

# “What About the Law?”

A Reformed Defense of the Law’s Place  
and Function in the Life of the  
New Testament Believer

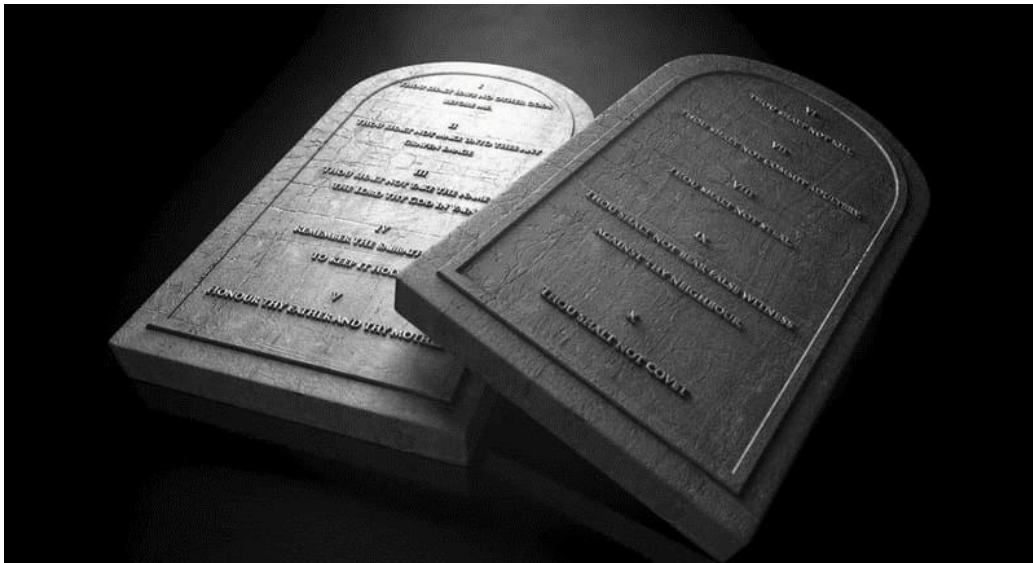


RONALD HANKO



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What is the relationship between the civil/ceremonial law and the moral law? What does Paul mean when he says that the law is intended to act as a “schoolmaster” to bring us to Christ? Is this function of the moral law today? Which law applied to the Jews in the Old Testament economy to bring them to see *their* need for a Saviour—the civil/ceremonial law, the moral law, or both? Was the law, given to Adam, the same in essence as the Ten Commandments and the summary given by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40? Is the law a rule of life, or method of condemnation? In Galatians 4:22-31, what are the two covenants and what relationship do they have to the covenant of grace? Is the law part of the covenant of grace in these verses? And what is antinomianism?

It is obvious that the question of the place and function of the law is a difficult matter for many and there is much difference of belief about the law among Christians.

On the one hand there are those who believe that the Law of Moses, including the moral law (the Ten Commandments) has no place in the New Testament. They refer to such passages as Romans 6:15 and Galatians 3:10 as proof. If Christians are bound by any law, they say, it is only the “new” law or “new commandment” given us by Jesus (John 13:34), though even that is differently defined by different people.

Then there are those who believe that some of the Ten Commandments are binding, but only those that are specifically mentioned in the New Testament. This, they believe, excludes the fourth commandment (regarding the Sabbath) as binding in the New Testament.

On the other hand, there are those today who are teaching that some or all of the civil laws of the Old Testament are binding on New Testament Christians. These people usually call themselves *Theonomists* or *Reconstructionists*.

Finally, there is the traditional Reformed and Presbyterian teaching that, while the civil and ceremonial laws are abrogated and no longer binding on New Testament Christians, the moral law is still in place for all New Testament Christians. Even here, however, there is disagreement about the function of the moral law.

We do not intend to deal with each question separately, but to deal with the biblical teaching regarding the law in a more systematic way, in order to be as clear and as thorough as possible. In this way, we hope, all the questions will eventually be answered.

Recognizing the wide differences that exist among Christians regarding the law, we do not expect that everyone will agree with us. We trust, however, that our readers will hear us patiently, examine our reasons for believing as we do in the light of the Word of God, and write to us with further questions and comments.

May God guide us in our study of *His* law.

## What Are the Different Kinds of Old Testament Law?

We wish to address the whole question of the difference between the moral law (the Ten Commandments) and the civil and ceremonial law, and the relationship between them.

