

The Penetrating Law of Christ

Many ill-informed and dismissive comments are made about those who advocate the law of Christ, and not the law of Moses, as the believer's rule. Speaking for myself, I do not merely resent this. It is a travesty. It hinders many in making a fair assessment of new-covenant theology. Worse, it is a direct offence against the Lord Christ himself. Christ's law is *not* foggy sentiment.¹ Christ is *not* content with a woolly obedience, a vague profession of some sort of 'love'. He demands total, unstinted, constant and continual obedience, out of the highest possible motives – because he loved me, because of all that he is, because of all he has done for me, because he has taught me to love him, because he has written his law on my heart, because he himself has been formed within me, and because he has given me his Spirit, the one who moves me to live in increasing conformity to my Redeemer's likeness to the glory of God:

My brothers, you... have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code... There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 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... For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those

¹ See 'Fuzzy Sentiment' in my series: 'New-Covenant Theology Made Simple' ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and under the Edocs link on: [David H J Gay Ministry sermonaudio.com](http://DavidHJGayMinistry.com)).

whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified... I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:12-4,29-30; 12:1-2).

This Christ-likeness in the believer is both an inevitable and essential consequence of the new covenant. Anything less ‘wishy-washy’ could not be imagined. In this short article, I want to explore these things a little.²

Now there are two vital principles to make clear before we go any further. The law of Christ is not the law of Moses. It is not even a ‘law’ in the Mosaic sense. Since I have set all this out in detail elsewhere, I will not develop my line of reasoning here. Nevertheless, these two points are not trivial, and I urge you to read and weigh my supporting arguments.³

In saying that the law of Christ is not a list of rules, and in stressing that ‘we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code’, however, I am not implying that the believer is not under the rule of the entire Scripture (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16). Nor am I saying that God’s demands under the gospel are easier than the demands of the law. Far from it. Why, the new covenant is *more* searching than the old. As the letter to the Hebrews makes crystal clear, to sin against Christ’s law is far worse than sinning against Moses. That letter was written, not to inform its readers that it would be a pity if they went back from Christ to the old covenant, but to tell them bluntly that it would be fatal! Don’t do it! Don’t even think of it! And that is what the

² For this article, I have lightly edited certain sections from my *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law* pp162-163,232-236,252-253,494-495,508-509,535-536.

³ ‘The Law of the Believer’s Heart’; ‘The Law the Believer’s Rule?’; ‘What is The Law?’; “The Law” in “The Law of Christ”. These articles may be found in my series: *New-Covenant Articles* (various volumes), and under the Edocs link on: David H J Gay Ministry sermonaudio.com or on the christmymcovenant.com website.

sacred writer is saying to us, and saying to us now. We must not leave Christ.

The warning passages in Hebrews

Let me start with this:

Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:28-29).

Clearly, it is more culpable to sin under the new covenant than the old.

Furthermore, *ekklēsia* life plays a vital role in the law of Christ; in particular, the discipline of church life. Take the case of incest at Corinth, over which the believers were – yes – boasting! Paul rebuked them. They should have ‘been filled with grief’ (NIV) over it, and removed the offender. The apostle went on, setting out the way in which the law of Christ must be applied in such cases:

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote to you in my letter not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not

judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person’ (1 Cor. 5:1-13; see also Matt. 18:15-19; Acts 5:1-11; 8:18-23; 2 Thess. 3:6-15).

Do not miss the references to the old covenant, the law – the Passover and the extract drawn from several repeated Deuteronomy passages. The law of Christ knows how to make full – but properly nuanced – use of the law of Moses, the Mosaic covenant – as a paradigm.⁴ Do not miss the reference to leaven – echoes of Galatians 5:9. And while the severity aspect of the law of Christ stands out a mile, do not forget that its application at Corinth had a reforming effect, and all was put right (2 Cor. 2:5-11). This, too, is another heart-warming aspect of Christ’s law. But the point at issue stands. The law of Christ is anything but hazy sentimentalism, vague ethics, however often such dismissive terms are used by its ill-informed critics. Iron sits within the velvet.

