BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR ETHICS IN THE AGE OF FULFILLMENT

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ABSTRACT
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The purpose of this Thesis is to examine the foundational principles upon which biblical ethics is constructed. We have set out to identify the underlying theology that serves as the meta-ethic for a distinctively Christian ethical approach. Our contention is that an ethical approach that is Christian in nature must establish a biblical theology which properly reflects certain elements of discontinuity in the new covenant era, the new covenant people, and new covenant legal/ethical system. This topic is important because the theological basis upon which one builds his or her ethical system will influence that system and the resultant ethical practice. Our methodology involved examining the exegesis from various NT scholars and biblical ethicists on passages of Scripture dealing with the relationship between the old and new covenants, the nature of the new covenant people of God, and the ethical/legal systems of each covenantal era. We have found that there is a significant redemptive-historical advancement from old to new covenant, the people of God has been constitutionally changed, and God’s covenantal law in the new covenant era has been reformulated. These three findings serve as pillars of a distinctively Christian meta-ethic.
To my wife, Celeste, and my children, Caroline and Cathryn, 
who have sacrificially shared time with my studies.

To my parents, Eric and Nancy, 
who have sacrificially shared their resources to further my studies.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have witnessed a surge of interest from New Testament scholars with respect to the Mosaic covenant’s place in the life the new covenant community. Many of the questions that have been raised in the literature have implications for the discipline of ethics. For purposes of this thesis, we adopt John Frame’s definition of ethics as “theology viewed as a means of determining which human persons, acts, and attitudes receive God’s blessing and which do not.” We believe the kinds of questions being asked by New Testament scholars are most helpful in assisting us in developing a foundational “theology” of ethics. Such questions include: What is the relationship between the law of Moses and the Christian? What does Paul mean by “works of the law”? Are the stone tablets of the Decalogue the codification of God’s eternal and perpetually binding law? What does Paul intend by contrasting the “letter” in the old covenant with the “Spirit” in the new covenant?

This thesis seeks to discern what an ethical approach looks like which takes into consideration certain biblical-theological realities such as the nature of redemptive history, the contours of biblical law, and the ethically significant contrasts between covenantal epochs. The perspective taken herein sees three realities brought about by Christ’s redemptive work that are foundational for establishing a Christian ethical approach. The first

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relates to the *covenantal jurisdiction* under which ethics is undertaken. By “covenantal jurisdiction” we mean the temporal rule of God over his people within the framework of an identifiable covenant relationship. The two major covenantal jurisdictions with ethical aspects that the New Testament (hereafter, “NT”) highlights are the old (Mosaic) covenant and the new covenant. The second reality with ethical significance is the *new relationship* that the people living in the new covenant jurisdiction have with the Holy Spirit. In the present era, the Spirit is universally and internally present in all those who are members of the new covenant. The third aspect of import is the change that has taken place in the *ethical norms* of the people of God who have entered the new covenantal jurisdiction. “Ethical norms” are those directives from God prescribing what people under a particular covenantal jurisdiction must think, become, and do.\(^3\) The NT demonstrates that a change in ethical norms has taken place as a result of Christ’s finished work. Concisely stated, our thesis is that the new covenant jurisdiction, the new relationship of believers to the Spirit, and the new system of ethical norms are three pillars of a distinctively Christian ethic.

In pursuing this thesis, we operate under certain assumptions and within necessary limitations. First, in defining ethics as “*theology viewed as a means of determining which human persons, acts, and attitudes receive God’s blessing and which do not*,” we necessarily affirm that ethics is God-dependant and biblically-derived.\(^4\) Accordingly, we will not

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\(^3\) Ethical goals presented this way mirror the standard learning taxonomy of cognitive (thinking), affective (being), and psycho-motor (doing) competencies. Sanctification is the “outcome” that God wills for his people (1 Thess. 4:3) in every dimension of life. Marshall and Payne pick up on this theme stating: “An integral part of making disciples is teaching and training every disciple to make other disciples . . . [which] involves nurturing and teaching people in their understanding and knowledge (their convictions), in their godliness and way of life (character), and in their abilities and practical experience of ministering to others (their competence),” Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2010), 154-55.

examine the various non-Christian views of ethics. Our focus will rather be directed to exegesis of biblical texts in an effort to draw out their ethical significance. Second, we will not provide extensive case study analysis of ethical issues of the day. This certainly is an important next step for any ethical approach, but space limitations do not permit such a massive undertaking. Our focus here will be on what is traditionally known as meta-ethics, or the underlying theory (or in our case, theology) upon which value judgments are made.

Third, because the thesis seeks to uncover what makes a *distinctively Christian* ethic, our emphasis will often highlight points of *discontinuity* between the various eras of redemptive history. This should not be understood as a rejection of the many points of continuity found throughout redemptive history.

Each chapter of this thesis will seek to address one of the three pillars. In Chapter 2, we will establish a basic framework for understanding the nature of salvation history. The two major ethical covenants of redemptive history, the old and new covenants, will be contrasted as ethical jurisdictions. In Chapter 3 the reality and implications of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the people of God will be examined to show that the ethical enterprise in the new covenant jurisdiction is worked out by the leading, enlightening and freeing of the Holy Spirit who indwells every member of the new covenant. Finally, in Chapter 4, we will examine the ethical systems of the old and new covenant jurisdictions. While the two systems evidence some overlap with respect to certain ethical norms, it will be argued that the new covenant jurisdiction is characterized as having its own distinct ethical system.

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6 O’Donovan refers to the kind of academic pursuit sought by this thesis as “Christian moral concepts.” O’Donovan, vii.

7 O’Donovan writes “Christian ethics must arise from the gospel of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, it could not be Christian ethics.” O’Donovan, 11.
CHAPTER 2
A NEW COVENANTAL JURISDICTION

This chapter will examine how the NT contrasts the old and new covenants as distinct jurisdictions of biblical ethics and then show the importance of redemptive-historical distinctiveness for ethics.

A Transition From One Covenantal Jurisdiction To Another

The NT teaches that the Mosaic covenant ceased to function as the covenantal jurisdiction for the people of God at the point of Christ’s death and resurrection. This perspective is communicated in a number of different ways in the NT.

On numerous occasions in the NT, Christians are characterized as no longer being “under law.” The “law” in this context refers to the Mosaic law, which is at the center of the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. In Gal. 3, “under law” occurs (v. 23) amidst an entire passage characterized by temporal indicators. Notice how Paul’s argument is grounded on historical chronology:

23Before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal. 3:23-26, emphasis added).

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1 When Jesus offered up the cup at the last supper he made plain that the new covenant is inaugurated by his own blood, that is, his death (Luke 22:20).
2 See examples at Rom. 2:12; 3:19; 6:15; Gal. 3:23; 4:5, 21; 5:18; Phil. 3:6; and Heb. 9:22.
The beginning of the era in which God’s people were “under law” is set on a timeline in relationship to the giving of the Abrahamic covenant. As Schreiner suggests, “The phrase ‘under law’ (υ`po. no,mon) here in Gal. 3:23 invariably refers to the old era of salvation history, referring to the time period in which Israel lived under the Sinai covenant.”

Similarly, William Hendriksen contrasts the manifestation of “faith in Christ” (v. 22) with “the old dispensation” that “held the Jews in strict custody.” Paul seeks to show that the era when the Mosaic law came into effect occurred 430 years after the covenant with Abraham (Gal. 3:17). He is making an argument from redemptive history for the superiority of the current place in salvation history characterized by “faith in Christ” over against the prior era characterized by the Mosaic “law.” Prior to Christ, the people of God were “under law,” which is described as a “guardian” (paidagwgo,n), who in the ancient world was a servant who brought children to and from school (i.e., an escort) and watched over them during the day to guard their conduct (i.e., a disciplinarian). The Mosaic administration, then, was a stopgap between the spiritual promises given in the Abrahamic covenant and their fulfillment realized in the era typified by “faith in Jesus Christ.” Paul makes a similar contrast in Rom.

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3 Thomas R. Schreiner, Galatians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 246.
5 Ibid.
6 The Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants are typically viewed as different kinds of covenants, the former being an unconditional “royal grant” type of covenant, and the latter being a suzerain/vassal type of covenant requiring obedience to covenant stipulations in order to enjoy covenant benefits. See Walter Kaiser, Toward Old Testament Ethics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 76.
7 Hendriksen, Galatians, 148.
8 Traditional Dispensational theology has characterized the “church age” as being a parenthesis in God’s plan of salvation. However, based upon Paul’s teaching in Galatians 3 it might be better to think of Israel as the “parenthesis” era of redemptive history. See William VanGemeren, “The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective,” in Five Views on Law and Gospel, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 380. God’s plan all along was that the spiritual promises to Abraham would be fulfilled in a multi-ethnic people of whom he could truly say, “I am your God, and you are my people.” See 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 21:3.
6:14-15 in stating that the believer in Jesus is “not under law, but under grace.” The contrast is one of historical periodization.⁹

In Rom. 7:1-6, Paul shows that a change has taken place with respect to the Mosaic covenant’s jurisdictional authority over the people of God by using an analogy from the covenant of marriage. Paul utilizes a common understanding from Jewish culture that “a woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law” forbidding marriage to another man. Douglas Moo explains, “As the death of her husband allows here to marry another man, so the Christian’s death to the law allows him or her to ‘belong to another,’ Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ Again, there is a temporal contrast from what once was (“we were”) to what currently is (“but now”). When a woman’s husband dies, she is not considered an “adulteress” in marrying another man. In the same way, it is not an act of unfaithfulness for the Christian to move beyond the Mosaic covenant to a new covenantal jurisdiction.

