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ON THE LAW OF GOD





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Tom Nettles

Introduction

Of the Law of God

Chapter XIX of the Second London Confession

This chapter of the confession brings us to a careful consideration of the eternal standards of righteousness by which God rules and judges the world (Romans 2:5-8, 12, 13). The law of Scripture is a revelation of the divine nature itself as it pertains to the duties of the creature toward his Creator and toward his fellow image-bearers. Unless we see how law and gospel are perfectly congruent, we will not grasp what Paul meant when he said “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Romans 3:31). Nor will we get it when Paul closes a careful argument about faith and “works of the law” by saying, “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Galatians 2:21). And yet again, apart from a robust vision of the complementarity of law and gospel can we see the beauty and power of Paul’s conclusion to his massive treatment of law, grace, faith, propitiation, and righteousness in saying, “This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25, 26).

This issue contains five articles. Samuel Renihan, a pastor in California, introduces us to paragraphs 1 and 2 with a careful examination, not only of the theology of

these paragraphs, but a critical comparison of them to the same paragraphs in sister confessions. He also looks at the relation of this chapter to other chapters in the confession. My article, (Tom Nettles) expands the theological ideas introduced by Samuel Timon Cline, a law student at Rutgers Law School and a MA student at Westminster Theological Seminary, gives an insightful discussion of ideas of natural law, introduced in the first two articles. He shows that this theological idea is both implicit and explicit in this confession and shows that the Particular Baptists were in theological continuity on this issue with the Reformers, the formative scholastic theologians, and going back to Augustine. Jon English Lee, an Executive Pastor in Montgomery, AL, gives an exposition of paragraphs 3-5 and provides valuable look at the trifold division of the Mosaic Law and how that helps us understand the abiding nature of moral law. Fred Malone, Pastor Emeritus at First Baptist Church, Clinton, LA, takes on paragraphs 6 and 7 and contrasts the law as a covenant of works with its continued use as a rule of life. How its continued usefulness as a rule of life heightens the reality of the operations of God's grace toward believers is a particularly insightful aspect of his exposition.

We pray that this issue of the *Founders Journal* will be of abiding usefulness and provide some rich moments of reflection on the power, beauty, righteousness, justice, and grace given us in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and the consequent proclamation of good news, saving news, transforming news to corrupt and condemned sinners.

—Tom J. Nettles



Samuel Renihan

God's Truth Abideth Still

Paragraphs 1 and 2

Chapter XIX

Second London Confession

As it states in its preface, or “Epistle to the Judicious and Impartial Reader,” the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith expresses the “fundamental articles of religion.” Among the 32 fundamental articles (i.e., chapters), the nineteenth was dedicated to the law of God. The law deserved its own place within the system of fundamentals because the Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God (the gospel) and what God requires of man (the law), making the law one half, so to speak, of what should concern the mind of man.

This is not the first place that the law appears in the Confession. Chapter 1 affirms that the written Word of God contains all things necessary for our obedience and service to God. More specifically, we find in SLC 2.2 a passing reference to the distinction between moral law (that which is known and binding by nature) and positive law (that which is known and binding by institution). This reference occurs when the Confession distinguishes between the obedience creatures “owe unto the Creator, and whatever he is further pleased to require of them.” The obedience creatures owe unto their Creator refers to the moral law, binding at all times and places. That which God further requires refers to positive laws instituted for a time and place.

This generic idea of moral and positive law is spelled out in more specific detail in SLC 4.2. First, the Confession mentions “the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it.” Adam and Eve had a natural knowledge of the moral law, as well as a natural ability to keep it. The next paragraph, SLC 4.3, proceeds from the moral law to positive law. “Besides the law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” Adam and Eve were given a positive command in addition to their natural obligations.

Chapter six develops this further, asserting that this law “had been unto life had he kept it” (SLC 6.1). In other words, God made a special arrangement whereby through obedience to the moral law of creation and the positive law of Eden, Adam could have obtained eternal life for himself “and all mankind” (SLC 6.3).

Chapter seven completes the picture of God’s dealings with Adam by affirming that the means through which God provided a reward for Adam’s obedience was a covenant. Because man’s natural obedience to God earns no reward in return, “they could never have attained the reward of life, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express, by way of covenant” (SLC 7.1). As Nehemiah Coxe put it, “None can oblige God, or make him their Debtor, unless he condescend to oblige himself by Covenant or Promise. Such a priviledg, and nearness to God, as is included in Covenant-Interest, cannot immediately result from the relation which they have to God as Creatures...for the Lord owes not unto Man the Good promised in any Covenant he makes with them, antecedently.”¹

This survey of the appearance of the law in the early chapters of the Confession of Faith is important because the opening paragraph of chapter nineteen simply summarizes what has already been stated. However, whereas previous chapters focused on other doctrines and mentioned the law only as it related to the doctrines in discussion, chapter nineteen brings the law itself into specific focus and follows it through a historical progression, starting with Adam.

God gave to Adam a law 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; 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.²

With the law brought into focus as its own article among the other fundamentals, the Confession immediately returns to the distinction between moral and positive law. There

was “a law of universal obedience” that was written on the heart of man. This is natural law, or moral law. It is known by nature and obligatory for all mankind by virtue of the relationship of the creature to the Creator. Being written on the heart of man, there is no man to whom the law does not apply.

In Romans 2:14–15, Paul teaches that those who do not have God’s law written down, externally, nevertheless possess a knowledge of the law that is written on their hearts, internally.

14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.

Thus, despite man’s fall and suppression of the truth, there is a universal natural knowledge of the universal natural law.

The Confession moves from this to “a particular precept” that is clearly an addition to the universal law of nature. The Scriptures speak of other laws beyond the law of nature, laws that were added for a time but designed to be removed. These are positive laws. For example, Hebrews 9:10 speaks of “regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.” In 1 Corinthians 7:19, Paul says that circumcision, a once binding and important command, now counts for nothing. Positive laws, having been added, can also be subtracted.

The Confession then transitions from a description of the law of nature and the positive laws of Eden to the function of the law in the phrase “by which.” The law functioned in three ways. It bound, or obligated, Adam and all his posterity to perfect obedience. It promised Adam and all his posterity life, if obeyed. And it threatened Adam and all his posterity with death, if disobeyed. The Confession adds that God gifted Adam the power and ability to keep the law.

When compared with the Savoy Declaration and the Westminster Confession, the parent and grandparent documents of SLC, one will note that the Baptist editors of the Confession deleted the phrase “as a covenant of works” from this paragraph. Both the Savoy Declaration and Westminster Confession state that God gave Adam the law “as a covenant of works, by which....” The question, then, is why did the Baptists delete the phrase “as a covenant of works”? It is likely impossible to determine exactly why the phrase was deleted. However, several important qualifications must be introduced in order to define the boundaries of our thoughts on this question.

First, it is impossible that this deletion was designed to reject the idea that the law was given to Adam as a covenant of works. Chapters 4, 6, and 7 already specifically stated that the only way in which life could ever have been available as a reward for Adam's obedience was through God making it available through covenant. And we see here in SLC 19.1 that God "promised life upon the fulfilling [of the law]." So, SLC 19.1 should be read in light of SLC 7.1 which preceded it.

Second, the next chapter opens with the following statement, "The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life..." (SLC 20.1). This, again, asserts that life was only available through covenant, a covenant now broken. So, to assert that the deletion of "as a covenant of works" in SLC 19.1 is a rejection of the law being given to Adam as a covenant of works would be to assert, necessarily, that SLC 19.1 contains a direct internal contradiction with SLC 7.1 and 20.1.

Third, external evidence from the Particular Baptists' writings strongly predisposes our reading of their Confession in favor of the covenant of works. I am aware of at least twenty different Particular Baptist publications in the seventeenth century that affirm a covenant with Adam.³ I am not aware of a single Particular Baptist argument or publication in the seventeenth century that denies a covenant with Adam. When the covenant of works appears in the Particular Baptists' literature, it is treated as a given. For example,

Who hath any thing to reason against it? *Hos. 6.7.* the words are, *They like Adam have transgressed the Covenant ... So that a Covenant passed betwixt God and Adam, for the violation whereof on Adams part, he and his incur'd eternal death.*⁴

As Protestant Divines say; that God made a Covenant of works with Adam, concerning perfect obedience, which he had then power to perform.⁵

We suppose none will (or can at least Rationally) deny: Forasmuch as Life was Implicitly promised unto our First Parent upon his Obedience, and Death was Explicitely threatned... And upon these terms he was to Stand or Fall; which was plainly and undeniably a Covenant of Works.⁶

In light of the internal and external evidence, therefore, we can rule out the idea that the deletion of the phrase "as a covenant of works" indicates a rejection of the covenant of works. Several possible explanations may fill in the blanks of why the phrase was deleted.

First, the simplest and most likely explanation is that, as we have noted previously, 19.1 is merely a summary of what has already been confessed in previous chapters.

Second, the purpose of 19.1 in the context of the chapter as a whole is not to develop all of God's dealings with Adam but specifically to introduce the moral law in a historical progression that begins with Adam.

Third, it is possible that since chapter 19 follows the progression of the law, the Baptists wanted to maintain the focus on the law, *as the law*. As SLC 7.1 notes, obedience does not earn a reward apart from a covenant. A law alone is merely a law. A law becomes a covenant when God promises a reward in return. And the Baptists do confess in 19.1 that God promised Adam a reward of life for obedience to the law. But it is possible that they deleted the phrase "as a covenant of works" in 19.1 on the one hand because they confessed its theological parts there in the same paragraph and on the other hand because they wanted to preserve the focus of the subsequent paragraphs that trace the progression of the law on its own, not the covenant of works. Supporting such a suggestion is the fact that when the function of the law in the life of the believer is discussed in 19.6, the idea that the law comes to the believer as a covenant of works is specifically ruled out. To repeat the point, chapter 19 is concerned with the law on its own, though it notes the function of the law in various historical contexts along the way. If the law is introduced as a covenant of works in 19.1, it could unintentionally alter or misdirect the focus of the ensuing paragraphs by an assumption that the law is, in itself, a covenant of works.

Paragraph 2 of chapter 19 continues the historical progression of the law.

The same law that was first written in the heart of man, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall; and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in Ten Commandments and written in two tables; the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six our duty to man.⁷

With history in mind, SLC 19.1 locates the law in the heart of man and the verbal commands delivered in Eden. SLC 19.2 asserts that the law remains written on the heart of man. It is "a perfect rule of righteousness." It is the standard by which the rectitude of all conduct is measured.

The very same law written on the heart of man, internally, was written down, externally, in the Ten Commandments. This is the first external expression of the natural law. The Confession cites Romans 2:14–15, referenced above as well, to prove this point.

14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.

Paul's argument is not just that all men have a natural knowledge of the law of God, but that their natural internal knowledge of the law of God aligns with the law of God written down externally for Israel in the Ten Commandments. When Paul says that Gentiles "do not have the law" he means that they don't have Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5. They do not have the law written in stone, or on paper. But, Paul says, "the law is written on their hearts." Paul does not speak of a different law being written on the hearts of Gentiles, but the same law that was delivered to Israel.