The fact is, however, here we have what seems to be a contradiction. How can the new covenant be *more searching* than the old, and to sin against Christ’s law be *far worse* than sinning against Moses’ law (Heb. 10:28-29), and yet at the same time the ‘law’ of Christ, his ‘yoke’, his ‘burden’, be ‘easy’ and ‘light’ (Matt. 11:30)?

How do Reformed teachers, covenant theologians, deal with this?⁵ They say the law of Christ is the law of Moses shorn of its condemnation. I call this ‘pulling the law’s teeth’. The new law, according to this, is something *less* than the old, *less* severe. It is the old law *minus* the difficult part. Reader, how can this be reconciled with the fact that the new covenant is more penetrating than the old? Instead of explaining the problem, this approach explodes it! How ironic, it is, therefore, that the Reformed are so free with their accusations of fuzzy sentiment, woolly concept, and all the rest, when dismissing new-covenant theology! Glass houses and the throwing of stones comes to mind. Who’s the real antinomian, after all?⁶

⁴ See my: ‘The Law the Believer’s Rule?’.

⁵ See my ‘The Law: Reformed Escape Routes’.

⁶ See my video: ‘Antinomianism!’ (youtube.com).

The question remains: How can the law of Christ be more severe than the law of Moses? What is the biblical answer? How can the new covenant be more penetrating than the old, and yet be easy and light? Clearly, although the Bible states the seeming contradiction, there can be none. As to the severity aspect of Christ's law, contrary to the Reformed approach, no teeth are to be pulled. The warnings of the new covenant *are* to be taken seriously and given their full weight. There must be no getting round them by semantics. The warning passages are real.

The fundamental sin of the new covenant is to depart from Christ. I have just quoted Hebrews 10:29. What sin does the verse warn against? Nothing less than the deliberate, wilful (Heb. 10:26) forsaking of Christ, the bitter rejection of him and his Spirit.⁷ Whoever breaks Hebrews 10:29 'has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace'. 'Worse punishment' than under Moses awaits such a man! And this warning note is sounded again and again throughout the letter to the Hebrews (Heb. 2:1-3; 3:12-14; 4:1,11; 6:4-8; 10:26-39; 12:14-17,25-29). Take also Romans 8:6,13: 'To be carnally minded [to have the mind of the flesh] is death... If you live according to the flesh you will die'. And Galatians 6:8: 'He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life'. I stress the reality of the warning passages. They are not hypothetical. They are not put in Scripture as 'bogey men'. They are unfeigned. They mean what they say, and they say what they mean. I do not think they can be 'relegated' to dealing with the believer's reward. The believers who received the letter to the Hebrews were in danger of forsaking Christ.

Perseverance under Christ, holding to him and his law, is a sure mark of grace, the ultimate proof of spirituality. To depart from Christ is the worst of all sins. We are Christ's 'house... *if* we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end' (Heb. 3:6). 'For we have become partakers of Christ *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end... And

⁷ Do Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10 speak of this?

we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end... See that you do not refuse him who speaks' (Heb. 3:14; 6:11; 12:25). 'The gospel... by which... you are saved, *if* you hold fast' to the apostolic word, the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-2). 'He who endures to the end shall be saved' (Matt. 24:13).

Is the punishment under the new covenant severe? It is indeed. To break the law of Christ – to reject Christ, to turn back from him, to forsake him – leads to: 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness' (Matt. 7:23; see verses 13-29). How harrowing, then, is Christ's question: 'Do you also want to go away?' There is only one satisfactory reply: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (John 6:67-69). The ultimate testimony which counts is this: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith' (2 Tim. 4:7). Believer, Christ will 'present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in his sight – *if* indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel' (Col. 1:22-23).