The Mosaic law is also presented in the NT as having come to an end. In the old covenant era, the people of God related to God through the Mosaic covenant. In Rom. 10:4, however, Paul states that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Moo insightfully amplifies the passage to read: “Christ is the telos of the law, with the result that there is righteousness to everyone who believes,” the word “telos” having a meaning that includes both the aspect of “termination” and “goal.” Here Paul pictures “the Mosaic law as the center of an epoch in God’s dealings with human beings that has now

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come to an end. The believer’s relationship to God is mediated in and through Christ, and the Mosaic law is no longer basic to that relationship.”

The NT also highlights the impermanence of the Mosaic ministry. In 2 Cor. 3:7-18, Paul compares and contrasts the ministries of the old and new covenants by expositing Exod. 34:29-35. The single comparison between the old and new covenant ministries that Paul highlights here is that of glory. Both covenants revealed the glory of God. The old covenant “came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory.” Moses wore a veil over his face to shield its brightness from the Israelites who were afraid to come near him after he had descended Mount Sinai with the new hand-carved stone tablets (Exod. 34:29-30). Paul uses this episode to show that the old covenant was not something ugly. As Paul affirms in Rom. 7:12, “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”

The contrasts between the two covenants are, nonetheless, significant for Paul. While both covenants were glorious, the new covenant in relation to the old has “more glory” (v. 8), “far exceed(s) it in glory” (v. 9), and has “surpassed it” in glory (v. 10). Another contrast relates to the relative characterization of the covenants. The old covenant era is called the “ministry of death” and the “ministry of condemnation” (vv. 7, 9), while the new covenant era is called the “ministry of the Spirit” (v. 8) and the “ministry of righteousness,” (vv. 8-9). A similar assessment of the old and new covenants is also given in Romans where Paul states “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death,” (Rom. 8:2).

A final contrast is seen in that the old covenant is described as “being brought to an end” (vv. 7, 11) and having “come to have no glory at all” (v. 10), while the new covenant is

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said to be permanent (v. 11). As in Gal. 3, Paul again highlights the temporary nature of the old covenant. It served for a particular era of redemptive history, but has now become a product of a bygone age. The old covenant law was not inherently bad (it was glorious!), but it had exhaustively served its purpose.

In Heb. 8:7-13, the author cites Jer. 31:31-34 as a basis to explain the significant changes that have come about with the death of Christ. The prophet Jeremiah had prophesied about a day when God would “establish a new covenant” with his people (Jer. 31:31). Focusing on the overall relational aspect between the old and new covenants, the author states: “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,” (8:13). The author has previously established that one who makes a covenant has the authority to “annul”12 it (7:18). By establishing a new covenant, God has annulled the old one.

In the new covenant era, no longer are the uniquely Jewish elements of the Mosaic covenant normative for the Christian experience. In Ephesians 2, Paul makes the point that “in Christ” the “dividing wall of hostility” that once separated mankind at large from Israel is now “broken down.” In Christ there is now “one new man instead of two.” The people of God in the new covenant era are “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” with “Christ as the cornerstone.” The fulfillment of God’s promise that all nations would be blessed in Abraham occurred in an unexpected way (Gen. 12:3). Gentiles were not joined to the nation of Israel as an inferior people (cf. Isa. 2:1-4). Instead,

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12 As O’Brien states, the Greek a.qe,thsij is a term “used for an official annulment of a decree, the cancellation of a debt, or the abrogation of a will,” Peter T. O’Brien, The Letter to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 265.
Gentiles and Jews were co-heirs in the people of God and members of the same body (Eph. 3:6).”

The Importance of the Redemptive-Historical Transition for Ethics

We have shown above the Scriptural teaching that a change in covenants has taken place. God has brought about a new covenantal era in redemptive history. And we have noted this shift has ethical implications. The covenantal jurisdiction under which one works out one’s ethics provides an indispensable context for the ethical enterprise. A failure to recognize the trans-historical nature of ethics can lead to great confusion at the level of meta-ethics, which in turn distorts the ethical structure which is built upon it.

Consider, for example, the following fictional dialogue between President Bartlet and a stereotypical conservative talk show host from an episode of the television program, The West Wing, from several years ago:

The atmosphere was electric. The president of the United States was about to address a gathering of radio talk show hosts in the White House. As the president entered the hall, they all stood and applauded. All, that is, except one — a woman with strikingly blond hair, wearing a bright green suit. At first, her presence rattled the president. He lost his train of thought several times before he finally spoke directly to the sitting talk show host. “Excuse me, doctor,” the president said to her. “It’s good to have you here. Are you an M.D.?”
“A Ph.D.,” she retorted smartly.
“In psychology?” he pursued.
“No, sir,” she said.
“Theology?”
“No.”
“Social work?”
“I have a Ph.D. in English literature,” she replied.
“I’m asking,” continued the president, “because on your show people call in for advice and you go by the title ‘doctor,’ and I didn’t know if maybe your listeners were confused by that and assumed you had advanced training in psychology, theology, or health care.”
“I don’t believe they are confused. No, sir,” she responded.

“Good,” said the president, raising his voice sarcastically. “I like your show. I like how you call homosexuality an abomination.”
“I don’t say homosexuality is an abomination, Mr. President,” she replied haughtily. “The Bible does.”
“Yes, it does!” he shouted. “Leviticus 18:22.” The president was just warming up. “I wanted to ask you a couple of questions while I had you here. I’m interested in selling my youngest daughter into slavery as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. She’s a Georgetown sophomore, speaks fluent Italian, always cleared the table when it was her turn. What would a good price for her be?”
After a brief moment, he continued: “While thinking about that, can I ask another? My chief of staff, Leo McGarry, insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly says he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself or is it OK to call the police?”
Now on a roll, the president steamed on triumphantly. “Here’s one that’s really important, ’cause we’ve got a lot of sports fans in this town. Touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean, Leviticus 11:7. If they promise to wear gloves, can the Washington Redskins still play football? Can Notre Dame? Can West Point?
“Does the whole town really have to be together to stone my brother John for planting different crops side by side?
“Can I burn my mother in a small family gathering for wearing garments made from two different threads?
“Think about those questions, would you?”

The above dialogue was apparently scripted to demonstrate that the biblical prohibition against homosexuality was, in fact, an arcane law amidst other equally outdated laws like slavery, resting on the Sabbath, not touching unclean animals, agricultural and clothing regulations, and capital punishment for certain “minor” offenses. President Bartlet’s tirade, in one sense, demonstrated an appreciation of different laws for different people. He certainly did not believe that twenty-first century Americans (or at least the elites of Washington D. C.) should have anything to do with such an outmoded and parochial ethical system. However, if President Bartlet and the talk show were dialoguing about Christian ethics, then they both had significant errors in their thinking. The Bible is not a source book of detached ethical

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maxims. A command from Leviticus does not *directly* become a Christian precept simply because it is in the canon of the Christian Bible. In the context of Christian ethical discourse, President Bartlet’s diatribe was directed against a straw man, and the talk show host’s chagrin was for naught.

Another example of ethical confusion comes from a very different perspective than that of Hollywood. Certain Messianic groups have popularized “Torah-keeping” for the Christian. One such group, First Fruits of Zion, “espouses a path of discipleship to Jesus of Nazareth that includes the practice of what some Christians might commonly call ‘OT Law.’” This group encourages “all believers to take hold of their full biblical heritage – including the Torah of Moses – not for the sake of earning righteousness, but for the sake of discipleship to Jesus.” By “OT Law” or “Torah” this group means “instruction” in “ritual laws about sacrifices, holy days, dietary restrictions, and various ceremonies.” According to this perspective, the Christian should keep “Torah,” just like the faithful Jews of old because “God’s expectations have not changed.”

While the writers for *The West Wing* series and the First Fruits of Zion organization clearly come from opposite ends of the cultural spectrum, both share the same jurisdictional confusion. Both have failed to recognize, among other things, to whom the law of Moses was given, the purpose and duration of the Mosaic law, and what the NT has to say about the particular laws of the Mosaic covenant in light of Christ’s incarnational work.

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., vii-viii.
18 Ibid., 45.
President Bartlet has given the challenge to “think about [the] questions” he has provocatively raised. First Fruits of Zion has exhorted the readers of its publication to “take responsibility to study the Scriptures, ask questions, seek answers, learn, and grow.”\(^1\) In the remainder of this thesis, we will seek to do precisely that.

