

# THE MORAL LAW A RULE OF OBEDIENCE

by

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**QUERY I:** Are Christians freed from the moral law as a rule of obedience?

Our text (John 8.36) is the main basis whereon this doctrine of Christian freedom is built. But many have endeavoured to build their own superstructures, hay and stubble, upon it, which the foundation will never bear. Indeed, there are so many opinions which plead patronage from this doctrine that I conceive it is my great work to vindicate so excellent a doctrine as this is - true Christian freedom - from those false, and I may say licentious, doctrines which are fastened and fathered upon it. I must show you that neither this doctrine, nor yet this text, will afford countenance to, or contribute any strength to the positions and opinions which some would seem to deduce from it and build upon it.

The work is great, for I am to deal with the greatest knots in the practical part of divinity, and men's judgments are various. Scripture is pleaded on all hands. The more difficult the work, the more need of your prayers, that the Father of lights would go before us, and by His own light lead and guide us into the ways of all truth. In this confidence we shall venture to launch into these deeps, and begin the examination and trial of those doctrines which are deduced from, and would seem to be built upon, this text. The first doctrine, and the main one, that they would seem to build upon this text is, that believers are freed from the law. And this shall be the first question we will examine.

In answer to this query as it is propounded, we must confess that we are not without some places of Scripture which declare the law to be abrogated, nor without some again that speak of it as yet in force. We will give you a taste of some of them; and shall begin with those that seem to speak of the abrogation of the law.

**Jeremiah 31.31-33:** 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of

Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.'

**Romans 7.1-3:** 'Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.'

That the apostle here speaks of the moral law is evident from the seventh verse; and that believers are freed from it, see the sixth verse and others. See also Rom. 6.14: 'For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace'; Gal. 3.19, 'The law was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come'; Gal. 4.4-5, 'God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons'; Rom. 8.2, 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death'; Gal. 5.18, 'But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law'; Rom. 10.4, 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth'; 1 Tim. 1.8-10, 'The law is good if a man use it lawfully, knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man', etc.

There seems therefore to be a great deal of strength in the Scripture to prove the abrogation of the law, that we are dead to the law, freed from the law, no more under the law. These Scriptures we shall have to deal with afterwards. For the present, I only quote them, to let it be seen with what strength the Scriptures seem to hold out for the first opinion, that is, for the abrogation of the law.

On the other hand, there are some Scriptures which seem to hold up the law, and which say that the law is still in force: I say, some which seem to support the obligation, as the others the abrogation, of it. Thus there is Rom. 3.31: 'Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish

the law.' This seems contrary to the former; the verses previously given seem to speak of the abrogation, this of the establishment, the obligation, of the law. So also Matt. 5.17-18: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.' Upon these varieties of texts, men have grounded their varieties of opinions for the abrogation of, or the obligation of, the law. There is no question but the Scripture speaks truth in both; they are the words of truth; and though they seem here to be as the accusers of Christ, never a one speaking like the other, yet if we are able to find out the meaning, we shall find them like Nathan and Bathsheba, both speaking the same things.

In order to find out the truth under these seeming contraries, and for the purpose of answering the query, lest we should beat the air and spend ourselves to no purpose, it will be necessary to make two inquiries:

- (1) what is meant by the word 'law'?
- (2) in what sense is the word used in Scripture?

When this has been done there will be a way opened for the clearing of the truth and for the answering of the queries.

### **THE SCRIPTURAL USES OF THE WORD 'LAW'**

(1) What is meant by the word '*law*'? I answer: the word which is frequently used for 'the law' in the Old Testament is 'Torah'. This is derived from another word which signifies 'to throw darts', and comes to signify 'to teach, to instruct, to admonish'; hence it is used for any doctrine or instruction which teaches, informs, or directs us: as, for example, in Proverbs 13.14: 'The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.' Here '*law*' is taken in a large sense for any doctrine or direction which proceeds from the wise; so, too, in Proverbs 3.1 and 4.2.

In the New Testament the word '*law*' is derived from another word which signifies '*to distribute*', because the law distributes, or renders to God and man their dues.

In brief, this word '*law*', in its natural signification both in the Old and New Testaments, signifies any doctrine, instruction, law, ordinance, or statute, divine or human, which teaches, directs, commands, or binds men to any duty which they owe to God or man. So much, then, for the first matter.

(2) In what senses is this word '*law*' used in Scripture? I shall not trouble the reader with all the uses of the word, but shall confine myself to the chief of them:

(i) It is sometimes taken for the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the books of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets. So the Jews understood it in John 52.34: 'We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever'. So also in John 15.25: This cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause' (Ps. 35.19). Similarly, we have 1 Cor. 14.21: 'In the law it is written', where the apostle is repeating the words of Isaiah 28.ss, and he says they are written in the law.

