior to this Turretin is clearly discussing the Mosaic covenant when he writes: "Now although that revelation of grace was somewhat obscure and sparing as to mode (being more enigmatical and specular, and such that Christ could be beheld in it only under a veil—as formerly Moses, 2 Cor. 3:7)...Still it did not differ as to substance and no less saved them, than faith under the New Testament saves us...To these spiritual promises pertain (1) remission of sins and *justification* [emphasis ours]. For Turretin, the old covenant administered eternal "justification", i.e., "saved them" though "faith".

the opposite position on both counts.

Finally, this book's teaching that Israel merited blessings in the land is a denial of Turretin's way of constructing the relationship between the essence of the Mosaic covenant and its formal administration. For Turretin, the *administration* of the Mosaic covenant was *grounded in the essence* of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace. Thus, while its formal administration did reflect the covenant of works, that administration itself was fundamentally and primarily gracious.

This is never asserted in the book. Instead the authors (when they do distinguish between the essence and administration) assume that the essence is gracious but the administration of the moral law is simply a republication of the covenant of works. This is because the authors are really defending the system of Meredith G. Kline, not that of Turretin. Kline believed that two antithetical principles were at work in the Mosaic order, that of grace and that of meritorious works.<sup>108</sup> Both were sharply distinguished into two fundamentally different levels, sometimes known as the upper register and the lower register.

As we approach the exegetical section of this review, we will see that Turretin's approach can do justice to a proper interpretation of Lev. 18:5 and Gal. 3, but Kline's system and that of this book cannot. For Turretin, when Paul was contrasting the Mosaic law (as it was administered to believing Israelites) to the grace that is now administered to us in Christ, he was only making a relative contrast. Kline's view that Israel's actual obedience to the law was meritorious suggests that Paul was making an absolute contrast between

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108 Meredith G. Kline, "Gospel until the Law: Rom 5:13-14 and the Old Covenant." *JETS* 34 (1991): 434. "Classic covenantalism recognizes that the old Mosaic order (at its foundation level—that is, as a program of individual salvation in Christ) was in continuity with previous and subsequent administrations of the overarching covenant of grace. But it also sees and takes at face value the massive Biblical evidence for a peculiar discontinuity present in the old covenant in the form of a *principle of meritorious works*, operating not as a way of eternal salvation but as the principle governing Israel's retention of its provisional, typological inheritance." [emphasis ours]. Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos*, 96-7. "The introduction of this Law arrangement centuries after the covenant promise to Abraham did not abrogate the earlier promise of grace *because its works principle* did not *appertain to* individual, eternal salvation (cf. Gal 3: 17). The works principle of the Law was rather the governing principle in *the typological sphere* of the national election and the possession of the first level kingdom in Canaan" [emphases ours, 97]. Dr. Kline believed that the works principle was opposite in kind from the grace principle, writing: "the principle of promise, the opposite of the principle of works that was operative in the Law" (96), a "sharp contrast" (97).

the justifying grace of the new covenant and the actual administration of the Mosaic covenant to believing Israelites. However, our exegetical argument is that Paul is fundamentally interpreting Lev. 18:5 correctly and that Lev. 18:5 in its original context (insofar as it was administered to believing Israelites) was grounded in individual redemptive grace. As a result, the actual practice of Lev. 18:5 by believing Israelites were dependent on their faith in that redemptive grace and presupposes both grace and faith. This suggests that Paul (insofar as he was contrasting the new covenant to the faith of Israel) is only making a relative contrast between the grace administered through the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant.<sup>109</sup>

## Leviticus 18:5 and Bryan Estelle

Trying to sort out Dr. Estelle's view of the Mosaic covenant is like playing Twenty Questions. The person being asked questions gives out some details about the thing described, but he does not explain how they relate to one another. This is up to the questioners to figure out. And so it is with Estelle; he gives us all kinds of claims about the Mosaic covenant, but he does not explain how they can fit together in any coherent fashion. Oh yes, he appeals to Brenton Ferry's chapter (130, n. 100), which attempts to lay out various Reformed alternatives. However, Ferry includes John Cameron's view of the Mosaic covenant among his options without criticism (101). And this was the Amyraldian view. How do we know that this is not Estelle's position especially when he appeals to T. David Gordon's article (130, n. 92), which denies that the Mosaic covenant administers justification (248)?

Thus, Estelle makes little attempt to reconcile apparently contradictory claims in his chapter. For instance, central to the concerns of this review, he says that Israel merited her blessings in the land. As he says: "in the old covenant

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<sup>109</sup> That is, *as a whole*, the contrast is relative. Still, there are ways in which this relative contrast can be described using diametrically opposing *phrases*. For instance, we can speak of believing Israel living under some degree of curse in the formal sphere of the Mosaic covenant and this curse in the formal sphere being completely removed in the new covenant. Thus we might say, of the old covenant 'there was curse in the formal sphere' but in the new covenant 'there is *not* curse in the formal sphere.' But this opposition between a positive and negative statement still only describes a relative difference, as if we were comparing white to gray rather than describing a total difference between white and black.

there was the need for compliance so that this would be the meritorious grounds for Israel's continuance in the land" (136). Once again he states: "according to Deuteronomy, 'its [Israel's] right of occupation is therefore contingent on its actions.' ...Of course law-keeping never provided—this side of the fall of Adam into sin—the meritorious grounds of life in the eternal sense. Since the fall of mankind, no mere man could obtain that goal" (119). The kind of merit he denies to mere humans for eternal life, he implicitly affirms to Israel for meriting blessings in the land. Law-keeping did provide the meritorious grounds for Israel's land blessings, as he also states in our first quotation.

At the same time, Estelle claims "the Sinaitic covenant should be called an administration of the covenant of grace" (132, n. 100). But how can merit exist in an essentially gracious covenant? He does not tell us, hoping to leave us with the impression that there is no problem.

In connection with this, Estelle says: "the old Sinaitic covenant by way of contrast is built upon a very fallible hope" (130-31). That is, it is built upon a very fallible hope because it is built upon Israel's merits—"the principle of works" (131). At the same time Estelle claims that "the substance of the covenant of grace is the same in both testaments" (136). But we ask, can the Mosaic covenant be *built upon* a very fallible hope if it is the covenant of grace, which essentially administers eternal hope? How can it be built upon merit and grace? These two things do not seem to compute. He leaves it to the reader to figure it out for himself.

And many will give Estelle the benefit of the doubt and say that he is orthodox because he says the Mosaic Covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace. Imagine again, if you were playing Twenty Questions, and it was already established that the thing in question was warm-blooded. What if your little brother naively asked, "Does it have gills?" and the answer came back, "Yes"? You would either be thinking, this guy's lying or he's describing something that I have never heard of and probably doesn't exist. And when you finally learn that the thing in question is a mountain goat, you know the jig is up. The same is true for Estelle. He says that the Mosaic covenant is built upon a fallible hope grounded in Israel's merits. This description is completely at odds with any classic Reformed formulations of the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace. Either Estelle means something

entirely different by an administration of the covenant of grace or he is hopelessly contradictory and describing a phantom.

Estelle's apparent contradictions are in fact real ones. You cannot have it both ways. Further, consider his claim that "Israel can achieve holiness only by its own efforts. YHWH has given it the means: Israel makes itself holy by obeying YHWH's commandments" (116). Admittedly, this is a direct quotation from Milgrom's commentary on Leviticus. But Estelle quotes it as if he is in hearty agreement with it (using it to prove one of his points), without any critical reflections. However, this claim neglects Lev. 20:8 ("I am the Lord who sanctifies you") by stating "*only* by its own efforts" (emphasis ours). And at best, it propounds a Semi-Pelagian view of grace where God only gives sinners the means that they must activate. This again does not accord with his claim to believe that the Mosaic covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace. If Estelle had not propounded a view of Israel's merits, we might think this a slip of the pen. However, things are not beginning to look good.

Finally, Estelle makes it all too clear that he is not simply saying that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace legally administered, for he rejects this formulation as it is expressed by Geerhardus Vos in his *Biblical Theology*. As Estelle states, "Murray further explains and cites for support Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, at a point where Vos himself could definitely have been clearer and done better in his analysis of the Sinaitic covenant and legal merit" (136, n. 114). Estelle does not tell us the section of the *Biblical Theology* he is referring to; however, Murray refers to the 1954 edition of Vos's work, page 143,<sup>110</sup> where Vos writes:

It is plain, then, that law-keeping did not figure at that juncture as the meritorious ground of life-inheritance. The latter is based on grace alone, no less emphatically than Paul himself places salvation on that ground. But, while this is so, it might still be objected that law-observance, if not the ground for receiving, is yet made the ground for retention or the privileges inherited. Here it cannot, of course, be denied that a real connection exists. But the Judaizers went

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<sup>110</sup> Murray also tells us to look at the whole section, pp. 126-129 in the Banner of Truth edition.

wrong in inferring that the connection must be *meritorious*, that, if Israel keeps the cherished gifts of Jehovah through observance of His law, this must be so, because in strict justice they had earned them. The connection is of a totally different kind. It belongs not to the legal sphere of merit, but to the symbolico-typical sphere of *appropriateness of expression*.

Vos is here making a distinction that was essential to maintaining the view that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace legally administered. That is, this real connection is not in the essential sphere of the covenant (the legal sphere of merit) but is simply in the formal or symbolico-typical sphere (of appropriateness of expression). By rejecting this view, Estelle shows that he is *rejecting* the view that Samuel Bolton ascribes to the majority of the Reformed, that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace legally administered in such a way that “it seems to be nothing else but the repetition of the covenant of works.”<sup>111</sup> That is, “it seems to be”; it only follows the formal *pattern* of the covenant of works. As Francis Turretin states: “clothed as to external dispensation with the *form* of a covenant of works”<sup>112</sup> [emphasis ours]. However, Estelle will not be satisfied with a formal pattern; he requires a real covenant of works, grounded in merit.

This is the rub. In the 17th century there was an intramural debate between the orthodox who believed that the Mosaic covenant was the covenant of grace pure and simple (hereafter PS) and those who believed that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of grace uniquely legally administered (hereafter LA).<sup>113</sup> WSCal

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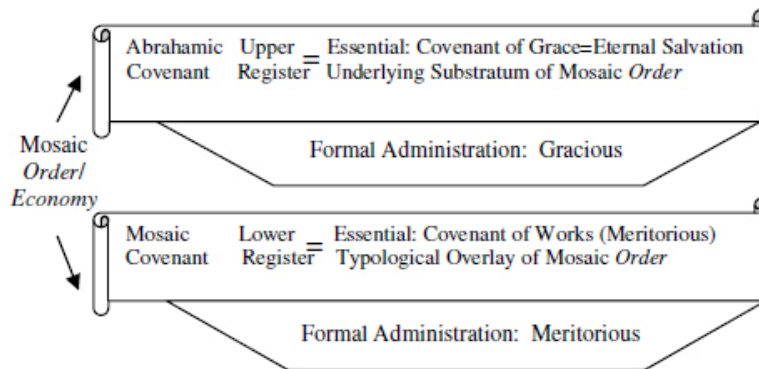
111 The full quote is: “Still others say that there were never more than two covenants made with man, one of works, the other of grace, the first in innocency, the other after the fall. Yet, they add, this covenant of grace was dispensed to the Jews in such a legal manner that *it seems to be nothing else but the repetition of the covenant of works*” [emphasis ours] (Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 90).

