

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO BIBLICAL LAW**

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Foreword

The essay that follows is my father's introduction to his monumental 1973 first volume of *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, the work that gave birth to the modern theonomy movement. As the author repeated many times before his death in 2001, the word *theonomy* means simply "law of God" and *theocracy* the "rule of God." These terms refer to the sovereignty of God and the authority of His revealed Word. They do not imply prerogative for any human authority to speak for God:

False theocracies are the rule of men; true theocracy is the rule of God's law in and over men. True theocracy required a very limited church and state. Giving more power to men, either privately or institutionally, is no substitute for the rule of the triune God in the lives of men.¹

The purpose of the *Institutes*, then, was to address a major subject of God's Word, the law. By merely broaching the subject as relevant it countered the prevailing *antinomianism* (which literally means "anti-law") of the twentieth century that had been popularized by C. I. Scofield's Bible notes. As a dispensationalist, Scofield believed God has dealt differently with man in different periods

¹ R. J. Rushdoony, *Sovereignty* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2007), 244.

of time, or dispensations. Much of the Bible, though believed to be true, was said to be non-binding on the Christian who was, he believed, living in a period of grace neither foreseen in the previous dispensations nor revealed by Scripture. The Christian, Scofield believed, was living in a “parenthesis period” called the church age. Some dispensationalists believed the Gospels and much of the rest of the New Testament pertained to a future Jewish kingdom and thus did not pertain to “the church age.” This dispensationalism, because it saw the law of God as belonging to a previous age and the church to another, rejected God’s law as non-binding on the believer, hence the term antinomian. Strains of antinomianism have long existed in Christian thought, but its modern manifestation is almost exclusively as a necessary corollary to dispensationalism. The publication and influence of the *Institutes* was not, obviously, welcomed in dispensational circles. To some, it seemed heresy because it challenged an artificial dichotomy that dispensationalism created—that of law vs. grace.

Law and Grace

The opposite of law is not grace; it is lawlessness. The opposite of grace (God’s undeserved mercy to sinners) is no grace, that is, God executing the sentence of death for sin that men deserve. The law of God is the righteousness (or justice) of God in which the righteous man of God is to “delight” and in which he is to “meditate day and night” (Ps. 1:2).

Law and grace have the same divine author, and grace was not first manifested in the New Testament. The giving of the law was itself an act of grace by God to His people. Abraham knew his culture well enough to fear he could be killed and his wife taken from him by force. Jacob had no legal recourse against the fraud of Laban. Joseph knew the futility of crying “unfair” when he was

made a slave, and later, the whole Hebrew tribe was likewise enslaved and at the mercy of a tyrant who claimed divine birth and who could order Hebrew babies killed at will. Such was the brutal system before the giving of the law of God. When God brought the Hebrews out of Egypt He gave them not just another set of arbitrary rules, but justice in its purest and divinely ordained state. The law was and remains a gift of grace.

Then too, grace itself must involve law. The idea of a morally lawless Christian is an oxymoron. Paul said the thought that we can sin because grace abounds should be abhorrent (Rom. 6:1ff). Rather, the law is how we live in the state of grace, and as new creatures in Christ, declare with Paul that the law is “holy, just, and good” (Rom. 7:12).

The alternative to dispensational antinomianism presented in *Institutes* was a covenantal theology, one that saw a single message of grace and redemption throughout Scripture. The covenant between God and man is a contract, though not between equals as in our use of contractual arrangements. This covenant was between a Sovereign Creator and sinful creatures, so it was a gift by God, i.e. of grace. The covenant of grace had to be interpreted in terms of a law, just as our contracts specify the civil jurisdiction whose laws are to be used to interpret or adjudicate its provisions. The law of the covenant given by God’s grace was God’s law.

Jesus offered us His “blood of the new testament [i.e., covenant]” (Mk. 14:24). This was done at the Passover, one of the two signs of the old covenant, so Jesus obviously saw a carryover. The new covenant is the renewed covenant and its only real distinctions are *first*, that the anticipated atonement represented by the blood of animals was to become an accomplished fact in Christ’s blood and *second*, that the covenant was expanded to Jew and Gentile alike.

The Law Is for Sanctification, Not Justification

If the authority of a father, husband, or pastor is sometimes abused, it does not negate their legitimate authority and purpose as given by God. Likewise the law can and has been abused, but this does not detract from its purpose as directed by God. The fact that no man can keep the law perfectly is irrelevant to its applicability. It was not given to perfect men but to sinners to teach them the alternative (I Tim.1:9-10). Sinful self-will can affect our prayers at times, but that certainly does not make proper prayer invalid. The law was never a means of salvation for sinless men but a revelation of the righteous standard of God. This standard is not negated by man's sin.