(ii) The term '*law*' is sometimes used as meaning the whole Word of God, its promises and precepts, as in Ps. 19.7: The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul'. Conversion is the fruit of the promise. Neither justification nor sanctification is the fruit of the law alone. The law commands but gives no grace, so that here the psalmist includes the promise of grace in his use of '*law*'; or else conversion, as he speaks of it here, does not mean regeneration.

(iii) '*Law*' is sometimes taken for the five books of Moses, as in Gal. 3.21: 'If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law'. Likewise, in John 1:45 'We have found him of whom Moses in the law . . . did write'. Similarly in Luke 24.44: 'All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses', meaning the five books of Moses; see also Gal. 4.21.

(iv) '*Law*' is used for the pedagogy of Moses, as in John 5.46: 'Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.' See also Josh. 1.7-8.

(v) Sometimes '*law*' is used for the moral law alone, the Decalogue, as in Rom. 7.7, 14 and 21.

(vi) Sometimes '*law*' refers to the ceremonial law, as in Luke 16.16.

(vii) Sometimes '*law*' refers to all the laws, moral, ceremonial, and judicial, as in John 1.17: 'The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ': 'grace' in opposition to the moral law, 'truth' in opposition to the ceremonial law which was but a shadow. Thus Chrysostom comments on this passage: The ceremonial law was given right up to the time of the coming of

the seed promised to Abraham.'

Among all these different usages, the controversy lies in the last-mentioned, where the word 'law' signifies the moral, judicial, and ceremonial law. In respect of two of these varieties of law, we find considerable agreement; the main difficulty concerns the moral law.

The ceremonial law was an appendix to the first table of the moral law. It was an ordinance containing precepts of worship for the Jews when they were in their infancy, and was intended to keep them under hope, to preserve them from will-worship, and to be a wall of separation between them and the Gentiles. This law, all agree, is abrogated both in truth and in fact.

As for the judicial law, which was an appendix to the second table, it was an ordinance containing precepts concerning the government of the people in things civil, and it served three purposes: it gave the people a rule of common and public equity, it distinguished them from other peoples, and it gave them a type of the government of Christ. That part of the judicial law which was typical of Christ's government has ceased, but that part which is of common and general equity remains still in force. It is a common maxim: those judgments which are common and natural are moral and perpetual.

However, in respect of the ceremonial and the judicial law we find few dissenters. All the controversy arises from the third part, the moral law.

And so we come to speak of the moral law which is scattered throughout the whole Bible, and summed up in the Decalogue. For substance, it contains such things as are good and holy, and agreeable to the will of God, being the image of the divine will, a beam of His holiness, the sum of which is love to God and love to man.

It is one of the great disputes in these days, whether this moral law is abrogated, or, in the words of the query, whether believers are freed from the moral law. All agree that we are freed from the curses and maledictions, from the indictments and accusations, from the compelling and irritations, and other particulars which we named before. But the question is, to put it in plain terms: Are believers freed from obedience to the moral law, that is, from the moral law as a rule of obedience?

Some there are who positively or peremptorily affirm that we are freed from the law as a rule, and are not, since Christ came, tied to the obedience of it.

Others say that it still remains in force as a rule of obedience, though abolished in other respects, as Beza says: 'Christ fulfilled the law for us, but not in order to render it of no value to us.' We are still under the conduct and commands of the law, say these Christians, though not under its curses and penalties.

Again, others say that we are freed from the law, as given by Moses, and are only tied to the obedience of it, as it is given in Christ: and though, they say, we are subject to those commands and that law which Moses gave, yet not as he gave it, but as Christ renews it, and as it comes out of His hand and from His authority: 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another' (John 13.34). It is a commandment, for Christ is both a Saviour and a Lord; and it is a new one, not that it did not exist before, but because now renewed, and because we have it immediately from the hands of Christ.

I shall not much quarrel with this. Acknowledge the moral law as a rule of obedience and Christian walking, and there will be no falling out, whether you take it as promulgated by Moses, or as handed to you and renewed by Christ.

Indeed, the law, as it is considered as a rule, can no more be abolished or changed than the nature of good and evil can be abolished and changed. The substance of the law is the sum of doctrine concerning piety towards God, charity towards our neighbours, temperance and sobriety towards ourselves. And for the substance of it, it is moral and eternal, and cannot be abrogated. We grant that the circumstances under which the moral law was originally given were temporary and changeable, and we have now nothing to do with the promulgator, Moses, nor with the place where it was given, Mount Sinai, nor with the time when it was given, fifty days after the people came out of Egypt, nor yet as it was written in tables of stone, delivered with thunderings and lightnings. We look not to Sinai, the hill of bondage, but to Zion, the mountain of grace. We take the law as the image of the will of God which we desire to obey, but from which we do not expect life and favour, neither do we fear death and rigour. This, I conceive, is the concurrent opinion of all divines. For believers, the law is abrogated in respect of its power to justify or condemn; but it remains full of force to direct us in our lives. It condemns sin in the faithful, though it cannot condemn the faithful for sin. Says Zanchius: 'The observance of the law is necessary for a Christian man, and it