112 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:263. Turretin’s full quote is instructive, given here in part. Speaking about the “Sinaitic covenant”, he writes: “It was really the same with the covenant made with Abraham, but different as to accidents and circumstances (to wit, clothed as to external dispensation with the form of a covenant of works through the harsh promulgation of the law; not indeed with that design, so that a covenant of works might again be demanded with the sinner [for this was impossible], but that a daily recollection and reproaching of the violated covenant of works might be made...”

113 Both groups subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith 7. 6 “There are not

often appeals to theologians who believed the latter position in support of their own view. But in the case of Estelle, it is clear that this is a facade. In reality, he and many of his colleagues are propounding an actual works covenant or a principle in the Mosaic covenant that is *merit pure and simple*.

How then are we to view Estelle's claim that the Mosaic covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace? It is quite possible that he holds to the Amyraldian view with a Klinean spin. In this view, the Mosaic covenant is a distinct covenant that does not administer eternal justification directly. However, this Mosaic covenant is administered by the covenant of grace to serve it, to show sinners that they cannot keep it and they must flee to the covenant of grace. On this view, only the Abrahamic covenant administers justification. This appears to be the view of T. David Gordon in this volume, following the view of Meredith G. Kline, as interpreted by Lee Irons. In this view there is a bifurcation between the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants, each being absolutely antithetical to the other. We may diagram this view as follows:



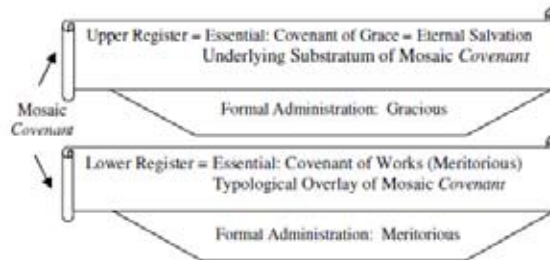
If on the other hand, Estelle means to say that the Mosaic covenant administers eternal justification to the elect (which he never states explicitly), then the Mosaic covenant (on his view) administers two absolutely antithetical principles—that of meritorious works and that of grace. This would seem to fit

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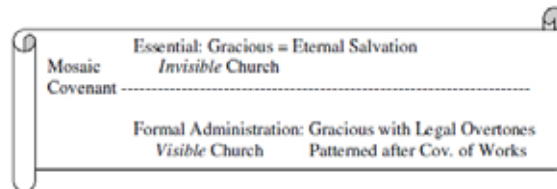
therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.”

with his claim that “Paul clearly saw both a principle of works and a principle of grace operating within the old covenant” (135). In this way, the works are not synthetically dependent upon the grace. But they are completely antithetical to it; the Mosaic covenant administering the upper register and the lower register simultaneously.

Thus, even if the Mosaic covenant administers justification directly, this justification is not the precondition of the works principle. Instead, the works principle of merit has its own first cause and the grace principle has its own first cause. Both are simply administrations of the Mosaic covenant, which (on this account) is simultaneously an irreconcilable combination of an unmixed grace principle and an unmixed merit principle. And if these are two essential principles, they must each have their own administrations. (It is folly to speak of essential grace administering essential merit.) We may diagram this view as follows:



This differs from LA, which we may diagram as follows:



Even if Estelle tries to retreat from his criticism of Vos, there is no escape, that is, no ability to appeal to the view that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace administered according to the pattern of the covenant of works (LA).



For according to LA, to speak as if the formal administrative level is essential merit (in contradistinction from the grace that is of the essence of the Mosaic covenant) is ridiculous. For the formal administration is formal. It is not essential. That is, it cannot have any of its own essential features. It borrows all its essential features from the essence of the Mosaic covenant. Thus it cannot administer essential merit. It cannot be meritorious. The administrative dimension does not possess any essential qualities that it does not receive from the gracious essence of the covenant.

On one traditional view (LA), the Mosaic covenant may have formal similarities to the covenant of works, but these formal similarities cannot themselves be meritorious. Estelle, by discussing merit in the Mosaic covenant has undermined the Reformed tradition and substituted for it a Klinean bifurcation. His rejection of Vos's distinction between the sphere of legal merit and symbolico-typical sphere simply confirms and seals this fact.

In addition, all those who held to LA explicitly taught that it administered justification to the elect. However, not only Estelle, but also none of the authors of this book ever explicitly asserts that the Mosaic covenant administers justification. Some of them do assert that it administers grace, even redeeming grace. However, why do they not develop this grace administered by the Mosaic covenant? It is hard to resist the conclusion that it is at least unimportant to them, especially in a volume supposedly dedicated to both works *and* grace in the Mosaic covenant.

At the same time, we are also left wondering what kind of grace is administered by the old covenant. Roman Catholics believed in the administration of grace, but not justification. Are the authors silent on whether the Mosaic covenant administers justification for a reason? We are left wondering especially in light of the fact that the Reformed have usually insisted on affirming this point explicitly, arguing that the Mosaic covenant administered justification *directly* to the elect.<sup>114</sup> Should our authors respond saying that they intended to include justification since they appealed to the Reformed confessions, we would be pleased. But our solace must await their explicit affirmation on this point and with it the explicit renunciation of Lee Irons's Amyraldian view of the Mosaic

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<sup>114</sup> The Reformed made this affirmation in response to the Amyraldians, who claimed that the Mosaic covenant administered justification to the elect *indirectly*.

covenant, which denies this point, as the Amyraldian view always has.

However, in order to maintain their orthodoxy, more is needed from them still. Perhaps they will claim to have included justification in the benefits of the Mosaic covenant by way of its relationship with redemption in the Reformed confessions. Nonetheless, the understanding of the merit/works principle as propounded by Estelle and other authors in this volume suggests that they believe that the Mosaic covenant contains a works principle that is essentially independent of the redeeming grace administered by it. That is, they believe the Mosaic covenant administered two antithetical principles (works and grace) that were independent of each other in their essential nature.

On the other hand, the orthodox who held to LA approached this issue differently. They held that *forensic justification is the necessary precondition determining the essential nature of the relationship between Israel's obedience and reward*. That is, just as justification is the precondition for the good works of sanctification (making sanctification non-meritorious), so the unique legal dimension of the Mosaic covenant is dependent on forensic justification. The legal dimension of the Mosaic covenant does not exist as an independent principle, independent of the essential grace of the Mosaic covenant. Thus, WSCal must demonstrate that they believe that the relationship between Israel's obedience and reward is dependent in its very nature upon forensic justification. And they must present this in a coherent theological framework, which they have failed to do. But this would also force them to renounce their claim that Israel's obedience was meritorious.

Putting all of Estelle's language together yields the conclusion that he certainly believes that the Mosaic covenant contains a unique meritorious principle that is independent of the grace principle, each with their own distinct first causes. For him, these are two independent principles. Thus, the relationship between Israel's obedience and reward is not dependent on justification; instead for Estelle, Israel's obedience is truly meritorious.

## **Responding to Estelle**

To refute Estelle's claims of Israel's merit, all we need to prove is that Lev. 18:5 arises out of justifying grace and is intimately connected with the

ceremonial law which administers that grace. If this is proved, the life promised in Lev. 18:5 cannot be meritoriously earned. However, to press the point further, we will show that both the actual obedience of Israel and the reward of life are gifts of God's redemptive grace.

That is, we will seek to prove that from beginning to end, Lev. 18:5 is gracious, being dependent on the grace of the coming Messiah. Lev. 18:5 presupposes Israel's union with God (the beginning), Israel's obedience (the middle), and promises life (the goal or end). Each of these aspects is grounded in the eternal justifying grace of Christ to come.

Thus first we will seek to demonstrate that the imperative of Lev. 18:4-5 flows out of the redemptive indicative of God's union with his people. Second, we will demonstrate that the holiness of Israel (doing the commandments) is intimately tied to keeping the ceremonial law and being a participant in the eternal redemption it administers. Third, we will discover that the life God offers in Lev. 18:5 is grounded in the ceremonial law and is a gift of the justifying and sanctifying grace that it administers. As a gift of grace, it is not a benefit given to Israel's merit.

If from beginning to end Lev. 18:5 is dependent on the justifying work of Christ, where is room left for merits? They are but an airy fog of the imagination.

## **The Beginning: Israel's Union with God**

Thus, let us first look at Israel's union with God. Leviticus 18:5 promises life to the one who keeps the law (v. 4). This command and promise flow out of Israel's union with God (v. 2) and his redemptive work (possibly implied in v. 3). Wenham, in his commentary on Leviticus, has proposed the following covenant structure for Lev. 18:

vs. 2 Preamble: "I am the Lord your God"

vs. 3 Historical retrospect: "Egypt, where you have been living"

vs. 4 Basic Stipulation: "Do my laws"

vs. 5 Blessing: “He will enjoy life”

vs. 6-23 Detailed stipulations

vs. 24-30 Curses

What is important for our purposes at this point is to recognize that Israel’s union with God (v. 2) is the precondition for the stipulation (v. 4) and its blessing (v. 5). The nature of this union defines the nature of the stipulation and blessing. If we can demonstrate that this union was a union of eternal salvation, then this salvation is the framework for understanding the relationship between this obedience and blessing. That is, if forensic justification is the necessary precondition for that relationship, then it is not and cannot be essentially meritorious. And Estelle’s argument on this point is vacuous.

Thus, to begin, we will seek to demonstrate that this union with God was a genuine saving union with God, which administered justification and sanctification to God’s people. It was not simply typological union, as argued by many Klineans.<sup>115</sup> Klineans often argue that it was simply a typological union so that they can argue that the law and its benefits were merely typological as well. Also, if this grace of union is merely typological, they conclude that only “typological grace” determines the nature of the obedience/blessing arrangement of the law. For them, this arrangement is not directly grounded in eternal justification, sanctification and glorification. Thus eternal grace does not determine the nature of the relationship between Israel’s obedience and blessing. As a result, this relationship can be meritorious (from the Klinean point of view). However, we hope to demonstrate that Israel’s union with God (Lev. 18:2) administered justification and sanctification to the elect of Israel; that it was essentially the same as the union God now has with his new covenant saints in Christ. And therefore, justifying grace determines the nature of the relationship between Israel’s obedience and blessing, making it non-meritorious.

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<sup>115</sup> Admittedly, Estelle, in this chapter, does not explicitly affirm that the exodus merely administered typological grace. However, this is the most consistent Klinean response to our argument. It is also consistent with the Klinean “works principle” and the bifurcation between the upper and lower registers. Thus, to show how clearly the text is discussing eternal grace and justification, we must rule out alternatives that are placed before us, this being the chief contender among them in this context, namely, that the text is describing mere external typological grace.

To make this point, we will argue that God's justifying union with Abraham is essentially the same union that is administered to Israel in Lev. 18:2. Now let us see the background of this union in the justifying union God had with Abraham. Paul refutes the Judaizing heresy by appealing to Abraham. "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gal. 3:6, alluding to Gen. 15:6).

After Gen. 15:6, God immediately states "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess it" (Gen. 15:7). Abraham's justification is linked to this declaration. And this declaration is very similar to that repeated in the law: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2). Or as we find it with a somewhat different nuance in Lev. 18, "I am the Lord your God...the land of Egypt where you lived" (vv. 2-3). If the statement of Ex. 20:2 simply refers to temporal typological salvation and not eternal salvation, as the Klineans claim, then this should be the case with Gen. 15:7: "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans." However, God's recollection of this deliverance from Ur is a direct response to Abraham's justification and is tied to the eternal salvation it embodies.