The Pharisees were often singled out by Jesus because they represented the logical end of much of the Jewish misuse of the law. One way the Pharisees abused the law was that they made their own rules equal to and then greater than God's law (two examples are in Mark 7:1-23). Their reasoning was that if they made rules as "hedged" around the law that were stricter than the law, they would never get close to breaking the law itself. Often, however, their "hedged" allowed them to "reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition."

In the modern church, such Pharisaical rule-making has also been popular. What is deemed "Christian" or "God honoring" is too often a subjective rule which purports to be binding on others, thereby destroying Christian liberty. An obvious reason for such pietistic rule-making is the gaping void left by antinomianism. For this reason, antinomianism churches are often the most flagrantly guilty of Pharisaical rule-making.

A second error of Pharisaism was a hypocritical use of law. This is a tendency of all men. When Jesus said "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1ff.), He was referring to hypocritical judgment where a man had greater sin ("beam in thine own eye") than the

one he criticized (“mote” in brother’s). What is often neglected in that passage is that Jesus commands the removal of our sin to “see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” Hypocritical judgment was a sin, not judgment itself. Repeating the requirement of Leviticus 19:15 to “judge in righteousness,” Jesus commanded that we “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). By what standard does the believer judge in righteousness? The thesis of the *Institutes* is that the law of God was given as that plumb-line.

The tendency to wrongly use the law was early present in the Christian community as well. The entire book of Galatians was written to refute the error of a group of Judaizers who sought to require conversion to the old covenant Jewish religion so as to make Christianity a sect of that religion. Their motive in doing this was to bring Christianity under the umbrella of the Jewish religion, simply because it had long enjoyed legal status and such a strategy would prevent Rome’s persecution of Christianity (Gal. 6:12-13). With this cowardly motive, they demanded circumcision of believers as the act of conversion to the Jewish tradition before acknowledging them as members of the church. Paul rightly characterized this as “justification by the works of the law,” because it added an act (circumcision) to faith in Jesus Christ as a requirement for inclusion in the church.

Theonomy is sometimes falsely labeled as the same heresy Paul condemned in Galatians, though its view of the law has no relation to that of the Judaizers. God’s law is how the Christian obeys God, not his means of redemption. The law is part and parcel of God’s Word. Because it is a revelation of the Righteousness of God it is all moral law. Every Biblical doctrine has, at some point, been distorted and abused. The response must be a return to Scripture and orthodoxy in terms of it. This includes the law. Misconceptions and even its abuse must be addressed, but we must declare, with Paul, that “the law is good, if a man use it lawfully” (I Tim. 1:8).

The Protestant Reformation correctly settled the issue of that day: justification is an act of God's grace received by faith alone that no man can merit. The *Institutes* stands clearly on that foundation, but what was never settled by the Reformation was the means of sanctification. What is the believer's response to God's grace? Theonomy is based on the belief that all provisions of God's Word, including the law, are binding on man today unless (as the book of Hebrews relates) they were perfected in the atonement and priesthood of Christ or altered by apostolic authority. The law of God, in other words, is the believer's instruction for obedience, growth in grace, and the exercise of His covenant duties in the Kingdom of God and His Christ.

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The Importance of the Law

When Wyclif wrote of his English Bible that “This Bible is for the government of the people, by the people, and for the people,” his statement attracted no attention insofar as his emphasis on the centrality of Biblical law was concerned. That law should be God’s law was held by all; Wyclif’s departure from accepted opinion was that the people themselves should not only read and know that law but also should in some sense govern as well as be governed by it. At this point, Heer is right in saying that “Wyclif and Hus were the first to demonstrate to Europe the possibility of an alliance between the university and the people’s yearning for salvation. It was the freedom of Oxford that sustained Wyclif.”¹ The concern was less with church or state than with government by the law-word of God.

Brin has said, of the Hebrew social order, that it differed from all others in that it was believed to be grounded on and governed by the law of God, who gave it specifically for man’s government.² No less than Israel of old, Christendom believed itself to be God’s realm because it was governed by the law of God as set forth in Scripture. There were departures from that law, variations of it, and laxity in faithfulness to it, but Christendom saw itself as the new Israel of God and no less subject to His law.

When New England began its existence as a law-order, its adoption of Biblical law was both a return to Scripture and a return to Europe's past. It was a new beginning in terms of old foundations. It was not an easy beginning, in that the many servants who came with the Puritans later were in full scale revolt against any Biblical faith and order.³ Nevertheless, it was a resolute return to the fundamentals of Christendom. Thus, the New Haven Colony records show that the law of God, without any sense of innovation, was made the law of the Colony:

March 2, 1641/2: And according to the fundamentall agreem(en)t, made and published by full and gen(e)r(a)ll consent, when the plantation began and government was settled, that the judiciall law of God given by Moses and expounded in other parts of scripture, so far as itt is a hedg and a fence to the moral law, and neither ceremoniall nor typical nor had any reference to Canaan, hath an everlasting equity in itt, and should be the rule of their proceedings.⁴