The civil law is the body of law that applied to Israel's *everyday* life. It included laws about food, farming, war, health, land, crime, and other such things.

The ceremonial law is the body of law that had to do with Israel's *religious* life. It included laws about the priesthood, the sacrifices, the tabernacle (and later the temple), ceremonial cleansings, religious feasts, etc.

That there is a difference between all the civil and ceremonial laws and the Ten Commandments is obvious. It is obvious, first, from the way the law was given at Mount Sinai. Only the *Ten Commandments* were spoken by God Himself from the top of the mount in the hearing of the people, and only *they* were inscribed on tables of stone and put in the ark of the covenant.

But even the New Testament makes clear that these laws are different. In several places where the law is mentioned (Rom. 13:8-9; James 2:8-12), various of the Ten Commandments are also listed. They are *the law*, according to these passages.

This difference between the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law of Moses may never be forgotten in any discussion of the law.

Nevertheless, the moral law of the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law of Moses are closely related. The relationship is this: the civil/ceremonial law is an *application* of the Ten Commandments *to the life of Israel in the land of Canaan*. The ceremonial law is primarily an application of the *first table* of the moral law and the civil law an application of the *second table*.

This relationship is evident from the regulations themselves. For example, the regulations about the "cities of refuge" and the "avenger of blood" are an obvious application of the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."

It is in this relationship that the real difference between the moral law and the civil/ceremonial law comes out. The moral law lays down the abiding and unchanging principles of the law of God, while the many regulations of the civil/ceremonial law had application *only* to Israel, to Canaan, and to Israel's agricultural life there, and were only temporary.

Similarly, the principles of the *moral* law deal with things that are *always* right or wrong in God's sight. The regulations of the *civil/ceremonial* law deal with things that are not *in themselves* right or wrong. For example, there is nothing *inherently* wrong in ploughing with an ox and ass together. It may not be wise, but is not in itself wrong.

## Why was the Civil/Ceremonial Law Given?

The civil/ceremonial law was a body of temporary regulations that God used to *teach* His Old Testament people the abiding and fundamental principles of the law summarized in the Ten Commandments. In much the same way, *we* use rules about things that are not in themselves right or wrong in order to teach our children what

is right and wrong in God's sight. For example, we say that our children may only have one sweet after tea—not because it is wrong to have two, but because we want to teach them to avoid immoderation, lack of self-control and avoid gluttony (all of which *are* sins). Thus, a law is used to teach the law just as in the Old Testament.

By way of further explanation, consider Galatians 4:1 ff. There we learn that the Old Testament church was a “son” and “heir” of God, but was treated like a slave because the Old Testament was the time of its *childhood* (vv. 1-3).

In that time of childhood, the church was little better than a slave, because it was under the tutorship and governorship of the law. A child in those days was put under the care and authority of a household slave called a *pedagogue* (“schoolmaster” in 3:24) and was therefore, though son and heir, little better than the lowest of slaves as far as his position was concerned. The church of the Old Testament was in the same position.

It was the law, especially the civil/ceremonial law, which functioned as its pedagogue. It was ruled by the endless regulations of the law in the same way that a pedagogue ruled the life of a child in those days. That was its “bondage.”

That civil/ceremonial law is called “the elements of the world” in 4:3 and “the weak and beggarly elements” in 4:9. That these expressions refer to the civil/ceremonial law is clear from the reference to “days, and months, and times, and years” in 4:10). It is described as weak, beggarly and worldly exactly because it was not permanent like the moral law, and because it was merely an *application* of the moral law to Israel's life *in the world*.

Nevertheless, the church of the Old Testament needed those laws because it was still in its childhood. She had not yet “learned” the moral law. She did not have the moral law written in her heart (Heb. 8:8-10) and therefore had to be under the bondage of innumerable outward rules and regulations. The civil/ceremonial law served the good function, therefore, of showing and teaching Israel the deeper principles of the moral law.

Perhaps we can understand this by thinking of our own children. When they are small, they too have to be under the bondage of all sorts of “weak and worldly” rules because they have not learned what is good and bad for them. They do not know, for example, that it is unhealthy and gluttonous to eat only sweets; so we make rules about how many sweets they may have—perhaps, as we have said, they may only have *one* sweet after tea. The regulations of the civil/ceremonial law are of the same sort.

