

Misleading, Sad, Revealing: 'Relevant Today' by Jeremy Brooks

To give Jeremy Brooks' article its full title: 'Are the Ten Commandments Relevant Today? An Exposition of Exodus 20:1-2'.¹ Why do I call it misleading, sad and revealing?

Since he was purporting to deal with the ten commandments and their relevance today, surely Brooks should have given us what the apostles have to say on the subject, should he not? Exodus 20:1-2, yes, but the believer's paramount authority for all his belief and practice is the apostolic writings. Surely that must be a given.² I hope nobody runs away with idea that this means I have no time for the Old Testament. Far from it!³ The question is, however, how do we read the Old Testament? It must be through the eyes of the New. And if the believer's *paramount* authority – note my word – is not the apostolic writings, what is? So, I say again, any work on the relevance of the ten commandments today, if it's worth its salt, must be crammed full of apostolic passages on the subject. Brooks, alas, gives us none. None! And this is more than strange. For although you would never guess it from Brooks' article, Paul, in particular, did use the ten commandments when pressing progressive sanctification on believers.

But he did so on only three occasions. Only three occasions, mark you, in all his writings, and even then, he did not quote all

¹ Published in the February 2017 issue of *The Banner of Truth*, pages 9-12.

² If Brooks found himself washed up a desert island one day, and he could be given only one page of Scripture, would he opt for Ex. 20 or Rom. 8?

³ As I will show, it is Brooks and the advocates of 'historic Reformed theology' who see little use for believers for 99% of the Mosaic law, for instance. And this is in stark contrast with the apostles and, I might add, the advocates of new-covenant theology.

ten, not by a long chalk.⁴ Such is the sum total of Paul's use of the ten commandments when instructing believers in holiness.⁵ Moreover, in pursuing his aim to promote the believer's progressive sanctification, Paul made far greater use of the entire Mosaic law – which, see below, Brooks thought had no relevance for believers today. Now the very limited use the apostle made of the ten commandments, coupled with his far greater use of the entire old covenant, when dealing with the believer's progressive sanctification must, in itself, tell us something about the importance of the ten commandments in apostolic thinking, must it not, as well as telling us something about their role in the life of the believer?

Let me make good Brooks' failure to quote Paul's relevant use of the ten commandments:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet', and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Gal. 5:13-14).⁶

⁴ Nor did he ever use the phrase 'the ten commandments'. Indeed, it appears only three times in the entire Bible.

⁵ I am not forgetting Paul's use of Rom. 7:7, when, speaking of his unregenerate days as a Jew under the law, he declared: 'If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said: "You shall not covet"'. But since Brooks was dealing with the relevance of the ten commandments for believers today in the matter of their progressive sanctification, Rom. 7:7 is not relevant. There is another point. Notice that even in Rom. 7:7 Paul did not limit what he was saying to the ten commandments; he spoke of 'the law'. See also Rom. 3:20; 4:15. I will return to this.

⁶ Notice that even here Paul did not actually quote one of the ten commandments.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land'. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4).

This is the sum total of Paul's quotation from the decalogue when dealing with the believer's life of holiness, and, as I have noted, in Galatians 5:13-14 he did not actually quote one of the ten. I leave you, reader, to decide if you get the impression that Paul was always referring to the ten commandments, which, if Brooks had been right, he would have been.⁷ After all, according to Brooks, 'the ten commandments' have 'abiding relevance, and [serve] a vital role as the believer's rule of life'. Well, if that really is so, I would expect the apostolic letters, letters in which they are constantly calling for the believer's progressive sanctification, to be full of extracts from the ten commandments. Yet they are not. This speaks volumes.

Above all, why did Brooks fail to mention the key Pauline passage on the subject? I refer to:

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to

⁷ The same goes for the other apostles.

have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. 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 their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains un-lifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:1-18).

