

Crucial Thoughts on "Law in The New Covenant"

by Jon Zens

In "Is There A 'Covenant of Grace?'" (Autumn, 1977, BRR, pp.43-53), I argued that the traditional formulation and use of the "covenant of grace" concept lacked Scriptural support, and served to confuse rather than illumine Biblical truth. I was gratified by the number of Baptists who responded positively to this article. Several Presbyterians felt that it raised some issues that deserve further evaluation. Below is the only formal, written response that has come in reaction to this article. Responding to it will afford an opportunity to expand, clarify and crystallize some important thoughts regarding the administration of law in the New Covenant.

Dear Mr. Zens,

Thank you for your thought-provoking article, "Is There A Covenant of Grace?" in the Autumn, 1977, BRR. Your discussion of the covenantal character of developing redemptive history, the historical nature of Biblical covenants, their self-defining character and the relevance of these ideas for determining the subjects of baptism is nothing short of exciting. I hope I'll be reading more about one eternal 'purpose' in Christ worked out in progressive covenants.

Some features of your article, however, are a bit disturbing. First, the statement on p.47: "The Dispensationalists have posited that law and grace are opposites: where law is in force, grace is not operative...." This remark seems unfair considering you quote on the preceding page from Dr. C. Ryrie's book *Dispensationalism Today*. He devotes most of pages 110-121 in that work refuting this charge, listing six ways in which grace operated during the Mosaic economy.

Secondly, you state that: "this law of Moses was always thought of as a totality" (p.48). This seems to be indeed a "very involved subject" as you state (p.47), but I believe that advocating the inseparability of the Moral Law from the Civil and Ceremonial code is laying a questionable foundation. You quote from *Hebrew Christianity* by Arnold Fruchtenbaum to show why the moral aspect of the Law of Moses should not be pushed out of its historic covenantal setting into the Messianic Age. It should be noted by all that Fruchtenbaum is a Dispensationalist of the most rigorous stamp. He advocates that the most thorough-going distinction between Israel and the Church be maintained at every point. With all due respect to him as a Christian and a minister, I tremble somewhat to think we are building "foundational thoughts" concerning the place of the Law in the New Covenant upon his approach to the subject. I mention this primarily as a note of caution. This is not to disparage his work as exegete or historian.

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Thirdly, in this same connection I must challenge the notion that the concept of the Moral Law is purely arbitrary and has no more relevance for the Christian than the ceremonial and civil aspects of the abrogated covenant. I agree with your concern [to locate the commandments with a specific historic covenant](#), and do full justice to their historically restricted significance. However, we should not at the same time make the error of Dispensationalism, which while avoiding the artificial unity of the covenants as required by the "covenant of grace" concept, loses sight of [the genuine succession of covenants and the continuity of their progressive unfolding](#). Any aspect of distinction between the Biblical covenants should not lose sight of their organic progressive development. To swim out into the ocean of grace under the New Covenant is indeed to leave behind the shoals of the Law; but that ocean still has a floor. The New Covenant was not ratified in a legal and moral vacuum. And [what other legal foundation could there be but the Moral Law which was fulfilled \(Matt. 5:17\) and expanded \(vv.22, 28, etc.\) by Christ?](#)

In his study manual on the Westminster Confession, G.I. Williamson gives evidence to show that the Bible itself distinguishes the Moral Law from the rest of the Mosaic Code (Westminster Confession for Study Classes, Pres. & Reformed Pub. Co., 1964, pp.142ff.) Your article points out that [the very heart of the believer under the New Covenant has the Law written into it by the Holy Spirit](#) (p.48). The concept of a progressive development of covenants in history demands that the term "laws" in Hebrews 10:16 be interpreted in connection with the New Covenant. But since this is rooted in Old Covenant history, neither can we separate the New Covenant terminology from its historical origin. [What laws could Jeremiah have been referring to but the Ten Commandments as the basic expression of God's will for the moral behavior of His creatures?](#)