**Summary of the Chapter**

In this second chapter we have shown that Christ’s redemptive work brought about the end of the Mosaic covenant as a governing jurisdiction of the people of God. The new covenant jurisdiction is now in force, and since Christ’s death the people of God live under it. We have also attempted to show that redemptive history is important for engaging in biblical ethics. One’s redemptive historical position has bearing on how one uses biblical data to answer ethical questions.

In the next chapter we will examine how the coming of the new covenant era has brought with it an important change in the Spirit’s relationship to the people of God. It is in this new relationship between the Spirit and God’s people where a significant advancement in biblical ethics has occurred.

\(^{1}\) Ibid., ix.
CHAPTER 3

A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SPIRIT

In the last chapter we established that advance of redemptive history has brought about a change in covenantal jurisdictions from old covenant to new. In this chapter we will examine how this change in covenantal jurisdictions has brought about a change in the Spirit’s relationship with the people of God and how such a change affects ethics. A foundational ethic must take into consideration that “the redeemed creation does not just confront us as moral agents, but includes us and enables us to participate in it.”\(^1\) And this we do by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit’s Presence Under The Old Covenant

We begin our examination of the Spirit’s role in ethics by examining the Spirit’s activity amongst the covenant community of Israel. In the Old Testament (hereafter, “OT”) God’s relationship with his people was characterized by dwelling with and among them. “God (or His ‘name’) is often presented in the OT as dwelling in particular places (see Deut. 31:11), such as the tabernacle (e.g., Exod. 25:8; 29:42-45; Deut. 12:11) and later in Zion (Ps. 74:2; Isa. 8:18; Joel 3:17, 21) or the temple (1 Kgs 8:13).”\(^2\) However, those whom the Old


Testament presents as having had the Spirit come upon them in a direct and personal way are limited to three classes of individuals: political leaders, prophets, and craftsman.  

Political Leaders

James Hamilton observes that “It is noteworthy that in the approximately 2,000 years of Israelite history described in the OT, relatively few of Israel’s leaders are described as…endowed with…the Spirit.” Aside from a somewhat ambiguous reference in Gen. 41:38 (where Pharaoh may describe Joseph as having the Spirit or a spirit of God upon him), we first encounter the Spirit’s presence upon Moses. Yahweh informs Moses that He will “take from the Spirit that is upon [Moses] and put the Spirit upon” the seventy elders of Israel (11:16) to help Moses lead the people. This is a case of God distributing his anointing with seventy other leaders set aside for a leadership task. As a result of this transference of the Spirit from one man to many men, Moses expresses great joy and longing to universalize the experience of this select group: “O that all the people of Yahweh were prophets, and that Yahweh would put his Spirit upon them,” (11:29). The clear implication is that the experience of the Spirit’s empowering descent, at least in the form evident in the case of Moses and the seventy elders, was not normative for the people of God at that time.

The Scriptures next speak of Joshua as being “filled with the Spirit of wisdom” (Deut. 34:9) as a manifestation of his anointing as the successor to Moses. Joshua was filled, liked Moses, to lead the people of Israel as Moses had been called to do. During the time of the Judges, “when Yahweh raised up judges for [the Israelites],” Yahweh would be with the judge in order to “save them from the hand of their enemy,” (Judg. 2:18). This “being with”

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3 See Bruce A. Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” in Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition, Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 77.
4 Hamilton, 27.
5 Ibid., 28.
the judges sometimes was described as the Spirit “coming upon,” “putting on,” or “stirring” a particular judge, as in the case of Othniel (3:1), Gideon (6:3), Jephthah (11:29), and Sampson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

A similar experience occurs with the anointing of Saul as king over Israel. Samuel announces to Saul that “the Spirit of Yahweh will rush upon you,” (10:6; cf. 11:6). This same phrase is used in 1 Sam. 1:18 in connection with “an evil spirit,” suggesting that the spiritual “rushing upon” was transitory in nature, as was the Spirit’s presence was with Samson. When Samuel anointed David as the new king, the Spirit rushed to David and departed from Saul (1 Sam. 16:13-14). When the Spirit rushed upon David, the Scripture records additionally that this endowment continued “from that day forward,” (1 Sam. 16:13). This phrase would seem to indicate that David received the empowering Spirit for the remainder of his life as king of Israel. However, after serious moral failure David feared that God would take His Holy Spirit from David (Ps. 51:11), just as God had done with Saul.

Prophets

After the seventy elders prophesied in Num. 11:25-26, the next record of the Spirit coming upon someone occurred in the instance of Balaam (Num. 24:2-3). The Spirit’s presence caused Balaam to speak God’s words, but shortly thereafter the prophet died in battle while attacking Israel (31:8), suggesting the Spirit’s influence in his life was sporadic and had not transformed his heart. Other OT prophets similarly had the Spirit come upon them in the process of receiving divine inspiration. The Spirit came upon Azariah before he prophesied to king Asa (2 Chron. 15:1-7), and Scripture makes similar statements with

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6 Ibid., 33.
respect to the ministries of Zechariah, Amasai, Elisha, and Micah. Ezekiel reports that, "the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me," (Ezek. 2:2).

Craftsmen

The Spirit empowered craftsmen like Bezalel with artistic skills to build the tabernacle and its equipment (Exod. 31:3; 35:31) and to pass on their trade to other craftsmen (Exod. 35:34). Later when the temple was rebuilt a similar endowment was bestowed upon those involved in its building, “not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty,” (Zech. 4:6).

In summary, Bruce Ware describes the work of the Spirit in the lives of people under the old covenant as characterized by three realities. First, the Spirit’s work was selective or discriminating. The Spirit was given to those individuals who were to do specific work in God’s economy. Second, the Spirit was a temporary phenomenon in the life of the recipient. Samson and Saul are two examples of the kind of transitory nature of the Spirit’s work. David, recognized this transience when he prayed that God would not take the Spirit away from him. Third, the Spirit’s empowerment was task-oriented. Whether for leading a nation, defeating enemies on the battlefield, building the temple, or speaking God’s words, the Spirit was given to facilitate specific God-ordained activities.

The Spirit and Regeneration in the Old Covenant

We have examined ways in which the Scriptures speak of the Spirit’s coming upon individuals in the old covenant. We now turn to the relationship between the Spirit’s working in the OT and spiritual regeneration. As we have suggested above, the OT gives no direct

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7 Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," 77-78.
10 Ware, "The New Covenant and the People(s) of God," 78.
evidence that the Spirit’s ministry in the old covenant expanded beyond the selective, temporary, and task-oriented empowering of individuals. Furthermore, the Spirit’s “coming upon” an individual is never presented as the cause of a change in the heart (i.e., the inner person).\textsuperscript{11} Some upon whom the Spirit rested, such as Balaam, where enemies of God (Num. 31:8; Jude 11). In other words, the Scriptural evidence gives no indication that regeneration accompanied the Spirit’s descent upon an individual. James Hamilton provides a helpful definition of “regeneration” as “God’s work of granting to humans the ability to hear, understand, believe, obey, and enter the kingdom. The New Testament’s metaphor of ‘new birth’ matches the Old Testament’s metaphor of ‘heart circumcision.’”\textsuperscript{12}

The storyline of the OT suggests that the Holy Spirit had, in fact, brought very few individual Israelites to new life. That is to say the vast majority of God’s people under the old covenant jurisdiction were unregenerate. Several lines of Scriptural evidence support the notion that the nation of Israel was, by and large, an unregenerate people. Repeatedly, Israel as a collective body was characterized as being a “stiff-necked” people (Exod. 32:9; 33:3-5; 34:9; 2 Chr. 30:8; Acts 7:51). The compiler of the Second book of Kings writes that Israel did “what is evil in [God’s] sight and…provoked [him] to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt,” (2 Kings 21:15). The final prophet of the OT gives a similar assessment: “From the days of [their] fathers [they] turned aside from [God’s] statutes and have not kept them (Mal. 3:7).

Faith in the promises of God was not an essential requirement for membership in the old covenant, even though that was certainly the ideal and ultimate intention for the people

\textsuperscript{11} Hamilton points out that, “The Old Testament speaks of the Spirit ‘rushing upon’ someone not to describe a conversion experience (e.g., the expression is not used of Abraham or Rahab), but rather the Spirit’s empowering leaders who will deliver the nation” (Hamilton, 31).

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 2.
God had prepared for his own. Another way of stating this reality is to say that one could be *in* the old covenant and not be regenerate. While there were certainly true believers in the old covenant, James White rightly points out that “for every David there were a dozen Ahabs; for every Josiah a legion of Manassehs.” Those having the heart-felt love of the law exhibited by David, the other psalmists, and the prophets were sadly in the minority among the membership of the old covenant people. The legal prosecutions against the nation by the prophets fell largely on deaf ears. The NT writers indicate that Israel was more prone to kill the prophets than heed their warnings. All of this is to say that the people of God in the old covenant were a mixed group of believers and unbelievers, a faithless nation that contained a faithful *remnant*.