April 3, 1644: Itt was ordered thatt the judiciall lawes of God, as they were delivered by Moses . . . be a rule to all the courts in this jurisdiction in their proceeding against offenders. . . .⁵

Thomas Shepard wrote, in 1649, "For all laws, whether ceremonial or judicial, may be referred to the decalogue, as appendices to it, or applications of it, and so to comprehend all other laws as their summary."⁶

It is an illusion to hold that such opinions were simply a Puritan aberration rather than a truly Biblical practice and an aspect of the persisting life of Christendom. It is a modern heresy that holds that the law of God has no meaning nor any binding force for man today. It is an aspect of the influence of humanistic and evolutionary thought on the church, and it posits an evolving, developing god. This "dispensational" god expressed himself in law in an earlier

age, then later expressed himself by grace alone, and is now perhaps to express himself in still another way. But this is not the God of Scripture, whose grace and law remain the same in every age, because He, as the sovereign and absolute lord, changes not, nor does He need to change. The strength of man is the absoluteness of his God.

To attempt to study Scripture without studying its law is to deny it. To attempt to understand Western civilization apart from the impact of Biblical law within it and upon it is to seek a fictitious history and to reject twenty centuries and their progress.

The Institutes of Biblical Law has as its purpose a reversal of the present trend. It is called “Institutes” in the older meaning of that word, i.e., fundamental principles, here of law, because it is intended as a beginning, as an instituting consideration of that law which must govern society, and which shall govern society under God.

I. The Validity of Biblical Law

A central characteristic of the churches and of modern preaching and Biblical teaching is antinomianism, an anti-law position. The antinomian believes that faith frees the Christian from the law, so that he is not outside the law but is rather dead to the law. There is no warrant whatsoever in Scripture for antinomianism. The expression, “dead to the law,” is indeed in Scripture (Gal. 2:19; Rom. 7:4), but it has reference to the believer in relationship to the atoning work of Christ as the believer’s representative and substitute; the believer is dead to the law as an indictment, a legal sentence of death against him, Christ having died for him, but the believer is alive to the law as the righteousness of God. The purpose of Christ’s atoning work was to restore man to a position of covenant-keeping instead of covenant-breaking, to enable man to keep the law by

freeing man “from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2), “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom. 8:4). Man is restored to a position of law-keeping. The law thus has a position of centrality in man’s indictment (as a sentence of death against man the sinner), in man’s redemption (in that Christ died, Who although the perfect law-keeper as the new Adam, died as man’s substitute), and in man’s sanctification (in that man grows in grace as he grows in law-keeping, for the law is the way of sanctification).

Man as covenant-breaker is in “enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7) and is subject to “the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2), whereas the believer is under “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ” (Rom. 8:2). The law is one law, the law of God. To the man on death row in a prison, the law is death; to the godly man, the same law which places another on death row is life, in that it protects him and his property from criminals. Without law, society would collapse into anarchy and fall into the hands of hoodlums. The faithful and full execution of the law is death to the murderer but life to the godly. Similarly, the law in its judgment upon God’s enemies is death; the law in its sustaining care and blessings is for the law-abiding a principle of life.

God, in creating man, ordered him to subdue the earth and to exercise dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28). Man, in attempting to establish separate dominion and autonomous jurisdiction over the earth (Gen. 3:5), fell into sin and death. God, in order to re-establish the Kingdom of God, called Abraham, and then Israel, to be His people, to subdue the earth, and to exercise dominion under God. The law, as given through Moses, established the laws of godly society, of true development for man under God, and the prophets repeatedly recalled Israel to this purpose.

The purpose of Christ’s coming was in terms of this same creation mandate. Christ as the new Adam (I Cor. 15:45) kept the law perfectly. As the sin-bearer of the elect, Christ died to make atonement for their sins, to restore them to their position of righteous-

ness under God. The redeemed are recalled to the original purpose of man, to exercise dominion under God, to be covenant-keepers, and to fulfil “the righteousness of the law” (Rom. 8:4). The law remains central to God’s purpose. Man has been re-established into God’s original purpose and calling. Man’s *justification* is by the *grace* of God in Jesus Christ; man’s *sanctification* is by means of the *law* of God.

As the new chosen people of God, the Christians are commanded to do that which Adam in Eden, and Israel in Canaan, failed to do. One and the same covenant, under differing administrations, still prevails. Man is summoned to create the society God requires. The determination of man and of history is from God, but the reference of God’s law is to this world. “To be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6), and to be spiritually minded does not mean to be other-worldly but to apply the mandates of the written word under the guidance of the Spirit to this world.