Perhaps what I'm mainly concerned about is that we understand that [the Old Covenant was abrogated by way of fulfillment, not simply by being set aside or postponed](#). The Moral Law of Moses is not abrogated in the sense that it no longer has any relation to the will of God for man. Instead, it should be recognized as that which continues to bring condemnation. And while it is not the rule of life for a Christian, it does represent with limited clarity the will of God for Christian behavior. The rule of life for the Christian, as you state, is the "law of Christ" (Gal.6:2). But this new rule of life is dependent on and related to the Moral Law as flower to bud, and cannot be properly understood apart from it. The legal framework in which the New Covenant was ratified was none other than the expanded and unfolded demands of the Moral Law. The significance of this continuity in the development from Moral Law to the Law of Christ can be seen in examining the legal aspects of Christ's obedience in becoming Mediator of a better covenant.

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In general, Christ's coming was not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matt.5:17). In relation to His earthly obedience, then, the Moral Law describes the character of Christ's earthly life, that is, obedient under the law (Heb.5:8; Gal.4:4). Without this obedience He would not have been suited to redeem because those who need redemption are described as those "under the law" (Gal.4:5). In what sense can a modern pagan be said to be under the law, except as he stands condemned by the Moral Law and its ramifications? **When the Ten Commandments cease to describe the basic will of God for human behavior, then sinners will no longer stand in need of a substitute Savior.** A Christian is justified because in Christ's active obedience the standard reflected at Sinai was perfectly lived out. New Covenant blessings are not available apart from His obedience to Old Covenant Law. This is why the Moral Law in particular is a delight to the justified Christian (Rom.7:22).

In relation to His obedience on the cross, again we see an important connection between the Moral Law and the Christian's rule of life in the Spirit. **The effect of Christ's death is to release the believing sinner from the curse of the Law (Rom.7:6; Gal.3:13). The result in the life of the believer is that he becomes dead to the law. But while this is said to take place through the body of Christ in Romans 7:4, it occurs through the Law according to Galatians 2:19. The death of Christ which ratified the New Covenant can only be explained against the demands of the Moral Law as first revealed in capsule form at Sinai. By faith-union with Christ a believer passes "through the law" in the person of his Substitute and thereby becomes dead to the Law and its curse. The Moral Law continues to point the believer to Christ and is relevant to a discussion of proper Christian behavior (Gal.3:24; James 2:10-11).**

To conclude, may I ask you to reconsider whether the recent arguments against the traditional view which distinguishes the Moral Law within the Mosaic Covenant deal fairly with the Biblical data. The "inspired order of redemption" which you delineate ("promise - law - promise," p.50) actually distorts in some measure the very progressive and successive nature of the historical covenants. Perhaps a better scheme is simply **"promise - law - fulfillment."** The distinctive character of the Ten Commandments is seen in the close connection between them and the revelation to the covenant community of God who redeemed them from Egypt (Ex.20:2). In a manner unique to this aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, the Moral Law is connected with the revelation of God as Redeemer of His people. The rule of life for the Christian unfolds and explains the Moral Law just as the Incarnate Son reveals the infinite dimensions of the redemptive love of God who drowned the Egyptians.

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The New Covenant's legal framework and moral ramifications are not served by accepting a Dispensational scheme which mechanically separates it from the Old. Again this is not meant to reflect negatively on the character or abilities of any Dispensational writer.

Thank you for taking time to consider these thoughts, and I hope something will be of benefit to you! And thank you for what, it should be obvious, was a most stimulating and enjoyable article,

Yours Sincerely, Ian McPhee Westminster Theological Seminary

1. With regard to law and grace being opposites in the Dispensationalist system, I had in view the concept of specific covenant administrations. In other words, to be "under law" is seen by them as totally opposite to being "under grace." The Mosaic administration of "law" is pitted against Christ's administration of "grace." I think this much is borne out in Dispensationalist writings: Scofield Reference Bible: "Grace given up for law" when Israel said, "All that the Lord has said, we will do" (p.93). Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today: "While Dispensationalists may have overemphasized the differences between law and grace, the covenant man has failed to admit differences....dispensationalism alone among theological systems teaches both the antithetical nature of law and grace and the truth of grace under law" (pp.130-131).

Charles Feinberg, Premillennialism or Amillennialism?: "The principles of law and grace are mutually destructive; it is impossible for them to exist together....Grace began to be manifested when the law was done away" (pp.138-139).

To the degree that Dispensationalists admit the presence of law "under grace," and grace "under law" they are self-destructing their own system. In their more consistent moments, the Dispensationalists verify the essence of my contention on page 47 of the Autumn issue.

2. My emphasis on the Mosaic covenant as a unit was being said against the background of those who isolate the Ten Commandments from their specific covenantal context. My "foundational" thoughts do not depend on the thinking of Dispensationalists. I quoted A. Fruchtenbaum because I felt he stated the truth at that point. Listen to these non-Dispensationalists affirm the point I was making:

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Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day*: "It should always be remembered, however, that the distinctions Christians make between 'moral' and 'ceremonial' laws in the Old Testament, was hardly perspicuous to the Hebrew mind. In the Old Testament, cultic and ethical, moral and ceremonial, religious and civil enactment's are all worked together, with no sense of impropriety, since they all express the will of Yahweh for his covenant people Israel"(p.118).

Herman Ridderbos, *Paul - An Outline of His Theology*: "in the epistles that have been preserved to us, nowhere is a distinction made explicitly between the moral and ceremonial, particularistic parts of the law" (P.284).

I think my point is well taken within the confines of this specific purpose. The history of Reformed thought reveals a tendency to view the Ten Commandments apart from the progress of redemptive history. I am seeking to point out that "law" in these "last days" is solely in the hands of Christ, not Moses. And in order to establish this point, it is imperative to see that the Mosaic law-covenant was a unified code which had a beginning and end in history. To be sure, the Ten Commandments occupied a special place in the Old Covenant; but this does not detract from the point I made, and wish to now further develop.

3. I am convinced that "law" must always be located in relationship to the advance of redemptive history. The Law of Moses (as a totality) was connected to a particular covenant people. It was codified after a specific act of redemption, the Exodus. In the ratification of this Old Covenant, a nation was constituted and set apart for the Lord.

But in the ultimate purpose of God, this Mosaic economy was temporary, destined to exist "until the time of reformation" (Heb.9:10) when God would speak in a final way in His Son in the last days (Heb.1:1-2). Everything going on in Israel was of a typical nature, and was fulfilled in the person and work of Christ (Heb.3:5; 8:5; 9:8-9). With the coming of Christ and the ratification of the New Covenant, the Spirit was given to the new Israel - the church. The Old Covenant then passes away in terms of redemptive culmination in the Messiah.

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We must do justice, then, to the plain statements of the New Testament:

"If that first covenant had been faultless, then no place have been sought for the second" (Heb.8:7).

"In that he says, A new covenant, he has made the first old; now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away" (Heb.8:13).

"He takes away the first, that he may establish the second" (Heb.10:9).

"That which is done away....that which is abolished" (2Cor.3:11-13).

When Jesus died on the cross "the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were broken apart" (Matt.27:51; Cf., Heb.9:7-8). This decisive, supernatural act visibly demonstrated the end of the Old Covenant and the establishment of the New.

Thus, within this restricted perspective of the abolishing of the Old and the beginning of the New, it is proper to see the "stones" as included in that which was terminated. G.I. Williamson states that "he (God) wrote them (Ten Commandments) not on perishable skins but upon tablets of stone - symbolic of the permanence belonging to them" (The Westminster Confession of Faith - A Study Guide, p. 142). There is truth to this in the sense that they were set apart in the Old Covenant (Heb.9:4); but according to Paul the age of outward writing on stones is past, and the era of inward writing on the heart by the Spirit is in effect (2 Cor.3:3).

This is simply to say, then, that "law" must now be identified with the current covenant in force, for the former covenant is no longer operative. Moses was the head of his house: Israel. Christ is now the Head of His house: the church. We must come to grips with the fact that the house of Moses is finished, and the house of Christ is being built until the end of this age (Heb.3:1-6; Matt.16:18; 28:20).

