

# *Peter Masters’ Muddle over the Covenants Part 2*

This piece is Part 2 of my response to the first of two articles by Peter Masters in the *Sword and Trowel* 2016: Issue 2: ‘God’s Parallel Covenants’, ‘drawn from the 2016 Tabernacle School of Theology’.<sup>1</sup>

In my previous article I dealt with Masters’ work in general terms. I have to confess that my reply in that piece was not so clear as I would have liked, but I found myself constantly having to sort out Masters’ confusing use of the terminology of covenant theology; in particular, ‘the covenant of works’ and ‘the covenant of grace’, or their equivalent. If only he had used scriptural terms! We would be talking about the old covenant (the Mosaic) and the new. Ah, well!

This article, however, should be more straightforward. There is one remaining issue, one issue only. Was the covenant of Deuteronomy 29 and 30, made by God through Moses with Israel at Moab just before the nation entered the land, the old covenant or the new? Masters says it was the new. I deny it categorically.

Before I look at Deuteronomy 30, however, we need to get to grips with Romans 10. For when he deals with justification in Romans 10, Paul turns to Deuteronomy 30. This is highly significant. I refer to:

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the

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<sup>1</sup> *Sword and Trowel* 2016: Issue 2, pp3-10. It can also be found online.

word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says: ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame’. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Rom. 10:4-13).

Homing in, the essential passage, in which Paul draws on Deuteronomy 30, is this:

But the righteousness based on faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)...

Let us take it slowly. When Paul speaks of ‘the righteousness of faith’, he is clearly referring to the gospel, justification by faith. And he is contrasting that with attempted justification by the law (Rom. 10:5), which is futile, impossible to any sinner (Rom. 7:10; 9:30 – 10:3). So, in prosecuting his argument, in expounding the gospel, Paul turns to Deuteronomy 30:12-14. Does this mean that in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 Moses, himself, was setting out the gospel, the new covenant, justification by faith? Is this what Paul is telling us? Not at all! Notice what Paul does not do. He does not *quote* Deuteronomy 30; he *accommodates* it to suit his purpose. There is a big difference. He does not say: ‘As Moses said, as Moses made clear, as Moses declared to Israel...’. I am not nit-picking. I am being precise.<sup>2</sup>

I am not alone in making this point. Albert Barnes:

Paul regards this [passage in Deuteronomy 30] as appropriately describing the language of Christian faith; but [he uses the passage] without affirming that Moses himself had any reference in the passage to the faith of the gospel.

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<sup>2</sup> Another nickname for ‘Puritan’ was ‘Precisionist’. When John Rogers was asked why he was so precise, he replied that he served a precise God. See my *Battle for the Church*.

M.R.Vincent:

The quotation in Romans 10:6-8 is a *free citation* from Deuteronomy 30:11-14. Paul recognises [something he can adapt]<sup>3</sup> in Moses' words, and thus changes the original expressions so as to apply them to the Christian faith-system. His object in the change is indicated by the explanatory words which he adds. He does not formally declare that Moses describes the righteousness of faith in these words, but *appropriates* the words of Moses, putting them into the mouth of the personified faith-righteousness.<sup>4</sup>

C.H.Spurgeon:

I want to call your special attention to the fact that Paul *borrow*s the words of Moses.<sup>5</sup>

Yes, Paul finds Moses' words 'appropriate', he makes 'a free citation' of them, he 'appropriates' them, 'borrows' them. That is as much as can be said about Paul's use of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10. One thing is certain. Paul does not quote Moses to support what he is saying about justification by faith, on the grounds that this is what Moses taught.

Let me summarise what is happening in Romans 10:

1. Paul *uses* the words of Deuteronomy 30 merely as a vehicle to set out his own doctrine. We must also remember that he loves wordplay.<sup>6</sup> Fascinated by language, and skilful at using language to make a point, he calls on that ability here. Most definitely, he is not saying that Moses taught justification by faith. Moses does not teach it in Deuteronomy 30. Paul is not saying he did, nor is he implying it. It is impossible to infer it. The apostle is simply using Moses' words for his own purpose. Masters' far-reaching claim on this passage is preposterous.