But just a moment! Surely all believers sin? Sadly, they do! Well, when a believer sins, does he bring condemnation upon himself? Does he lose his salvation? Certainly not! Let me explain. The law of Christ is far more than a list of rules. 'We serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code' (Rom. 7:6). Of course, as I have said, the believer is under Scripture (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16), but, I repeat, he does not serve God in the old way of the letter (2 Cor. 3:6). The law of Christ is not a sort of re-vamped law of Moses! In truth, it is not that at all. It is an entirely new system. To submit to the law of Christ is to yield to him, to receive him as Lord and Saviour, to honour and obey him, to learn of him, to cleave to him, to abide in him, to continue in him, to have him formed within, to have his Spirit, to walk according to his Spirit. Now although a believer may stumble into sin, this is a far cry from deserting the Redeemer.⁸ While I would not excuse the least sin, there is a

⁸ The believer cannot go back to the old slavery, and sin. He dare not, it is unthinkable: 'What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law

world of difference between *failing* Christ and *forsaking* him. The believer sins; sadly, it is so. But God has made abundant provision for such (1 John 1:5-10; 2:1-2, for instance). Nevertheless, the warnings are real. If professing believers do turn their back upon Christ, and abandon him, they will come under the severest of all judgments: 'For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them' (2 Pet. 2:20-21). This, it goes without saying, is far worse than under Moses.

but under grace? Certainly not!' (Rom. 6:15). So thunders the apostle. Before his conversion, the believer was a slave of sin, but now he is not; he is a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). In his former slavery to sin he produced sin and death (Rom. 6:19-21). Now, being the slave of God, the slave of righteousness, he produces holiness (Rom. 6:22-23). I am not preaching sinless perfection. I do not say that a believer cannot sin. Of course not! But there is all the difference between 'sinning', and 'living in' or 'being a slave' to sin; between 'being in the flesh', and 'the flesh being in you'; between 'a sense of desertion', and 'living without God'; between 'a sense of darkness', and 'living in the kingdom of darkness'. I am not – *not* – teaching sinless perfection, I repeat. But I am restating Paul's doctrine: the unbeliever is a slave to sin; the believer is not. In Scripture, no believer is ever addressed as a sinner. John said: 'Whoever abides in [Christ] does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen him nor known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who sins is of the devil... Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God' (1 John 3:6-9). NASB has 'sins... sins... practices sin... practices sin... sin'; NIV has 'keeps on sinning... continues to sin... does what is sinful... continue to sin... go on sinning'. He does not 'sin wilfully' (Heb. 10:26), 'sin deliberately' (NIV). He does not live in the *realm* of sin. Above all, although I talk as though *I* am saying this or that, all I have done is quote the apostle and try to enforce what *he* is saying! And at the heart of Paul's doctrine is this glorious statement: 'For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace' (Rom. 6:14).

This, then, is the biblical answer to the seeming contradiction. I realise that this, in itself, raises other problems, problems connected with God's sovereignty, his purpose and decree. One the one hand, I know that God will bring all his elect to everlasting glory. I rejoice in it. But I also know that each one of the elect has to come individually to faith in Christ and has to continue in Christ. I do not try to reconcile these two. I believe them both because I find them both revealed in Scripture. However much I explored these matters, I would still end up with a seeming contradiction, something beyond my wit to understand or explain. But this happens so often with me, I do as I always do: after trying to reconcile the paradox as far as I can within biblical parameters, I accept the remaining tension, and press on by faith. And it not just me! All believers find the same. Of course they do! Unless, that is, they are prepared to trim Scripture to fit their system!⁹ Which they are!

So, although there is much that can be said – and must be said – about the gentle, kindly aspect of Christ's law,¹⁰ its severity aspect is real. We must take the warnings seriously. In the final analysis, to break the law of Christ is to depart from Christ, to desert him, to live according to the flesh. And the consequences are indescribably bad. But the law of Christ is far from negative. Although I have spent a little time on this negative aspect of it in order to tackle a seeming contradiction, there is far more to be said on the positive side. 'But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life... Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen' (Jude 20-21,24-25).

⁹ On the seeming contradiction or paradox between God's sovereignty and the free offer, and between human inability and duty faith, see my *The Gospel Offer is Free*, especially pp75-152.

¹⁰ That is, there is more to be said about the 'easy' (the opposite of burdensome) and 'light' (easy to be kept) aspect of Christ's law.