The “remnant” leitmotif is significant in the history of the OT. It was most prominent in the exilic period, when God promised to restore a small group of faithful members of the covenant to the land. Isaiah, for instance, prophesied, “For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return,” (Isa. 10:22; cf. Rom. 9:27). The theme, however, had emerged earlier in OT history. During Elijah’s ministry, Israel had

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13 Hebrews 11 contains an extensive list of those who had faith in the Lord.
17 The Greek word for “remnant” is *lei/mma* (*lei/pw*), which contains the idea of “what is left over,” “what remains,” and “surplus.” It has broad usage in Scripture. In Romans 11, Paul makes use of only a small part of the rich prophetic tradition concerning the remnant idea, identifying the remnant as those Jews who believe in Christ. The advance that Paul makes with the remnant concept is teaching that the remnant is now related only to the Christ who has appeared. See G. Schrenk, “*lei/mma*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, translator (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), vol. 4, 194-214.
18 Moo is correct in positing that “this text reflects a hermeneutical supposition for which we find evidence elsewhere in Paul and in the NT: that OT predictions of a renewed Israel find their fulfillment in the church,” that is, the new covenant people of God. See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 613.
become essentially apostate. Elijah communicated this pessimistic assessment of Israel to God as he surveyed the population of his day: “the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword,” (1 King 19:10). Elijah found himself in the midst of an existential crisis: “I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away,” (v. 10). In the depths of Elijah’s despair, God promised, “I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal,” (v. 18). The apostle Paul uses this episode of OT history in Rom. 11 to explain that God has “not rejected his people,” (v. 2). Paul indicates that just like in the time of Elijah, “at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace” within Israel, who would not be “hardened” as the general population of Israel had been (Rom. 11:4-7).

Paul speaks of the “hardness” of Israel (Rom. 11:7, 25) in the same larger context as he does that of their ancient pagan foe, the Egyptian Pharaoh of the exodus period (9:17-18). While God had shown Israel great mercies and tremendous grace in rescuing them from the physical bondage of Egypt, most of Israel had not been rescued from the bondage to their own hard hearts. Just as God had withheld his mercy from Pharaoh, resulting in his heart being hardened (Exod. 4:21; 7:3, 13, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34-35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8), so the majority in Israel had not experienced heart-regeneration. The unbelieving, unfaithful Israelites were qualitatively no different than Pharaoh, despite the unparalleled position of their privilege (Rom. 9:4-5). As Thomas Schreiner expresses it, “Israel as a

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19 While the Rom. 9:8 and 11:17 use different verbs (sklhru,\,nw in 9:8 and pwro,\,w in 11:17), the word families both have to do with the concept of spiritual “hardening” of an individual. M. A. Schmidt, “sklhrokardi,a,” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Gerhard Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:1022-1023.

20 Israel can be viewed as “paradigmatic” of all nations (Moo) or a “microcosm” of the entire world (Longnecker). See Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ,” Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and NT. Essays in honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester: Crossway, 1988), 213; Longnecker, Bruce W. “Defining the Faithful Character of the Covenant Community: Gal. 2.15-21 and Beyond,” in Paul and the Mosaic Law, ed. James D.G. Dunn, WUNT
whole, with the exception of the remnant, did not receive the ability to keep God’s law, and thus they lived under the dominion of sin.”

Yet in a new era of redemptive history God would change the situation of his people. Ezekiel looked forward to the day when God would rectify the hard-heartedness of his people and universally “remove the heart of stone … and give [the people] a heart of flesh,” (Ezek. 36:26). God would given them a “new heart” and put a “new spirit” within his people. Schreiner contends that the new “rite of entry into the people of God [is] circumcision of the heart” and that the “spiritualization of the rite of passage into the new community was coincident with the spiritualization of the people of God.”

In Romans 11, Paul affirms that the people of God, regardless of their place in redemptive history, share a common “root” (v. 17) that is, the patriarch’s of Israel. For, in Paul’s analogy, there is only one olive tree whose roots provide the nourishment for the entire tree. However, there is a change that takes place. Where in the old covenant the membership was a mixed group of believers and unbelievers, in the new covenant, only believers will compose God’s covenant people. Those who reject God’s Son as the

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Various interpretations of “root” have been given, equating the term with Christ, Jewish Christians, or the patriarchs. That the term refers to the patriarchs is suggested by extra-canonical texts such as I Enoch 93:3, 8 and Jub. 21:24, which refer to Abraham and the patriarchs as a “root.” This is the majority view among commentators. See Moo, Romans, 699.
fulfillment of OT promise are “broken off because of their unbelief.” In other words, in the new covenant, only a *believing* remnant remains a part of the tree. However, in addition to the faithful remnant of ethnic Israel, believing Gentiles are “grafted in” to the olive tree as “wild olive shoot[s].” The new covenant people of God, then, look quite different than their old covenant counterpart. The remnant is expanded to the exclusion of the unfaithful, and believing non-Jews are added to the Jewish remnant. What now defines the people of God is the inward character trait of faith and the universalization of a regenerate heart.

Some theologians see the new covenant as a “mixed” entity composed of believers and unbelievers like the old covenant. For instance Jeffery Neill writes, “the new covenant is not new in its nature or membership.” The issue is whether God made his new covenant with the same composition of covenantal membership as he did with the Mosaic covenant. Did God make his new covenant with a small nucleus of true believers alongside a mass of reprobates as he did in the OT? The NT data seems to indicate that the new covenant is made only with the elect.

We contend that the NT does not view the membership in the new covenant in precisely the same way it does membership in the old covenant. Unlike the membership in the old covenant, the new covenant is a spiritual, inward covenant made only with the *spiritual* offspring of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). It has no genetic, familial or nationalistic aspects as did the old covenant. Those who are truly in the new covenant cannot break it as the

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24 This expansion and contraction within the people of God is seen elsewhere in the NT in Matt. 8:5-13 (Jesus’ encounter with the centurion), Matt. 16:18 (Jesus’ future promise to build a church), John 10:16 (one flock), and Acts 28:17-31 (the majority of ethnic Israel rejected the gospel).
26 Certain passages in the OT and NT suggest a de-emphasis on familial and clannish ties. See Jer. 3:14; 31:29-30; Matt. 10:34-36; Mark 10:29-31.
members of the old covenant had done (Jer. 31:32; cf. Heb. 8:9). This is a significant difference that goes to the very nature of the old and new covenants.

Thomas Schreiner concisely summarizes much of the relevant biblical data suggestive of this view:

It is quite clear from the OT texts that the new covenant promised forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 11:18-20; 36:26-27). Indeed, Hebrews emphasizes that forgiveness of sins has been accomplished once for all through the atoning death of Christ (Heb. 10:11-18). The same OT background is reflected in the Lord’s Supper tradition, where Jesus’ blood is understood covenantally, with the result that it brings “forgiveness of sins,” (Matt. 26:28). In 2 Corinthians 3, the distinctiveness of the new covenant is located in the gift of the Spirit, so that the law is written on the heart, in contrast to the external character of the Sinai covenant.

Distinguishing between the elect and the members of the new covenant is quite unconvincing. The NT emphasizes that the gift of the Spirit is the sine qua non for belonging to the people of God. . . .Further, Paul’s argument in Romans 8 links together those who are chosen by God and those who have received the Spirit. Those who have the gift of the Spirit as a down payment are assured of obtaining the final inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14).

One might raise the objection, “What about the warning passages of Scripture that threaten to judgment for those who do no persevere until the end?” After all, Rom. 11:22 warns that those who are “grafted in” to the “root” (v. 17) must “continue in [God’s] kindness” lest they be “cut off” from the tree (v. 22). The Arminian version of this objection understands the warning to be directed to true believers who can and do fall away. They were genuine believers who lost their salvation. A Calvinistic version of the argument understands the warnings to be directed against mere professors of faith who later show by their leaving that they are not truly God’s elect (e.g., 1 Jn. 2:19). We, however, find both perspectives to be unsatisfactory. The former perspective rightly sees many warnings directed to true

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28 Ibid., 90-91.

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Christians, but incorrect abandons the truth of God’s assurance that his elect (i.e., true believers) can never actually fall away (e.g., Rom. 8:29-39). The latter view rightly upholds the perseverance of true Christians and makes sense of some NT passages directed to false professors of faith who eventually leave the visible church. However, it fails to take into consideration the many warning passages that seem to be directed to true Christians. For instance, Paul’s warning in Rom. 11:22 is part of the larger context of Romans 9-11, which suggests that the Gentiles Paul addresses are part of the elect membership (Rom. 9:11; 11:7, 28) who share the same “nourishing root,” (11:17). In preaching on the warning in Heb. 6:4-6, another difficult and controversial passage, Charles Spurgeon, acknowledged that despite many eminent Calvinistic writers who assert that the people warned in this passage are not Christians, “the persons intended by it must be Christians.”

How, then, does one interpret the warning passages of Scripture? Schreiner, again, is instructive in formulating a biblical tertium quid:

The warnings are addressed to believers and threaten them with eternal destruction if they fall away. ...[A]ll true believers (all the elect, all those who have the Holy Spirit and enjoy the forgiveness of sins and are members of the new covenant) heed the warnings and are thereby saved. In other words, the warnings are one of the means God uses to keep his own trusting him and persevering in faith until the end.

