

GOD'S GRACE SHINING  
THROUGH THE LAW



# GOD'S GRACE SHINING THROUGH THE LAW

Edited by  
Joel R. Beeke



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*God's Grace Shining through the Law*

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## Preface

Puritan Stephen Charnock wrote, “The commands of the gospel require the obedience of the creature. There is not one precept in the gospel which interferes with any rule in the law, but strengthens it and represents it in its true exactness; the heat to scorch us is allayed, but the light to direct us is not extinguished. Not the least allowance to any sin is granted; not the least affection to any sin is indulged. The law is tempered by the gospel but not nulled and cast out of doors by it. It enacts that none but those that are sanctified shall be glorified; that there must be grace here if we expect glory hereafter; that we must not presume to expect an admittance to the vision of God’s face unless our souls be clothed with a robe of holiness (Heb. 12:14). It requires an obedience to the whole law in our intention and purpose and an endeavor to observe it in our actions; it promotes the honor of God and ordains a universal charity among men; it reveals the whole counsel of God and furnishes men with the holiest laws.”<sup>1</sup>

The 2020 Puritan Reformed Conference committee had a desire to see the exactness of these truths articulated to a new generation. The Grace of Law Conference brought together an exceptional group of speakers who examined the intertwining themes of grace and law, both from biblical and historical perspectives. In the following pages, you will learn of the unique and helpful contributions made to this topic by men such as Augustine, Ralph Erskine, and the Puritans. You will also be challenged to examine your own soul in light of the grace of God that

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1. Quoted in *Ore from the Puritans’ Mine: The Essential Collection of Puritan Quotations*, comp. Dale W. Smith (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 304.

shines through the law of God. Lastly, you will find practical and edifying help for daily living—help that flows out of the grace of God in the gospel, empowered by the soul-searching Holy Spirit, and in accord with the holy law of God.

Christians throughout the centuries have struggled to understand the relationship between the law of God and the grace of God. Sadly, many have fallen into one of two pitfalls: they have either rejected the law of God (antinomianism), or they have rejected the grace of God (legalism). The following conference addresses will help Christians navigate through these errors and live in joyful obedience to the Word of God.

It is the prayer of those involved in the annual Puritan Reformed Conference that this volume will be used of our sovereign Lord as both a warning signal and a welcome sign to everyone who reads these addresses. May they challenge each of us to examine our standing before a holy and just God. May they also encourage our hearts to rest in the grace of God that is ours in the gospel. Above all, may the addresses contained in this book motivate each of us to live *solī Deo gloria!*

Thanks to each of the speakers for contributing to both the 2020 conference and to this volume. I also thank Liz Smith and Ian Turner for assisting me in editing, Gary den Hollander for proofing, Linda den Hollander for typesetting, and Amy Zevenbergen for the cover design.

If you are able, please consider joining us at a future Puritan Reformed conference, held annually at the end of August. Please remember the seminary faculty, staff, and students in your prayers and with any contributions you are able and willing to give in partnership with us.

—Joel R. Beeke



# HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

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## The Puritans on the Grace of Law

Joel R. Beeke

In Part 2 of John Bunyan's classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the character Great-heart tells a pilgrim named Mercy of the conduct of three men named Simple, Sloth, and Presumption: "They brought up an ill report of your Lord," says Great-heart, "persuading others that he was a hard task-master.... Farther, they would call the bread of God, husks; the comforts of his children, fancies; the travail and labour of pilgrims, things to no purpose." "Presumption," in particular, explains Bunyan, "presumes to find favour with God, in a way which his word does not promise, or expects salvation at the end, without the means prescribed by God for attaining it. Such are your licentious Antinomian spirits, who boldly presume to hope for salvation by Christ, without being conformed to the image of Christ... for without this real personal holiness, no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14)."<sup>1</sup>

It is no surprise that in our day the Christian's practical use of the Law as a means of grace comes under frequent attack by those who, knowingly or ignorantly, are rechanneling the "licentious Antinomian spirits" that made Bunyan recoil.<sup>2</sup> It may be surprising, however, to consider that those who hold to rigid legalism, the error on the other side of the fence, also attack the conviction that the Law is of grace and is a means of grace. As Tim Keller writes, "The root of both legalism and antinomianism," in fact, "is the same"—both stemming from the

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1. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 2 (H. Trapp; A. Hogg, 1778), 54. I thank Ian Turner for his research assistance on this chapter.