Whatever this passage is talking about, it most definitely is talking about the ten commandments. What else can the apostle's 'carved in letters on stone', and his reference to Moses' veil, be alluding to?

But Brooks quoted none of these passages. He did not even mention them. Instead, he gave us a screed based on 'historic Reformed theology'. This, it seems, is what being 'relevant today' means for men like Brooks. Remarkable!

Before we leave 2 Corinthians 3, however, we should note that it demands a closer look, for it deals with something of the utmost importance in the believer's approach to the law. Why? Because, in that passage Paul does not confine his remarks to the ten commandments. Oh no! He certainly includes those ten commandments at the heart of what he wants to say – and rightly so, since, as I will show, the ten commandments encapsulate and stand for the entire Mosaic covenant. But what Paul is doing in 2 Corinthians 3 is putting backbone into believers who are being damaged by teachers who want them to go under the law. Nothing new under the sun, you see! And very much as he did to the churches in Galatia and elsewhere, Paul writes to rebuke his readers for yielding to this pressure, and, in addition, to strengthen them in their resistance to it, by reminding them that they are not under the old, Mosaic covenant – the law, including the ten commandments – but under Christ and his law in the new covenant. Having laid this foundation in 2 Corinthians 3, in

subsequent verses – chapters – he goes on to apply his doctrine.⁸
Read the passage again – out loud – and see.

We can very easily summarise the apostle’s main points in 2 Corinthians 3:

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – was to do with the flesh; the new covenant is the covenant of the Holy Spirit (verses 3,6,8).

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – was an outward covenant, written on stones; the new covenant is an inward covenant, written on the heart (verses 2-3,7).

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – killed; it spelled death; the new covenant is life (verses 3,6-7).

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – was deliberately temporary, designed by God to be so; the new covenant is permanent; it remains (verses 11,13).

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – had glory, but its glory was lesser and fading; the new covenant has a glory which exceeds, excels, being so much greater than the glory of the old covenant – including the ten commandments – (verses 7-11).⁹

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – condemned; the new covenant is saving (verse 9).¹⁰

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – spelled bondage; the new covenant brings liberty (verses 12,17).

I will not stop to develop this further, having done so elsewhere,¹¹ but there can be doubt as to the apostle’s teaching. For my present purpose, two main points stand out.

First, it is impossible to separate the ten commandants from the entire law, the old, Mosaic covenant. But that is precisely what Brooks, arguing on the basis of ‘historic Reformed theology’, wants to do. I quote him again: ‘The ten commandments [are] distinct from the other Mosaic laws, having

⁸ See my *Glorious*.

⁹ Note the apostle’s ‘deliberate tautology’ – without redundancy, of course.

¹⁰ ‘Righteousness’, *dikaïosunē*, ‘justification’. But this does not mean that the apostle is speaking only about the law for justification. ‘Righteousness’ here includes the whole of salvation, not excluding sanctification. The context proves it.

¹¹ See my ‘The Two Ministries’.

abiding relevance, and serving a vital role as the believer's rule of life'. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 3, simply will not let Brooks get away with this. As the apostle told the Galatians, 'every man who accepts circumcision... is obligated to keep the whole law' (Gal. 5:3); that is, the law is not a menu to play pick and mix with.¹² It is all or nothing.

But it is not only Paul that will not let Brooks and 'historic Reformed theology' get away with it. The ten commandments 'are distinct from all the other Mosaic laws', according to Brooks. Really? In one sense, yes, in that they were written on the tables of stone. But the fact is, the ten commandments encapsulate the entire Mosaic covenant and are intimately – unbreakably – bound up with it. After all, the ark of the *covenant* contained the tables of the ten commandments. And God explicitly made the entire law – including the ten commandments – one covenant:

And the Lord said to Moses: 'Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel'... And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments (Ex. 34:27-28).