With these things in view, we can easily see that just as the Old Covenant community was structured by written revelation which centered in Moses, so the New Covenant community is ordered by the "law of Christ" as given in the writing of the Apostles and prophets (Eph.2:20).

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These lines of thought come together in Matthew 5:17-7:29. Jesus stands in history as the long-awaited Messiah. [The government is to be upon His shoulders](#), which is to say He is the law-giver. He here expounds "law" in the New Covenant. But - and this is crucial - His explication of "law" in His Kingdom incorporates elements of the Mosaic code into the New Covenant. If anything, He intensifies the Mosaic elements ("whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart," 5:28). There are similarities between the Mediator of the New Covenant giving His law, and the Old Covenant mediator Moses receiving the Ten Words at Sinai [James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (London, 1966), p. 115]. But most conspicuous was the authority Christ manifested in setting forth His law: "when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (7:28-29). As James Barr puts it:

The New Testament kerygma (proclamation) ... depended on the Old Testament, [but] was very conscious of having something new to say; perhaps the most familiar expression of this is the "But I say to you" of the antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount (Old and New, pp. 138-139).

It is in this area of doing justice to the reality of Old Covenant abolishment, and the implications of this for the New Covenant community that Reformed theology has failed. This tendency to level redemptive history is seen, for instance, in the following statement by Dr. Jack Fennema:

It is important, however, to realize that the words "old" and "new" do not refer to two different covenants. They both refer to the Covenant of Grace, but the words "old" and "new" point to the two ways in which the covenant has been administered ("Growth in the Lord," *Calvinist Contact*, March 3, 1978, p. 21)

But the New Testament is clear: the Old and New Covenants are indeed two different covenants, the one an administration of death, the other an administration of life (2 Cor. 3:6-8). And Christ as Mediator has the prerogative to delineate what "law" is in the New Covenant.

We must make it clear that the written documents of the Apostles and prophets of the New Covenant are binding for the church. These writings constitute the "law of Christ." Dr. Robert Reymond observes:

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The church is built on them as organs of revelation (cf., Eph. 3:5) and hence as authoritative teachers of revealed doctrine The church of subsequent ages is commanded to discover its foundation in those apostles and prophets, or more specifically, in their doctrine as the latter is recorded in the Scriptures John knew he was the last of the apostles, and there is evidence that by the last decade of the first century the several literary parts of our New Testament were already regarded as God's word to his church and were being gathered together in codex or "book" form [What About Continuing Miracles and Revelations in the Presbyterian Church Today? (Pres. & Ref., 1977), pp37,40].

More pointedly, Dr. Meredith Kline crystallizes the matter before us:

The words of the New Testament which the enthroned Christ has spoken through his inspired ministers of the New Covenant are his architectural directives for the holy task of constructing this new covenant home ... The Old and New Testaments ... will be seen as two separate and distinct architectural models for the house of God in two quite separate and distinct stages in history This is to say that the Old testament is not the canon of the Christian church The form of government appointed in the old covenant is not community polity for the church of the new covenant In these terms, the Old Testament, though possessing the general authority of all the Scriptures, does not possess for the church the more specific authority of canonicity. Under the new covenant the Old Testament is not the current canon [The Structure of Biblical Authority (Grand Rapids, 1972), pp. 85, 99, 102; emphases mine].

The implications of [Kline's insights](#) are of tremendous import. He has captured the concept that with the institution of a new covenant also comes a new canon, a new "law" for the body of Christ. The church stands bound, not to the minutely detailed Mosaic code, but to those new documents inspired by the Spirit of Christ. Indeed, the "law of Moses" (as a covenantal administration) has passed away, and the "law of Christ" now rules the church. If this is correct, then the current Chalcedon movement, led by Dr. R. J. Rushdoony, is creating great confusion by seeking to push the Old Covenant regulations into the New Covenant age (Cf., Walter J. Chantry's review of God's Plan For Victory by R. J. Rushdoony in the April, 1978, Banner of Truth, pp. 23-24). The dominion of Christ over His Kingdom (the church, Matt. 16:19, 18:17,18) is expressed in the New Testament, not the Old. Herman Ridderbos puts his finger on this when he says:

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Christ also represents the new standard of judgment as to what "has had its day" in the law and what has abiding validity (Col. 2:17) The church no longer has to do with the law in any other way than in Christ and thus is *onnomos Christou* (in-lawed to Christ) The new creation brings a new canon, a new standard of judgment, along with it. This is above all redemptive-historical in character (Paul - An Outline, pp. 285-286).