In summary, the very nature of the covenant and its admission requirements have changed. Only God’s elect are in the new covenant. The warning passages of the NT are neither proof that one who is regenerate can lose his salvation nor evidence that there are unbelievers in the new covenant. God’s warnings are real. If a true Christian were ever to stop trusting in Christ, he would be eternally lost.

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31 Schreiner, Run to Win the Prize, 92.
However, God uses the warning passages as a means of preserving his people until the end (Phil. 1:6).

The Spirit’s Presence in the New Covenant People of God

We have already argued that OT provides no direct evidence of the Spirit’s role in the lives of individuals in the old covenant other than the selective, temporary, and task-oriented empowering of leaders, prophets and craftsman. We have also contended that while the old covenant people of God was a composite of regenerate/elect and unregenerate/reprobate people, the new covenant people of God (i.e., those in the new covenant) are exclusively regenerate/elect. In this section we will argue that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within all God’s elect is a uniquely new covenant phenomenon.32

“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water,’ ” (John 7:38). Jesus uttered these words to a crowd at the water pouring ceremony during the annual Feast of Booths celebration in Jerusalem. John adds an editorial comment: “Now this [Jesus] said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified,” (v. 39).

Three observations concerning this passage are noteworthy. First, Jesus is calling out individuals: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink,” (v. 38, emphasis added). From out of the crowd, Jesus makes a personal summons for believers to come to him. Second, while Jesus certainly understood that the imagery of pouring water was one commonly associated with the prophesies of the coming Spirit (see Isa. 12:3; 44:3; 49:10; Ezek. 36:25-

32 Abraham Kuyper taught this perspective: “The Holy Spirit was indeed standing in the midst of Israel (in the Old Testament), working upon the saints from without, while in the New Testament He is said to be within them.” See Abraham Kuyper, The Work of the Holy Spirit (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 121.
he is not principally referring to the phenomena of the Spirit’s empowerment of individuals for a divine task. Jesus’ statement speaks to inward spiritual vitality. The promise is that the individual who comes to Jesus and drinks from him “out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” This is imagery that is unmistakably dealing with inward (“heart”) spiritual transformation. Third, Jesus’ statement is anticipatory. That is to say, the reality of which he speaks has not yet happened. The giving of the Spirit in this context was yet future: “for as yet the Spirit had not been given,” (v. 39). What Jesus promises is something new, something that the old covenant saint did not enjoy.

Additional confirmation of this perspective comes later in the same Gospel in John’s recording of another teaching of Jesus with respect to the Spirit coming. Jesus said to his disciples: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you,” (John 14:16-17, emphasis added). Here Jesus reveals something about the place of his disciples in redemptive history. They live in a time when the old covenant realities have not yet given way to the new. Like the saints of old covenant Israel, Jesus’ disciples had God with them (in their case, God-incarnate). Yet even the disciples had not yet experienced God’s presence in them. Soon, however, the disciples (and all of God’s new covenant people) would be the recipients of the indwelling and empowering Spirit of God as Jesus had promised.

On the day of Pentecost, the prophecies of the OT and Jesus came to pass. While a group of about 120 followers of Jesus sat together in a house, “suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house….And they were all

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filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance,” (Acts 2:2-4). In explaining the phenomena to the onlookers that day, Peter told them that what had just happened was a fulfillment of God’s promise to pour out the Spirit on his people in the latter days. He specifically cites Joel 2:28-32 (cf. Acts 2:17-21) and generally refers to Jesus fulfilling his promise to send the Spirit (Acts 2:33).

The Spirit’s work at and after Pentecost takes on both an empowering and an indwelling aspect. Pentecost should bring to mind the empowering of the seventy elders of Israel in the time of Moses (Num. 11:29). The Spirit’s effusion in Acts 2 is a phenomenon similar in kind but exceedingly expansive in its extent in comparison to the activity of the Spirit in Numbers 11. The new covenant outpouring of the Spirit is not restricted by gender distinction (“sons and daughters will prophecy”), age division (“your old men…your young men”), or class delimitation (“on my servants”).

However, there is also a unique indwelling component to the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost. Peter makes clear that one receives the Spirit solely by placing one’s trust in God’s son. That is, one must “repent and be baptized…in the name of Jesus Christ” in order to “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” (Acts 2:38). Luke records in Acts 2 that as a result of the coming Spirit, thousands of people were “cut to the heart” (v. 37) and “souls” were added (v. 41) to the group that “God calls to himself,” (v. 39). In the new covenant faith is explicitly tied to the “gift of the Spirit” in a way that was not evident in any of the OT empowerments of the Spirit upon individuals. The manifestation of the Spirit in the book of Acts was also evidence that true saving faith had come. God’s missional program announced

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34 Ware, “The New Covenant People(s) of God,” 83.
35 The full realization of the scope of God’s work would come later. The promise was even greater than Peter had initially imagined, since not only believing Jews would receive the Spirit, but also believing Samaritans and Gentiles. See Acts 8:12-17; 10:34-48; 15:1-11.
by Jesus in Acts 1:8 is validated by the Spirit’s manifestation amongst groups of Jews (Acts 2:5-41), Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), Gentiles (Act 10:44-48) and the last of the old covenant saints (Acts 19:1-7) as they put their trust in Christ.

D. A. Carson provides a useful summary of the transition that has taken place from old to new covenant eras with respect to God’s presence in relation to his people:

The Old Testament writers were concerned that God should live with men [citing 1 Kgs 8:27; Ezek. 37:27; Zech. 2:10] . . . . John insists that this occurred historically in the incarnation: “The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us” (1:14). But now we are brought a stage further: this God reveals himself to the individual believer and takes up residence within him [citing 2 Cor. 6:16; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27; Eph. 3:16, 17a; Rev. 3:14-21].

Similarly, Willem VanGemeren recognizes the redemptive-historical progression of God’s presence in relation to his people:

To Israel God revealed his glorious presence. He had kept people away from his presence after Adam’s expulsion from Eden and dramatically symbolized the impossibility of reentrance by stationing the cherubim at the entrance of Eden (Gen. 3:24). When Yahweh came to dwell in Israel, however, he had Israel make gold cherubim and place them over the ark of the covenant in order to symbolize his presence “in the tents of Shem” and the possibility of access to his glory through the ministry of the high priest.

The presence of God was more fully manifest in the incarnate Christ, who now dwells in each believer with his Spirit of glory. The Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts to the great glory awaiting all the children of God in the new heaven and earth; the New Jerusalem [sic]. Then the triune God will dwell among the renewed humanity (Rev. 21:3).

VanGemeren sees the presence of God as a theme that can be traced from the Garden to the New Jerusalem: man was created to be in God’s Trinitarian presence, lost that presence in the

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Fall, and is experiencing that presence restored progressively with definitive milestones in salvation history.\(^{38}\)

The new covenant launches a new program with respect to the work of the Holy Spirit. As Sinclair Ferguson explains, “The Christian lives in a new sphere, in the new aeon,” which has been “inaugurated by the triumph of Christ and the gift of the Spirit.”\(^{39}\) Paul concisely summarizes the transition that has taken place in Rom. 8:3-4 by stating:

\[3\text{For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,} \]
\[4\text{in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.}\]

The law was powerless to produce righteousness. The Spirit’s coming was God’s plan to remedy the ethical futility inherent in the old covenant.\(^{40}\)

Imagine the astonishment of the disciples when Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father,” (John 14:12). How could a group of mostly uneducated, ordinary men do greater things than their Lord and Master? It certainly was not because of anything in the disciples themselves. Ironically, the key to the disciples’ greatness was related to Jesus’ departure from them: “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go I will send him to you,” (John 16:7). It was the promised “Helper,” the Holy Spirit, that Jesus sent in his absence to

\(^{38}\) It appears that a common Reformed objection to viewing the old covenant saints as not possessing the indwelling Spirit often centers on the implications for sanctification. The argument is that because the old covenant saints evidenced sanctified lives they must have had the indwelling Holy Spirit. However, the OT data would seem to suggest that it was God’s presence \textit{with} his people (not \textit{in} them) through the tabernacle, the temple and Spirit-empowered mediators that sanctified old covenant believers. See Hamilton, 35-41.


be with his people. On the day of the Spirit’s effusion, 5,000 people repented and were 
baptized, literally fulfilling Jesus’ prophecy of doing greater things than he did by possibly 
generating more genuine converts in one day than Jesus attracted in his entire ministry.\(^{41}\) The 
Christian must never cease to be amazed at the incredible “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 
2:38) that is given to every believer entering into the new covenant. As Bruce Ware 
summarizes the implications of Paul’s perspective on the Spirit:

Paul envisions a distinctively new role for the Holy Spirit, a role he did not play under the 
old covenant but does so now only since the coming of Christ to conquer sin. Furthermore, 
this role is fundamentally characterized in qualitatively new terms. The Spirit comes to do 
what the law could not do. He comes to bring his indwelling power for life, righteousness, 
and covenant fidelity (Rom. 8:4) transforming believers into the likeness of the sin 
defeating and risen Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).\(^{42}\)

### The Spirit that Leads

As we begin to examine what life under the influence of the Spirit looks like, we must 
not overlook the fact that Jesus lived his life by the power of the Spirit. Adequately 
appreciating this truth requires a robust view of the incarnation. Jesus was (and is) fully 
human, and executed his rescue mission without drawing on his own divine resources (Phil. 
2:5-8). The Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; 
John 1:32). The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness and sustained him during his grueling 
ordeal with Satan (Matt. 4:1; cf. Mark 1:12). Jesus returned from the wilderness “in the 
power of the Spirit” to begin his ministry of preaching and teaching (Luke 4:14-15). In 
reading the Scriptures in the Nazarene Synagogue, Jesus identified himself as the Messianic 
figure of Isaiah upon whom was “the Spirit of the Lord,” (Luke 4:18). Jesus “rejoiced in the 
Holy Spirit” that the Father’s will was being accomplished (Luke 10:21). Though Jesus was

\(^{41}\) Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 889.  
\(^{42}\) Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” 90-91.
fully God during his incarnation, he set aside his divine privileges, and lived by the power of
the indwelling Spirit.