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<sup>3</sup> Vincent had 'a secondary meaning'. This is too strong.

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>5</sup> Spurgeon sermon 1700, emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to Gal. 3:24 with 5:18, see Rom. 8:2-4; 9:6; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 11:3-16; Gal. 6:2,16; Phil. 3:3; 2 Thess. 3:11 (NIV); Philem. 10-11.

2. Moreover, in accommodating Moses' words, Paul makes a highly significant change.<sup>7</sup> Moses said:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say: 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring *it* to us, that we may hear *it* and *do it*?' Neither is *it* beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring *it* to us, that we may hear *it* and *do it*?' But the word is very near you. *It* is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can *do it*.

In his free use of Moses' words, Paul said:

But the righteousness based on faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?"' (that is, to bring *Christ* down) 'or "Who will descend into the abyss?"' (that is, to bring *Christ* up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Moses was speaking about 'it' – God's commandment, God's law – which Israel had to 'do'. Paul is speaking about 'Christ' with no talk of 'do'. These are momentous changes. They alter the whole thrust of the passage. Moses was speaking of obedience to law. Paul is speaking of Christ. *And it is all about justification and nothing but justification.*<sup>8</sup> And as he goes on to say, the sinner has to believe – trust – Christ for righteousness. This is the apostle's teaching in this very passage, Roman 10:4-5, the culmination of Romans 3:21 – 8:39. Christ has done the necessary doing, having come under the law, he kept it, thereby earning righteousness for

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<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to George Platt of Highgate Baptist church for this vital observation.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to assert this. Paul is not talking about a believer's progressive sanctification here. He is not saying the law and Christ are equivalents for believers. He is not saying that in the new covenant the law of Christ is Christ himself in the sense that this means there are no written commands which the believer has to obey. Paul is not conflating Christ and law. These are vital negatives. See my *Believers Under the Law of Christ*.

his people, and, by his triumphant death, accomplished their redemption. So that, as Paul puts it: ‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Rom. 10:4). And by ‘end’, *telos*, Paul means the end, the goal, the purpose and the terminus of the law. The law foreshadowed, pictured Christ, and Christ has rendered the shadow-covenant obsolete by fulfilling it. He himself, he and his work, are the reality of the shadows.

3. Furthermore, Paul is not contradicting himself by using Deuteronomy 30, which is securely fixed in the book of the law:

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says...

There is no justification for any sinner through his own works under the law. Paul has said so already in Romans: ‘God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do’ (Rom. 8:3). How? ‘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. 8:3-4). As he told the Galatians (before he wrote to the Romans):

We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified... I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose (Gal. 2:16-21).

Paul was soon driving on even stronger:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written: ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them’. Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith’. But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them’. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so

that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:10-14).

Incidentally, in both passages, Romans 10 and Galatians 3, Paul quotes – quotes, not alludes to – Leviticus 18:5: ‘You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord’ (Lev. 18:5). This is the unmistakable doctrine of the old covenant. Nowhere is this more clearly brought out than in the Jewish lawyer’s confrontation of Christ:

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put [Christ] to the test, saying: ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him: ‘What is written in the law? How do you read it?’ And he answered: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself’. And he said to him: ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live’ (Luke 10:25-28).

And the lawyer was left with Christ’s ‘You go, and do...’ (Luke 10:37) ringing in his ears. Go and do! So thundered the law!

And let us not forget:

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it (Jas. 2:10).

Getting back to Israel’s history, just before or during the captivity, as God reminded the people through the prophet:

I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. Moreover, I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my sabbaths they greatly profaned... They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my sabbaths (Ezek. 20:11-13,21).

And then, at the restoration, when the Israelites were assembled, and the Levites ‘read from the book of the law of the Lord their God’, they addressed the people, and confessed to God:

You warned [the Israelites] in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey (Neh. 9: 3,29).

In short, as Paul, as an Israelite, admitted:

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me (Rom. 7:10).