Those rules demand of our children things that are neither right nor wrong in themselves (there is nothing immoral in *two* sweets after tea). But we make such weak and worldly rules to teach them moderation, self-control, and good eating habits. In the same way, the civil/ceremonial law taught Israel the “deeper principle” of the moral law through rules and regulations about things that were not *in themselves* right or wrong.

When our children have grown to maturity, we hope that they have learned moderation and self-control, and we then drop the rule about how many sweets they

may eat. They have the moral law of moderation and self-control “written in their hearts,” so that they know, without a lot of rules, what is good and bad for them—or so we hope.

In this way, God dealt with His church. When the church, by the coming of Christ and the work of the Spirit, came into her maturity by having the (moral) law written in her heart, the rules and regulations of the civil/ceremonial law could be taken away. From that bondage Christ and His Spirit delivered the church.

## **The Law as Our Schoolmaster**

In Galatians 3:24, Scripture says that “the law was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ.”

The reference here is especially to the *moral* law. It is the schoolmaster of all God’s people to lead them to Christ (note the words “our” and “us” in Galatians 3:24). When God begins His work of grace in us, He uses the law to show us our sin (Rom. 7:7).

The law fulfils that function because (as we will see below) it *reveals the holiness and perfection of God Himself*. Revealing the holiness of God, it shows us our need for Christ and the impossibility of being justified by our own works.

The moral law does this for us when it is written in and impressed upon our hearts by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. But it is *only in the new covenant* that the Spirit writes the law in people’s hearts rather than on tables of stone (Heb. 8:8-10).

For this reason, God gave Israel the civil/ceremonial law *in addition to* the moral law. In the old covenant the people were taught the principles of the moral law, not by the work of the Spirit writing them on their hearts, but *through the rules and regulations of the civil/ceremonial law*. Thus, in the Old Testament, too, the moral law functioned as a schoolmaster, but *through* those weak and beggarly elements of the civil/ceremonial law under which the Israelites were kept in a kind of bondage.

In addition, because Christ had not yet come, the ceremonies and shadows of the law, especially the ceremonial law, also showed them Christ in whom alone they could be justified. In this, too, the law was a schoolmaster.

All of which is to say that the civil/ceremonial law is no longer in force in the new covenant. It would be wrong for us, in fact, to go back under the precepts either of the civil law or of the ceremonial law. It would be a denial of what Christ and His Spirit have done for us.

That raises the question, however, why it is in the Scriptures, or, given the fact that it is there, whether we should bother to read and study it. Is the civil/ceremonial law still of use to us in the New Testament?

## **Is the *Civil/Ceremonial* Law Still of Use?**

We believe that the civil/ceremonial law is still of value. It should be read and studied. It is not binding, but it is useful. Because it teaches the deeper principles of



the moral law, we can still learn those principles from the civil/ceremonial law, even though we need not keep them.

There are several illustrations of this in the New Testament. It is not wrong in the New Testament to plough with an ox and an ass together, but the rule (which was part of the civil law) still teaches the great principle of the moral law: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (II Cor. 6:14ff)—a principle of the first commandment.

I Timothy 5:18 is another illustration. There is nothing inherently wrong in muzzling an ox that treads the corn if we still thresh our grain that way. Yet that civil/ceremonial law rule still teaches an important principle of the moral law—that we must support and honour those who labour in the church—a principle of the fourth commandment.

The same is true of the ceremonial law. We cannot let it be in force, as Roman Catholicism does with its priesthood and sacrifices, without denying the unique priesthood of Christ and His only sacrifice. Nevertheless, we can still learn much about the sacrifice of Christ from the sacrifices of the Old Testament and about the worship of God from the temple worship. It is still of value.

## **The Permanence of the Moral Law**

Is any part of the Law of Moses permanent? Is any part of it still in force in the New Testament?

We believe that the moral law, as summarized in the Ten Commandments, is permanent. The rest of the Law of Moses—the civil and ceremonial law, is not. It was only a *temporary* application of the moral law to Israel’s life in Canaan by which God taught Israel the meaning and significance of the moral law.

Scripture clearly teaches that the moral law is permanent. Jesus says in Matthew 5:17-18, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, until all be fulfilled.”

Note the following:

(1) Jesus is speaking here of the law that is identified throughout the New Testament with the Ten Commandments (Rom. 13:8, 9; James 2:8-12).

(2) He makes it very plain that the law “fulfilled” is *not* the law “destroyed”—i.e., the *fulfilling* of the law does not cause the law to pass away! This needs emphasis over against the teaching that the law has no place in the New Testament because Jesus fulfilled it.