Two responses might be forthcoming from the Klinean advocates. First, hypothetically (though unlikely) they might say that God is reminding Abraham of a deliverance he had before he was justified. If someone should make such a claim, it should be noted that Heb. 11:8 states that "by faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance." It claims that Abraham believed when he was called in Gen. 12. Thus, we should reasonably conclude that he was already justified at that time and that Gen 15:6 further affirms the righteousness he had by his continual faith (what John Calvin would call continuous justification, which is by grace alone through faith alone<sup>116</sup>). Nonetheless Paul appeals to Gen. 15:6 because it clearly states that he was justified before the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17; Rom. 4:10-12).

Second, the Klineans might argue that Gen. 15:7 introduces a typological blessing—the land. Thus, it prefaces it with typological grace, not eternal saving grace. Yet this bifurcation is unjustified. One will notice in the text

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116 John Calvin, *Institutes* 3.14.1-21.

a clear synthetic relationship between the eternal and the typological. That is, Abraham is justified by believing a promise that is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, but whose fulfillment sheds its shadow back in the old covenant period with the many children of Israel. So also God promised Abraham an eternal inheritance, which sheds its shadow back and displays itself in the inheritance of Canaan. This seems to be Paul's point in Rom. 4:13 when he says that Abraham was promised to be "heir of the world...through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13).<sup>117</sup> Here Paul displays the true expanded eschatological import of God's promise to Abraham. The land looks beyond itself to its eschatological fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth. Thus, Abraham's faith is intimately tied to the eschatological fulfillment, which he anticipates as an intrusion before the time in its typological manifestations. You cannot bifurcate the promise just as you cannot bifurcate his faith.

Our response to this possible objection brings us back to our main point, that when God says "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess it" (Gen. 15:7), this is intimately tied to Abraham's justification. Our last quotation from Paul makes this clear. Abraham was promised to be "heir of the world... through the righteousness of faith." The righteousness of faith was the necessary precondition of the promise that Abraham would be heir of the world, which felt its effects before the time in the Promised Land. Thus justification is the necessary precondition of the land promise. In this, Paul is intimately tying Abraham's redemptive deliverance from Ur to justification. For Gen. 15:7 makes "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans" the precondition for inheritance. Again, Paul is implicitly connecting Abraham's deliverance from Ur with eternal justification. That deliverance did not simply bring him typological salvation, but

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<sup>117</sup> Paul is primarily appealing to Gen. 15 here. The possible allusion to Gen. 17:4 (where God promises to Abraham that he will be the father of many nations) is only secondary. This appears from the context of Rom. 4:9-13. For Rom. 4:13 states that "the promise to Abraham... that he would be heir of the world was not through law." "Not through law" in the context connects to "not while circumcised" (4:10) and suggests that Paul is primarily referring to a promise made to Abraham before he was circumcised in Gen. 17. The promise in Rom. 4:13 is further connected with the "righteousness of faith" (4:13), bringing us back to Gen. 15:6 (4:9-10). Our acknowledgment that Paul may be alluding to Gen. 17 secondarily by way expansion follows from the recognition that the preceding context moves from Gen 15 (Rom. 4:9-10) to Gen. 17 (Rom. 4:11). However, this should not detract from the fact that "not through the law, but through the righteousness of righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13) primarily brings us back to Gen. 15 and the promise made there.

administered to him eternal salvation, as received through faith.

This presents a strong presupposition that parallel phrases in the Pentateuch such as “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” also describe more than typological salvation. God’s deliverance from Egypt also administered eternal justification to those who trusted in that deliverance by faith. For in trusting in that deliverance, they looked ahead to its fulfillment in Christ.

Leviticus also grounds God’s presence with Israel in his redemptive grace, supremely manifested in the exodus and promised in the covenant made with the patriarchs. Lev. 26:45 states, “I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the Lord.” This passage unequivocally states that God redeemed Israel in the exodus *in order that* he might become their God and Lord (see also Lev. 11:45). “I am the Lord” (26:45) reminds us of Lev. 18:2, “I am the Lord your God.” Lev. 26:45 is telling us that the claim of Lev. 18:2, “I am the Lord your God,” is grounded in God’s redemption of Israel in the exodus.

Thus, we conclude that Lev. 18:2 (“I am the Lord your God”), like Ex 20:2 and Lev. 26:45, describes God’s saving covenant relationship with Israel grounded in eternal justification. This is the case even if “the land of Egypt where you lived” is not similar to “brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 20:2). But if Wenham is correct that it is, then the point is further strengthened. Wenham’s proposed covenant structure for Lev. 18 also suggests that Lev. 18:4-5 presents the basic stipulation and the reward that flows from that covenant relationship. That is, we have here an indicative/imperative relationship. The nature of the relationship described in verse 2 determines the nature of the imperative and reward (18:4-5). And we have seen that this covenant relationship is administered to sinners only insofar as it administers eternal justification to those who trust in its provisions. Therefore, we conclude that *eternal forensic justification is the necessary precondition that determines the nature of the relationship between Israel’s obedience (v. 4) and her reward (v. 5).*<sup>118</sup> As such that relationship cannot be meritorious.

<sup>118</sup> This is also true of eternal adoption and sanctification, which Paul and the writer to the Hebrews respectively consider the necessary means of entering into communion with God after the fall (Gal. 4:5, Heb. 12:14).

## **The Middle: God's Sanctifying Grace and Israel's Holiness**

We have seen that eternal justification (not mere external typological salvation) was the precondition for God's promised blessings in the land. This implies, that as we look at Israel's sanctification, we are not simply dealing with her external typological sanctification, but with eternal sanctification. This is essentially the position of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which teaches that the various ceremonies associated with the land were means of grace, which "were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation" (7:5). They were not simply means of external/typological holiness. But received by faith, they were means of internal/real holiness, whose end is eternal life (Rom. 6:22).

Thus, we hope to show that Israel's holiness was dependent on the sovereign grace of her Lord. God's Spirit, at work in his people, was the first cause and source of all their obedience. And it was also the final cause of their obedience. From beginning to end, God sanctified his people by his grace. And it was this grace at work in them (not their merits) that he rewarded with blessings in the land.

At least two elements in Leviticus, indicate this. First, Leviticus states that it is the Lord who sanctifies his people. Second, Leviticus requires Israel to keep the ceremonial law in order to be holy. This indicates that Israel had to receive the grace (administered through the sacrifices) in order to be holy. Together these two elements indicate that Israel could not be holy on her own. God did not simply provide the parameters for her obedience, as if she then was left to attain holiness by her own efforts. No, he provided sanctifying grace at every point, often administered through the ceremonial law. Her good works could not be meritorious. Israel was neither the first nor the final cause of her obedience. Her obedience was by grace alone.

First, we shall see that Israel's holiness is grounded in God's sanctifying grace. Leviticus 20:8 states plainly, "And you shall keep my statutes and practice them: I am the Lord who sanctifies you." As Dr. Estelle himself notes, chapters 18-20 of Leviticus fit together. Thus, we are not surprised to find that



this text (along with 19:37) reminds us of our primary text (Lev. 18:5), “So you shall keep my statutes and my judgments by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord.” What is significant is that 20:8 implies that behind 18:5 is God’s sanctification of his people, “I am the Lord who sanctifies you.”

Leviticus 22:32-33 grounds this sanctification in God redeeming his people from Egypt. “I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel: I am the Lord who sanctifies you, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord.” Thus, if this redemption from Egypt is merely external and typological (ala Kline) so also should Israel’s sanctification be. However, if (as we have seen) God’s deliverance of his people from Egypt is the means of their eternal salvation (when received by faith), so also their national sanctification is the means of their eternal sanctification (when united by faith). Thus, since Lev. 18:5 (through its connection to Lev. 20:8 and 22:32-33) is grounded in the God’s eternal sanctification of his people (through the exodus), it is grounded in eternal grace. The relationship between the command and blessing that it articulates (18:4-5) cannot be meritorious.

Second, God required Israel to keep the ceremonial law as part of her sanctification. And since she was a sinful people, she kept these ceremonies as a means of eternal salvation (when received in true faith). That is, as the Reformed have always taught, the sacrifices were sacraments of the covenant of grace, i.e., eternal salvation. And many of these sacrifices were newly instituted in the Mosaic covenant. This indicates that the Mosaic covenant administered eternal salvation.

This is significant for Lev. 18:5, for a characteristic theme of Leviticus is that God’s sanctifying of his people is tied to Israel keeping the ceremonial law. While the focus of Lev. 18 is Israel’s obligation to keep the moral law, Lev. 19 and 20 clearly interlace the ceremonial law into this obligation. Obeying the ceremonies becomes part and parcel of keeping God’s “statutes.” This term appears throughout chapters 18-20 (18:26, 19:19, 37, 20:8, 22), making obedience to the ceremonial law part of the requirement of Lev. 18:4-5 (Lev. 19:19). For instance, Lev. 19:19 contains a requirement that most would judge is unique to the land of Israel and many would classify as ceremonial. “You shall keep my statutes...you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together” (see also

vv. 23-27). Therefore, this ceremonial commandment is one of “my statutes . . . by which a man may live if he does them” (Lev. 18:5).

In fact, the repetition of the phrase “my statutes” throughout chapters 18-20 suggests that all of the laws it contains are part of God’s “statutes.” This point is strengthened by the fact that the goal of keeping the statutes is to be holy (20:7-8).<sup>119</sup> Therefore, everything God requires of Israel to be *holy* in Lev. 18-20 are his *statutes*. Two of these statutes are clearly ceremonial, namely Lev. 20:25-26 and Lev. 19:5-8. First, in Lev. 20:25-26, God says: “you are to be holy to me” (v. 26), and “you are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean animal” (v. 25). This clearly refers to the dietary laws of the ceremonial law. Only if a man does these things will he live by them (Lev. 18:5).

Second, Lev. 19:5-8 presents God’s statutes for offering “a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord” (v. 5). In it, he demands: “you shall offer it so that you may be accepted” (v. 5). And if it is not done this way, it will not be “accepted” (v. 7). This is clearly a statute. It is tied to God’s holiness (19:2), and not obeying it results in the same type of punishment as not keeping the other statutes, namely being “cut off” (Lev. 19:8, 18:29). The passage also presents this offering as a means of eternal saving grace. The one who offers it correctly will be “accepted” (v. 5), implying that the one who offers it correctly in faith is acceptable to God (also 1:3-4). He will not “bear his iniquity” as the one who offers it incorrectly (v. 8), making him unacceptable (v. 7, also Lev. 1:3-4). Thus, such offerings are truly called a “peace offerings,” being a means of eternal peace between believing Israel and God. They are sacraments of the covenant of grace, administered through the Mosaic covenant (cf. WCF 7:5). In fact, they administered justification (received by faith) for Paul makes “peace with God” dependent upon justification (Rom. 5:1).

The context of Lev. 18-20 suggests that these are among the statutes Israel must keep to have life (Lev. 18:4-5). Since Lev. 18:4-5 requires Israel to keep the ceremonial law in order to receive life, *that life must be dependent on its ceremonial provisions*. That is, both the obedience of Israel and the life given her is dependent on eternal forgiveness and sanctification. Thus, the *relationship* between Israel’s obedience and its reward (18:4-5) is dependent upon the

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119 “Be holy . . . and you shall keep my statutes.”

eternal justification and sanctification that the ceremonial law administered to the elect in Israel.