Clearly, Deuteronomy 30, in Paul's estimation, lies securely in the realm of the Mosaic law, the old covenant.

4. In any case, Deuteronomy 30 is, in itself, clear. It is full of commandment, law, with promises of life as reward for obedience. This covenant is not the gospel! It is the law! Listen to Moses:

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you... And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

In other words, if you return and obey, then I will circumcise your hearts and you will live. In other words, regeneration would follow obedience. Which is precisely what the law says: 'Do and live'. But the new covenant says: 'Live and you will do'. In the old covenant, life followed obedience; in the new, obedience follows life. Deuteronomy 30 is the exact opposite of the gospel; it is pure old covenant. Blessing follows obedience. And so on.

Let me bring this section to a close by setting out the full context of Paul's glorious words on justification by faith and not law,

contrasting Israel under the old covenant with sinners coming to faith in Christ in the new:

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame’. Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says: ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame’. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Rom. 9:30 – 10:13).

But the time has come to let Masters set out his stall:

The biblical narrative says he made this covenant in the land of Moab ‘beside’ the covenant which he made with them in Horeb. The Hebrew means ‘separately, distinctively’. It was not a reiteration of Sinai, but something different and very special. It has long been known as the ‘evangelical covenant’...<sup>9</sup> In other

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<sup>9</sup> In Part 1, I noted that I have been unable to verify Masters’ claim that this covenant ‘has long been known as the “evangelical covenant”’.



words, the Sinaitic law covenant is works, but the covenant presented in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 (in the plains of Moab) is grace... only a passing reference to law. It is all about circumcision of the heart. It is all about grace. It is all about evangelical experience, and loving the Lord with all our being... No wonder Moses completed his preaching of this covenant of grace with the stirring appeal... [of] Deuteronomy 30:15-16.

I agree that Deuteronomy is not a mere reiteration of the covenant at Sinai (Horeb) (Ex. 20 and Ex. 34) and Moab (Deut. 5), all of which referred to the old covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the works covenant. But the question is whether or not the opening of Deuteronomy 29 can bear the weight Masters puts upon it. Here are those opening words:

These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb (Deut. 29:1).

Masters is unequivocal that this justifies regarding the covenant in these two chapters as totally different to the Mosaic covenant, the old covenant, the works covenant:

The Hebrew means ‘separately, distinctively’. It [the covenant in question] was not a reiteration of Sinai, but something different and very special.

So I repeat that I agree that the covenant in question was not a reiteration of the Sinai covenant. The earlier three (Sinai/Horeb/Moab), were virtual carbon copies of each other, the second and third being restatements of the original, the Sinai covenant; this one is not. But is it altogether different? This is the material point. Is it totally, radically, new? So much so, is it so new that is the new covenant and not the old? What if the word ‘besides’ should be taken to mean ‘in addition to’, ‘alongside of’, ‘with another purpose’? Worthy commentators take such a line, (inadvertently, as it were) rejecting Masters’ categorical stance.

Charles Ellicott, for one:

It should be carefully noted that the formal repetition of the law in Moses’ second great discourse in this book opens with these words: ‘The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb’.

There is no real break in Deuteronomy from Deuteronomy 5:1 to the end of Deuteronomy 26, and Deuteronomy 27 – 28 are the ‘sanction’ of that covenant.

Consider Jamieson-Fausset-Brown:

It was substantially the same [covenant as Sinai/Horeb/Moab]; but it was renewed now, in different circumstances. They had violated its conditions. Moses rehearses these, that they might have a better knowledge of its conditions and be more disposed to comply with them. The manifold works and mercies of God are a motive to obedience. Moses solemnly engages them to keep covenant with God. Unbelief, careless contempt, and breach of covenant shall be severely punished. [He also speaks of] the end and use of the revealed will of God [Deut. 29:29].

*The Pulpit Commentary:*

This was not a new covenant in addition to that made at Sinai, but simply a renewal and reaffirmation of that covenant. At Sinai the covenant was, properly speaking, made; sacrifices were then offered, and the people were sprinkled with the sacrificial blood, whereby the covenant was ratified; but on the occasion here referred to, no sacrifices were offered, for this was merely the recognition of the covenant formerly made as still subsisting.