is not possible to separate such observance from faith.' And as Calvin says: 'Let us put far from us the ungodly notion that the law is not to be our rule, for it is our changeless rule of life.' The moral law, by its teaching, admonishing, chiding, and reproof, prepares us for every good work. The law is void in respect of its power to condemn us, but it still has power to direct us; we are not under its curse, but yet under its commands.

Again, the moral law is perpetual and immutable. This is an everlasting truth, that the creature is bound to worship and obey his Creator, and so much the more bound as he has received the greater benefits. If we claim to be free from obedience, we make ourselves the servants of sin. But these matters I shall speak more largely upon in the discourse that follows.

Therefore, against that opinion which holds forth the abrogation of the law, and says that we are freed from obedience to it, I shall state and endeavour to make good two propositions which will serve fully to answer the query, and to refute the false notions. The propositions are these:

- (1) That the law, for the substance of it (for we speak not of the circumstances and accessories of it), remains as a rule of walking to the people of God.
- (2) That there was no end or use for which the law was originally given but is consistent with grace, and serviceable to the advancement of the covenant of grace.

If these two propositions are made good, the doctrines of the abrogation of the law and of freedom from the law will both fall to the ground.

### **PROPOSITION 2: THE LAW REMAINS AS A RULE OF WALKING FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

We shall begin with the first proposition, namely, that the law, in the substance of it, remains in force as a rule of walking to the people of God. I shall not need to stay long over this, for when the second proposition is made good it will be seen that it establishes this also. By the law is meant the moral law comprehended in the Decalogue or ten commandments. By the substance of it, I mean the things commanded or forbidden which are morally good or evil, and cannot be changed or abolished. For what is the law in the substance of it but that law of nature engraven in the heart of man in innocency? and what was that but the express idea or representation of God's own image, even a beam of His own holiness, which cannot be changed or abolished any

more than the nature of good and evil can be changed? And that the law thus considered remains as an unchangeable rule of walking to believers I am now to prove.

### THE TESTIMONY OF THE REFORMED CONFESSIONS

For this proof, not to mention individuals whose testimony might be produced, even as many almost as men, we have a cloud of witnesses if we look upon the Confessions of Christian and Reformed Churches in their agreement together. *The Helvetian (Swiss) Church* has this confession: 'Thus far is the law of God abrogated, in that it has no power to condemn believers . . . Notwithstanding, we do not disdainfully reject the law, but condemn them as heresies which are taught against the law, that it is not a rule of walking.' *The French Church* has this: 'We believe all the figures of the law to be taken away by the coming of Christ, although the truth and substance of them continue to us in Him, and are fulfilled to us in Him. But the doctrine of the law is used in them both to confirm our life and that we may be the more established in the promises of the Gospel.' Agreeable to this is the *Belgic Confession*.

*The Wittenberg Confession* includes this: 'We acknowledge the law of God, whose abridgment is in the Decalogue, to command the best, the most just and perfect works, and we hold that man is bound to obey the moral precepts of the Decalogue. Neither are those precepts which are contained in the apostles' writings a new law, but are branches of the old law.' And again, 'It is needful to teach men that they must not only obey the law, but also how this obedience pleases God.'

*The Scottish Church* confesses: 'We do not think we are so freed by liberty as if we owed no obedience to the law; we confess the contrary.' The *Church of England* holds a similar doctrine: 'Although the law given of God to Moses in regard of the rites and ceremonies does not bind Christians, neither is any, although a Christian, loosed from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral.' To these testimonies might be added many more.

But it may be that some men regard these Confessions as of no authority and therefore they have no power with them. And indeed, if these things are not proved from the Word of God, they have no power with us. We respect good men and their writings, but we must not build our faith upon them as a sure foundation. This is against our Christian liberty; we cannot be enslaved to the



judgments of any. 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' We shall therefore give some proofs out of the Word itself, and then draw arguments from them.