In 1 Corinthians 9:20-21, there are three Greek phrases used which delineate the relation of men to "law": (1) *hupo nomos*, under Moses' law [Jews]; (2) *anomes*, without Moses' law [Gentiles]; and (3) *onnomes Christou*, in-lawed to Christ [Christians]. Thus my diagram on page 48 of the Autumn issue failed to reflect this distinction when I said Christians were "under Christ's law," as if the Greek text had *hupo nomos*. Herman Ridderbos summarizes the teaching of this passage by saying:

This passage contains three elements in which the relationship of Christ and the law in its continuing significance is expressed: (a) The law no longer has an unrestricted and undifferentiated validity for the church of Christ. In a certain sense the church can be qualified as "without the law." (b) The law of God is not thereby abrogated. (c) The continuing significance of the law can be qualified as "being bound to the law of Christ" (*ennomos Christou*) (Paul, p. 284).

4. Having, I trust, sufficiently shown that the traditional Reformed treatment of the Ten Commandments has not done justice to the redemptive-historical movement from "stones" to "Spirit," as summarized in 2 Cor. 3, we can move on to some other issues related to "law."

First, Galatians 3:23-24 has been used as a central "proof-text" in the history of Reformed thought to teach the necessity of some sort of "law-work" before a sinner comes to Christ. However, these verses have nothing to do with the subjective effects of the law upon a soul in connection with effectual calling (the *ordo salutis*). Rather, they clearly have to do with the movement of redemptive history from the promise to Abraham (v. 17) to the manifestation of Christ in the fullness of time (the *historia salutis*). In other words, the "coming of the seed" [Christ] (v. 19) renders the services of the schoolmaster [the law of Moses] unnecessary (v. 25).

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Secondly, I wonder if we have been careful to maintain Scriptural distinctions. For instance, Mr. McPhee says, "In what sense can a modern pagan be said to be under the law, except as he stands condemned by the Moral Law and its ramifications?" I see three categories of men in Scripture: (1) those "without law," but who do instinctively the things contained in the law, will "perish without law" [Gentiles] (Rom. 2:12, 14; 1 Cor. 9:21); (2) those "with the law" who will be judged by the law [Jews] (Rom. 2:12; 3:2; 1 Cor. 9:20); and (3) those "in-lawed to Christ" [Christians] (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2).

Thus, "under law" in Galatians has specific reference to those moving back under the Mosaic economy, Again, it seems that in Galatians 3:13-14 the movement of redemptive history is central in Paul's argument. In order for the blessing of Abraham ("in you shall all nations be blessed") to come upon the Gentiles, Christ must first undergo the curse of the law. I do not see how Paul's point could be that all men are "under the law," but rather that in order for blessing to come upon those "without law" Jesus had to experience the curse due those "under the law."

Is this not what is in view in Ephesians 2:11-19? The "uncircumcision" [Gentiles] (v. 11) not having the oracles of God (v. 12) comes into New Covenant blessings because Jesus "has broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity [between Jew and Gentile], even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; so as to make himself of two one new man, so making peace" (vv. 14-15).

A modern pagan does not need to be condemned by the "Ten Commandments." He stands already condemned in Adam (Rom. 5: 18), is "without excuse" just by virtue of being a man in God's image who is exposed to the general revelation (creation) of God Himself (Rom. 1:19-20), and will be judged "without law" as a sinner without law (Rom. 2:12). To preach the gospel to lost men is to bring the "law of Christ" to bear upon their consciences.