2. In this chapter, I am capitalizing the word *Law* when it refers to the Ten Commandments to distinguish it from meanings given to the word *law*.

serpent's lie in the garden of Eden "that you can't trust the goodness of God or his commitment to our happiness and well-being and that, therefore, if we obey God fully, we'll miss out and be miserable." Both antinomianism and legalism "assume that any commands given to us are evidence that [God] is unwilling to bless us," and both "fail to see obedience as the way to give the gracious God delight as well as the way to become our true selves."<sup>3</sup>

The Puritans aimed to be faithful to God and His Word when faced with such issues as the uses of the Law, the effect of Christ's work on our relationship to the Law, and the place of the Law in the Christian life. Many of the Puritan voices in this conversation were defending orthodoxy in the controversy with the Antinomians.<sup>4</sup> They discovered God's gracious intent in the giving of the Law and the blessedness and delight in store for the Law-keeping Christian. The Law thus became central in Puritan theology: "Sin is the transgression of Law, the death of Christ is the satisfaction of Law, justification is the verdict of Law, and sanctification is the believer's fulfillment of the Law."<sup>5</sup>

As will become apparent in this chapter, the qualities for which the Puritans are known—passion for Christ, zeal for godliness, and effectiveness in ministry—did not emerge despite their love for the Law but because of it: "The Puritans taught the exquisite doctrine of the grace of Law. They took it into their lives and were ennobled by it. That it brought a seriousness into life no one can deny, but it was a seriousness with a glory."<sup>6</sup>

This chapter presents the Puritan doctrine of the grace of the Law, drawing on the insights of over three dozen Puritans. For the overall structure of this message, I am indebted to Ernest F. Kevan's outstanding dissertation already quoted, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan*

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3. Tim Keller, foreword to *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* by Sinclair B. Ferguson (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2016), 13–14.

4. Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1964; repr., Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 28–31. Quotations from Kevan's magisterial work will be noted only in footnotes.

5. Kevan, 21.

6. Kevan, 268.

*Theology*—the best modern work on the Puritan doctrine of the grace of the Law. After covering some Puritan basics on the Law of God and sin, we will consider the place of the Law in God’s purpose of grace, the place of the Law in the Christian life, the blessing of Christian Law-keeping, and the power and freedom of the “in-written” Law—that is, the Law inscribed on the regenerate heart.

### **The Law of God and Sin**

The Puritans often addressed the question, What is the place of the Law in the Christian life? We must consider the Puritans on the nature of the Law, the knowledge of it by man, and the relationship between the Law and sin.

#### *Law Is God Exercising His Right to Command*

What is the nature of the Law? All sorts of answers to this question may arise if man is seen as the measure of all things. The strong bent to humanism we see today was just as strong in the seventeenth century, and the Puritans rightly met this humanism with a robust doctrine of “the majesty of God, with its corollary in the doctrine of the law of God.”<sup>7</sup> The Puritans never thought about the Law as an abstract concept but as a part of their “awareness of the exalted Lawgiver: behind the *lex* (Law) stood the Legislator.” The Law of God is thus “the expression of Divine majesty.”<sup>8</sup> As Anthony Burgess summarized, “Law is law only if God be God.”<sup>9</sup> The Law is God exercising His supreme will.

The Law is personal to God because it reflects the perfections of His nature.<sup>10</sup> Because the Law is inseparable from God’s personal will and glory, it has a permanent quality from man’s creation onward.<sup>11</sup> God’s

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7. Kevan, 50.