If this is the case, how is it that others (who were not elect) participated in these blessings? We can answer this by way of analogy to the new covenant church, which can be distinguished into the *visible* and *invisible church* (ala Augustine). Today God allows unregenerate people to participate in the visible church by their external profession and obedience (Heb. 6:4-9). So also, he allowed the unregenerate in Israel to participate in the blessings of the land by their external profession and obedience. However, in each case, the only reason God allows this is because he has created the invisible church (and their visible gathering together) by eternal justification and sanctification. The unregenerate in their midst do not participate in these blessings by their merits, but only by borrowed capital (if you will), externally borrowing the gracious privileges of the elect for a time. Thus, God's grace is the cause of their participation in those blessings although they do not receive that grace really and internally.

This situation also shows how we can claim that the exodus administered eternal salvation without claiming that all who went through the sea were eternally saved. It only administered eternal salvation to those who received it by faith (very few). But the eternal salvation of these few elect (administered through the exodus) was the basis for the visible exodus to the reprobate. In the same way, Hebrews speaks of the visible deliverance God promised Israel if she would enter the land with Joshua and Caleb (Heb. 3:16-19). "We have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (4:2). In the land promise, the children of Israel had the gospel preached to them. Had they entered the land, conquering it would have been a means of their eternal salvation (received by faith). That is, the author is suggesting that this promise would have both offered *and administered* eternal salvation to those who received it by faith. So also for the exodus, though here visible faith did not function as test in the same way that it did for entrance into the land. However, both were of the same order, and if the Klineans were consistent, they would classify both merely under typological blessings (the upper register). But Hebrews suggests otherwise.

So also, the sanctification of Israel is not merely external typological sanctification (which the Klineans might assert if they were consistent with themselves). The external sanctification of the nation as a whole is dependent upon the genuine sanctification of the elect in Israel, including the forgiveness of their sins<sup>120</sup> administered through the ceremonial law. And this forgiveness and sanctification is the basis for the relationship God established between Israel's obedience and her blessings in Canaan. Thus, *both eternal justification and sanctification are the preconditions determining the nature of the relationship between Israel's obedience and her blessings in the land*. That relationship cannot be meritorious.

## **The End: The Promise of Life**

This section will be divided into two parts. The first will show how the promise of life is dependent on the ceremonial law and the eternal redemption it administers. The second will deal with the renewal of life in the renewal of the covenant and show how this is dependent on the eternal grace administered in the Mosaic covenant.

The overall point of the first part of this section will be that the promise of life in Lev. 18:5 (insofar as it promised the Israelites various degrees of life in the land for their various degrees of imperfect obedience) is dependent on the ceremonial provisions of redemptive grace in the book of Leviticus. This life cannot be separated from the book's distinctions between the clean and the unclean or the holy and the common. And these distinctions are dependent upon God's presence in the land of Israel. God was uniquely present in the land by his redeeming grace. And without his holy presence, without this grace, the land would not have been holy. And it is this holiness which is the basis for the promise of Lev. 18:5. His redemptive grace stands behind his holy presence in the land, and God's holy presence stands behind his promise to Israel that she will have blessings in the land for her imperfect obedience. God promises blessings to Israel's imperfect obedience because justifying grace stands behind those promises. Those commands are grounded in redemptive grace. They are not meritorious.

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120 Together with imputed righteousness

We will begin by observing how the blessing of life is grounded in God's holy presence in the land. This is seen by the blessing's opposition to the curse. The curse is grounded in God's holy presence. And this suggests that the blessing is also grounded in that presence. As we noted earlier, Wenham proposed a covenant structure for Lev. 18 in which verse 5 serves as the blessing that is contrasted with the curses of verses 24-30. And this contrast does not stand or fall with Wenham's suggestion. We believe that a simple reading of the text also suggests the relationship between the statutes of verse 5 and 6-23 followed by a contrast between the blessings of verse 5 with the curses of verses 24-30. Verse 5 states: "keep my statutes", and then verses 6-23 describe those statutes. When the description of these statutes is completed, verse 24 immediately reads "do not defile yourselves by any of these things." Verse 5 provides the positive assertion to obey and verse 24 states it negatively: do not reject the statutes of the Lord. Therefore, it is also natural to recognize another connection between these verses. Verse 5 provides the positive blessing for obedience while verses 24-30 state the negative curses for disobedience.

Having seen the opposition between blessing and curse in the text, we will see that the *connection between defilement and curse* is dependent on God's presence. This will imply that the connection between holy obedience and life is also dependent on God's presence. Chapters 18 and 20 are intimately connected and many of the sins that defile in 18 are judged for their defilement in chapter 20. See for example, homosexuality (Lev. 18:22, 20:13), adultery (Lev. 18:20, 20:10), incest (Lev. 18:17, 20:14; 18:15; 20:12), and the offering of offspring to Molech (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5).

Let us first observe how these sins defile; then we will go on to their judgment. In Lev. 18, the curses of the law (vv. 24-30) involve casting the inhabitants out from the land for defiling the land. Chapter 18 looks upon all the sins that it forbids as defiling, i.e., making unclean, as it states in verse 24, "do not defile yourselves by any of these things". In fact the word "defile" is specifically attached to two of these sins (vv. 20 and 23), but due to verse 24 it cannot be limited to these. The repetition of the word "defile" (vv. 20, 23, 24, 25, 27, 30) is striking and demonstrates that Moses wished to emphasize the defiling character of these sins within the context of the land. These sins defiled Canaanites as well as Israelites within the land.

Now we come more specifically to God's judgment of this defilement, observing how it is grounded in God's special presence in the land. This is emphasized in verse 29. "For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do *so* shall be cut off from among their people." This threat of being "cut off" recurs numerous times in Lev. (7:20, 21, 25, 27; 17:4, 9, 10, 14; 18:29; 19:8; 20:3, 5, 6, 17, 18; 22:3; 23:29). Two passages underscore the fact that being *cut off* in this way is grounded in God's special presence among his people. First, chapter 20, verses 3, 5, and 6 introduce this threat with the words "I will set my face against that man" (or: soul, v. 6; see also 17:10). Elsewhere Moses associates God's face with his glory cloud (14:14), the cloud Nehemiah associates with God's Spirit (Neh. 9:20). Thus Moses states that when God hides his "face from them...our God is not among us" (Deut. 31:17). God's face is associated with his presence. Thus, when he threatens "I will set my face against that man" and cut him off "from among his people" he is grounding this threat in God's special presence with the people.

Further, Lev. 22:3 specifically states "if any man...approaches the holy gifts which the sons of Israel dedicate to the Lord, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off before me, I am the Lord." To be cut off is to be cut off from God's presence where God is enthroned as King, "I am the Lord". It results from profaning God's holy enthroned name (22:2). This accords with our passage (Lev. 18:29-30), which states "cut off from among their people... so as to defile yourselves with them; 'I am the Lord your God'." God's holy presence is among his people for is the Lord their God (v. 30).

Since the *connection between defilement and curse* (Lev. 18:24-30)<sup>121</sup> is dependent on God's presence in the land, so also is the *connection between holy obedience and life* (18:5). Now we go on to observe that this presence is a result of God's redeeming grace to Israel, administered through the ceremonial law. To do this we will remind ourselves of the exodus and look at

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121 Because we are focusing on the connection between defiling and judgment, it is not necessary to answer the question whether the defiling takes place before the tabernacle enters the land (the defilement resulting from an offence against God's omnipresence) or whether technically these sins (which are always an offence to God) take on their specific defiling character after God enters the land by his Spirit (so that the defilement is an offence against God's special presence). Nor are we denying that God judges sin with suffering and death in this life (by means of his omnipresence). (For sinners are truly capable of meriting suffering and death.) Instead we are only noting that this specific form of judgment is an intrusion of eschatological judgment—when God will be fully present by his Spirit.

the ceremonial distinctions in Leviticus between the clean and unclean and the holy and the common.

As we have seen, God's redemption of Israel in the exodus administered eternal redemption to those who laid hold of it in true faith. Here we will observe that it was God's gracious presence that lead Israel through the exodus that also went with them into the land, making the land the sanctuary of the Lord. The pillar of fire and cloud that lead Israel through the exodus and desert was God's Spirit (Neh. 9:20). This same cloud settled on Mt. Sinai and the tabernacle. It was only through blood sacrifice (administering the grace of Christ to come) that God could dwell with his people in the tabernacle. It was this—God's presence in the Ark of the Covenant (administered to them by grace)—that was the source of Israel's victory in warfare and God's judgment of his enemies. Thus, God's presence, given to Israel by eternal redemptive grace in the tabernacle was the source of cursing God's enemies, resulting in the relationship between defilement *and* curse that we have observed above. Thus, it should also be the case that God's redemptive presence was the source of the relationship between obedience and life.

This is further confirmed by the ceremonial distinctions in Leviticus between the clean and the unclean, the holy and the common. The law tells the priests "to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean" (Lev. 10:10). In his commentary on Leviticus, Gordon J. Wenham notes:

Everything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups, the clean and the unclean. Clean things become holy, when they are sanctified. But unclean objects cannot be sanctified. Clean things can be made unclean, if they are polluted. Finally, holy items may be defiled and become common, even polluted, and therefore unclean.<sup>122</sup>

This distinction between clean and unclean is basic to the whole book of Leviticus. As Wenham notes, "Ch. 11 divides the animal kingdom into two groups, those who are clean and those that are unclean. Similarly the following chapters (12-15) detail which illnesses make someone unclean and which leave

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122 Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (1979), 19.

him clean.”<sup>123</sup> Thus the unclean or defiled and the holy are at two opposite extremes. The holy judges the unclean when it comes into contact with it. As Wenham notes, Leviticus unfolds this fact when it states, “If for example an unclean person eats holy food, i.e., part of a sacrificial animal, he will be cut off (7:20-21; 22:3).”<sup>124</sup>

These ceremonial distinctions reveal that it is only by the ceremonial law (and its administration of eternal justification) to the people as a whole that one can live in God’s holy presence in the land. It is because the tabernacle of God’s presence abides in the land that the land itself is his holy habitation. Thus, it makes sense that Israel’s proper relationship to God, as manifested in the tabernacle, grants them life in the land. And it is only by the administration of eternal grace that they are clean and properly related to the tabernacle. Thus it follows that it is only by the administration of eternal grace that they were properly related to the land. Without the administration of God’s eternal grace through the sacrificial system, Israel would not have been offered life in the land by means of her faith and obedience.

Hints of this are seen at various points in Leviticus. For instance, the sacrifices keep people from defiling the sanctuary and so being cut off from the land. When the unclean comes into contact with God’s sanctuary, he defiles it and is cut off in death (Lev. 15:31, also 7:21). It is the ceremonial law that provides the means for the unclean to become clean and so partake in the sacrifices. As an example, an “unclean” leper must stay “outside the camp” (Lev. 13:46). And so he must be cleansed with a sacrifice when his leprosy has disappeared (Lev. 14:2ff). Now clean, he may enter the sanctuary on the appropriate occasions. It is the sacrificial system that allows him to enter the holy presence of God without defiling it.

This accords with Lev. 20:22. As we have seen in the previous section, this passage includes the ceremonial laws of chapters 19-20 (e.g. 20:25) when it states: “You are therefore to keep all my statutes and my ordinances to do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out.” This is parallel to “that the land should not spew you out lest you defile it” (18:28). It was necessary for Israel to keep the ceremonial law so that the land

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123 Ibid.

124 Ibid, 20.



would not spew her out. Why was obedience to the ceremonial law necessary for Israel to remain in the land? It would seem that the answer to this question must lie in its ceremonial nature. In terms of the sacrifices, it would seem that their sacrificial nature allowed Israel to remain in the land.