And [the LORD] declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone (Deut 4:13).¹³

¹² Do not miss 'the whole law' in Gal. 5:13-14 and Jas. 2:10-11. James is blunt: breaking one command, wherever it is found in the law, brings the ruin of the whole law with consequent condemnation for the offender. And although the immediate context of Gal. 3:10 is justification, nevertheless the principle is clear: 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them'. This is what the law said (Deut. 27:26). The idea that we can pick and choose with the law is utterly forbidden by Scripture. Greater and lesser commandments there are, but not one of them can be hived off from the rest and broken with impunity (Matt. 5:19; Mark 12:31). 'Historic Reformed theology', disposing of 99% of the law by its schemes, is playing with fire. New-covenant theology demands and glories in Christ's fulfilment of the entire law, and its abiding relevance for the believer today.

¹³ See also 2 Kings 23:3,21; Ps. 103:18; 111:9; Jer. 11:8; Dan. 9:4; Mal. 2:4. See my *Christ* pp105-106,401-404. By the way, Ex. 34:27-28 and Deut 4:13 are two out of the three references to 'the ten commandments' in all the Bible. The third is Deut. 10:4.

Read the entire law through and you will see the ten commandments – the sabbath commandment in particular – mixed, even jumbled higgledy-piggledy, I might say, with all sorts of laws throughout the entire old covenant. The notion that the ten commandments can be hived off from the rest of the law might be a clever trick, but it is utterly contrary to Scripture, and repugnant to those who want to honour the God who gave his law to Israel to distinguish them from all other nations (Deut. 4:6-45; 5:26; 7:6-11; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:12-14; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:21; Eph. 2:11-12), and did so in solemn state and with dire warning (Ex. 19:1-25; Heb. 12:18-21).

Secondly, the believer has been liberated or delivered from the old covenant – the Mosaic law, including the ten commandments – and is in, and under, the new covenant. These two covenants are in stark contrast as I have noted, as, of course, they have to be! Believers are in the *new* covenant, under a *new* head, under a *new* law, not in Adam under the rudimentary law which is written in the conscience of every man (Rom. 2:12-15), or under pagan law, or under the law of Moses, the law that aroused sin (Rom. 7:5) and brought bondage (Gal. 4:21 – 5:1), the ministry of wrath, condemnation and death (Rom. 4:15; 7:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:7,9), but in Christ and under his law. And this is precisely what Paul sets out, not only in 2 Corinthians 3, but time and time again throughout the New Testament – though from Brooks’ article you would never guess it. And yet what could be more relevant for the believer today than apostolic teaching on the question in hand?

Brooks might want to restrict the discussion to the ten commandments, but Scripture will not let him. The only authority Brooks can come up with to justify his sleight of hand is ‘historic Reformed theology’ and its use of Aquinas’ construct of the tripartite division of the law. Brooks’ thesis depends absolutely and entirely on this man-made imposition on Scripture, and it represents the fundamental flaw in his attempted imposition of the law – ‘the moral law’, as ‘historic Reformed theology’ styles it – on the believer.

And this opens the door into the necessary exploration of the real question. Which is? What is the relevance of the Mosaic law

in its entirety – including the ten commandments – for the believer today? On this score, Brooks’ article was an abject failure. He just did not face up to the fundamental question. Either he did not recognise it as fundamental, or, if he did, he simply ignored it.

And this is why I called Brooks’ article sad. It is sad because the subject he was purporting to deal with – the law (and, make no mistake, that is what the subject is or ought to be, as I have explained) and its relevance today – is of the highest contemporary significance. Naturally enough, one might have thought, even as the title of his article more than suggests. Indeed, the law and the believer is, as he tacitly admitted, subject to vigorous debate within ‘much contemporary evangelicalism’. While it is refreshing, therefore, to see *The Banner of Truth* taking up this issue, the subject requires a far more rigorous response than it gets in Brooks’ article. I am not talking about length, I hasten to add. I recognise the limitations imposed by a magazine article. No! The article is – yes, I will use the word – unworthy of such a prestigious magazine, and that because it is misleading. The article is sad because it does nothing to clarify the issue, and shows a woeful ignorance of new-covenant theology. But it is sad for a far more important reason. And that leads me to say more about it being misleading.