And Peter J.Gentry:

The instruction in Deuteronomy reshapes the covenant at Sinai for life in the land. There is a whole new context and situation even though it is the same covenant... In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is adding something in continuity with the covenant at Sinai. Moses is making a covenant to keep the covenant at Sinai... Deuteronomy is best seen as a renewal and expansion of the Sinai covenant. The exposition given here of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 coheres completely with Deuteronomy 4:25-31 and Leviticus 26:39-45 where even the idea of uncircumcised heart is found and repentance in exile. This, then, best explains the relation of Deuteronomy 1 – 30 to Exodus 19 – 24.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Peter J.Gentry: ‘The Relationship of Deuteronomy to the Covenant at Sinai’.

These, and other writers, take the view that Deuteronomy 29 – 30 is ‘substantially the same’ covenant as Sinai/Horeb/Moab, ‘not a new covenant in addition to that made at Sinai, but simply a renewal and reaffirmation of that covenant’, so that ‘the instruction in Deuteronomy reshapes the covenant at Sinai for life in the land. There is a whole new context and situation even though it is the same covenant’. This is my position in a nutshell. The essential point is that Deuteronomy 29 – 30 is securely based on the old covenant, firmly fixed within that covenant. It is the old covenant, which Moses takes and, as it were, preaches to Israel, exhorts Israel, encourages Israel, warns Israel that when they enter the land they must stick to the Sinai covenant, treasure it, but above all, obey it. If they do, massive material benefits will be theirs. If they do not...

Deuteronomy 30 must not be taken out of context, in isolation. Certainly a couple of verses must not be pushed beyond measure. I am afraid Masters fails in this respect. Read the entire section from Deuteronomy 27:1 – 34:12. It represents Moses’ last attempt to try to set Israel on the right path in the old covenant, and keep Israel there: duties, curses, blessings, all enforced by verbal and written teaching both in discourse and song. *It is old covenant through and through.*

Let me quote the entire chapter, and set out what I am talking about:

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

Let me pause there. Note the presupposition of Israel's failure to keep the covenant and obey the law. Note the consequent judgment. Note the heavily conditional nature of what is being said. God promises to bless Israel – not only the adults, but their children – with earthly blessings if – and what an ‘if’ – they return to him with all their heart and soul, and obey his commandments, all of them. Is this the new covenant? Earthly blessing for a man and his child if the man obeys all God's commandments? For a start, the new covenant promise is spiritual. If Masters sticks to his position on Deuteronomy 30, I fail to see how he can avoid encouraging some to capitulate to the prosperity gospel.<sup>11</sup> And what a disaster that would prove to be! In addition, the new covenant is concerned with the believer; the promise is for the one who believes – not the believer and his child. Moreover, the necessary believer's obedience in the new covenant under the law of Christ, obedience both expected and guaranteed by the terms of that covenant, follows God's work in the soul, not the other way round. Yet in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 all this is the other way about. There is only one explanation: these chapters are old covenant, not new.

To continue:

And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. And the Lord your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord and keep all his commandments that I command you today.

I break in again. Here we reach the crux in this debate, as far as Masters is concerned. He is certainly exhilarated about it:

There is only a passing reference to law. It is all about circumcision of the heart. It is all about grace. It is all about evangelical experience, and loving the Lord with all our being.

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<sup>11</sup> The mistaken view that, in the days of the new covenant, obedience to God brings material reward, prosperity in health and financially. But that was precisely the nature of the old covenant. See, for instance, Ex. 23:25-27; Deut. 4:40; 5:16; 7:12-15; Ps. 1:3; 128:3; Jer. 23:3.