The same Spirit that rested on Jesus also rests on his followers (1 Pet. 4:14). As the
Lord Jesus lived by the power of the indwelling Spirit, so his disciples are to follow in his
footsteps. In Galatians 5, Paul instructs believers to “walk by the Spirit” (v. 16) and be “led
by the Spirit,” (v. 18). True freedom (v. 13) comes from yielding to the Holy Spirit. The
promise given to believers here is that those who walk by the Spirit will not practice the
sinful desires of the flesh (v. 16). All believers after Pentecost possess the gift of the
indwelling Spirit, but the present evil age has not yet been conquered. Indwelling sin also
remains. Paul calls upon the believer to feed or gratify the spiritual impulses that he truly
possesses, while at the same time, starve the competing fleshly desires. The idea of being led
takes on the aspect of mortification, or “putting to death” the flesh (Rom. 8:13-14). With the
Spirit working in their lives, believers can be confident that as they wage war on the flesh
they will have victories over it.

Does the reality of the Spirit’s leading imply the external commandments are not
longer needed? Some have argued that when Paul says that Christians are not “under law” he

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43 Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ*, 152. Of course, the Spirit rested in greater measure upon
Christ. See John 3:34; Eph. 4:7.

44 Concerning Paul’s use of the word “flesh” (sarx, sa, rx), Paul’s most characteristic use of sarx, and
his most frequent, is his application of sarx to sinful human nature . . . Well over half of these instances occur
in Romans, mostly in Romans 8. All others but one (1 Cor. 5:5; cf also 1 Cor. 3:3) appear in Galatians.
Correspondingly, in over two-thirds of the many contrasts between sarx and pneuma, sarx refers to fallen
human nature. Most of these are found in Galatians 5 and 6 and Romans 8; of the others (Gal. 3:3, Rom. 7:5, 1
Cor. 5:5), Galatians 3:3 is almost programmatic for the whole group. See R. J. Erickson, “Flesh,” in Dictionary
of Paul and His Letters, Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993),
304.

45 Schreiner appears to correctly interpret ἵνα as denoting purpose, that is to say, the believer
struggles against the flesh “in order that” the flesh will not have the victory over the believer. See Schreiner,
*Galatians*, 344.
means that they are no longer under obligation to observe ethical norms, and that externally

This assertion is flawed for a number of reasons, the most significant of which is that
in the immediate context of Galatians 5 specific ethical demands appear in close proximity to
the call to be led by the Spirit. Paul provides a vice list admonishing believers against “sexual
immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger,
rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like,” (vv. 19-21). A
believer may know if he is walking by the Spirit when his life is characterized by the
diminishing presence of these vices, or at least a growing awareness of and disdain for the
“fleshliness” of such behaviors or attitudes.

Further evidence of being led by the Spirit is demonstrated in one’s increasing
appropriation of the characteristics wrought by Spirit. Again, Paul provides a representative
list of the kinds of inner virtues that will develop as a believer walks after the Spirit. The
development of these internal virtues is only attainable by the Spirit. The Spirit working in a
supple heart will lead to an inexhaustible variety of virtuous expressions.\footnote{Paul concludes the list with the “catch-all” phrase “and things like these,” suggesting that by the Spirit the believer will extend the list to include similar activities and attitudes.}

Being led by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit, however, involve more than simply
trying to obey normative commands. The battle within the soul of a believer concerns the
“desire” (ἐῳπικυμία) of the person,\footnote{Grudem, 643-44.} the strong emotions and passions that come into
play when provoked to a point of decision. Both the flesh and the Spirit provide their own
desires to the believer. The believer is to discern the distinctive voice of the Spirit personally
leading him as a trusted companion away from the competing desires of the flesh. In his
book, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, J. I. Packer insightfully describes the process as the “impelling of our wills to pursue and practice and hold fast that sanctity whose terms we know already.”\(^{49}\) Personal holiness is the purpose for which the Christian has been saved (Eph. 1:4; 2:10; 5:25; Titus 2:11-12).\(^{50}\) Through the Spirit’s leading we can achieve God’s intent for our lives.

**The Spirit That Renews the Mind**

The Scriptures bear witness that the Spirit’s indwelling of Jesus was the resource for his wisdom. Notice the role of the Spirit in Isaiah’s prophecy of the coming Messiah:

> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.  
> And the **Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him**,  
> the **Spirit of wisdom and understanding**,  
> the **Spirit of counsel and might**,  
> the **Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord**. (Isa. 11:1-2, emphasis added)

The prophecy foretold of a “shoot” that would come forth who would bear certain “fruit.”\(^{51}\) This is precisely what happened at the incarnation. The teachers of the law were “amazed at [Jesus’] understanding” as a boy in the temple (Luke 2:46-47). He “increased in wisdom” in his youth (Luke 2:52), and crowds marveled at his teaching (Matt. 7:29). With reference to himself, Jesus proclaimed that “something greater than [the wisdom of] Solomon is here,” (Matt. 12:42). He “astonished” his neighbors in his hometown with the wisdom of his teaching (Matt. 13:54; Mark 6:2).

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 97-98.  
\(^{51}\) Bruce Ware connects this passage with the “fruit of the Spirit” passage in Gal. 5:22-23. See Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 89-89.
The NT teaches that the Spirit is also the giver of wisdom to the believer. As John Stott writes, “God’s promises of guidance are not given to save us the bother of thinking.” Peter encourages the recipients of his first epistle to “prepare your minds for action” and be “sober-minded,” (1 Pet. 1:13). Paul, likewise, exhorts the Ephesian believers “to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,” (Eph. 4:23). In Romans 12, Paul exhorts believers to offer up “spiritual worship” (v.1) which involves no longer being “conformed to this world, but [being] transformed by the renewal of your mind,” (v. 2a). With this renewed mind, one is then able to “discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect,” (v. 2b).

These passages display the clear ethical implications of the noetic affects of the Spirit’s presence in the believer, enabling him or her to make ethical decisions. We saw above that being “led by the Spirit” involves the will or the desires. Here the Spirit brings a new reality to the mind. Believers “have the mind of Christ,” (1 Cor. 2:16). He has become “to us wisdom from God,” that is, our “sanctification,” (1 Cor. 1:30). Ethical transformation is an important component of sanctification. Unlike the natural person (i.e., the Spirit-less person) who sees the Spirit’s truth as folly, the Spirit-indwelt person has spiritual discernment (v. 14). Paul’s prayer for the Colossians expresses the supreme goal of the Spirit’s noetic work:

52 John Stott, cited in Donald Macleod, *The Spirit of Promise* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 1986), 64. Some scholars have pointed to another sense of leading and guidance that the Spirit provides, namely, the subjective directing of specific actions for the believer. Evidence for this is often seen in the book of Acts where the Spirit leads individuals to take certain specific actions like Philip approaching the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:29), Peter going with the men sent from Cornelius (11:12), the church at Antioch setting aside Paul and Barnabas for ministry (13:2), and Paul and Silas being directed away from Asia (16:6-7). For presentations of this view, see Hays, 131, and Grudem, 642-44. While the Spirit may lead in this way should He chose to do so, it seems that the references in Acts should not be used to suggest this kind of leading is a normative or expected means of the Spirit working in the believer’s life any more than the Spirit’s activity witnessed in Acts 2:1-4; 8:14-17; 10:44-46; and 19:1-7 should be seen as normative or expected with every believer’s conversion.

53 From the Greek, noe, relating to perception, understanding or cognition.
that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God,” (Col. 1:9-10).

The new mind that the Spirit produces in the Christian results in a new freedom. Paul expresses this reality in 2 Cor. 3:17 “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” As Paul develops in the passage leading up to this statement, freedom is a primary characteristic of the new covenant believer now that the era of the Spirit has arrived and the old era of the letter has passed way (2 Cor. 3:1-11).