This point is suggested by the fact that he who improperly offers a sacrifice is also cut off (19:7-8). This further indicates that all Israel would be cut off without proper sacrifice. The sacrifices administer redemptive grace to them so that they may live in the land.<sup>125</sup> This is the implication of Lev. 19:7-8 (found in the context of Lev. 18-20). If the sacrifice of the peace offering is eaten the third day, it will “not be accepted” (v. 7). Thus the person himself will not be accepted (v. 5) and will “bear his iniquity” (v. 8), cutting him off from life in the land (v. 8). In other words, it is only because he offers the sacrifices properly that he does not bear *all* his sins and so be cast out. The administration of eternal justification (resulting in peace) through the sacraments keeps him from bearing all his sins and gives him life in the land. Thus, life in the land is dependent on eternal justification.

Some may object, saying that the only sin that he bears is the sin of offending the offering. If this is the case the text is not talking about all his other sins. And it is not saying that without the offerings he would be cut off. However, Lev. 7:18 discusses the same offence as Lev. 19:7-8. It states that anyone who eats the peace offering on the third day “shall not be accepted, neither shall it be imputed unto him that offereth it: it shall be an abomination, and the soul that eateth of it shall bear his iniquity” (ASV). This text teaches that it is because the sacrifice is not imputed to him that he will bear his iniquity. This must include *sins committed prior to the sin of offending the offering*, even if offending the offering exacerbates his sin (as in 22:15-16).<sup>126</sup> Leviticus 10:17 teaches that this is the purpose of another sacrifice, “to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord.” So likewise, Lev.

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<sup>125</sup> Here the distinction between the visible and invisible church continues to have significance. The elect in Israel truly receive eternal grace by faith through the sacrificial system (as sacraments of the covenant of grace). That blessing partially expresses itself for a time in the blessings of the land. The unregenerate only participate formally in the visible blessings of the church by way of borrowed capital. No eternal saving grace is truly given to them.

<sup>126</sup> This is also true even if failing to offer the offering on that particular occasion would not have cut him off from the land. For the inappropriate presentation of the sacrifice is the showcase of the fact that without proper sacrifice there is no remission (Heb. 9:22)

19:7-8 teaches that without proper atonement, one must bear all his iniquity and so be cut off. The administration of eternal grace through the sacrificial system is the first cause of his life in the land. Without it, he would have nothing but death in God's presence.<sup>127</sup>

Since the sacrifices were a necessary means of grace to live in the land,<sup>128</sup> we may conclude that *the justification, sanctification and foretastes of glorification administered to the elect through these sacrifices were the preconditions determining the nature of the relationship between Israel's obedience and her blessing of life in the land*. This grant of life had its first cause in the eternal redemption of the covenant of grace. It was not meritorious.

## **Conclusion: Answering Estelle's Possible Objections**

We believe the above conclusion must be considered in any proper assessment of the blessing and curse sanctions of Leviticus. Leviticus teaches that Israel's faith and obedience served as the instrumental means of obtaining *blessing as opposed to external curse* in the land. This is also taught by Leviticus's sacrificial system, the various degrees of holiness in the land, and the opposition of various degrees of blessing and curse found in the book. And further, it may be properly affirmed that this function of obtaining blessing as opposed to curse (in relationship to Israel's inheritance) was fulfilled by *Christ as the ground* of eschatological blessings. But this does not imply that Israel's obedience was the ground for obtaining her blessings in the land as Estelle maintains. This function of Israel's obedience was fundamentally gracious from beginning to end. Faith and obedience served only as *instrumental means* (not grounds) of obtaining these land blessings. Even the removal of visible curse in the land was a foretaste of Christ's work to come, being grounded therein. And even here it took place in the formal (visible) relation of the covenant. It did not touch its substantial nature. But in theological usage, a "ground" is a

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<sup>127</sup> Even those who cannot enter the sanctuary (such as unclean lepers and the maimed) must have *all* their sins atoned for once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:16, 21, 30, 34).

<sup>128</sup> For more material related to this conclusion see Scott F. Sanborn, "The Book of Hebrews: The Unique Legal Aspect of the Mosaic Covenant Grounded in the Covenant of Grace." *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 22/1 (May 2007), 28-36.

formal and essential cause of something. Therefore, Israel's obedience could not be the *ground* of obtaining her blessings in the land.

This is true of every inadequacy of the Mosaic covenant's formal administration. Every one of its inadequacies is fulfilled by the work of Christ. But this does not make Israel's obedience the grounds of her blessings in the land any more than it makes the sacrifices the grounds of averting God's wrath from the people.

Estelle's claim that Israel's works were the meritorious grounds of her land blessings is no more substantiated by Jeremiah's prophesy of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31). But this is what Estelle tries to argue when he states:

The new covenant, however, is going to be unlike the old covenant with respect to breaking. The old covenant was a breakable covenant, it was made obsolete; indeed, the promises in the Abrahamic covenant entailed that the old covenant would pass away; it was planned obsolescence. The reader is obliged to say that a works principle in the old covenant was operative in some sense because the text clearly says that it was a fracturable covenant, "not like the one *they broke*" (130).

The footnote at this point then reads, "from this passage alone it seems evident that the Scriptures considered the works principle operating realistically, and not just hypothetically." Yet we beg to differ with Estelle. Here we will suggest how one of the two orthodox options (i.e., that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace legally administered, LA) can do justice to this text. And since it also does justice to our above analysis of Lev. 18:5 we believe it trumps Estelle's advocacy of a "works principle" that is in fundamental opposition to the grace principle of the Mosaic covenant.

How did Israel break the Mosaic covenant in such a way that the new covenant (by contrast) cannot be broken? To show how this makes sense within the above orthodox view (as opposed to Estelle's view) we will first look at how the reprobate can break both the old and new administrations of the covenant of grace. Under both the old and new covenants, the reprobate may break their *formal* (external and visible) relation to the church and thus to God.

As a result, they are really judged more severely for doing so. Further, when Jeremiah states: “they broke my covenant” he explains the nature of this break by saying, “though I was a husband to them.” This implies that this covenant was a bond. Since many in Israel at the time of the exile were reprobate, how could they break a bond with God? The reprobate never had an *essential* bond to God as their God. So they could never break an *essential* bond. Therefore, the text must be implying that they broke their *formal* (external) bond with God. They broke the covenant in terms of its formal relation.

If breaking the formal relation to the covenant (and not its essential nature) is sufficient to describe the way in which the reprobate broke the covenant, then why is it not sufficient to describe the way in which the elect broke the covenant? For Jeremiah includes all Israel under the category of those who broke the covenant, even the elect. We would argue that this formal breaking is sufficient to describe the way in which the elect broke the covenant. They did not break their *essential* relation to the Mosaic covenant because that was not possible. The essential nature of the Mosaic covenant administered unconditional promises of grace to the elect. The elect could not break this bond. However, the visible church at that time was national in character. If the nation as a whole apostatized, then the elect were externally cast into exile with them. Thus, in terms of their formal (external) relation to the covenant, they were cut off from God’s special presence in the land and tabernacle. Insofar as their visible covenant bond tied them to God in this way, they were also cut off.<sup>129</sup>

That is why Jeremiah describes the new covenant as one that cannot be broken. He is not saying the reprobate cannot be broken off from it. Instead, he implies that the elect cannot be broken off from their formal relation to it. They cannot be separated from anything that is their inheritance in God.<sup>130</sup> In

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129 For a diagram that may be helpful for this discussion, see Scott F. Sanborn, “Paul and Semi-Eschatological Justification: With a critique of N.T. Wright.” *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 24/2 (September 2009), 23. Note that a typographical error left out “instrumental means: faith alone” in the larger circle representing the formal relation of the new covenant.

130 It is true that the elect may be formally broken off from the new covenant for a time as a result of church discipline. However, they will not die in the state of this formal separation since God will bring them to repentance before their death. Further, during the exile, even those not deserving church discipline for their personal sins were separated from something that was their inheritance in God, namely their inheritance in the land. This does not take place for the

this respect, they are unlike the saints of old who were separated from their inheritance in the land when they formally (externally) bore the curses of the law with the rest of the people in exile. In this sense, they partook in the formal breaking of the bond.

Once again, with respect to the elect in Israel, their essential covenant relation to God was still in tact during the exile. And even their formal relation to its external administration was not entirely obliterated (Dan. 1:8). However, insofar as they were broken off from the full privileges of this formal relation, they were considered to have broken the covenant with the rest of the people. None of this suggests that the essential bond of the covenant was broken.

The continuance of this essential bond is taught in Lev. 26:44-45: “Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I abhor them as to destroy them, breaking my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God, I am the Lord.” Here God says he will not break his covenant with them, even in exile. Then he goes on to describe that covenant, the one given to the exodus generation, i.e., the Mosaic covenant. Thus, God does not break the essential nature of his covenant with the elect. And as a result of this he can remember that covenant, using it as the ground of returning Israel to the land and thereby renewing its formal administration. In this way, an orthodox view, namely LA, can do justice to both Jeremiah and Leviticus.

Leviticus 26 clearly teaches that God does not break his covenant with his people in exile. As a result, the breaking that Jeremiah records does not imply the breaking of any essential bond, including an essential works principle. Estelle is wrong to imply that since the covenant could be broken this implies a “works principle,” one that is presumably compatible with his articulation of it in this chapter. He may claim *not* to be describing the nature of this works principle, just that it exists (130, n. 93). However, it must have some definition or it has no meaning. And he otherwise describes it in such a way that only accords with the view that it is an independent first principle. That is, it is in absolute antithesis to the principle of grace administered in that same Mosaic covenant.

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saints in the new.

When Estelle says in this context that the old covenant goes down in judgment as a “*modus operandi*” (130), one may be tempted to give Estelle the benefit of the doubt, saying that he is only discussing the Mosaic covenant’s administration in contrast to its essence. However, once again he is throwing out claims like one does in the game Twenty Questions. He does not explain how this fits with his other unorthodox claim that the “works principle” is the meritorious grounds of Israel’s blessings.

Further, to support his interpretation of Jeremiah’s prophecy, he refers the reader to T. David Gordon’s chapter in this book (130, n. 92). As an editor of this book, he also accepted Gordon’s article, presumably believing that its formulation of a works principle is orthodox. However, Gordon teaches that the Mosaic covenant is essentially different from the new covenant. As he says: “the Sinai covenant...was a different covenant, different in kind... non-justifying because it was characterized by works” (251). Speaking about the old and new covenants (Gal. 4:24), Gordon writes: “if Paul contrasts these two in as many ways as he does, how can we continue to resist the notion that some covenants have at least some substantial differences in kind” (253). To say that the old and new covenants have “some substantial differences in kind” is (by the canons of traditional philosophical and theological language) to say that they are *substantially different*. Gordon’s claim that they differ in *kind* is clearly at odds with what Estelle should know to be the orthodox view from John Ball, as quoted in Ferry’s chapter: “Most divines hold the old and new Covenants to be one in substance and kind, to differ only in degrees” (83). This further raises the question whether Estelle (like Gordon) is adopting one of the other formulations in Ferry’s chapter, not the orthodox position.<sup>131</sup>

And Estelle at least tips his hat to Gordon’s view, accepting it in the book, and referring to it in his argument about Jeremiah’s prophecy. His view cannot be far behind Gordon’s, giving further weight to the evidence that he believed (as we sought to demonstrate at the beginning of this analysis) that the Mosaic covenant contained a works principle that was fundamentally in opposition to its own grace principle. On this view, both of them are independent prin-

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131 Cf. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:267. “Although the Sinaitic and the legal covenants are opposed in Jer. 31 to the new covenant, it is not necessary that this opposition should be as to essence, but it can be as to accidents or diversity of economy (as a man is opposed to himself standing or sitting)... These promises are not to be understood absolutely and simply, but relatively and comparatively with regard to greater clearness and efficacy.”

principles<sup>132</sup> or first causes.<sup>133</sup>

Therefore, we conclude, in light of our study of Lev. 18:5, that *eternal justification, sanctification, and foretastes of glorification administered through the Mosaic covenant determine the nature of the relationship between Israel's obedience and reward*. That relationship was not meritorious as Estelle claims. And Jeremiah's prophecy is best interpreted in light of this conclusion.

## Introduction to Our Analysis of T. David Gordon

Here we present a brief summary of the point of view from which we will critique Gordon's exegetical arguments. This point of view is essentially the Legally Administered (LA) view expanded to include the semi-eschatological insights of Geerhardus Vos and others. For the discussion that follows, the reader may wish to consult the diagram on p. 137.

The following two quotes from Francis Turretin are representative of one who took the LA position:

There is not the same opposition throughout between the Old and New Testaments as there is between the law and the gospel. The opposition of the law and the gospel (insofar as they are taken properly and strictly for the covenant of works and of grace and are considered in their absolute being) is contrary. They are opposed as the letter killing and the Spirit quickening; as Hagar gendering to bondage

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<sup>132</sup> Note that the term "works principle" suggests this. For a "principle" is a universal rule or quality that is the same wherever it is found. Thus, if both the Covenant of Works and the Mosaic covenant contained "the works principle," it should follow that this works "principle" was the same in both covenants, being equally meritorious in both.

<sup>133</sup> When we say "first cause" we are not denying that Estelle (with other Klineans) may affirm that God was the first cause of this arrangement, insofar as he created human beings in his image and presented Israel with this arrangement. However, we are claiming that Estelle's language suggests that human beings and their merits are the first cause of *executing* this arrangement. And if Estelle were to peer further into the implications of his position he would find that it is inconsistent with the position that God was the first cause of this arrangement with Israel. For if the execution of this arrangement finds its first cause in human merits, then human merits per se after the fall must be inherently worthy of temporal blessings (even without an added Mosaic arrangement).

and Sarah gendering to freedom, although the law more broadly taken and in its relative being is subordinated to the gospel. But the opposition of the Old and New Testaments broadly viewed is relative, inasmuch as the Old contained the shadows of things to come (Heb. 10.1) and the New the very image (*ten eikona*).<sup>134</sup>

We agree with Turretin that we must carefully distinguish the nature of those things that Paul contrasts absolutely and those things that he only contrasts relatively. In addition to this, we are suggesting that Paul often makes an absolute and relative contrast *in the same words*. That is, in one verse (using the same words) he is often describing the difference between the new covenant and the formal administration of the Mosaic covenant as well as the difference between the new covenant and the covenant of works with Adam (i.e., the law in abstraction from the Mosaic covenant). However, Paul clearly recognizes the differences between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of works with Adam: both are not meritorious, only the Adamic covenant. That is, Paul sees through the formal curse upon Israel and peers through this gray glass to the dark black curse upon the whole world (together with the covenant of works that lies behind it).<sup>135</sup> What is ascribed to the dark black world is not to be materially ascribed to the gray glass. They are only *formally* similar.<sup>136</sup> They are not *materially* similar. Thus they cannot be essentially the same, as WSCal claims when it ascribes merit<sup>137</sup> to the Mosaic covenant.

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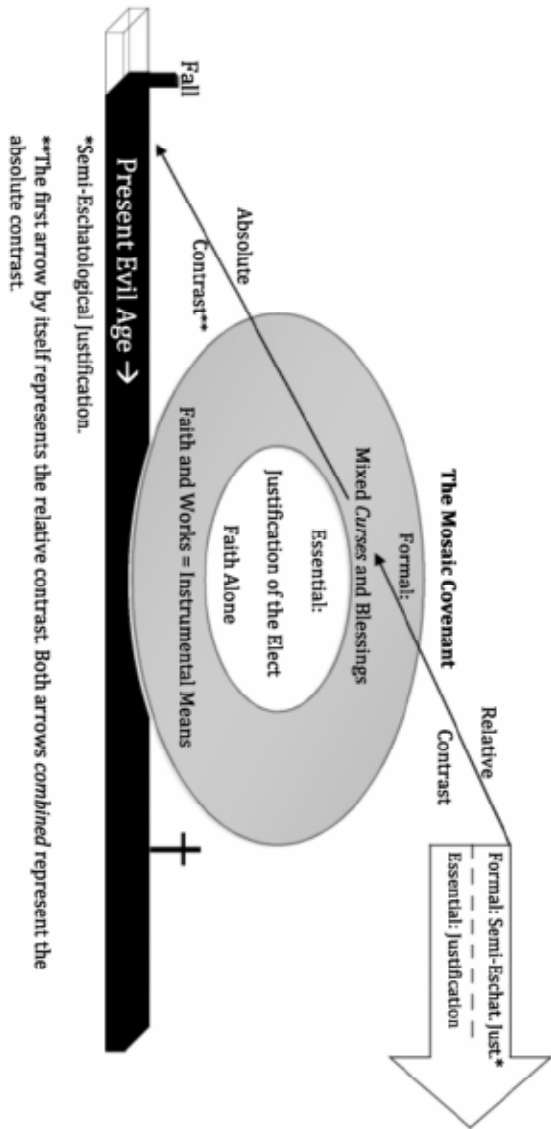
134 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:236-237.

135 As with some of the other points in the previous section on Estelle, we do not intend to suggest that each of these exegetical suggestions be made a point of orthodoxy. In the last section we intended to show that any number of exegetical points (all of which do not have to be embraced to embrace orthodoxy) are sufficient to refute the unorthodox claims of Estelle. Here we also hope to show (as we did in some measure with Estelle) that one of the orthodox alternatives can present a strong argument against Gordon's unorthodox exegetical conclusions. At the same time, it may be that our claim that both the absolute and relative contrasts occur *in the same words* (while suggested by previous theological formulations), is a somewhat unique development.

136 This accords with the orthodox view that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of grace legally administered according to the pattern of the covenant of works (LA). As such it only affirms a *formal pattern* of similarity between the Adamic covenant of works and the formal administration of the Mosaic covenant, as a covenant of grace.

137 (which lies behind the dark black world in the Adamic covenant)





\*Semi-Eschatological Justification.

\*\*The first arrow by itself represents the relative contrast. Both arrows combined represent the absolute contrast.

For example, since Paul must have recognized the grace of redemption in Lev. 18:5, it follows that when he said “the law is not of faith” (insofar as he was contrasting the actual administration of the old covenant to Israel with the new covenant), he was not saying the law is completely devoid of faith in God’s redemptive promises, as WSCal implies. To interpret Paul this way would put him at odds with Leviticus. Instead, we suggest that he means to contrast the greater faith of the new age to the beggarly faith of the old. This contrast is found later in Gal. 3 when Paul states: “when faith came.” Does this mean that faith did not exist at all before Christ’s coming? Certainly not. Instead, by making this statement, Paul simply highlights the greater faith and grace that has come in the new covenant. However, when Paul looks through the formal curse on regenerate Israel *to the actual curse on the unregenerate whole world*, his words should be taken in their full antithetical force, the law is not of faith in God’s *redemptive* promises in any sense. For here the law is tied, not to the Mosaic covenant, but to the covenant of works with Adam.<sup>138</sup>

### **Gal. 3: Exegesis and Analysis of T. David Gordon**

T. David Gordon does not believe that the Mosaic covenant administered justification. This is clear in one of the subheadings of his chapter: “Fourth Difference: The Abrahamic Covenant Justifies; the Sinai Covenant Does Not” (248). In this section he states: “The law is not characterized by justifying faith, but rather by works. Since the Sinai covenant requires *doing*, and is not characterized by faith, it justifies no sinners” (ibid.). During the period of the law “insofar as those Israelites were justified, it was because of the justification by faith that was already theirs through the Abrahamic covenant-administration; but the Sinai covenant, in terms of its own distinctive administration, did not justify anyone” (ibid.).

To prove this, he quotes Gal. 3:11: “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law.” What is characteristic of Gordon’s argument is that he takes this text (assumes that it only describes an absolute contrast between the law and the gospel) and then applies another card of New Testament scholarship to it, namely that “Paul uses the term *nomos* most often and most basically of

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<sup>138</sup> For more on this approach see Scott F. Sanborn, “Paul and the Law.” *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 24/2 (September 2002), esp. 37-38.

the Mosaic law” (249, here quoting Douglas Moo). For Gordon this means that “law” refers almost exclusively to the “Sinai covenant” (249). Interestingly, many New Testament scholars apply this Joker of New Testament scholarship (the law refers to the old covenant) and use it with the Ace of Hearts (the *relative* contrast between the old and the new). Thus, they believe that Paul is describing a relative contrast between the old and the new exclusively (the New Perspective). On the other hand, Gordon takes this Joker and applies it to the Ace of Clubs (the *absolute* contrast between the old and new).

Both fail to recognize that there is another Joker in the pack, the one that the Reformed have recognized from the beginning—that Paul can allude to the law in abstraction from its gracious administration under the Mosaic covenant. Assuming Jokers have a suite in this pack, it is this latter Joker that goes with the Ace of Clubs. That is, insofar as Paul is making an absolute contrast between the law and the Abrahamic covenant, he is abstracting the law from its gracious administration under the Mosaic covenant. And insofar as he is making a relative contrast between the old and the new, the other Joker applies—that the law alludes to the gracious administration of the Mosaic covenant. Paul’s contrast between the old and new administrations of the covenant of grace is only a relative one.

In seeing the allusion to the Mosaic covenant in the term “law,” many New Testament scholars have failed to recognize that it has another allusion—to the law in abstraction from the Mosaic covenant. Thus, they fail to acknowledge that Paul simultaneously discusses both an absolute and a relative contrast between the law and the gospel. (Their denial of the absolute contrast has led to the New Perspective.) Ironically, Gordon takes the first half of this equation (that law refers exclusively to Mosaic covenant) and applies this to the absolute contrast, creating a form of crypto-Lutheranism.

How can this be answered? First, we need not argue with the authors of this book that Paul makes an absolute contrast between the law and the gospel, for they acknowledge this. Thus, we must simply show that Paul simultaneously makes a relative contrast between the law and the new covenant. If he has two contrasts in view simultaneously, then we need two Jokers in our pack—one to apply to the Ace of Clubs (the absolute contrast) and another to apply to the Ace of Hearts (the relative contrast). We need the Joker of the law

in abstraction from the Mosaic covenant as well as the other Joker, the law in relationship to it. If Paul is making both a relative contrast and an absolute contrast, it is absurd to have only one Joker in the pack. Let's say for the sake of argument that his only Joker was the idea that the law refers to the Mosaic covenant. It would be absurd for Paul to apply this Joker to both of his aces. For instance, what if Paul were claiming that the Abrahamic covenant is absolutely contrary to the Mosaic covenant (thereby denying that it administers justification)? Then at the same time, he was claiming that the new covenant is only relatively contrasted to the Mosaic covenant (thereby implying that it does administer justification). This would be absurd, a straightforward contradiction. Therefore, if Paul is simultaneously playing an Ace of Hearts and an Ace of Clubs, he must have two Jokers. If he is simultaneously making a relative and an absolute contrast, then he must have two ways of looking at the law, one that applies to each. Without such, he would be involved in hopeless contradictions. Thus, to prove that Paul is also looking at the law in abstraction from its gracious relation under the Mosaic covenant (when he is making an absolute contrast), all we have to prove is that he is simultaneously making a relative contrast.