Particular Baptists such as Nehemiah Coxe and Benjamin Keach affirmed the abiding authority of the moral law of God. Coxe said, "The Law of Creation binds when the Covenant of Creation is broken."⁸ Keach said, "The law of the gospel is the same in nature with the moral law, therefore (if it may be called a law) it is a perfect law...The law certainly loses no part of its sanction by the gospel, that is as holy, just, and good as ever, and a perpetual rule of life and obedience."⁹

There is an important deletion in this paragraph that deserves attention, as well. The Westminster Confession states not only that the moral law was an abiding rule of righteousness, but also that "as such," that is, *as a rule of life*, it was delivered to Israel. The Savoy divines and the Baptist editors of their respective confessions of faith deleted the phrase "as such." The reason for this deletion does not at all reside in a denial that the moral law was a rule of righteousness for Israel. Such a conclusion is impossible to draw from a paragraph that explicitly states that the moral law remains a rule of righteousness for all men, and was written down for Israel.

As discussed earlier, there is a distinction between the law in itself and the function of the law in historical contexts. All three confessions agree that there is a continuity of law between Eden and Sinai. But the Westminster Confession limited the function of the law at Sinai to a rule of life. The

Savoyans and Baptists affirmed that the law remained a universal obligation for mankind as a rule of life but were open to the possibility that the law was delivered at Sinai for more than just governing conduct. In other words, some of them believed that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works.

The Congregationalist divines were heavily influenced by John Cameron's view of the Mosaic covenant as a subservient covenant of works for Israel. Samuel Bolton translated and reprinted Cameron's work on the subject with high praise, and Cameron's model is evident in the thought of Jeremiah Burroughs, Thomas Goodwin, and John Owen. The

majority of the Particular Baptists in the seventeenth century, though not all of them, likewise affirmed that the Mosaic covenant, and indeed the Abrahamic covenant, were (subservient) covenants based on obedience, covenants of works.¹⁰

By deleting the phrase “as such” in relation to the giving of the law as a rule of life at Sinai, the Congregationalist and Baptist editors of their confessions did not positively assert that the law was given at Sinai as a covenant of works, nor did they deny that the law continued to function as a rule of life for all persons, Israel included. Their deletion removed the limitation imposed by the language of the Westminster Confession and opened the door for the belief that most of them held, that the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works.

These first two paragraphs establish a foundation for the rest of the chapter. There is a universal natural law known and possessed by nature. This law rules the lives of all persons and was summed up in the Ten Commandments given to Israel at Sinai.

NOTES:

¹ Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants That God made with Men before the Law. Wherein, The Covenant of Circumcision is more largely handled, and the Invalidity of the Plea for Paedobaptism taken from thence discovered* (London: John Darby, 1681), 6.

² Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (SLC) 19.1.

³ The twenty are: Anon, Baptist Catechism, Christopher Blackwood, Philip Cary, Thomas Collier, Hercules Collins, Nehemiah Coxe, Edward Drapes, Thomas Edwards, Thomas Hardcastle, Thomas Harrison, Edward Hutchinson, Benjamin Keach, Elias Keach, William Kiffen, Isaac Marlow, Robert Purnell, Samuel Richardson, Thomas Whinnell, Nathaniel Wyles. If our arguments are sound, we can add to the list 2LCF itself.

⁴ Christopher Blackwood, *A Soul-Searching Catechism* (London: J.C., 1653), 12.

⁵ Edward Hutchinson, *A Treatise Concerning the Covenant and Baptism Dialogue-wise, between a Baptist & a Poedo-Baptist, Wherein is shewed, That Believers only are the Spirituall Seed of Abraham; Fully discovering The Fallacy of the Argument drawn from the Birth Priviledge* (London: Francis Smith, 1676), 94.

⁶ Philip Cary, *A Solemn Call Unto all that would be owned as Christ's Faithful Witnesses, speedily, and seriously, to attend unto the Primitive Purity of the Gospel Doctrine and Worship: Or, a Discourse concerning Baptism* (London: John Harris, 1690), 121.

⁷ SLC 19.2.

⁸ Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants*, 44.

⁹ Benjamin Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened: Or, The Glory of God's Rich Grace Displayed in the Mediator to Believers: And His Direful Wrath against Impenitent Sinners. Containing the Substance of near Forty Sermons Upon several Subjects* (London: William Marshall, 1694), 152–153.

¹⁰ Thomas Hardcastle is the only example I know of in the seventeenth century, where a Particular Baptist explicitly affirms that the Mosaic covenant is the covenant of grace, and not a covenant of works. There are other authors, such as Robert Purnell, that seem to hold the same position. And, in fact they were pastors of the same church. This is not to say that there were not other Particular Baptists who believed the same things as Hardcastle. But because Hardcastle's position appears in an unpublished exposition of the Westminster Larger Catechism, the published literature of the Particular Baptists in the seventeenth century is entirely devoid of this position, to my knowledge.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Samuel Renihan is pastor of Trinity Reformed Baptist Church in La Mirada, California.



Tom Nettles

God's Law: Absolute, Universal, and Eternal

Paragraphs 1 and 2

Chapter XIX

Second London Confession

A Positive Command with Absolute Implications

Paragraph one of chapter XIX of the Second London Confession sets forth the clarity and certainty with which God established the moral order of His creation through the creature made in His image. First, God wrote in Adam's heart a "law of universal obedience."

This cordially established moral disposition was to be manifested in the obedience to a "particular precept" of abstaining from eating of one tree in the exuberant garden in which the creature was placed. By establishing a standard in terms of a positive ordinance, "He bound him, and all his posterity to personal entire exact and perpetual obedience." This requirement of perpetual obedience given to Adam was for the entire race of humans at the time, Adam and his wife Eve. Adam's obedience and Adam's disobedience would be ours.

The Law of the Heart

The requirement had clear consequences attached to it: life, eternal life without fear of its being interrupted or broken was consequent upon obedience, "life upon the fulfilling;"

death, eternal death under the righteous frown and wrath of the Creator was consequent upon disobedience, “the breach of it.” God “indued him with power and ability to keep it.” Nothing was lacking in the moral faculties by which he could discern the moral character of the command. He had every natural faculty requisite for the actions of a moral creature. Nor was his heart a mere *tabula rasa* but sensed the goodness of the Creator and the loveliness of obedient fellowship with Him. His heart was good, though mutable, and would give rise to good fruit until corrupted by a single act of disobedience. Andrew Fuller stated the case beautifully in his personal “Confession of Faith.”

I believe, from the same authority [the Bible], that God created man in the image of his own glorious *moral character*, a proper subject of his *moral government*, with dispositions exactly suited to the law he was under, and capacity equally to obey it to the utmost, against all temptations to the contrary. I believe if Adam, or any holy being, had had the making of a law for himself, he would have made just such an one as God’s law is; for it would be the greatest of hardships to a holy being not to be allowed to love God with all his heart.

The Righteous Law of Love

Though the particular test was perpetual obedience to a positive ordinance, its root was an eternal standard of righteousness. The Psalmist wrote, “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your law is truth ... The righteousness of your testimonies is everlasting.... Every one of your righteous ordinances is everlasting.... All your commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:142, 144, 160, 172). When God made a creature in His own image, He necessarily placed within Him a standard of righteousness. This righteousness was not changeable but was a reflection of God’s own internal character. Since the greatest of all commandments, and a summary of what is called “the first table” is “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength,” we know that love for the Creator was the dominant affection of Adam in his unfallen state.

Since God’s love first of all is directed toward Himself in an eternal return of love between the three persons of the Trinity (John 17:24; 1 John 4:7, 8, 11,) the righteous impulse of Adam’s heart was to love God. The relation between righteousness and love is seen in John’s discussion in 1 John 3, summarized in “Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God nor is he who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10). The love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit at conversion is the sanctifying principle fundamental both to regeneration and progressive sanctification. This “love of God” means the love that is characteristic of God’s own internal nature has been restored to us and

serves as the foundation for all those spiritual connections that produce hope (Romans 5:3–5; cf. 1 John 3:1–4 for love and purity as opposed to lawlessness).

Thus, if the “law of universal obedience” written in the heart of Adam consisted of love to God, then any positive command given by God would be a delight to Adam, for his demonstration of love to God would be the joyful and punctilious doing of His commands. When Adam was given, therefore, the “particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil,” he knew only that love meant following the will of his Creator. It is probable that at this stage he did not know the difference between a moral precept and a positive precept, but knew only that the divinely revealed will was in itself good.

The eating of fruit was not immoral in itself as indicated by the complete freedom given to have “every tree which has fruit-yielding seed” to be food. Genesis 2:9 reads, “Out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This language throughout leads one to see that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil had all the same traits in its appeal and in its food value, and that nothing intrinsic to eating it would be immoral or destructive. The prohibition, therefore, related solely to the will and wisdom of the Creator and would, due to the positive nature of the command, be a test of Adam’s full commitment—affections, mind, understanding, will—to find his complete joy in unbroken fellowship with his Creator. The issue here was the Lawgiver, not the specific dimension of the rule itself. This draws us to investigate the nature of the temptation from Satan that resulted in disobedience.

Satan’s Subtle Scheme

Satan did not find his avenue to disobedience for Adam and Eve through any perverse affections in the two representatives of humanity, but by means of a deceitful appeal to the affections. The temptation focused on three issues—the character of the Lawgiver, the rationale for the Law, and the particular object of the command.

The engagement that Eve had with the serpent involved a critical evaluation of the meaning of God’s words in light of her sense of God’s goodness and her desire to complete the journey to be like Him, immutably holy. The path to disobedience in this case was through giving a new understanding to inform her affections. “You shall not surely die” was an appeal to look upon God as merciful, and kind, and so attached to the well-being of His

creature that He would not inflict death upon the harmless act of eating fruit, something that they did every day. Second, the reason they would not die is that the fruit would give them a knowledge like God's knowledge, the very goal they had through this time of probation. What could be more desirable than to be like the transcendently lovely Creator? Third, the fruit itself had all the qualities of goodness invested in it by the Creator/Lawgiver. So the perverse construal, to disobey would really be to obey.

A critical engagement with a superior intellect altered the understanding of Eve, and consequently involved Adam, so that the positive command was seen as merely provisional, not absolute. Paul wrote the Corinthians about false apostles who preached another Jesus, "I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). We have observed, however, that all positive commands arise from the first table of the commandments summarized as "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37; cf. Leviticus 19:18). Thus, what Satan made to appear inconsequential to Eve, actually violated the greatest of the commandments in substituting the wisdom that is earthly, sensual, and demonic, for that that is first of all pure, then peaceable (James 3:15, 17).

Righteousness Never Changes

In breaking the positive command, Eve broke the unchangeable, everlasting standard of righteousness. Since Adam viewed her as a "helper suitable for him," he followed her lead. Though we are not forbidden to eat fruit, we still must love God unreservedly in heart, mind, soul, and strength. In emphasizing this, the confession states, "the same law that was first written in the heart of man, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall." The confession points to Romans 2:14, 15 as making this point: "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness."