(3) According to Jesus, the *fulfilling* of the law is not finished *until heaven and earth pass away*. In other words, even if the fulfilment of the law does cause it to pass away, that will not happen “*until heaven and earth pass.*”

(4) What is more, He says that this applies to *all* of the law—to every jot and tittle. A jot is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, just a little hook, and a tittle is a small stroke on some Hebrew letters that distinguish them one from another, like the stroke on a “Q” which distinguishes it from an “O.” Not one jot

or tittle of it shall pass away. This, too, must be taught against the idea that only some of the commandments are still in force, and some, like the fourth, are not.

(5) Nor does Jesus *change* the law in fulfilling it (though He does change our *relationship* to the law). Some think that in the rest of Matthew 5 Jesus is “changing” many of the commandments, but verse 18 (“one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass”), shows that it is not so.

The word “fulfil” only means “to complete” or even “to obey completely,” as in passages like Philippians 2:2 and Romans 13:8 (in each of these passages the same word is used). Christ fulfils the law by *obeying it completely*. Thus, He also completes it both as far as its power to curse is concerned and as far as its types and shadows, its sacrifices and ceremonies, pointed to Him.

Neither is the law something bad, therefore. Romans 7:12 and I Timothy 1:8 clearly teach this. There are bad *uses* of the law, but the law itself is *good*. It is not even “against” the promises of the gospel (Gal. 3:21). Indeed, in its power to reveal sin, it may be said to have a *necessary function* in connection with the gospel.

All this must be considered in dealing with those statements in Romans and Galatians that seem to denigrate the law. The Word does not set the law and grace over against each other (cf. Gal. 3:21), but rather *salvation* by law-works over against *salvation* by grace. Being *under the law* and *under grace* are contrasted. We must neither “disgrace grace” (as A. W. Pink once put it) nor disallow the law by setting them against each other to the exclusion and destruction of the law.

## The Moral Law and the Nature of God

The Ten Commandments (the moral law) are not arbitrary! They are not a body of precepts imposed by God on men simply to make life hard for them or to control them. They are not, therefore, like many of the laws which we obey in everyday life which *are* in some respects arbitrary and which can easily be changed.

Speed limits are a good example. On general principles, such as the preservation of life, speed limits may be necessary; but even then there is nothing intrinsically wrong about going 100 mph. The setting of a speed limit and the setting of it at 60 or 70 mph is really quite arbitrary. Such laws can be changed and often are.

This does not mean, of course, that we may disobey such laws. There is a good reason for having speed limits; but even those laws for which we can see no good reason must be obeyed if for no other reason than that the Word commands us to “submit [ourselves] to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (I Pet. 2:13).

The moral law is permanent and unchangeable. It is permanent and unchangeable because it is *an expression of the very nature and attributes of God Himself*. It is unchangeable because *God* is unchangeable and abiding even as He is. In other words, what God says to us in the Ten Commandments is essentially this: “Here is what I Am and what you must be in relation to Me. This is My glory and the way your life must match and show My glory.”

That is not at all difficult to see. The first commandment, for example, is not an arbitrary prohibition of idolatry. It prohibits the worship of other gods *because*

*Jehovah is the One Only True God.* Likewise, the second commandment forbids all false worship not just because God happens to be displeased with false worship, but because “*God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). Thus, it is with all the commandments.

We would suggest that each of the commandments is closely associated with the following aspects of God’s glory:

- First commandment . . . . . God’s oneness,
- Second commandment . . . God’s spirituality (God is a spirit), or  
invisibility,
- Third commandment. . . . God’s holiness,
- Fourth commandment. . . God’s covenant,
- Fifth commandment . . . . . God’s authority or sovereignty,
- Sixth commandment . . . . . God’s life (God is the Living God),
- Seventh commandment . . God’s covenant faithfulness,
- Eighth commandment . . . God’s providential ownership and  
government of all things,
- Ninth commandment . . . . God’s truth,
- Tenth commandment . . . . God’s simplicity or perfection.

This is fundamental. This is the reason why the law cannot pass away. It can no more pass away than God or His *glory* can. It is also the reason why the law has abiding significance for the life of man. God’s *glory and attributes* always have significance for us. It shows our sin in the blazing clear light of God’s glory!

To love God’s law, therefore, is to love God Himself and to love the great glory of God. How else could anyone say, “Oh how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97).