Thirdly, a few words are in order about the "law" mentioned in Jeremiah 31:33 - "I will put my law within them, and on their heart will I write it." Mr. McPhee suggests that only the Ten Commandments could be in view. But such a view betrays an openness to future definitive redemptive events which, in the new economy, would effect certain radical changes. New wine must be put into new wineskins (Luke 5:33-39). Thus, in the case of Jeremiah 31: 31-34, future redemptive history reveals that the words "house of Israel and house of Judah" cannot be "literally" applied only to the twelve tribes; instead, the New Covenant opens the door of faith to the Gentiles.

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Likewise, future redemptive history shows that Christ selected from the Mosaic economy that which would be binding on the New Covenant community. Thus, it is not entirely accurate to say that the "Ten Commandments" of the Old Covenant must be in view in Jeremiah 31: 33. More properly, in light of New Covenant fulfillment, it is the "law of Christ" that is ultimately written on the heart. We must remember that the New Covenant documents are the "canon" (standard, norm) of the church. We must allow these documents to define "law" in the new age.

This immediately raises the question of "Sabbath." It is obvious that nine of the Ten Commandments are reiterated in the New Covenant. Respected brethren have always differed on whether the "Sabbath" is still in force. I do not hope to solve this question here, but I will share the fruits of my study on this subject. The only passage in the New Testament I can see that might seem to teach the perpetual nature of the Sabbath-principle is Mark 2:27 - "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." The argument runs like this: the text does not say "the Sabbath was given to Israel," but to "man" in the generic sense. The context, however, seems to emphasize the purpose of the Sabbath, not its universal scope, or perpetual obligation. The Pharisees perverted the Sabbath and made it burdensome, rather than a blessed day of rest. Jesus corrects this perversion by stating the true purpose of the Sabbath: it was an institution for the good of man.

It seems to me that the weight of evidence reveals that the Sabbath was given to Israel as distinct from the nations. In Nehemiah 9:5-38, the repentant Levites review God's dealings with a stiff-necked nation. Notice the attention given to the order of events: affliction in Egypt (v.9); Pharaoh judged (v.10); Red Sea divided (v.11); pillar of cloud/pillar of fire guides Israel (v.12); God appears on Mount Sinai (v.13).

Then did you come down on Mount Sinai, and did speak with them from heaven; you did give them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments. So you did make known to them your holy Sabbath, and did lay down for them commandments, statutes, and law, through your servant Moses (vv.13-14).

Similar sentiments are expressed in Ezekiel 20:10-12:

So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and informed them of my ordinances, which if a man observes them, he will live [cf., Gal.3:12]. And I also gave them my Sabbaths **to be a sign between me and them**, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.

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I have difficulty, therefore, in saying that the Sabbath is universally and perpetually binding on all men. It seems rather to be a special ordinance for the covenant people only, just as the Lord's Day has special significance only for Christians.

The only "Sabbath" I can see in the New Testament is that which remains for the people of God after they strive in this life to enter into it (Heb.4:9,11). In other words, [the eternal "Sabbath" for the church is a yet outstanding blessing](#). Just as a generation of Israel failed to enter Canaan because of unbelief, so the New Covenant community must "be diligent to enter that rest, lest any one fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb.4:11).

Hebrews 10:25 emphasizes the importance of brethren assembling with one another for purposes of encouragement and exhortation. This gathering together, of course, centers on the Lord's Day. The Lord's people remember the resurrection every Sunday. Thus, I hold to a high view of the [Lord's Day \[Ultérieurement, Jon Zens a atténué ce qu'il dit ici au sujet du dimanche\]](#). Christians should structure their Sundays around the stated meetings of the church, and use this day - since it is in most locales a "day off" - unto edification both private and corporate. But we no longer "remember the Sabbath." We remember the climactic redemptive events of our Savior Who was dead on the Sabbath and arose in power on the first day of the week. Paul Jewett comments on [Col.2:16](#) - "[let no man act as your judge with regard to food or drink, or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day](#)":

The argument that Paul's statement in Col. 2:16 refers to ceremonial Sabbaths, not the weekly Sabbath, an argument generally held by Puritans, is seldom found today, except among Seventh-Day Adventists who can scarcely endure that the Apostle should have mentioned the seventh-day Sabbath in the same breath with new moons and divers feasts. Such an interpretation is untenable, since [the Hebrew for Sabbath \(shabbath\), the equivalent of the Greek sabbaton which Paul uses in writing to the Colossians, occurs about a hundred times in the Old Testament and refers without exception to the weekly Sabbath....](#) Hence, Paul's statement comes as near to a demonstration, as anything could, that he taught his converts they had no obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath of the Old Testament (The Lord's Day, pp.44-45, note 20).