Yet true Christian freedom has important limitations. Paul speaks of the ethical life as a fundamental contrast of slavery and freedom. In Romans 6 Paul sets up this slavery/freedom contrast. Being “under the law” is the equivalent of being “slaves of sin,” (Rom. 6:15-17). However, being “under grace” does not change the fact that we are still slaves. For Paul explains that people are “slaves of the one whom [they] obey, either sin that leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness,” (Rom. 6:16). The Christian life, then, is not about the categorical liberation from slavery or the pursuit of freedom in all forms. Rather, it is concerned with transferring masters – moving from being a “slave to sin” to “slave of righteousness,” (v. 18). When our allegiance has changed from one master to the other, we “become obedient from the heart,” (v. 17). When we were “slaves of sin” we were “free in regard to righteousness,” that is, we could not do what was righteous. However, Christians have “been set free from sin and have become slaves of God.” In being loosed from the bonds of sin, they are liberated to do righteousness, thus willfully becoming “slaves to righteousness,” (v. 19). This new freedom, far from being lawless (v. 19) follows apostolic

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54 Theologically, this is the state Augustine referred to as *non posse no pecarre*, the condition of the unregenerate man who is unable to avoid sinning.

55 The believer lives in a condition theologically referred to as *posse non pecarre*, having been liberated from his inability to please God and thus being able to avoid sinning.
The mark of true Christian liberty is sanctification (v. 19), that is, conforming our character to that of Christ. Our freedom, then, is to be used not for self-aggrandizement or personal independence, but rather to do what Christ did, loving others (Gal. 5:13) and looking out for others’ interests ahead of our own (Phil. 2). This freedom is not a license to sin, but liberation to serve and please God.

In Phil. 2:13, Paul exhorts believers to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” This passage does not describe a kind of ethical paradox, where God is sovereignly working while the believer is also responsible to work. Rather, Paul is pointing to the reality that because of the work God does within the believer he or she is enabled to freely respond in godly obedience. That is, as the Spirit molds and shapes us, we begin to act spontaneously in various life scenarios in a loving manner without needing a detailed set of directives and case laws to direct us. Or as O’Donovan expresses it, the “Spirit forms and brings to expression the appropriate pattern of free response to objective reality.”

Paul assumes this kind of enablement by the Spirit, as he directs believers to use godly discernment in doing God’s will in various situations. In Eph. 5:10, he exhorts believers to “discern what is pleasing to the Lord.” In Phil. 1:9 he writes, “It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.”

We conclude this chapter with a proposal for Spirit-filled decision-making. The following considerations should be explored:

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56 As Frank Thielman points out, Paul refers to the “ethical element of his teaching variously as ‘his ways in Christ Jesus,’ ‘the law of Christ,’ the ‘tradition,’ ‘the fruit of the Spirit,’ and the received ‘pattern of teaching’ (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6; 1 Cor. 4:17; 9:21; 11:2; Gal. 5:22-23; 6:2; Rom. 6:17),” Frank Thielman, The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity (New York: Crossroad), 169.
57 O’Donovan, 106; Hays, 45.
58 O’Donovan, 25.
59 See Macleod, 64-67.
1. Are any choices clearly sinful as a violation of any new covenant ethical norm? If so, these must be rejected.

2. What do we want to do? While we cannot look to our own desires in isolation, the Spirit has redeemed our desires. There is some biblical truth in Augustine’s maxim that the Christian should “love, and do as thou wilt.”

3. What do other wise, Spirit-filled, people advise? Christ has built a community that is also indwelt by the same Spirit that can share godly wisdom.

4. What are the gifts God has given a person? Certain options are going to be unrealistic because God has not equipped a person for a particular course of action. For instance, those who are incurably poor in mathematics should not seek to become engineers.

5. What impact will a given course of action have on the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), the advancement of God’s kingdom (Matt. 6:33), the making of disciples (Matt. 28:19-20), edification and helpfulness (1 Cor. 6:12; 8:13; 10:23; Rom. 14:20, 21), testimony to unbelievers (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:7; Titus 1:6, 7), family and church life, etc.? One should seek to maximize the godly outcomes of one’s actions.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter we have shown that the indwelling of the Spirit is a unique blessing of the new covenant. Unlike old covenant members, all those in the new covenant are regenerate and indwelt. This new relationship of the Spirit within God’s people provides ethical ability, guidance and a new mode of freely operating with a transformed mind in the situations of life.

In the next chapter we will explore the nature of legal system of the new covenant jurisdiction.

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60 Chapter 4 will address ethical norms for Christians.
CHAPTER 4

A NEW LAW

As we have shown above, Jer. 31:31-34 foretold of a change that would take place in the application of God’s law to the hearts of God’s people. However, the OT prophecies of the new covenant said nothing about the law or the legal system itself changing. Taking the OT passages alone without reference to the authoritative interpretation given in the NT witness one would be justified in concluding that the law that would be written on the heart would be the law of Moses.1 However, in this chapter we will examine what the NT indicates to be the nature of the law under the new covenant jurisdiction.

The legal systems2 of the old and new covenant jurisdictions are in a sense like the legal systems of two nations. Moving from the old covenant jurisdiction to the new covenant jurisdiction is much like crossing a border between neighboring countries. Upon leaving one jurisdiction to go to another, one removes oneself from under the first nation’s legal system and takes upon the second nation’s legal system. Many laws between nations will be similar (laws against murder, theft, assault, etc.) while other laws will be different (the legal drinking age, penalties for specific crimes, proper driving protocol, etc.).3 In this chapter we will

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1 This is precisely the perspective taken by groups like the First Fruits of Zion mentioned in chapter 2. This chapter will present other perspectives on how the law of Moses applies to new covenant ethics.  
2 By “legal system” I mean a collection of rules imposed by a governing authority under a particular jurisdiction. In the realm of ethics, the legal system is the set of demands that God places on his people under a particular jurisdiction of redemptive history.  
3 The perspective given herein does not advocate a kind of ethical relativism, such as the perspective of Martin Honecker, for instance, who views “laws” arising in the context of a particular historical movements. See Oliver O’Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), xii-xv.
examine the nature of the new legal system of the new covenant in relation to that of the old. However, before we examine the covenantal legal systems, we first briefly turn to examine ethics arising out God’s creational framework prior to the establishment of His historical covenantal jurisdictions.

**Universal Ethical Norms**

Scripture reveals that basic ethical norms have always existed, and human beings have always been obliged to follow them. The OT, for instance, indicts the pagan nations who did abominable deeds like sacrificing their children and committing acts of homosexuality.\(^4\) Specific passages within the OT are directed to the nations, such as Isa. 13-23, Jer. 45-51, Ezek. 25-32, Dan. 2 and 7, Amos 1-2, and the books of Obadiah, Jonah and Nahum.\(^5\) Creation-based norms about marriage are affirmed by Jesus in Matt. 19:4-12. In Romans 1 and 2, Paul makes clear that ethical rules have been conspicuous to all mankind since the beginning of time through God’s created order, both externally in the cosmos (1:18-20) and internally upon the hearts of men (2:15). Those living prior to, after and/or outside the Mosaic covenantal jurisdiction are characterized as liable before God for all kinds of “unrighteousness,” including, “envy, murder, strife, deceit, [and] maliciousness,” (1:29). They were condemned as “gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, [and] ruthless,” (1:29-31). The second table of the Decalogue objectifies by codification some of the rules generally


\(^5\) Ibid., 12.
known to mankind: dishonoring parents (Rom. 1:30), murder (1:29), adultery (2:22),
stealing (1:29-30), and coveting (1:29). Romans 2 refers to the “uncircumcised” (non-
Israelite person) who “keeps the precepts of the law” (v. 26) even though they do not “have
the written code,” (v. 27). In Rom. 8:4 Paul speaks of “the righteous requirement of the law,”
which may point to those universal principles within the Mosaic law that apply to Jews and
Gentiles alike.

Walter Kaiser has also shown by biblical examples that the basic principles of the
Decalogue in varying degrees of clarity were known prior to the giving of the law at Mount
Sinai.

1. Gen. 35:2 – “Get rid of the foreign gods.”
2. Gen. 31:39 – “But why did you steal my gods”
3. Gen. 24:3 – “I want to swear by the Lord”
4. Gen. 2:3 – “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy”
5. Gen. 27:41 – “The days of mourning my father are near.”
6. Gen. 4:9 – “Where is your brother Abel?”
7. Gen. 39:9 – “How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”
8. Gen. 44:4-7 – “Why have you stolen my silver cup?”
9. Gen. 39:17 – “[Joseph] came to me to make a sport of me…but…he ran….”
10. Gen. 12:18; 20:3 – “You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken;
she is a married woman.”

With this survey of universal ethical law in mind, we are now ready to address the
specific, covenantally-contextualized presentations of God’s law found in the Mosaic and
new covenant jurisdictions. We first turn to the NT’s witness to the distinctiveness of the
individual legal systems of these two covenants.

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6 It should be noted, however, that while basic ethical norms were known by all people, Rom. 1:18
says that such truth is suppressed in unrighteousness, and thereby, denied. This is the chief flaw with a natural
law perspective that attempts to establish ethical truths through the created order. Some ethical norms of Paul
were agreeable to the wider Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day (Rom. 1:32; 2:14-15), while others like humility
(Phil. 2:3) and homosexuality (Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10) were not. See Thomas R. Schreiner, New
7 Thomas R. Schreiner, 40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law (Grand Rapids: Kregel), 93.
8 Frank Thielman, The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity (New York:
Crossroad), 27.
Programmatic Statements of Systemic Change

In 1 Cor. 9:19-21 the apostle Paul makes statements which provide a glimpse of his understanding of how the legal systems of the old and new covenants are related to one another:

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law (emphasis added).