### **THE TESTIMONY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

We read in Matt. 5.17-18: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I. am not come to destroy but to fulfill; for verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.' This seems to be very full and very plain for the continuance of and obligation to the law. And yet there are corrupt readings of these words, and as sinister interpretations. Some would have it to be understood that Christ would not abolish the law until He had fulfilled it. Indeed, He was 'the end of the law', as the apostle speaks in Rom. 10.4, but we must understand this to mean 'the perfecting and consummating end', not 'the destroying and abolishing end' of the law. In Christ the law had an end of perfection and consummation, not of destruction and abolition. It is to be noted that in this verse Christ gives a stricter exposition of the law, and vindicates it from the corrupt glosses of the Pharisees, which surely speaks the continuance, not the abrogation, of the law. And agreeable to this is the language of the apostle in Rom. 3.31: 'Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.' How? Not for justification, for in this respect faith makes it void, but as a rule of obedience, and in this respect faith establishes it. Further, the apostle tells us 'that the law is holy, just and good' and that 'he delighted in the law of God after the inward man' and also that 'with the mind I myself serve the law of God' (Rom. 7.12, 22, 25). With this agrees James 2.8: 'If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture . . . ye do well'. What law this was, he shows in the eleventh verse to be the Decalogue or moral law. Likewise: 'He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar' (1 John 2.4); also: 'Sin is the transgression of the law' (1 John 3.4).

Therefore, since Christ, who is the best expounder of the law, so largely strengthens and confirms the law (witness the Sermon on the Mount, and also Mark 10.19); since faith does not supplant, but strengthens the law; since the apostle so often presses and urges the duties commanded in the law; since Paul acknowledges that he served the law of God in his mind, and that he was under the law to Christ (1 Cor. 9.21); I may rightly conclude that the law, for

the substance of it, still remains a rule of life to the people of God.

But I would add further arguments, beginning with this: If ever the law was a rule of walking, then it is still a rule of walking: this is clear. Either it is still such a rule, or we must shew the time when, as such, it was abrogated. But no such time can be shewed. If it is said that it was abrogated in the time of the Gospel by Christ and His apostles, we reply that no such thing can be proved. It was not so abrogated at that time. If Christ and His apostles commanded the same things which the law required, and forbade and condemned the same things which the law forbade and condemned, then they did not abrogate it but strengthened and confirmed it. And this is what they did: see Matt. 5:19 'He that breaketh one of the least of these commandments, and teacheth men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but he that shall teach and observe them shall be called (not legal preachers, but) great in the kingdom of heaven.'

Therefore, in that Christ Himself expounded and established the law, by His word and authority, as shown in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew, it shows us the continuance of it; for had it been His will utterly to abolish it, He would rather have declared against it, or have suffered it to die of itself; and would not have vindicated it, and restored it to its purity from the glosses of the Pharisees. All this clearly speaks to us of the continuance of, and obligation to, the law.

As with Christ, so with the apostles: instead of abolishing, in their doctrine they establish it, frequently urging the duties of the law upon the churches and people of God: 'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves' (Rom. 12.19). Why? 'For it is written, Vengeance is mine'. Likewise, in Rom. 13.8-10. There the apostle repeats the commandments of the second table, not to repeal or reverse any of them, but to confirm them as a rule of walking for the saints. He comprehends them all in this: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, for love is the fulfilling of the law.' As Beza writes: 'Love is not perfected except as the fulfilling of the law.' See also 1 Thess. 4.3, 4, 7: 'This is the will of God . . . that ye should abstain from fornication . . . that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter; because that the Lord is the avenger of all such.' See also Eph. 6.1: 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord.' The apostle here presses this duty from the authority of the precept, and persuades to it from the graciousness of the promise, 'for this is the first

commandment with promise' - a conditional promise (as Beza says), as are all such promises as are found in the law. As full and plain are the words of the apostle in Rom. 3.31: 'Do we abrogate the law? No, we establish it by faith.' Though it carries another sense, it bears this sense also, that though we disown the law in respect of justification, yet we establish it as a rule of Christian living.

Again, in Matt. 3.10 we read: 'The axe is laid to the root of the tree; every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire'; and in Mart. 5.22: 'Whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.' In these and sundry other places, so some learned and holy divines tell us, the comminations and threatenings of the New Testament are not of the nature of the Gospel, but are confirmation of the law, and plainly demonstrate to us the continuance of the law under grace. Thus Daniel Chamier<sup>[1]</sup> distinguishes in the Gospel between the doctrine of the Gospel and the grace of the Gospel, between the preaching of the Gospel by Christ and the apostles and the law of faith or spirit of life in Christ. The preaching or doctrine of the Gospel, he tells us, contains two things, first the promise of grace, and second, the confirmation of the law. And he shows that all those comminations and threats which we read in the Scriptures of the New Testament in no way belong to the nature of the Gospel properly so called, but are the confirmation of the law, and declare the continuation of it now under the Gospel as an exact rule to direct Christians in their walk and obedience.