Only a passing reference to law? It seems to me that the passage in question, the chapters we are discussing – as all the book of Deuteronomy – all of it is full of the notion of law! No wonder since the very name of the book means ‘second giving, copy, statement, of the law’. Did Moses switch horses as he came to conclude his work? And what of Masters’ ‘all about grace’? The word is not used in the entire book, let alone Deuteronomy 30! All about circumcision of the heart? The word ‘circumcision’ or its derivative is used only once in forty-nine verses in Deuteronomy 29 – 30. Indeed, in the entire book, it is used only twice – here in Deuteronomy 30:6 and earlier in Deuteronomy 10:16 – when God commands Israel:

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven (Deut. 10:12-22).

I quote the passage in full to give the sense. Do not miss the command to Israel, calling upon them to circumcise their hearts.<sup>12</sup>

Returning to Deuteronomy 30, not only does Masters go off *piste* by saying the chapter ‘is all about circumcision of heart’, with ‘only a passing reference to law’, the facts of the case are

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<sup>12</sup> See also Lev. 26:41; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Acts 7:51.

precisely the opposite. He could not be more wide of the mark! The difference between Deuteronomy 10 and Deuteronomy 30 is that heart circumcision is a requirement in the former passage, and a promise in the latter. God promises circumcision of heart upon obedience, and he requires obedience leading to heart circumcision.

Moreover, since circumcision of heart speaks of regeneration, I am staggered that Masters can even think of writing in such a way as might lead any reader to think that the author is suggesting that in the new covenant sinners will be regenerated if they keep God's commandments! The merest whiff of such a doctrine in the days of the gospel should be abhorred. God rewards law-keeping with life? This is old covenant!<sup>13</sup> And, of course, the old covenant promised life for perfect obedience. But the least offence ruined all, as Paul found: 'The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me' (Rom. 7:10). For, as I have already quoted, 'whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it' (Jas. 2:10).

To continue: given Israel's obedience, and God's circumcision of their heart consequent on their obedience, God, through Moses, promises earthly blessing to Israel, consequent yet again upon their obedience. Do not miss the reinforcement of this point:

The Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, when you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this book of the law, when you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Moses then urges the children of Israel to obedience, exhorts them to it, spelling out that they know full-well what they have to do. They have no excuse! The law of the covenant has been set before them on repeated occasions, laid out in fullest detail, with both its curses and blessings:

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<sup>13</sup> As I have already noted.

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say: ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say: ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you may do it.<sup>14</sup>

And so to the final plea, still full of earthly blessing utterly conditional on obedience to the law:

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:1-20).

Do not miss the curse as well as the blessing. Is this new-covenant language? Really?

As I have said, in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 Moses, grasping his last chance, is exhorting Israel on the basis of the Sinai covenant,

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<sup>14</sup> Moses is not asserting that the natural man can keep God’s law (‘so that you can do it’, ESV). That would be a lie! ‘The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot’ (Rom. 8:7) knocks the suggestion on the head! Rather, Moses is telling the people they have no excuse. It is not like their fathers in Egypt. They do not have to make bricks without straw, hunting here, there and everywhere for the material before they can start. The law is before their very eyes – literally on their forehead and wrists, written on their doorposts, and constantly in the hearts and on their lips (Ex. 13:16; Deut. 6:6-9; 11:18-21, for instance).

preaching to them to live up to it. Just as Joshua, when he came to die, did:

But Joshua said to the people: 'You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good'. And the people said to Joshua: 'No, but we will serve the Lord'. Then Joshua said to the people: 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him'. And they said: 'We are witnesses'. He said: 'Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel'. And the people said to Joshua: 'The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey'. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said to all the people: 'Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God'. So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance (Josh. 24:19-28).

The prophet Ezekiel repeated God's word to Israel:

If a man is righteous and does what is just and right – if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbour's wife or approach a woman in her time of menstrual impurity, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any profit, withholds his hand from injustice, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully – he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord God... I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live (Ezek. 18:5-9,30-32).



All this is old covenant, law, works from start to finish. Masters gets this wrong.

I do not say that nowadays, in the era of the new covenant, believers have no use for any of this. It is a part of Scripture and, as such, is profitable for believers for their progressive sanctification (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The law of Christ uses all Scripture as nuanced through Christ and laid out in the post-Pentecost Scriptures by the apostles.<sup>15</sup> As a gospel preacher, with even more assurance than Moses under the law could press the law upon Israel, I can, therefore, press the gospel equivalent upon sinners. I can declare to them, warn them, that they do not have to go looking for the gospel; it is right before their eyes; it is simple, clear, plain, direct, categorical. Salvation will be theirs if they trust the Saviour. Condemnation will be their lot if they refuse. Obey the gospel! Submit to Christ! Repent! Believe! Now! And so on. See John 3:14-36; Acts 16:30-31; 17:30; 2 Corinthians 5:19 – 6:2, for instance.

But none of this detracts from the point at issue. Deuteronomy is old covenant! Masters is wrong!

Now compare all the old-covenant material above to the actual prophecies of the new covenant. I say ‘compare’, but ‘contrast’ is more like it:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the

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<sup>15</sup> See my *Believers; Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*; ‘NCT Made Simple: Separation Essential: No Mixture! Deut. 22:9-11’. Believers use the law as a paradigm, pattern or typical example. See, for instance, 1 Cor. 5:6-13; 9:8-14; 10:1-11,18; 14:21; 2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1; 8:15; 13:1.

least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek. 11:19-20).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezek. 36:25-27).<sup>16</sup>

In the new covenant, regeneration is not consequent upon obedience.<sup>17</sup> Quite the reverse. Regeneration by the free and sovereign grace of the Spirit of God, trust in Christ, union to Christ, leads to obedience. The blessings of the gospel are not presented to sinners as a reward for their obedience. Rather, gospel blessing – the person and work of Christ, in particular – by the Spirit are the motive and moving power of the believer's obedience.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the new covenant is a resounding assertion

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<sup>16</sup> Masters speaks of 'the covenant of grace' – by which means the new covenant – 'being increasingly revealed... approaching a climax in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel'. I see it rather as an explosion in the prophecy in Jeremiah with the actual explosion taking place in Luke 1 – 2. Hear my series of discourses on that passage, 'Watershed Of The Ages'.

<sup>17</sup> This does not do away with duty faith; that is, the biblical doctrine that it is the duty, the obligation, the responsibility of all sinners to trust Christ, even though they have no ability to comply. The gospel preacher must command all sinners to believe. I have written several books on this issue. See my *The Gospel Offer is Free; Septimus Sears: A Victorian Injustice; A Victorian Injustice Revisited; No Safety Before Saving Faith; Eternal Justification: Gospel Preaching to Sinners Marred by Hyper-Calvinism*. But the old-covenant principle of blessing as reward for obedience is entirely absent. For a start, saving faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). See also John 6:37,40,44-48.

<sup>18</sup> See my *Christ*.

of what God will do, and the effect his Spirit will have as he works in the elect.

Why have I got steamed up about all this? I have not been indulging myself in a theological knockabout. It is not an academic nicety that I want to argue over. It is not a question of bickering over words and phrases for the fun of it. The salvation of sinners and the assurance of saints is at stake here.<sup>19</sup> Let us be clear about it! There is no salvation by works, but only on the basis of grace through faith:

By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

Consequently any teaching which encourages anyone to take passages of Scripture which refer to the old covenant, and literally apply them as gospel statements, is doing untold damage. If people believe such doctrine, they will end up holding to salvation by works, and salvation defined as the prosperity gospel. I am not accusing Masters of this, of course, but I am saying words have power – for good or for ill.<sup>20</sup>

Let me draw this towards a close with one of Masters' predecessors at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. I am glad to say that C.H.Spurgeon saw things very differently to Peter Masters. Spurgeon, preaching on Romans 10:5-9, spoke of Moses and his role in the passage; that is, the doctrine of the law, the old covenant:

‘Moses describes the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which does those things shall live by them’. This is a clear statement. There is no mystery or obscurity about it. You need not go to the universities and earn a degree of D.D. in order to understand this declaration: it is as plain as words can make it. If you wish to be saved by the law you must do its commands and you shall live..<sup>21</sup> It will not suffice for you to learn those commands by heart, or to write them up in your churches, or to read them over and say: ‘Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline

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<sup>19</sup> See my *Assurance in the New Covenant*.