Now we turn to the proof for the relative contrast. We know from our previous study of Lev. 18:5 that its commands and promise are dependent upon redeeming grace. Since Lev. 18:5 and its gracious nature are administrations of the Mosaic covenant, that covenant was a covenant of redeeming grace (according to Moses). As such, that covenant directly administered justification. Was Paul ignorant of this background? Certainly not. As one schooled in the law, Paul recognized this gracious background to Lev. 18:5. Thus, if he is contrasting Lev. 18:5 in its original context to the new covenant (as an administration of grace), he is only making a relative contrast between two covenants that administer the same redeeming grace of God (contra Gordon). Otherwise, Paul would have failed to recognize that the original context of Lev. 18:5 ties it to redeeming grace and he would be a poor interpreter of Scripture, not to mention an uninspired one.

This alone should be enough to refute Gordon's interpretation of Gal. 3:11-12. However, we go on to prove that Paul also has a relative contrast in mind, driving the nail deeper into Gordon's argument.

Of key importance to Paul's argument in Gal. 3 is his quotation in 3:8: "All the nations shall be blessed in you." There are three crucial elements in this quotation. First, it includes the Gentiles, not simply those who are circumcised and thus of the law. Second, it looks to the future ("shall be blessed"), that is, it looks to the semi-eschatological period. And of great importance, third, they shall be blessed in Abraham ("in you"), which promise is ultimately made to Christ (3:16, 19).

The first two go together and clearly express the future orientation of this promise, promising something new in the semi-eschatological age. In other words, Paul is telling us that something new arrives in this semi-eschatological period in relationship to justification, which we may call semi-eschatological justification.<sup>139</sup> Here we focus on two elements of our text that flesh this out: first, the eschatological promise of Hab. 2:4 and second, the connection between Christ's death and the eschatological gift of the Spirit in Gal. 3:13-14.

## 1. Eschatological Promise of Hab. 2:4

Habakkuk 2:4 states that "the just shall live by faith." While Paul reminds us that Abraham was justified by faith, he also speaks as if faith and justification have come in a new way now that Christ has actually performed his work in redemptive history. "But before faith came" (Gal. 3:23) and "now that faith has come" (Gal. 3:25) suggest that faith has come at a particular historical point. And that historical point is with the arrival of Christ after the period of the law. The law became our tutor (historically) "to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith" (3:24), as if justification comes in a new way with the coming of Christ. When Paul uses this language, he cannot be denying what he said before, that Abraham was justified by faith. Nor can he be denying that those under the law possessed faith. Thus, he must be speaking of a relative

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<sup>139</sup> Cf. Scott F. Sanborn, "Paul and Semi-Eschatological Justification: With a critique of N.T. Wright." *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 24/2 (September 2009), 13-39. This articulation of semi-eschatological justification affirms Westminster Confession of Faith 11.6: "The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament." In "all these respects" (all the respects discussed in WCF 11.1-5) the justification of old covenant saints was one and the same as new covenant saints. This leaves open the possibility that in another respect, they differ, as we affirm.

newness in redemptive history and not of an absolute newness. We suggest that this contrast focuses on the relative contrast between the period of the law (in which the external curses of the law were upon Israel in her relationship to the land) and this semi-eschatological age (in which we are not cursed in relationship to anything that is our inheritance).

This relative newness of semi-eschatological justification accords with Habakkuk's prophecy. Habakkuk 2:4 is in the context of his prophetic word concerning the future. In the preceding verse (3), Habakkuk writes, "for the vision is yet for the appointed time, it hastens toward the goal, and it will not fail." According to Francis Watson, who analyzes Qumran literature and other sources, this eschatological orientation of Hab. 2:3 is a common interpretation of the passage. The runner who is to run (2:2) with the vision is to do so with an eye to the eschatological future.<sup>140</sup>

What is the backdrop to this eschatological projection? Paul quotes Hab. 2:4 in Gal. 3:11: "Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, 'the righteous man shall live by faith.'" However, Paul quotes only the second half of Hab. 2:4. The entire verse reads: "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith." The proud ones Habakkuk speaks of here are those who are wealthy even though they disregard the law. "Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted" (Hab. 1:4). If justice were upheld in the land, the wicked would be cursed and have nothing (as was promised in Deuteronomy). In Habakkuk's time, however, justice had not arrived.

This situation is finally reversed in Hab. 3:17-18: "though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines... Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." Here the prophet looks to the future, in which God will vindicate his people, to a period in which the blessings of Canaan, administered by the law (i.e., fruitful harvests, etc.) will be surpassed. Here he finds a future age in which the Deuteronomic promises will be transcended in their fulfillment. This will be an age in which God's people will be fully vindicated even without experiencing the blessings of the land. In the future, God's people will be called (even more supremely than before)

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140 Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 114.

to live by faith and not by sight. This fits with the future orientation of Hab. 2:3-4,<sup>141</sup> suggesting that in the future God's people will be justified in a new way, no longer considering fruitless fields to necessarily be a curse to them. Thus, Habakkuk is looking forward to a time of eschatological justification. Habakkuk may have suggested that even in his own time, the just should live by faith in the midst of their oppression, and so lay hold of the future embodied in his prophesy (2:4). At the same time, the future orientation of Habakkuk's prophecy suggests that the justification promised only arrives in fullness in the eschatological future.

This fits with Paul's quotation in which he declares that this administration of eschatological justification was not administered by the law (Gal. 3:11). It only comes in its fullness with the eschatological age, now semi-realized. The point of what we have been saying is that this newness is a relative newness. In it, Paul describes a relative newness of the administration of justification (now in terms of semi-eschatological justification). You cannot get away from this relative newness by saying that justification was *only* administered by the Abrahamic covenant under the Old Testament period (Gordon). If you do then you have to acknowledge that Paul is making a relative contrast between semi-eschatological justification and justification as administered through the Abrahamic covenant. If you do not acknowledge this then you cannot acknowledge that there is any newness in semi-eschatological justification. But Habakkuk and Paul (clearly Gal. 3:23-25) claim that there is. Claiming that only the Abrahamic covenant administered justification, does not get you out of this quandary. Thus, there is no reason to deny that Paul believed that the Mosaic covenant administered justification, as it was then administered under the period of the law.

On the contrary, our analysis of Lev. 18:5 suggests that there is every reason to acknowledge that Paul believed that the Mosaic covenant admin-

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<sup>141</sup> Francis Watson (*Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 161) also argues more generally for an eschatological orientation of *pistis*, implying that Hab. 2:4 looks toward Hab. 3:17-19. "*emunah* or *pistis* refers to the human response to the divine promise of definitive, eschatological saving action... The prophet likewise seeks to evoke a response in which the entire life of his reader is reoriented towards the future divine saving action of which he writes. His book begins with a despairing question about salvation: "YHWH, how long ... shall I cry to you, "Violence!", and you will not save?" (Hab. 1:3). It concludes with a theophany which tells how God "went forth for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed ones" (3:13), so that YHWH can be simply identified as "the God of my salvation" (3:18).

istered forensic justification. And with this acknowledgement, we can still make sense of Paul's claim that Christ now administers semi-eschatological justification in a new way.

## **2. Eschatological Gift of the Spirit**

Second, Gal. 3:13-14 connects the historical accomplishment of Christ's redemption with the giving of the eschatological gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles. Geerhardus Vos's famous essay, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit," has forcefully argued that after Christ's resurrection, he bestowed the Spirit on his church in greater fullness—a fullness that accords with the eschatological age. As a result, the giving of the Spirit is the fulfillment of the eschatological promises of the Old Testament. Even for those who are not familiar with this argument, a cursory glance at Gal. 3:13-14 should prove that Christ's death resulted in the giving of the Spirit to the Gentiles. Clearly this effect is only felt after its cause has been accomplished. That is, before Christ himself actually died in history, unless someone was circumcised, they could not participate in the full blessings of the old covenant. It was only after Christ's death that the blessing of the Spirit came to uncircumcised Gentiles (at Cornelius's house, Acts 10).

This resulted from Christ bearing the curse of the law. Thus, the curse of the law must have functioned as a barrier that kept the Gentiles from entering into the full rights of inheritance with the Jews. Paul discusses this barrier of the curse of the law that separated Jew from Gentile in Eph. 2:13-18. By taking away this curse historically, Christ made the way for the Gentiles to come in. This alone is sufficient to prove our point that in this text, Paul discusses a relative newness, a relative contrast between the old administration of grace and that of the new. And this is reinforced by the fact that he speaks of the eschatological gift of the Spirit, a gift of relatively greater blessing in the new age. This reference to the eschatological gift of the Spirit (as the true inheritance) reminds us of the prophetic promises and loosely connects this fulfillment with the prophetic promises of Habakkuk (insofar as both have an eschatological orientation).

The administration of the eschatological gift of the Spirit awaits the his-



torical accomplishment of Christ's work. And thus, the eschatological gift of justification awaits Christ's work as well. Both represent the greater outpouring of blessing that takes place in the semi-eschatological age. Thus, both exceed in excellence the administration of the Spirit and justification given through the Mosaic covenant.

### 3. In Christ Jesus

Now, let us look at what we are calling the third element of Gal. 3:8, that "all nations will be blessed *in you*" (emphasis ours). We will argue that this is central to Paul's argument that we are justified *in Christ*, for unto him is this promise made (Gal. 3:16, 19). This quotation (together with Paul's quotation of Gen. 15:6 in Gal. 3:6) shows us what Paul had in mind when he refers to the promise throughout Gal. 3 (vv. 14, 17, 18, 19, 22, 29). It is the promise made to Abraham and to his seed Christ (Gal. 3:16, 19). This promise is not made to the many physical descendants of Abraham (3:16), being conditioned upon their obedience to the law (3:17). Instead, it is made to Christ (Gal. 3:16, 19). He redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (3:16) in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles. Thus, believers have faith in Christ Jesus (3:26). Therefore, if you belong to Christ you are Abraham's offspring (as he is father of those who believe, 3:9) and you are heirs according to the promise. Only by being in Christ is one a true recipient of the promises given in Gen. 15 and 17.

Paul relates this "in Christ" relationship to our previous discussion of the new administration of semi-eschatological justification. For he states that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). In the old covenant, the distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female existed in terms of inheritance rights in the land. But now in the new covenant age, these distinctions have been done away with "for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This later phrase suggests that the church now has greater union with Christ in the new covenant than it did under the old—for our union with Christ now implies that we have a greater union with one another in him (3:28). As a result of our union with him, there are no distinctions among us in terms of inheritance rights. If the Mosaic covenant administered the same

degree of union with Christ as the new then there would have been no distinction among the Jews in terms of inheritance rights at that time, but this was not the case. Thus, the fulfillment of the promises given to Christ, that in him all nations would be blessed, suggests that now under the new covenant the blessing of being “in Christ” brings greater union blessings with Christ than it did under the old covenant. This is an aspect of what was promised to Christ himself. Thus, the relative contrast between the administration of grace between the old and the new is part of Paul’s “in Christ” argument.