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Christians, then, should be careful about harshly judging one another with regard to observance of the Lord's Day. The stricter "Sabbatarians" should not label Christians who reject the Sabbath principle as "loose" or "antinomian," if these brethren use the Lord's Day in terms of Biblical priorities. And those who do not hold to the "Christian Sabbath" should not label "Sabbatarians" as "legalists," unless these brethren impose their strictness as binding upon the consciences of others.

Further, there are those who would see moral, ceremonial and political - as still in force. They consistently push those ordinances abolished by Christ into the new era. The lengths to which this new legalism extends is illustrated in Dr. Gary North's remarks on the Sabbath:

The Sabbath is decentralized in the New Testament times, but it is not abolished. We are not to exploit the land, our employees, or those in debt to us. We are to impose the restraints of the Sabbath principle in our economic affairs. We are not to become long-term debtors or long-term creditors. We are not to farm all of our land each year; instead, one-seventh of the land must be rested on a rotating basis, year by year. We must permit a moratorium on economic growth, personal and social, in one-seventh of our lives, or about 14%. This is why I believe that the biblical tithe is closer to 14% than it is to 10%. The primary tithe in the Old Testament was 10%....there was an additional tithe every third year (Deut.14:28-29), averaging, therefore, 3.3% per year; plus the first fruits of the harvest, an indeterminate, though small, required offering....This is God's "holy 14%"("An Economic Commentary on the Bible," Chalcedon Report, May, 1977, No.141,p.4).

This kind of "Christian Reconstruction" [legalism](#) is a dangerous influence in the church at large. It denies the progress of redemptive history to a new and better covenant. It wishes to make the particularities of the Old Covenant documents still binding on the church, and, yes, even society as a whole. Any system that seeks to resurrect a theocracy according to the Mosaic pattern is at odds with the New Covenant which our Lord instituted.

To return to my original thesis in "Is There A 'Covenant of Grace'?: we must do justice to the historical nature of covenants, and stop using the nebulous "covenant of grace" idea as a theological catch-all. To illustrate the hold this concept has on men, I again quote Dr. Jack:

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The two primary covenants are: Covenant of Works (or Creation): the promise of God is life for Adam and his posterity....Covenant of Grace (or salvation): The promise of God is life and salvation through Jesus Christ for all who believe ("Growth in the Lord," Calvinist Contact, March 3, 1978,p.2).

In my opinion, this shows how people can be swallowed up by a preconceived system, and lose their orientation to the clear statements of Scripture. The Scriptural evidence for a "Covenant of Works" is indeed scanty; in fact, it is so flimsy that it is quite a bold statement to say that this is one of two "primary" covenants in the Bible. The Scriptural evidence for a "Covenant of Grace" - as defined by Covenant theologians - is non-existent. Yet this is the second of two "primary" covenants in the history of redemption. But if we read the New Testament and heed its data, do we not see that the two "primary" covenants are the "Old Covenant" and the "New Covenant"? The Book of Hebrews even uses the specific terms "first" and "second." How more explicit must God's Word be? Even if you add the Abrahamic Covenant as a major Bible covenant land I think it should be accorded that honor, per Gal.3:14-17), you are still far from the "Covenant of Works" with Adam, and the nebulous "Covenant of Grace" hanging above history being the "two primary covenants of Scripture."