Lawless Christianity is a contradiction in terms: it is anti-Christian. The purpose of grace is not to set aside the law but to fulfil the law and to enable man to keep the law. If the law was so serious in the sight of God that it would require the death of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, to make atonement for man’s sin, it seems strange for God then to proceed to abandon the law! The goal of the law is not lawlessness, nor the purpose of grace a lawless contempt of the giver of grace.

The increasing breakdown of law and order must first of all be attributed to the churches and their persistent antinomianism. If the churches are lax with respect to the law, will not the people follow suit? And civil law cannot be separated from Biblical law, for the Biblical doctrine of law includes all law, civil, ecclesiastical, societal, familial, and all other forms of law. The social order which despises God’s law places itself on death row: it is marked for judgment.

2. *The Law as Revelation and Treaty*

Law is in every culture religious in origin. Because law governs man and society, because it establishes and declares the meaning of justice and righteousness, law is inescapably religious, in that it establishes in practical fashion the ultimate concerns of a culture. Accordingly, a fundamental and necessary premise in any and every study of law must be, first, a recognition of this religious nature of law.

Second, it must be recognized that in any culture *the source of law is the god of that society*. If law has its source in man's reason, then reason is the god of that society. If the source is an oligarchy, or in a court, senate, or ruler, then that source is the god of that system. Thus, in Greek culture law was essentially a religiously humanistic concept.

In contrast to every law derived from revelation, *nomos* for the Greeks originated in the mind (*nous*). So the genuine *nomos* is no mere obligatory law, but something in which an entity valid in itself is discovered and appropriated. . . . It is "the order which exists (from time immemorial), is valid and is put into operation."⁷

Because for the Greeks mind was one being with the ultimate order of things, man's mind was thus able to discover ultimate law (*nomos*) out of its own resources, by penetrating through the maze of accident and matter to the fundamental ideas of being. As a result, Greek culture became both humanistic, because man's mind was one with ultimacy, and also neoplatonic, ascetic, and hostile to the world of matter, because *mind*, to be truly itself, had to separate itself from non-mind.

Modern humanism, the religion of the state, locates law in the state and thus makes the state, or the people as they find expression in the state, the god of the system. As Mao Tse-Tung has said,

“Our God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people.”⁸ In Western culture, law has steadily moved away from God to the people (or the state) as its source, although the historic power and vitality of the West has been in Biblical faith and law.

Third, in any society, any change of law is an explicit or implicit change of religion. Nothing more clearly reveals, in fact, the religious change in a society than a legal revolution. When the legal foundations shift from Biblical law to humanism, it means that the society now draws its vitality and power from humanism, not from Christian theism.

Fourth, no disestablishment of religion as such is possible in any society. A church can be disestablished, and a particular religion can be supplanted by another, but the change is simply to another religion. Since the foundations of law are inescapably religious, no society exists without a religious foundation or without a law-system which codifies the morality of its religion.

Fifth, there can be no tolerance in a law-system for another religion. Toleration is a device used to introduce a new law-system as a prelude to a new intolerance. Legal positivism, a humanistic faith, has been savage in its hostility to the Biblical law-system and has claimed to be an “open” system. But Cohen, by no means a Christian, has aptly described the logical positivists as “nihilists” and their faith as “nihilistic absolutism.”⁹ Every law-system must maintain its existence by hostility to every other law-system and to alien religious foundations, or else it commits suicide.

In analyzing now the nature of Biblical law, it is important to note *first* that, for the Bible, law is revelation. The Hebrew word for law is *torah*, which means instruction, authoritative direction.¹⁰ The Biblical concept of law is broader than the legal codes of the Mosaic formulation. It applies to the divine word and instruction in its totality:

. . . the earlier prophets also use *torah* for the divine word proclaimed through them (Isa. viii. 16, cf. also v. 20; Isa. xxx. 9 f.; perhaps also Isa. i. 10). Besides this, certain passages in the earlier prophets use the word *torah* also for the commandment of Yahweh which was written down: thus Hos. viii. 12. Moreover there are clearly examples not only of ritual matters, but also of ethics.

Hence it follows that at any rate in this period *torah* had the meaning of a divine instruction, whether it had been written down long ago as a law and was preserved and pronounced by a priest, or whether the priest was delivering it at that time (Lam. ii. 9; Ezek. vii. 26; Mal. ii. 4ff.), or the prophet is commissioned by God to pronounce it for a definite situation (so perhaps Isa. xxx. 9).

Thus what is objectively essential in *torah* is not the form but the divine authority.¹¹

The law is the revelation of God and His righteousness. There is no ground in Scripture for despising the law. Neither can the *law* be relegated to the Old Testament and *grace* to the New:

The time-honored distinction between the OT as a book of law and the NT as a book of divine grace is without grounds or justification. Divine grace and mercy are the presupposition of law in the OT; and the grace and love of God displayed in the NT events issue in the legal obligations of the New Covenant. Furthermore, the OT contains evidence of a long history of legal developments which must be assessed before the place of law is adequately understood. Paul's polemics against the law in Galatians and Romans are directed against an understanding of law which is by no means characteristic of the OT as a whole.¹²

There is no contradiction between law and grace. The question in James's Epistle is faith and works, not faith and law.¹³ Judaism

had made *law* the *mediator* between God and man, and between God and the world. It was this view of law, not the law itself, which Jesus attacked. As Himself the Mediator, Jesus rejected the law as mediator in order to re-establish the law in its God-appointed role as law, the way of holiness. He established the law by dispensing forgiveness as the law-giver in full support of the law as the convicting word which makes men sinners.¹⁴ The law was rejected only as mediator and as the source of justification.¹⁵ Jesus fully recognized the law, and obeyed the law. It was only the absurd interpretations of the law He rejected. Moreover,

We are not entitled to gather from the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels that He made any formal distinction between the Law of Moses and the Law of God. His mission being not to destroy but to fulfil the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17), so far from saying anything in disparagement of the Law of Moses or from encouraging His disciples to assume an attitude of independence with regard to it, He expressly recognized the authority of the Law of Moses as such, and of the Pharisees as its official interpreters (Mt. 23:1-3).¹⁶

With the completion of Christ's work, the role of the Pharisees as interpreters ended, but not the authority of the law. In the New Testament era, only apostolically received revelation was ground for any alteration in the law. The authority of the law remained unchanged:

St. Peter, e.g., required a special revelation before he would enter the house of the uncircumcised Cornelius and admit the first Gentile convert into the Church by baptism (Acts 10:1-48)—a step which did not fail to arouse opposition on the part of those who “were of the circumcision” (cf. 11:1-18).¹⁷

The *second* characteristic of Biblical law is that it is a *treaty* or *covenant*. Kline has shown that the form of the giving of the law, the language of the text, the historical prologue, the requirement

of exclusive commitment to the suzerain, God, the pronouncement of imprecations and benedictions, and much more, all point to the fact that the law is a treaty established by God with His people. Indeed, “the revelation committed to the two tables was rather a suzerainty treaty or covenant than a legal code.”¹⁸ The full covenant summary, the Ten Commandments, was inscribed on each of the two tables of stone, one table or copy of the treaty for each party in the treaty, God and Israel.¹⁹

The two stone tables are not, therefore, to be likened to a stele containing one of the half-dozen or so known legal codes earlier than or roughly contemporary with Moses as though God had engraved on these tables a corpus of law. The revelation they contain is nothing less than an epitome of the covenant granted by Yahweh, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, to his elect and redeemed servant, Israel.

Not law, but covenant. That must be affirmed when we are seeking a category comprehensive enough to do justice to this revelation in its totality. At the same time, the prominence of the stipulations, reflected in the fact that “the ten words” are the element used as *pars pro toto*, signalizes the centrality of law in this type of covenant. There is probably no clearer direction afforded the biblical theologian for defining with biblical emphasis the type of covenant God adopted to formalize his relationship to his people than that given in the covenant he gave Israel to perform, even “the ten commandments.” Such a covenant is a declaration of God’s lordship, consecrating a people to himself in a sovereignly dictated order of life.²⁰

This latter phrase needs re-emphasis: the covenant is “a sovereignly dictated order of life.” God as the sovereign Lord and Cre-

ator gives His law to man as an act of sovereign grace. It is an act of election, of electing grace (Deut. 7:7 f.; 8:18-20; 9:4-6, etc.).

The God to whom the earth belongs will have Israel for His own property, Ex. xix. 5. It is only on the ground of the gracious election and guidance of God that the divine commands to the people are given, and therefore the Decalogue, Ex. xx. 2, places at its forefront the fact of election.²¹

In the law, *the total life of man* is ordered: “there is no primary distinction between *the inner and the outer life*; the holy calling of the people must be realized in both.”²²

The *third* characteristic of the Biblical law or covenant is that it constitutes a plan for *dominion under God*. God called Adam to exercise dominion in terms of God’s revelation, God’s law (Gen. 1:26 ff.; 2:15-17). This same calling, after the fall, was required of the godly line, and in Noah it was formally renewed (Gen. 9:1-17). It was again renewed with Abraham, with Jacob, with Israel in the person of Moses, with Joshua, David, Solomon (whose Proverbs echo the law), with Hezekiah and Josiah, and finally with Jesus Christ. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is the renewal of the covenant: “this is my blood of the new testament” (or covenant), so that *the sacrament itself re-establishes the law*, this time with a new elect group (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25). *The people of the law* are now the people of Christ, the believers redeemed by His atoning blood and called by His sovereign election. Kline, in analyzing Hebrews 9:16, 17, in relation to the covenant administration, observes:

. . . the picture suggested would be that of Christ’s children (cf. 2:13) inheriting his universal dominion as their eternal portion (note 9:15b; cf. also 1:14; 2:5 ff.; 6:17; 11:7 ff.). And such is the wonder of the messianic Mediator-Testator that the royal inheritance of his sons, which becomes of force only through his death, is neverthe-

less one of co-regency with the living Testator! For (to follow the typological direction provided by Heb. 9:16, 17 according to the present interpretation) Jesus is both dying Moses and succeeding Joshua. Not merely after a figure but in truth a royal Mediator *redivivus*, he secures the divine dynasty by succeeding himself in resurrection power and ascension glory.²³

The purpose of God in requiring Adam to exercise dominion over the earth remains His continuing covenant word: man, created in God's image and commanded to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it in God's name, is *recalled to this task and privilege* by his redemption and regeneration.

The law is therefore the law for Christian man and Christian society. Nothing is more deadly or more derelict than the notion that the Christian is at liberty with respect to the kind of law he can have. Calvin, whose classical humanism gained ascendancy at this point, said of the laws of states, of civil governments:

I will briefly remark, however, by the way, what laws it (the state) may piously use before God, and be rightly governed by among men. And even this I would have preferred passing over in silence, if I did not know that it is a point on which many persons run into dangerous errors. For some deny that a state is well constituted, which neglects the polity of Moses, and is governed by the common laws of nations. The dangerous and seditious nature of this opinion I leave to the examination of others; it will be sufficient for me to have evinced it to be false and foolish.²⁴

Such ideas, common in Calvinist and Lutheran circles, and in virtually all churches, are still heretical nonsense.²⁵ Calvin favored "the common law of nations." But the common law of nations in his day was Biblical law, although extensively denatured by Roman law. And this "common law of nations" was increasingly evidencing a new religion, humanism. Calvin wanted the establishment of

the Christian religion; he could not have it, nor could it last long in Geneva, without Biblical law.

Two Reformed scholars, in writing of the state, declare, “It is to be God’s servant, for our welfare. It must exercise justice, and it has the power of the sword.”²⁶ Yet these men follow Calvin in rejecting Biblical law for “the common law of nations.” But can the state be God’s servant and by-pass God’s law? And if the state “must exercise justice,” how is justice defined, by the nations, or by God? There are as many ideas of justice as there are religions.

The question then is, what law for the state? Shall it be *positive law, the law of nations, a relativistic law*? De Jongste and van Krimpen, after calling for “justice” in the state, declare, “A static legislation valid for all times is an impossibility.”²⁷ Indeed! Then what about the commandment, Biblical legislation, if you please, “Thou shalt not kill,” and “Thou shalt not steal”? Are they not intended to be valid for all time and in every civil order? By abandoning Biblical law, these Protestant theologians end up in moral and legal relativism.

Roman Catholic scholars offer *natural law*. The origins of this concept are in Roman law and religion. For the Bible, there is no law in nature, because nature is fallen and cannot be normative. Moreover, the source of law is not nature but God. There is no law *in* nature but a law *over* nature, God’s law.²⁸

Neither positive law nor natural law can reflect more than the sin and apostasy of man: *revealed law* is the need and privilege of Christian society. It is the *only* means whereby man can fulfil his creation mandate of exercising dominion under God. Apart from revealed law, man cannot claim to be under God but only in rebellion against God.

3. *The Direction of the Law*

In order to understand Biblical law, it is necessary to understand also certain basic characteristics of that law. First, certain broad premises or principles are declared. These are declarations of basic law. The Ten Commandments give us such declarations. The Ten Commandments are not therefore laws among laws, but are the basic laws, of which the various laws are specific examples. An example of such a basic law is Exodus 20:15 (Deut. 5:19), “Thou shalt not steal.”

In analyzing this commandment, “Thou shalt not steal,” it is important to note, a), that this is the establishment, positively, of private property, even as, negatively, it punishes offenses against property. The commandments thus establish and protect a basic area of life. But, b), even more important, this establishment of property issues, not from the state or man but from the sovereign and omnipotent God. The commandments all have their origin in God, who, as the sovereign lord, issues the law to govern His realm. Further, it follows, c), since God issues the law, that any offense against the law is an offense against God. Whether the law has reference to property, person, family, labor, capital, church, state, or anything else, its first frame of reference is to God. In essence, law-breaking is entirely against God, since everything and every person is His creation. But, David declared, with reference to his acts of adultery and murder, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight” (Ps. 51:4). This means then, d), that lawlessness is also sin, i.e., that any civil, familial, ecclesiastical, or other social act of disobedience is also a religious offense unless the disobedience is required by the prior obedience to God. With this in mind, that the law, first, lays down broad and basic principles, let us examine a second characteristic of Biblical law, namely, that the major portion of the law is case law, i.e., the illustration of the

basic principle in terms of specific cases. These specific cases are often illustrations of the extent of the application of the law; that is, by citing a minimal type of case, the necessary jurisdictions of the law are revealed. To prevent us from having any excuse for failing to understand and utilize this concept, the Bible gives us its own interpretation of such a law, and the illustration, being given by St. Paul, makes clear the New Testament's undergirding of the law. We cite therefore, first, the basic principle, second, the case law, and, third, the Pauline declaration of the application of the law:

1. Thou shalt not steal (Ex. 20:15). The basic law, declaration of principle.
2. Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn (Deut. 25:4). Illustration of the basic law, a case law.
3. For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. . . . Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel (I Cor. 9:9, 10, 14; the entire passage, 9:1-14, is an interpretation of the law).