This is also seen when we recognize the reason why there is no more distinction between Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free in terms of inheritance rights. This results from semi-eschatological justification, a *relatively* greater administration of grace under the new. Now that Christ has born the curse of the law, in terms of our relationship to everything that is our inheritance in him, there is no longer any distinction among the people of God in terms of inheritance rights. This is one conclusion of Paul’s “in Christ” argument. He first connects Christ’s bearing of the curse to his “in Christ” argument when he says: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law... in order that *in* Christ Jesus” (3:13-14, emphasis ours). Christ’s bearing of the curse of the law brings something new in redemptive history—the semi-eschatological gift of the Spirit (3:14). This semi-eschatological inheritance is not administered by the law (3:18), relatively speaking, but only through the administration of semi-eschatological justification. Therefore, only under this greater age is there no distinction among the people of God in terms of inheritance rights, implying that they are more equal than before as inheriting sons of Abraham (3:28-29).

The point is that Paul (insofar as he is making a relative contrast between the administration of the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant) is not denying that the Mosaic covenant administered justification insofar as all God’s people have been justified by grace alone through faith alone from Adam and Abel onward. Instead, he is simply stating that the Mosaic covenant did not administer semi-eschatological justification. The Mosaic covenant in its visible administration still administered external curses upon the nation of Israel. Christ has eliminated those curses in the new covenant. But both covenants administer justifying grace to believing sinners under their respective administrations.

By showing that Paul is arguing for a relative contrast between two administrations of redemptive grace, we have shown that this relative card must take the Joker that associates the law with the Mosaic covenant. It cannot take the other Joker, which abstracts the law from the gracious administration of the Mosaic covenant. For this Joker would not result in a relative contrast between two administrations of grace. Oh well, since the Joker that associates the law with the Mosaic covenant is taken for the relative contrast, there is only one Joker left for the absolute contrast—the Joker that abstracts the law from the Mosaic covenant. Does this mean that Gordon loses the game? We're afraid so. His cards do not match. You cannot put together the absolute contrast with the Joker that says the law is associated with the Mosaic covenant. It's just not a winning hand.

### **The God-Man Alone Can Keep the Whole Law**

Following the view that the “works principle” has its independent first cause in the merits of mere humans, this book asserts that the Mosaic covenant simply recapitulated the motif of Adam in the Garden of Eden when it envisioned Israel in the land. However, we will suggest that this approach simply brings us backward in the history of redemption. If the motif is purely Adamic, in *reality* (not simply formally) it brings us back to the Garden, to a time when Adam might have merited something before God. On the contrary, we should expect that a true redemptive-historical perspective would bring us forward in the history of redemption, that what is found in the law would be grounded in the promise of the seed of the woman who will bring redemption to his people as the second Adam. As a result, the law given at Mt. Sinai goes beyond the law given to Adam in the Garden, and it includes the ceremonial provisions that the second Adam must keep (kept by him in their full eschatological significance). Thus, also Christ's work can only be shown forth in Israel's obedience insofar as her life is bound to the ceremonial law, and she possesses this ceremonial law as a means of individual redemptive grace. Thus, it can only be shown forth in her life insofar as she is in union with Christ to come and reflects his life. She cannot perform the law meritoriously, for she is sinful and she is not God. Only the God-man can take this law (moral, ceremonial and judicial) upon himself meritoriously so as to merit salvation for his people in his obedient life, sacrificial death and resurrection.

Only this approach is consistent with Lev. 18:5 and Paul's interpretation of it, for Lev. 18:5 is grounded in the ceremonial law. Thus it also requires one to keep the ceremonial law. Also for Paul, the whole law is not only the moral law but also the ceremonial law, involving the right of circumcision in its ceremonial context. Paul states that he who circumcises himself is required to keep the whole law, moral, ceremonial and judicial. In such a case one is separated from Christ (Gal. 5:4). This implies that Christ himself kept that obligation to the whole law, not simply moral but also ceremonial and judicial. Leviticus 18:4-5 includes both the moral and ceremonial law, both of which take on one relation to believing sinners and one relation to the righteous God-man. The God-man identifies with both the ceremonial and moral law in terms of perfect obedience, meriting salvation for his people. The old covenant saints identified with both the moral and ceremonial law in terms of non-meritorious grace, uniting them with their savior.

Thus, the whole law not only provides a law suitable for sinners, but it also provides a law suitable for the true seed of the woman. For the seed of the woman is not simply a recapitulation of the first Adam, but also the one whose obedience involves his necessary sacrifice, death, and resurrection, his identification with the ceremonial law.

In accordance with this, the death of Christ (Christ's obedience to the ceremonial law) is meritorious.<sup>142</sup> It may be thought that Christ's passive obedience is not meritorious, only his obedience to the law. Now we certainly acknowledge that his obedience to the moral law was meritorious. He had to accomplish what the first Adam failed to accomplish. However, we believe his passive obedience was also meritorious. The New Testament says that he purchased us with a price. Certainly that price included his positive obedience to the moral law. But it also included his death. He paid the price of his death for our redemption (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). His death was a price by which he earned our salvation, i.e., merited it.

Christ alone was able to merit our salvation. "For what the law could not

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142 A. A. Hodge claims something similar when he states in *Outlines of Theology*, chapter 22, section 12, 5th. "The ceremonial institutions of Moses were symbolical and typical of Christ's work; as symbols they signified Christ's *merit* and grace to the ancient worshipper for his present salvation, while as types they prophesied the substance which was to come. Hebrews 10:1-10; Colossians 2:17" (emphasis mine).

do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom. 8:3-4). This passage indicates that Israel was *not* only morally unable to keep the law, but also metaphysically unable to keep it. That is, the weakness of the flesh (as Ridderbos has pointed out) is both the weakness of man in his transitoriness as opposed to God and his sinful weakness.<sup>143</sup> The ontological inability of Israel to keep the law perfectly (and so bring the eschatological age) is emphasized by the contrast of man in the flesh to the Son *as a sin offering*. Certainly no human being (whether upright or sinner) could have become a sin offering and thus brought in the blessed age of the Spirit to sinners. After the fall, only God could do so by becoming man and bearing the eternal wrath of sinners. This is why “the Son” is so emphasized and this text is one of the central proof texts that the Son of God was Son before his incarnation, not simply as a result of it—that he was eternally begotten of the Father.

The law as administered to mere humans was unable to bring in the blessed age of the Spirit. Only the Son could do it. Only he could keep the law perfectly by becoming a sin offering, by keeping the ceremonial law perfectly insofar as it was directed to him, not as sinner but as the Son. Only he could keep its provisions fully and so fulfill it. So that now the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us, in him who fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law by becoming a sin offering. Thus, while Rom. 7 (and so Rom. 8) focuses on the moral law (see especially 7:7-8), this does not exclude the ceremonial law, as seen in Rom. 8:3. Romans 12:1 implies something similar when it calls Christians to give up themselves as a living sacrifice, and thereby fulfill the ceremonial law. Therefore, Paul sees the whole law, moral, ceremonial, and judicial (Christ destroying principalities and powers) directed to Christ, requiring him to keep its provisions perfectly and eschatologically, and promising him the kingdom together with all his seed. The promises of the law were made to the seed and in him to all his posterity.

If the law only required perfect obedience to its moral provisions to bring the kingdom, then the law (in its relation to sinners) was only *morally unable* to bring the kingdom, for sinners are only morally (not metaphysically) incapable

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<sup>143</sup> For the theme of the inability of the law, see further Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 143-149.

of keeping the moral law. However, if the law required perfect eschatological obedience to all its provisions (moral, ceremonial, and judicial) in order to bring the kingdom, then the law (in its relation to sinners) was also *metaphysically unable* to bring the kingdom. For mere human beings are metaphysically incapable of bearing God's eternal wrath, let alone satisfying it in a moment of time. Only the God-man could fulfill it.<sup>144</sup>

Therefore, this promise of the eschatological kingdom (for perfect obedience to the law) was not given directly to Israel, as if she were ontologically or morally able to fulfill its provisions. But it was given to Christ, the seed, and only in him (having fulfilled it) to all his posterity.

Paul speaks elsewhere of the impotence of the law to bring eschatological life. Here we present Gal. 3:21 with some commentary. "If a law had been given which was able to impart life" (eschatological life) "then righteousness" (semi-eschatological justification) "would have indeed been based on the law." The impotence of the law is its impotence (as administered to sinners) to merit the coming eschatological kingdom. Only the Son could merit this kingdom because only he (as the God-man) could bear the provision of the ceremonial law in its full eschatological import.

The ceremonial and moral law cannot be separated from one another in their relation to Christ. Therefore, they cannot be separated from one another in their gracious relation to those in union with him in the old covenant. And this is also true of those under the new, though now that the bloody sacrifice has been accomplished, our union with Christ's sufferings are our share in the fulfillment of the ceremonial law. All return to actual ceremonies (as in Rome) is contrary to Christ's accomplishment.

Such a perspective still allows for the progress of the kingdom insofar as the kingdom arrives semi-eschatologically after Christ accomplishes his death and resurrection in history. The benefits of this work are administered through the Mosaic covenant of grace before the time (an eschatological intrusion), yet with less fullness and more obscurity. Thus the types and shadows of the law, while they are grounded in the intrusion of future grace into the present, still take the form of shadows and types. Christ alone, by his ontological in-

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144 See *The Canons of Dordt*, Head 2, Articles 1, 3-4.

trusion into history, is able to bring the kingdom, now semi-eschatologically administered. What the law could not do, bring this semi-eschatological age, he did. Christ brought semi-eschatological justification (righteousness), which brought the semi-eschatological *life* of the Spirit.

Thus, when Paul contrasts justification to the works of the law in Gal. 3, insofar as he is contrasting the actual administration of the old covenant to believing Israel with justification, he is not making an absolute contrast between that administration and justification as it has always been administered to the saints, even under the old (Gordon). Instead, he is making a redemptive-historical contrast between the administration of the old covenant and semi-eschatological justification. He is contrasting the old (which administered justification as well as the visible curses of the law) to semi-eschatological justification, as it has now come in this semi-eschatological age. He is making a relative contrast between the previous administration of grace and the greater grace now administered in semi-eschatological justification. He is not making an absolute contrast between justification per se and the Mosaic covenant, as if the Mosaic covenant did not administer justification in its own time. Paul is not making this latter type of law-gospel contrast as we find it in classic Lutheranism and WSCal.

Paul does have an absolute contrast in mind at the same time, but it is only an absolute contrast between the law as it universally (throughout history) condemns sinners apart from Christ for their rebellion against its perfect requirements and justification as it has been universally administered to the saints at all points of redemptive history, now manifest more fully in semi-eschatological justification. However, in terms of their essential nature, this absolute contrast is between two things that always exist simultaneously at all points after the fall. This absolute contrast is not between different historical eras of redemptive history. Nor is it between two absolutely opposing principles administered by God to his people at a particular point in the history of redemption (namely between the Mosaic covenant and justification as it was administered during the time of the Mosaic economy).

Paul's simultaneous relative and absolute contrasts allow him to counter the Judaizers who believe that their obedience to the law will bring a Jewish earthly paradise eschatology. And so Paul can rightly accuse them of denying

Christ, who has already brought semi-eschatological justification and the age of the Spirit. In denying this semi-eschatological justification, the Judaizers are denying the fountain of all justification as it has always been administered throughout redemptive history. By being severed from Christ and his semi-eschatological justification, they have been severed from justifying grace altogether. Thus, now they must keep the whole law—which they are unable to do.