8. Kevan, 48. When the pagan nations see the majesty of God’s Law given to Israel, they cannot but see the majesty of the Lawgiver: “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (Deut. 4:7–8).

9. Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated* (London: A. Miller for Tho. Underhill, 1664), 2:379.

10. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 48.

11. Kevan, 47.

Law is not like human laws, for when we break a human governor's law, it does not violate his or her person—but, as Thomas Taylor wrote, “God and his image in the Law, are so straitly united, as one cannot wrong the one, and not the other.”<sup>12</sup> Since sin is the breaking of the Law of God, we should estimate it “not merely by intrinsic wrongness of the action” but by the offense it gives to God's majesty.<sup>13</sup> Sin is therefore always a personal affront to God, since the Law “bears the very character of God himself.”<sup>14</sup>

Since the Law is essentially a revelation and statement of God's will,<sup>15</sup> it is never necessary for God to explain Himself, and sometimes, as Thomas Manton noted, God gives “no other account of his law, but this: ‘I am the Lord.’”<sup>16</sup> God's right to command, however, “is not a doctrine of Divine arbitrariness.” To the Puritans, the Law of God did not make Him deistically remote, but personally near—the same God who has the right to command is the God “whose grace and truth are revealed in Christ.”<sup>17</sup>

### *The Law of God in the Heart of Man*

God wrote His Law on the hearts of men when He made us (Rom. 2:14–15). John Lightfoot said, “Adam heard as much in the garden, as Israel did at Sinai, but onely in fewer words, and without thunder.”<sup>18</sup> And Vavasor Powell added, “It's probable he had written in his nature the substance of the Ten Commandments.”<sup>19</sup> “This in-written Law is the

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12. Thomas Taylor, *Regula Vitae, The Rule of the Law under the Gospel* (London, 1631), 233. Since the Law is “the immediate expression of His perfections, then whether ‘what God willed was right’ or ‘what was right God willed’ was irrelevant, for they must merge into one and the same thing” (77). The Puritans taught that we do right “from the simple motive of worshipping God in utter obedience” (77).

13. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 251–52.

14. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 166.

15. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 50.

16. Thomas Manton, *Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm* (London, 1681–1701), 3:172.

17. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 52.

18. John Lightfoot, *Miscellanies, Christian and Judaicall, and others* (London, 1629), 182–83.

19. Vavasor Powell, *Christ and Moses Excellency* (London, 1650), 186. See also Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 60.

very foundation of conscience”<sup>20</sup> and a vehicle of man’s blessedness. The Law was “not burdensome in its original purpose” but “the essence of man’s delight.”<sup>21</sup> Richard Baxter said, “It is a contradiction to be happy and unholy.”<sup>22</sup> John Preston illustrated it more quaintly:

As the flame lives in the oyle, or as the creature lives by its food; so a man lives by keeping the Commandements of God, that is, this spiritual life, this life of grace, it is maintained by doing the Commandements: whereas on the other side, every motion out of the ways of Gods Commandements, and into sin, is like the motion of the fish out of the water, every motion is a motion to death.<sup>23</sup>

Because the Law is an expression of God’s holiness, the nature of the Law is spiritual. “The Law’s demands are inward, touching motive and desire, and are not concerned solely with outward action.”<sup>24</sup> Thomas Wilson said, “The spirituality of the Law makes demands on the believer which he is unable to fulfill”; only the Spirit, who is the author of the Law, can help us obey the Law “in some measure of truth and sincerity.”<sup>25</sup>

When sin came into the world, however, it diminished our knowledge of the Law, weakened our moral ability, and rendered us completely unable to fulfill it.<sup>26</sup> The fall in Paradise crushed human strength to obey, “yet the obligation to Obedience remains. We are no more discharged of our duties, because we have no strength to doe it: than a debter is quitted of his bands because he wants money to make payment.”<sup>27</sup> Burgess wrote that God preserved some knowledge of the moral Law within the heart of man to leave men inexcusable and to provide “a ground of conversion,”<sup>28</sup> though “man has no power to convert himself.”<sup>29</sup>

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20. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 59.

21. Kevan, 60–61.

22. Richard Baxter, *End of Doctrinal Controversies* (London, 1691), 205.

23. John Preston, *Sermons: New Life* (London: 1631), 53.

24. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 63.

25. Thomas Wilson, *A Commentarie upon the...Romanes* (London, 1614), 220.

26. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 69.

27. Kevan, 152. William Pemble, *Vindicae Fidei* (Oxford, 1625), 91–92.

28. Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining* (London, 1652, 1654), 337.

29. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis* (London, 1646), 94–95.

*The Law, Sin, and the Believer's Imperfections*

Many know that the Puritans “took a serious view of sin,” but this attitude grew from an understanding of sin’s “relation to the Law.”<sup>30</sup> The Puritans taught that the Law and sin are correlatives, for “where no law is, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). While the Law defines, restrains, and condemns sin, convicting the sinner of his guilt, it also, paradoxically, provokes sin because of man’s corrupted nature (Rom. 7:5, 8).<sup>31</sup> And yet, the Law still condemns sin and convicts the sinner, not because “of anything inherent in the law” but because “of the evil that is inherent in us.”<sup>32</sup> Edward Elton explained,

Without the true knowledge of the Law, the corruption of nature lies hid, and as it were dead. . . . Men are ready to soothe up themselves; and to think well of themselves. . . . They bless themselves, and think they are well and in every good case. The Law of God. . . makes men see and feel themselves as dead men, and in a most wretched case, by reason of their sins.<sup>33</sup>

The Puritans preached the Law, in what they called “legal preaching,” to awaken men to an awareness of sin for, as Giles Firmin noted, “men may be convinced of sin without the gospel, but not without the Law.”<sup>34</sup> In typical Puritan thought, John Flavel wrote, “The Law of God hath a Soul-winning and Heart-Cutting Efficacy,” and until the soul “be wounded for sin, it will never be converted from Sin, and brought effectually to Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup>

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30. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 107. “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature” (WLC 24).

31. This provoking function of the Law is an “accidental” contradiction (not by design). “In the unregenerate it doth by accident make these lusts swell higher.” Thomas Goodwin, *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness before God*, in *Works* (London, 1692), 10:64. See also Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 81.

32. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 165.

33. Edward Elton, *Complaint of a Sanctified Sinner*, in *Three Excellent and Pious Treatises*, Part 1 (London, 1618), 86, 89, 95.

34. Giles Firmin, *The Real Christian* (London, 1670), 51–53. Legal preaching is “the great work that the Ministers of God have to do in their congregations in these times.” Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 143.

35. John Flavel, *Method of Grace* (London: 1681), 221, 224.



Antinomians such as John Eaton and Tobias Crisp stirred up controversy on the subject of sin in the believer, denying that “his shortcomings [are] to be regarded as sin.”<sup>36</sup> As Whitney Gamble summarized, to them, “God’s gracious act of accepting Christ’s mediatorship meant not only that God no longer viewed His people as sinners but also that believers should no longer view themselves as such.”<sup>37</sup> One of the hallmarks of the Antinomians was to erroneously use “the categories of justification when speaking of sanctification.”<sup>38</sup> To them, “justification eliminated the need for ongoing sanctification” since believers would “automatically... walk in the law.”<sup>39</sup> “The root of the antinomian fallacy was in the concept of the justification of the believer’s works,” but “it is morally impossible to justify sinful works; God cannot call evil good, or make unjust works just. Sin can never be anything but sin.”<sup>40</sup>

Walter Cradock insightfully links spiritual depression to its root “because in some sort, even to this day, you mix sanctification with justification.”<sup>41</sup> The Antinomians also spoke of sin as a disease, but it is more than a disease. Sin springs not from weakness but from wickedness.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the Puritans taught that believers must recognize and humbly confess their indwelling sin as sin.<sup>43</sup> Thomas Goodwin taught that believers often experience that “a Regenerate man is... guilty of more known sins than an unregenerate man,” for the sins of the believer are not only against knowledge, they are also sins “against mercy.”<sup>44</sup> John Ball wrote that after a relapse a believer must recover “by a speedy

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36. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 93.

37. Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 55.

38. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 95–97.

39. Gamble, *Christ and the Law*, 53. “This doctrine that the justified children of God must be kept from sin, and driven to holy walking for fear of correction and punishments, doth quite mar the true nature of sanctification.” John Eaton, *The Honey-combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone* (London, 1642), 145. John Eaton was “arguably the first Antinomian.” Gamble, *Christ and the Law*, 155.

40. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 99–100.

41. Walter Cradock, “Privilege and Practice of the Saints,” in *Gospel Holiness* (London, 1651), 234–35.

42. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 103.

43. Kevan, 79.

44. Thomas Goodwin, *Aggravation of Sin*, in *Works* (London, 1637), 4:169, 185, 188.

consideration of what he hath done, renewing his repentance with sorrow and shame, bewailing his sinne before God, reforming his life, and laying hold upon the promise of mercy.”<sup>45</sup> Sin is no less sin because it is committed by a believer; so the Christian experience that begins with the cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13) must be continued by the prayer, “Cleanse thou me from secret faults” (Ps. 19:12).<sup>46</sup>

The application to us today is obvious: we must acknowledge and confess our sins as wickedness, not excuse or explain them away as weakness. Sin must remain sin to us. Is that true for you as a justified, assured believer? Is sin “exceeding sinful” to you (Rom. 7:13)?

### **The Place of the Law in God's Purpose of Grace**

If you ask Christians about the place of the Law in the Christian life, you are sure to get many mixed answers, with some even denying the place of the Law altogether. What did the Puritans teach about the place of the Law in God's purpose of grace?

#### *The Law and the Covenant of Grace*

The Puritans wanted to integrate the Law of God into the entire system of Christian theology. They taught that at the moment of man's fall, God entered into relation with sinful man not on the basis of a covenant of works but on the basis of a covenant of grace in which, from its beginning in Eden onward, “the Redeemed of the Lord were...brought into a new-Relation to God in...Christ” and were accepted “upon terms of faith.”<sup>47</sup> This covenant of grace is the same throughout the Old and New Testaments.<sup>48</sup> This means that all God's dealings with His people since

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45. John Ball, *A Short Catechism Contayning the Principles of Religion* (London, 1642), 41.

46. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 79–80.

47. Nehemiah Cox, *A Discourse of the Covenants that God Made with Men before the Law* (London, 1681), 47; see also Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 120–21.

48. The Puritans held a variety of views about the Mosaic covenant, making any “accurate classification of the Puritans on the basis of their views” difficult. In general, Puritans either regarded the Mosaic covenant “as a Covenant of Works” or “a Covenant of Grace.” And yet, so many concessions are made by writers on either side that “the cumulative weight of the concessions” shows that “it was agreed that the mosaic

the fall, including the giving of the Law, had gracious intentions. The Law was given as a means of grace.

The Antinomians, however, “were unable to perceive any grace in the giving of the law,” so they challenged “the preaching of the law as an instrument of grace” as “illegal preaching,”<sup>49</sup> sometimes even calling those who preached it “ministers of the devil.”<sup>50</sup> But to the Puritans, it was plain that the Law had evangelical intentions. We need only consider, according to Burgess, “the way God introduces Himself, the pardon of sin that is offered, the faith that is accepted, the sacrifice and blood that are provided, and the continuity of the covenant with Abraham and Isaac.”<sup>51</sup> The Mosaic covenant, therefore, is consistent with grace. Thus, we must look at the Law with “gospel spectacles.”<sup>52</sup> “God doth use the law instrumentally, for to quicken up grace, & increase it in us.”<sup>53</sup>

Grace is opposed to the Law only if the Law is used as a means of attaining righteousness. The Israelites “notoriously perverted” God’s intention in the Law: “By separating the law from faith, they made law a cause of death and put it into apparent opposition to Christ.”<sup>54</sup> Richard Byfield wrote, “The Law for righteousness, and Christ for righteousness, do stand in direct opposition; yet the Law is not against the gospel: the Law drives to Christ alone.”<sup>55</sup> When the apostle Paul writes that we are not “under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14), he does not set grace in opposition to the Law but to the *wrong use* of the Law. “Paul does not dismiss the Law from the life of the believer,” said John Owen, “but

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covenant was a form of the Covenant of Grace; and this view was embodied in the *Confession of Faith*.” Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 113–14, 117. See also WCF 7.5–6.

49. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 124, 126.

50. Gamble, *Christ and the Law*, 19.

51. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 151–236; see also Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 123–24. “The Passover sacrament was the sign of grace”; the preface to the Ten Commandments is an expression of grace, indicating “that obedience is to be in the channel of the covenant,” of having God be our God; and “at Sinai there was a formal betrothal between God and his people.” John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1645), 108–42.

52. Francis Roberts, *Of God’s Covenants... The Myserie and Marrow of the Bible* (London, 1657), 789.

53. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 183.

54. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 131.

55. Richard Byfield, *The Gospels Glory, without prejudice to the Law* (London, 1659), 107.

grapples with it in its mistaken and perverted use.” It was never God’s intention for man to be justified by the Law.<sup>56</sup> Legalistic Law-keeping is thus an offense against the Law of God. Therefore, any antithesis between the Law of God and the grace of the Gospel is rooted not in these revelations but in the pride and hardness of our hearts that pervert the right end of the Law.<sup>57</sup>

*Christ Is the “End” of the Law—But the Law Has Not Ended*

What does it mean, then, that Christ is the “end of the law” (Rom. 10:4)? “The antinomians held that the Law was abrogated, the Baxterians, that the Law was modified, and the Puritans, that the Law was established.”<sup>58</sup> The Antinomians read “the end of the law” to mean the Law’s termination. Many Puritans, however, understood “end” to mean “purpose” or “intended aim.”<sup>59</sup> They maintained that “the eternal Law of God was incapable of being terminated in time.” The “end of the law” is thus the fulfillment of the moral Law by Christ and, through His work, “the obedience of regenerate sinners.”<sup>60</sup>

To explain how the Law is still valid in the wake of Christ’s redemptive work, the Puritans drew the necessary distinction between a commandment and a covenant, or in other words, between the Law’s substance and its circumstance or context. We must not confuse the concepts of command and covenant: the Law has commanding and covenanting aspects,

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56. John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, in *Works* (Oxford, 1656), 6:47; Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 133.

57. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 251–53.

58. Kevan, 137.

59. Some Puritans did hold that “the end” meant “cessation,” but this was not problematic since they also read “Law” to mean “a means of obtaining righteousness.” Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 140.

60. Kevan, 165. Most of the Puritans affirmed that as Christ fulfilled the moral Law, God imputed to believers the righteousness of Christ’s active and passive obedience. In His active obedience, Christ performed the whole Law and thus “has both recovered the glory of the Law, and fully met its claims.” Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Works* (London, 1692), 5:102, 125, 180. Christ in His passive obedience has “felt and borne the weight of God’s wrath” on the cross (WLC 49). The Antinomians misread the doctrine of imputation to mean that *holiness* is imputed to believers—again, confusing the categories of justification and sanctification. It is *righteousness*, not holiness, that is imputed. See also Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, 172.

and these must be distinguished. Thomas Taylor said that the believer is under the Law in its substance, its *command*, but not in its circumstance, its *covenant*.<sup>61</sup> “God’s covenants change, but the same constant Law is to be honoured throughout.”<sup>62</sup> When the new covenant replaced the old, “the Law as a Covenant was abrogated,” but the Law still has force as a commanding rule.<sup>63</sup> The grace of Christ *does not annul the Law as a command*: “If the law might be disannulled as to new creatures, then why doth the Spirit of God write it with such legible characters in their hearts?”<sup>64</sup> The saving purpose of the Law found its fulfillment in Christ, whose work of redemption has become the end—the fulfillment—of the Law, not its termination.