In fact, this itself will be a ground of accusation, (or excuse) when God judges the secrets of the heart by the gospel. To judge by the gospel engages the law in its clearest manifestation of unalterable righteousness. The gospel is the work of God that challenges any attempt to relativize the eternal and immutable righteousness set forth in God's law, whether in the heart, or distinctly revealed on Mount Sinai, and given to the hand of Moses. This is a further application of Paul's argument in Romans 1 that all human sin

and even radical perversity is acted out in defiance of a law obvious to the conscience of all men. They hate it, they seek to deny it, they sear their consciences against it, but still it witnesses against them—“They are without excuse, for although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God; ... who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, ... and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, ... who knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”

This testimony also is behind Paul’s argument in Romans 5 when he notes in a parenthetical way, “For until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam” (Romans 5:13, 14). The assumption upon which Paul argues is that, though the Mosaic law had not been written, delineating on stone tablets the specific propositions of the moral law, the original law of the heart against which Adam sinned was still operative, even though it was not present in the form of a positive command as it had been for Adam.

“The Same Law ... was Delivered by God upon Mount Sinai”

In order for this law not to be smothered in the corruption of depraved and rebellious consciences, God revealed that eternal standard of righteousness in a series of short and clearly stated propositions. This revelation came to Moses, the leader of a developing nation that was to provide the context from which the Redeemer would come. In order to suit a people for Himself, the original standard of righteousness by which the creature/Creator relation was defined had to be reinstated and its violation had to be satisfied with the threatened death. After the giving of the law, Moses bound the people to its provisions by stating, “This day you have become the people of the Lord your God. Therefore you shall obey the voice of the Lord your God, and observe his commandments and his statutes which I command you today” (Deuteronomy 27: 9, 10).

They were to embody as a nation/society purity in their worship of the Lord and transparent sincerity in their regard for their neighbor and in their sexual purity. That they had been given such a solemn responsibility and so exalted a calling and yet violated this call and the explicit commandments showed that they in particular and humanity as a whole needed redemption from sin. In addition, they needed new hearts in which the law of God was no longer smothered (Ezekiel 36:26, 27; Jeremiah 31:33). With new hearts, repentance and faith arise and the Lord declares “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their

sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). David experienced this personally when he requested, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51:2). This cry arose from an awareness that sin primarily is a violation of the authority and prerogative of God, an assault upon his law and disregard for his holiness (51:3, 4). This cry also arose from a renewed awareness that the heart is the source of violations of God’s law: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (51:10).

Regeneration, repentance, faith/trust/submission, justification, and sanctification (removal of the corrupting influences that plague our thoughts and actions) all happen in relation to the original law planted in the heart. Righteousness is the key in all of these parts of God’s redemption of sinners. That it might stand as an unalterable, unassailable, clearly enunciated proclamation of the righteousness that governs all of these saving transactions, the law “was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai in Ten Commandments and written in two tables.” Though it was delivered as one of the elements that established the covenant between Israel and God, its relevance was not limited to that specific covenantal relationship. Since Israel was to serve as a vehicle for prophecies, types, instances of judgment, praise and worship in accord with revealed truth, and the human genealogy of the coming Savior, there was a mixture of things that would pass away and things that must necessarily remain. For example, prophetic ceremonies when fulfilled would pass away. Offices which only could find perfection in the Redeemer would pass away when he came. The revelation of righteousness, however, under which he himself died and that constitutes the righteousness he accomplished for our justification, would not, could not pass away, but would be magnified. “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary we establish the law” (Romans 3:31).

“Ten Commandments Written in Two Tables”

The two tables reflect “our duty towards God, and ... our duty to man.” Our relation to angels, both fallen and elect, is not dealt with in the Ten Commandments, but its implications in that area are spelled out in other places in Scripture (1 Corinthians 10:18–22; Ephesians 6:12–16; Colossians 1:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–17; Hebrews 1:5–14; Revelation 19:9, 10; 22:8, 9). Specifically, the commandments revealed at Sinai deal with the creature’s relationship with God in the first table and with our fellow image-bearers in the second table.

Every Law is Absolute

A violation of any of the commandments means that eternal life is lost (Galatians 3:10–12; James 2:8–13). Already under the sentence of death and corrupted in heart through our connection with Adam, we add transgression upon transgression in aggravation of our condemnation and in elevation of the grace of our justification (Romans 5: 16, 17). James said that partiality breaks the second table entirely for partiality dishonors a co-equal image-bearer. “Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.” So Paul reasoned from Deuteronomy 27:26 that any violation of the law put the transgressor under the divine curse—“Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them” (Galatians 3:10).

Absolute distributed According to Degrees

The First Table

Given the absoluteness of righteousness as distributed in all parts of the law, we see also that there is a descending intensity of heinousness in the violation in each table. If the summary of the first table is to love God with all our heart mind soul and strength, then the division into four, perhaps five, specific commands implies partitive elements of obedience beginning with the most fundamental and important and then including applications of that first and fundamental principle.

In the first commandment, we find God’s proclamation of His uniqueness, His solitary claim to deity, His ontological exclusivity as God. All the so-called gods of the Egyptians He has shown to be shams, imagined imposters, deifications of things that He created. They have no power, no eyes with which to see, no mouths with which to speak, no arms by which their power may be shown, indeed no minds by which to purpose, plan, and execute. The Lord had shown their emptiness in His bringing His people “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” The first commandment, therefore, lays the groundwork for all that follows. No supposed deity is to be set alongside or anywhere near Him in their minds or their hearts. He is Jehovah, their God, and other than Him there are no gods. The Lord claimed exclusivity of being and, thus, of loyalty and worship.

For this reason, the writer of Hebrews states, “For he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). There is no possibility of knowledge of God or of any degree of obedience to any of His

commands if we reject the fundamental principle, and ontological truth, that a God who is to be known and worshipped actually does exist. Those who “do not like to retain God in their knowledge” will be given over to debased minds and cannot make any progress toward a reverent and saving knowledge of God until they consent to His existence and the worthiness of knowing Him.

Such an announcement of exclusivity of existence and worthiness involves other elements of fitting worship that must be stated. They are not to worship Him by means of any physical image arising from their imagination and craft. If there are symbols that can be expressive of the nature of pure worship, God Himself will provide them in due time. They, however, are to dismiss any attempt to liken God to any created thing, for their allegiance will quickly turn to superstition and idolatry and God’s holy jealousy will be provoked. True worship does not involve finding a physical object before which to bow, but consists of loving God and obeying His commandments (Exodus 20:4–6).

The third commandment presents another aspect of true knowledge of God and His unique being and consummate holiness: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” Our credibility is not to be secured at the price of God’s name. An empty, flippant invocation of the name of God—as a profane manner of expressing amazement or anger or outrage—or speaking of holy things in a mundane way is forbidden. In our conception of the name of God, the mouth is to be used to sing praises and give benediction for divine revelation and redemption. We avoid using God’s name in a common way but employ it only in ways that indicate gratitude, praise, awe, and dependence.

The fourth commandment sets apart a day for rest, worship, and for remembering the great power and work of God. It recalls Genesis 2:2, 3 as a time to look back at God’s completion of creation. Everything that exists that is not Him, He made. The day set forth a regular time for worship in recognition of the majesty and excellence of God revealed in creation. Added to this is His gracious intervention on their behalf, rescuing them from bondage. They are to recognize with regularity as a people that all of their joy spiritually and present sustenance physically depends on Him.

Creatures must have a regular rhythm in which the prescribed manner of approach to God is maintained. As God ceased from His labor, noting that it was very good, so we cease from ours to reflect on the wisdom, power, intelligence, beauty, and transcendent excellence manifest in the order and magnitude of creation. The creature’s mutability and dependence means that he must labor to sustain his life; he has six days to do this. The

creature's mutability and dependence means that he must recognize and worship the one who is immutable and upon whose power and goodness all created life depends. The rhythm of worship and the necessity of recognizing the greatness of God and our dependence on Him will never cease.

To partition our lives in terms of a regular time of praise to the giver and sustainer of life is a moral duty. The action is built on such an intrinsic worthiness of the object that performing the action engages the most sublime aspects of the creature's being in a manner fitting both to the object of worship and the worshipper. While such obeisance should permeate our being all day, every day, God set aside a particular time in which we join Him in a deep satisfaction and enjoyment of a completed work of His.

The day on which this is done would be changed only in light of another work from which God rested. This work must be a purposeful manifestation of even greater power, greater wisdom, greater beauty, greater excellence, and greater purpose. It must result in an expansion of the creature's knowledge of the fulness of God's holy character and the nature of our dependence on him. While redemption from Egypt foreshadowed it, redemption through Christ accomplished the reality. The day of resurrection, the day sealing redemption's certainty, was immediately set aside as the time commemorating the final rest of God and the eventual Sabbath rest for His people (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:19–23; 26–29; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Acts 20:7; Hebrews 4:1–11; 8:6; 9:15; Revelation 1:10).

The Second Table

The fifth commandment appears to be a transition from the absolute authority of God and the ultimate allegiance of all to Him into our relationship with our fellow humans. We all initially come into this world through parents, our learning of right and wrong and ideas of respect for authority come initially from them. We find our first point of relation to God through them as well as our first contact with "neighbors." It is important, therefore, both for love of God and love of neighbor that we honor our "father and mother." So important was this dually applied commandment that the longevity of the people in the land was promised if obeyed.

The sixth commandment parallels the first. While the first establishes the absoluteness of God in respect to existence and, therefore, the sole object of worship, the sixth establishes the absolute value of our fellow man as a creature whose life is not at our disposal. The

greatest of sins against God is to doubt His existence or His uniqueness; the greatest violation of our neighbor's existence is the taking of his life due to schemes of our own (Romans 13:8–10). When Noah, his family, and the animals emerged from the ark, God gave Noah the proposition, “every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.” He also gave a strict prohibition of taking the life of another human except as a punishment for murder. “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God he made Man.” Instead of taking life, human life was to be replenished on the earth: “Be fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it” (Genesis 9:3–7). In love to neighbor, the preservation of the image bearer in recognition of the necessity and dignity of his existence holds the place of priority.

The commandments following enumerate descending ways in which we nip away at his life in a sinful violation of his integrity. Next to the sin of taking our neighbor's life is the taking of his or her spouse. The first human relationship was between husband and wife (Genesis 2:24) so related that they become one flesh. Adultery is second only to murder as a sin against neighbor. Though their life is preserved, the union of two lives in holy matrimony has been violated. This is the reason that Paul gives such intense attention to violations of sexual purity and the designed place of sexuality in human relations (Romans 1:24–29; 13:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 5:1, 9–11; 6:13–20; 7:3–9; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3–7; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4: 3–8; Hebrews 13:4).

Stealing his possessions also is a way of pecking away at his life. To rob persons of that which represents the investment of their time in the provision for their earthly needs and pleasures gouges out a part of their life and transfers it to oneself.

To give a false testimony about one's neighbor and hurt his reputation is an assault on his life, robbing him of time invested in achieving the judgment from others of trustworthy character. This can be regained through demonstration of the falsity of charges, but a life taken cannot be restored.

Foundational of all violations against our neighbor's life, his wife, his possessions, and his character is a jealous, envious, possessive, and resentful spirit. These attitudes are also sinful even if never put into actual practice. This final commandment, “You shall not covet,” was the one that killed the self-righteousness of Saul of Tarsus (Romans 7:7–12). In addition, one could make a case that the entire Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 is an extended exposition of the pervasive relevance of the tenth commandment, and how it extends its implication throughout the entire decalogue.