Nevertheless, I say again, the letter to the Hebrews was written, not merely to inform its readers that it would be a pity if they went back from Christ to the old covenant, but to make sure they persevered to the end. Departing from Christ would be fatal! Don't do it! Don't even think of it! That is what the sacred writer is saying to us, and saying to us right now: Do not leave Christ for anything or anybody!

The law of Christ as spelled out by Christ himself

As I have said, Christ's law is *not* foggy sentiment. He is *not* content with a woolly obedience, a vague profession of some sort of 'love'. Christ demands total, unstinted, constant and continual obedience, out of the highest possible motives – because he loved me, because of all that he is, because of all he has done for me, because he has taught me to love him, because he has written his law on my heart, because he himself has been formed within me, and because he has given me his Spirit, the one who moves me to live in increasing conformity to my Redeemer's likeness to the glory of God.

Having glanced at Hebrews, let me now go directly to Christ himself. We know what he declared in the Sermon on the Mount. Addressing his disciples, Christ took the Mosaic law for his springboard or starting point, saying again and again: 'You have heard that it was said... but I say to you' (Matt. 5:21-22,27-28,31-32,33-34,38-39,43-44). Christ always cut deeper than Moses. Instead of making obedience an external matter, Christ made (his) law-keeping a matter of the heart, which is far more penetrating and searching. He could not have made it any clearer: 'Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:20).

At the highest pitch of all, the believer, as Christ declares, has to 'keep my [Christ's] commandments... just as I [Christ] have kept my Father's commandments' (John 15:10). Note the 'just as'. This is what Christ requires. This is what pleases him. He demands the same quality of obedience from his people as that which he himself gave to his Father. Let *that* sink in! Moreover,

such obedience not only pleases Christ, this is what makes his people truly happy: ‘If you know these things, blessed [happy, AV] are you if you do them’ (John 13:17).¹¹ More, obedience is essential; it is no option. And if anyone dares to dismiss this obedience to the gospel as sentimental vagueness, I urge him to think seriously about what he is doing. On a coming day, he will have to explain his words to Christ, the one who commands his people to show their love to him by obedience to his commandments, his law, and to do so with the same quality of obedience as he himself, while he lived on earth, showed to his Father.

Hear the word of Christ:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, **just as** I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another **as** I have loved you (John 15:10-12).

Receive one another, **just as** Christ **also** received us, to the glory of God (Rom. 15:7).

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, **even as** [**just as**, NIV] God in Christ [**also**, NASB] forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, **as** Christ **also has** loved us and given himself for us (Eph. 4:32 – 5:2).

Husbands, love your wives, **just as** Christ **also** loved the church and gave himself for her... **just as** the Lord does the church (Eph. 5:25,29).

In light of biblical commands of this nature and weight, all foolish, dismissive talk – cheap talk! – about the so-called inadequacy or vagueness of the law of Christ should cease forthwith. Such scorning of the law of Christ verges on the blasphemous.

Extracts with brief comments

Robert Govett:

¹¹ This is more than a warm feeling, of course. Such people are truly blessed in God’s eyes.

Let us now turn to another field in which the loftiness of the new rule of life is more fully exhibited. I refer to the Sermon on the Mount, in which the Saviour's doctrine is compared with that of Moses in many and most important points. The main difference between the two systems consists in this – that Moses' law embodies the spirit of JUSTICE; the teaching of our Lord, the spirit of MERCY. It is from this fundamental distinction that the superiority of the new rule of life flows... Jesus came in no hostile spirit against the law or the prophets. Both were sent by his Father; both must receive their entire fulfilment ere they passed away, as it was designed that they should. But... there is no 'unseemly opposition' here...

The Saviour begins to compare his new standard with the old. He takes the second table of the decalogue, and shows how much more he requires than Moses demanded of old. The Saviour announces his commands with the most studied contrast to the law: a contrast which has been blunted to English readers by our translation. We read [in the AV of Matt. 5:21]: 'You have heard that it was said *by* those of old time', instead of '*to*', which beyond just question is the correct rendering; and which is given in the margin [of the AV, and is the translation in the NKJV, NIV; the NASB has 'the ancients were told']. [Christ] begins with the sixth command. The law forbade murder, and announced to the murderer the judgment of the appointed court. Jesus assures his disciples that even anger between brethren would come before his future court; and that a malicious word would expose the utterer to the danger of hell-fire. Here is a heightening indeed of the offence and of the penalty. That which was no misdeed against the law of Moses is now to be visited with a sentence greater than that belonging to the highest crime under the law (Matt. 5:21-22).

When he speaks of the seventh command, there is a similar raising of the standard. That which was no misdeed at all as reckoned by Moses is by Jesus announced to be adultery, and exposed to the visitation of Gehenna. With like words does Jesus exalt the rule of life concerning theft, false witness and coveting a neighbour's goods (Matt. 5:27-30).

But he does not halt at the decalogue. That was not the Jew's entire rule of life.

Let me break in. What a very important point Govett is making. It must not be missed. The ten commands comprised only a part of the rule for Jews. So, if the Reformed are right, believers, who according to the Reformed have only the ten commandments as

their rule, have a lesser regime than the Jews! The Jews had 613 commands, whereas believers have only ten! Remarkable.

And that's not all. Govett:

The Saviour therefore shows how his new commands rise above and set aside the law. He forbids divorce in cases permitted by Moses. Moses allowed oaths and vows... the Saviour forbids them... Moses' general doctrine was that goodness and kindness were to be exhibited towards men, specially towards the holy nation of Israel; but it admitted of two exceptions – criminals and enemies... Criminals... pity was forbid (Deut. 13:8; 19:21). The enemies of Israel might be smitten to death with the sword. The priests with the trumpets of God were to encourage and bless their warfare. Now [under the law of Christ] this is forbidden. The law of grace is to encircle even the cases excepted by Moses. The disciple is not to prosecute the offender; nor is he permitted on any occasion to take the sword against a foe. His Father in heaven is sparing criminals and enemies; he is to resemble him (Matt. 5:38-48).

Jesus next drops a word of warning. He confesses the extreme difficulty to fallen man of a rule of life so high and heavenly as this. 'Tis a narrow gate and a strict way indeed! But he tells us not to imagine that he was asking of disciples born of God only conduct such as might be exhibited by the lowest of mankind. Was such a life difficult indeed? Yes, but an especial reward was also promised thereto. Were they born again of God? Let them show it by grace like that of the Father in heaven.

In regard of religious service, the Saviour next exalts the standard greatly beyond the law. Moses... required only that the offerer should be a circumcised Jew, not ceremonially unclean, and that the offering... should be without blemish. But now our Lord brings into view the motives of the worshipper... (Matt. 6:1-18).

The law promised, and gave as its blessing, treasures on earth. Filled barns and overflowing storehouses were the sign of Jehovah's favour. Now the disciples were to give up these for treasures in heaven, and for a recompense at the resurrection of the just (Matt. 6:19-34). Under the law, to be a magistrate and ruler was an honour, rightly desired by an Israelite... The Saviour now forbids this to his disciples... (Matt. 7:1-2). The law admitted to its sacred rites every circumcised descendant of Abraham. No matter how sensual, bloodthirsty, deceitful and unbelieving a Jew might be, he had a right to partake of the Passover. Judas the betrayer had as good a right to the Paschal

lamb as our Lord. Wicked as a high priest might be, if he were not ceremonially unclean, he had a right to enter the holiest. But that defect is removed in the Saviour's new scheme. His disciples were to exclude from the sacred rites appointed by our Lord all the unclean and unrenewed in spirit (Matt. 7:6).

Thus I have rapidly gone over the Sermon on the Mount, and have exhibited our Lord as indeed the author of a new doctrine, affecting all the Christian's life, and standing in constant contrast with the commands of the Mosaic law. Jesus is no mere expounder of Moses.

