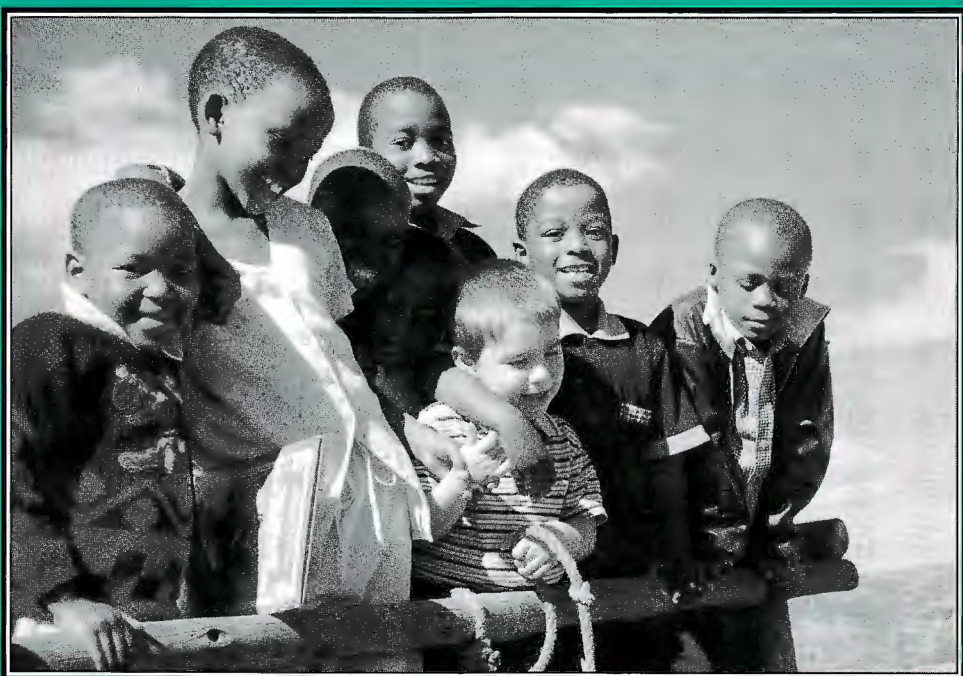


# REFORMATION TODAY



SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2000

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## Contributors to this issue

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*David Seefried* was pastor of two churches in NY State, USA from 1967-1977. He then pastored churches in Augsburg and Mehlingen in Germany despite serious illnesses. On returning to the USA in 1998 he became European Director and is now also Director of Strategic Development with Evangelical Baptist Mission.

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### Death of Dr James Montgomery Boice

On June 16th, after a short illness, James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000) was taken to be with the Lord. Dr Boice was one of the most learned men of our times. From the time he became senior pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia in 1968, he contributed enormously to reformation as a preacher, pastor and writer.

In 1996, 110 conservative, mainly reformed, Christian leaders gathered near Harvard College with the purpose of making a firm stand on the primacy of Scripture as against pragmatism. Out of that meeting the *Alliance of*

*Confessing Evangelicals* was established with James Boice as president.

Dr Boice had a firm grasp of contemporary evangelicalism. He esteemed John Gerstner, Francis Schaeffer and Martyn Lloyd-Jones as among the leaders. He maintained that, 'we are in the second generation, the stage of laying the ground-work for new reformation. Today's young pastors may well be the ones to accomplish under God the reformation for which many in my generation have dreamed, prayed, and worked hard.'

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Front cover : *Joshua Holdt, son of Pastor Jonathan and Mrs Adèle Holdt, with children of the Shongwene Baptist Church, KwaZulu, South Africa.*

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## Editorial

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Happy is the man who can unpack and apply the constituent parts of God's law: ceremonial, civil and moral. Such a person can count himself to be a competent theologian. According to our Lord's description, such a person should be esteemed great in the kingdom of God. 'Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven' (Matt 5:19).

In their work of transparent quality Joel Beeke and Ray Lanning trace out Reformed and Puritan teaching on the law of God, teaching which is summarised in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and *The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, chapter 19.

According to the Reformers and Puritans the third use of the law is didactic (instructive). The Bible is full of references to this didactic use of the law which applies to the pursuit of holiness. Some of these references are expounded in the book *The Weakness of the Law* by Jonathan Bayes (see review). The Reformed and Puritan position provides a highway between the precipice of antinomianism (anti-law) on the one side, and the muddy places of legalism where the traveller can be bogged down, on the other.

The didactic use of the law promotes love, 'This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome' (1 John 5:3). Love and law are not enemies but friends. The summary of the whole law is to love God and my neighbour as myself (Matt 22:37-40; Rom 13:8-10). The didactic use of the law is a foundation for Christian freedom as displayed in Samuel Bolton's book *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (Banner of Truth).

### *The challenge of the doctrinal antinomians*

During the years 1631-1647 in Puritan England the Reformed view of law and grace was challenged by doctrinal antinomians. During this period nineteen books were written from both sides. The doctrinal antinomians held that the Ten Commandments are not designed to be the believers guide for sanctification. Today the doctrinal antinomian contention is resurfacing and in America is led by John Reisinger.

The whole case for doctrinal antinomianism hinges on the idea that God's law is a single entity and is indivisible. Illustrations have their limitations but this is rather like a family outing in which a picnic hamper is filled with everything needed for a three course meal. When time for lunch arrives the children clamour for the hamper to be opened and the feast to begin. But Dad says, No! We cannot open the hamper because that will ruin its unity. The hamper is one! It is indivisible!

In his article *The Threefold Division of the Law* Jonathan Bayes shows that the prophets distinguished between ceremonial and moral law. He surveys Church history and proves that the threefold division of the law is not a modern invention.

His article is followed by a review of his book *The Weakness of the Law*. The New Testament usage of law (*nomos*) is examined. The moral law is established as an entity and its relevance explored in Acts, Romans, Galatians and Hebrews.

*What about practical antinomians?*

Doctrinal belief is the basis of practice. But doctrinal antinomians are unable to live with the obvious conclusion of their contention: if the Ten Commandments no longer apply we are free to break them. They stress that Christians are not under Moses but under Christ. We are no longer under law but under grace. But Christ himself wrote out the Ten Commandments and gave them to Moses. There was a national application of that decalogue for the nation of Israel. As mediator of the New Covenant our Lord has not abrogated the Ten Commandments. Rather he has expounded the spiritual meaning and application of the commandments for us in the New Covenant (Matt 5). Likewise in writing to the Ephesians the apostle exhorts children to obey their parents in the Lord – which is the first commandment with a promise.

And in Romans 13:8-10 Paul refers to four commandments. *The New Living Translation* expresses the matter perfectly, 'Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbour, you will fulfil all the requirements of God's law.'

One matter remains. The debate which took place between 1631 and 1647 was not always conducted according to the law of love. In the controversy which is re-emerging let us improve not only by way of lucidity but also in tone. Jonathan Bayes' book *The Weakness of the Law* is commended on both counts; he breaks new ground and his attitude throughout is peaceable.

# The Threefold Division of the Law



Jonathan Bayes

Traditional Reformed theology has distinguished God's law revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures into three parts, moral, ceremonial and civil (or judicial). It teaches that the moral element in the law, focused in the ten commandments, is of permanent application, while the ceremonial and civil elements were for the duration of the Old Testament economy only. The ceremonial was a shadow of Christ which became obsolete with his coming, and the civil a model of legal arrangements for any society, though not of such a status as to demand exact replication. My present purpose is to establish whether or not the threefold division is valid. Detailed discussion of the implications in terms of the continuation and abrogation of the respective parts of the law is beyond the scope of this article, though it will be necessary to make occasional reference to the issue.

In the final chapter of *The Institutes* Calvin writes:

We must attend to the well-known division which distributes the whole law of God, as promulgated by Moses, into the moral, the ceremonial, and the judicial law.

Similarly, Francis Turretin, one of Calvin's successors at Geneva in the middle years of the seventeenth century, has written:

The law given by Moses is usually distinguished into three species: moral (treating of morals or of perpetual duties towards God and our neighbour); ceremonial (of the ceremonies or rites about the sacred things to be observed under the Old Testament); and civil (constituting the civil government of the Israelite people).