Therefore, the Law as a covenant of works is perfectly fulfilled by Christ, and we are dead to it;<sup>65</sup> that is, we are *dead to the Law as a covenant* in the sense that we are “never more looking for righteousness and justification of life that way” and no longer expecting by duties to earn God’s favor.<sup>66</sup> The Law in its commanding aspect remains, however, as a rule for the Christian walk.

Is this true in your life experientially? Has the Holy Spirit taught you that you are dead to the Law as a covenant in terms of your justification but that you are under the Law as a rule or command in terms of your sanctification?

### The Place of the Law in the Christian Life

As seen above, the Law’s end is in Christ’s work, but the Law is not abolished, nor does the experience of God’s grace detract from the authority and permanence of the Law of God. So, how did the Puritans work out the implications of this in Christian experience? First, the human obligation to obey God continues in the gospel. Second, the Puritans press that the proper motive in obeying God’s Law is that He

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61. Taylor, *Regula Vitae*, 19.

62. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 251.

63. Kevan, 151. See also William Hinde, *The Office and Use of the Morall Law of God in the days of the Gospell* (London, 1622), 16.

64. Manton, *Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm*, 1:5.

65. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 159.

66. Byfield, *Gospels Glory*, 36.

commanded it. Finally, the demands of the Law are unchanged, along with its threatenings, rewards, and chastisements.

### *Humans Are Obligated to Obey God*

The bedrock of the Puritans' conviction that the Law must be the Christian's rule of life was rooted in our Creator-creature relation to God. Grace does not lessen, but increases, human obligation. "The challenge to God's sovereignty contained in man's fall must be matched in his restoration by the renewed recognition of that sovereignty."<sup>67</sup> This was the fertile ground that nurtured in the Puritans "one of their outstanding characteristics": the holy fear of God. The Puritans dreaded impiety: "We are not to consult whether the will of God is to be obeyed or no," wrote William Ames, "for such a consultation cannot be free from impiety: but we are to enquire only to this end, that we may understand what is the will of God."<sup>68</sup> As Samuel Bolton put it, "There were an impossibility of having one sin forgiven, as long as one sin is unforsaken."<sup>69</sup> Therefore, we should obey God, in holy fear, because He commands us to do so, and should be careful not to take license as liberty.<sup>70</sup>

"One of the most established Puritan convictions" is "the continuance of the believer's moral obligation to fulfil the law."<sup>71</sup> It is unthinkable that grace should abolish the Law. When God in Christ became our Savior, He did not cease to be our Sovereign. In fact, grace increases our obligation to obey the Law of God.<sup>72</sup>

### *Obeying the Law because God Commanded It*

The Antinomians rejected the concept of commandment. They held that "to serve God because of commandment to do so was legalistic and unspiritual."<sup>73</sup> There is "no Moses now," and so, if we perform actions

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67. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 173; see also Stephen Charnock, *Discourse on the existence and attributes of God*, in *Works* (London, 1682), 2:494.

68. William Ames, *Conscience, with the Power and Cases thereof* (London, 1639), 4:25

69. Samuel Bolton, *The Sinfulness of Sin* (London, 1646), 37.

70. Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist*, Part 2 (London, 1648), 93.

71. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 193.