### **FIVE PROOFS OF THE BINDING NATURE OF THE LAW**

Before I proceed to the rest of the arguments, I will mention what objectors say to this. Some of them say that, though the law is a rule, yet it is a rule which we are free to obey or not to obey: it is not a binding rule. There are various opinions about this. Some say that it binds us no further than as we are creatures. I answer: if so, why then are they not bound? I hope they are creatures as well as Christians. Others say that it binds the flesh but not the spirit; it binds the unregenerate part, but not the regenerate part of a man, to obedience, for the regenerate part is free. I answer: here is a dangerous gap, open to all licentiousness; witness the opinions of David George<sup>[2]</sup> and the Valentinians.<sup>[3]</sup> Others say that the law is not a binding rule at all and that believers are no more under the law than England is under the laws of Spain; that Christians are no more bound to the obedience of the law than men are

bound to the obedience of the laws of another commonwealth than their own; to speak otherwise, they say, overthrows Christian liberty.

Now if this be true, it strikes down all. If it be a rule, but not a binding rule, a rule binding to obedience, it will be of small use. We will end this cavil, therefore, before we go any further, and show that the law is indeed a binding rule, and that it binds Christians, not as men, but as Christians. I will give five arguments in proof of this:

**(1)** That which being observed, causes the consciences of regenerate men to excuse them, and which, not being observed, causes their consciences to accuse them, is binding on the conscience. But it is the law of God which thus causes the consciences of the regenerate to excuse or else to accuse them. Therefore the law of God is that which is binding on the Christian conscience.

**(2)** That which has power to say to the conscience of the regenerate Christian, This ought to be done, and that ought not to be done, is binding on the conscience. But the law of God has this power. Therefore, though it cannot say that this or that ought not to be done on pain of damnation, or on pain of the curse; or this or that ought to be done in reference to justification or the meriting of life; yet it shows it ought to be done as good and pleasing to God, and that this or that ought not to be done, as things displeasing to Him.

**(3)** The authority by which the apostles urged Christians to duty binds the conscience to obedience. But the apostles used the authority of the law to provoke Christians to their duty (as in Eph. 6.1-2). Therefore the law is the rule by which Christians must walk.

**(4)** If the law of God does not bind the conscience of a regenerate man to obedience, then whatever he does which is commanded in the law, he does more than his duty; and so either merits or sins, being guilty of will-worship. But in obedience to the law he is not guilty of will-worship, neither does he merit: 'When ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do' (Luke 17.10).

**(5)** Either the law binds the conscience of Christians to obedience, or Christians do not sin in the breach of the law. But they sin in the breach of it, as says 1 John 3.4: 'Sin is the transgression of the law'. Therefore, the transgression of the law is sin. Or look at it thus: If Christians are bound not

to sin, then they are bound to keep the law. But Christians are bound not to sin; therefore they are bound to keep the law. I know that objectors will agree that Christians are bound not to sin, but that they will deny that they are bound to obey the law; but I will prove my point in this way: If he that breaks the law sins, then Christians are bound to keep the law if they are not to sin. But he that breaks the law does sin, as says the apostle: 'Sin is the transgression of the law' (1 John 3.4), and 'Where no law is there is no transgression' (Rom. 4.15). Therefore Christians are bound, if they would avoid sin, to obey the law.

And now, being driven against the wall, the objectors have no way to maintain the former error but by another. They tell us plainly that believers do not sin: 'Be in Christ and sin if you can.' But the apostle tells them that they sin in saying this: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John i.8). Nay, we 'make him (that is, God) a liar' (v. 10). 'If we say', includes the apostles as well as others, for 'there is no man who sins not' (1 Kings 8.46). 'In many things we offend all' (James 3.2).

#### **FIVE FURTHER ARGUMENTS FOR OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW**

But if this will not silence them, then they say that God sees no sin in those who are believers. But what is this? It is one thing to sin, and another for God not to see sin. Indeed, He sees not sin, either to condemn believers for sin, or to approve and allow of sin in believers. He sees not sin, that is, He will not see sin to impute it to us when we are in Christ. But if this does not convince the objectors, then they say: Though believers sin, and though God sees it, for He sees all and brings all into judgment, yet God is not displeased with the sins of believers.

I reply:

**1.** Certainly, perfect good must for ever hate that which is perfect evil, and the nearer it is to Him, the more God hates it. In a wicked man, God hates both sin and sinner, but in a believer, He hates the sin, though He pities and loves the poor sinner. He is displeased with sin, though He pardons sin through Christ. But we will follow this no longer. Thus much must suffice for the proof and vindication of the first argument.

**2.** If the same sins are condemned and forbidden after Christ came as were forbidden before He came, then the law, in respect of its being a rule of obedience, is still in force; but the same sins are thus condemned and

forbidden. That which was sin then is sin now. I speak of sin against the moral law. Therefore the moral law is still in force to believers as their rule of obedience.