Before I do, a word on lack of space. If that should be pleaded as an excuse to explain away Brooks’ failure to set out scriptural teaching, imagine a physician being content to give his patient life-saving diagnosis and counsel by cramming it into a ten minute consultation, ignoring vital material, leaving his patient in a misleading position, no wiser about the real issue, but confirming him in his preconceived misunderstanding. This, I suggest, is more or less what we get in Brooks’ article – and on a far more important matter. For we are not dealing with mere illness. Nor are we moving pieces on a theological chess board. Vital pastoral issues are at stake, not least the believer’s assurance and progressive sanctification. Indeed, eternal issues are at stake – for sinner and saint. The subject deserves far better than Brooks’ article. He found space enough for ‘historic

Reformed theology’. Why did he not omit that and give us Scripture?

What extracts from, or references to, Romans (especially chapters 6 – 8), the letter to the Galatians, 2 Corinthians 3:6 – 4:5, Ephesians 2, Philippians 3, Colossians chapters 2 and 3, for instance, did we get? And what about the letter to the Hebrews? Brooks did not even mention any of these passages – even entire books – which deal with the very issue at the root of what he was talking about, let alone expound them, let alone expound them rigorously. Consequently, his article ends up as irrelevant because it is misleading, in that it does not refer to the very source material that is essential for the believer’s understanding of the issues.

I acknowledge that Brooks did, in his title, speak of expounding Exodus 20:1-2, and I suppose it could be said that to some extent he kept to his last. But it is the ‘relevant today’ which is the issue here. The truth is, as he himself told us, he fell back on ‘historic Reformed theology’, and, I would add, merely repeated its well-worn dogmas on the law. How sad! Imagine attending a lecture supposedly on the contemporary theory of the chemistry of combustion, and it turns out to be a talk advocating the phlogiston theory!¹⁴

Now this is far from trivial. Is *the* issue here. By ‘historic Reformed theology’, there can be no doubt that Brooks was talking about the writings of John Calvin, the puritans and, supremely, the Westminster documents and the Confessions which depend on them – more or less from about 1550-1690, give or take. While I am not dismissing these works, are we really to believe that for the Reformed they are the relevant authority for believers today? It certainly looks like it.

Right from the start, Brooks told us what to expect. It did not take him long to introduce the key phrase. ‘Historic Reformed

¹⁴ First put forward in 1667, the theory was that when materials burned they lost phlogiston. Unfortunately for the theory, it was found that when substances burned they gained weight, not lost it. The advocates of the theory responded by saying that phlogiston must have a negative mass. We now know that when substances burn they gain oxygen; they do not lose phlogiston.

theology’ came in the second line of his article, setting the tone for all that was to follow:

Historic Reformed theology has understood these ten commandments to be distinct from the other Mosaic laws, having abiding relevance, and serving a vital role as the believer’s rule of life... Matthew Henry... Historic Reformed theology has argued very differently... Reformed theologians speak in terms of the threefold division of the law... Thomas Watson... The puritans and their successors...

True, Brooks did quote two modern authors – Vernon Higham and Sinclair Ferguson – but since these writers are firmly cast in the mould of ‘historic Reformed theology’, in a very real sense we have already reached the end of the story, and Brooks has effectively shut the door on constructive consideration of Scripture on the issues. It was all cut and dried by Calvin 450 years ago, apparently. Read the *Institutes* laced with the Westminster Confession! That’s all you need! Brooks’ article is really nothing more than a regurgitation of the hackneyed statements of ‘historic Reformed theology’ – the tripartite division of the law, and all that that entails. And when it is all boiled down, the result is – surprise, surprise – a foregone conclusion. The yardstick on this great contemporary issue has been set in stone since the 1640s by the covenant theologians of the day, and today’s antinomians are antinomians because they reject the template imposed by covenant theology on Scripture.¹⁵ How sad! Incidentally, Brooks, speaking of ‘the overwhelming view of the puritans and their successors’, said: ‘We would argue that it is nothing more and nothing less than the teaching of holy Scripture’. Pity then, as I have already remarked, that Brooks did not even mention the vital New Testament passages concerned with the issue, let alone expound them.