For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward (I Tim. 5:18, cf. v. 17; the illustration is to buttress the requirement of "honour," or "double honour" for presbyters or elders, i.e., pastors of the church). These two passages illustrate the requirement, "Thou shalt not steal," in terms of a specific case law, revealing the extent of that case in its implications. In his epistle to Timothy, Paul refers also to the law which in effect declares,

by case law, that “The labourer is worthy of his reward.” The reference is to Leviticus 19:13, “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning,” and Deut. 24:14, “Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates (cf. v. 15). This is cited by Jesus, Luke 10:7, “The laborer is worthy of his hire.”

If it is a sin to defraud an ox of his livelihood, then it is also a sin to defraud a man of his wages: it is *theft* in both cases. If theft is God’s classification of an offense against an animal, how much more so an offense against God’s apostle and minister? The implication then is, how much more deadly is stealing from God. Malachi makes this very clear:

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? in tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all the nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts (Mal. 3:8-12).

This example of case law illustrates not only the *meaning* of case law in Scripture, but also its *necessity*. Without case law, God’s law would soon be reduced to an extremely limited area of meaning. This, of course, is precisely what has happened. Those who deny the present validity of the law apart from the Ten Commandments

have as a consequence a very limited definition of theft. Their definition usually follows the civil law of their country, is humanistic, and is not radically different from the definitions given by Moslems, Buddhists, and humanists. But, in analyzing later the case laws illustrative of the law, “Thou shalt not steal,” we shall see how far-reaching its meaning is.

The law, then, *first* asserts principles, *second*, it cites cases to develop the implications of those principles, and, *third*, the law has as its purpose and direction *the restitution of God’s order*.

This *third* aspect is basic to Biblical law, and it illustrates again the difference between Biblical law and humanistic law. According to one scholar, “Justice in its true and proper sense is *a principle of co-ordination between subjective beings*.”²⁹ Such a concept of justice is not only humanistic but also subjective. Instead of a basic *objective order* of justice, there is instead merely an *emotional condition* called justice.

In a humanistic law-system, restitution is possible and often exists, but again it is not the restoration of God’s fundamental order but of man’s condition. Restitution then is entirely to man.³⁰ Biblical law requires restitution to the offended person, but even more basic to the law is the demand for the restoration of God’s order. It is not merely the courts of law which are operative in terms of restitution. For Biblical law, restitution is indeed, *a*), to be required by courts of law of all offenders, but, even more, *b*), is the purpose and direction of the law in its entirety, the restoration of God’s order, a glorious and good creation which serves and glorifies its Creator. Moreover, *c*), God’s sovereign court and law operates in terms of restitution at all times, to curse disobedience and hamper thereby its challenge to and devastation of God’s order, and to bless and prosper the obedient restoration of God’s order. Malachi’s declaration concerning tithes, to return to our illustration, implies this, and, indeed, states it explicitly: they are “cursed with a curse” for robbing God of His tithes. Therefore, their fields are not produc-

tive, since they work against God's restitutive purpose. Obedience to God's law of the tithe, honoring instead of robbing God, will deluge His people with blessings. The word "deluge" is appropriate: the expression "open . . . the windows of heaven" recalls the Flood (Gen. 7:11), which was a central example of a curse. But the purpose of curses is also restitution: the curse prevents the ungodly from overthrowing God's order. The men of Noah's generation were destroyed in their evil imaginations, as they conspired against God's order (Gen. 6:5), in order to institute the process of restoration through Noah.

But to return to our original illustration of Biblical law, "Thou shalt not steal." The New Testament illustrates restitution after extortion in the form of unjust taxation in the person of Zaccheus (Luke 19:2-9), who was pronounced a saved man after declaring his intention of making full restitution. Restitution is clearly in view in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:23-26). According to one scholar,

In Eph. iv. 28, St. Paul shows how the principle of restitution was to be extended. He who had been a robber must not only cease from theft, but must labour with his hands that he might restore what he had wrongfully taken away, but in case those whom he had wronged could not be found, restitution should be made to the poor.³¹

This fact of restitution or restoration is spoken of, in its relationship to God, in three ways. *First*, there is the restitution or restoration of God's sovereign law-word by proclamation. St. John the Baptist, by his preaching, restored the law-word to the life of God's people. Jesus so declared it: "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not" (Matt. 17:11, 12). There is then, *second*, the restoration which comes by subjecting all things to Christ and establishing a godly order over the world (Matt. 28:18-20; II Cor.