Do *you* love it?

### **Did Adam Have the Moral Law?**

Linked to our discussion of the permanence of the moral law is the question as to whether the law, as given to Adam, was the same in essence as the moral law of the Ten Commandments.

Obviously, if the moral law is permanent and an expression of the very nature of God Himself, it would seem to follow that it is from the beginning and that the law Adam had must have been, in essence, the moral law.

This is, indeed, what Scripture teaches.

Romans 5:13-14 clearly teaches that the moral law is *from the beginning*. Specifically, these verses say something about the law during the period from Adam to Moses, i.e., up to the time that the Ten Commandments were given to Moses at Mount Sinai.

On the one hand, the passage makes it clear that there is a sense in which the law was not given *until Moses* (“until the law”). Nevertheless, as verse 13 indicates,

there must have been law in the world *before* that time because “sin is not imputed when there is no law”; and sin definitely was imputed to all those who lived during the time from Adam to Moses (and to Adam also).

The difference between the time before Moses and after, therefore, was only this: that at Mount Sinai, the law which was in the world from the very beginning was written in tables of stone as ten distinct commandments.

That law which was in the world from the beginning was essentially the same as the moral law given to Moses in the Ten Commandments. Romans 5 also makes that clear.

Normally, when referring to the Law of Moses the Greek New Testament is very careful to refer to it as *the* law in distinction from “law” in a more general sense. Yet in Romans 5:13 the Greek New Testament speaks of the Law of Moses simply as *law*, and not *the* law (this is not clear from our English translation). Literally in Romans 5:13 we read, “Until *law*, sin was in the world” (the word “the” is not actually present in the Greek).

Romans 5:13 refers to the Law of Moses simply as *law* in order to identify it with law in general—i.e., law, as it was given from the beginning, even from Adam to Moses. That is, *the* law, as given at Sinai, belongs to law *as it has always been in the world*.

One more evidence, however, that the moral law and the law by which Adam lived are the same is the fact that *both have the same penalty*. God said to Adam, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). The penalty attached to the moral law is the same: “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10).

### **What is the Function of the Law Today?**

Another question that arises from our discussion of the permanence of the moral law is this: What is the place and function of the moral law in the lives of New Testament believers? Is the law a rule of life or a method of condemnation?

Our answer is, “Both.”

That the law is a method of condemnation is abundantly clear from Scripture and few would disagree with us on this point. Paul says in Romans 7:7, “I had not known sin, but by the law.” The law is able to show us our sin because, as we have said above, the law is full of *the glory and holiness of God Himself*. It shows us, therefore, what we are before God and in relation to Him.

That the law is also a rule of life means that we not only go to the law to learn how wicked and corrupt we are in ourselves, but that the law has a function in our new life of sanctification. In other words, the law not only constantly shows us our need for salvation, but also shows us *how*, as saved persons, *we are to live in obedience to God*.

Understand: *the law does not make us holy*—that is the work of the Holy Spirit. Nor is our holiness ever a matter of “merit.” Even the new obedience that we render to

God out of thankfulness for what He has done for us, is not a matter of meritorious works but *of grace in Christ Jesus*.

Nevertheless, the law still shows us what the will of God is concerning obedience and holiness. It shows us, then, how to be thankful to Him for salvation, in deed as well as in word.

This does not mean that we are “under the law.” That cannot be true of those who are in Christ. If anything, it means that the law, which was once over us as our master is now under us as our *servant and advisor* in the whole area of thankful, obedient, Christian living.

The passages which teach this most clearly are James 1:25, 2:8 and 12, where the Ten Commandments are called “the law of *liberty*,” and “the *perfect* law of liberty.” That liberty cannot be anything but our liberty *in Christ*—that is, our freedom from the bondage and curse of sin. The law is the “law of liberty” in that it *sets the boundaries* for our liberty—showing us where that freedom to serve God ends and the slavery of sin begins.

To walk in obedience to God’s commands *is* liberty. Just as the law for a fish is that it swims in the sea, and for that fish to be outside that law is to *die*, so for man, the law of life and liberty is that he be in obedience to God, and for him to be outside that law is to be in *death*.

The moral law, as a law of liberty, shows us the boundary between life and death, liberty and bondage.

### **What is Antinomianism?**

What is antinomianism? The word means “against the law,” and refers to those who deny in one way or another that the moral law (the Ten Commandments) has any place in the life of a New Testament Christian.