Two years after Turretin's death the *1689 Baptist Confession* incorporated reference to this threefold division of the law. Chapter 19 of the Confession was entitled *Of the Law of God*. It was taken over with only minor modifications from the Westminster Confession of 1646, which represents the distilled essence of Puritan theology. While recognising the primacy of the moral law, the Puritan confessions speak also of the ceremonial laws governing the worship of the people of Israel and prefiguring Christ, and the judicial laws governing the political life of Israel.



Although the threefold division of the law is associated with Reformed theology, and has even been described as 'the cornerstone of Reformed orthodoxy', it would be a mistake to assume that these distinctions were novelties at the time of the Reformation. Turretin notes that the threefold division is 'usual'. Calvin speaks of 'the well known division'. I J Hesselink traces this division back to the medieval scholastic theologian, Thomas Aquinas. It was around 1270 that Aquinas wrote:

We must therefore distinguish three kinds of precept in the Old Law; viz. 'moral' precepts, which are dictated by the natural law; 'ceremonial' precepts, which are determinations of the Divine worship; and 'judicial' precepts, which are determinations of the justice to be maintained among men.

Despite Hesselink's claim that this threefold division originated with Aquinas, it seems *prima facie* probable that the idea (even if not the precise terminology) has a longer pedigree. Calvin refers to 'the ancients who adopted this division'. Such a turn of phrase suggests that he was looking back further than the thirteenth century.

In his *Summa Theologica* Aquinas refers frequently to Augustine. Distinctions within the law were already familiar by the time of this fifth-century theologian, although he operates with a twofold rather than a threefold division.

In AD 400 Augustine wrote a reply to a Manichaean attack on the Old Testament. In the course of this work Augustine introduces a distinction between the moral and the symbolical precepts of the law:

For example, 'Thou shalt not covet' is a moral precept; 'Thou shalt circumcise every male on the eighth day' is a symbolical precept.

By 'symbolical' precepts Augustine clearly means what would later become known as the ceremonial law; he seems to have given little consideration to the civil law.

However, we can trace these distinctions even further back than the fifth century. At this early stage in the development of Christian theology the distinctions within the law are not fully worked out, but they are clearly implicit. Writing about two hundred years before Augustine, Tertullian distinguishes what he terms 'the primordial law' or 'the natural law' from 'the sacerdotal law' or 'the Levitical law'. At one point Tertullian seems to recognise the difference between what would later come to be known as the moral and civil parts of the law when he distinguishes the 'prime counsels of innocence, chastity, and justice, and piety' from the 'prescriptions of humanity'.

However, the threefold division can be found already in the period earlier than Tertullian. In the mid-second century Ptolemaeus, a gnostic heretic, found

three sections to God's law. Johannes Quasten explains:

The first section contains the pure law, untainted by evil, in other words the ten commandments. This is the section of the Mosaic law which Jesus came to fulfil rather than to suspend. The second section is the law adulterated with injustice, namely that of retaliation, which was suspended by the Saviour. The third section is the ceremonial law which the Saviour spiritualised.

According to Jean Daniélou, the reason why Ptolemaeus regarded the second part of the law as a mixture of good and bad was that it was 'the result of adaptation to circumstances'.

However, it would be a mistake to treat the idea of the threefold division of the law as suspect on the assumption that it originated with a heretic. Daniélou points out that the orthodox Justin Martyr, who wrote around the same time as Ptolemaeus, also suggested a threefold division in his *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*:

Justin too distinguishes three types of material in the Law, 'one which was ordained for piety and the practice of righteousness', and another which was instituted 'either to be a mystery of the Messiah or because of the hardness of heart of your people'.

One of the most primitive post-apostolic writers whose work is still extant, the

early second-century Barnabas, also recognised the need for distinctions within God's law. He notes that sacrifices, burnt offerings and oblations have been abolished and replaced by 'the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ', as has circumcision. However, he is clear that believers must 'utterly flee from all the works of lawlessness', and in spelling out 'The Way of Light' which Christians must walk in contrast with 'The Way of the Black One', he quotes most of the ten commandments and insists, 'You shall not desert the commandments of the Lord.' Clearly, Barnabas, at this early stage of Christian theological development, was already feeling the need for distinctions within the law of God.

Sometimes, as is common in patristic literature, he uses the word 'law' as functionally equivalent to 'covenant', and so distinguishes the old law, which is completely abrogated, with the new law revealed in Jesus Christ. However, at other times he uses the vocabulary of law more specifically of the sacrificial system or of the moral demands of the faith. In this more specific sense, the law is abolished only in certain parts: the sacrificial system has gone, but moral demand remains.

Moreover, the threefold division of the law is not only a Christian construct. Judaism also recognises that there are distinctions to be made. The mid-twentieth century Jewish writer, Boaz Cohen, notes that the divine law consists 'of ceremonialism, jurisprudence and ethics', and finds this

threefold division indicated in the words 'commandment' (*mizvah*), 'statutes' (*hoqim*) and 'judgements' (*mispatim*) in Deuteronomy 6:1, and in verse 20, where 'commandment' is replaced by 'testimonies' (*edah*). Cohen's terms are recognisably equivalent to the traditional Christian vocabulary. Moreover, Cohen, like the Christian Reformed tradition, describes the Decalogue as moral principles.

Samuel Holdheim was a nineteenth-century German rabbi. He too distinguished at least between the moral and the ritual parts of the law. Ralph Bisschops notes that Holdheim saw the destruction of the temple in AD 70 as God's declaration that 'sacrificing animals could no longer be held as true worship'. Bisschops explains:

The observation of the moral laws laid down in Mosaic revelation is an unconditional obligation for every Jew. Holdheim defines the moral laws as those laws which are eternally true and not bound to the particular mentality of the Jews at the time of Moses. As to the ritual laws, their purpose is to stimulate devotion ... According to Holdheim, the ritual laws are to be regarded as mere 'crutches', helping man to develop deep inner devotion. They are the form of Jewish devotion, whereas ethics are its substance. They make up the outer appearance, whereas ethics constitutes the core.

Amongst contemporary Jews, there are those who recognise that it is simply

impracticable to observe all the laws in the circumstances of the modern world:

A large portion of the laws relate to sacrifices and offerings, which can only be made in the Temple, and the Temple does not exist today. Some of the laws relate to the theocratic state of Israel, its king, its supreme court, and its system of justice, and cannot be observed because the theocratic state of Israel does not exist today.

This categorisation of those laws which cannot still be practised tallies very closely with the two parts of the law which have become known in Christian parlance as the ceremonial and the civil law respectively, and which traditional Christian theology has seen as superseded.

In spite of this impressive pedigree of the threefold division of the law, there have been those who have questioned its validity. One such is John Metcalfe, who, in his typical colourful style, writes:

What! rend asunder the one law of God into three mutilated parts, inventing the names moral, judicial, and ceremonial, just so that you can discard two and retain one? But what God has joined together, let not man put asunder. The law, one law, as such, was given by Moses. Then either we are under it, or we are not under it. It is impossible for anyone to be under only a part of it. ... God called the whole, *the law*. Israel calls



it *the law*. And so did Paul, agreeing with Israel, the Jews, and the Lord Jesus, none of whom allowed of this dismemberment. It is *the law*, integrally, the whole of it, all that Moses commanded, and none of it can be separated from any other part of it.

Another representative of this school of thought, at least to some extent, is Edgar Andrews, whose recent commentary on Galatians proceeds on the assumption that,

There is no indication in Galatians that Paul ever thinks of the law as being divided into different parts (moral, civil, ceremonial).

Rather,

Paul sees the law as indivisible. ... There is no evidence that Paul ever thought of the law as being divided into separate parts; he speaks explicitly about 'the whole law'.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to add some qualifications when considering Andrews' position. Despite this insistence on the essential unity of the law, he does suggest that a two-part analysis can be made:

In the first part (or aspect), we see what a holy God required of his people, and what penalties were applied to those in Israel who broke his commandments. In the second aspect we see the provision God made for the forgiveness and reconciliation of those who sinned. This second aspect prefigured the work of Christ.

Andrews works with a twofold division by conflating the moral law and the civil law, arguing that the 'civil law' is really an amplification of the ten commandments. This point is not altogether without substance: the civil law was indeed the application to Israelite society of the moral principles enshrined in the Decalogue. Nevertheless, it is as well to retain the distinction between the absolute principles and their application in the context of specific social arrangements. In any case, it is evident that Andrews acknowledges that this aspect of the law is distinguishable from what is usually termed the 'ceremonial law'.