10:5; Rev. 11:15, etc.). *Third*, with the second coming, there is the total, final restoration which comes with the second coming, and towards which history moves; the second coming is the total and culminating rather than sole act of “the times of restitution” (Acts 3:21).

God’s covenant with Adam required him to exercise dominion over the earth and to subdue it (Gen. 1:26 ff.) under God and according to God’s law-word. This relationship of man to God was a covenant (Hosea 6:7; cp. marginal reading).

But all of Scripture proceeds from the truth that man always stands in covenant relation to God. All God’s dealings with Adam in paradise presuppose this relation: for God talked with Adam and revealed Himself to him, and Adam knew God in the wind of day. Besides, salvation is always presented as the establishment and realization of God’s covenant. . . .

. . . this covenant relation is not to be conceived as something incidental, as a means to an end, as a relation that was established by way of an agreement, but as a fundamental relationship in which Adam stood to God by virtue of his creation.³²

The restoration of that covenant relationship was the work of Christ, His grace to His elect people. The fulfilment of that covenant is their great commission: to subdue all things and all nations to Christ and His law-word.

The creation mandate was precisely the requirement that man subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it. There is not one word of Scripture to indicate or imply that this mandate was ever revoked. There is every word of Scripture to declare that this mandate must and shall be fulfilled, and “scripture cannot be broken,” according to Jesus (John 10:35). Those who attempt to break it shall themselves be broken.³³

Notes

1. Friedrich Heer, *The Intellectual History of Europe* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1966), p. 184.
2. Joseph G. Brin, "The Social Order Under Hebrew Law," *The Law Society Journal*, vol. VII, no. 3 (August, 1936), pp. 383-387.
3. Henry Bamford Parkes, "Morals and Law Enforcement in Colonial England," *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 5 (July, 1932), pp. 431-452.
4. Charles Hoadly, ed., *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New Haven from 1638 to 1649* (Hartford: for the Editor, 1857), p. 69.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
6. John A. Albro, ed., *The Works of Thomas Shepard*, III, *Theses Sabbatical* (1649) (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853; New York: AMS Press, 1967), p. 49.
7. Hermann Kleinknecht and W. Gutbrod, *Law* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1962), p. 21.
8. Mao Tse-Tung, *The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), p. 3.
9. Morris Raphael Cohen, *Reason and Law* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 84f.
10. Ernest F. Kevan, *The Moral Law* (Jenkintown, Penna.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1963) p. 5f. S. R. Driver, "Law (In Old Testament)," in James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. III (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), p. 64.
11. Kleinknecht and Gutbrod, *Law*, p. 44.
12. W. J. Harrelson, "Law in the OT," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), III, p. 77.
13. Kleinknecht and Gutbrod, *Law*, p. 125.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 81-91.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
16. Hugh H. Currie, "Law of God," in James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), II, p. 15.
17. Olaf Moe, "Law," in James Hastings, ed., *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), I, p. 685.
18. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King, The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), p. 16. See also J. A. Thompson: *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1964).
19. Kline, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
21. Gustave Friedrich Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1883), p. 177.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
23. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, p. 41.
24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. IV, chap. XX, para. xiv. In the John Allen translation (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), II, p. 787f.

25. See H. de Jongste and J. M. van Krimpen, *The Bible and the Life of the Christian*, for similar opinions (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1968), p. 66ff.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
28. The very term “nature” is mythical. See R. J. Rushdoony, “The Myth of Nature,” in *The Mythology of Science* (Nutley, N. J.: The Craig Press, 1967), pp. 96-98.
29. Giorgio Del Vecchio, *Justice, An Historical and Philosophical Essay*, edited with additional notes by A. H. Campbell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1956 [1952, 1924 Italian edition]), p. 2.
30. See, for a study of such a concept, Dr. Stephen Schafer, *Restitution to Victims of Crimes* (London: Stevens and Sons; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960).
31. John Henry Blunt, ed., *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology* (London: Longmans, Green, 1891), p. 645.
32. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), p. 221f.
33. H. de Jongste and J. M. van Krimpen, *The Bible and the Life of the Christian*, p. 27, recognize this, “That mandate has never been revoked,” and then proceed to revoke it by their amillennial presuppositions by foreseeing the revocation of the mandate by the triumph of the anti-Christ: “There is no room for optimism: towards the end, in the camps of the satanic and the anti-Christ, culture will sicken, and the Church will yearn to be delivered from its distress” (p. 85).