By the way, would the two Johns – Calvin and Robinson – have qualified for membership of Brooks’ historic Reformed faith? On the sabbath, Calvin would have had a job to pass

¹⁵ In my experience, this seems to be standard way Reformed writers deal with the issue. See my ‘A Must-See Debate’; ‘No Confession? No Debate!’, for instance.

muster; indeed, by Reformed (including Brooks in his article) assessment today, poor Calvin would find himself well on the way to being relegated to the ranks of the antinomians! With his non-Reformed view of the sabbath, he would certainly fail to pass what Brooks called ‘the litmus test’. And as for Robinson, in 1620 he had the ‘audacity’ to reprimand those many believers who were stopping where Luther and Calvin left them.¹⁶ If he had said it in 1720, he would have had to include ‘the men of Westminster’ in his sticking point for many. If Robinson had been writing today, he would certainly have had Brooks in his sights. Perhaps I may be forgiven for advocating a healthy dose of Robinson’s dictum for the Reformed today? *Sola Scriptura* is a great mantra.¹⁷ How about keeping to it?

And that takes us to the next point. As Robinson saw, believers have a more substantial dictum to go by than ‘historic Reformed theology’ – Isaiah 8:20 and Acts 17:11. In all matters to do with the spiritual life of the believer, should we not read, interpret and understand old-covenant scriptures (in Brooks’ article, Exodus 20:1-2), by reading them through the lens of the new? Should we not read the Old Testament in the light of the New? Should we not go first to the primary New Testament passages that deal with the matter in hand? Brooks told us how the historic Reformed faith imposes its template on the passage, and that, according to him, is final. But what did Paul make of the law, including its prologue? After all, Christ promised that his apostles would be led by his Spirit into all truth, that they would expound and set out the definitive faith for all time which he himself could not give them at that moment (John 14:25-26; 16:12-15). Should we not, therefore, establish all our belief and practice primarily from the apostles?

Brooks mentions only one New Testament text; Mark 2:27-28, on the sabbath.¹⁸ And since, I can say without the slightest

¹⁶ See my ‘A Thanksgiving Day Thought’.

¹⁷ The Reformed love to repeat *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture only. I wish they meant it and started doing it. Especially over this question of the law.

¹⁸ For the Reformed, the sabbath is the touchstone today. In Brooks’ words: ‘The... sabbath commandment... our attitude to which is the

hesitation, that the readers of *The Banner of Truth*, and Brooks himself, signally fail to keep the sabbath according to explicit biblical teaching, this would seem to be a singular case of shooting oneself in the foot.¹⁹

And this is why Brooks' article is revealing. I am delighted to say it gives the game away.²⁰ I can best explain my meaning by repeating the Council of Trent, which in 1564 stated:

In order to restrain petulant spirits, it decrees that no one... shall... presume to interpret... Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church... has held and holds.

Shocking, is it not! Quite.

But Reformed writers today have no qualms about stating their position on the Mosaic law in terms not so far removed from that:

In order to restrain antinomianism, historic Reformed theology defines an antinomian as someone who, on the doctrine of the

litmus test in this wider debate'. To raise any question about sabbath observance today is to invite, and almost certainly get, instant dismissal as an antinomian. Yet even a superficial knowledge of the history of the 'Christian sabbath' proves that, on the basis of the Reformed criterion, the vast majority of believers since Pentecost have been antinomians. The sabbatarianism Brooks advocates stems from Nicholas Bownde who published *The Doctrine of the Sabbath* in 1595. See my *Sabbath Notes*.