Remember, it is generally admitted by paedobaptists that:

the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace is the strongest argument for infant baptism....the advocates of Covenant theology reject "this common belief in two basic covenants" and hold that "the really basic covenant is the one covenant of grace. It is found throughout the Old and New Testaments....The two halves of the Bible should be regarded not as separate covenants made by God with mankind, but as records of the way in which the covenant was administered in two different ways for necessary reasons (Review of The Water That Divides: The Baptism Debate [IVP,1977], by J.G. Vos in Blue Banner Faith and Life, April-June, 1978, p.29).

If indeed the "Covenant of Grace" is a faulty concept, then one of their most used "proofs" carries no weight. And I ask every reader to seriously consider, "Where in Scripture is the 'one Covenant of Grace' clearly taught?" If one is basing the brunt of his case for infant baptism on the "Covenant of Grace," then he must look elsewhere for Biblical grounds to put "covenant children" in the church.

One of our readers, George Groner, after reading "Is There A 'Covenant of Grace'?" submitted the following tentative revision of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, Chapter 7, titled "Of God's Covenant." I think it incorporates the Biblical data in a balanced fashion, and we would do well to reflect this line of thinking in our contemplation's and presentations of Christ's truth.

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Chapter VII Of God's Covenants In Grace

1. The distance between God and the creature is so great that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some (a) voluntary condescension on God's part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenants (b).

2. Moreover, man having brought himself (c) under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make covenants in grace wherein he freely offers to sinners (d) life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they might be saved; and (e) promising to give to all those that are ordained to eternal life, His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to repent and believe.

3. The Old Testament covenants progressively reveal the gospel (f); first of all to Adam in a promise of salvation by the (g) seed of the woman and afterwards in further steps, until the full (h) discovery of grace was manifested in the person and work of Jesus Christ in the gospel; and being founded in that (i) called a counsel (k) that was between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (l) concerning the redemption of the elect; and it is alone by grace in the covenants that all the posterity of fallen Adam that ever were (m) saved did obtain life and blessed immortality, (n) all mankind, even infants, being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God; (o) even upon those terms on which Adam stood in his state of innocence.

(a) Gen.6:8-18. (b) Eph.2:12; Rom.9:4. (c) Gal.3:10. (d) 2 Cor.1:19-24. (e) Acts 13:48; 15:8-9. (F) 1 Pet.1:9-11. (g) Gen.3:15. (h) John 1:14-17; Gal.4.4. (l) Eph.3:11 John 17:4. (J) Eph. 1:9; Acts 2:23; Heb.6:17. (k) 1 John 5:7. (l) Eph.1:11. (m) Acts 4:12. (n) Rom.5:12-19. (o) Gen.3:3,17.

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I conclude with these words. The way the Apostles and prophets used the Old Testament is normative for this age. In light of the person and work of Christ, they interpreted the preparative history before Christ. The organic historical connection, and the Christocentric unity that exists between the Old and New Covenants, guarantees the usefulness of the Old Testament for the church; the progression of history to a final New Covenant guarantees the "law of Christ" to be sufficient for the church. The Old Covenant documents constituted "law" for that time period for Israel; the New Covenant documents are binding for The new people of God until the end of this age. Just as Israel had to anticipate the future revelation of the Messiah in the New covenant age, so the church cannot ignore the past historic progression toward Christ deposited in the Old Testament. To push Moses' law (as a totality) into the New Covenant is [legalism](#); to take "law" out of the New Covenant is [antinomianism](#); to see redemptive history culminate in Christ, Who seals the New Covenant and as Mediator gives "law" to his servants, is [Biblical](#).

In seeking to delineate more precisely what form "law" takes in the New Covenant, I trust your understanding has been Biblically sharpened. If my basic points are correct, we are in need of reforming and purging our thinking. I do not expect everyone to spontaneously agree with what has been set forth, for the redemptive historical dimension as applied to "law" is new to many of you, and some conclusions I have suggested are at variance with traditionally formulated Reformed thought. But, frankly, I feel the time has come for us to let the light of Scripture adjust our tradition, a tradition which itself would cry out for us to be true to Scripture, and not to past human formulations. I challenge all of you to seriously consider what I have said with an open Bible, for these issues focus on the words of Christ which are most basic to the fabric of the Christian life - "if you love me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth....make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28;19-20).