**3.** If the same duties which were enjoined in the law are commanded believers under the Gospel, then the law still remains as a rule of direction and obedience. But the same duties are commanded under the Gospel as were enjoined under the law, as I have already shown (e.g. Rom. 13.9-10 and Eph. 6.1). Therefore the law still remains as a rule of obedience under the Gospel.

**4.** If the things commanded in the law are part of holiness and conformity to God, and if this conformity to the law is required of us, then we conclude that the law is still in force. But the things commanded are part of Christian holiness, and conformity to the law is required of us. Therefore the law is still in force. That the things commanded are part of our holiness, I suppose is granted. If so, that this conformity to the law is required of us, it is easy to prove. That which we are to aspire to, and labour for, and after which we are to endeavour both in our affections and actions, in our principles and practices, that, surely, is required of us. But this is all the same with conformity to the law of God. That we are to aspire to such conformity in our affections is clear from Rom. 7.22, 25, where the apostle shows us that he delighted in the law of God, and that he served the law in his mind. Nay, it was his purpose, aim, desire, and endeavour of heart, to be made conformable to that law which he says is 'holy, just, and good'. Though he fell short of it, yet he aspired after it; which shows we too are to aspire after it in our affections. And it is equally plain that we are to endeavour after conformity to it in our actions. Take both together: 'Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments' (Ps. 119.4-6). He has respect to them in his heart and affections; and he seeks conformity to them in life and actions. And this was his duty, because God had commanded: 'Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!'

**5.** It cannot be part of our freedom by Christ to be freed from obedience to the law, because the law is holy, just, and good. Surely it is no part of our freedom to be freed from that which is holy, just, and good! Consider it in this way: That cannot be part of our freedom which is no part of our bondage.

But obedience and subjection to the moral law in the sense I have showed was never part of our bondage. Therefore to be freed from obedience to the law cannot be part of our freedom. I will prove that it was never part of our bondage.

That cannot be part of our bondage which is part of our glory; but obedience and conformity to the law, both in principle and in practice, is part of our glory; therefore it cannot be part of our bondage. Again, that cannot be said to be part of our bondage which is part of our freedom. But to obey the law is part of our freedom, as we read in Luke 1.74: 'That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.' I shall proceed no further upon this. It is plain enough, that the law in the substance of it remains a rule of walking or obedience to them in Christ. We shall give two or three applications and then come to the second matter.

### **(i) Application against Papists**

The foregoing will serve to show the error of the Papists in their unjust charge against us that we make it a part of our Christian liberty to be exempted from all law and to live as we list, and that we are not bound to the obedience of any law in conscience before God. We appeal to all the Reformed Churches in the Christian world, whether ever any of them did put forth such an opinion as this. It is the concurrent opinion of all Reformed Churches that Christians are subject to the rule, the direction, and the authority of the moral law, as says Chamier: 'Believers are free from the curses, not from the obligations, of the law.' We preach obedience to the law, but not as the Papists do. They preach obedience as a means to justification; we preach justification as a means to obedience. We cry down works in opposition to grace in justification, and we cry up obedience as the fruits of grace in sanctification. He that does not walk in obedience is a stranger yet to Christ; and he that rests in his obedience does not know Christ. Indeed, many are too much like the Jews still. God set up a law as a rule of walking, and they look for justification by it. These poor men are like oxen in the yoke; they draw and toil and spend their strength (for who do more than those who think to earn merit thereby?), and when they have performed their labour, they are fatted up for slaughter. So it is with these: when they have endeavoured hard after their own righteousness, they perish in their just

condemnation. These men Luther fitly calls 'the devil's martyrs': they suffer much, and take much pains to go to hell. The apostle tells them what they are to expect: 'For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse' (Gal. 3.10), that is, those who are under the works of the law for justification; and the apostle gives the reason, 'for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them'. These men seek life in death, righteousness in sin. And, alas, we are all too apt to follow this line; it is hard to perform all righteousness and rest in none; hard to be in duties in respect of performance, and out of duties in respect of dependence. We are apt to weave a web of righteousness of our own, to spin a thread of our own by which we may climb up to heaven. Were it not so, what is the need for so many exhortations and admonitions to perform all righteousness but to rest in none? The Scripture does not make a practice of killing flies with beetles,<sup>[4]</sup> or cleaving straws with wedges of iron; nor does it spend many admonitions and exhortations where there is no need.

Alas, there are multitudes in the world who make a Christ of their own works, and this is their undoing. They look for righteousness and acceptance more in the precept than in the promise, in the law rather than in the Gospel, more in working than in believing; and so they miscarry. There is something of this spirit in us all; otherwise we should not be up and down so much in respect of our comforts and our faith, as is still so often the case. We become cast down with every weakness in ourselves. But we should be all in Christ in weak performance, and nothing in ourselves in strong performances.