As a matter of fact, it is virtually impossible to carry through a rigorous rejection of the threefold (or at least a twofold) division. Andrews says:

Those who are Spirit-led will fulfil the righteous requirements of the law. ... But this will not be because they subject themselves to the law, but because they are guided by the indwelling Spirit.

It is clear that the phrase 'the righteous requirements of the law' is not intended to include the requirements of the laws to do with sacrifice, circumcision, diet, and the like. Andrews implicitly recognises that there is a section of the law (described as 'righteous requirements'), which can be distinguished from other parts of the law, and which remains the definitive expression of the Spirit-led life. The phrase 'moral law' has been replaced by the phrase

‘righteous requirements of the law’, but the two appear to be identical in content. Thus, despite the assertion that the law is indivisible, those who deny the threefold division cannot avoid making distinctions by default, even though they may reject the traditional terminology, and even though they prefer to speak of ‘aspects’ rather than ‘parts’ of the law.

However, it is time to turn to the all-important question: does Scripture affirm a threefold division of the law? Whatever commentators, Jewish or Christian, might say, the issue hangs on the teaching of the Word of God. Those involved in the debate, from both sides, are committed to the authority and inerrancy of the Bible. Their discussion concerns the proper interpretation of the Scriptures.

My purpose is to demonstrate that the Word of God does indeed uphold the threefold division of the law, and that the traditional Reformed classification is correct. It follows that the implications of this division are also correct: the ceremonial and civil law are abrogated, but the moral law remains in force for all time as the declaration of divinely ordained ethical principles and as the rule of life for the true believer, who will inevitably ‘delight in the law of God according to the inward man’ (Rom 7:22). The exposition of these implications is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

We take as our starting point the words of Samuel to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22:

Has the LORD as *great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

These words are echoed by Hosea 6:6, where God protests:

I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

The same sentiment appears also in Proverbs 21:3:

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Such verses give the lie to Jakob Jocz’s assertion that ‘the division between the strictly moral and the ‘ceremonial’ in our sense was entirely unknown to the Jews’. Here are affirmations both of the distinction between the moral and the ceremonial law. The Proverbs text, with its dual reference to ‘righteousness and justice’ probably indicates the further analysis of the former part of the law into both strictly moral and civil components. These verses also teach the primacy of the moral law and its civil application over the ceremonial. This was a theme which was to become dominant in the writings of the prophets. Alec Motyer summarises the prophetic message as follows:

The nation has missed the divine priority by its concentration on the mere operation of a cult, for the cult

is not a thing which exists on its own but rather for the sake of the spiritual needs of a people committed to the moral law of God.

This prophetic concern may be illustrated by reference to a number of passages. In Isaiah 1:11-17 God denounces the sacrifices as purposeless. He has had enough of them, and finds no delight in them. The reason is the uncleanness of the people. The solution to the distastefulness of the sacrificial ritual is not its abolition, but rather that the people should:

Cease to do evil, learn to do good;  
seek justice, reprove the oppressor;  
defend the fatherless, plead for the  
widow.

Fastidiousness in ceremonial observation is invalidated unless it goes hand-in-hand with obedience to the moral law and its social application in the civil law.

Later, in Isaiah 43:22-24, we find God complaining that it is not to Him that Israel has brought its numerous sacrifices; He has remained unsatisfied. The reason is that their sins have become a wearisome burden to the Lord. The words 'sins' and 'iniquities' used in verse 24 clearly have moral and social connotations in this context, where compliance with the LORD's ceremonial requirements alone is insufficient to count as obedience to the law.

In similar vein, Jeremiah 6:19-20 gives God's pronouncement of impending calamity on the people 'because they

have not heeded my words, nor my law, but rejected it'. This is not a complaint against a failure in ceremonial observation, because the LORD immediately refers to their burnt offerings and sacrifices. However, their law-breaking makes these unacceptable. Clearly here, 'law' refers to ethical demand in distinction from the ritual requirements, which have been carefully followed: 'Ritual performances divorced from a proper moral attitude are worthless in God's sight.'

Amos, too, takes up this theme:

Though you offer me burnt offerings  
and your grain offerings, I will not  
accept *them*, nor will I regard your  
fatted peace offerings.

The word 'fatted' seems designed to highlight the people's ardour in observance of these ceremonial requirements. However, they are of no avail, because justice and righteousness are missing (Amos 5:22-24). God's moral requirements, and their application to civil society, are paramount. Micah 6:6-8 makes the same point:

To a generation preoccupied with things ceremonial to the neglect of weightier matters of the law, Micah needs to bring a counterstress on the impact of the covenant upon all of life's concerns. ... To keep Yahweh confined in a gilded cultic cage was a travesty of faith in a moral God.

Perhaps all this may be summed up by the statement of Proverbs 15:8: 'The

sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD.'

The same emphasis is found in the words of the Psalmist. Psalm 40:6, reads:

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire; ... burnt offering and sin offering you did not require.

The explanation of this apparent rejection of God's ceremonial instructions is that it is the person who delights to do God's will because his law is written in the heart who genuinely fulfils his will. If we must emphasise one or the other, the moral demands of God must always take precedence over the ritual.

When we turn to the New Testament we discover that the same distinctions continue. Our starting point in this instance will be 1 Corinthians 7:19:

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters*.

To a Jew this would have seemed a remarkable statement. Circumcision was one of God's foremost commandments: 'It is commanded by Yahweh as the sign and seal of his covenant.' Evidently Paul could discern distinctions within God's law which set certain commandments apart as applicable to all Christians, while others were irrelevant. This is tantamount to the division between the moral and the ceremonial law.

Similarly, in Romans 2:25-27 the apostle repeatedly contrasts circumcision and law, even though, to the Jew

'circumcision was not something other than law-keeping; on the contrary, it was the most fundamental part of the covenant and its law'. However, Paul is well aware that there are distinctions to be made within the law of God.

Further New Testament evidence for the threefold division is found in passages such as Matthew 5:17-48, Matthew 19:18-19, and Romans 13:9, especially when they are read alongside the many passages, such as the book of Hebrews, which speak of the irrelevance of circumcision and the obsolescence of the Levitical and sacrificial requirements. The commandments which are cited in the New Testament as having convicting power or as God's continuing demands for the believing life are clearly distinguished from those which were specific to the Jews at a certain time. This observation upholds the view that the moral commandments are to be treated separately from those which are suspended, which had a ceremonial purport.

When the Pharisees challenged Jesus over the failure of his disciples to wash their hands, in breach of a rabbinical extension to all the people of the requirements for the priests in Exodus 30:19,21, Jesus side-stepped the issue, and turned instead to the fifth commandment. He evidently had different priorities in legal interpretation from the Pharisees. In other words, his concern was moral where theirs was ceremonial.

In his book *Tablets of Stone* John Reisinger writes:

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*New to the conference:*

**Bob Selph** is missions director of the Reformed Baptist Missions Services in the USA. Prior to that he was senior pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Greenville, South Carolina.

**Dennis D Hustedt** is the senior pastor of Durban North Baptist Church, South Africa. Dennis spearheaded Reformed Ministries International, a literature work into Eastern Europe.

**Kirk Wellum** is the founding pastor of Sovereign Grace Community Church in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada.

The term 'moral law' is a theological term developed in the Middle Ages and is not a biblical term in any sense whatsoever. The term may, or may not, be a correct and useful term if it can be proven to be scripturally correct. However, the term would first have to be established with texts of Scripture that clearly prove the doctrine implied or stated in the term.

Leaving aside the minor point that Reisinger is inaccurate in his dating (we have already seen that the term 'moral law' originated at least as early as Augustine), it must be acknowledged that he speaks truly when he says that it

is a term which is not found as such in the Bible. However, I am confident that the texts of Scripture to which reference has here been made do establish that the idea contained in the term is biblical. Although the words 'moral', 'civil', and 'ceremonial' are theological, it is apparent that they do justice to vital scriptural distinctions. 'These theological designations collect important biblical teachings into brief phrases.' The threefold division of the law is indeed taught in the Word of God.

*Scripture quotes in this article are from the New King James Version.*

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# The Weakness of the Law

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## *God's Law and the Christian in New Testament Perspective*

### *A Review Article*

*Review of 'The Weakness of the Law'  
by Jonathan Bayes, Paternoster Press,  
PO Box 300, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3  
OQS, UK, 243 page pbk, £19.99.  
Available in USA from Eisenbrauns of  
Warsaw, Indiana 46580.*

The title of this book is derived from Romans 8:3 – *what the law could not do*. The subject matter throughout concerns the didactic use of the law (see article by Joel Beeke and Ray Lanning).

The book falls into two parts, historical and doctrinal. The author describes the debate from Calvin to the antinomian disputes among the English Puritans. He clearly and fairly states the position of the doctrinal antinomians, John Eaton and Tobias Crisp, and the opposite position held by Samuel Bolton and Thomas Watson. He traces the debate in New England and in the 'Marrow' controversy in Scotland. He gives his readers an overview of 19th-century positions and brings them up to date by informing them of present-day denials of the third use of the law by doctrinal antinomians such as John Reisinger (pages 5 - 52).

Dr Bayes concludes the historical section by pointing to differences in pastoral practice. Doctrinal antinomianism sees the preacher's responsibility as the extolling of free grace and argues that the preaching of the law hinders

sanctification whereas those who teach the third use of the law regard the preaching of the law as a source of strength.

The contemporary Reformed movement is mostly confessional in character and Reformed Baptists stand by chapter 19 of *The 1689 Confession of Faith*. However that position can only stand if it is supported by Scripture.

In the second part, the doctrinal section of the book (pages 56 - 213) there are four chapters each devoted to a NT book. In each case three questions are examined. 1. What does law mean in the text and context of the book? 2. In what sense is the law held to be weak? 3. What are the implications of the text in its context for the question of the place and power of the law in the life of the believer?

It is vital for readers to study this section with an open Bible and if possible with the Greek text. In each case the background and original purpose of the epistle in question is examined. What did the original readers understand by the term 'law' as used in a variety of contexts?

1. ACTS. Acts 13:39. *Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified*



from by the law of Moses. The Pharisees distorted the law by interpreting it in terms of law-righteousness whereas at no point had the Lord ever intended the law to be a means of justification. 'The law's weakness is an aspect of its incompleteness: it required fulfilment in the Messiah to whom it pointed forward, and in whom prophecy and promise were fulfilled' (p 63). The conclusion to which the author comes can be summarised as follows: 'The book of Acts makes it clear that if *nomos* (law) is defined in the OT economy as focused in its ceremonial requirements, then it has no ongoing status in the life of the Christian believer. Luke hints that while the Jewish believers continued to observe the law's ceremonial requirements the time was coming when even they would abandon them since they were destined for oblivion having been fulfilled in Christ. However Luke understands Jesus, the Jerusalem Church, and Paul to be unanimous in affirming the validity of the moral law of God. Obedience to these requirements has not been rendered obsolete by the dawn of the age of newness.'

2. ROMANS. Romans 8:3. Bayes concurs with contemporary scholarship which affirms that Paul was acutely aware of inter-racial tensions between Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome. This has a bearing on the way we view how the term 'law' is employed in Romans. His translation of 8:3 reads, *For this being the law's inability while it used to be weak in the sphere of the flesh, God, having sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the law's righteous requirement might*

*be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

He answers these questions: What is the law's inability? What is the law's weakness in the sphere of the flesh? What is the connection between *adunaton* (the impossible thing) and *ēsthenei* (it was weak)? Moving on, Dr Bayes examines positive indicators as to the ongoing status of the moral law in the life of the Christian as found in Romans 2:25-29; 6:14ff; 7:4 and 6;10:4 and 13:8-10, and negative indicators in Romans 6:14ff and 7:4 and 6 and 10:4.

Part of his conclusion runs: 'According to Romans, the law does have an ongoing place in the Christian life. Though it was disabled for as long as it used to be weak in the sphere of the flesh, in the sphere of the Spirit (where the believer now has his being), the law is empowered as a means of sanctification.'

3. GALATIANS. Galatians 3:21. *Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would have come by the law.* And 4:9, *How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?* Paul sees the law as a definite epoch in the life of the Jewish people (Gal 3:19-25). The epochal status of the law implies that it is a bracketed period within human (and specifically Jewish) history. It is not of unending duration. Paul does not assert an unqualified weakness of the law. There are some senses in which he sees the law as possessed of great power. While law is used in an epochal sense,

in Galatians 5:13,14 it is used in a sense which is not epochal but denotes the moral requirements of the law in a way which transcends the epochal. Christians are not under obligation to fulfil the ceremonial law since its fulfilment has been completed in Christ. In Galatians 5:13ff Paul affirms the continuing binding validity upon Christian believers of the moral law. Life in the Spirit entails walking by the rule of the law, and the outworking of this is a life of loving service. The moral law stands as a needed pattern for the redeemed life.

4. HEBREWS. Hebrews 7:18. *The former regulation was set aside because it was weak and useless.* In setting out the historical background Dr Bayes reminds us that the Jews' opposition expressed itself in the ridicule of the poverty of ritual worship in Christianity as compared with OT religion. To the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, the terms 'law' and 'Levitical priesthood' are practically equivalent. But the word 'law' is used in different ways. The writer shows that the OT economy is completely defunct and a new law must supplant the old. The author discusses fully the implications of God's laws being written upon the hearts of New Covenant believers, Hebrews 8-10. With regard to Hebrews 13, it is striking how many allusions to the OT laws there are in this chapter. Pink is the commentator who most clearly sees the connection of the final chapter with the rest of Hebrews. The whole law in its twofold structure, as in the Decalogue, is in view in the second half of chapter 12 and the first six verses of chapter 13. That which was commanded in the Old Covenant is repeated in the New.

The writer to the Hebrews esteemed the law to be weak because it was founded upon the Levitical priesthood and a sacrificial system which was inadequate. For access to God it was restrictive. It did not abolish guilt. The writer uses *nomos* (law) in different ways and especially with regard to the new law written on the hearts of God's people. God's law is enshrined in the place where once sin was engraved. The believing life 'in Christ' is not divorced from the requirements of God's written law in the Decalogue. Although not a major theme in Hebrews, the ongoing role of the law in Christian experience is indicated in the final chapter.

In short, in his book Dr Bayes surveys the historical background of the NT, he interacts with scholars past and present, he exegetes thoroughly the relevant texts and explores the usage and nuances of the word *nomos* in the NT. He amasses exegetical and expository evidence for what we term 'the didactic use' of the moral law of God. The didactic or third use of the moral law he shows to be wholly in tune with the teaching of Acts, Romans, Galatians and Hebrews.

The bibliography is extensive but the author misses the helpful *The Law and the Gospel* by Ernest C Reisinger published by P and R, 1997, 196 pages. This book takes the opposite view throughout to his brother John Reisinger, all of whose writings on the subject are listed in the bibliography.

For its expository value Jonathan Bayes' book is worth every penny of £19.99.

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## News

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### Guildford, Surrey, UK



*A cherished moment in the history of Chertsey Street Baptist Church, Guildford, Surrey, Lord's Day 18th June, 2000. Representing the church officers, Pablo Fernandez presents John and Ann Benton with tokens of love for twenty years' faithful service in the pastorate. Chertsey Street has a congregation of about 200. The history of the work can be traced back to 1645 and is an assembly out of which other churches have been born. Since 1993 Dr John Benton has also been editor of Evangelicals Now, a monthly evangelical newspaper which maintains an excellent service for analyses, news and comment, at home and abroad.*

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### Mozambique

*Ministers' Conference, May 2000*

*A report by Martin Holdt*

The FIEL (meaning 'Faithful') Conference held in Nampula, Mozambique was attended by 85 pastors from a variety of churches. It was clearly a great milestone in the work being done by missionaries Charles Woodrow (Nampula) and Karl Peterson (Maputo). The eagerness of the men to learn was immensely encouraging and their response to the truth of God's Word made all the hard work of organising the



*Martin Holdt*

conference more than worth while for Charles and Karl. It was striking to note that, side by side with material poverty experienced by virtually all the pastors,

the hunger for truth and the spiritual contentment of these men of God contrast sharply with the materialism and complacency which become such a temptation to men in the ministry where we live. The smooth running of the conference from beginning to end was a proof of the Lord's good hand upon the memorable event. The part played by the two missionaries was significant. The hunger for the truth on the printed page was observable as men gathered around the book tables like bees around a honey-pot. Richard Denham's contribution in this area was immense. Attending the service in the small local church on Sunday morning was moving. Richard Denham preached in Portuguese, the official language of Mozambique. About 35 listened with rapt attention. Erroll Hulse agreed to be the main preacher for the second conference planned for 25-27 July, 2001.

The Woodrows' cramped quarters (seven members of the family living in a one-bedroomed apartment!) calls for urgent prayer that the house to be built for them will be ready soon. The hospital they are hoping to build will follow shortly after as this facility will enhance the excellent work already being done by God's committed servants.

What is going on in the wider sphere is reflected in the way some leaders have been used. For instance one church planter at the conference has been used to gather 1,600 into four churches for which he cares. Another has the enormous responsibility of 32 churches where the gospel has gone out faster than pastors can be trained.

## Singapore

Shalom Reformed Baptist Church was founded in 1979 by Pastor David Yan of New Zealand. The doctrinal basis of the church is *The 1689 Confession of Faith*. Wei En Yi became the pastor in 1993. Pastor Wei preaches in English and Mandarin. He is married to Wendy. They have 3 children aged 8, 5 and 1.

A significant development has taken place in the history of the Shalom Reformed Baptist Church. Singapore is a city-state of over three million (77 per cent Chinese). After 21 years meeting in rented offices in the very heart of the city centre, the assembly is now moving to a property of their own. The address is 8 New Industrial Road, #03-01, 36200. For those familiar with the geography of Singapore, this would be the Hougang, Serangoon and Ang Mo Kio area. The past few months have been demanding for the church with energies expended to complete the purchase of the property and commence the renovation work. The auditorium will have a seating capacity of 150-200.

Shalom under the leadership of Pastor Wei constantly engages in evangelistic enterprise including participation in the annual 'World Book Fair'. Attention is now being concentrated on outreach in the area of the newly acquired property. Visitation of the neighbourhood in the area of the new property is being planned to commence soon.

Having started in 1979, Shalom is a missionary-minded church and takes a practical interest in the extension of the gospel in Cambodia and Bangladesh. Members of Shalom, Kim Seng and Tian

Keong, visited Bangladesh from 17th to 21st May. During the trip they were able to visit churches as well as meet with some of the leaders there. God willing, they hope to receive two of our Bangladeshi brothers into their midst for two weeks in late August, for attendance at the Reformed Ministers' Conference in Malaysia as well as to carry out the proof-reading of books translated from English to Bengali.

In 1995 Shalom initiated a church planting work in Dover, one of the suburbs of Singapore. This assembly has grown to the stage of being independent. Meetings take place in a school on Lord's Day afternoons. The services are in Mandarin, translated into English.

## Bulgaria

Fred and Florence Huebner representing American Mission European Nations (AMEN) have returned from their fourth missionary visit to Bulgaria which involved ministry in the city of Sofia as well as in country churches.

Their report embraces the following:

*Evangelism.* 50,000 Gospels of John have been published and widely distributed.

*Promotion of Reformed literature.* Fred and Florence are encouraged by the work of Roumen Paprilov, head of a publishing house which is Reformed in theology. A number of well-known titles are available in Bulgarian such as: *Chosen by God*, R C Sproul; *The Sovereignty of God*, A W Pink; *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Tedd Tripp; *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, John Murray and *Biblical Christianity*, John Calvin. Using these and other titles, 75 churches have been



stocked with 60 books each. These churches include Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Church of God and even the Orthodox Church in Sofia.

*Poor relief.* In cases of need over 1,000 food parcels, designated 'care packages', have been distributed in rural areas.

*Training for the ministry.* A Scholarship Fund in memory of David Straub has been established and will be used to provide the necessary funds to send a man for theological training at the Logos Bible Institute in Sofia. Valeri Arnaudov and his family will begin this autumn and receive \$350.00 per month for 4 years. This amount covers all their needs including housing, food, car expenses, etc. While at school he will be able to continue preaching in country churches at the weekends as the Lord opens up opportunities. His progress will be monitored not only by AMEN but also by fellow lay teachers. Fred and Florence ask us to pray for Valeri and his family as they begin this exciting time in their lives. 'Pray that God would make him a mighty preacher of the Word.'

## Macedonia

Branko Trajkovski has attended the Banner of Truth Leicester Conference regularly for many years and is well known in Reformed circles in the UK.



*Branko Trajkovski and Pastor Alexander Mitev of the Evangelical Methodist Church in Bitola. Both men assisted Dr Konstantinov in the final editing of the Bible in Macedonian*

Pastor David Sprouse and Andrew Symonds visited Branko in Bitola, Macedonia for a week in June on behalf of Cuckfield Baptist Church, Sussex, UK. They found Branko well and busy with translation work, active in the local Evangelical Methodist Church and a much respected gardener and caretaker in his community, enjoying a variety of social and Christian contact with his unbelieving neighbours.

Substantial spiritual encouragement to the local believers has been the printing and delivery of 47,000 Bibles in the Macedonian language. The Bibles were provided free by the Christian Brethren churches in Holland. It is based on a



*Dr Dusan Konstantinov holding volume one of the five volume set of his final draft of the Macedonian Bible before it went to print*

translation completed in 1981 that was suppressed under the Communist regime and subsequently delayed through lack of funds. The translator, Dr Dusan Konstantinov, now lives in Bitola. David and Andrew were privileged to visit him in his home. He is 76 and rather frail. The work is the first complete translation of the Scriptures in Macedonian. Other earlier versions were in Serbo-Croat.

Branko and Pastor Alexander Mitev of the Evangelical Methodists assisted in the proof-reading and final edit of the translation. The Evangelical Methodists are the only Bible-based church in Bitola. The church survives from an American missionary movement in the last quarter of the 1800s. While much of the hierarchy of the church organisation is liberal, the Bitola church has remained faithful to the Scriptures and has seen about fifty converts in the last ten years. The young and dynamic pastor is a preacher, broadcaster and writer, using every medium at his disposal to proclaim biblical truths.



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# The Didactic Use of the Law

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*In glad obedience I will live*

By Joel R Beeke and Ray B Lanning

*Keep me from falsehood; let Thy law  
With me in grace abide;  
The way of faithfulness I choose;  
Thy precepts are my guide.*

*I cleave unto Thy truth, O Lord;  
From shame deliver me;  
In glad obedience I will live  
Through strength bestowed by Thee.<sup>1</sup>*

The law of God addresses the world and the life of every individual directly or indirectly. Protestant theologians have written much about the various applications or uses of the law in the life of society at large and in the individual lives of both the unbeliever and the Christian. Classic Protestant theology posits a threefold use of the law: the *usus primus* ('first use'), or civil use of the law in the life and affairs of state and society; the *usus secundus* ('second use'), or *evangelical* use of the law as a teacher of sin in the experience or process of conversion unto God; and the *usus tertius* ('third use'), or *didactic* use of the law as a rule of thankful obedience on the part of the Christian.<sup>2</sup> It is this last or didactic use of the law that inspired the prayer of the psalmist cited above, for he knows that only God's law can direct him as he endeavors to live 'in glad obedience' as a child of God.

## The Uses of the Law

In this article we briefly summarize the first two uses of the law in order to examine its didactic use in the proper context of sanctification which

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 119:29-32, metrical version, *The Psalter* (1912; reprint Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), No. 324:3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Many Reformed theologians, following Calvin, invert the first and second uses of the law.

necessarily involves grateful obedience to God for his full-orbed salvation in Jesus Christ. The believer who is justified by faith alone, and adheres to the principle of 'Scripture alone' (*sola scriptura*), will thankfully and wholeheartedly trust and obey the Lord. This response of grateful obedience can be fleshed out in a case study of the law's most controversial commandment-keeping the Sabbath day holy. All of this enables us to draw several significant conclusions about the Christian in his relationship to the didactic use of the law.

### *The Civil Use of the Law*

The first use of the law is its function in public life as a guide to the civil magistrate in the prosecution of his task as the minister of God in things pertaining to the state. The magistrate is required to reward good and punish evil (Rom 13:3-4). Nothing could be more essential to this work than a reliable standard of right and wrong, good and evil. No better standard can be found than the law of God.

Here the Protestant Reformers were in complete accord. Concerning the restraint of sin, Martin Luther writes in his *Lectures on Galatians* (3:19), 'The first understanding and use of the Law is to restrain the wicked.... This civic restraint is extremely necessary and was instituted by God, both for the sake of public peace and for the sake of preserving everything, but especially to prevent the cause of the Gospel from being hindered by the tumults and seditions of wild men.'<sup>3</sup> John Calvin concurs:

The . . . function of the law is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats in the law. But they are restrained not because their inner mind is stirred or affected, but because, being bridled, so to speak, they keep their hands from outward activity, and hold inside the depravity that otherwise they would wantonly have indulged.<sup>4</sup>

The civil use of the law is rooted thoroughly in the Scriptures (most specifically in Romans 13:1-7) and in a realistic doctrine of fallen human nature.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Lectures on Galatians, 1535', *Luther's Works*, ed. Jeroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26:308-309.

<sup>4</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book 2, chapter 7, paragraph 10. (Hereafter, *Institutes* 2.7.10).

The law teaches us that the powers that be are ordained of God in order to administer justice – justice which necessarily includes being a terror to the workers of iniquity. The powers that be bear the sword; they possess a divinely conferred right of punishment, even of ultimate capital punishment (vv. 3-4).

This first use of the law, however, serves not only to prevent society from lapsing into chaos; it also serves to promote righteousness: ‘I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty’ (1 Tim 2:1-2). The ‘higher powers’ must not only strive to intimidate evil, but also to provide a peaceable context in which the gospel, godliness and honesty may prosper. This duty compels the state, the Reformers believed, to preserve certain rights, such as freedom of worship, freedom to preach, and freedom to observe the Lord’s Day.

The implications of the first use of the law for the Christian are inescapable: he must respect and obey the state so long as the state does not command what God forbids or forbid what God commands. In all other cases, civil disobedience is unlawful. To resist authority is to resist the ordinance of God, ‘and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation’ (Rom 13:2). This is critical to affirm in our day when even Christians are prone to be swept along with a worldly spirit of rebellion and contempt for authority. We need to hear and heed what Calvin writes:

The first duty of subjects toward their magistrates is to think most honorably of their office, which they recognize as a jurisdiction bestowed by God, and on that account to esteem and reverence them as ministers and representatives of God.... [Even] in a very wicked man utterly unworthy of all honor, provided he has the public power in his hands, that noble and divine power resides which the Lord has by his Word given to the ministers of his justice and judgment.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, this does not imply that the believer forfeits his right to criticize or even condemn legislation which strays from the principles of Scripture. It does mean that a significant part of our ‘adorning the doctrine of God’

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<sup>5</sup> *Institutes* 4.20, 22, 25.

involves our willing subjection to lawful authority in every sphere of life – be it in the home, school, church, or state.

### *The Evangelical Use of the Law*<sup>6</sup>

Wielded by the Spirit of God, the moral law also serves a critical function in the experience of conversion. It disciplines, educates, convicts, curses. The law not only exposes our sinfulness; it also condemns us, pronounces a curse upon us, declares us liable to the wrath of God and the torments of hell. ‘Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them’ (Gal 3:10). The law is a hard taskmaster; it knows no mercy. It terrifies us, strips us of all our righteousness, and drives us to the end of the law, Christ Jesus, who is our only acceptable righteousness with God. ‘Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith’ (Gal 3:24). Not that the law itself can lead us to a saving knowledge of God in Christ. Rather, the Holy Spirit uses the law as a mirror to show us our impotence and our guilt, to shut us up to hope in mercy alone, and to induce repentance, creating and sustaining the sense of spiritual need out of which faith in Christ is born.

Here, too, Luther and Calvin see eye-to-eye.<sup>7</sup> Typical of Luther’s writings are his comments on Galatians 2:17:

The proper use and aim of the Law is to make guilty those who are smug and at peace, so that they may see that they are in danger of sin, wrath, and death, so that they may be terrified and despairing, blanching and quaking at the rustling of a leaf (Lev 26:36)... If the Law is a ministry of sin, it follows that it is also a ministry of

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<sup>6</sup> In selecting a term for this use of the law, we are aware of the many possibilities in the literature, but have chosen the term which best expresses the Reformed view of the relationship of the law and the gospel, to wit, that they are complementary and not antithetical. Here we are dealing with that work of the law which prepares the heart of the sinner to receive Christ freely offered in the gospel to sinners as the only Savior from the law’s condemnation, curse, and punishment – i.e., with evangelical rather than legal convictions. The Puritans excelled in describing this distinction, stressing that legal conviction deals only with the consequences of sin whereas evangelical conviction grapples with sin itself and the need to be delivered from it by Christ. For example, Stephen Charnock wrote, ‘A legally-convicted person would only be freed from the pain [of sin], an evangelically-convicted person from the sin [itself].’ (I D E Thomas, *Puritan Quotations* [Chicago: Moody, 1975], 167).

<sup>7</sup> The only substantial difference between Luther and Calvin on the evangelical use of the law is that for Luther this is the law’s primary use, whereas for Calvin the third use of the law is primary.

wrath and death. For just as the Law reveals sin, so it strikes the wrath of God into a man and threatens him with death.<sup>8</sup>

Calvin is no less intense:

[The law] warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own righteousness.... After he is compelled to weigh his life in the scales of the law, laying aside all that presumption of fictitious righteousness, he discovers that he is a long way from holiness, and is in fact teeming with a multitude of vices, with which he previously thought himself undefiled.... The law is like a mirror. In it we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both – just as a mirror shows us the spots on our face.<sup>9</sup>

This convicting use of the law is also critical for the believer's sanctification, for it serves to prevent the resurrection of self-righteousness – that ungodly self-righteousness which is always prone to reassert itself even in the holiest of saints. The believer continues to live under the law as a lifelong penitent.

This chastening work of the law does not imply that the believer's justification is ever diminished or annulled. From the moment of regeneration, his state before God is fixed and irrevocable. He is a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17). He can never revert to a state of condemnation nor lose his sonship. Nevertheless, the law exposes the ongoing poverty of his sanctification on a daily basis. He learns that there is a law in his members such that when he would do good, evil is present with him (Rom 7:21). He must repeatedly condemn himself, deplore his wretchedness, and cry daily for fresh applications of the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses from all sin (Rom 7:24; 1 John 1:7, 9).

### *The Didactic Use of the Law*

The third or didactic use of the law addresses the daily life of the Christian. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, the law instructs the believer

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<sup>8</sup> *Luther's Works* 26:148, 150.

<sup>9</sup> *Institutes* 2.7.6-7.

how to express gratitude to God for deliverance from all his sin and misery (Question 2). The didactic use of the law is a subject that fills a rich chapter in the history of Reformation doctrine.

*Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560)*

The history of the didactic use of the law begins with Philip Melanchthon, Luther's co-worker and right-hand support. Already in 1521 Melanchthon had planted the seed when he affirmed that 'believers have use of the Decalogue' to assist them in mortifying the flesh.<sup>10</sup> In a formal sense he increased the number of functions or uses of the law from two to three for the first time in a third edition of his work on Colossians published in 1534<sup>11</sup> – two years before Calvin produced the first edition of his *Institutes*. Melanchthon argued that the law coerces (first use), terrifies (second use), and requires obedience (third use). 'The third reason for retaining the Decalogue,' he writes, 'is that obedience is required.'<sup>12</sup>

By 1534 Melanchthon was using the forensic nature of justification as bedrock for establishing the necessity of good works in the believer's life.<sup>13</sup> He argued that though the believer's first and primary righteousness was his justification in Christ, there was also a second righteousness – the righteousness of a good conscience which, notwithstanding its imperfection, is still pleasing to God since the believer himself is in Christ.<sup>14</sup> The conscience of the believer, made good by divine declaration, must continue to use the law to please God, for the law reveals the essence of God's will and provides the framework of Christian obedience. He asserted that this 'good conscience' is a 'great and necessary godly consolation'.<sup>15</sup> As Timothy Wengert asserts, he was no doubt encouraged to emphasize the connection between a good conscience and good works by his desire to defend Luther and other Protestants from the charge that 'they deny good works without at the same time robbing the conscience of the gospel's consolation. He thus devised a way to speak of the necessity of works for the believer by excluding their necessity for justification.'<sup>16</sup> Wengert

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10 *The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon [1521]*, trans. Charles Leander Hill (Boston: Meador, 1944), 234.

11 *Scholia in Epistolam Pauli ad Colossenses iterum ab autore recognita* (Wittenberg: J. Klug, 1534), XLVIII r, LXXXII v - LXXXIII v.

12 *Ibid.*, XCIII v.

13 *Ibid.*, XVII r.

14 *Ibid.*, XC v.

15 *Ibid.*, L v.

16 Timothy Wengert, *Lex et Poenitentia: The Anatomy of an Early Reformation Debate Between Philip Melanchthon and John Agricola of Eisleben* (forthcoming), 303 (typewritten manuscript).



concludes that by arguing from the necessity of knowing how we are forgiven, to the necessity of obeying the law, and to the necessity of knowing how this obedience pleases God, Melancthon managed to place law and obedience at the centre of his theology.<sup>17</sup>

### *Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

Unlike Melancthon, who went on to codify the didactic use of the law in the 1535 and 1555 editions of his major work on Christian doctrine,<sup>18</sup> Luther never saw a need to embrace formally a third use of the law. Lutheran scholars, however, have debated at length over whether Luther actually taught in fact, though not in name, a third use of the law.<sup>19</sup> Suffice it to say, Luther advocated that though the Christian is not 'under the law', this ought not be understood as if he were 'without the law'. For Luther, the believer has a different attitude to the law. The law is not an obligation, but a delight. He is joyfully moved towards God's law by the Spirit's power. He conforms to the law freely, not because of the law's demands, but because of his love for God and his righteousness.<sup>20</sup> Since in his experience the law's heavy yoke is replaced by the light yoke of Christ, doing what the law commands becomes a joyous and spontaneous action. The law drives sinners to Christ through whom they 'become doers of the law'.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, because he remains sinful, the Christian needs the law to direct and regulate his life. Thus Luther can assert that the law which serves as a 'stick' (i.e. rod – second use) which God uses to beat him to Christ, is simultaneously a 'stick' (i.e. cane – which Calvin would call the third use) that assists him in walking the Christian life. This emphasis on the law as a 'walking-stick' is borne out implicitly by his exposition of the ten

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>18</sup> *Melancthon on Christian Doctrine (Loci communes 1555)*, trans. and ed. Clyde L. Manschreck (Oxford: University Press, 1965), 127.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hans Engelland, *Melancthon, Glauben und Handeln* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1931); Werner Elert, 'Eine theologische Fälschung zur Lehre vom tertius usus legis,' *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 1 (1948):168-70; Wilfried Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit: Das Problem des tertius usus legis bei Luther und die neutestamentliche Parainese* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951); Hayo Gerdes, *Luthers Streit mit den Schwärmern um das rechte Verständnis des Gesetzes Mose* (Göttingen: Göttinger Verlagsanstalt, 1955), 111-116; Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); Eugene F. Klug, 'Luther on Law, Gospel, and the Third Use of the Law,' *The Springfielder* 38 (1974):155-69; A C George, 'Martin Luther's Doctrine of Sanctification with Special Reference to the Formula *Simul Iustus et Peccator*: A Study in Luther's Lectures on Romans and Galatians' (Th.D dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1982), 195-210.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 267.

<sup>21</sup> *Luther's Works* 26:260.

commandments in various contexts – each of which indicates that he firmly believed that the Christian life is to be regulated by these commandments.<sup>22</sup>

Luther's concern was not to deny sanctification nor the law as a guiding norm in the believer's life; rather, he wished to emphasize that good works and obedience to the law can in no way make us acceptable with God. Hence he writes in *The Freedom of the Christian*, 'Our faith in Christ does not free us from works, but from false opinions concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works.' And in *Table Talk* he is quoted as saying, 'Whoso has Christ has rightly fulfilled the law, but to take away the law altogether, which sticks in nature, and is written in our hearts and born in us, is a thing impossible and against God.'<sup>23</sup>

### *John Calvin (1509-1564)*

What Melanchthon began to develop in the direction of a God-pleasing righteousness in Christ and Luther left somewhat undeveloped as a joyous action and a 'walking-stick', Calvin fleshed out as a full-fledged doctrine, teaching that the primary use of the law for the believer is as a rule of life. Though Calvin borrowed Melanchthon's terminology, 'third use of the law' (*tertius usus legis*), and probably gleaned additional material from Martin Bucer,<sup>24</sup> he provided new contours and content to the doctrine and was unique among the early Reformers in stressing that this didactic function of the law as a norm and guide for the believer is its 'proper and principal' use.<sup>25</sup>

22 See *On Good Works, The Freedom of the Christian, Small Catechism, Large Catechism, Disputations with Antinomians*.

23 Cited by Donald MacLeod, 'Luther and Calvin on the Place of the Law', in *Living the Christian Life* (Huntingdon, England: Westminster Conference, 1974), 10-11.

24 Speaking of believers, Bucer taught that 'Christ will indeed have freed [*liberasse*], but will not have loosed [*solvisse*] us from the law' (*Enarrationes* [1530], 158b; cf. 50a-51b). François Wendel suggests that the three functions of the law 'recognized by Melanchthon' were 'further accentuated by Bucer in his Commentaries' (*Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet [New York: Harper & Row, 1963], 198). For example, Bucer wrote that the law 'is in no sense abolished, but is so much the more potent in each one as he is more richly endowed with the Spirit of Christ' (*ibid.*, 204). Cf. Ralph Roger Sundquist, 'The Third Use of the Law in the Thought of John Calvin: An Interpretation and Evaluation' (Ph.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1970), 317-18.

25 For Calvin, the convicting use of the law is not its 'proper' use for this was to drive a sinner to Christ, and the civic use was only an 'accidental' purpose. Cf. Victor Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin* (Maçon, G A: Mercer, 1983), 153ff.

Calvin's teaching on the didactic use of the law is crystal clear. 'What is the rule of life which [God] has given us?' he asks in the Genevan Catechism, and replies, 'His law.' Later in the same catechism, he writes:

[The law] shows the mark at which we ought to aim, the goal towards which we ought to press, that each of us, according to the measure of grace bestowed upon him, may endeavour to frame his life according to the highest rectitude, and, by constant study, continually advance more and more.<sup>26</sup>

Calvin wrote definitively of the third use of the law already in 1536 in the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

Believers ... profit by the law because from it they learn more thoroughly each day what the Lord's will is like.... It is as if some servant, already prepared with complete earnestness of heart to commend himself to his master, must search out and oversee his master's ways in order to conform and accommodate himself to them. Moreover, however much they may be prompted by the Spirit and eager to obey God, they are still weak in the flesh, and would rather serve sin than God. The law is to this flesh like a whip to an idle and balky ass, to goad, stir, arouse it to work.<sup>27</sup>

In the last edition of the *Institutes*, completed in 1559, Calvin retains what he wrote in 1536 but stresses even more clearly and positively that believers profit from the law in two ways: first, 'here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it'; second, by 'frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression. In this way the saints must press on.' Calvin concludes: 'For what would be less lovable than the law if, with importuning and threatening alone, it troubled souls through fear, and distressed them through fright? David especially shows that in the law he

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26 *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (1849; reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 2:56, 69.

27 *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 36.

apprehended the Mediator, without whom there is no delight or sweetness.’<sup>28</sup>

This predominantly positive view of the law as a norm and guide for the believer to encourage him to cling to God and to obey God ever more fervently is where Calvin distances himself from Luther. For Luther, the law generally denotes something negative and hostile – something usually listed in close proximity with sin, death, or the devil. Luther’s dominant interest is in the second use of the law, even when he considers the function of the law in sanctifying the believer. For Calvin, as I John Hesselink correctly notes, ‘the law was viewed primarily as a positive expression of the will of God.... Calvin’s view could be called Deuteronomic, for to him law and love are not antithetical, but are correlates’.<sup>29</sup> For Calvin, the believer strives to follow God’s law not as an act of *compulsory* obedience, but as a response of *grateful* obedience. The law promotes, under the tutelage of the Spirit, an ethic of gratitude in the believer, which both encourages loving obedience and cautions him against sin, so that he sings with David in Psalm 19:

*Most perfect is the law of God,  
Restoring those that stray;  
His testimony is most sure,  
Proclaiming wisdom’s way.*

*The precepts of the Lord are right;  
With joy they fill the heart;  
The Lord’s commandments all are pure,  
And clearest light impart.*

*The fear of God is undefiled  
And ever shall endure;  
The statutes of the Lord are truth  
And righteousness most pure.*

*They warn from ways of wickedness  
Displeasing to the Lord,*

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28 *Institutes* 2.7.12. Calvin gleans considerable support for his third use of the law from the Davidic Psalms (cf. *Institutes* 2.7.12 and his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, 5 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949]).

29 ‘Law – Third use of the law’, in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 215–16. Cf. Edward A. Dowey, Jr., ‘Law in Luther and Calvin,’ *Theology Today* 41, 2 (1984):146–53; I John Hesselink, *Calvin’s Concept of the Law* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1992), 251–62.

*And in the keeping of His word  
There is a great reward.*<sup>30</sup>

In sum, for Luther, the law *helps* the believer – especially in recognizing and confronting indwelling sin; for Calvin, the believer *needs* the law to direct him in holy living in order to serve God out of love.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)*

Ultimately, Calvin's view of the didactic use of the law won the day in Reformed theology. An early indication of this strongly Calvinistic view of the law is found in the Heidelberg Catechism, composed a year or two before Calvin's death. Though the Catechism begins with an intense emphasis on the evangelical use of the law in driving sinners to Christ (Questions 3-18), a detailed exhortation on the prohibitions and requirements of the law placed upon the believer is reserved for the final section which teaches 'how I shall express my *gratitude* to God' for deliverance in Jesus Christ (Questions 92-115).<sup>32</sup> The Decalogue provides the material content for good works which are done out of thankfulness for the grace of God in His beloved Son.

### *The Puritans*

The Puritans carried on Calvin's emphasis on the normativity of the law for the believer as a rule of life and to arouse heartfelt gratitude, which in turn promotes genuine liberty rather than antinomian licentiousness.<sup>33</sup> To cite only a few of hundreds of Puritan sources available on these themes: Anthony Burgess condemns those who assert that they are above the law or that the law written in the heart by regeneration 'renders the written law needless'.<sup>34</sup> Typically Puritan is Thomas Bedford's affirmation for the need of the written law as the believer's guide:

There must also be another law written in tables, and to be read by the eye, to be heard by the ear: Else...how shall the believer

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<sup>30</sup> *The Psalter*, No. 42.

<sup>31</sup> W Robert Godfrey, 'Law and Gospel', in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair B Ferguson, David F Wright, J I Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 379.

<sup>32</sup> *The Psalter*, 26-88.

<sup>33</sup> Ernest F Kevan, *The Grace of Law* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1976) provides a thorough treatment of Puritan teaching on the believer's relationship to the law.

<sup>34</sup> *Spiritual Refining: or a Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: A Miller, 1652), 563.

himself be sure that he doth not swerve from the right way wherein he ought to walk?... The Spirit, I grant, is the justified man's Guide and Teacher:... But he teacheth them...by the law and testimony.<sup>35</sup>

The Spirit's teaching results in Christians being made 'friends' with the law, Samuel Rutherford quipped, for 'after Christ has made agreement between us and the law, we delight to walk in it for the love of Christ'.<sup>36</sup> That delight, grounded in grateful gratitude for the gospel, produces an unspeakable liberty. Samuel Crooke put it this way: 'From the commandment, as a rule of life, [believers] are not freed, but on the contrary, are inclined and disposed, by [their] free spirit, to willingly obey it. Thus to the regenerate the law becomes as it were gospel, even a law of liberty'.<sup>37</sup> The Westminster Larger Catechism, composed largely by Puritan divines, provides the most fitting summary of the Reformed and Puritan view on the believer's relationship to the moral law:

*Q. 97. What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate?*

A. Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned; yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to shew them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good; and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience.<sup>38</sup>

How does this principle of gratitude and practical application work in practice? Each commandment of the ten comprehends a spectrum of relationship to God or a sphere of life. Many volumes have been devoted to the Decalogue. For those beginning there could hardly be a better exposition than the one by Thomas Watson (Banner of Truth).

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<sup>35</sup> *An Examination of the Chief Points of Antinomianism* (London, 1646), 15-16.

<sup>36</sup> *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (Edinburgh: William Collins, 1845), 102; Samuel Rutherford in *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, ed. Alexander F. Mitchell (London: James Nisbet, 1886), 226.

<sup>37</sup> *The Guide unto True Blessedness* (London, 1614), 85.

<sup>38</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian, 1994), 180-81.



# **A Christlike Response to the AIDS Epidemic**

## *– Bethesda Outreach*

*David Seefried has pastored churches in Germany and in America. He has been conducting research in South Africa and is working toward establishing what will hopefully be the first of many villages which will provide refuge for orphans.*

### **The biblical principle**

*'Learn to do good;  
Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless;  
Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow' (Isa 1:17, NASB).  
'Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:  
to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself  
from being polluted by the world' (James 1:27, NIV).*

### **The statistics highlight the need**

\* South of the Sahara, 2.2 million died of AIDS in 1998. A greater number died in 1999. The number of deaths will continue to climb each year. What began as a trickle is now a stream and soon will become a raging river of deaths.

\* According to the US Census Bureau, 15.6 million children will have lost their mothers or both parents by this year (2000) in 23 countries heavily affected by HIV/AIDS. The number will increase to 22.9 million by 2010, largely as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (US Agency for International Development).

\* In KwaZulu-Natal, where HIV prevalence rates have edged past the 30% mark (this is a low estimate), deaths now outstrip births, according to research by the University of Natal demographer, Karen Michaels. If current trends persist, by 2005 only 13% of the population could live to celebrate their 40th birthday. According to UNAIDS, more than 700,000 AIDS orphans will be created by the AIDS epidemic in this one area.

\* This epidemic will change the African continent more than anything else, more than colonialism, more than liberation. Much of that change will hit hardest at the family level.

\* 6,000 mothers and fathers in Africa will die today from AIDS. The same number, 6,000, will die tomorrow, and the next day. For the children left behind, the tragedy is only just beginning!

### **Bethesda outreach**

True religion, real faith, will respond to this crisis in Africa. Because of this pandemic an open door is now available to the Christian community to reach Africa on an unparalleled scale. The need is huge but the Christian community mobilised can meet some of the needs of this great continent. Although mission is intimately tied to church planting, building villages for destitute children will ultimately build many, many churches. We must reach the children before the moral decay of the culture causes them to contract HIV/AIDS. Out of the ashes of the lost generation who are presently dying of AIDS can rise a new generation of those who know the Lord.

The secular approach taken by governments in Southern Africa is called 'community based' and aims to place orphans for care in extended families which are already overtaxed with regard to space and money. They are tending to turn children away because of the lack of space and money to feed more children. Many children are ending up as 'street children'. Also morals in the community are low and AIDS is propagated by sending children into this environment. This particular cycle of immorality must be stopped at some point.

The proposal is to establish the first Bethesda children's village in South Africa because of the contacts and potential support and leadership within a mainly first-world setting, and the need in the townships is as great as, if not greater than in the rest of Africa, a South African governing board has been established and plans are under way to acquire property, develop governmental relationships and locate personnel. We are hoping soon to commence the programme, possibly in early 2001. Our South African architect has developed a plan which includes buying land on which to build the first segment of the children's village, building a clinic and five children's homes, developing the sports fields and encompassing the land with a security fence. We are actively seeking funding from churches, individuals, foundations and corporations for this project. The design will be such as can be reproduced all over Southern Africa, each village ideally containing: 1. 40 cottages each housing 10 children; 2. A school; 3. A clinic; 4. A vocational training centre; 5. A sports complex; 6. A farming project; 7. A hospice.

*If you wish to be kept informed or to help in any way please write to: David H Seefried, Bethesda Outreach, Evangelical Baptist Missions, PO Box 2225, Kokomo, IN 46904, USA or email: dseefried@ebm.org.*

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