<sup>20</sup> See my ‘Words Have Power’.

<sup>21</sup> Spurgeon spoke of the ten commandments, but the law had over 600!

our hearts to keep this law': all that may be well enough, but it is not to the point. If you are to be saved by the commandments you must do them: that is clear. Moses does not allow any person to dream that under the law he can be saved in any other way than by perfect obedience thereto. 'For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified'. Whatever it is that God has commanded, you must do; whatever he forbids, you must avoid; for by such obedience alone can you live.

Mark you, Moses does not tone down the law to suit our fallen state, or talk of our doing our best and God's being satisfied with our imperfect obedience. No, he says only: 'He that does those things shall live by them'. He demands perfect and entire obedience, if life is to come of it. He does not say that if you have broken the law you may still live by some other means. No, if the law is once broken it is all over with you as to salvation thereby: one single fault takes away the possibility of your ever being justified by the law. 'He that does those things'; that is, always, without exception, with all his heart and soul and strength – 'he shall live by them'; but nobody else. Be he Jew or be he Gentile, his only righteousness by law must come through the doing of the law.

Spurgeon then turned to the gospel, the new covenant:

Now observe, first, that the gospel claims to be like the law in its clearness. Moses claimed for the law which God had given to the people through him that it was clear, and within the range of their knowledge and understanding. I will read his exact words to you. Turn to Deuteronomy 30:11. 'For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not hidden from you, neither is it far off...'. Now Paul here very adroitly takes these words out of the mouth of Moses, alters them somewhat, and as good as says: 'It was the boast of the law that it was clear, known, and accessible to the people; but much more is this the glory of the gospel'. Did not I show you just now that when Moses spoke he did not mystify the matter, but put it plainly: 'The man that does those things shall live by them'. So also the gospel by no means involves itself in obscurity, but says: 'Believe and live', quite as distinctly as Moses said: 'Do and live'. Here you have it: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved'...

I want to call your special attention to the fact that Paul borrows the words of Moses; for his intent was the ending of all fears. No man among us doubts that if he had performed the law of God

the Lord would give him life; but it is equally certain that if we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ we have eternal life. No trembling sinner doubts but that by the breaking of the law we are condemned: be you equally sure of it, that by not believing you are condemned. As no keeper of the law would have been lost on any ground whatever, so no believer in Christ shall be lost on any ground whatever; as no breaker of the law could escape punishment, so no unbeliever in Christ can be saved. The gospel states its message as clearly as the law. As positively as the law utters its promise and threat, so positively and unalterably does the gospel deliver its decree. The believer in Jesus shall be saved because he is a believer; and Christ's veracity is staked thereon: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me has everlasting life'.<sup>22</sup>

And let Isaac Watts, who based his hymn on Hebrews 12:18-24, remind us all of the contrast between the two covenants, the old and the new:

*Curs'd be the man, for ever curs'd,  
That does one wilful sin commit;  
Death and damnation for the first,  
Without relief, and infinite.*

*Thus Sinai roars, and round the earth  
Thunder, and fire, and vengeance flings;  
But Jesus, your dear gasping breath  
And Calvary, say gentler things:*

*'Pardon and grace, and boundless love,  
Streaming along a Saviour's blood;  
And life, and joy, and crowns above,  
Obtained by a dear bleeding God'.*

*Hark! How he prays (the charming sound  
Dwells on his dying lips): 'Forgive!'  
And every groan and gaping wound  
Cries: 'Father, let the rebels live!'*

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<sup>22</sup> Spurgeon sermon 1700. I commend the entire sermon to your attention.

*Go, you that rest upon the law,  
And toil and seek salvation there,  
Look to the flame that Moses saw,  
And shrink, and tremble, and despair.*

*But I'll retire beneath the cross;  
Saviour, at your dear feet I'll lie!  
And the keen sword that justice draws,  
Flaming and red, shall pass me by.*

And that, reader, is my hope for all of us, including you.