There are various kinds of antinomianism. There is, first of all, the teaching that separates the Old and New Testaments, insisting that the moral law was only for Israel in the Old Testament and not for Christians in the New Testament. New Testament Christians, so they say, have only *the law of Christ and of the apostles* to obey. This form of antinomianism is often used as an argument against remembering and keeping holy a New Testament Sabbath day. Jesus shows that this is wrong in Matthew 5:17-19.

Another kind of antinomianism denies that Christians are called to do good works, i.e., the things commanded in the law. It says that the good works commanded by the law were all done by Christ and so there are none for us to do. The answer here, of course, is that Christ did all the good works necessary for our justification, but that He does not *do* the good works that are part of our sanctification—though the grace for them does come from Him. The Christian’s good works are done, therefore, not in order to merit salvation, but *as a result of* salvation. They are a matter of *thankfulness for salvation received*—not of meriting in order to receive that salvation.

A variation of this kind of antinomianism is the refusal on the part of some Christians to accept any commands or demands. If you say to them, “You *must* live a godly life,” they insist that the “must” is a denial of sovereign grace and a concession to work-righteousness. They reject, therefore, any preaching of the law or any preaching at all that exhorts believers to live obedient lives.

This form of antinomianism also sometimes rejects the demand for repentance and faith that accompanies the gospel. They feel that demanding repentance and faith of sinners implies that men have the ability in themselves to repent and believe—a denial of total depravity and of salvation by grace alone.

Others are antinomian in denying that the moral law is a rule of life for New Testament Christians. Because Scripture says that Christ “redeemed us from the curse of the law” and that we are no longer “under the law” but “under grace,” they think that we have nothing more to do with the law, once we are saved. To this, James 2:8-13 is an answer.

There is also a kind of practical antinomianism according to which those who claim to be Christians nevertheless live careless and even wicked lives and excuse themselves by an appeal to God’s sovereignty. The young man who claimed to be a Christian, but excused his wicked lifestyle by saying, “God didn’t give me the grace to do what is right” is an example of this kind of antinomianism. Such carelessness on the part of those who are supposed to be Christians is very much like the error Paul condemns in Romans 6:1: “Let us continue in sin that grace may abound.”

If, as we have pointed out so far, the law is still valid and is a rule of life for New Testament Christians, then these are serious errors. We believe, then, that I Corinthians 9:21 exactly expresses the Christian’s relation to the law: “Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ.”

## **A Rule of Life and a Method of Condemnation**

We believe that, according to the Bible, the law is *both* a method of condemnation *and* a rule of life for New Testament believers.

That the law is a method of condemnation would be difficult to deny. Such passages as Romans 3:20 (“By the law is the knowledge of sin”), Romans 7:7 (“Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law”), and Galatians 3:10 (“Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”) clearly teach otherwise.

There is dispute, however, about whether the law is a rule of life for believers. To some it seems that this would bring New Testament believers once again under the bondage of the law and would be a denial of salvation by grace alone.

This is the clear teaching of the Reformed creeds.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says, in chapter 19,

5. *The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof;*[a] and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the

authority of God the Creator who gave it.[b] Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen, this obligation.[c]

[a.] Rom. 13:8-10; Eph. 6:2; 1 John 2:3-4, 7-8. [b.] James 2:10-11. [c.] Matt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:31; James 2:8.

6. Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned;[a] 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*;<sup>[b]</sup> ...

[a.] Acts 13:39; Rom. 6:14; 8:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:13; 4:4-5. [b.] Psa. 119:4-6; Rom. 7:12, 22, 25; 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:14, 16, 18-23.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* says much the same thing in Q&A 114:

But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

No; but even the holiest of men, while in this life, have but a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution *they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.*

And in Q&A 115:

Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin, and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavour and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come.

The *Belgic Confession* says, in Article 25,

We believe, that the ceremonies and figures of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all the shadows are accomplished; so that the use of them must be abolished amongst Christians; yet the truth and substance

of them remain with us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have their completion. In the meantime, we still use the testimonies taken out of the law and the prophets to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel, *and to regulate our life in all honesty*, to the glory of God, according to his will.

To this, we add the testimony of Scripture.

The first passage we wish to consider is John 14:15, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” Now, some would object that the commandments of *Jesus* are not the same as the commandments of the *moral law*—that Jesus’ commandments are a new law for New Testament believers. But even if that is so, believers are still bound *by* commandments and *by* a law. We, however, believe that Jesus’ commandments are the same as the Ten Commandments. How could Jesus’ commandments be different from God’s?