¹⁹ Brooks (on the basis of 'historic Reformed theology') confirms his readers in some sort of half-cock Sunday-keeping, in an observance which is full of escape clauses and other attempts to wriggle out of sabbath laws. If they dare to think about it for a minute, they know the supposed 'Christian Sabbath' is without an atom of biblical authority, but is entirely creedal and theological; in other words, an invention of man. Indeed, the 'Christian Sabbath', which is supposed to be the fourth command, represents a man-made change to the unchangeable law of God given uniquely to Israel at its key point – the sabbath as the special distinguishing mark for Israel (Ex. 31:12-17; Neh. 9:14; Ezek. 20:12) until Christ came and fulfilled the shadows and rendered them obsolete (Matt. 5:17; Gal. 3:19 – 4:7; Col. 2:16-23; Heb. 8:13, for instance). See my *Sabbath Questions; The Essential Sabbath*.

²⁰ See my 'A Must-See Debate'.

law, interprets... Scripture contrary to that sense which the historic Reformed faith... has held and holds.²¹

Sauce for Rome is sauce for the Reformed, I reckon.

Setting the record straight

Paul certainly quotes the ten commandments, but he never imposes them on believers as their perfect rule of life, but always uses them as paradigms, and, even then, he does so on only three occasions (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-15; Eph. 6:1-4). But, there again, he uses all the law in that way (1 Cor. 5:7-8,13; 9:7-14; 10:1-14,18; 14:21,33-35) – just to take one book – as well as pagan authors (Tit. 1:12-13) and nature (1 Cor. 11:11-16). And what about 1 Corinthians 9:19-23? None of this establishes that the believer is under the ten commandments as his perfect rule of life for holiness, any more than it gives that dominant role to the entire law. Of course the believer is under a law – the law that is written on the heart of the believer in the new covenant – and this can only be the law of Christ, not the law of Moses. Matthew 5 – 7, John 1:17; 12:47 – 16:33, Romans 6:14 – 7:6, 1 Corinthians 9:21-23 and Galatians 6:2 put this beyond doubt.²²

As I have explained, it is biblically impossible to isolate the ten commandments from the rest of the law, call them ‘the moral law’, and impose it on believers as their rule of life. But just for sake of argument, let me allow Brooks his historic Reformed theology’s tripartite division of the law. Brooks could not have elevated the ten commandments to a higher station:

The ten commandments [are] distinct from the other Mosaic laws, having abiding relevance, and serving a vital role as the believer’s rule of life... The decalogue shows us the way [of

²¹ Of course, I have invented the precise form of words. But I submit that this fairly sums up Brooks’ article – and a host of other efforts to refute new-covenant theology. Indeed, the Westminster Assembly was convened specifically to deal with antinomianism – both real and imaginary – and that is why its documents are so heavy on law. See my ‘The Law and the Confessions’.

²² See my listed works for my arguments. Incidentally, 1 Cor. 7:19; Jas. 1:25; 2:8,12; 1 John *passim*; 2 John 6; Rev. 12:17; 14:12, refer to the law of Christ, not the law of Moses.

progressive sanctification]... They show us the pathway of holiness.

Really? Does Brooks judge everything by the ten commandments? For, mark it well, according to Brooks and ‘historic Reformed theology’, the ten commandments are not *part* of the rule: they serve as *the* believer’s rule, full stop. If so, then Brooks won’t have much guidance, will he, concerning the glories of the believer’s justification and positional sanctification in Christ, his assurance, his life as the slave and husband of Christ under his law, baptism, the Lord’s supper, the appointment of elders, private and public prayer, preaching, temptation, church discipline, how to deal with things indifferent, and a host of other vital topics, all of which are the utmost concern to the believer? Or should be! And why did Christ pray as he did in John 17:17? Why did he not adopt historic Reformed theology’s mantra? After all, he asked his Father: ‘Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth’. All the word, please note, is the believer’s rule, not simply the ten commandments. New-covenant theology, contrary to historic Reformed theology, stresses this point.