### **(ii) Against Antinomians**

We look next at the case of those who are called Antinomians.<sup>[5]</sup> Just as the Papists set up the law for justification, so the Antinomians decry the law for sanctification. We claim to be free from the curses of the law; they would have us free from the guidance, from the commands of the law. We say we are free from the penalties, but they would abolish the precepts of the law. They tell us that we make a false mixture together of Christ and Moses, and that we mingle law and Gospel together. How unjustly they lay this charge against us, let men of understanding judge. We cry down the law in respect of justification, but we set it up as a rule of sanctification. The law sends us to the Gospel that we may be justified; and the Gospel sends us to the law again to inquire what is our duty as those who are justified. Whatever they say of



the law, though they cast contempt and disgrace upon it, and upon those who preach it, yet we know that, for the substance of it, it is the image of God, a beam of His holiness. The things therein commanded and forbidden are things morally, and therefore eternally, good and evil; nothing can alter the nature of them. Things not by nature either good or evil are alterable by him that commanded them. But those things which are morally good or evil, God can no more alter them than make evil good, or good evil. That which was morally good formerly is morally good now, and is to be pursued and practised. That which was formerly morally evil is morally evil now, and is to be shunned and avoided. We have a Gospel rule which turns us to obedience to the law. We find it in Phil. 4.8: 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.' And I hope the law is of this number. The apostle tells us that the law is 'holy and just and good'; certainly in it there is nothing commanded but what is good. If we are to learn of the ant, and from brute beasts, certainly are we much more to learn from the law, which is the image of God in man and the will of God to man. We have nothing to do with Moses, nor do we look to Sinai, the hill of bondage, but we look to Zion, the mountain of grace. We take the law as the eternal rule of God's will, and we desire to conform ourselves to it, and to breathe out with David, 'O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!' Certainly the law and the Gospel help one another; they lend one another the hand, as says Peter Martyr.

The law is subservient to the Gospel. Its purpose is to convince and humble us, and the Gospel is to enable us to fulfill the obedience of the law. The law sends us to the Gospel for our justification; the Gospel sends us to the law to frame our way of life. Our obedience to the law is nothing else but the expression of our thankfulness to God who has freely justified us, that 'being redeemed, we might serve Him without fear' (Luke 1.74). Though our service is not the motive or impelling cause of God's redeeming of us, yet it is the purpose of our redemption. The apostle shows this at length in the sixth chapter of Romans; it is the application he makes of the doctrine of free justification. He continues: 'Therefore, brethren, we are debtors' (Rom. 8.12). If Christ has freed us from the penalties, how ought we to subject ourselves to the precepts! If He has delivered us from the curses, how ought we to

study the commands! If He paid our debt of sin, certainly we owe a debt of service.

This was the great end of our redemption; He redeemed us *from* bondage and brought us into freedom, from slavery to service. That which Christ has redeemed us to, He cannot be said to redeem us from; but He has redeemed us unto service, and therefore cannot be said to redeem us from service. Indeed, He has freed us from the *manner* of our obedience, but not from the *matter* of our obedience. We now obey, but it is from other principles, by other strength, unto other ends, than we did before.

Previously, the principles of obedience were legal and servile, now they are filial and evangelical. As the law was given with evangelical purposes, so it is now kept from evangelical principles, principles of faith, love, and delight, which causes the soul to obey, and facilitates the whole of obedience. The love of Christ constrains (2 Cor. 5.14), yet is the obedience free. Love knows no difficulties; things impossible to others are easy to them that love. The grounds of obedience differ: heretofore, fear, now love. Previously the strength was our own; now we have fellowship with the strength of Christ. Our works are said to be wrought in God, by union with Him (John 3.21), and by fellowship with Him. As we can do nothing without Him, so we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. And this strength He has promised: 'The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments' (Deut. 26.18). He tells us that He works all our works in us and for us (Isa. 26.12), the required works of grace in us, and of duty for us.

The ends before were for justification and life; now they are for other ends - to glorify God, to dignify the Gospel, to declare our sincerity, to express our thankfulness. Before, we obeyed, but out of compulsion of conscience; now we obey out of the promptings of nature, which, so far as it works, works to God, as naturally as stones move downward or sparks fly upward. Thus, then, it is that we preach the law, not in opposition to, but in subordination to the Gospel, as we shall show at length later.