Holiness in heart when expressed as a true response to the law of God reveals a life of rich worship, deeply embraced righteousness, and sacrificial self-giving. To honor the law with sincerity and truth, is to embrace the gospel of Christ who is made unto us wisdom from God—righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tom Nettles is retired but presently teaches as a Senior Professor at SBTS in Louisville. He is an active member at LaGrange Baptist Church in LaGrange, KY. He and his wife Margaret have three adult children and five grandchildren.

Timon Cline

Natural Law in the Second London Confession

I. INTRODUCTION

As Carl Trueman has recently reminded us,¹ mere tacit affirmation of the words of confessions does not a confessional Christian make.² The historic doctrinal formulations are, by nature, dogmatic assertions, a topical summary of Scriptural truth.³ Therefore, the *meaning* of the words therein must be affirmed and believed and said meaning must be understood within the historic context in which they were first employed. The words of the historic confessions were intentionally and carefully chosen because they already possessed precise and established meaning. Therefore, “They are not empty placeholders onto which the reader can impose any meaning he chooses,” says Trueman. If the opposite were the case then the purpose of confessions, namely, to guard the deposit of truth (2 Timothy 2:14), would be undermined. A reader-response style confessionalism guards nothing except the immediate, subjective sentiments of the individual reader.

It is essential to understand the imported meaning of confessional terms, the original intent of the authors, so that Christians can honestly subscribe to them with the same intentionality and care with which they were formulated. This is what it means to be truly *confessional*.

Accordingly, this article endeavors to expound on the meaning of chapter 19 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (SLC), specifically its use of “the light of nature” or “law of nature,” otherwise known as the natural law, as understood in the seventeenth-century context. As will be shown, the particular use of natural law concepts and terms in the SLC situates the seventeenth-century English Baptist codifiers squarely within the broader Reformed consensus at the time.

II. CHAPTER 19: OF THE LAW OF GOD

Perhaps it goes without saying that before we can discern the *meaning* of chapter 19 of the SLC regarding the natural law, we must first outline what the text says.⁴ Chapter 19 opens as follows:

God gave to Adam a law 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; 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.⁵

The reference to the “law of universal obedience written in [Adam’s] heart” refers the reader back to chapter 4 (“Of Creation”) of the confession. Article 2 therein states that God made Adam and Eve with “responsible and immortal souls” which were capable of living unto God. They were supplied with innate knowledge of God’s moral law by His inscribing of it upon their hearts and they had power to fulfill it without the aid of supernatural grace.⁶ Besides this natural knowledge of the moral law, God also gave man a positive precept, namely, the “command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which whilst they kept, they were happy in their communion with God.”⁷ This combination of law, stipulation, and promise spoken of in chapter 4 has been referred to by Reformed authors as the creative or natural covenant, or more commonly, the covenant of works.⁸

Chapter 19.2 then affirms that the same moral law that was written on the hearts of Adam and Eve continues “to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man.”⁹

Doubling down on the continued veracity and applicability of this law, the confession reiterates in 19.5 that “The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, 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; neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.”¹⁰ In short, the moral law, though not the positive precept regarding the tree of knowledge, endured after the fall of man. It is eternally binding on all men and not abrogated by the gospel, but on the contrary, does “sweetly comply with it.”

To the latter point, 19.7 clarifies that in true believers the Spirit of Christ subdues and enables the will of man to perform the law “freely and cheerfully.”¹¹ Yet, 19.6 is quick to clarify that the performance of the moral law is not salvific. But God’s law “is 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.” The moral law also has the effect of exposing sin, bringing men to conviction and repentance, showing them their need for Christ, and restraining sin.¹²

The 19th chapter also acknowledges that in addition to the moral law implanted in the hearts of all men, God prescribed other positive laws to the people of Israel which included ceremonial and judicial laws that were particular to their polity and context. These have been abrogated by the new covenant in Christ, yet, especially the judicial laws remain morally relevant and applicable today in terms of the general equity they convey.¹³

Like any document, the confession assumes at chapter 19 that the reader is acquainted with the preceding content.¹⁴ Better to understand the references made in chapter 19 to the moral law of God naturally known to man, it must also be remembered that the confession makes reference to such natural knowledge in its very first lines. In Chapter 1.1, establishing the *principium cognoscendi externum* of Scripture, the confession states that though not sufficient for saving knowledge of Christ,¹⁵ man can know by “the light of nature” and a studious examination of the created order “the goodness, wisdom, and power of God,” such that he is utterly left without excuse.¹⁶

From the above outline several observations can be made regarding the natural law. First, its divine authorship. The natural law is a product of God, just like His divine positive precepts in Scripture. Second, its promulgation. The natural law was implanted by God in man’s heart at creation and enjoys close connection to the *imago Dei* in humans. Third, its enduring relevance and universal applicability. The natural law, being connected to the *imago Dei*, continues to be present in, and binding on, all men after the fall. It was reiterated in the ten commandments (19.2) and was not abrogated by the gospel (19.5).

Having gathered the basic terms and summarized the general assertions of the confession regarding the natural law, the meaning of these terms and assertions must be set in their

original intellectual context. In so doing, not only will the meaning of the text be illuminated, but it will become evident that the SLC was in full agreement with the Reformed consensus regarding the natural law.

III. NATURAL LAW IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY REFORMED ORTHODOXY

As Stephen J. Grabill surmises, since the at least twentieth-century “a cloud of suspicion and hostility has engulfed” the natural law in Protestant circles. This phenomenon was epitomized by the 1934 debate between Emil Brunner and Karl Barth.¹⁷ Several factors contributed to this shift, but such analysis is out of scope here. What is important to realize is that such was not always the case. In the period of High Orthodoxy (1620–1700),¹⁸ the natural law was a thoroughgoing element of Reformed theology.¹⁹ And this was no innovation of the seventeenth-century by which the Calvinists turned against Calvin and regressed to medieval scholasticism.²⁰ Indeed, as John T. McNeil famously declared over seventy years ago, “There is no real discontinuity between the teaching of the Reformers and that of the predecessors with respect to natural law. Not one of the leaders of the Reformation assails the principle.”²¹ The natural law was part of the mental framework, a basic assumption, of the magisterial Reformers, and it continued to be so with their progeny. David VanDrunen has rightly observed that, “Natural law remains a fixture of the Reformed confessional heritage.”²²

Richard Muller offers a helpful definitional summary of natural law as it stood in the era of High Orthodoxy. Each element of the following definition is present in the SLC. The natural law (*lex naturalis* or *jus naturale*) is,

[T]he universal moral law either impressed by God upon the mind of all people or immediately discerned by the reason in its encounter with the order of nature. The natural law was therefore available even to those pagans who did not have the advantage of the Sinaitic revelation and the *lex Mosaica* with the result that they were left without excuse in their sins... The scholastics argue the identity of the *lex naturalis* with the *lex Mosaica* ... according to substance and distinguish them ... according to form. The *lex naturalis* is inward, written on the heart and therefore obscure [due to sin], whereas the *lex Mosacia* is revealed externally and written on tablets and thus of greater clarity.²³

All created things have a “law” in them that governs their activity according to their assigned nature and end, but only passively in this respect. This is the secondary use of the natural law. The primary use in focus in Muller’s definition refers to the moral law of God which governs human morality and socio-political activities. Yet, ethical conclusions can be

derived from both because both function to direct creation to its proper end, the glory of God.²⁴ From Muller's definition of the natural law several elements can be drawn out which track with those drawn from the SLC above.

A. Divine Authorship

At the outset it must be affirmed that for the Reformed orthodox, the natural law is not a mere epistemological theory. It is first and foremost God's revelation; an objective moral order reflective of the eternal law.²⁵ However, the natural law is not identical to the eternal law, which is in the mind of God which is "nothing more than the Divine essence,"²⁶ or the "Divine Wisdom," to invoke Thomas Aquinas.²⁷ Man cannot know the mind of God. The natural law is derivative of the eternal law in that it is the eternal law expressed with reference to creatures, and proportional to their natures. The divine essence itself being the prerequisite, the first metaphysical foundation, for the natural law, the notorious proposition by Hugo Grotius that even if God were not to exist the natural law would still endure is demonstrably false.²⁸ Neither would the natural law exist but for the existence of creatures. In the case of their non-existence, eternal law would remain but, without a creaturely referent, the natural law would cease to exist.²⁹

B. Written on the Heart

The second thing to notice in Muller's definition is that all men have, by the law of nature, knowledge of God (e.g. Romans 1), and are thereby duty-bound to worship Him. They also possess general precepts of right and wrong (i.e. the moral law).³⁰

The London Ministers of Sion College in 1646 penned an explication and defense of the then recently drafted Westminster Confession. Therein they affirmed that the "light of Nature, was con-created with man," and that the "divine Law of Gods image [was] naturally engraven in Adams heart." Hence this law could not be "totally abolished and utterly razed by the fall" lest the image of God itself, and man's very nature be blotted out as well. There remain in man "some glimmerings" of natural knowledge of God and His law.³¹

Likewise, the *Synopsis Purioris*, a seminal theological manual of the seventeenth century, states that post-fall, man still possesses primary moral notions or first principles, but his secondary notions (i.e. discernment, the will, and the affections) "stagger with wretched hesitation." He fails to apply the natural law equitably and consistently.³²

The Reformed orthodox, following Peter Martyr Vermigli, also insisted that this remnant of knowledge enabled pagans to act, though unsavingly, in accordance with God's moral law.³³ Romans 2:14, said Vermigli, referred to "certain outward honest and upright actions, which as touching civil righteousness might by nature be performed by them."³⁴ Unregenerate man can only perform the law in this *external* sense unto civil righteousness, and not unto right worship of God. Here Vermigli followed the traditional interpretation of Romans 2:14–15 as did most, if not all, of the Reformed of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁵

C. The Epistemological Question

If we accept that the natural law *is* known by all men, we might still ask, *how* is it that men access it? It is partly innately known and partly empirically.³⁶

1. Innately

William Perkins and William Ames, among others, described the conscience as an act of practical judgment which applies what man knows to a particular case, including his own actions.³⁷ The *synteresis* is the "storehouse," so to speak, of the natural law written on the heart.³⁸ It is an intellectual habit, and therefore cannot be extinguished. It is the failure of the conscience to apply what man innately knows to his actions appropriately that plagues the human condition, not, fundamentally, a lack of knowledge. Far from denying human depravity, this formulation compounds man's guilt. He is truly without excuse.

2. Empirically

In addition to innate moral knowledge, the truths of natural law are discovered by observation of the providence of God and the order of His handiwork bear witness to His existence and majesty and force themselves upon the consciences of man.³⁹ Along these lines Calvin said that the perfections of God are so manifest in creation that "we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him."⁴⁰ These proofs "force themselves on the notice of the most illiterate peasant, who cannot open his eyes without beholding them."⁴¹

D. Republished in the Decalogue

Due to the noetic effect, the reason of man is flawed such that he will inevitably fail to appropriately apply, and arrive at derivative conclusions from, the remnant of the moral law that he still possesses "naturally." He can also knowingly suppress the truth due to his

pride and corrupt will, as the pagans in Romans 1 did.⁴² Aquinas stated that these factors necessitate divine special revelation.⁴³

Hence, the fourth element of Muller's definition: the natural law is substantially synonymous with, and supplemented by, the Decalogue.⁴⁴ Calvin wrote that the *lex scripta* is "nothing but an attestation of the *lex naturae* whereby God brings back to memory what has already been imprinted on our hearts."⁴⁵ The natural law is authored by the same God of Scripture. Therefore, one cannot contradict the other. Accordingly, Christian natural law theory has, since Gratian's *Decretum*,⁴⁶ held that the Mosaic Decalogue is synonymous with, though not exhaustive of, the natural law in content but not form.⁴⁷ This being the case, the moral law inscripturated at Sinai "binds more strongly, and is as a double bond," said Francis Roberts. "So that the sins of Jews before Christ or of Christians since Christ against the Moral Law, are far more heinous and inexcusable than the sins of pagans against the Law of Nature."⁴⁸ It is important to note here that the natural law is synonymous with the Mosaic law once one has controlled for the particularities of the purpose and context of the Jewish polity. However, Christian natural law has regularly included the judicial laws of the Mosaic corpus of law, not to the letter but according to the sense.⁴⁹ This use of Israel's judicial law becomes especially helpful in evaluating the application of natural law principles in specific circumstances given that it is at that point that man's fallen reason is most in play.

The Reformed orthodox also saw the Sermon on the Mount to be a summation of the natural law. Given the attestation to the natural law in Scripture via the two Mounts, clearly the natural law does not render human reason autonomous. Rather the natural law is situated within a Scriptural paradigm. The divine positive law is always the *norma normata*. As Johannes Althusius, the greatest Reformed political and legal theorist of the seventeenth century, advised, the natural law can be known most properly by the consultation of Scripture and church tradition.⁵⁰

IV. CONCLUSION

Though much more could be said, given what has been delineated above it should be clear that the SLC reflects a conventional understanding of the natural law in the seventeenth century. There are many uses of the SLC's doctrine of natural law. But suffice it to say, the older theory that the Reformed tradition stands in a relationship of antithesis and repudiation with the natural law must be put to bed.⁵¹ And the more recent conviction by some Reformed scholars that chooses to ignore or denounce the natural law for epistemological and apologetical reasons is equally untenable if one is to honestly

subscribe to the SLC or either of her sister confessions and the original meaning of the truths espoused therein. And the view enshrined in the SLC, far from being antiquarian, has been reaffirmed by Baptists throughout the centuries, from Nehemiah Coxe to John Gill to James Boyce.⁵² It behooves modern Baptists to take notice and reaffirm, rather than dismiss, this doctrine that pervades their confessional heritage.⁵³

NOTES:

¹ Carl Trueman, “A Most Mischievous Ill-Informed Half Truth,” *Postcards from Palookaville* (Blog) (Feb., 11, 2019), <http://www.alliancenet.org/mos/postcards-from-palookaville>.

² See also Carl Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

³ John Owen once made a similar point, in the context of defending the Trinity, to the one being made here. It is the truth of Scripture, not merely its words, that must be believed by the Christian. And hence, the truth derived from the text by good and necessary consequence is as much immutable truth as what is evident on the face of the text. “Whatever is so revealed in the Scripture is no less true and divine as to whatever necessarily followeth thereon, than it is as unto that which is principally revealed and directly expressed... For if the principal assertion be a truth of divine revelation, so is also whatever is included therein, and which may be rightly from thence collected.” John Owen, *The Trinity Vindicated*, in *Works*, 2:379.

⁴ Notably, the SLC marks the first full treatment of the law of God in any Baptist confession. W. R. Estep, “Law and Gospel in the Anabaptist/Baptist Tradition,” *Grace Theological Journal* 12.2 (1991), 189–214, 204; and see *Ibid.*, 206–207 (“There is little doubt that the Second London Confession introduced into Baptist life a robust Reformed understanding of the Bible, election, and the Law which had never been *prominent* features of previous Baptist confessions.” (emphasis added)). cf. John English Lee, “The Moral Law of God and Baptist Identity,” *Founders Journal* (Fall 2013), <https://founders.org/2013/10/01/the-moral-law-of-god-and-baptist-identity/> (noting that whilst earlier Baptist confessions contained no comprehensive treatment of the law of God it was nevertheless frequently implied and at least referenced in the English Declaration (1611) and the Propositions and Conclusions (1612). [Editor’s note: The First London Confession contains an article (XXV) which has sparked controversy over their perception of the relation of law and gospel. My reading of it sees its relation more to a highly articulated “preparationism” than to any absolute negation of the “Ministry of the Law.” Its article on creation contains this sentence: “In the beginning God made all things very good, created man after his own Image and likeness, filling him with all perfection of all natural excellency and uprightness, free from all sin.” On sanctification it presents the saved as pressing “after a heavenly and evangelical perfection, in obedience to all the commands, which Christ as head and king in the new covenant has prescribed to him.” There is a substantial continuity between “natural excellency,” “evangelical perfection,” “obedience to all the commands which Christ . . . prescribed,” and the revelation of two tables of the Law at Sinai. The 1646 appendix to this confession made this connection very clear when it said, “Though we be not now sent to the law as it was in the hand of Moses, to be commanded thereby, yet Christ in His Gospel teacheth and commandeth us to walk in the same way of righteousness and holiness

that God by Moses did command the Israelites to walk in, all the commandments of the Second Table being still delivered unto us by Christ, and all the commandments of the First Table also (as touching the life and spirit of them in this epitome or brief sum, 'Thou shalt love the Lord the God with all thine heart, etc.')

⁵ SLC 19.1 (citing Genesis 1:27; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:10, 12).

⁶ SLC 4.2 (citing Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Genesis 1:26; Romans 2:14, 15; Genesis 3:6).

⁷ SLC 4.3 (citing Genesis 2:17; 1:26, 28).

⁸ Importantly, Herman Bavinck explains that this covenant is called the “covenant of nature” not because it flows *naturally* from the nature of man, “but because the foundation on which the covenant rested, that is, the moral law, was known to man by nature, and because it was made with man in his original state and could be kept by man with the powers bestowed on him in the creation, without the assistance of supernatural grace.” *Reformed Dogmatics*, John Bolt (ed.), John Vriend (trans.), vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 567.

⁹ SLC 19.2 (citing Romans 2:14, 15; Deuteronomy 10:4). The confession cites in support of this doctrine of the “light of nature” the *locus classicus* of natural law, Romans 2:14–15, which had been employed to prove such since at least Augustine. See Augustine, *De Serm. Dom. In Mont.*, 2.9.32 (Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount), cited in Jacqueline A. Laing and Russell Wilcox, eds. *The Natural Law Reader* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 94. Although Augustine, in *De Spiritu & littera ad Marcellinum*, interpreted Romans 2 to be referring to Gentile Christians he continued to cite the passage as a proof text for natural law. See S. J. Gathercole, “A Law unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14–15 Revisited,” *JSNT* 85 (2002), 27–49, 28.

¹⁰ SLC 19.5 (citing Romans 13:8–10; James 2:8, 10–12; James 2:10, 11; Matthew 5:17–19; Romans 3:31).

¹¹ SLC 19.7 (citing Galatians 3:21; Ezekiel 36:27).

¹² SLC 19.6 (citing Romans 6:14; Galatians 2:16; Romans 8:1; 10:4; 3:20; 7:7; 6:12–14; 1 Peter 3:8–13) (emphasis added). Here the confession is asserting the classic Reformed conception of the threefold use of the law (civil, pedagogical, and normative). See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7

¹³ SLC 19.3–4 (citing Hebrews 10:1; Colossians 2:17; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 2:14, 16, 17; Ephesians 2:14, 16, 1 Corinthians 9:8–10); see also 21.1.

¹⁴ Since this article is focused on chapter 19 none of the subsequent references to the natural law in the confession will be directly dealt with.

¹⁵ This is reaffirmed by 10.4 and 20.2.

¹⁶ SLC 1.1 (citing 2 Timothy 3:15–17; Isaiah 8:20; Luke 16:29, 31; Ephesians 2:20; Romans 1:19–21; Romans 2:14,15; Psalms 19:1–3; Hebrews 1:1; Proverbs 22:19–21; Romans 15:4; 2 Peter 1:19, 20).

Additionally, chapter 1.6 suggests that though Scripture is the sole infallible rule for Christian faith and life, “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by *the light of nature* and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.” SLC 1.6 (citing 2 Timothy 3:15–17; Galatians 1:8,9; John 6:45; 1 Corinthians 2:9–12; 1 Corinthians 11:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40) (emphasis added).

¹⁷ Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 1.

¹⁸ See Willem J. Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2011), 132–166.

¹⁹ Indeed, it would arguably have been impossible for Protestants to have constructed any theory of society independent of the natural law tradition. Stephen A. Chavura, *Tudor Protestant Political Thought 1547–1603* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 90–91.

²⁰ This is intentionally a facetious sentence. Richard Muller has sufficiently stripped of credibility any “Calvin against the Calvinist” approach to the development of Reformed dogma. And the work of Willem Van Asselt and Muller, among others, has disabused the alert student of the old view that imputed to “scholasticism” necessary doctrinal content and conclusions. We now know that scholasticism, like humanism, refers more to method and approach than it does to any theological commitments. See Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 51–69; Willem J. Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2011); *Reformed Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, eds. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

²¹ John T. McNeill, “Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers,” *The Journal of Religion* 26:3 (Jul. 1946), 168–182.

²² David VanDrunen, “Natural Law for Reformed Theology: A Proposal for Contemporary Reappropriation,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 9 (2015), 117–130, 118 (“... appearing in various guises in Belgic Confession Article 2, Canons of Dort 3.4.4, and at least a dozen times in the Westminster Standards.”) (citing WCF 1.1; 1.6; 4.2; 10.4; 20.4; 21.1; 21.7; and Westminster Larger Catechism 2, 17, 60, 121, 151). See also Second Helvetic Confession (1562) 12; Cambridge Platform (1648) 1.4; 11.1; 14.3.

Regarding the natural law, the SLC stands in substantial agreement with the Reformed confessions of the continent and is nearly identical to WCF. But lest anyone allege that the authors of the SLC succumbed to pressure to uncritically conform to the WCF, it should be noted that the SLC features a stronger affirmation of the natural law in chapter 19 than its sister confession. A cursory comparison of the SLC and WCF reveals that the Baptist codifiers opted for the language of the Savoy Declaration (1658) (SDF) over that of the WCF, thereby inserting the reference to “the law written on the heart” in 19.1 and 19.2 where it does not appear in the WCF. Additionally, SDF and SLC contain the additional chapter, “Of the Gospel and the Extent of Grace Thereof,” which is not present in WCF. In both confessions, 20.2 contains a reference to “the light of nature,” making the case that knowledge of salvation through Christ is not possible through that means. See Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1989), 235 (noting this common objection).

²³ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 175.

²⁴ For a further explanation of the relationship between the jus naturale and the jus gentium, which space does not permit to be discussed here, see George Gillespie, *Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies* (1637).

²⁵ David VanDrunen, “Natural Law for Reformed Theology: A Proposal for Contemporary Reappropriation,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 9 (2015), 117–130, 119. Keep in mind Thomas Aquinas’ famous division of law: eternal law, natural law, human positive law, and divine positive law (i.e. Scripture). *Summa Theologiae*, I-II. 91.

²⁶ David Haines and Andrew Fulford, *Natural Law: A Brief Introduction and Biblical Defense* (The Davenant Trust, 2017), Kindle edition, pt. I, ch. I.

²⁷ Aquinas, *ST*, I-II. 93. 1.

²⁸ Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace, Including the Law of Nature and of Nations* (1625), bk I. ch. 1.

²⁹ Haines and Fulford, *Natural Law*, pt. I, ch. II.

³⁰ This notion of right and wrong is usually taken by sixteenth and seventeenth-century authors to include knowledge of the duty to worship God (just not the specifics on how to do so), self-preservation of one’s person and family, general sociableness, the Golden Rule, and etc.

³¹ *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici* (1646), 9.

³² *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, Reimer A. Faber (trans.) and Dolf te Velde (ed.), vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 18.16. Though a minority of Reformed theologians like Jerome Zanchi had argued that the natural law was totally lost in the fall but was subsequently reinscribed by God after the fall, the result is the same. Some remnant of the knowledge of God and his moral precepts remains in man, leaving him without excuse for his insolence. Jerome Zanchi, “On Law in General,” 11, in *Journal of Markets & Morality*, Volume 6:1 (Spring 2003): 305–398, available at <https://www.marketsandmorality.com/index.php/mandm/article/viewFile/517/508>.

³³ *Jus Divinum*, 9–10.

³⁴ Quoted in Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 118.

³⁵ See John T. McNeill, “Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers,” *The Journal of Religion* 26:3 (Jul. 1946), 168–182; John Witte, Jr., “Law Written on the Heart: Natural Law and Equity in Early Lutheran Thought,” in *The Legal Teachings of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations*, Wim Dekock, ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 231–265. Although Augustine interpreted Romans 2:14–15 to be referring to gentile Christians he nevertheless acknowledged “certain excellent actions of the pagans which...

inasmuch as they agree with the things that God commands in the law, cannot be condemned by the judgment of man.” Augustine believed that this is possible in pagans because, “the lineaments of the first estate still abide.” Quoted in Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 118. On Romans 2:14–15, see also John C. Collins, “Echoes of Aristotle in Romans 2:14–15: Or, Maybe Abimelech Was Not So Bad After All,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 13:1 (2012).

³⁶ For more on the epistemological critique of the natural law, and natural theology generally, and the historic response thereto, see J.V. Fesko and Guy M. Richard, “Natural Theology and the Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, vol. 3, Ligon Duncan (ed.) (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2009), 223–266.

³⁷ Lee Gibbs, “The Puritan Natural Law Theory of William Ames,” *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971), 54–56. See also Robert A. Greene, “Synderesis, the Spark of the Conscience, in the English Renaissance,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52 (1991), 195–219; Greene, “Whichote, The Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52 (1991), 617–644.

³⁸ Mika Ojakangas, *The Voice of Conscience: A Political Genealogy of Western Ethical Experience* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 83.

³⁹ Acts 14:15–17 has usually been understood to exhibit Paul arguing from the nature of humans and the created order in his rebuke of people at Lystra who were attempting to worship Barnabas and himself.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.1.

⁴¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.2; 1.5.8. See also Aquinas, *ST I-II*, Q. 94, A. 2, 4.

⁴² See Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law*, 109.

⁴³ Aquinas, *ST I*. 1. 1.

⁴⁴ See Nehemiah Coxe, “A Discourse of the Covenants,” in *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*, eds. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (Palmdale: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), 43.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, XXXII. 63.

⁴⁶ Ewart Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas*, vol. 1, (New York: Routledge, 1954), 9.

⁴⁷ “Verily, the Decalog [sic] is lodged in the conscience.” McNeill, “Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers,” 168 (quoting Luther).

⁴⁸ Francis Roberts, “On the Moral Law and the Law of Nature,” in *The Mystery and Marrow of the Bible: God’s Covenants with Man* (1675), 3.4.1, Q. 6.

⁴⁹ See Ralph H. Clover, “The Rule of Law in Colonial Massachusetts,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 108:7 (1960), 1001, 1036, 1014.

⁵⁰ John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159.

⁵¹ Representative of this older view is August Lang, “The Reformers and the Natural Law,” J. Gresham Machen (trans.), in *Calvin and the Reformation: Four Studies* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), 56–98. Contra Lang, modern research has revealed the affirmation of the natural law by a host of Reformed authorities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, revealing basic continuity between the doctrine of the confessions and the natural law theory of the medieval period. See e.g. Martin Bucer, *Common places*, D.F. Wright (trans.) (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972); Phillip Melancthon, *Loci communes* (1543), J. A. O. Preus (trans.) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992); Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, G. W. Willard (trans.) (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1985), 476–618; William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof* (1639) (Norwood: W. J. Johnson, 1975); Edward Leigh, *A System or Body of Divinity: Consisting in Ten Books* (1662); Stephen Charnock, “Discourse of the Knowledge of Christ,” in *Works*, vol. 2 (1684); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), vol. 6, 297–304.

⁵² Nehemiah Coxe, in “God’s Transactions with Adam,” in *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (eds.) (Palmdale: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005); James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (1887) (e.g. “The Fall of Man” and “The Effects of the Sin of Adam”); John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Paris: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 312–313, 368–369.

⁵³ The doctrine remained unaltered in the Philadelphia Confession (1742).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Timon Cline is a law student at Rutgers Law School and a MA student Westminster Theological Seminary.



Jon English Lee

“The Moral Law doth Forever Bind All”

Paragraphs 3 – 5

Chapter XIX

Second London Confession

The amount of literature that has been written on topic of the law and its relationship to believers is immense. Godly believers seeking to serve God and be faithful to Scripture can be pulled in countless directions. Am I still obligated to obey the law? If so, does that mean that I cannot, under penalty of death, pick up sticks on the Saturday (Numbers 15:32–36), eat shellfish (Leviticus 11:9–12), or wear clothing of more than one material (Leviticus 19:19)? If I am not obligated to obey the law, then how do I know how to please God? Am I bound to whatever demands are placed upon me by my conscience, my pastors, or by the culture? How do I know how to behave and how to live a life that is pleasing to God?

These issues are crucial, not only that we may live lives that are pleasing to God, but also so that we can lead men and women in our churches without binding their consciences. We must not put upon them a weight of law that has been lifted from them in Christ. Conversely, we must also encourage them in the proper path of holiness, which means we must know what that path is. We have not the liberty to add to nor take away from God’s decrees.

Thankfully, we have the wisdom of faithful men in the past to help guide us in such complex issues. They, standing on the shoulders of those before them, have charted a path that helps bring clarity to these difficult issues, and that avoids the twin pitfalls of adding to God's law (legalism) and taking away from it (antinomianism). As will be shown below, the Second London Baptist Confession explains the biblical understanding of the law as a complex of different portions of laws: moral, ceremonial, and judicial. The moral law is unchanging and remains a guide for believers, while the ceremonial and judicial are abrogated by the coming of Christ. These simple principles are essential for the right understanding of the Bible and the proper application of biblical imperatives for us today.

Trifold Division of the Law

Paragraphs 3–5 of chapter XIX of the Second London Baptist Confession assume what has come to be known as the tri-fold division of the Old Covenant law. This tri-fold division distinguishes between the ceremonial law, the judicial law, and the moral law.¹ Before examining each of these divisions of the law, the tri-fold division that is assumed must be addressed. Indeed, these very divisions within the law have come under attack recently.²

A complete defense of the tri-fold division of the law is beyond the scope of this article.³ However, a few brief comments can be made in defense of the interpretive framework.

First, the Old Covenant itself makes linguistic distinction between the Decalogue and the rest of the old covenant laws. The headings and outline of Exodus 20 (Ten Commandments) and Exodus 21–23 (the “Judgements”) shows the special privilege given to the Decalogue. Similarly, the Ten Words are presented as absolute commands or prohibitions, and are usually in the second person singular. They are general commands given without regard to any specific social context. By contrast, the Judgements are presented as case studies of law, functioning as precedents would in the legal system of today. Unlike the Ten Words, the Judgements are usually presented as conditional statements, rather than universal commands. Thus the structure of text, the nature of the laws, and the manner of their delivery all point to the distinction between the Decalogue and the rest of the Old Covenant laws.⁴

Second, the Decalogue is of a different origin and was treated differently than the rest of the laws. In Deuteronomy 5:22 we are told that God “added nothing more” to the Ten Words, which “supports the idea that the Ten are somehow distinct from the rest of the statutes that follow and allows for the interpretation that the Ten are distinct in terms of

being everlasting and moral in contrast to those that follow.”⁵ Additionally, the Ten Words were written on stone by the very finger of God, in contrast to the Judgements written on paper by God through Moses. Furthermore, the Ten Words were given with Mount Sinai with loud thunder, flashes of lightning, a thick cloud, and a “very loud trumpet blast” (Exodus 19:16). No other laws were revealed this way. Finally, the Ten Words were placed within the Ark of the Covenant, an honor not given to the remainder of the Old Covenant law (Deuteronomy 31:24–26). These reasons indicate the distinctiveness of the Ten Words apart from the Judgements.

Third, the New Testament contains several instances of authors seeing distinction within the Old Covenant law. Jesus teaches that “until heaven and earth pass away, not a dot will pass from the Law” (Matthew 5:17). What law is Christ speaking about? He goes on to list laws from the Ten Commandments: do not murder (Matthew 5:21–26); do not commit adultery (Matthew 5:27–32); do not lie (Matthew 5:33–37). Additionally, Paul writes, “So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?” (Romans 2:26). Paul has a category for Gentiles who “keep the law” without obeying the Old Testament command to be circumcised. What law is Paul thinking about? Again, context shows, it’s the Ten Commandments (Romans 2:21–23). Furthermore, Paul distinguishes between “the law of commandments” and its “ordinances.” Ephesians 2:15 says that when Christ died, He abolished “the law of commandments *expressed* in ordinances.” Notice that Christ didn’t abolish the law of commandments itself, only its expression in ordinances. “Ordinances” are the national “rules” or “decrees” of Israel that were based on moral law, but not identical to it.⁶ Thus, the New Testament authors see distinctions within the Old Covenant law.

In light of the language used within the Old Covenant law, the differing modes of its revelation, the differing ends of its use, and the interpretations of the New Testament authors, it is reasonable to conclude that the Old Covenant law contained within it distinct portions of law. Given that Jesus said that some portions would not pass away (Matthew 5:17), the confession is correct to conclude that the moral core will remain in place and, as will be argued below, the ceremonial and judicial elements passed away with the dissolution of the theocratic nation and its cultic system.

Ceremonial Law

After having addressed God’s unchanging standard of righteousness in paragraphs 1 and 2 of the confession, the authors move on to address the ceremonial laws in paragraph 3.

19.3. Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties, all which ceremonial laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are, by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only law-giver, who was furnished with power from the Father for that end abrogated and taken away. (Hebrews 10:1; Colossians 2:17; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 2:14, 16, 17; Ephesians 2:14, 16)

God was pleased to give to the Hebrews the ceremonial portion of the law in order to magnify His name and make manifest His gracious provision to come, namely, Jesus Christ. The ceremonial laws related to the 10 commandments in that they regulated the proper observance of the first table of the law during the Old Covenant.⁷ These laws mandated “several typical ordinances” that served multiple functions. First, these ordinances were, in part, the means that God had ordained for His people to worship Him under the Old Covenant. Second, these ordinances prefigured Christ. That is, the ceremonial system with its sacrifices, priests, holiness laws, etc., all pointed toward the necessity of a once and for all sacrifice needed for the eternal remission of sins. Third, these ordinances also mandated “diverse instructions of moral duties.” That is, they instructed the Israelites in how they were to apply the immutable moral law of God to their religious and social context.

All of these ceremonial laws were not eternal; rather, they were “appointed only to the time of reformation,” i.e., until Christ. The law had always been but a “shadow of the good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1). Jesus Christ is “the true Messiah and only law-giver,” and His coming has made an end to all the types and shadows found within the ceremonial law (Colossians 2:14–17).⁸

Judicial Law

19.4. To them also he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any now by virtue of that institution; their general equity only being of moral use. (1 Corinthians 9:8–10)

Just as the ceremonial law was concerned with the proper expression of the first table of the Decalogue under the Old Covenant, the judicial laws were concerned with the proper enforcement of the second table of the Decalogue under the Old Covenant. The confession makes two important points regarding the abrogation of the judicial (or civil) law, while affirming that the law itself is useful in the modern application of judicial principles.

This paragraph is similar in substance to the Westminster Confession's stance, and is clearly in line with John Calvin's thoughts on the matter.⁹

The confession teaches that because Christ's people are no longer limited to a single national body, and because the former theocratic state has been destroyed, it is reasonable to conclude, according to the confession, that the former civil code will end as well. However, the old covenant civil code retains value for new covenant believers. The judicial laws provide principles for the application and enforcement of the moral law in society: "Their general equity only being of moral use." The judicial laws regulated punishments for breaching the moral law in order to establish and enforce justice in the land. Similarly, civil rulers of today ought to establish and enforce penalties for violating.¹⁰

Perpetuity of the Moral Law

19.5. The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, 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; neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (Romans 13:8–10; James 2:8, 10–12; James 2:10, 11; Matthew 5:17–19; Romans 3:31)

Being that law that is written on the hearts of mankind, and being the righteous reflection of the immutable character of our sovereign God, the moral law is unchanging and forever binds mankind. Mankind is made in the image of God, and therefore is obliged to honor God's image by always acting in accordance to God's standard of righteousness:

"The moral law (which is the pattern of God's image in man) ought to correspond with the eternal and archetypal law in God, since it is its copy and shadow (*apoksimation*), in which he has manifested his justice and holiness. Hence we cannot conform ourselves to the image of God (to the imitation of which Scripture so often exhorts us) except by regulating our lives in accordance with the precepts of this law... This [archetypal] law is immutable and perpetual. Therefore the moral law (its ectype) must necessarily also be immutable."¹¹

The moral law of God reflects God's perfect righteous character, and thus His immutable (archetypal) law or perfection. The logical formula is not complex: if God's character does not change, then His moral law does not change. And if mankind is made in His image, then mankind ought to forever honor God by conforming to His standard of righteousness.¹² The "moral law doth forever bind all."

Indeed, far from removing the obligation of the moral law, the confession actually states that Christ in the gospel in no way dissolves this obligation, but strengthens it.¹³ The believer is freed from the rigor and reign of the law as a covenant (2LBC 19.6), is given a new heart with the law written upon it, and is given the Holy Spirit to guide him in his obedience to that law. The moral law's fulfillment in the obedience of Christ and our freedom from its curse by His death opens to us a new freedom in our deliberate service unto God and unto holiness. Both of these are defined by the moral law. Far from ridding us of the law, saving grace actually frees us to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, the very summary of the law, while standing in a state of justification. Being freed to love God with our whole being is the very fulfillment of the law, and obedience to the law is the very path of expressing that love. Having been justified by a perfect righteousness, that same righteousness, the perfection of the moral law, points us to a path of sanctification until we are among the "spirits of the righteous made perfect" awaiting "the resurrection from the dead" (Hebrews 12:23; Philippians 3:11).

NOTES:

¹ For the purposes of this article, I will use "moral law," "Ten Commandments/Words," and "Decalogue" as synonymous unless otherwise noted. However, I am aware that, properly speaking, the Ten Commandments contain statements that are partly moral and partly ceremonial. For more on this distinction between the moral law proper and the Ten commandments, see: Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, 1st edition (Baker Book House, 2006), s.v. moral law; *lex naturalis*; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 2.11.1 (pp. 1–18).

² For example: Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 355; Tom Wells and Fred G. Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002), 72–74; Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (B&H Academic, 2009), 282.

³ For the best contemporary defense of the tri-fold division of the law, see: Philip Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010).

⁴ For a thorough linguistic analysis of the Ten Words/Judgements distinctions, see: Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 305–9; see also, Ronald M. Rothenberg, "Relation of the Tripartite Division of the Law and the Public/Private Distinction: Examining the Streams of Thought behind Them," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 4 (2018): 808–10; Ross, *From the Finger of God*, 86–88.

⁵ Rothenberg, “Relation of the Tripartite Division of the Law and the Public/Private Distinction: Examining the Streams of Thought behind Them,” 809.

⁶ For further argumentation, see: Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.11.24–26 (pp 145–167); Ross, *From the Finger of God*, 51–114; Tom Hicks, “The Division of the Old Testament Law,” Founders Ministries (blog), February 18, 2019, <https://founders.org/2016/04/23/the-division-of-old-testament-law/>.

⁷ Concerning the division of the law into two tables, see 2LBC chapter 19 paragraph 2, and Tom Nettles’ article that contains an exposition of this paragraph.

⁸ For a full defense of the abrogation of the ceremonial law, see: Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.11.25–26 (pp 158–168); Ross, *From the Finger of God*, 265–95.

⁹ John Calvin, John T. McNeill, and Ford Lewis Battles, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 translation edition (Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 4:20:14–14; Samuel E Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 5th ed. (S.I.: Evangelical Press, 2016), 283.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that there is a small group of believers that argue for the abiding validity and enforcement of the judicial laws. Those of such a mind are called “theonomists.” For a substantive critique of such views, see: W. Robert Godfrey, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Michigan: Academie Books, 1994); Samuel Waldron, “Theonomy: A Reformed Baptist Assessment,” *The Reformed Reader*, accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.reformedreader.org/rbs/tarba.htm>.

¹¹ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.11.3 (p 12).

¹² For more on the human obligation to obey God’s moral law, see: Ernest Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 172–73; Ross, *From the Finger of God*, 308–50; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.11.23 (pp 141–145).

¹³ For more on this increased obligation, see: Ross, *From the Finger of God*, 341–44; Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 173–76.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jon English serves as a Pastor of Morningview Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society, a fellow for the Center for Pastor Theologians, and serves as an Editor for the Center for Ancient Christian Studies.



Fred Malone

The Use of God's Law in Daily Christian Life

Paragraphs 6 and 7

Chapter XIX

Second London Confession

The first five paragraphs of Chapter 19 confess our forefathers' understanding of Scripture concerning the moral law of God, identified by them as the Ten Commandments. The moral nature of God, reflected in Adam's nature, was written on Adam's heart at his creation (Romans 2:14–15). This is identified as the same law as the Ten Commandments of God, given to the Jews at Sinai (2:20–23). It is this moral law which is still written in remnant form on the heart of all men, their conscience bearing them witness. Thus, God's standard of righteousness and the basis for His judgment of all men is the Ten Commandments (3:19–20). This was clarified and reiterated by our Lord Himself in Matthew 5:17–22. These commandments fill up the meaning of the two great commandments of love to God and man (Matthew 22:36–40; Romans 13:8–10).

Therefore, paragraphs 2LBC 19:6–7 explain how the Christian is to follow the law of God in his daily life. Having been freed from the condemnation of the law broken by Adam and by each of their own committed sins, having a perfect Savior who kept and fulfilled the Covenant of Works given to Adam, having one's sins against the law atoned for by the efficacious atonement of our impeccable Savior, now the believer lives no longer under law but under grace all the time (Romans 5:1–2).

And yet, freed from the condemnation of the law covenant in Adam, the believer still lives under the definition of righteousness and of sin identified in the Ten Commandments of God (1 Cor. 9:21–22). Under grace, the redeemed and forgiven believer delights after the law of God in the inner man, and seeks to keep it with a living faith in Christ (Rom. 7:22; versus 8:7). This is, biblically, the pursuit of holiness and Christlikeness often eluding the preaching and teaching in today’s evangelical-reformed churches (see Chapter XIII:3). If a believer would pursue Christlikeness, he/she must love God and man as defined in the Ten Commandments which Jesus perfectly embodied:

2LBC Chapter 19:6–7

19.6. Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned,¹³ yet it is 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; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their natures, hearts, and lives, so as examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against, sin;¹⁴ together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ and the perfection of his obedience: it is likewise of use to the regenerate to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin; and the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse and unallayed rigour thereof. These promises of it likewise shew them God’s approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, though not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works; so as man’s doing good and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace.¹⁵

¹³ Romans 6:14; Galatians 2:16; Romans 8:1; 10:4. ¹⁴ Romans 3:20; 8:7, etc.

¹⁵ Romans 6:12–14; 1 Peter 3:8–13.

19.7. Neither are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it,¹⁶ the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.¹⁷

¹⁶ Galatians 3:21. ¹⁷ Ezekiel 26:27.

Paragraph 6: The Uses and Blessings of the Law of God for Believers

It is of great interest that Paragraph 6 is the lengthiest paragraph in this chapter on the law of God. The purpose of this paragraph is to identify biblically and to explain practically the

relationship of the born-again Christian to the moral law of God. In so doing, great effort is given to clarify that the believer no longer is “under law” in its condemning power but now lives continually “under grace” in Christ. This continual clarification removes any accusation of legalism in justification or sanctification. Legalism is defined by seeking to gain God’s blessings by one’s own obedience alone. Evangelical obedience is from being justified, not to be justified.

1. First, the paragraph states that though the law no longer condemns the true believer before God, yet it still has great use as a rule of life. Then it lists three ways that it is of use to the Christian:

a. **It informs the believer and others of the will of God and their duty which binds them to walk accordingly.** Here the confession is dealing with the truth that all men are responsible to God to obey His law (defined as the Decalogue) as the standard for obedience and judgment. This application of the law to the Christian has received opposition in the past and in the present day. It is objected that the mention of duty or binding to obedience is a return to legalism and works-righteousness. However, it is clear that the confession simply states that all men are bound by God’s law as a rule of life, whether non-Christian or Christian.

And what is *duty*? Those who object to this word assume that it always means “to pay a debt.” However, it is a command of God for Christians to give to all what is due them, whether they are indebted to them or not (Romans 13:7). It is God’s will for us to give what is due others, whether tax, custom, fear, or honor. For the Christian to fear God as their Father under grace (Acts 9:31; 1Peter 1:17–18; Revelation 15:4) and to honor the law of God as His standard for righteousness and Christlikeness (Romans 7:12) is a duty not based upon paying back a debt which can never be repaid, but in giving respect to those to whom it is due, including God and His law (Romans 13:7; 7:12, 8:4). We must not let semantics and debates about words confuse us against the plain statements of Scripture: “If you love Me, you will keep (guard, watch) My commandments” (John 14:15; Matthew 28:19–20). Objections to the duty of honoring God and His law betray either confusion or a tendency toward historic antinomianism. To obey God’s law is a privilege, not a burden, to those who love the nail-pierced One who commands them (Matthew 28:19–20).

b. **Further, the law of God discovers and unveils sin in our hearts and lives to convict us of our guilt for breaking God’s law and to produce a hatred of sin in us.** The existence of remaining sin in the Christian’s heart and life is a

grievous reality. To have God's law as a continuing standard to expose remaining sins in our minds and lives is a great help and blessing of God to expose sin, renew repentance, and flee to Christ by faith alone for fresh cleansing for sin (see Matthew 5:21–22; 1 John 1:9).

- c. **In addition, the conviction of the law by the Spirit also points us to a clearer understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ in His personal perfections and His sufficiency as a perfect Savior for their need.** He kept each commandment perfectly in thought, word, and deed as substitute. Thus, the law functions as the standard to reveal our spiritual poverty in the light of a Holy God who justly condemns all men by nature. When the Holy Spirit convicts the mind and heart of sin, righteousness, and judgment, then the non-Christian is enlightened to their terrible sinfulness and need of Christ (John 16:8–11). But the Christian also is convicted of their remaining sins by the same standard of God's law and refreshes their need to flee to Christ, confessing their sins to Him (1 John 1:9). Therefore, the law as a rule of life is of great use to both to examine their thoughts, words, and deeds as approved by God or not. Sin is the transgression of the law both for believers and unbelievers (1 John 3:4; Romans 3:20).

2. Second, the law is “likewise” of use to the regenerate for blessings. By the use of “likewise” it is clear that the previous point had main reference to the unbeliever but included the believer as responsible for obeying the same law. Now, “likewise,” the confession addresses the born-again believer directly.

- a. **The law restrains the remaining corruptions in the Christian in that it forbids sin.** This places the standard of God's righteousness before the Christian every day. It reminds them that all their sins—past, present, and future—have been atoned for in the Lord Jesus Christ; yet it also keeps before them their remaining sinfulness which may yield to temptation at any time. Remembering the law of God, that our Lord kept it perfectly, that He had to suffer for all our sins, places a guard in the Christian's mind to restrain being tempted by sin. To sin against our perfect and loving Savior and His commandments is abhorrent to the true believer. By reminding us of what is sin against God, the law restrains us from dishonoring our Lord.
- b. **Even the threatenings of the law to the unconverted, though the Christian is no longer subject to such threatenings under grace, assist the converted to understand what even their “Christian” sins still deserve but for the grace of God.** This humbles them, warns them, and prevents them from taking

advantage of the grace of God to “sin that grace might abound.” God hates the sinner and his sin before regeneration, but after regenerating those whom He loves, He still hates the evil of their remaining sins. Each Christian’s sin committed still requires the remembrance of judgment escaped and of redemption accomplished by the bloody death of Christ. Therefore, the threatenings of the law to the unconverted still help the converted to “watch and pray that you might not enter into temptation.” Further warnings to confessing Christians who are becoming dull of hearing exhort them to persevere to the end (Hebrews 5:11–6:9).

- c. **Though freed from the curse and condemnation of the law by faith alone in Christ alone, though freed from its “unallayed rigour” (absolute perfection) to please God, the law still reveals one’s sins by which God may send afflictions in this life.** Sometimes afflictions and trials are not sent because of specific sins committed but for the purpose of purifying one’s faith in Christ (1 Peter 1:6–7). At other times they are so sent (1 Corinthians 11:29–32).

However, it is the 2LBC 19.6 which adds the words “unallayed rigour” to the Westminster and Savoy identical paragraphs. Baptists wished to emphasize that, “under grace,” the rigor of the law demanding perfection before acceptance is now gone for the walking Christian. Samuel Bolton explains:

Observe that the believer is freed from the rigour of the obedience required in the law. He is not freed from the requirement of exact obedience, but from that rigour of obedience which the law required as a condition of salvation.¹

The rigour of the law ... required universal and actual, as well as personal, obedience, yea, and with such a degree of rigour that if a man failed in one tittle he was lost for ever... The Gospel admits of repentance, but the law will not own it. The law looks for exact obedience in every jot and tittle. From this rigid obedience has God freed the believer. Instead of universal actual obedience, God is pleased to accept of universal habitual obedience, as we find it written: “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments” (Ps. 119:6). Though there may be failing in action, yet where there is truth of affection, God can own it. In the Gospel God accepts affections for actions, endeavours for performance, desire for ability. A Christian is made up of desires, of mournings, thirstings, and bewailings: O that my ways were directed! O miserable man that I am! Here is Gospel perfection.²

Under grace, the Christian walks by saving faith in Christ, seeking to keep His law and commandments, knowing that God accepts his/her attempts to obey though imperfect in themselves. No longer under the condemnation of the law, the law becomes the friendly

guide to Christlike righteousness which is pleasing to his Father in heaven. Such great truths persuade the believer to pursue sanctification, without which no one shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). For true saving faith, under grace, always seeks to love Christ and to keep His commandments (John 14:15; Romans 6:14).

- d. **The promises of the law also show God's approval of obedience and the just reward a believer may expect upon keeping (guarding, watching) God's commandments (John 14:21).** Yet, these rewards are not on the basis of the Covenant of Works to gain God's blessings, but they are rewards for an imperfect obedience performed while under grace (1 Corinthians 3:10–15). And even then, this obedience is due to God's work of grace within their hearts and minds (Philippians 2:12–13). Therefore, God's blessings (rewards) for faithful obedience is no evidence of the Christian's being "under law" and not "under grace" (Romans 6:14).

Again, the objection to the Christian having a legalistic "eye to rewards" in their obedience to God's law is a false charge leaning toward some historical antinomian views. Our forefathers understood that faith's pursuit of obedience to God's law while "under grace" is not legalism for justification. Rather, the exercise of faith in Christ by obedience to His commands results in Christlike sanctification to the glory of God.

Paragraph 7: The Mutual Support of the Law and the Gospel for Christian Obedience

19.7. Neither are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it,¹⁶ the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.¹⁷

¹⁶ Galatians 3:21. ¹⁷ Ezekiel 26:27.

Here the confession affirms that the use of the law for obedience in the Christian life in no way contradicts living "under grace" in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although there is an obvious difference between the law-covenant (works-righteousness) and the gospel covenant (faith-righteousness), yet there is also a great harmony and mutual support between them. Later than the 2LBC, the New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833) captured this unity in a short paragraph:

XII. THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

We believe the Scriptures teach that the Law of God is the eternal and unchangeable rule of his moral government; that it is holy, just, and good; and that the inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfil its precepts, arises entirely from their love of sin; to deliver them from which, and to restore them through a Mediator to unfeigned obedience by the holy Law, is one great end of the Gospel, and of the Means of Grace connected with the establishment of the visible church.

The 2LBC (the Philadelphia and Charleston Baptist Confessions) and the NHBC were the working confessions of American Baptists up to the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message (SBC). So, one can see that the moral law of God was taught to Christians to live by under the grace of the gospel.

Further, the emphasis of Paragraph 7 upon the Spirit of Christ working in man shows the connection between the Spirit's work and the Law of God in the Christian life. Here the confession explains that the Holy Spirit of Christ subdues and enables the will of man to do God's will cheerfully and freely (Ezekiel 36:26–27). And that will is revealed in the Law of God which He requires us to obey. This is why biblical sanctification is defined in the 2LBC 13.3 as:

13.3 In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail,¹⁰ yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome;¹¹ and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, *pressing after an heavenly life, in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in his Word hath prescribed to them.*¹² (emphasis added)

¹⁰ Romans 8:23. ¹¹ Romans 6:14. ¹² Ephesians 4:15,16; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 7:1.

The above quotation explains that the Holy Spirit of Christ (through regeneration and indwelling) enables the will of man to do willingly the law of God. Using the language of the 1LBC (1644/46), which is excluded from the WCF and the Savoy paragraph, the 2LBC affirms “pressing after an heavenly life, in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in his Word hath prescribed to them.” These statements by our forefathers make clear that any teaching on sanctification that does not enjoin obedience to God's law under grace, empowered by the Holy Spirit's work within, is defective and leading the Christian into an erroneous understanding of what is Christian growth and holiness.

The remedy to today's lack of Christlike holiness by professing Christians is not neglect of the law while fostering grace and the Holy Spirit's fullness. Rather, it is to teach that the believer under grace, no longer condemned by the law, whose obedience is no longer accepted by the former rigor of the law, is still commanded by God to keep, guard, watch, and live by His law. This is not legalism as charged by some but simply living by a justifying faith in Christ according to His commandments. This is sanctification. This is how Jesus Himself lived in obedience to all of God's commands, thus defining what it means to love God with all your heart, your neighbor as yourself, and loving Christians as Christ first loved us. As John exhorted Christians:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so *that you may not sin*. And *if anyone sins, we have an Advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. By this we know that we have come to know Him, *if we keep His commandments*. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," *and does not keep His commandments*, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but *whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected*. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him *ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked* (1 John 2:1–6). (emphasis added)

It is so very clear in the above quotations that to walk as Christ walked (i.e., holiness, Christlikeness) involves depending upon Christ by faith as one's Propitiation and Advocate while studying and seeking to keep His commandments in the same manner as He did; i. e., thoughts, words, and deeds. Christian holiness requires believing in Christ alone for one's justification all the time. But Christian holiness also calls the believing one actively to guard and keep the law as He did. This is a Lordship salvation that perseveres to the end (Philippians 2:12–13).

The word "keep" (guard, watch, protect) does not mean that the justified believer must "keep" the law perfectly for one's obedience to be accepted by God. Rather, it means to watch after the law and commandments continually as you walk by faith and seek to obey them. There is no such thing as perfectionism in behavior until heaven where "the spirits of righteous men made perfect" live (Hebrews 12:23). Yet, believers are commanded by God to guard their thoughts, words, and deeds by the law of God. The believing Paul said: "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). The contextual meaning of "Law" is the Decalogue (Romans 7:7).

In sum, the goal of our instruction is love (1 Timothy 1:5). And love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:8–10) in loving submission to our Lord Jesus Christ "under grace" (Romans 6:14).

NOTES:

¹ Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust), 40. This work is highly recommended for a thorough study of the Law and the Gospel in the believer's life. It shows that the once-for-all justified believer lives by faith under grace while seeking to obey God's unchanging Law. Though written in 1643, he answers the same questions being explored today by Baptists.

² *Ibid.*, 42.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Fred A. Malone has served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Clinton, Louisiana, since 1993, having previously served eleven years as founding pastor of Heritage Baptist Church, Mansfield, Texas.