What a vital point this is. Govett went on:

Most would make Jesus only a land-surveyor, pointing out afresh the old boundaries of the fields, scraping from the surface the stones, the moss and lichens which in the course of ages had covered them; or rooting from their neighbourhood the brambles that concealed them. But now evidence in plenty has been adduced to prove that this view is mistaken. Moses brought LAW: Jesus brought GRACE (John 1:17). The prophet who was to come, according to God's own promise, was not merely one who was to recall attention to the words spoken by Moses. He was to bear a new doctrine ['his law' (Isa. 42:4)]; and woe to him that refused it! The two schools of doctrine taught by Moses and by Christ, respectively, have been briefly presented. You, my reader, must decide by which you will be led. Some, as the Saviour foresaw, would prefer the old and easier rule of life. For them, he draws the consequence of such a choice... (Matt. 5:20).¹²

Let me emphasise this last point. As Govett rightly shows, the law of Christ is more penetrating than the law of Moses, and its punishment ultimately more severe. The warning passages are real! Please remember Jesus' words about judgment were largely delivered to his disciples and for them. Most evangelicals today are quite content to forget the context and apply them to unbelievers. So, taking up Govett's expression, those who opt for the Mosaic law as the way of progressive sanctification have actually opted for the 'easier rule of life' – the wrong one, but easier!

¹² Robert Govett: *Is The Law The Christian's Rule Of Life?*, Fletcher and Son, Norwich, Third edition, 1874, pp48-53.

John G.Reisinger as editor of *Sound of Grace* in an ‘Open Letter to Dr Sproul’:

Dr Sproul, please explain why your magazine labels new-covenant theology as antinomian when we not only affirm just as strongly as you that the Christian is not only under clear objective ethical commandments in the new covenant, but we also insist those new-covenant laws are even higher than those written on stone. How is it possible for our belief in a *higher* law to be turned into *anti* law? Your September [2002] issue of *Tabletalk* condemns us as heretics simply because we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is a true lawgiver in his own right and, as such, gives higher and more spiritual laws that anything Moses ever gave. Why do we deserve the odious label of ‘antinomian’ simply because we believe that Christ replaces Moses as the new lawgiver in exactly the same way he replaces Aaron as high priest?¹³

James D.G.Dunn, commenting on Galatians 5:14, quashed the notion that the biblical call for ‘love’ is ‘imprecise’:

On the contrary, just because it is less prescribed beforehand what love of the neighbour demands, and depends on who the neighbour is and his/her situation in each particular instance, *it is all the more demanding*. Moreover, the demand is open-ended: we do not know beforehand who our neighbour might be at any one time (see also... Gal. 6:10)... It is a call for a practical love, a concentrated love, not a vague feeling for humankind stretched so thin as to be non-existent.

I agree, further, with Dunn when he once again observed how an emphasis upon ‘the freedom of the Spirit can easily degenerate’ into all sorts of carnal behaviour, unless it is accompanied by the equally biblical emphasis on the all-embracing law of Christ. As Ben Witherington likewise observed, carnal behaviour ‘is the lot of those who throw over the law without a principle as penetrating as love of neighbour to guide them, and without a genuine commitment to serve one another. Without that, the call

¹³ John G.Reisinger: ‘An Open Letter to Dr R.C.Sproul’, *Sound of Grace*, Frederick, Vol.9 number 4, February 2003, p3, emphasis his.

to freedom can open a floodgate which sweeps away every foundation'.¹⁴

Conclusion

So, paradoxically, Christ's law is both more penetrating and yet easy (Matt. 11:30). I see both in Scripture, I state both with equal vehemence, and, by God's Spirit, I seek to apply both with equal fervour, beginning with myself. This is the new-covenant theology I espouse.

I praise God for his grace, and I use all necessary means to hold on my way by his Spirit. Oliver Cromwell's 'trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry' is an excellent dictum.

No, I am not teaching that any of the elect can be lost. But the warning passages (the Gospels, *Hebrews*) are real, not hypothetical. My works don't save or keep me. Only God's grace does that. But I have to persevere:

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rom. 8:13).

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do

¹⁴ James D.G.Dunn: *The Epistle to the Galatians*, A & C Black, London, 1993, pp289,292-293, emphasis mine; Ben Witherington III: *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on... Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, T.&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1998, pp384-385.

not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:1-17).

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:3-11)

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own

destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Pet. 3:14-18).