

SIC ET NON: VIEWS IN REVIEW

Westminster Seminary California Distinctives? Part III

I. Law and Gospel

By Mark A. Garcia with Response by Michael S. Horton

The Place of Law in the Gospel of Glory

*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.
And his commandments are not burdensome* (1 John 5:3)

“WE BELIEVE,” OR, RECOVERING A SENSE OF PROPORTION

The Church must remember the primitive Christian conviction, rooted in the primitive gospel, that the commandments of God are not burdensome. This is good news for those who understand that keeping the commandments of God is, as John says in his first epistle, the material of one's love for God. This love enfolded in obedience to commands had long escaped Israel, but she had been taught to hope in its arrival in the fullness of time. The gospel announces its arrival.

But we easily miss this driving desire of the scriptures of Israel, this longing for and lack of the new heart so acutely felt. We easily miss it because it has become customary in some pockets of the church, historically and presently, to conceive of the need created by the Fall, and thus of the remedy, along primarily and sometimes exclusively forensic and judicial lines. The gospel ends up as the message of Christ's payment of the penalty of sin, and the gift in him of justification and forgiveness. Rejoicing at the new title we are given in Christ, we neglect the reality to which that title points: the new-creation fullness of the glorified Bride of Christ. And so, in a manner of speaking, we easily confuse the business card with the business itself.

To be sure, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is a non-negotiable for a fully faithful Christian confession. The sad but necessary polemic against true abuses and distortions of this doctrine must continue so long as the Church hopes to continue. But not all polemic is created equal, and we must be vigilant not to inflate the importance of relatively minor differences among brethren. The high cost of neglecting this sense of proportion has troubled many in Reformed circles in the

last decade or so, myself among them. The differences among Reformed brethren discussed in this “sic et non” series are real and important. However, this does not mean they are always clearly articulated or understood, nor does this mean that they are as important as some voices make them out to be. Yet they are important, and if it is possible to advance understanding and avoid injuring officers and members of the Church of Jesus Christ, there is a duty to labor in that direction, a duty that involves a spirit and standards of debate and not only the quest for a particular outcome.

Rather than discuss only the general picture of the topic, and rather than go the route of a historical investigation,¹ I would like to focus attention on certain select biblical passages and themes and ask what consequences

VIEWS IN REVIEW: *Sic et Non: Views in Review* is an occasional feature under the purview of the Reviews & Responses editor and will afford a place for a collegial and scholarly discussion of noteworthy if not controversial positions within the Confessionally Reformed community. The first round of discussions of “Westminster Seminary California Distinctives?” appeared our eighth issue (2012). The three topics and six participants were I. Law and Gospel (Michael S. Horton with response from Mark A. Garcia); II. The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine (David VanDrunen with response from Jeffrey C. Waddington); III. The Republication of the Covenant of Works (J. V. Fesko with response from Cornelis Venema). According to the set order for the discussion, those authors and respondents exchanged roles. The exchange on Republication of the Covenant of Works appeared in our last issue. Here we conclude the exchange with I. Law and Gospel (Mark A. Garcia with response from Michael S. Horton) and II. The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine (Jeffrey C. Waddington with response from David VanDrunen). In the second exchange the editors determined a brief rejoinder was in order and so a final word from Jeffrey Waddington was allowed.

THE AUTHORS: Dr. Mark A. Garcia is Pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Moon Township, Pa. Dr. Michael S. Horton is J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California, and host of the White Horse Inn (a weekly broadcast) and is editor-in-chief of *Modern Reformation* magazine.

1. In the last exchange on this topic, in the 2012 (vol. 8) edition of *CPJ*, my response to Prof. Michael Horton was dominated by concern with historical questions. In the present article I shift my attention to

they may have for our vision of law and gospel. After these various explorations, which include some brief notes on Christ and the gospel, I will then return to the general picture at the end to offer some observations and suggestions prompted by these studies. Throughout, I will note some features of the contemporary landscape in the confessional Reformed tradition in order to ask for a more elastic representation of that tradition in ongoing debates and dialogue.

In what follows I propose some general observations on one key feature in recent debates: the gospel, and how the nature of the gospel includes a special place for keeping God's commandments. When I say "includes" I choose my wording carefully: I intend thereby to deny that keeping God's commands comes on the "backside" of the gospel, as a consequence of it, and instead to suggest that it is part of the gospel itself. In short, I hope to help clarify in a small way that the "good news" of the gospel itself is more than justification, and that the important distinction between "law" and "gospel" has only one narrow context in which it renders a service to Christians. But I will also suggest that its use in other contexts, especially its use as a biblical hermeneutic, eclipses the gospel we love rather than defends it.

The gospel, again, is more than justification, but let me say clearly that it is not less: if we lose justification based solely upon the meritorious grounds of Christ's imputed righteousness, there is no gospel. And for all that the Church has come to understand about this glorious and indispensable article of the Faith, the more we attend to it the clearer it becomes that despite two thousand years of post-canonical reflection we have hardly scratched the surface of its beauty. The eternal efficacy and perfect sufficiency of the obedience and sacrifice of the Son of God for sinners, attributed to us and received through faith as a benefit of our oneness with him—there remains a great deal indeed to learn here, and before which to stand in awestruck wonder.

I would ask, then, that the reader note my goal. It is not to suggest that my brethren who see things differently do not know, believe, love, or teach the gospel. And it is certainly not to minimize the indispensable importance of justification for the Christian gospel. Far from it. My goal is to seek to persuade some writers, teachers, and preachers to present that gospel we share in what I believe is a better, because more biblically faithful, way. My overarching concern is that some

biblical and theological questions, and I view this article as a complementary extension of reflections I offered in the earlier article. Therefore the reader may find it helpful to review the earlier piece.

formulations of the relationship of "law" and "gospel" put us at a marked and unfortunate distance from the ways that God speaks in Scripture. Despite its pedigree in Protestant traditions, the popular use of "law" and "gospel" as theological shorthand is already problematic and dangerous because these are biblical words used in a wide variety of ways that are not ordinarily reflected accurately in the conventional slogans. This needs to trouble us a great deal more than it apparently does. But beyond this red flag which we encounter at the outset, I further suggest that there is not only a "disconnect" between the biblical scope of these words and our use of them, but also that some formulations within Reformed circles make us unnecessarily uncomfortable with how the Bible ordinarily speaks and pose insuperable problems for hearing the good news in the Bible's native tongue. Consider what follows, then, as a personal plea to reconsider one's language, and perhaps even one's framework, in the light of Scripture's way of speaking, so that we might return much of Scripture back to the Church's speech, faith, and life.

SOME TERMS TO ACCEPT, AND SOME TO QUESTION

The clear distinction between "law" and "gospel," properly understood and explained, renders a valuable, necessary service to the Church. In its most faithful deployment, this distinction eliminates any works of the sinner from the ground of justification before God, and ascribes all meritorious obedience to Christ alone. The law always was, in and of itself, powerless to change the heart of the sinner. Given the Fall, the law could only point out the way of faithfulness and provoke a greater sensitivity to the reality of our sin; given the heart of the old man, dead in sin and alienated from God, obedience to God could never simply be legislated. God's Word, apart from the Spirit's work on the heart, could not *ipso facto* bring about what it declared in the law's commandments. In terms of God's holiness and our sinfulness, it certainly could never form part of the ground of our justification before him: law (in this sense of our works which cannot earn justification) and gospel (in this sense of Christ's meritorious work in our stead) are to be distinguished when that important question is in view. If there is a proper home for the law-gospel distinction, then, it is not only within justification in general but within this one specific area of concern in the doctrine of justification: the meritorious grounds of one's justification before God.

Habakkuk thus declared, "The law is powerless" (Hab. 1:4), but this powerlessness is not a deficiency

in law as such but in the sinful flesh. We thus expect a new, reconfigured relationship to the commandments of God if the flesh is crucified and the Spirit is at work. This is the liberty of the law of the Spirit, which is not the false liberty of liberty *from law as such*. The Apostle Paul amplified this qualified notion of the law's powerlessness and the reconfigured relationship when he wrote the following to Roman Christians: "For *the law of the Spirit of life* has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, *weakened by the flesh*, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*" (Rom. 8:2-4). Any proper construal of the relationship of law and gospel must endeavor to do full justice to this feature of the good news of Jesus Christ—a feature which sadly suffers neglect, and sometimes outright rejection, among Reformed preachers in our day.

I have referred thus far to the law-gospel *distinction* (LGD) rather than the law-gospel *hermeneutic* (LGH), though to be sure they are treated by some writers as though they are the same. But one ought not to speak of these synonymously; there is an important but often overlooked difference between them. The LGH, formulated by Luther and codified in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession,² refers to an interpretive method by which Scripture is filtered out either as moral demand (law) or promised redemption (gospel). The Bible, we are told, has two antithetically opposed words or "moods," law and gospel, and it is necessary that we distinguish them in everything we read in Scripture. Otherwise we are told we slip into a form of works righteousness, often linked in the literature, simplistically and recklessly, with the late medieval vocabulary of "condign" versus "congruent" merit. If we encounter a command, it is said, we should read that command as "law"; whereas if we encounter a promise or a gift, we should understand that as "gospel." Imperatives are law, pure gifts and promises are gospel. Conditional passages in Scripture are examples of law; unconditional ones are examples of gospel.

Correlatively, if we characterize the law as gracious, or the gospel as obligatory, we pollute God's free grace and weaken the law's push away from itself (and from ourselves) to Christ for salvation. Those who conceive of obedience as belonging invariably to real saving faith, as per James, or who recognize horizontal, and not only vertical, dimensions to new covenant salvation, as per 1 John, are guilty of "confusing" law and gospel. And so on.

Of course, I do not suggest that there is no historic precedent for such a model within the Reformed tradition (the frequently-noted example of Theodore Beza is a legitimate one), but having historic precedent is not the same as having biblical warrant. Still less does it mean one can argue for confessional prescription. Thus the LGH. The LGD, however, requires no such hermeneutical procedure: importantly, one can affirm the *distinction* of law and gospel *with respect to the meritorious grounds of justification*, as I have, without adopting a wide-ranging law-gospel *hermeneutic* for biblical interpretation. I trust we will soon see something of why we must in fact hold to the one and reject the other.

With these admittedly sketchy and ambitious preliminaries in place, I turn now to a consideration of Moses and glory, Paul's summary of the gospel in his letter to Titus, and some relevant features in his letter to the Galatians.

READING CHRIST IN MOSES: THE LAW, THE GOSPEL, AND (UN)VEILED GLORY

The relationship that Moses, as the *persona* of the Law and old covenant, bears to Christians poses a classic challenge in considering the place of law (especially the Law) within the gospel, rather than only before or apart from it. This difficulty is both understandable and very, very old. Within the pages of the New Testament we see how mightily the earliest Christians struggled to get this relationship right. The centuries of reflection the Church has enjoyed since have certainly clarified a lot, but there remains a great deal yet to explore and work out. Minimally, then, we ought to be patient with others who see things somewhat differently than we do, reluctant to declare variations in the big picture wholly out of bounds, as well as humble enough to recognize we may have it wrong ourselves.

2. Article 4 of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531): "All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the Law and the promises. For in some places it presents the Law, and in others the promise concerning Christ, namely, either when [in the Old Testament] it promises that Christ will come, and offers, for His sake, the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal, or when, in the Gospel [in the New Testament], Christ Himself, since He has appeared, promises the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal." *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. and trans. by F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), Apology IV (II).5, p. 135. Note, however, that even in this case, only the Decalogue is in view, not all of Moses. Sect. 6 reads: "Moreover, in this discussion, by Law we designate the Ten Commandments, wherever they are read in the Scriptures. Of the ceremonies and judicial laws of Moses we say nothing at present." Cf. IV (II).7.

It is not possible to provide a full proposal of the many ways in which the law should be understood as a covenant-historical, metaphysical, and theological idea. I cannot provide here a treatment of the nuances of the relationship between law under Adam and law under Moses, or the varied dimensions of Torah life and obligation. Yet I appreciate that something should be said, at least, when it comes to Moses. For our purposes I will tease out some fixed points in this big topic from the words of Paul in 2 Cor. 3:12–13, words which promise to be uniquely useful. It is a place in which the Apostle Paul speaks of the *telos* of the Law.

In fact, though, we are not accustomed to thinking of Paul's statement here as pertaining to the *telos* of the Law. To a great degree, this is an unfortunate by-product of a tradition of translation. In the ESV, the passage reads, "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end." But the words for "at the outcome of what was being brought to an end" are indeed εἰς τὸ τέλος τοῦ καταργουμένου. Paul here states that the *telos* of the Law given through Moses was obscured by Moses's veil.

Most view this *telos* as "end" or "termination," something like the "outcome" idea in the ESV. In this case the meaning is that Moses donned a veil in order to keep Israel from seeing the *termination* of a fading splendor, the fading splendor of the old covenant. This assumes, then, that Paul thought of the glory on Moses's face as a fading glory, just as the old covenant had a fading glory, and as a figure of just that fact. Yet a minority reading, which has the advantage of some patristic precedent, reads *telos* here as "goal" or "purpose." On this reading, the verse means that Moses put on a veil in order that

the Israelites might not discover the true goal of the transitory old covenant. As for why Moses, and God through Moses, would want to conceal this true goal from the Israelites, it is suggested that this was in keeping with God's purpose of hardening the Israelites, or that Moses's veiling is a common ancient pedagogical device designed to aid in a spiritual quest. Whatever the reasons for this veiling, there is a more proximate, Pauline factor at play in our reading of this verse which can help us a great deal. Our reading of *telos* in 2 Cor. 3:13 will have a lot to do with how we understand Paul's more familiar, and no less controversial, words in Rom. 10:4 that Christ is, again, "the *telos* of the Law." Keep this in mind as we reflect further on 2 Cor. 13:3.

With Richard Hays,³ I suggest that the sense of 2 Cor. 13:3 is as follows: The glory of God revealed at Sinai transfigured Moses, and this transfiguration of Moses was visible in his face. Considered in terms of the Mosaic order as a whole, and governed by his reading of Exod. 34:29–35, Paul assumes the veil on Moses's face had the purpose of hiding Israel from the glory of God, for "Israel could not bear looking at the transfigured person and concentrated instead on the script that he gave them." But this is a tragic irony, for that very text, the Law, bears witness to the glory of God in Christ in the figure of the glorified prophet-servant, Moses, and the glory of Christ is the true aim or *telos* of the covenant. Thus, for Jews to attend only to the text, preoccupied myopically with the words, and remain blind to the glory of God, continues Israel's old and tragic misuse of the Law. The Law, thus misused, can only condemn; it does not bring life. But those who turn to the Lord are enabled, by the Spirit, to behold the Lord in and through the text, to see the Law's true *telos*, its true goal or aim: Christ. For such spiritual readers of the Law, the veil is removed and they, like Moses, are transfigured by the glory of God into the glorious image of Jesus Christ, of whom Moses and the Law had always, in veiled yet real ways, spoken.⁴

As Hays perceptively notes, this reading does justice to the ordinary meaning of *telos* as goal, but it also makes better sense within 2 Corinthians 3. If we ask, "what is seen when Moses's veil is removed?" the answer is not that Moses is finally unmasked as the flawed or defiled or inglorious man (and order) he is. Instead, when the veil is removed it is the glory of God that is revealed on Moses's face. The veil does not conceal the embarrassing truth of the absence of God's glory in the Mosaic order; it conceals its presence.⁵

This reading also coheres nicely with a proper understanding of Romans 10:4, namely, that Christ is the goal

3. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 131–49; cf. D. A. Garrett, "Veiled Hearts: The Translation and Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3," *JETS* 53.4 (2010): 729–72; S. J. Hafemann, "The Glory and Veil of Moses in 2 Cor 3:7–14: An Example of Paul's Contextual Exegesis of the OT—A Proposal," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 14.1 (1992): 31–49; and many other studies. In what follows, rather than quote him at length, I have opted to lightly rephrase much of what Hays argues in his treatment of the passage, depending heavily upon his presentation yet reconfiguring and revising it in terms with which I am more comfortable.

4. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 137.

5. Furthermore, Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 134, discusses why *katarkein* does not mean "to fade," a conclusion based soundly upon the fact of Paul's regular use of the word in the sense of abrogate, invalidate, nullify, etc. (e.g., Rom. 3:31; Gal. 3:17). He continues (p. 135): "The participle *katarougomenēn* in verse 7 should be understood, in light of verses 10–11, as Paul's retrospective judgment on that which the radiance on Moses' face symbolized. It is a theological afterthought, just

or culmination of the Law, not the Law's termination (excepting, of course, the kind of important termination accented in Hebrews, where Christ is the once-for-all sacrifice and Priest). In Romans 10, Christ is the Subject and Object of the Law, the one to whom Moses and the prophets bore (and still bear) witness. Moses's ministry was certainly a ministry of death and condemnation, but this ministry is not due to something inherently defective in the Law but the defects of a dead, sinful heart which refuses the Christ-glory which was, from the beginning, the *telos* of Torah. This reading, dismissed often by modern critics as hopelessly anachronistic and typical of patristic wishful thinking, has the benefit of being the "plain sense" recognized by the Greek-speaking Church fathers.⁶

The consequences of this reading for our purposes is rather straightforward. According to Luke and Paul, the ascended, glorified Christ gave his Church, at Pentecost, the Spirit of glory (Acts 2; Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 15). This Spirit of glory is at work in us, and through the means of grace and the life of suffering in Christ, he cultivates glory in us (Rom. 8:16–17). But this ministry, particularly in its attachment to a proper, faith-filled response and relationship to the Word, is a very old ministry in new covenant form. The problem was not the law. Paul's contrast of the faith of the gospel with the "works of the law" (Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 11–12), a negative commentary on the law demanded by his specific polemical concern, make the most sense as they are applied to the Judaistic and Pharasaic misuse and misinterpretation of the law.⁷ And as the problem Paul identifies is not with the law itself, or with the reality of commands or obligations, but with the heart, then one expects that the Spirit's ministry of life and of the new heart will entail a new, positive, reconfigured relationship to the law.

To be sure, as we will note below, this clarifies for us that if we are to penetrate further into the *why* of the place of ethical conformation to God's character *within*, rather than on the backside of, the gospel, we will have to explore the relationship of Christ, eschatology, the Spirit, and glory. In particular, we must account for how the accomplishment of redemption includes the Pentecost event, the outpouring of the Spirit by the ascended Lord who, in His resurrection from the dead, became functionally identical with the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45).⁸ But we should note at this point that, against the backdrop of Paul's words concerning Moses and the veiled glory, with the coming of the incarnate Glory, and our union with him, the Word has its full effect in us by the Spirit, bringing us fully to glory. The Spirit is now bringing the sons of God to the glory of God in

their believing encounter with Torah. This is the biblical *milieu* of our language of the Word as an ordinary means of glorious grace.

THE GOSPEL AS THE GLORIOUS EPIPHANY OF THE GRACE OF OBEDIENCE: TITUS 2:11–14

We turn now to a place in which the glory of the appearance of Christ in history connects directly to our positive relationship to God's commands. In this case, we focus on an early creedal statement. Biblical examples of creedal statements provide unique insight into how Christians were accustomed to receiving, confessing, and spreading the gospel. Titus 2 provides one example of a succinct summary of the apostolic tradition which is termed "sound doctrine" and which Paul urges Titus to teach with all authority. It is a richly woven summary in which the prophetic hope of Jeremiah and Ezekiel forms the foundation for identifying the nature of "the grace of God" which has "appeared," which is a conventional shorthand form for the gospel framed in apocalyptic terms. *In Titus 2, the long-awaited epiphany of grace in Jesus Christ has, at its core, the fulfillment of the prophetic*

as is his description—in the same sentence—of the old covenant as offering a 'ministry of death.' ... This 'afterthought' quality of the remark that the radiance was transitory is reflected syntactically by the position of the participle at the end of the sentence, a stylistic feature that is captured nicely by Ralph Martin's translation: 'the Israelites were not able to fix their eyes on Moses' face because of his glory, although it was transient.' This interpretation should be augmented only by the observation that the old-covenant glory did not just peter out like a battery-powered flashlight; rather it was done away by the greater glory of the new covenant in Christ (cf. v. 10)."

6. For one study, see Riemer Roukema, "The Veil Over Moses' Face in Patristic Interpretation," in Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, et al., eds, *The Interpretation of Exodus: Studies in Honour of Cornelis Houtman* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006) 237–52.

7. This point has been raised and discussed at great length for a long time in the literature. It has also been raised by P. Andrew Sandlin in a lengthy essay that, while over-reaching in places, still in many places merits close and serious consideration: "The Gospel of Law and the Law of Gospel: An Assessment of the Antithetical Gospel-Law Paradigm," in P. Andrew Sandlin, ed., *A Faith That Is Never Alone: A Response to Westminster Seminary California* (La Grange, CA: Kerygma Press, 2007) 193–247, here p. 219.

8. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "A Cessationist View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today—Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 36: "Without Pentecost, the accomplishment of redemption is incomplete and meaningless. To maintain the significance of Pentecost as a power experience enjoyed by some believers in distinction from others, one that 'beyond' salvation (seen only as the forgiveness of sins) is seriously inadequate. Such an appraisal makes too little, not too much, of Pentecost. Without Pentecost there is no salvation. Period. Why? Because without Pentecost there is no (resurrection) life in the Spirit, and without that eschatological life, sinners remain 'dead in [their] transgressions and sins' (Eph. 2:1, 5)."

promise of a new heart obedient to the commandments of God (Jer. 24:7; 31:33–34; 32:39; Ezek. 36:26; cf. 18:31).

The circumstances of the epistle put the creed-like summary in chapter 2 in a special light as well. Paul's letter to Titus advises him regarding proper faith, life, and order for the new churches on Crete. Because of their youth, these churches do not wrestle with the problem of false teaching regarding the gospel from within, as other churches do, but instead must relate themselves properly to the world.⁹ For this reason, the Titus 2 summary of the gospel holds special significance for our interests inasmuch as it is not crafted to correct theological deviancy; it does not address the problem of Judaistic distortion, and it is not governed by a need to emphasize one facet of the gospel or another. Instead, it is the gospel Christians must believe and confess as they seek to live faithfully in an idolatrous world.

We discover just such a focus in Paul's words to Titus regarding the gospel he must preach. In Titus 2:15, Paul charges Titus to teach "these things" (ταῦτα) with full authority to the members of Christ's church: "Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you" (v. 15). As the first occurrence of ταῦτα in Titus (cf. the only other occurrence in 3:8, to similar effect), it is the first time we can look with confidence to the immediately preceding words in order to ascertain something concrete regarding the tradition of the gospel handed down by the apostles. This first use of ταῦτα reflects a pattern in 1 Timothy by which Paul charges the servant of Christ's church to teach something (1 Tim. 4:11; 6:2), and in each case the immediately preceding verses captures the content of that teaching. In view of those parallels, what does Paul here charge Titus to preach and teach?

In Titus 2:1, Paul instructs Titus to teach godly behavior "in accordance with sound doctrine." This is the first of two statements which bracket a vast range of ethical admonitions concerning human relationships. The other, concluding bracket for those ethical admonitions is in vv. 11–14, a succinct statement concerning their foundation. It is, it seems, a statement of the "sound doctrine" which is to control and empower Titus's confident teaching regarding godly behavior, the "these things" he must declare. Starting in v. 11, we read, in a tightly woven and complex statement,

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

This highly compressed, creed-like summary is particularly noteworthy for our purposes. In its initial movement it identifies the gospel as the "appearance" of the "grace of God" to all people. And this gospel *is*, and not only *leads to*, *paideia*, teaching or training. The epiphany (ἐπιφάνη) of God's grace—the gospel—*itself* trains or teaches the saints in Crete to deny ungodliness and to live in godliness, says Paul (v. 11). It is this gospel-*paideia* (παιδείουσα) that leads believers to the consummation of its blessings at the "blessed appearing" of Christ to come. We read elsewhere, of course, that the epiphany of the glory of God in Christ will *include* the glorification of his Body, the glory of the new Adam in his new Eve (cf., Gen. 2:22–23; Song of Songs 3:5–11 with 1 Cor. 11:7; Rev. 21:1–2, 10–23). Indeed, the anchored reality of our future in Christ—or, better, the present Christ of our promised future—is the gravitational pull that draws believers along the path of faithfulness to the consummation of our salvation. In an apparent parallelism, denying ungodliness and living in a godly way are both captured in this faithful kind of "[waiting] for the blessed hope" of the appearance of Christ in glory. Faithful waiting, for Paul, is a matter of denying ungodliness and living in a godly manner, and this faithful waiting is something the appearance of the grace of God in history *trains* us to do.

With this sketch in place, I would draw the reader's attention especially to the final words of the summary statement, in v. 14: Christ "gave himself" (up or over) for us "to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." These words capture the substance, the "stuff," we might say, of Christ's redemptive action considered in terms of its design or purpose. Undoubtedly the reference here to Christ's "giving himself" refers to the once-for-all, past act of Jesus on the cross. Scholars regularly root this vocabulary in Mark 10:45 (the Son came "to give his life as a ransom for many") and note the important sacrificial connotation of this species of gift (cf. Luke 2:24 with the Eucharistic formulae in Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:24).¹⁰ Whatever the real

9. Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series; Hendrickson, 1984; 1988; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), introduction, n.p.

10. Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (New Testament Library; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) 354.

source(s) for his use of the formula, Paul clearly adopted this language quite early on, using it in Galatians (1:4); Ephesians (5:2); and in 1 Timothy (2:6); and he could hardly do otherwise if his gospel was to reflect a most fundamental identifying mark of God's Israel as a people "redeemed" from this present age (e.g., Ex. 15:13).

The key features in Paul's expression are "gift" or "giving" of "himself" "for our sins," a conscious, deliberate act of self-sacrifice which is not mere martyrdom but a substitutionary death which effects a decisive transformation. Moreover, here in Titus, Paul appeals to Christ's self-sacrifice as an act considered in terms of a fullness we must not miss. To what end did Jesus give himself for us? What was the purpose of this act which, as such, determines our understanding of its nature? The first intention in this act of love is that he might "redeem us from every lawless deed." Paul's language obliges us to ask, what is it about Jesus' giving himself at the cross that would accomplish this release or redemption from "every lawless deed"?

Paul's reference to redemption from "every lawless deed" echoes the gospel or good news anticipated in Ezek. 37:23–24,

"They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes." (Cf. LXX Ps. 129:8; 1 Jn. 3:4)

The prophet Ezekiel anticipated a day when the people of God would be "set free from" the control of sin and walk in his rules. In his immediate context, sin is the defilement of exilic and postexilic idolatry, and Paul picks up this link in order to apply it in Titus 2 to purification from Cretan idolatry (1:10–16, esp. v. 15).¹¹ We note, however, that Paul does not merely announce the arrival of this promised blessing; he assumes its arrival in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Put strongly, for Paul, if "the grace of God" has appeared, then the promised law-obedient heart has appeared. Still more precisely, in terms of Titus 2, the heart that keeps God's commands is the promised grace of God which has appeared in Jesus Christ.

Related to this Ezekiel-shaped promise and hope, the second intention in Christ's self-sacrifice is that he would prepare "a people for himself" who will be

"zealous for good works" (v. 14). The former reality finds expression in the latter dynamic: a people wholly belonging to the Lord express this reality in zealous obedience such that there is no real belonging that is not expressed in obeying (for "good works" in Paul's letters to Timothy, see 1 Tim. 5:10, 25; 6:18). Indeed, Paul tells Titus that Jesus wants a body of zealots, and that he gave himself for us to that end. Again the background in the Old Testament is crucial: the good news in which Israel was called to hope was good news about becoming a purified people of Yahweh's special possession, a motif saturated with the cultic and ethical concerns of holiness (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). We note again the expectation of Ezekiel: God will cleanse (καθαρίζω) a people for himself (ἔσονται μοι εἰς λαόν), having delivered them from all their sins (ρύσομαι αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἁνομιῶν αὐτῶν). It is at least highly likely that Paul is influenced here by Ezekiel's vision of the messianic age, resting as it does upon the deeper substratum of the covenantal language of Deuteronomy.¹²

What, then, is Paul teaching? Paul, conveying and perhaps repeating a conventional summary of the Gospel in circulation among the earliest Christians, reminds Titus that when Christ "gave himself" for sinners, his people were dipped into the cleansing laver through their union with him in his death. They died with the old order in his death, and implied is that they were raised into the new order in his resurrection. He gave himself that his people might be cleansed pure from all defilements, and there is no question but that the Apostle regarded Christ's mission to be successful. Καθαρίζω is used consistently by Paul for moral cleansing or purification from sin (2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:26; cf. Heb. 9:14). Not only sin's condemnation but its control and defilement (καθαρίζω) is removed in the cross of Christ. Paul had earlier made the same connection in 2 Cor. 7:1 when, again in light of Ezekiel's prophetic promises of the coming messianic age (Ezek. 37:23, 27; cf. 2 Cor. 6:16), he calls us to "cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." This same flow of thought is present elsewhere in the NT.¹³ Union with Christ in his death

11. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 763.

12. George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Paterson, 1992) 328.

13. Though it is not possible to develop the suggestion here, note that the flow of argument in Hebrews 10 reflects the same complex of concerns: by the obedient will of Jesus Christ (v. 9) we have been sanctified (h' giasme, noi, perf. pass. part.) through the once-for-all offering of his body (v. 10), having perfected those who are being sanctified (tou.j a' giazome, nouj, pres. pass. part.; v. 14). *It is this to*

is a fundamental dimension of Christian identity, and as Philip Towner has stated, “From Paul’s eschatological Spirit-perspective, the faith response to covenant grace is the *Spirit-generated fulfillment of Torah* (suggesting the internalization of the law; cf. Jer. 31:31–34 [MT], the reshaping of the heart/will to obey; 3:5; Rom. 8:1–9; Gal. 5:17–18).”¹⁴

Noting that Paul translates Ezekiel’s “keeping the law” (as in 36:27) into “zealous for good deeds,” Towner also properly recognizes that one cannot detach obedience to God’s commands from the content of the good news of the gospel. Christ’s death, as Paul conceives of it (or repeats it) here, is Yahweh’s great promised act of deliverance, with the purpose and results which Ezekiel and Jeremiah announced beforehand.¹⁵ As disobedience and defilement are elemental to the problems sinners face, so Spirit-worked obedience and purification unto obedience are elemental to the good news of the gospel. For Paul in his words to Titus, Christ gave himself up for our cleansing from defilement in order that he might have a people of his own who are zealots for the good works of obedience. This is perfectly consonant with what we noted above from Paul in Rom. 8:3–4: God sent his Son *in order that* the righteous demands of the law might be fulfilled in us.¹⁶ Given the way the Apostle

draws a straight line from the once-for-all redemptive action of Christ in history to this specific goal or purpose for the act itself, we must consider this as gospel. This righteousness fulfilled in us, this zeal for the good works of obedience, is not part of the grounds of our justification; *but then justification is not the whole gospel*, and an allergy to Paul’s way of speaking may expose the problem of gospel reductionism. Nor is Titus 2 unique: this same understanding of the nature of the gospel is found for a second time in Titus at 3:4–7.¹⁷

What, then, is that gospel? It is, simply, the gospel to which the OT Scriptures bear witness. This is easily overlooked but it is crucial to understanding why Paul’s gospel looks one way and not another. Whenever we ask the question what Paul would have understood the “gospel” to be, we must account for the fact that Paul believed the gospel is what the OT Scriptures teach. As Richard Hays has noted, “The first sentence of Paul’s letter to the Romans proclaims that ‘the gospel of God’ was ‘promised beforehand through his prophets in early texts’” (ὁ προεπηγγείλατο διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφαῖς ἀγίαις) and one of Paul’s “urgent concerns” in Romans is “to ground his exposition of the gospel in Israel’s sacred texts.”¹⁸ In the last generation or so, traditional historical criticism has been found wanting and scholars have returned with zeal to the conviction that the OT, *on its own terms*, proclaims the gospel. Interest in “figural” readings and the ongoing status of the OT witness for NT writers have fueled the better studies coming from this vantage point. The conviction that the OT itself proclaims the gospel of course affects how one understands the nature and function of New Testament proclamation of that gospel, as well the more familiar problem of NT interaction (quotations, allusions, etc.) with OT texts. The literature is varied, not uniform, and any sustained investigation of the doctrine of justification must account for the important cluster of issues emerging from this ongoing discussion.

But there is yet one more feature of Paul’s summary statement in Titus 2 that requires our attention. In this case it is something that is conspicuous by its absence. Charging Titus to preach and teach obedience puts Paul at odds with some preachers and writers in our day. Charging him to do so *without also mentioning justification*, Jesus’ satisfaction of divine justice, or His bearing of the curse in forensic terms, puts him at odds with even more people who insist that one thereby confuses law and gospel. In this summary of the epiphany of Christ in history, Paul commends the Christ who gave himself up (cf., “became sin” as in 2 Cor. 5:21, noted below) in order to purify a people for himself into zealots

which the Spirit bears witness to us in promising, first, to put the laws on our hearts and write them on our minds (v.16; cf. Jer. 31:31, 33), and then added to this the promise not to remember our sins anymore (v. 17). The gospel of Jer. 31 is realized in the obedient will of Jesus in the form of his sacrificial offering.

14. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 765. Italics mine.

15. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 765.

16. This is further indicated by the role of the Decalogue in the earliest churches in the New Testament. See, among many options, the impressive body of work by the eminent Martin Hengel, e.g., *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity*, trans. by John Bowden (Fortress, 1983; rep. Wipf and Stock, 2003) 56–8. On the role of the Decalogue, see the important article by Peter Stuhlmacher, “Christliche Verantwortung bei Paulus und seinen Schülern,” *Evangelische Theologie* 28.4 (1968): 165–86, esp. pp. 178f.

17. Space constraints do not permit an analysis of Paul’s words in 3:4–7. Note, however, that in this later creed-like summary of the gospel, it is again expressed in terms of an apocalyptic epiphany (εὐφραίνω), the epiphany of the goodness and kindness of God in Christ. Paul’s second summary of the gospel reflects the same understanding of its nature as the coming of new heart through the promised Spirit. Paul contrasts God’s salvation with “works done by us in righteousness,” but not as an antithetical contrast with *justification* but with the merciful washing and regeneration of the Spirit (v. 5, διαλουτροῦ/παλιγγενεσι, αἱ καὶ ἀνακαινῶν, πνεύματος ἁγίου). The saving goodness and kindness of God that has appeared *is* the washing and renewing/regenerating ministry of the Spirit. In v. 7, this is taken by Paul as coincident, and perhaps synonymous with, being justified by God’s grace.

18. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 34.

for Torah, for keeping God's word. Biblical creedal statements reflect a more expansive, vision of the gospel than the version often preached today which is justification-heavy, if not justification-only (we note, of course, the uncontested place of justification later in Titus 3:7). Titus 2 is not the only NT creedal text which omits specific mention of the sinner's justification (but again, cf. 3:7). Instead, most creed-like passages employ the more comprehensive language for Christ's redemptive work (his death "for our sins," ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, in 1 Cor. 15:3-4; 1 Tim. 2:5-6 ["who gave himself a ransom"]; Col. 1:12-20 [deliverance is listed, followed by forgiveness]; cf. 1 Cor. 8:6, "and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him;" and 1 Tim. 3:16 which refers to the justification or vindication of Christ in the Spirit).

GALATIANS AND THE SURPRISING LOOK OF JUSTIFICATION POLEMIC

These reflections can be related more closely as we revisit a text widely considered to be the most conspicuous biblical support for the LGH and its wider complex of commitments: the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. Here we have many of the classic formulaic expressions on the doctrine of justification which have driven the model forward, and yet I suggest that a closer look, or perhaps a fresh second look, at the text prompts concerns with the LGH in the closely-related polemical, pastoral-preaching, and theological contexts of life in the Church.

Consider Galatians within its polemical context. It may be thought, and it is often suggested, that the LGH model has the virtue of being starkly clear on the doctrine of justification in a time when clarity is needed. Furthermore, it is suggested that even if one understands, theologically, that sanctification and obedience shaped by the law's "third use" are necessary to salvation, it is nevertheless more important, *in a time when justification is misunderstood*, to preach and teach clearly on justification by faith alone and not to confuse the situation, at least potentially, with strong statements on the necessity of obedience. After all, it is suggested, the life of obedience is a matter of living out a well-grasped justification.

But here is another example of where the LGH wholly precludes the Scriptures themselves. Galatians is a polemical text in which the matter of dispute is (at least largely) the doctrine of justification in the context of Jewish-Gentile relations. In this polemical text on the topic of justification, the Apostle is adamant regarding

some of the very ideas to which the LGH appears to have a strong aversion. Where one might expect, on LGH terms, to hear the Apostle prioritize justification in the faith and life in the Church, he twice points elsewhere when he speaks of what matters most, and he does so before and after relating the Galatian Christians to the law *positively* in Galatians 5:14.

In Galatians 5:14, the Apostle sums up the whole Law in keeping with the push of the Torah and Jesus' authoritative interpretation of it, namely, in terms of the "one word" of love for neighbor: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" But unlike some contemporary approaches to polemic and to preaching, this is not Paul's segue into how that law condemns and drives us to Christ who has fulfilled that law in our stead so that it no longer truly obliges the Galatian Christians. Instead, his "one word" shorthand for the whole Torah is his segue into the imperatives of *Christian* conduct. The law in "one word" rules out the works of the flesh from the arena of Christian conduct and that same law in "one word" instead finds positive expression in the "fruit of the Spirit." The ministry of the Spirit is to bring forth the fruit of the law under its one-word umbrella: well-ordered love. Expressed alternatively, the flow of Paul's argument identifies the reality of the Spirit in those united to Christ as the realm where the "one word" of brotherly love is the norm and form of true life (cf. 5:14 with vv. 15-26).

On both sides of this statement, Paul points to obedience to the law or commandments of God as nothing less than identifiable with the new creation. To suggest it is not only related but *identifiable* with keeping God's commandments may sound ambitious, but Paul's own teaching compels us to use this strong language. One cluster of passages in his epistles brings this out rather clearly. In Galatians 5:6, a passage which I suggest poses an insurmountable challenge to a justification-centric notion of salvation, Paul states that faith-working-through-love is alone what "counts for anything." He contrasts this actively loving faith with the mistaken notion evidently held by the Judaizers that circumcision—whether its presence or its absence—is what matters. To be sure, Paul's language of what "alone" counts is contextualized by his opponents' view of what counts: circumcision. And it would be careless to over-read Paul's language here to suggest, for instance, that other facets of the gospel do not also count greatly. But, in terms of our present interest in his words, popular zeal to preserve an accent on justification only heightens the importance of what Paul in fact says here. In a context of *controversy over justification*, where the gospel

in terms of justification is truly at stake, Paul does not contrast circumcision with *justification*. Indeed he does the very opposite of opposing the circumcision-feature of “law” with the “gospel” of law-free justification. Instead, Paul contrasts one law-feature, circumcision, with another, and the comprehensive one: faith active in love. Circumcision, falsely used as a necessary identifying marker for those who belong to Abraham’s seed and to Christ, is irrelevant, whereas faith active in love is “omnirelevant” and the true distinguishing mark of Christ’s people.

On the other side of Galatians 5:14, the theme reappears. In a remarkably similar vein, in Galatians 6:15 he states that “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” Though the vocabulary is not identical, the parallel of ideas is telling. In both cases (5:6 and 6:15) Paul speaks of what really “is” or what matters, and in both cases he contrasts what matters with circumcision. This suggests that the elements on other side of the equation in each case—what *does* “count,” namely, faith working through love in 5:6 and the new creation in 6:15—should be related closely, perhaps even seen as synonymous with one another.

But if the parallel of 5:6 with 6:15 does not yet confirm a relationship of identity, we need only set Paul’s words alongside a further parallel present in 1 Cor. 7:19, “For neither circumcision counts for anything nor

uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.” With this third instance of Paul using strikingly similar language, we can be confident Galatians does not represent an anomaly and that the relationship between the gospel of the new creation and law-keeping is undeniable: keeping the commandments of God, properly understood as synonymous with “faith active in love,” is in 1 Corinthians 7:19 the “stuff” of the new creation, and it is *this* that Paul says “counts.”

Placing Paul’s model alongside contemporary arguments regarding law, gospel, and the LGH exposes a tragic chasm between the gospel understood by the Apostle and the one often taught in print and pulpit in our day. In the epistle that is (a) most frequently thought to uphold a LGH and a justification-focused understanding of the gospel and (b) explicitly devoted, with evident passion, to protecting the faithful from errors on justification by faith alone, Paul refers not to justification but to faith active in love and to the new creation as what matters. Similarly, he does not hesitate, even within his epistolary warning against dangerous distortions in the doctrine of justification, to state that perseverance in “doing good” will reap eternal life: “the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:8–9).¹⁹ Would such language be acceptable in contemporary evangelical circles? I suggest that against the standards for what qualifies as “the gospel” in some circles today, particularly in the context of debates over justification, Paul’s approach should be reckoned by some to be imprudent at best and compromising the gospel at worst.

As Moises Silva notes, “this remarkable correspondence among the three passages is routinely ignored by Pauline scholars, no doubt because the usual interpretation of Paul’s view of the law cannot account for the possibility that the apostle identifies ‘keeping the commandments of God’ with the ‘new creation.’”²⁰ Yet this is precisely the connection which Paul insists upon, no less than John insists upon it in his first epistle.²¹ For Paul, the new creation is presently on display in the faith, hope, and love of the Church. Within Galatians in particular, it is manifested “in loving behavior” with the language of fulfilling (πεπλήρωται) the law by loving one’s neighbor, producing love as the fruit of the Spirit (which is described with understatement as conduct that the law does not condemn), and fulfilling (ἀναπληρώσετε) the law of Christ by bearing one another’s burdens (5:14, 22–23; 6:2).²²

The new creation, then, particularly in its inaugurated form as in the purview of Galatians, is not an

19. This holds even without consideration of the note of prospective, future justification which introduces and animates “only faith working through love” in 5:6, namely, “For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness (εὐλπίζομεν δικαιοσύνην)” (5:5). On this verse in context, including a defense of the objective rather than subjective reading of εὐλπίζομεν δικαιοσύνην, see Moises Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996; 2nd. ed., 1991) 181–3.

20. Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 182. To confirm that this coheres with Paul’s teaching on the law as a whole, Silva points to Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles, Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* 3/1 (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

21. 1 John is framed by a concern for the necessary bilateral dimension of new covenant life, which is not justification but the works of love which mark out the reality of fellowship or union with God in Christ. This love for God and neighbor (within John, particularly the members of God’s new covenant household) is the same love Jesus identified in the Gospels as the *scopus* of the whole Mosaic Torah. The perceptive outline of 1 John constructed by Theodor Häring in 1892 has been modified in several recent studies, including the excellent commentary by John Painter, 1, 2, and 3 *John* (Sacra Pagina 18; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008) 117–18. This outline makes clear that the dual tests for claims to fellowship with God in Christ—ethics (doing righteousness, especially love) and christological orthodox—frame 1 John in back-and-forth or cyclical fashion.

22. Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 182–3.

immaterial abstraction of endless entitlement but an order pierced through with fulfillment of the law of Christ, with ethical material or content, the very content of Christ's embodiment of the righteousness of God. Our understanding of the new creation, then, is ultimately a question of our Christology. It is the order of the Spirit, the Spirit of the risen, ascended Christ who is the embodiment and revelation of the righteousness of God. As the law is a revelation of God's character, and as the glorified Christ is the consummate revelation of that same God, then to live in him is unavoidably to inhabit the glorious reality of ethical conformation to his image in the Spirit. Otherwise, given the needs created by the Fall into sin, a gospel lacking this central feature is not good news at all. For the gospel of the new creation to lack Torah-conformity, obedience, and ethical consummation in the image of God would entail a gospel without the Spirit of glory, indeed without the glorified Christ. More on this below.

Of course, such language is always prone to overstatement in a way that eclipses other necessary, critical elements of the gospel; but we have ample evidence, too, that it also prone to severe understatement, even neglect. This new creation which alone "matters" to the Apostle Paul is, in no small measure, the order of "faith working through love" and "keeping the commandments of God." Alongside the truth of "faith alone," and as a way of protecting it from misuse, perhaps we should speak, too, of Paul's "new creation alone," with all the ethical content of that glorious order that the Apostle understood it to include. But while this new creation is future, it is not exclusively so. This is the apostolic pronouncement. The glories of the new creation have been brought forward in time in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, inaugurated in his empty tomb, and the Church's present life is a life lived from within that reality. Thus the Apostle urges upon the Church a moral and ethical life conformed to her already real heavenly identity, and urges that way of life as the path to the fullness of glory to come. But the glory of that order is inextricably bound up with obedience.

MURRAY, NOT KLINE?
WHERE THE DISAGREEMENT IS NOT

To restate Paul's "new creation alone" conviction, one could say that the restoration of human beings in the image of God, their ongoing and final conformity to the glory of Christ, is, as M. G. Kline, has put it, not a subordinate blessing but "the *acme* of the redemptive blessings provided in Christ."²³

I mention Kline by name for a reason. While some will consider the few paragraphs that follow little more than an awkward "aside" in my proposal, others will lean in for what is, in their mind, the most pertinent and poignant material in this article. Readers may be tempted to associate my emphases with a Reformed tradition reflective more of John Murray than of M. G. Kline, assuming the latter more amenable to the LGH. Yet this suggests we may suffer in our day from more than a little regrettable confusion over the true guiding *animus* of Kline's theology, and over where their differences really were. Murray and Kline certainly had their differences, and they have been discussed at great length by many, but I fear those differences are not always what students today assume them to be.

Note, for instance, that it is Kline, and not only Murray, who has called ethical conformation, not justification, the "acme of the redemptive blessings provided in Christ." Note, too, that Kline goes on in *Kingdom Prologue* to explain obedience to covenant law as belonging to that "acme" just noted. He continues,

Though it involves a kind of conditionality and has a certain kind of necessity, obedience thus originating and thus functioning is agreeable with the principle and guarantee of grace. Functioning as it does as a confirmation of saving faith it is supportive of the grace-promise-faith principle of salvation.

Kline thus affirms the harmony of conditionality with "the principle and guarantee of grace." But Kline does not stop there. He continues,

And originating as it does from the renewing grace of God it did not nullify the guaranteed fulfillment of the

23. Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000) 320. Italics mine. As Kline argues elsewhere (*Images of the Spirit* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998], 320), the "ethical *conformitas*" facet of the image of God is integral to appreciating the filial dimension of salvation as well as the relationship believers bear to Christ's fulfillment of the so-called "dominion mandate": our relationship to Christ as second and last Adam is not limited, in this respect, to what he has done *for* us but includes what he does *in* us by his Spirit. With regret, I cannot take the necessary space to explore here how this topic has been significantly enriched in the work of Kline. Kline's work on the ministry of the Spirit in producing glory in the Church (heavenly temple-city) throughout the present and especially in consummation introduces further insight into the real *necessity* for that present work of glory production and its place within the gospel, properly conceived. Especially throughout his *Images of the Spirit*, Kline demonstrates how the recreation of the Church in the glory of the Lord—foundational for the book of Revelation—is a matter of the Spirit producing truly essential and indispensable ethical glory in her.

kingdom promises, the grace that produces it being sovereign grace which infallibly accomplishes its purpose. More than that, *it is not merely that there is compatibility here, but rather that attainment of the covenant blessings is unthinkable apart from this obedient devotion to covenant law. For such obedience is itself one of the promised blessings. Indeed the acme of the redemptive blessings provided in Christ is the restoration of man, the image of God, to conformity to the glory of such godliness* (Rom. 8:29, 30; Eph. 2:10).²⁴

I submit that this is not the Kline we hear enough about, and yet careful study of his work, especially on Christ and the Spirit, leads one to expect exactly this kind of claim.²⁵ I submit, too, that it is incompatible with the LGH and its particular understanding of conditionality, “law” versus “grace,” and “gospel.”

THE GLORIOUS FULLNESS OF CHRIST-AND-HIS-BRIDE

As I trust our survey is making clear, the issue is ultimately Christological, and in relation to this, eschatological. The question of the relationship between “law” and “gospel” is the question of the eschatological Christ. Because the gospel is the good news of the arrival of the glory of God in Christ for us and in us, it is the good news of Christ himself: who he is, what he has done, and who he has become. But who is the Christ of the gospel? This is our real question beneath our many other questions. The law reveals the glory of God, and Christ

24. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 320, under the section title “Compatibility of Promise and Obligation.” Italics mine.

25. For instance, this is overlooked in Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray’s and Meredith G. Kline’s Response to Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004) 328, who also simply conflates Murray and Kline on law and gospel and then contrasts them on the positive place of good works in salvation.

26. See Holly J. Carey, *Jesus’ Cry from the Cross: Towards a First-Century Understanding of the Intertextual Relationship Between Psalm 22 and the Narrative of Mark’s Gospel* (Library of New Testament Studies Volume 398; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009).

27. Roy A. Harrisville, *Fracture: The Cross as Irreconcilable in the Language and Thought of the Biblical Writers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 101. Emphasis is Harrisville’s.

28. “The point of this usage is that the Spirit present in the Church (indwelling all believers and in the full diversity of his working) is the down payment on the eschaton, which down payment is itself a realization of the eschaton; he is the first installment of eschatological existence. In that actual sense the Spirit is the guarantee that what has already been received initially will be received in its fullness at Christ’s return. His work provides the provisional, anticipatory experience of the eschatological transformation to be accomplished completely in the resurrection of the body.” Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “The Holy Spirit and Eschatology,” *Kerux* 4/3 (1989): 14–29.

the image and glory of God. Thus the gospel, and the relationship of ethical conformity to grace, is ultimately a question of Christology. Much more demands to be said on this front, but as the embodiment of righteous Israel, Christ is the law in flesh and blood, much as Proverbs attaches a multitude of tissues and tendons to the Mosaic Torah. Christ fleshes out the law in his flesh, and his obedience is an act of thoroughgoing faith. Indeed, at the very point of his consummate distress on the cross (Mk 15:34), his obedience was a matter of faith in his Father’s deliverance, a faith determined in its shape and content by what the OT Scriptures called for (in this case, Ps. 22).²⁶

Moreover, despite the conventional reading of 2 Cor. 5:21, which regards Christ’s “becoming sin” for us as a forensic, imputative action, the flow of Paul’s thought, particularly against the clear backdrop of the Isaiah texts with which he is working, leads us to read the “becoming” language more fully, more realistically, than mere reckoning. While, in my view, he certainly intends imputation in v. 19 (in negative or “non-imputative” form: “not counting their trespasses”), in the movement from v. 19 to v. 21 of 2 Cor. 5, it is as though “Paul has moved the idea of Christ’s death as vicarious and *punitive* toward that of its creating a new humanity, since by assuming our identity he has opened to us the possibility of assuming his identity.”²⁷ In a stupendously marvelous movement of redemptive love, Christ “became” sin as the one who *is* the righteousness of the law.

Further, in his becoming glorious life-giving Spirit in resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven (1 Cor. 15:45), we have our fixed and robustly comprehensive *locus* for understanding the grace of our salvation. What he is fully by his meritorious obedience and the Father’s faithfulness, we become in him by grace, which is righteous and glorious not only in name but in fact. This righteous “being” or fact of the glorification of the Church in Jesus Christ is part of the gospel, *not a reflex of a gospel already defined in primarily forensic terms*. It is the truth of who we are and what we are for. And if *this* is the Christ to whom we have been united, and if he is the temple-sphere of glory in which/whom we dwell presently by the Spirit who transforms us, then ethical conformation to his glory is fundamental to who we are.²⁸ If the fullness of the glorified Christ-with-his-Bride exerts proper control upon our thinking about what the gospel of Christ is, then we will regard ethical conformation to God’s glory in Christ—a *law* matter considered in terms of the ultimate *telos* of the law, as Paul taught—as nothing less than elemental to our identity and to the gospel which determines it.

All this is to say that the glorified Christ to whom we are united by faith and Spirit is, in a real sense, a particular “location,” not merely a person “met.” He is the glorified temple of God, *in* and *extra carnem*. To be in him is to be in this glorious realm of his Spirit, possessed by and possessing his Spirit, where the law’s original design is fully met and on display. To meet Christ, led there by the law, is inevitably to be brought to the varied vertical and horizontal dimensions of covenantal obedience that the law describes and which are the facts of our existence in Christ. To be led to Christ is to be led to the fulfillment of the law—not conceived *only* as his work *in our stead*, but also as ours in him by Spirit and grace. It belongs to the gospel that we have in Christ the righteousness that satisfies the legal demands of the law in our stead (justification). It also belongs to the gospel that we have in Christ the blessing of the Spirit who is at work in us that we might ourselves fulfill the righteous commands of the law (sanctification toward glorification). We do not glorify Christ when we make his saving work a matter only of what he has done in our stead, thinking we thus protect the gospel; in terms of how Scripture declares his own purpose in coming, we minimize him.

THINKING AND SPEAKING WITH THE GRAIN OF THE NEW CREATION: SELECT FINAL OBSERVATIONS

I offer the following four observations based upon and suggested by the foregoing. I appreciate that one could complain, justly, that they are four ways of saying the same thing. Implied in each observation, however, is a gentle plea that we reconsider our manner of speaking of law and gospel. In short, I suggest that, measured against the witness of Scripture, the LGH model suffers certain conspicuous weaknesses which require the attention of those who are accustomed to using it or who have an understanding of law and gospel which is indebted to it.

Firstly, a principal weakness is its wide distance from Scripture’s native tongue for the gospel and for obligation; in short, LGH’s catchy filter for biblical interpretation does not reflect the way Scripture in fact speaks. What we have noted briefly concerning Paul’s manner of speaking of the gospel in creedal form is not unique to Titus 2. It is consistent with how the vocabulary of “gospel” is used in Scripture more generally.

As D. A. Carson’s work on this topic has demonstrated, the biblical vocabulary for “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον) itself pushes decisively against the notion of gospel at work in the LGH. In a far-ranging study of all the

uses of “gospel” vocabulary in Scripture (εὐαγγέλιον, εὐαγγελίζω, and εὐαγγελιστής), including the LXX, Carson’s conclusion is as unremarkable as it is predictable, yet it is urgently required for our purposes: by “gospel” the Scriptures mean the remedy for the consequences of the Fall, for the wide and varied effects of sin, *all* of them.²⁹ I cannot do better than refer to Carson’s conclusion:

Finally, if the gospel is good news about what God is doing in Christ to rescue and redeem his rebellious image bearers, we must constantly bear in mind what it is we are being rescued from. The reason is that we will gain a clearer grasp of the gospel if we hold a clear grasp of the desperate situation the gospel addresses. If we see that we are guilty, we will understand that for the gospel to be effective it must clear us of our guilt; if we are alienated from God, we must be reconciled to him; if we stand under his judicial wrath, that wrath must be propitiated; if we are estranged from one another, we must be reconciled to one another; if the entire created order lies under the curse, the curse must be lifted and the created order transformed; if we are, morally speaking, weak and helpless (as well as guilty), we must be empowered and strengthened; if we are dead, we must be made alive; if the heart of our idolatry is abysmal self-focus and the de-godding of God, God must be restored in our vision and life to his rightful glory. In other words, we gain clarity regarding the gospel when we discern what the gospel addresses, what it fixes.³⁰

The *gospel*, Carson goes on to note, *fully connects plight with solution*, not only forgiveness but resurrection existence, transformation, obedience, participation in Christ, and vindication. Preachers must preach this full gospel in order to be faithful in their commission. This was also the conviction of an esteemed professor who long ago addressed Princeton ministerial students with the warning that they must not dare to preach less than this:

In conclusion, let us observe that these three aspects of the resurrection of Christ are not merely each for its own part fundamental, but are also, when taken together, a comprehensive summary of the gospel which we are commissioned to preach. Peace of conscience, *renewal of life*, assurance of heaven: what more than this could

29. D. A. Carson, “What is the Gospel?—Revisited,” in Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, eds, *For the Fame of God’s Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010) 147–70.

30. Carson, “What is the Gospel?,” 169–70.

we endeavour to bring to our fellow men? What less than this could we *dare* to offer them under the name of the *gospel*? ... Is there not a special satisfaction in being able to proclaim a *gospel which so completely covers the needs of a sinful world*?³¹

Secondly, biblical imperatives and conditional statements—whether as grammatical moods or as expressions of the law—are not only occasions for the law’s just demands to be recognized as threatening and condemning, driving us to Christ for justification. They can have that role and use, to be sure. But this is the Law’s “improper” (in the philosophical sense) or irregular use. The implicit and explicit imperatives of the Law and of obedience, as features of the *inevitably* bilateral dimensions of all God’s covenants with his image-bearing creatures, are also part of the life of the *gospel* given

31. Geerhardus Vos, “The Joy of Resurrection Life,” in *Grace and Glory: Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary* (1922; rep. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994) 167. Italics mine.

32. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.7.12; cf. with Luther’s and Melancthon’s view (and the view which has become more dominant in contemporary preaching) that the “theological” use of the law is its principal and most proper use. After agreeing on so much with respect to the law, Calvin, says Lutheran theologian Werner Elert, diverged from Melancthon on this most critical of points, assuming from the outset that the law is not fundamentally judgment but rule of life. See Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. by Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1957; rep. Wipf & Stock, 2004) 301; see also David Yoon-Jung Kim, “John Calvin: Kierkegaard and the Question of the Law’s Third Use,” in Jon Bartley Stewart, *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions: v. 2: Theology* (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, vol. 5; Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009) 85–97; and I. John Hesselink, “Christ, the Law, and the Christian: An Unexplored Aspect of the Third Use of the Law in Calvin’s Theology,” in Donald K. McKim, ed., *Readings in Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 179, n. 1.

33. The problem of positing “law” as the antithesis of “*gospel*” when the former is characterized as imperatives and conditions is, in my judgment, the most conspicuously aberrant and problematic element of the whole law-*gospel* paradigm. I have opted to focus on how we understand the *gospel* itself, and so cannot go into this topic here. For a superb analysis of the imperative in the New Testament, including a helpful discussion of conditionals in relation to imperatives, see Joseph D. Fantin, *The Greek Imperative Mood in the New Testament: A Cognitive and Communicative Approach* (Studies in Biblical Greek 12; New York: Peter Lang, 2010). Rather than list the most relevant imperatives and conditions in the New Testament, or provide a hefty list of studies of them, see the material in Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001). For an incisive analysis of the imperative in the New Testament, including a helpful discussion of conditionals in relation to imperatives, see Joseph D. Fantin, *The Greek Imperative Mood in the New Testament: A Cognitive and Communicative Approach* (Studies in Biblical Greek 12; New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

to and for Christians. This is, as Calvin famously said, the Law’s “principal” use which pertains more closely to its “proper” purpose, a view which put him in a different relationship to the Law in comparison with Luther and Melancthon.³² As a dominant feature of both Old Covenant anticipation and New Covenant blessing, keeping God’s commands are in fact *part of* (not merely consequences or fruit of) the good news of the grace given in the *gospel*. Neither are these commands relevant *only* as they point us to Christ who fulfills the Law’s imperatives in our stead, so that *we* are not obliged by them; nor are they *only* expressions of gratitude for the salvation received, defined largely as justification; they are also materially important for understanding our life in Christ in the present, and as obligations we continue to have now.³³

Thirdly, given the connection between plight and solution, behind the LGH, I suggest, is a deficient notion of the Fall which gives rise to a crippled notion of the *gospel*. The LGH only works if we reduce the Fall into sin, at least in essence, to a matter of guilt. However, while guilt is undeniably important to our Fall into sin, it is far from the only aspect of the Fall. The Fall also included our defilement or corruption as well as our alienation. Indeed, given the important work in recent decades which has highlighted the Garden of Eden as the prototypical temple, the problem of defilement would seem to be privileged, particularly when one relates Genesis 1–3 to the cultic texts of Exodus and Leviticus which develop the holiness code in Edenic terms. In essence, the reductionism which sees the incurring of guilt as the principal feature of the Fall into sin renders it impossible, from the start, that we will see sanctification or adoption as elemental to the *gospel*. Instead, having reduced the Fall to guilt, we will reduce the *gospel* to justification, guilt’s answer. With this concern in view, we note the timeliness and cogency of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.’s closing words in *Perspectives on Pentecost*:

The pressing and promising task before the church today is to demonstrate unambiguously, in practice as well as proclamation, that at its *core* the *gospel* concerns not only the free and full remission of sin but the present reality of a new creation and eschatological life in Christ, the present renewal and transformation of the believer in his entirety, according to the inner man, and the re-direction and reintegration of human life in all its aspects. The *gospel* is the *gospel* of the exalted Christ, the life-giving Spirit. This is one perspective on Pentecost the church cannot afford to lose. Without it the church will be uncertain of itself and ineffective in serving its

Lord; with this perspective it is more than equal to its mission in the world. In the ‘firstfruits’ power of Pentecost the church lives eloquently in hope of the glory to be revealed (Rom. 8:15–25), confident in its expectation of a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (II Pet. 3:13).³⁴

Lastly, confusion on the relationship of law and gospel runs the risk of obscuring the proper harmony of the law not only with God himself, as revealing his character to man, but also with human beings, whose ordinary relationship with the law is designed to be one of sweet harmony. On the theology proper front, John Murray is correct: “The law of God is the holiness of God coming to expression for the regulation of thought and conduct consonant with his holiness.”³⁵ It is as sin distorts the law, and as sin provokes the law’s righteous demands, that the disorderly relationship emerges. But one must always remember that the negative relationship with the law is, in terms of its original purpose and design, *disorderly*. The gospel, in turn, is the good news of the glorious reordering of heart and life in the new creation in Christ. It is a weak reading of the gospel, and a dangerous mistake, to hear in the words “the Law leads us to Christ” *only* “the Law leads us to Christ who bears its curse and obeys its commands *in our stead*.” This sees the improper or irregular function of the Law as its only function: condemning us and driving us away from it. The life we enjoy in Christ is a life of forgiveness and peace but also of Spirit-empowered obedience.

Perhaps Richard Gaffin puts the matter most succinctly when he reminds us that “the antithesis between law and gospel is not an end in itself. It is not a theological ultimate. That antithesis arises not by virtue of creation, but as the consequence of sin, and the gospel functions to overcome it.” Nevertheless, it is frequently treated in our day as though it is indeed a theological ultimate, even an ahistorical—and thus achristological—abstraction. It is for this reason that accounts of the gospel of the “epiphany” of the Christ in history must include, as a matter of definition, this overcoming or reversal, as Paul’s words require and as Gaffin goes on to note:

The gospel removes an absolute law-gospel antithesis in the life of the believer. How so? Briefly, apart from the gospel and outside of Christ, the law is my enemy and condemns me. Why? Because *God* is my enemy and condemns me. But with the gospel and in Christ, united to him by faith, the law is no longer my enemy but my friend. Why? Because *God* is no longer my

enemy but my friend, and the law, *his* will—the law in its moral core, as reflective of his character and of concerns eternally inherent in his own person and so of what pleases him—is now my friendly guide for life in fellowship with God.³⁶

WHAT, THEN, IS THE GOSPEL?

Once again, then, and for the last time, what is the gospel? The gospel is “Lord Jesus Christ,” with all that this title means, and all three names used in it, in the context of the promises and actions of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. More fully, the gospel is the good news of the glory of God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit for us and in us. This is the gospel, and this is the Christ, to which the Scriptures of Israel bear witness. He is the *scopus* of the Torah, and its glory. The gospel is the good news of his ascension in glory seen as the decisive heavenward movement of his redemptive accomplishment, which has yet to climax in the fullness of his future union with his Bride. It is the good news of who he is now, and of our secured life in him in the heavens now. It is the good news of the unfailing, loving gravitational pull of our future in him, in whom the glory of God is beautifully manifest and in whom we presently grow, by his Spirit, from glory to glory. It is the good news that we will be like him, not that we will become him; that we will always need him, but that we will always have him. It is the good news that we are accepted in him, justified because of the righteousness of Another, received to his Table and Temple, one with his people, and loved by him, fully. And as the Spirit has his way within us, the gospel warms us with the peaceful assurance that, yes, one day our love for him and in him will finally be unmixed, unqualified, unhesitating,

34. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1993) 122. Italics Gaffin’s. I used this passage to close another essay closely related in concern to this one: Mark A. Garcia, “The Lord and Giver of Life: Cessionism in Service of Catholicity,” in *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-Five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011) 147–68.

35. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics*, foreword by J. I. Packer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 184. Murray’s entire discussion of what the law can and cannot do remains valuable for its succinct representation of the biblical pulse-beat on command and promise.

36. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (2006; 2nd ed.; Phillipsburg, N.J., P&R, 2013) 117–18. Italics Gaffin’s

perfected. It is the wonderful announcement of every holy desire satisfied, both God's and ours, of our deep existence to the praise of his glory, and the end of frustration's gasps.

How does this gospel relate to the promises of the law concerning God's blessings upon the obedient? If we use the law's promises, and not only the doctrine of justification, to summon Christians to the blessings that obedience yields, have we confused law and gospel?

The promises of [the law], in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof; although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works: so as a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law, and not under grace. (WCF XVI.6)

On the whole, then, my plea is that we recover a vision of salvation as part of the biblically muscular, robust, thick, wide, comprehensive, panoramic eschatological vision: the new creation. This is not one option among others. *This reflects a commitment to read the gospel of Christ in terms utterly controlled by the telos of our creation in God's image: to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.* This is but another way of thinking through how eschatology precedes and contextualizes soteriology, for we are now construing the "gospel" as the Spiritual gift in the present of the fullness of what we are *for*, the fullness of life in Christ.

Response by Michael S. Horton

"Factions breed factions," as Puritan stalwart Richard Sibbes said during similar controversies in his day. I share Mark Garcia's concern that differences have sometimes been blown out of proportion among brothers who are largely in agreement on the most important points. At the risk of failing to give my brother a fit rejoinder to his thoughtful exegetical and theological argument, a few responses will have to suffice.

If I had read this piece outside of the present context, it would have struck me as far less controversial than it does now—inasmuch as I suspect that I am the target of

some of his criticisms. Indeed, many of his key points I have made in many places. For example, I have argued repeatedly that the gospel encompasses "Christ with all of his benefits"—not only the forensic but also the transformative.

In that vein, I've emphasized not only the resurrection but also the ascension and return of Christ; not only justification and sanctification, but also glorification, as the "glorious destination," complaining that this doctrine seems to have less prominence in Reformed circles today than in past eras.¹ "Even here, at the very end of the golden chain of salvation, we see the inextricable connection between the forensic verdict of God's Word that inaugurates the new creation and our progressive re-creation according to Christ's image ... Here our union with Christ ... reaches its glorious destination."² Under "Justification and Sanctification: The 'Double Benefit' of Union with Christ," I observe that Paul's answer to antinomianism is, ironically, a wider vision of the gospel as including participation in Christ's resurrection-life (regeneration and sanctification).

The antinomian has too narrow a view of the gospel, as if it were mere fire insurance—canceling our debt without actually marrying us to Christ—while the legalist turns the gospel into law. However, Paul returns to the gospel and simply announces that through our union with Christ by faith we have not only justification but sanctification. No one who is justified is in fact under the reign of sin and death. Drawing on the wide vista of this triumphant indicative, the imperative follows: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions" (v. 12).³

I've also in several places appealed to 1 John 2:7–8 as a terrific example of how Christ's eschatological victory has changed the believer's relation to the law (which is why Calvin calls it now the "principal use" for the believer).

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

The command to love (God and neighbor) being the essence of the moral law, John is not issuing a new requirement. Nevertheless, it is in a very real sense new

1. Since this is argued in many places, I'll refer to only one: *Pilgrim Theology* (Zondervan, 2011) 325–341.

2. *Pilgrim Theology*, 324.

3. *Pilgrim Theology*, 308.

because we are given a new heart that loves God's law because it is no longer the hangman but the friend of those who are in Christ. It is an inaugurated eschatology: "...because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining."

Mark Garcia distinguishes between a law-gospel distinction and a Law-Gospel Hermeneutic (LGH). Years ago, I wrote an article, "Calvin and the Law-Gospel Hermeneutic."⁴ In that article, "the Law-Gospel Hermeneutic" is taken for granted as the Lutheran paradigm and I wanted to see the relation of Calvin's thinking to that paradigm. While pointing out obvious differences, I also concluded that there was a long-standing tendency in Lutheran and in some recent Reformed circles to overstate those differences. Over the years, the evidence for that thesis has mounted in my view. In any case, I always refer to the Reformed endorsement of the law-gospel distinction, without treating it as a sweeping hermeneutic. Actually, most of our notable forebears from Bullinger to Berkhof have spoken more generally than I would of a sweeping "opposition between the law and the gospel" (Second Helvetic Confession) and that "everything in Scripture can be gathered under each of these two headings" (Beza, Ursinus, Berkhof, *et al.*).

On the law-gospel distinction, Calvin was "Lutheran." However, he displays more nuance than the LGH. Especially against the Anabaptists, he stressed the unity of the one covenant of grace; against Rome (and Anabaptist legalism), he emphasized the absolute contrast of law and gospel in relation to justification.

Like Melancthon, Calvin continued to speak of law and gospel in two senses: (1) as referring to the Old Testament and New Testament and (2) as referring to condemnation and justification. This important nuance is found explicitly even in Paul, where he refers to "law" in both of these senses even in the same sentence: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested *apart from the law*, although *the Law and the Prophets* bear witness to it ... (Rom 3:21, emphasis added). Calvin himself acknowledges these two senses: "Paul harmonizes law and faith, and yet sets the righteousness of one in opposition to that of the other." Why? "The law has a twofold meaning; it sometimes includes the whole of what has been taught by Moses, and sometimes that part only which was peculiar to his ministry, which consisted of precepts, rewards, and punishments." The goal of his ministry was to lead the people of God "to despair as to their own righteousness, that they might flee to the haven of divine goodness, and so to Christ himself. This was the end or design of the

Mosaic dispensation.... And whenever the word law is thus strictly taken, Moses is by implication opposed to Christ: and then we must consider what the law contains, as separate from the gospel."⁵

This nuance is crucial for understanding the different references to law and gospel not only in Calvin but in Scripture itself. So when we dip into the *Institutes* or commentaries for quotes, we should be cautioned that Calvin (again, like Luther and Melancthon) uses "law" and "gospel" differently—and without notice, depending on the context and the point he is making.

That being said, I do think that Mark wrongly assumes in his article that "Gospel" is reduced to justification. There is no logical connection between the law-gospel distinction and downplaying the reality of the new creation as part of the gospel. Much less is there reason to suggest that "those who conceive of obedience as belonging invariably to real saving faith, as per James, or who recognize horizontal, and not only vertical, dimensions to new covenant salvation, as per 1 John, are guilty of 'confusing law and gospel.'" Here as on many points in this essay, I found myself wondering whom the author had in mind.

Much of Mark's article is an illuminating exegetical argument concerning 2 Cor 3:12–13. I think that his conclusion is somewhat strained, though not entirely implausible. In my view, this is one of the many places where Paul uses "the law" as short-hand for the Mosaic economy. In comparison to the new covenant, the old covenant glory is fading and its temporary and typological character was evident even in Moses' day. However, I appreciated the argument, but did not see how it would be decisive theologically one way or the other.

My main concern with the essay, I suppose, is that in an effort to affirm what he thinks is often left out of some Reformed presentations today, he tries too hard to make passages traditionally viewed as "forensic" and "justification-centered" more sanctification-directed. In my view, this is a false choice. There seemed to me to be too many "it's this, not that" arguments. Rather, it should be a "both-and" argument.

The *telos* of the law (in 2 Cor 3 and Rom 10:4) I take to refer both the "end of the law" as an old covenant administration and the "goal of the law" finding its fulfillment in Christ. Only in Christ can the true goal

4. Michael Horton, "Calvin and the Law-Gospel Hermeneutic," *Pro Ecclesia*, 6 (1997), No. 1: 27–42.

5. Calvin, *Commentaries Upon the Acts of the Apostles; Commentaries Upon the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, translated and edited by John Owen (rep. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 386–87.

of the law—to inculcate love of God and each other—be realized. Mark argues that “Christ is the goal or culmination of the Law, not the Law’s termination (excepting, of course, the kind of important termination accented in Hebrews, where Christ is the once-for-all sacrifice and Priest).” However, in Hebrews the law—again, as old covenant—is said to be not only fading but “obsolete” (Heb 8:13). Surely it is not the moral law that is in view, but rather the old covenant.

His points about Galatians also, I thought, were flawed not by what they affirmed, but by the seeming false choice. “Paul’s contrast of the faith of the gospel with the ‘works of the law’ (Gal 2:16; 3:2, 11–12) ... make the most sense as they are applied to the Judaistic and Pharisaic misuse and misinterpretation of the law.” Agreed. They were confusing the terms of remaining God’s holy nation in his holy land (established by the Sinai covenant) with the terms for inheriting everlasting life—the Abrahamic promise.

He makes a great deal out of Paul’s point in Galatians 5:14 that “what matters most” is “faith working through love”—not justification. “In the epistle (a) most frequently thought to uphold a LGH and a justification-focused understanding of the gospel, and (b) explicitly devoted, with evident passion, to protecting the faithful from errors on justification by faith alone, Paul refers not to justification but to faith active in love and to the new creation as what matters.” It’s not circumcision versus justification by works, but circumcision versus “faith working through love” that is Paul’s main point.

Again, this is a false choice. It is as if Galatians 2–4 is being read through the lens of chapters 5 and 6. Others might follow a reverse strategy: reading chapters 5 and 6 as simply a restatement of chapters 2–4. Rather, I suggest that we read the epistle straight through. Those who are clinging to the shadows of the law do not realize that they are both condemned by it (circumcision obligates one to keep the whole law) and that it cannot even bring the ultimate *telos* of the law itself—*viz.*, love. Instead, the law is being used as a way of dividing the church into first- and second-class. When it comes to new creation living, “faith working through love” is the main thing, not whether one is circumcised. So I disagree that Paul is making a programmatic thesis statement about the most important thing in Galatians. It’s *all* important. I also have trouble with the conclusion that “the works of the law” refer merely to the boundary markers between Jew and Gentile. It’s “law” versus “faith” as the principle of inheritance that Paul explicitly contrasts—or, in Romans 4, “doing” versus “faith in Christ.”

I wholeheartedly affirm that the gift of sanctification

is part of the gospel, and that the call to holiness is an imperative of God’s abiding law that is meant to be heeded on the basis of faith in the gospel. However, where some separate what God has joined together, I fear that Mark sometimes confuses them, as when he says that “keeping God’s commands are in fact *part of* (not merely consequences or fruit of) the good news of the grace given in the gospel” (italics original). Nor do I think that his use of Titus 2 points in that direction. It’s one thing to say that the announcement that the new creation has dawned in Christ is part of the gospel; quite another to say that my keeping of God’s commands is part of the gospel rather than its fruit.

Since I have also argued that our glorification is the summit of the new creation and, with Calvin, argue that it is “the end toward which we have been saved,” I can only cheer Mark in the quotations from John Murray, M. G. Kline, and Richard Gaffin, Jr. I also affirm “a kind of conditionality ... agreeable with the principle and guarantee of grace.” In a number of places I’ve cited Bavinck’s helpful rubric on this point: “The covenant of grace is unconditional in its basis and conditional in its administration.”

In short, where I see Mark Garcia’s arguments sometimes implying a choice between forensic and eschatological-new-creation approaches in Scripture, I see them as two aspects of the same gift. Where I disagree, I think that it is the result of either the author’s misunderstanding of the subtleties with which Reformed theology has traditionally understood the law-gospel distinction or an over-correction of salvation-reduced-to-justification by marginalizing that aspect of the gospel. I have been illuminated by Mark’s insights and pray that our conversation can contribute to greater understanding and charity in our small and often overly-polemical churches—for the glory of Christ and the good of his church.