72. Kevan, 251–53.

73. Such Antinomians were John Eaton, Robert Towne, and John Saltmarsh. Kevan, 167.

merely as commanded, we are brought into bondage. We would sympathize with this statement if the “Law as a covenant” were in view, but most of these Antinomian discussions did not distinguish the “Law as commandment and the Law as covenant.”<sup>74</sup> The Puritan reply to these discussions was clear: Burgess said that we must serve God as those who are “admonished, instructed, and commanded by the Law of God.”<sup>75</sup> John Bunyan complained of the “ranter” who pretended they “could do what they would and not sin” and exclaimed, “Oh! These temptations were suitable to my flesh.”<sup>76</sup> Baxter explained that “most of the prophane people in every parish where yet I have liv’d, are Antinomians.... And almost all the successe of my labours which hath so much comforted me, hath been in bringing men from natural Antinomianism or libertinism, to true repentance and saving faith in Christ.”<sup>77</sup> The Puritans “affirmed it to be one of the marks of true believers that they perform, or refrain from, an action ‘when they see that it is the commandment of him who loveth them most dearly.’”<sup>78</sup> As Burgess noted, “Truly good actions are those that are performed because they are commanded. Do not therefore this or that, because this will agree with thy ends... but do it because God hath required it.”<sup>79</sup>

### *The Demands of the Law Are Unchanged*

The demands of the Law have not been altered by grace. William Strong wrote, “It is true, that perfect obedience... is required of us, as well as of Adam... but yet in the Covenant of Grace it is not required as the righteousness of the Covenant”—but rather as a rule of walking.<sup>80</sup> Taylor noted that if we see that Christ is the Lawgiver, we will realize that believers are not outside of “the compass of the Law for instruction, for

74. Kevan, 169.

75. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 51, 277.

76. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London, 1666), 21.

77. Richard Baxter, *Rich; Baxters Apology against the Modest Exceptions of Mr. T. Blake* (London, 1654), preface.

78. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 183; Richard Rogers, preface to *Seven Treatises* (London, 1603), see also 79.

79. Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 70.

80. William Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants* (London, 1678), 139.

subjection...in so far as it is written within their hearts.”<sup>81</sup> For Christ “will be Savior to none but those to whom he is a Master,” concluded John Preston.<sup>82</sup>

As the demands of God's Law are unchangeable, its threatenings, promises, and chastisements are still active for the believer. Believers need many goads, such as threatenings and rewards, to keep them motivated to piety because they have “much flesh and corruption in [them].”<sup>83</sup> As one can imagine, Antinomians repudiated the idea of threatenings, promises of reward, and chastisements, but “such threatenings as are made to believers are evangelical in purpose,”<sup>84</sup> and promises of reward, said William Perkins, “are not made to the worke, but to the worker”<sup>85</sup> as expressions of “God's love of complacency towards His obedient child.”<sup>86</sup> “Penalty and reward spring from the same root, but their reasons are different. The penalty is by due, but the reward is by bounty.”<sup>87</sup> Similarly, divine chastisement for our sin is not *forensically* vindicatory but an expression of *fatherly* displeasure toward the sins of His children.

The Puritans “lived in an awareness of the commanding authority of God, and this gave glory and dignity to all their actions. The Antinomian minimizing of this—although with the intention of magnifying grace—tended to obscure the divine perfections and thus to destroy the glory of God.”<sup>88</sup> In this context, the application of the Law's place in our Christian life today should be obvious: without the conviction that Law must be obeyed because it is Law, we cannot establish a biblical doctrine of sanctification. “Only the heart that can say ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God,’ can be adjudged to be truly converted and godly.”<sup>89</sup> Does that delight resonate in your soul as well? Can you say with Paul, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22)?

81. Taylor, *Regula Vitae*, 31–32.

82. John Preston, “Of Faith,” in *Breast-plate of Faith and Love* (London, 1630), 42.

83. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 14.

84. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 188.

85. William Perkins, *Epistle to the Galatians* (Cambridge, 1604), 274.

86. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 189.

87. Kevan, 190; see also Coxe, *Of the Covenants*, 25.

88. Kevan, 176.

89. Kevan, 183; see also Psalm 40:8.