### **(iii) To all believers**

Lastly, under this head, let me exhort you all to judge of the law aright, and then let it be your care to maintain it. Let not Moses take the place of Christ; but, at the same time, make a right use of Moses. When works and obedience

take their right place, when the law is rightly used, then it is holy, just and good. But if we use it as our life, then we trample the blood of Christ underfoot, and make His life and death in vain. Let the servant follow the Master; let Moses follow Christ; the law, grace; obedience, faith; and then all act their proper and designed parts. Remember what Zacharias said: 'You were redeemed that you might serve' (Luke 1.74), that you might live unto Him that died for you. Reason from mercy to duty, not from mercy to liberty. O beware that the great things of Christ do not make you more careless! Take heed not to abuse mercy. It is a sad thing when Christians abuse the grace of Christ. The justice of God prevails with others; oh, but God would have His tender mercies prevail with you: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice' (Rom. 12.1). The reasonings of saints are to be from engagements of mercy to enlargements in duty (2 Cor. 5:14 and 7.1). Having such precious promises, let us purge ourselves from all corruptions of the flesh and spirit. None but venomous spirits will, spider-like, suck poison from such sweets, or draw such inferences from mercy as may be encouragements to sin.

It would be a sad matter if believers should grow more slack and sluggish; if that which should quicken them slackens their hands; if a man should say in his heart, Christ died, I need not pray so much; Christ has done all, therefore I need do nothing. The doctrine we advance should strengthen and not weaken your engagement to duty, should heighten and not lessen your engagement to duty; it should quicken and not deaden your hearts' affections; it should inflame and not cool your spirits.

Worse still would it be if we should draw arguments to sin from mercy received. Should that become a spur which should be the greatest curb? 'Shall we sin because grace abounds?' (Rom. 6.1). 'There is mercy with thee, that thou mayest be feared', says the Psalmist (130.4), not that I may sin, but that I may serve. You whom the law has sent to the Gospel, let the Gospel again send you to the law; study now your duty; abundance of mercy calls for abundance of duty. If God had not abounded in mercy, what would have become of us? And has He abounded in mercy? Oh, then, let us abound in duty; let us obey for God's sake who gives us His Son; for Christ's sake who has given Himself that we might give ourselves to God; for faith's sake which is dead without obedience. It is the cry of faith, Give me children, else I die. Obey for the sake of your profession of His Name. Adorn the Gospel of our

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. What a shame if it should be said of us that faith cannot do that which unbelief is able to do! What will Turks and Mohammedans say - 'Look, these are the people who reverence Christ! These are the servants of the crucified God! They profess Christ and yet will forswear and will sin against Christ!' What will Papists say? 'These are they who preach faith, and yet are strangers to obedience, and live in sin.'

No, let the righteousness of the law be fulfilled in us; let us walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit' (Rom. 8.4). The law is a royal law: 'If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture', says James, 'ye do well' (2.8). It is a royal law, that we might live royally above the ordinary rank of men in obedience. 'Receive not the grace of God in vain' (2 Cor. 6.1). If you receive it not in vain, you will have power to will, and power to do; you will prize grace and walk thankfully. It was wittily spoken by one - and there is some truth in the saying - 'Live as though there were no Gospel; die as though there were no law. Pass the time of this life in the wilderness of this world under the conduct of Moses; but let none but Joshua bring you over into Canaan, the promised land.'

The saying agrees thus far with Scripture. Moses was a man of the law; he gave the law and he is often taken as representing the law: 'They have Moses and the prophets' (Luke 16.29); 'There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust' (John 5.45). Joshua was a type of Christ; his name signifies so much; he was Jesus, so called in Heb. 4.8: 'If Jesus', that is, Joshua, 'could have given them rest'. Moses must lead the children of Israel through the wilderness, but Joshua must bring them into Canaan. So while you are in the wilderness of this world, you must walk under the conduct of Moses; you must live in obedience to the law. But it is not Moses but Joshua, not works but faith, not obedience but Christ, who must bring you into Canaan. Do what you can while you live; but be sure to die resting on Christ's merits.

This must suffice under our first main proposition; that the substance of the law is a rule of obedience to the people of God, and that to which they are to conform their lives and their walk now under the Gospel. This we have proved by the Scriptures, by a cloud of witnesses, by the concordant testimony of the Reformed Churches. We have strengthened this by many arguments, and given some applications of the doctrine.

## FOOTNOTES:

[1] Chamier (1565-1621) served various Reformed congregations in France. He was killed by a cannon-ball during the siege of Montauban.

[2] David George (d. 1556), otherwise David Joris, was a religious fanatic in the Netherlands and Germany. He formed a sect in which he was virtually regarded as a messiah. He taught that 'a man filled with the Spirit is sinless, no matter what deeds he may commit.'

[3] Valentinians: a second-century sect founded by the Gnostic, Valentinus. It claimed that a Christian was 'law-less'.

[4] A long-handled heavy-headed hammer.

[5] The term *ma* have been coined by Luther, but its use in England appears to date from 1644. Literally, it means 'against law', and was used to describe professing Christians who claimed that the moral law was not binding upon them. Hence with many it came to signify a person holding loose moral standards, a loose-liver.

## Author

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