Proof that they are not different is found in John 16:12: “This is my commandment, that ye love one another.” Comparing Scripture with Scripture—in this case, John 16:12 with Mark 12:29-31—we see that Jesus’ law is simply the same as the summary that He gives of the moral law in Mark 12:29-31.

This is confirmed in I John 2:3-8. Notice, the “new commandment” John gives is really “an old commandment” (v. 7) which we have “had *from the beginning*.” Those words, “from the beginning,” mean “from the beginning *of the world*”—as the context clearly shows (1:1, 2:13-14, 3:8). They do not mean “from the beginning of the New Testament.”

Notice also: “keeping” His commandments involves *walking as He walked*. We know that the way Jesus walked all His life long was the way of perfect obedience to the law of God. That is the way we must walk.

Notice, finally, that John himself explains how the “old” commandment is also a “new” commandment. It is not new by replacing a commandment that is no longer in force. It is “new” in that our relationship to it has changed through the coming and shining of the true light (v. 8). This is at the heart of what we believe about the law. We do *not* teach that the law is a rule of life in that the believer must still be *justified* by it, or in that he can *earn* something by His obedience. It is a rule of life for him only in that it *shows him how to show love and thankfulness to God for all God has done for him*.

It is not something we must keep *in order to receive* salvation. That would be a denial of all that Christ has done. It is something we keep as a *result of salvation received*—an expression of love and gratitude to God. And that is exactly what the Word says in John 16:12 and in I John 2:5.

Another passage is James 2:8-13 where the “royal law,” the law of King Jesus, also called the “law of *liberty*,” is identified first with the same summary of the moral law that Jesus gives in Mark 12:29-31 and then with the Ten Commandments (v. 11—the commandments, “Do not commit adultery” and “Do not kill” belong to the law of liberty). This is the law James says we must fulfil, by which we shall be judged.

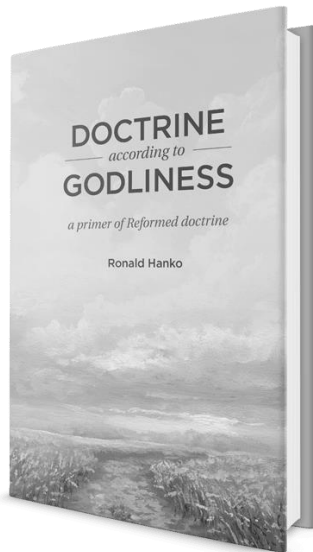


We should notice here, too, that liberty has a law. Liberty is never the freedom to do as we please or to be without law, but the freedom to serve and obey God (cf. Gal. 5:13-14). This is true also of our liberty in Christ.

The law has not changed, therefore; nor has it been taken away. Only our *relationship* to it has been changed. We are no longer under the law to condemnation, but “under the law to Christ” (I Cor. 9:21).



## Further Reading:

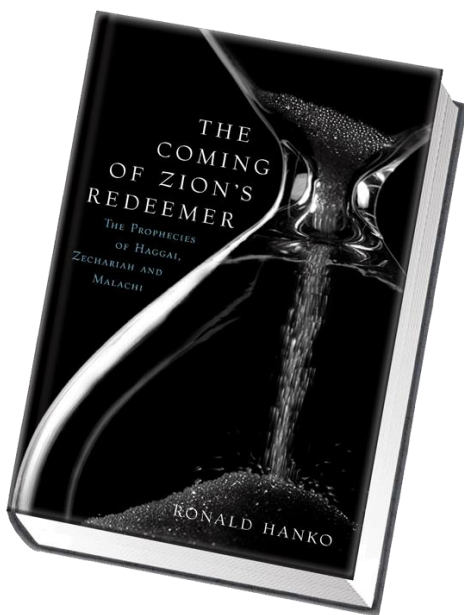


### ***Doctrine According to Godliness: A Primer on Reformed Doctrine***, by Ronald Hanko.

Short, easy-to-read explanations of over 235 topics in Reformed theology. Comprehensive and succinct, yet warm and personal. Second edition.

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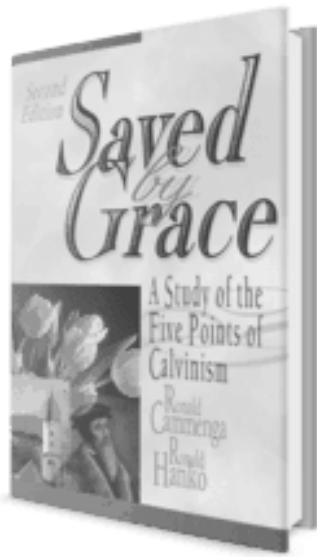
### ***The Coming of Zion's Redeemer: The Prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi***, by Ronald Hanko.

A profound commentary on the last three books of the Old Testament: Haggai on “the desire of the nations,” Zechariah on “the priest upon the throne,” and Malachi on “the messenger of the covenant.”

These prophecies, though not always easy to understand, are as much needed today as when they were inspired. Written for those living at the end of the Old Testament and looking forward to the first coming of Christ, they speak

with authority and promise to those who are looking forward to the second coming of Christ and who live near the end of this present age. Though Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are very different in style, they have a unity of theme and purpose in Christ, the great king, priest and prophet of His people.

Available for £22 at the CPRC Bookstore:  
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***Saved by Grace: A Study of the Five Points of Calvinism***, by Ronald Hanko & Ronald Cammenga.

A fine work explaining, proving and defending the sovereignty of God and the Five Points of Calvinism with ample Scripture, sound exegesis and theological acumen. It is very clearly laid out, answering objections to and denials of the truth, and demonstrating the practical importance of salvation by grace alone.

Beginning with a treatment of the sovereignty of God and then an examination of each petal of the TULIP in turn, Rev. Hanko and Prof.

Cammenga make a consistent and thorough exposition of the doctrines of grace known as Calvinism. Each point is boldly defended and objections to the doctrine are faced and refuted. “Difficult passages” which are often appealed to by Arminians are examined and explained.

The book is written with the “ordinary” Christian in mind. With a view to convincing the unconvinced, the book is saturated with proof texts (Authors’ Preface to the First Edition). “It does not suffer from the confusion, contradiction and compromise that characterize many similar efforts: God elected some but wills to save all; the natural man is totally depraved but performs many good works; Christ died for the elect but ‘is dead’ for everyone who hears the gospel; the actual saving of sinners is by irresistible grace but must take place by a ‘well-meant offer’ made alike to all” (Prof. Engelsma’s Foreword).

Buy it and learn the glories of God’s sovereign grace, or if you want to introduce a friend to Calvinism, buy him this book.

Available for £10 at the CPRC Bookstore:  
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## Useful Websites:

[www.cprc.co.uk](http://www.cprc.co.uk)

[www.limerickreformed.com](http://www.limerickreformed.com)

[www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)

[standardbearer.rfpa.org/](http://standardbearer.rfpa.org/)

[www.prca.org/prtj/](http://www.prca.org/prtj/)

[www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)

<http://www.britishreformed.org/>

<https://prcaphilippinesaudio.wordpress.com/>



The question of the place and function of the law is a difficult matter for many and there is much difference of belief about the law among Christians.

On the one hand there are those who believe that the Law of Moses, including the moral law (the Ten Commandments) has no place in the New Testament. They refer to such passages as Romans 6:15 and Galatians 3:10 as proof. If Christians are bound by any law, they say, it is only the “new” law or “new commandment” given us by Jesus (John 13:34), though even that is differently defined by different people.

Then there are those who believe that some of the Ten Commandments are binding, but only those that are specifically mentioned in the New Testament. This, they believe, excludes the fourth commandment (regarding the Sabbath) as binding in the New Testament.

On the other hand, there are those today who are teaching that some or all of the civil laws of the Old Testament are binding on New Testament Christians. These people usually call themselves *Theonomists* or *Reconstructionists*.

Finally, there is the traditional Reformed and Presbyterian teaching that, while the civil and ceremonial laws are abrogated and no longer binding on New Testament Christians, the moral law is still in place for all New Testament Christians. Even here, however, there is disagreement about the function of the moral law.

We do not intend to deal with each question separately, but to deal with the biblical teaching regarding the law in a more systematic way, in order to be as clear and as thorough as possible. In this way, we hope, all the questions will eventually be answered.

Recognizing the wide differences that exist among Christians regarding the law, we do not expect that everyone will agree with us. We trust, however, that our readers will hear us patiently, examine our reasons for believing as we do in the light of the Word of God, and write to us with further questions and comments.

May God bless and edify the reader in this brief study of *His* law!