As I conclude my response to Brooks, let me fill in some of the most glaring gaps in his article. Here is a sample of the passages which must come top of the list for any believer who wants to know what Scripture has to say on the relevance of the law – including the ten commandments – for his life of holiness today. Having set out my arguments elsewhere,²³ I will make no comment here, but just let the words of Scripture stand for themselves – except to plead that these passages be read unfiltered by the glosses and escape clauses of the historic Reformed faith:

Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace... My brothers, you also 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

²³ See my works listed below.

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 (Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6).

God... has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory... Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:5-13).

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me...

Before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith...

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying: 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God...

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman... 'Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman'. So, brothers, we are not

children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery...

You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'... But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (Gal. 2:19-20; 3:23-26; 4:4-7,21-22,30-31; 5:1,13-18).

A former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath... This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant...

If that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with 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. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, 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 laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying: "Know the Lord", for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more'. In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 7:18-22; 8:7-13).

Let me close with Brooks' final statement:

Our Saviour lived a holy life by obedience to the ten commandments springing from a heart overflowing with love to his heavenly Father. If that is what holiness meant for him, then that is what holiness means for us. How we should thank God for the ten commandments!

Just a minute! What a slipshod statement! The Bible tells us that Christ came under ‘the law’ (Gal. 4:4), the entire law, please note, not merely the ten commandments. As I read the Gospels, I find Christ repeatedly quoting the law – all parts of it – repeatedly obeying the law – all parts of it – not just the ten commandments. Of course he did! For as he made clear, he came into the world in order to fulfil the law in its entirety (Matt. 5:17). As the rest of the New Testament explains, by fulfilling the entire law, Christ established the new covenant to supersede all the shadows of the old covenant, thus rendering that covenant and its law obsolete (Col. 2:16-23; Heb. 8:13).

Thus, yet again, Brooks has shot himself in the foot. On his argument, the believer should take the same attitude to the law – the entire law – as Christ did, and keep it in order to live a life of holiness. Does Brooks pass muster on this score? Does he keep the 613 commandments? How does he cope with Matthew 5:17-48? How does he cope with James 2:10-11? And so on. And on.

Since Brooks has made it perfectly clear what he thinks of ‘historic Reformed theology’, perhaps I may be permitted to give my opinion of its attitude to the law. I do so, by accommodating some words of Martin Luther in his *Table Talk*:

When God’s word is by the Fathers expounded, construed and glossed, then, in my judgment, it is even as when one strains milk through a coal sack, which must needs spoil and make the milk black; God’s word itself is pure, clean, bright and clear; but, through the doctrines, books and writings of the Fathers, it is darkened, falsified and spoiled.

Now my accommodation:

When God’s word on the law is by historic Reformed theology expounded, construed and glossed, then, in my judgment, it is even as when one strains milk through a coal sack, which must needs spoil and make the milk black; God’s word on the law itself is pure, clean, bright and clear; but, through the doctrines, books and writings of historic Reformed theology, it is darkened, falsified and spoiled.

If only the advocates of historic Reformed theology would look at Scripture as Scripture, and not as glossed by their theology... But, in saying that, I fear I am wishing for the moon. How sad!

Some of my works on the subject.

Assurance in the New Covenant.

Believers Under the Law of Christ.

Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law.

Grace Not Law!: The Answer to Antinomianism.

New-Covenant Articles (Volumes 1-8).

Psalms 119 and the New Covenant.

Redemption History Through Covenants.

Sabbath Notes.

Sabbath Questions: An open letter to Iain Murray.

The Essential Sabbath.

The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry.