

Dear Giles

Thank you for your very detailed paper which I read with interest.

In a way I suppose we could carry on battling this backwards and forwards for ever – but I do feel I have to respond because there are so many points on which I either disagree or wish to supplement your points. Having said that I absolutely don't want this to become a contentious issue between us – I regard it as a friendly discussion to sharpen my understanding.

I respond (largely) following your numbering scheme.

I prefer the word distinguishing to separation. I distinguish God's dealings with us according to the terms of his covenants, but I don't separate them. I think the OT and the NT are inextricably linked as the history of God's dealings with mankind, and I believe my position reflects that better than your view.

1. I disagree. I don't accept that all the OT covenants or the NT covenant impose requirements on mankind. I still believe that some OT covenants and the NT covenant in Christ (the new covenant) are unilateral as is argued in more detail below. Believe it or not, I had not previously researched this issue, my view previously expressed is purely my own long held view. However, now that I do research it I find that many commentators of excellent standing are with me on this issue (I cite some references later) – so at least I'm not too far out on a limb here.

As regards the NT covenant in Christ's Blood (if indeed "covenant" as opposed to "testament" is the correct terminology), I would emphatically assert that this is certainly unilateral. In this paper I use the "covenant" terminology (and avoid introducing the diatheke issue) to avoid confusing the argument. Christ was incarnated and went to the Cross to seal the covenant "whilst we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8) without our asking and without anything being required of us. Humankind was not required to do anything to initiate or acknowledge the new covenant. All we need to do to avail ourselves of the free pardon from sin which Christ won for us on the cross is to turn to him in faith. That means we need to *relate* to God and his covenant, but this is not a *stipulation or condition* of the covenant and this need to relate to the covenant is also the case with the OT unilateral covenants considered later. In relation to the new covenant J M Boice is emphatically of the view that it is unilateral, and I also cite M Horton, S Mills and perhaps more importantly F F Bruce – see Appendix I.

I think this is an important rather than a purely academic issue because it impacts our understanding of our salvation. Although I believe there are plenty of other reasons for believing the "once saved always saved" doctrine I advocated in my last email, I think the issue of covenant is a further strong argument (I didn't propose it in my last email because we hadn't resolved the covenant issue). If the new covenant is a unilateral covenant (as I assert) then it is in effect a promise by God (as are all the unilateral covenants) and can never be broken or taken back (I counter your disagreement on this later) – which is one strong reason why I believe we can't lose our salvation. On the other hand if it were a bilateral covenant then our breaking it would potentially abrogate the covenant and we could lose our salvation.

Of course, following our receipt of the blessings of this new covenant, we should, in gratitude for all that God has done for us, seek to please him by obeying his moral precepts (with the aid and power of the Holy Spirit working within us) – *but this out of gratitude not because those precepts are any longer law for us (see later)*. Surely this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote of the possibility of a saved person sinning all the more in order that grace might increase – and firmly rejected the concept without denying it as a possibility (Romans 6:1-2). We also need to obey God’s moral precepts because if we do not we will lose our rewards in heaven and possibly become subject to God’s discipline or chastening.

I do not believe either that obedience to God’s moral precepts is necessary for our salvation or that faith is either a work to be performed under, or a condition of, the new covenant. As regards the first point I find that most Christians (certainly including myself) still sin. Yes, we are gradually being sanctified in the power of the Holy Spirit, but that process will not be completed in this life. However, I don’t believe that in any way nullifies our salvation. As regards the second two points, Paul deals with this matter in Romans chapter 4. Of course, he is talking about Abraham there, but the argument about faith not being works or a covenantal condition applies also to faith in Christ under the new covenant.

My aim is not to separate God’s dealings under the old covenants from the new covenant in general. Indeed my argument is that ALL the OT covenants were unilateral (and thus on the same terms as the new covenant) apart from the Sinai covenant (which I believe was bilateral) and thus different (see below).

Consequently, I contend that the Sinai covenant was the only covenant which *could* be abrogated by God and that it *has been* so abrogated and consequently that the rules (laws) imposed by it are no longer in force *as laws*. That does not mean that these rules are of no relevance or effect. The moral principles underlying the rules of the Sinai covenant represent God’s character and desire and thus are to be upheld, not because they are law but out of respect and reverence for God, to gain our heavenly rewards and to avoid falling under God’s discipline or chastening.

- 1a I would argue that a sacrifice is only necessary as part of the process of entering into a covenant, it is not a condition of the covenant itself. In the same way writing and signing an agreement is a necessary part of entering into a contract relating to land (other matters can be the subject of oral agreements) under English Law, but the writing and signing of the agreement are not *terms* of the agreement.

Here the sacrifice in Genesis 8:20 is a precursor to the entering into of the covenant by God, brings God’s blessings (Genesis 8:21 – 9:3 and 9:7) and God imposes some commands on Noah (Genesis 9:4-6). These are important and are a matter I shall return to later. The commands of God to Noah back in Genesis 6 are not in any way related to the covenant in the text there. In chapter 6 God merely tells Noah that he will establish a covenant with him at a future time. Nor are the commands of chapter 9:4-6 conditions of the covenant, again they come before God enters into the covenant in Genesis 9:8-9 but are not linked to the covenant. The covenant is now expressed to be with mankind in general (since they will all be Noah’s descendents). There are no stipulations whatsoever attached to the covenant.

I attach some support in Appendix II, including Leon Morris (who I would regard as one of the more notable theological authorities) who firmly supports the unilateral nature of the covenant with Noah.

In conclusion I absolutely assert that the covenant of God with Noah was unilateral and thus in the nature of a promise by God rather than an agreement.

- 1b. The covenant was brought into effect by (a) the animal sacrifice and (b) a representation of God passing between the cut pieces to confirm the covenant. But, as I argued about the covenant with Noah, this was merely to bring the covenant into effect. These acts were not conditions or stipulations of the covenant. I believe the two issues are quite different. God alone passed between the cut pieces because he alone was taking on the covenant obligations (which were thus of the nature of a promise, as was the case with the covenant with Noah). Paul seems to confirm this was a promise rather than a bilateral agreement in Galatians 3:16.

I partly agree with you about cutting a covenant. As I understand it the Hebrew word for covenant is *berith*. This frequently occurs with *karath* – to cut – hence *karath berit* to cut a covenant. I think God chose to use this format because it would have been familiar to Abraham (note it was not used with Noah) since this was also the means of making covenants between men in Abraham's time. It's irrelevant that Abraham cuts up the animals, this is merely a means of bringing the covenant into effect not a term of the covenant itself (see my comments in relation to the covenant with Noah).

I don't really agree with what you say about the later circumcision requirement. In Genesis 17:4 God says this *is* my covenant with no conditionality (no possibility of going back or abrogation). We can contrast this with the Sinai covenant and I do this later. God continues with unconditional promises in verses 5 and 6 and in Genesis 17:7 God has established his covenant as an eternal covenant – no possibility of going back or abrogation here. In these first verses of Genesis 17 God says I will seven times. Then in Genesis 17:9 God says to Abraham "you must". So, here is the contrast: God saying "I will," and then, as a consequence of that, "you must." When God says "you must," he is not saying "My will is dependent on your action." God does not say, "You must do this, and if you don't, I won't do what I've promised." God does not act like that. But it is no less true and no less important – though it is not a prerequisite for God's acting – that we must do something.

Nor do I think anything in Genesis 17 overrides the unilateral covenant already made by God with Abraham in Genesis 15.

Finally we must note that Abraham does not consent to the condition imposed by God either for himself or on behalf of his descendants – this is in complete contrast to the Sinai covenant (see later). Note that circumcision was a requirement imposed upon Abraham's descendants – in effect a requirement imposed upon the Jewish people. I believe that this is why Paul and the Jerusalem council took the view that this requirement need not be imposed on Gentile Christians (note Paul's requirement that Timothy, but not Titus, be circumcised). I return to the actual requirements of the Jewish council later.

To throw the covenant into doubt with Genesis 18:19 is to ignore the qualification imposed by the preceding verse:

“Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.” (Genesis 18:18 NIV)

what God is saying in verse 19 is that he will definitely uphold his covenant. He is not throwing it into doubt.

- 1c This issue (and one or two others) is precisely why I am so strong about two different kinds of covenants.

God’s covenant to Eli was in effect a covenant with the house of Aaron (1 Samuel 14:3 and 1 Chronicles 24:3). They had been chosen to perform priestly duties with reciprocal responsibilities to God (Exodus 28 and 29). Indeed, Numbers 18:1 specifically lays on Aaron and his descendents responsibility for offences against the sanctuary – which Eli’s family had committed. When Eli broke his side of the bargain God was enabled to abrogate the bilateral promise.

Again Judges 2:1-3 is a result of breaches of the bilateral Sinai covenant (Exodus 23, Deuteronomy 28). God would not have abrogated any part of his side of the bargain if the Israelites had kept to their side.

- 1d As I argued in my email on “once saved always saved” I am firmly of the view that those persons described in Hebrews 6 remained as saved people. I don’t believe that disobedience (other than a complete rejection of God and his covenant) jeopardises our salvation (although it can, of course, lose us our rewards and may lead to God’s discipline).

The Sinai Covenant

Although we both believe that the Sinai covenant was bilateral I think it is important to look at the making of this covenant in order to contrast it with the two covenants we have already looked at. The covenant was not made with a representative individual but with all the people and they all assented to the terms of the agreement (Exodus 24:3). The other covenants were made with a representative who assented to no obligations. This is absolutely crucial, agreeing to specific terms changes the nature of the covenant from a promise to an agreement. Only *after* this assenting to the terms of the agreement by the Israelites were sacrifices made to confirm the agreement. Moses then asked the people again if they agreed to the terms of the agreement and they again assented (Exodus 24:7) and Moses the sprinkled them with blood (Exodus 24:8). This seems to be a unique act in covenant making which again emphasises the unique nature of this covenant – Bright¹ and Leon Morris² both stress this. The initiative was with God in that he laid out the terms for the prospective agreement – but all the Israelites freely assented to them. This is in complete contrast

¹ “It will be noted that this form is markedly different from that of the patriarchal covenant, however much features of the latter have prepared the way for it. There covenant rests on unconditional promises for the future, in which the believer is obligated only to trust. Here, on the contrary, covenant is based on gracious acts already performed and issues in heavy obligation.”

² “The covenants made with Noah and Abraham were covenants of sheer grace, with the promise of divine blessing resting on the patriarchs and their seed but with no mention of corresponding obligations resting on them”. Leon Morris *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* p78.

to the two earlier covenants. This is also emphasised in the recapitulation in Deuteronomy 5. This covenant was incredibly important I think the whole of rest of scripture needs to be seen against this background.

I would certainly agree that there was a cleansing element in the sprinkling with blood (which we can see as a cleansing from sin), but I believe this only sanctified them for their part in the covenant, it was not a complete or general cleansing from sin such as we have under the new covenant.

Of course, the terms of the covenant were not freely negotiated. God chose the Israelites in his divine grace and purpose and imposed His commands. This is very different from the conclusion of a bargain between humans. Nevertheless I do not believe that we can escape the conclusions that this covenant was very different from the two earlier covenants and that it did impose real requirements upon the Israelites. This is of great significance, because God was entitled to repudiate the covenant in its entirety if its terms were significantly violated. As I think we agree the terms *were* grossly violated again and again and I believe this led to the eventual repudiation of the Sinai covenant by God. That I believe, although foreshadowed and foreseen, both by OT and NT scripture, did not come into full effect until the new covenant in Christ was inaugurated. I believe the difficulties which surround this issue (see Appendix IV) disappear if we take the view that the law imposed on the Israelites by the Sinai covenant was entirely abrogated as *law* by the new covenant. BUT also take the view that all the moral principles and imperatives of the Sinai covenant remain as such for us because they represent God's character and his desire for us. For me Romans 10:14, Galatians 3:25, Galatians 5:18, Ephesians 2:14-15, 1 Corinthians 9:20 and Hebrews 8:13 (and that's quite a lot of verses) all point strongly to this position. I think the overall advantages of my position are summarised quite well by Feinberg and Feinberg cited in Appendix IV, especially the highlighted sections – my only most disagreement with him is his “discontinuity” terminology, whereas I think the entire abrogation of the Sinai covenant gives a more unified approach. Not only are we free to adopt God's moral principles irrespective of their context within the law (not unimportant as Jesus said that the second greatest command was an obscure item buried between other minor commands in Leviticus) but we are also free from complications engendered by rules which have both moral and civil implications such as Exodus 22:19.

2. I think that by Old Covenant the NT means the Torah. BUT (a) only the Sinai covenant is able to be fully abrogated, because it is the only unilateral covenant and (b) only the Sinai covenant and the circumcision extension of the Abrahamic covenant impose covenant obligations on mankind. Thus, only that circumcision extension and the requirements of the Sinai covenant (mankind's obligations) are able to be done away with. I note in passing that, especially in Romans, Paul often uses terminology which leaves us in doubt as to whether he is referring to the Law (Torah) or law (more general law) – perhaps especially in Romans 7. That's why I usually use Law (with a capital L) when I am referring to the rules imposed by the Sinai covenant and the circumcision obligation (for me the only covenant obligations imposed on mankind). I don't think Paul *links* Abraham's faith with the mosaic law, rather I would say he contrasts it – which I think fits perfectly well with my position.

I think you misunderstand my position. *God's* part of the Abrahamic covenant has not (and cannot be) superseded. Only the physical sign of the covenant – circumcision – has been superseded for non-Jewish Christians. This latter because the original Abrahamic covenant was for Abraham's physical descendants – that's why Paul still required Jewish believers to be circumcised. We are Abrahams descendants in faith (Romans 4:11) not his physical descendants. Of course, merely being circumcised was not enough to save the Israelites (without Christ), they would have needed to keep all the requirements of the law as well – which no one could do perfectly.

Thus Paul required Timothy to be circumcised (because he was a Jew) but not Titus (because he was not a Jew).

I don't think circumcision was ever enough for salvation by itself, it only had value if one observed the law (Romans 2:25), indeed we are taught that only Christ's blood atones for sins committed under the old covenant.

I would agree to a limited extent that baptism is the NT counterpart to circumcision. It's a sign of the covenant in Christ.

I think it's clear that Christians have no right to the promised land. When it comes to Jews it's unclear whether or not the Abrahamic promise of the land was for all time and whether rights might be forfeited, for example, if they left the land. I believe that the promise was *not* for all time.

I don't at all think the Mosaic covenant was bad. As Paul says in Romans the law (my Law) was good. It's merely that it's purpose was for a limited time, partly to convict us of sin and to show us that we were unable to save ourselves by our own efforts (thus preparing us for God's radical salvation plan in Christ), and I believe it has been superseded and done away with in the new covenant in Christ (Hebrews 8:13). There was only one problem with the old covenant – sin. Thus the covenant was broken even before it could even be fully ratified.

3. I don't believe in two gospels, except in the sense that we *could* have been saved through the law *if* (and only if) we had been able to keep it perfectly (Romans 2:13; Galatians 3:10) (which no one was). Of course, God's grace and mercy were, and always have been, unalterable aspects of God's character, but only through his salvation plan in Christ were all aspects of his nature satisfied which enabled his grace to bring about our salvation. I believe that Christ's sacrifice reverberates backwards as well as forwards in time (just as the effects of the Fall did) so that sins committed under the old covenant and before are dealt with by the new covenant. Exactly how God will judge the people concerned (who never had the possibility to know Christ) I don't know. Presumably this will be on the basis of such revelation as they had received (Romans 2 implies that even pagans received some revelation of God) but I'm sure that God will judge justly.

I do believe we see God's grace in the Sinai covenant. It was God who initiated the covenant and set its terms – reaching out to the Israelites in his grace. God exercised his grace time and time again when the Israelites flagrantly broke the terms of this covenant. But, that doesn't imply any of the following (a) that the covenant was to be

for all time, or (b) that it was the culmination of God's plans (we know that it was not) or (c) that it was the same as the other earlier covenants or (d) that the obligations to be performed under it by the Israelites were of no importance. I hope you see how this differs from and is much more subtle than a simple works/grace approach – which I reject as an oversimplification.

- 3a I think we're in danger of confusing two kinds of redemption here. Certainly God redeemed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt purely out of his grace and because of his covenant promises to the Patriarchs. But this is not the same as redemption from bondage to sin (as we usually use the word "redemption" in the NT sense). God didn't redeem the Israelites from their slavery to sin at this time. As I argued above that *could* have come through perfect obedience to the Sinai covenant – but since no one could achieve that it was only accomplished in and through another act of God's grace, Christ's sacrificial death. As Paul argues, if salvation from sin could (in practice as opposed to theoretically) have been achieved through the law then Christ's death on the cross would have been unnecessary.
- 3b Well, yes and no. Of course, Christ's new covenant is the perfect fulfilment of God's plan, but I see that as an abrogation of the Sinai covenant and its replacement with a completely new covenant, as already argued. Surely Paul is talking about *faith* in Christ as the saving principle not anything which derives from the law. Paul says that righteousness through faith is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:17) not through the law. He says that we are justified by faith not the law (Romans 3:28). It's Abraham's faith, not his observance of circumcision, which was credited to him as righteousness (Romans 4). As I've already said if we restrict salvation *merely* to "faith" and "grace" (vital as those elements are) then we omit the most important element – Christ.
- 3c I don't agree that there was any general salvation apart from Christ's death. It doesn't contradict the OT – it's the fulfilment, the final step, of God's salvation plan. I don't agree with what you appear to be saying at all – I thought we both subscribed to the doctrine of Christ's death on the cross as penal sacrificial substitution. For me that's not an *application* of salvation it *is* salvation.

All this doesn't mean the NT contradicts the OT – surely it's developmental, a progressive revelation. Equally that doesn't mean that every aspect of the NT is contained in the OT (although, of course, many aspects of Christ's incarnation and sacrifice are prophesied in some detail).

4. I don't accept that my argument means the OT is a bad thing. Indeed, I've already said the I believe and contend the opposite. I see the OT and NT as a sweep (a unified sweep) of developmental history with a climatic culmination in Christ, more exciting than the end of any thriller.

Just because the Sinai covenant was abrogated doesn't mean it was bad. As Paul says it was good. As I've already said the only thing wrong with it was sin which rendered the Israelites totally unable to keep it. However, this served to convict us of sin and shows the need for a radical salvation plan in which we didn't and indeed couldn't play any part. That was Christ. People have enough difficulty with Christ and the cross as it is, unless I could argue that they could never be saved otherwise because no-one could keep the law I don't think I could convince most people that they

couldn't be saved by their own efforts. That's what most people would like (or think they would like). When they see that the Israelites failed time and time again over a 1,000 years or so they see the gravity and inevitability of human failure.

Just because the Israelites were unable to keep their side of the bargain under the Sinai covenant doesn't mean either that it was bad or that God "slipped up". Of course God would never do that. As I explained above I think we can see this as a developmental step rather than a failure. I think that you would have to admit that the Sinai covenant *was* unsuccessful in achieving the forgiveness of sins. If so it was either a failure or a step along the way. I'm convinced it was a step along the way of God's plan. Surely here it makes little difference here that I distinguish the Sinai covenant as bilateral (you also consider it bilateral) – you would have to concede that it is at least partly abrogated (as concerns civil and ceremonial law, if such a division is permitted) whilst I would say that it is entirely abrogated. The fact is that we have to concede (a) that the Sinai covenant was ineffective in procuring the forgiveness of sins and (b) that the Sinai covenant needed replacement (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Thus it was either faulty or a developmental step – I believe the latter.

5. To some extent I've already dealt with this. The rules for humans to obey were (a) no blood (from the command to Noah (not part of the Noah covenant)), (b) circumcision from the command to Abraham (not part of the Abrahamic covenant) and (c) the Sinai covenant rules. I use Law with a capital L to denote (b) and (c) above ((a)'s command is in any event contained in (c)) for reasons of clarity as already explained. Paul caused difficulty with a lack of clarity as to what he meant when he referred to law in his epistles.

I agree that the Hebrew word "Torah" *can* mean something like teaching, doctrine or instruction – but I think it can also mean "law" in the sense we would understand that word. Certainly Erdman's Bible Dictionary confirms that understanding and, as you say, this was clearly the Jewish understanding at least by the time of translation into Greek, otherwise the word "nomos" would not have been chosen. In any event, the form of the Sinai agreement imposing obligations on the Israelites surely has significant implications – see above.

I absolutely don't agree that we can see the Sinai covenant rules as mere optional, non-binding, 'directions'. This was a *covenant* a solemn binding agreement with our Holy God. That is not to be taken lightly. It was a true covenant ratified in blood sprinkled over the people (Exodus 24:8). Look at the parallel with the blood of the new covenant in Christ – I don't think we can take this lightly. Note also that this covenant is a *whole* the Israelites were not free to observe only part of it – see Appendix III.

If one adopts my understanding of the Sinai and other OT covenants then all difficulty falls away. The Sinai covenant is no longer binding as *law* and only God's moral guidelines and principles remain.

- 5a I don't deny that law (with a small l in my notation) is necessary for society. However, the Sinai covenant as a means of salvation was not God's ultimate plan and has been superseded. Law goes back to the Noah covenant but was not a condition of

that covenant as already argued – and as we shall see later this is of significance under my interpretation.

5 b, c and d Yes, but these problems fall away on my interpretation. All that remains are God's moral principles.

5e Again on my interpretation the difficulty falls away and I don't have to ditch the earlier covenants which stand as God's promises. As I shall argue later in relation to requirements imposed by the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, the requirement of circumcision falls away as being for Abraham's physical descendents and the command to Noah stands (as a command but not a covenant condition). I think the "like Moses" of Deuteronomy 18:15 refers to Moses bringing in redemption for the Israelites rather than bringing them the law.

5f I completely agree that the Torah contains God's moral principles and as I have said throughout this paper we should observe and abide by them not because they are *law* but because they are what God requires and wants of us. We are released from a detailed sifting through the law and are freed – see the end of my comments in the "Sinai Covenant" section.

Your difficulties with Torah entirely disappear on my interpretation. I agree that there is only one gospel and that is Christ. All that went before was developmental.

6. I think my position is not only correct, but I find it most helpful in teaching why "works righteousness" can't succeed and why we need God's help, indeed need a salvation plan where we can contribute nothing (other than our faith) and all is from and by God through Christ. Having said that, as I've already argued, I consider the works/grace position much too simplistic.

7. I think there are several reasons for this. Firstly, prior to Christ's death on the cross the old covenant had not been completely abrogated and the new covenant instituted. Christ's bringing in the new covenant was the fulfilment of the old covenant because he paid the penalty demanded under the old covenant for sin. Once that penalty was paid the old covenant was complete and was abrogated. Jesus' sayings apply to a time prior to the abrogation of the Sinai covenant.

I see Jesus' mission as *mainly* to pay the price for sins under the old covenant and to bring in the new covenant in his blood. Nothing more (but what a fantastic achievement by the only one able to achieve it)!!! Of course, he also trained his disciples in order that they might establish the church, but that would have been of no effect absent his main mission.

However, I don't think we can escape the fact that Jesus saw himself as in authority over the Sinai rules. He intensified the interpretation of the requirements of the law in several areas (e.g. murder and adultery) he amended the food laws (Mark 7:19) and overruled various Pharisaical interpretations (which I agree we can best see as having been erroneous).

8a Yes, as I've already said, the law was good (apart from the sin of man which rendered us unable to keep it), but I don't believe that Paul really believed he was sinless under

the law. Many times in Romans (I know I keep quoting Romans but I'm doing that book with my Tuesday group at the moment) he admits his sinfulness – e.g. Romans 6:1, 7:5, 7:7 etc.

I agree Paul thought the law was good (or at least that its underlying principles were) and, as I've already said, I completely agree with him – BUT that's not the same thing as saying that it's law for Christians. I don't believe Paul thought that at all – see the end of my section on the Sinai Covenant.

- 8b I think we are largely in agreement here EXCEPT that I do think that the law *could* have served to justify us if sinful man had been capable of observing it – surely that's what Paul is saying in Romans chapter 3 and Galatians chapter 3 and what Stephen was saying in Acts 7.
- 8c Again I largely agree, although the sacrifices of the OT could never have been effective for justification by themselves.
- 9 I don't say the law is irrelevant. You know I think the OT is important. Firstly it's developmental as I've already argued and secondly it contains God's moral precepts which are important for Christians to know.

As I see it Hebrews is arguing that the new covenant has replaced the old covenant which is now abrogated.

I don't think it's completely clear what "law" James is speaking about here. He appears to personify the law and some commentators take the view that he has the law of Christ or the law of love in mind. I would also point out that James is a very early letter probably mainly written to Jewish converts to Christianity.

- 10.1, 10.2 and 10.3 I think I've largely dealt with these issues and refer again to my section on the Sinai Covenant in relation to the reasons why I think the new covenant abrogates and replaces the old covenant.
- 10.4 Yes BUT only because of the salvific death of Christ which atones for sins committed prior to the incarnation.
- 12 As I've already argued, I believe my approach avoids the problems of sifting and disentangling laws (e.g. my Exodus 22:19 example). I completely agree there is a hierarchy of values and agree with what you say about Jesus in 12.3 – but it seems to me this is perfectly in accord with my approach. I would say we need to evaluate God's moral requirements *as* His moral requirements and not as law.
- 12.4 The Jerusalem council did not impose circumcision as a requirement but instead imposed four requirements (i) abstain from sexual immorality, (ii) abstain from food polluted by idols, (iii) abstain from the meat of strangled animals and (iv) abstain from blood.

Here we should note that it's significant that none of these requirements derive from the Sinai covenant. Items (iii) and (iv) derive from God's much earlier command to Noah (Genesis 9:4) and I believe it's important that these commands were for all

descendants of Noah (that is for the whole human race) not just for the Israelites. It was not thus inappropriate to impose them on Gentile Christians. I think we can see (i) as deriving from the divine institution of marriage for all mankind in Genesis 2 and (ii) idolatry is clearly a direct rejection of God and *has* to contrary to the requirement of any covenant with him, including, perhaps especially the new covenant.

This I would contend that nothing imposed on Gentile Christians by either Paul or the Jerusalem council was derived from its being a requirement of the Sinai covenant.

- 12.5 My approach encounters no difficulty here. I would argue that what is obsolete or abrogated is all obligations under the Sinai covenant, because as the only bilateral covenant it is the only covenant which *can* be abrogated. Unilateral covenants are in the nature of promises and cannot be broken by God.

I agree that the moral precepts of the OT remain as already argued.

- 12.6 I think it's quite clear that in 2:8 James is not talking about the Torah but probably about the law as handed down by Christ – he refers to “the Royal Law”. In verses 9-11 he is arguing by analogy – he's saying it's no good to partly keep the command Christ said was the second most important – to love your neighbour. Showing favouritism is not really loving your neighbour and thus you are breaking the commandment. Just as with the Torah it was no good partly keeping it, to break any of it was in effect to break it.
- 12.7 I would largely agree with you, although in relation to God's commandments I think it's clearly the moral principles which are in mind.
- 12.8 On my approach I don't need to filter out anything, only to decide which OT elements represent God's moral principles.
- 12.9 The (a) difficulties disappear on my approach. As for (b) if we don't regard the Sinai covenant as abrogated perhaps we *ought* to be living in or trying to establish a theocracy. What about punishments specified for breaking moral commandments? Personally I think it is much more straightforward if the Sinai covenant is abrogated.
- 12.10 I find this approach of attempting to divide up the law as unsatisfactory. I agree with you that it's too simplistic. It certainly doesn't fit well with James 2!
- 12.11 I believe we are released from the law as *law*, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't obey God's moral principles. As I've already said we do this out of gratitude for his inconceivable grace and mercy, out of desire to gain God's rewards and because we don't want to be subject to his discipline or chastening.
- 13 All the unilateral/bilateral approach requires us to do is to look at God's moral requirements for us in the light of the whole of scripture – both OT and NT – and obey that for the above reasons. I completely agree with what you say about the filter. I think this is a more consistent approach because (a) it provides a logical theological framework where we don't have to struggle to come up with reasons why only certain parts of the Sinai covenant are abolished and others are retained, (b) it deals cleanly and neatly with what would otherwise be difficult issues of separating

what are apparently unified parts of the Sinai covenant (if indeed it is legitimate to regard it as divisible at all which I seriously question) and (c) I think it's the best and most consistent interpretation of OT scripture relating to the establishment of the various covenants.

For me there is only one gospel Christ and him crucified as a penal substitutionary sacrifice for each and every one of us. The only effective sacrifice for sin there has ever been or could ever be – the only means of dealing with sin there has ever been. Yes, the OT points to that, and in some cases gives us prophetic foresight of it and is a developmental preparation for it – but in my view it can never do more than that. That doesn't mean the OT is unimportant, the prophecy, the pointers and the developmental issues are all vital to our understanding and confidence – but for me that is where it rests.

Appendix I

The nature of God’s covenant with man in Christ is seen in the record of a similar covenant that God later established with Abraham. In Abraham’s day a covenant was sometimes made through a strange ceremony in which animals were cut in two along the backbone and placed in two rows over against one another, thereby forming a space in which the parties to the covenant stood while they exchanged their vows. The shed blood of the animals made the covenant particularly sacred. Since this was the form Abraham was used to, God used it in promising Abraham that he would bless him. In this case, however, there was one significant variation. Abraham became a spectator to the covenant—he was on the sideline seeing it in something like a dream or vision—while God, represented by a smoking furnace and a lamp, passed alone between the pieces. The point was that God was establishing the covenant apart from any participation on the part of Abraham. Therefore, it was unilateral, eternal, and undeserved.

In a similar way, Jesus established a covenant on our behalf and for our good, long before we were able to have any part in it personally. He pledged himself to die for us, thereby giving his life as a ransom and an atonement for our sins. **The pledge was unilateral, for he did it by himself and without our asking.** It is eternal, for what he has begun he will most certainly bring to completion. It is undeserved, for we are lost in sin and therefore have no claim upon him. Moreover, it is sealed with Christ’s blood; for we are saved, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews says, “through the blood of the eternal covenant” (Heb. 13:20). Jesus pledged himself to do what we could never do, so uniting himself with us that his death became our death, his life our life, his resurrection our own resurrection. And when did he do this? Before we were even born; indeed, before there was even a physical creation. So great was his love for us!³

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The question naturally arises at this point whether there are any conditions, especially since this union rests ultimately in the covenant of redemption—an intratrinitarian pact to which we were not even a party. Critics insist that the Reformation teaching so emphasizes salvation as the unilateral act of God in grace that there is no real place for human responsiveness and activity. However, at least in the Reformed system of covenant theology, the unilateral basis of the covenant of grace—grounded in God’s electing, redeeming, regenerating, and justifying action alone—actually *creates* genuine human freedom for righteousness.⁴

.....

Jesus Christ sealed His promise to provide salvation for mankind with a blood covenant. It is unbreakable, and as a pledge of its inviolable nature He has vowed to abstain from wine until He celebrates His wedding to His bride, the Church. **It, too, is a unilateral blood covenant, and does not place any penalty for non-compliance on the other party (i.e., those redeemed by faith).** Ah! the Church is just as favored as Abraham—how gracious and generous is our Savior and Lord! The phrase ‘this is My body which is broken for you’ fits the symbolism of

³ Boice, J. M. (2005). *The Gospel of John: An expository commentary* (886–887). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

⁴ Horton, M. (2011). *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (615). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

a blood covenant, but Jesus metaphorically walked between the pieces on His own, just as Yhwh had done in Abraham's case.⁵

.....

16–17 But why was the Mediator's death necessary for the ratification of the covenant? It is not easy to follow the argument here in an English version, because we are almost bound to use two different English words to represent two different aspects of the meaning of one Greek word, whereas our author's argument depends on his use of the same Greek word throughout. The Greek word is *diathēkē*, which has the comprehensive sense of "settlement." As used elsewhere in the epistle, the particular kind of settlement which *diathēkē* denotes is a covenant graciously bestowed by God upon his people, by which he brings them into a special relationship with himself; in other words, it is used, as it had been used by the Greek translators of the Old Testament, as the equivalent of the Hebrew *berîth*.¹¹⁷ But in vv. 16 and 17 of our present chapter it is used of another kind of settlement, a last will and testament, in which property is bequeathed by the owner to various other persons on the understanding that they have no title to it until he dies. There are, in fact, some scholars who have maintained that "testament" is the sense of *diathēkē* throughout this epistle, if not indeed throughout the Greek Bible.¹²⁰ "Testament" is certainly the predominant sense of the word in Hellenistic Greek; but in the Greek Bible it usually takes its meaning from the Old Testament Hebrew word *berîth*, which does not have the sense of "testament." On the other hand, there have been exegetes who have endeavored to retain the meaning "covenant" even in Heb. 9:16f.; among these B. F. Westcott is outstanding. But it simply is not true that "where a *covenant* is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it"—nor of necessity the death of anyone else. Westcott takes "him that made it" to point to the covenant victim, with whom the maker of the covenant is representatively identified. But not only is this a straining of the natural force of the words here used; it is not always true that the maker of the covenant is identified with the covenant victim so that "in the death of the victim his death is presented symbolically." In the covenant made with Abraham in Gen. 15:1–18, and in that made with Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai in Ex. 24:3–8, covenant victims were slaughtered, but there is no suggestion that God, the covenant maker on both occasions, was represented by them; neither did they represent Abraham and Israel, the respective recipients of those divine covenants. "The death of him that made it" is, as the AV/KJV and the NEB simply and rightly put it, "the death of the testator"; a testament is the only kind of *diathēkē* which depends for its ratification on the death of the person who makes it.

"J. H. Moulton, after embracing Westcott's conclusion, felt himself obliged to 'capitulate,' as he phrases it, to the dual version of the Authorized Version and Revised Version,¹²⁸ inconsistent as he deems it to be. But is that the case? If we revert to the teaching of the old theology (Turretin, Witsius, Hodge), the covenant of redemption, viewed as the undertaking of the Son, will rank as the prior phase of the covenant of grace. By fulfilling that divine counsel of peace the heavenly Covenanter has met all the claims of outraged righteousness. His 'obedience unto death' fills up the breach with heaven as nothing else could do; and the covenant of grace in his hands at this stage assumes the aspect of a bequest accruing to His brethren through the death of the Testator, who in this unique transaction lives again to be the Administrator of His own mediatorial work" (E. K. Simpson).

It is quite likely that the testamentary idea suggested itself to our author's mind because of his reference to the "eternal inheritance" at the end of v. 15. Nairne finds a difficulty in

⁵ Mills, M. S. (1999). *The Life of Christ: A Study Guide to the Gospel Record* (Mt 26:26–Mk 14:25). Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries.

that “the mediator of a will would hardly be the testator, but what would now be called the executor, and his death would not come into the matter.” But all analogies from ordinary life must be defective when they are applied to him who rose from the dead and is thus able personally to secure for his people the benefits which he died to procure for them. He is testator and executor in one, surety and mediator alike. “There is no more possibility or feasibility of interference with the effective application of the blessings of the covenant than there is of interfering with a testamentary dispolement once the testator has died. **This use of the testamentary provision of Roman law to illustrate the inviolable security accruing from the sacrificial death of Christ serves to underline the unilateral character of the new covenant**” (J. Murray). Christ, says our author, is the Mediator of the new *diathēkē*, and there is one kind of *diathēkē* which serves particularly well to illustrate this aspect of his ministry—namely, the testamentary *diathēkē* which does not come into effect before the death of the person who makes it. It is well known that this kind of settlement cannot be ratified as long as its author lives. And so it is with the new *diathēkē*; its validity depends upon the fact that its author has died.⁶

⁶ Bruce, F. F. (1990). *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rev. ed.). The New International Commentary on the New Testament (221–224). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Appendix II

(ii) *Covenants between God and men.* The use of the term ‘covenant’ to describe the relationship existing between God and men goes back to the story of the flood in which we read the words of the Lord to Noah:

“But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.”

Not only is the initiative with God, the whole covenant is His. Noah is not represented as doing anything in the matter, either by way of seeking a covenant, or of performing covenant obligations. Nothing is said here or in subsequent passages which refer to this covenant, of the method whereby the covenant was established. There is, therefore, little to say about the procedure of covenant-making adopted. But we may notice that the covenant was made with Noah as a representative man rather than as an individual (Genesis 9:9, 10), that the terms were stated in the form of a promise (Genesis 9:11) and that there was a witness the covenant would be kept, namely the rainbow (Genesis 9:12-16). An important point is that the covenant was one of grace. The Lord freely bestowed His blessing on His servant. He did not grant it in return for services rendered.⁷

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Diplomats from all over the world have gone to the Middle East in order to try to help establish a covenant of peace in the area between Israel and the Palestinians or Israel and other Arab nations. A covenant is only as secure as the integrity of the parties involved in the covenant process. The Bible talks about covenants in which God becomes one of the parties. *Berit* means “covenant,” “treaty,” or “agreement.” It refers to covenants established between people (Gen. 31:44) or between God and people (Gen. 15:18). Several verbs are employed with the Hebrew noun *berit* to describe the creation of a covenant. Usually the verb *karat* is used with *berit* to mean “to cut a covenant,” and *qum*, “to establish,” *natan*, “to give,” and *nagad*, “to declare,” are also found.

The Lord, Yahweh, chose to relate to His creation and His people through the establishment of covenants. God initiated five main covenants in the Old Testament. The first covenant was with Noah and his descendants after the flood promising that God would not destroy the earth by water again. God also said He would maintain the seasons and cycles of nature as long as the earth would stand (Gen. 6:18; 8:21–22). As a sign of His covenant He set a rainbow in the sky (Gen. 9:12–16). **This was a unilateral covenant;** that is, only one party, God, had to keep its terms. God initiated a second unilateral covenant in which He promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. This covenant was concluded in a complex ritual, with male circumcision as an outward sign of accepting the covenant (Gen. 15:12–17; 17:9–14). God secured the Abrahamic covenant by swearing by Himself and it was first fulfilled under Joshua (21:43–45). Thirdly, God initiated the Sinai covenant with the descendants of Abraham at Mt. Sinai in a bilateral covenant; that is, the covenant could be broken if either of the parties failed to observe its terms (Exod. 19:7–8; 24:7–8). Fourthly, God established a unilateral covenant with David asserting that He would not fail to establish a King in Israel from David’s descendants (2 Sam. 7:11–16). The Davidic covenant was ultimately fulfilled in Christ (Matt. 1:1; Luke 1:32–33, 69; Acts 2:30).

Although Israel did not keep the Sinai covenant (2 Kgs. 17; Jer. 11), God promised a new covenant, the fifth covenant, in which He would enable His people to keep His laws and His

⁷ Leon Morris *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* 1965, Erdman, Grand Rapids Michigan

commandments by writing them upon their hearts and in their minds (Jer. 31:31–34). This covenant was established by the Lord Jesus Christ and is the one to which Christians commit themselves (Heb. 8:7–13). Because God has bound Himself to His people swearing by His own nature and integrity, there is no need to fear that any of the good promises He has ever made to His people will fail.⁸

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God made a special point of explaining His first promise to post-flood man. He made it absolutely clear that He will never again destroy all life by a flood; He did not preclude local floods, but did give His solemn word that a universal flood would not occur again. This, no doubt, was given so that man would not worship Him out of fear, but out of love, because He is a God of love. However, this promise was only about a judgment *by flood*, for II Pet 3:7 assures us that this present world will be judged by fire, and that, too, is the prophecy of Revelation. **This, the first covenant God made with post-flood man, was unilateral**; it called for nothing from man, it imposed no obligation on man, so God has given His word with no conditions attached. We live under this covenant, and so does all mankind whether they admit it or not. In terms of this covenant God promises us a livable climate until the earth ceases, as well as freedom from fear of a universal flood. This last promise may sound academic to you and me, but it was most vital to Noah’s family, for the experience of witnessing the extermination of a whole earth full of life, except for marine life, must have been traumatic and left them in deepest shock and trepidation, to say the least. We will find ourselves considering God’s covenants with man repeatedly as our study of Genesis progresses; it is therefore pertinent to note this first covenant, a covenant with the entire human race.⁹

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9:14–16 What follows elaborates on the function of the “sign,” explaining how it secures the covenant and tying it to the specifics of the covenant itself. A “sign” points to something beyond itself and therefore requires interpretation, which we find here. Its importance lies in what it communicates and evokes, not the wonder itself. Verse 14 connects the sign’s appearance with the forbidding clouds brought about by the Lord. With the coming of the storm clouds, the bow would prompt his assent to the vow. “Remember” (*zākar*) is the language of covenant promise, as God “remembered” his oath to Abraham in behalf of Lot (19:29) and his promise for Israel (e.g., Exod 6:5; Ps 106:45; cf. Mal 3:16). Here it recalls the turning point of the flood narrative, “God remembered [*zākar*] Noah” (8:1a). Thus the assurance of future security for the earth’s families has its root in the character of God himself and the precedent of Noah’s salvation. The Passover event for later Israel was also marked by a “sign,” the smearing of blood above the doorposts of the Hebrew homes (Exod 12:13). For both Noah and the Hebrews, God “saw” the “sign,” which averted disaster and resulted in his salvific favor.

Verse 15 rehearses all that has gone before of the promissory prohibition, once more reversing the language of the antediluvian threat to “destroy all life” (cf. 6:17). Verse 16, concluding this speech, is highly repetitive of the former verses, though not stereotyped. **Here God as speaker refers to himself in the third person, “between God [*Elohim*] and all living**

⁸ Carpenter, E. E., & Comfort, P. W. (2000). *Holman treasury of key Bible words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew words defined and explained* (41). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁹ Mills, M. S. (1998). *Genesis: A study guide to the book of Genesis* (Ge 9:8). Dallas: 3E Ministries.

creatures,” thus indicating a formal declaration of his unilateral obligation. The promise as “everlasting” (cf. 8:22) reinforces the unconditional and certain commitment of God. The recurring covenant terminology of “remember” is sprinkled throughout the narrative to describe God’s fidelity. The NJB’s rendering, “I will call to mind,” captures the anthropomorphic intention of the language.

9:17 In a recapitulation of the foregoing, God concludes the formal establishment of the agreement. The elements of the prior statements are gathered here: “sign of the covenant,” as evidence of God’s abiding promise; “I have established,” echoing the divine initiation and now completion of the covenant; and “all flesh,” showing the inclusive character of the agreement.¹⁰

¹⁰ Mathews, K. A. (1996). *Vol. 1A: Genesis 1-11:26*. The New American Commentary (411–412). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Appendix III

Exodus 24:8 Moses sprinkled blood on the people in order to symbolize their being parties to the covenant. Some droplets would remain on their skin for days; some that fell on their clothing would be visible, if faded, for as long as the clothing lasted. The ceremony itself was so vivid and extraordinary as to be memorable, and its memory was intended to keep in the consciousness of the people the fact that God had joined with the people of Israel in a formal, official covenant to which both he and they were bound by oath.³⁰³ The animal's blood recalled that oath (cf. v. 6), and therefore Moses commanded the people to take note of it and appreciate its meaning ("This is the blood of the covenant"; "See the blood of the covenant" [NRSV]). Moreover, the covenant was not merely a general concept. Rather, it was the sum of all its words, so Moses described it as "existing in accordance with all these words." Again the language emphasizes that Israelites were not free to keep only part of the covenant.¹¹

¹¹ Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Vol. 2: Exodus*. The New American Commentary (555). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Appendix IV

Abrogation and fulfilment of the law

One of the perplexities in reading the NT is that it seems to say contradictory things about the law. In fact, Raisanen makes this his central plank in his book on Paul's view of the law, contending that Paul's theology of the law is inconsistent and contradictory. Raisanen's solution is unsatisfactory, and yet the difficulty is apparent to all careful readers of the NT, since the various statements made about the law are difficult to reconcile. This comes to the forefront in the matter of the abrogation and fulfilment of the law. Some statements imply that the law is still in force and fulfilled in Christ, while others teach that the law has come to an end. The solution to this vexing problem is paradoxical, for NT writers affirm that both are true, *i.e.* the law is abrogated and yet it is also fulfilled.

Matthew, for instance, emphasizes that Christ came to fulfil the law (5:17–20; *cf.* 5:21–48). What Matthew means by 'fulfil' is the subject of controversy, but it should be related to his christology, since he emphasizes that Christ fulfils OT prophecy (*cf.* 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17, etc.). Matthew hints (15:1–20) that the food laws of the OT are no longer binding. Mark, in the parallel text (Mk. 7:1–23), makes it explicit that all foods are now clean (Mk. 7:19). It is also possible that Matthew's words about the Sabbath suggest some change regarding Sabbath regulations (12:1–14). The fulfilment envisaged by Matthew, then, hints at some changes in the law. Food laws and perhaps the Sabbath laws are no longer binding in the same way (*cf.* also the texts on divorce in 5:31–32; 19:3–12). Nonetheless, the moral norms of the law are not jettisoned, but can now become a reality with the coming of the kingdom (4:17; 5:17–48).

Luke also emphasizes that Jesus fulfils prophecy (1:32–33, 54–55, 68–79; 4:18–19; 24:25–27, 44–49; Acts 2:16–36, *etc.*), and that the law is eternally valid (16:17). This does not mean that there is no shift in terms of the law, for Acts 10:1–11:18 communicates in unmistakable terms that food laws are no longer required. Moreover, at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, circumcision is not imposed on the Gentiles. Luke's perspective seems to be a salvation historical one in which the law no longer functions in the same way now that Messiah has come, the Spirit has been poured out, and the gospel goes to the Gentiles (*cf.* Blomberg). The letter to the Hebrews depicts the covenantal shift in a beautiful argument which is unfolded in chapters 7–10. The law of the old covenant is no longer binding, since there has been a change of priesthood (Heb. 7:11–12). Indeed, the very fact that a Melchizedean priesthood was predicted in Ps. 110:4 signals that the Levitical priesthood was destined to become obsolete. If the Levitical priesthood has been superseded, the same is true of Levitical sacrifices. Ultimately, the blood of animals cannot atone for sin anyway, since they are brute beasts and unwilling victims. OT sacrifices actually anticipated and pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ which is the fulfilment of what they adumbrated. Thus, the author of Hebrews does not criticize the OT law *per se*. He places it in salvation historical perspective, arguing that it must be interpreted in light of the fulfilment accomplished by Jesus Christ. The OT itself, in promising a new covenant, envisaged a day when the old would be dissolved.

Paul's theology follows the same basic paradigm. The gospel of Christ fulfils the OT scriptures (Rom. 1:2; 3:21). And now that Christ has come, circumcision, food laws and observance of days are not mandated for the people of God (Rom. 2:26–29; 4:9–12; 14:1–23; 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 4:10; 2:3–5; 5:2–6; 6:12–13; Col. 2:16–23). The Mosaic covenant has come to an end upon the arrival of Christ (Gal. 3:15–4:7; 2 Cor. 3:4–18), for the promises given to Abraham that all nations would be blessed have become a reality (Gal. 3:6–9, 14–18, 29;

Rom. 4:9–17). Circumcision, food laws and Sabbath are not required, because the days of separation between Jews and Gentiles have ended. And yet the deeper reality to which these laws pointed has now been fulfilled. Circumcision of the heart has become a reality through the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 2:28–29; Phil. 3:3) and the work of Christ on the cross (Col. 2:11–12). The purity laws of the OT are fulfilled in purity of life and in separation from all evil (*cf.* 2 Cor. 6:14; 7:1; *cf.* Peter’s application of Lv. 11:44 in 1 Pet. 1:15–16). Paul himself does not enunciate how the Sabbath is fulfilled, but the author of Hebrews (Heb. 4:1–11) sees the Sabbath as coming to fruition in the Sabbath rest which believers now enjoy, and which will be consummated at the day of Christ’s return. The fulfilment of the law for Paul (*cf.* also Jas. 2:8–12) also involves empowerment so that the moral norms of the law may be kept. Many scholars doubt that Paul operated with a distinction between the moral and ceremonial law, but texts such as Rom. 2:25–29; 8:4; 13:8–10; Gal. 5:2–6, 14; 1 Cor. 7:19, suggest that he operated with such a distinction. Of course, Paul never conceived that the law could be fulfilled in one’s own strength. Fulfilling the law was due to the work of the Holy Spirit which enabled believers to obey God’s commandments.

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OT LAW AND THE NT ERA

Continuity Positions

These are views that see OT law continuing into the NT era. Some such as Greg Bahnsen say all of OT law applies today. Jesus came to fulfill it, not abolish it; none of it is irrelevant. Bahnsen’s basic hermeneutical principle for handling OT law is that unless Scripture shows change with respect to OT law, NT era believers should assume it is still in force. For Bahnsen this means the moral law still applies, but it can be divided into two parts (general precepts of morality and specific applications of more general norms, i.e., case laws). General precepts apply without alteration, whereas one is not bound to keep case laws as worded (e.g., rules about railing one’s roof), but are responsible only to obey the underlying principle. As to ceremonial law, Bahnsen argues that the ritual ordinances of the OT typified Christ and his sacrifice. “Christ does not abrogate their *meaning* and intention; rather, He makes their old manner of *observation* irrelevant, for circumstances have radically changed.” Those circumstances center around the once-for-all death of Christ. That death does not abolish OT ceremonial law, but only reminds us that God in Christ has fulfilled the requirements of that law. Hence, observing it as in OT times is outmoded.

As to civil law, Bahnsen appeals to the Reformation notion of the three uses of the law. The second use is to drive sinners to Christ, and the third is to guide regenerated believers in

¹² Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (676–677). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

living the Christian life. The first use of the law is known as its political use, its use in controlling government and society to curb the ungodliness of men. Bahnsen argues that even in OT times the political use of the law was relevant to Gentiles, though they did not live under the Jewish theocracy. As to NT teaching, Bahnsen appeals to Romans 13 as teaching three principles also found in the OT: 1) rulers are not to be resisted, because God has appointed them; 2) rulers are avengers of divine wrath; and 3) “so rulers must deter evil by ruling according to God’s law.” Since both testaments agree on these points, the political use of the law applies today.

A second more moderate continuity position holds that while OT law generally applies today, one must adjust it in view of changes in time. For example, we no longer live in a theocracy, so civil law does not apply, and the OT sacrificial system no longer applies today because of Christ’s sacrifice. Nonetheless, there is basic continuity between the law of Moses and the Law of Christ. The former generally applies today, even if one cannot always predict exactly how some laws (e.g., laws about fasting and dietary rules) apply.

Discontinuity Positions

These views see more discontinuity than continuity between OT law and the NT era. One view (a moderate discontinuity view) holds that Christ fulfills OT law. Because of that fact of salvation history, one cannot assume that all OT law is operative precisely as it was in the OT era prior to Christ’s coming. The NT elucidates the implications of Christ’s coming for the believer’s relation to God’s law. In particular, the NT teaches that believers are bound to the Law of Christ as set forth in the NT. There is great overlap with OT injunctions, but of necessity, many OT commands no longer apply today.

A final more radical discontinuity view is that Christ not only terminates Mosaic Law, but all law. This view sounds antinomian but is not, for the Christian is not left to do whatever he wants. Instead, he is to follow the direct leading of the Spirit. Practically speaking, this means that the believer usually obeys biblical precepts, but that is so because the Holy Spirit would not contradict Scripture’s demands. The key point, however, is that the believer is not bound to any specific code but rather to the direct leading of the Holy Spirit. While we know of no proponents of this exact position, it seems to be a logical extension of the general discontinuity approach.

Authors’ Position

We hold a moderate discontinuity position somewhat like the one described. In the NT we see neither OT ceremonial or civil law in force. Christ’s sacrifice ended the need for ceremonial law, and civil law no longer pertains since NT life is not life under a theocracy. We hold this view in part because we think continuity positions have serious problems. For example, if all of OT law continues into the NT, then why do even proponents of that view admit that some parts no longer apply? One can say ceremonial law, for example, still applies though OT methods of observing it are irrelevant, and one can say OT law still applies, but the event of Christ transforms it in the NT era. However, when we hear such claims, we really wonder how it makes sense to say it is the *same* or *identical* law in the NT as in the OT. Is it not merely playing word games to call it the *same* law?

Even more perplexing is trying to discover hermeneutical principles that tell how to transform OT laws into NT precepts. For example, by what hermeneutical rules does one decide that OT fasting is “transformed” by Christ’s coming but remains fasting in the NT, whereas dietary laws are transformed in the NT into a need to be separate from the things of the world? Those who make such interpretive decisions neither delineate nor defend the

hermeneutical rules they use to arrive at their conclusions. One wonders what those rules could possibly be.

In turning to our case for a discontinuity view, we begin by stating the basic hermeneutical principle we use in determining how the testaments relate. For us, since the OT is God's revelation of truth, whatever is true and binding during OT times still applies for the NT era, *unless the NT either explicitly or implicitly abrogates it*. Bahnsen agrees, but then argues that OT law is not canceled in the NT. We contend that both explicitly and implicitly the NT argues for the end of the Mosaic Law, though it does not abolish law altogether. Several points lead us to this conclusion.

First, both explicitly and implicitly the NT teaches that various aspects of the Mosaic Law are no longer binding. The epistle to the Hebrews, for example, makes it clear that OT ceremonial law, including the Mosaic sacrificial system, no longer applies in the NT era. In addition, the NT teaches that Jews and Gentiles are on equal footing spiritually before God and one another (Eph 2:1–15). Moreover, the NT assumes that believers will be under the political rule of non-believing rulers, and it explicitly commands believers to submit to such powers (Rom 13:1ff., 1 Pet 2:13–15). This all seems to us to imply that God is not dealing primarily with one ethnic group in the NT era, nor does he intend to govern his people under a theocracy. If this is so, then it follows that regulations that governed Israel as a theocracy bind neither believers nor non-believers today. It is surely true that Rom 13:1ff. teaches that the ruler is established by God, is the avenger of God's wrath, and deserves submission from his people. However, we fail to see how those facts logically entail a theocracy or anything like it. It is crucial to remember that Paul and Peter commanded believers to submit to the government of that day, the Roman Empire. Rome was neither a theocracy nor run by OT civil law. If God expects society to be a theocracy or to be run by OT civil law, then such a demand contradicts his demand through Paul and Peter that believers in their day submit to Rome, which was neither a theocracy nor run by OT civil law.

If neither Mosaic ceremonial nor civil law applies today, in what sense does it make sense to say we are under Mosaic Law? Additionally, as some have argued, the Mosaic Law cannot be detached from the Mosaic Covenant or vice versa. They are part and parcel of one another. If this is so, then to say the Mosaic Code is still in force today is also to say the Mosaic Covenant is binding for today. However, continuity-oriented thinkers traditionally say the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 governs the Church. **Jeremiah 31 clearly distinguishes the New Covenant from the Mosaic Covenant. All of this raises the following dilemma for continuity positions:** if the Mosaic Code is part and parcel of the Mosaic Covenant and inseparable from it, then to say we are under the Mosaic Code is to say we are under the Mosaic Covenant. But to hold that contradicts the belief that NT believers are governed by the New Covenant. It is inconsistent to say the Church is governed by the New Covenant when it comes to salvation, but by the Mosaic Code (and Covenant) when it comes to law. A discontinuity position avoids this problem by claiming that the Church is governed by the New Covenant as to salvation and by the Law of Christ as to law.

Second, those holding a continuity position on the law often raise Matt 5:17–19 as an objection to the discontinuity view. A detailed treatment of that passage is beyond the scope of this chapter, but suffice it to say that the crucial issue is the meaning of “fulfill.” As many claim, the word does not mean “annul” but “bring to completion.” However, to say the OT points to Christ who brings it to completion is not to say the OT still applies just as it did during the OT era. Rather, it means it must be interpreted and applied in light of its fulfillment by Christ. That means we must view it through Christ's teaching and ministry. That teaching comes both from his mouth and from the mouths of his apostles (John 14; 15; 16). What do they teach? As already noted, they teach that various aspects of Mosaic Law no longer apply today.

Third, there are passages that, though debated, we believe entail that Mosaic Law has ended. In particular, we are thinking of passages such as Rom 10:4, Gal 3:21–25, Gal 5:18, and 1 Cor 9:20–21. As to Rom 10:4 in particular, recent studies show that it is unlikely Paul means *only* that Christ ends the law in the sense of termination. Rather, the primary notion is culmination, completion, reaching the goal of the law. However, as others note, it is dubious that the verse in no sense speaks of termination. Having reached its goal, it need no longer continue. Here again the teaching reminds us of Christ’s comments in Matt 5:17ff. Christ is the law’s fulfillment. He does not abolish it, but its application must always be viewed in light of its fulfillment in Christ. **We believe verses like these warrant concluding that believers are no longer subject to the Mosaic Code of law.** However, that does not mean they are without law altogether; they have the Law of Christ.

Some will strongly object that Mosaic Law cannot be abrogated, for it is God’s law, and since God does not change, his law does not. However, this confuses applicability of a particular expression of God’s law (a particular code, like the Mosaic) with God’s enduring ethical principles. The latter never change, because they are grounded in God’s unchanging nature. But that does not mean those norms forever find expression in only one code of law, the Mosaic Code. Nor does it mean one has no divine law unless he has the Mosaic Code. On the contrary, in 1 Cor 9:20–21 and especially Rom 2:12, 14–15 Paul teaches that all people at all times have a form of God’s law “written in their hearts,” even if they do not have the Mosaic Code. Moreover, prior to the Mosaic Code, law was in the world. The book of Genesis shows that prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law people had some expression of God’s law. If all this is true, why must this particular expression of God’s law, the Mosaic Code, be so crucial?

In our day, non-believers are not under the Mosaic Code, but they still have a sense of God’s law. Are they not like the Gentiles described in Rom 2:14–15? Are they not accountable to the law of God written in their hearts, even if they have never heard of the Mosaic Law? As for believers, passages such as 1 Cor 9:21 and Gal 6:2 teach that they are under the Law of Christ. We do not believe there is vast divergence between the Law of Christ and the law written in men’s hearts any more than we think there is great divergence between the ethical norms of the Mosaic Code, the law written in men’s hearts, and the Law of Christ. The same God is author of all three, and the norms in each are grounded in his character.

From the preceding we conclude that rejecting the Mosaic Code as binding today is not antinomianism. Whether one has only the law written in his heart or is under the Law of Christ, he is still accountable to some expression of divine law. Certain ethical principles are grounded in God’s nature and will always apply, though they find expression at different times in different codes. Just as driving laws for two U.S. states may contain many of the same laws and yet represent two separate codes (one for each state), so laws reflected in the law of Moses and the Law of Christ have much overlap while coming from two distinct codes.

A position like this seems the best way to avoid the dilemmas raised by having to specify hermeneutics for deciding which parts of OT law apply today and which do not and which parts are transformed in the NT era and what they become. Those problems (and others we have mentioned) that confront continuity positions are avoided by holding that none of OT law applies today, for believers are under the Law of Christ. Moreover, since the Law of Christ is quite similar to OT law (including the Mosaic Code) in regard to general ethical norms, nothing of significance is really lost.

Does the preceding mean the OT is useless for Christian ethics? We think not. Where the content of the Mosaic Law, for example, and the Law of Christ overlap, appeal to the OT is proper. In fact, appeal to the OT may give a fuller explanation of a principle and God’s

reasoning for it than one finds in the NT. For example, while we believe Rom 13:1–7 warrants capital punishment, we believe Gen 9:5–6 gives a much clearer statement of why God enjoins it. Second, even when OT and NT law do not exactly overlap, the OT can be very instructive in setting forth God’s underlying attitude toward an ethical issue. For example, nowhere in the NT does one find the specific regulations of Exod 21:22–25 that protect pregnant women and their unborn children. Those ordinances are part of the Mosaic Code but are not part of the NT Law of Christ. On the other hand, as we shall argue when discussing abortion, proper understanding of that passage shows it to be one of the strongest passages in Scripture defending the rights of pregnant women and unborn children. Given that fact, it seems proper to appeal to it as indicating God’s attitude toward any kind of harm to the unborn, including abortion. Since nothing in the NT suggests that God’s attitude toward the unborn has changed, the OT passage is relevant for determining God’s attitude toward the unborn and for demanding protection of them.

In discussing the use of Scripture in Christian ethics, James Gustafson outlines various ways Scripture may give guidance to contemporary ethical problems. We think at least three of his suggestions are helpful in answering how the OT is useful in Christian ethics. Gustafson says judgments can be made about contemporary situations on the basis of: 1) specific commands of Scripture about what is right and wrong; 2) moral ideals (such as love and peace) found in Scripture; and 3) analogies between biblical situations where moral pronouncements are made and contemporary situations. So long as one joins these items with the two principles stated above (the norms in both codes must overlap or the OT must show God’s underlying perspective on an issue even if the specific OT regulation is not in the Law of Christ), we believe one who holds that believers are under the Law of Christ and not the Mosaic Law has a good set of rules of procedure for using the OT in Christian ethics.¹³

¹³ Feinberg, J. S., & Feinberg, P. D. (1993). *Ethics for a Brave new world* (34–40). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.