In the midst of explaining his evangelistic efforts with all kinds of people, Paul makes a very important distinction concerning “law.” He differentiates “the law” (differentiating the Mosaic law) from “the law of Christ,” both of which fall under the rubric of “the law of God.” Speaking redemptive-historically, we could say that Paul saw himself as a man who had lived under two historical eras of redemptive history. He was under the Mosaic law as his moral standard before Christ, but under the law of Christ as his moral standard after Christ.

10 Moo writes, “for Paul the convert Jew, “law” refers, unless other qualifications are present, to [the] specific, historical, body of commandments that functioned, more than anything else, to give Israel its particular identity as a ‘people apart.’” Douglas J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 145.

11 The Greek phrase translated “law of Christ” in the ESV is ἐννομών κρίστου/, literally, “in-lawed to Christ.” The Greek is very similar to phrase ἐννομών τοῦ/ κρίστου/ in Gal. 6:2, which is also typically translated “law of Christ.” Viewing these two instances of a similar phrase, Simon Kistemaker, drawing on a quotation from D. A. Carson, says of this nomenclature: “Because Christ mediates God’s law, Paul must abide by the constraints of that law in the setting of Christ’s covenant. ‘Whatever God demands of him as a new-covenant believer, a Christian binds him; he cannot step outside those constraints . . . . He is not free from God’s law; he is under Christ’s law,’” Simon J. Kistemaker, 1 Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 308.

12 Being “under law,” as argued in Chapter 2, has the sense of being under the Mosaic covenantal jurisdiction. The Mosaic “law,” which old covenant members were “under” (cf. Rom. 2:12; 3:19; 6:15; Gal. 3:23; 4:5; 21; 5:18; Phil. 3:6; Heb. 9:22), is characterized in the NT as the statutory body of law characterizing a bygone legal jurisdiction (e.g., Rom. 6:14-15; 7:7-12). Since this former jurisdiction has specific laws, Moo contends that “not being under the law . . . includes not being directly subjected to the ordinances of the Law of Moses,” Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in Five Views on Law and Gospel, Stanley N. Gundry, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 212.
however, that Paul is ever left in a kind of amoral limbo state. At no time is Paul without a moral law governing his conduct; he is always under a contextualized (covenantal) manifestation of the over-arching law of God. As Douglas Moo states, “[b]asic… to the biblical revelation is the contrast between ‘before’ and ‘after’ Christ, a contrast between two ‘ages’ or ‘eras.’” Graphically, Paul’s statements with respect to law would look something like this:

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The Law of God
/       \
|  “the law [of Moses]”  “the law of Christ” |
|    (old covenant)       (new covenant)    |
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This interpretation of 1 Cor. 9:19-21 is supported by Paul’s use of similar contrast in Rom. 6:14-15. As Wayne Stickland points out:

In the context, Paul is discussing sanctification rather than justification (vv. 12-13), and he sets up a contrast between law and grace. He writes, “because you are not under law [hypo nomon], but [alla] under grace [hypo charin]” (v. 14). The identical preposition hypo governing each prepositional phrase and the employment of the strongly contrastive particle alla demonstrate that Paul’s purpose is to set in clear antithesis the ideas of grace and the law of Moses. He is not suggesting that there was no grace under the law, but that in the Mosaic economy, sanctification came via obedience to the demands of the law, and that this economy has now been superseded by the dispensation of grace. Paul repeats this contrast in the next verse (v. 15).

The apostle employs the same phraseology, “under law” (hypo nomon) four times in 1 Corinthians 9:20, contrasting it to the obligation of the church saint, who is “in the law of Christ” (ennomos Christou). The contrast clearly demonstrates Paul’s understanding of a former period dominated by the commands of the Mosaic law (see Gal. 3:23; 4:4-5). This …category of [Paul’s usage of nomos] is generally not disputed within Pauline studies.

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13 Ibid., 321; cf. 360-370; 88-90.
It is important to note that this passage does not portray Paul as an antinomian or a purveyor of lawlessness. Elsewhere, Paul is clear that lawlessness is sin (Titus 2:14;\textsuperscript{15} cf. 1 Jn. 3:4). Rather, Paul assumes that, like the traveler crossing the border into another country, he has transitioned from one covenantal jurisdiction to another, and in so doing, has taken on the legal system of the new covenantal jurisdiction. Paul does not elaborate here on what the differences between the two legal systems entail. It is clear, however, that there are differences that Paul is sensitive to as he evangelizes people living under the norms of the old covenantal jurisdiction. He may live like a Jew under the old covenant system to reach his countrymen for Christ, but he is not ethically obligated to appropriate that system as his own.

Another important passage is Heb 7:1-22. Here the author of Hebrews explains that a change of the priesthood has occurred under the new covenant jurisdiction. The author seeks to explain how it is that Jesus, who was from the tribe of Judah, could be a priest when only those from the tribe of Levi were permitted by the Mosaic law to serve in that capacity. The answer is found in the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, the priestly-king that Abraham in encountered in Gen. 14:18-20. The author of Hebrews points out that Melchizedek’s priestly order was prior to, greater than, and independent of the Levitical priesthood. It was prior to the Levitical priesthood in that Levi “was still in the body of his ancestor” Abraham, when Abraham met Melchizedek (7:10). This encounter took place at a time in redemptive history prior to the Mosaic covenant (with its priestly law). The Melchizedek priesthood was greater than the Levitical priesthood because Abraham, “the lesser,” gave a tithe to Melchizedek, “the greater;” and in Hebrew culture it was “beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior,” (7:7). The Melchizedekian priesthood was independent of the

\textsuperscript{15}This verse states that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness (\textit{avnomi, aj}) and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”
Levitical priesthood because Melchizedek did “not trace his descent from Levi,” (7:6). Melchizedek was “a priest of God Most High,” (Gen. 14:18) prior to God covenanted with a single family for his special blessing.\(^{16}\) What all of this means is that Jesus performs his priestly duties outside the Mosaic jurisdiction. A new order, like that of the more ancient order of Melchizedek, now supersedes the Mosaic order of priests. Hence, the author of Hebrews may declare that the “priesthood has changed,” (7:11-19).

The author next makes an important connection between priesthood and law, namely, that God gave the Mosaic law “under” (ἐντὸς, literally, “on” or “on the basis of”) the Levitical priesthood (7:11). In other words, the entire Mosaic law was built on “the priestly sacrificial system of the Torah.”\(^{17}\) F. F. Bruce makes a similar point in stating that the Aaronic priesthood:

> was instituted under the Mosaic law, and was so integral to it that a change in the priesthood carries with it inevitably a change in the law. If the Aaronic priesthood was instituted for a temporary purpose, to be brought to an end when the age of fulfillment dawned, the same must be true of the law under which that priesthood was introduced.\(^{18}\)

When the priestly system is changed, “the law must be changed also,” (7:12). In verse 18, the author then goes on to further qualify what kind of change has taken place in the law by referring to “the former commandment” as being “set aside.”\(^{19}\) That the phrase “former commandment” refers to the entire system of Mosaic regulations is demonstrated by the parenthetical statement “for the law made nothing perfect,” (7:19). O’Brien concludes that

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\(^{16}\) The covenant with Abraham occurs in Gen. 15 after the Melchizedek episode in Gen. 14:17-20.  
\(^{17}\) Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 258.  
\(^{18}\) F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 166-167.  
\(^{19}\) The Greek ἀναφέρεται can also be translated “abrogated” or “annulled.” See Bruce, 164; John Owen, *Hebrews*, Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, eds. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 172.
“the weakness and uselessness of ‘one commandment is a reflection upon, and an expression of the character of, the entire law.”’

In summary, both 1 Cor. 9 and Heb 7 contain fairly strong statements about the change of the legal system under the new covenant jurisdiction. In the former passage, Paul simply assumes the change has happened without further explanation. In the latter passage, the author of Hebrews gives a detailed explanation of at least one of the rationales for why such a change has happened. In the next sections we will examine additional details of the two legal systems. We will frame this discussion by structuring both legal systems around four common elements: ethical basis, supporting principles, apodictic laws, and casuistic laws.

The Old Covenant Legal System

The ethical basis, or ultimate source, for old covenant ethics is the person of God. The OT roots holiness and moral perfection in God (Lev. 11:44-45; 20:26; 21:8; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16). Ethics at its core is about achieving holiness, which is found ultimately in the nature of God alone. “What God required was what he himself was and is.” In the old covenant, God is characterized as “the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,” (Deut. 7:9). Ethical obligation flowed from what God had done for Israel in rescuing them from their physical bondage in Egypt. The indicatives of the exodus led to the imperatives of the law (see Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6).

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20 O’Brien, Hebrews, 265.
22 Kaiser, 139.
23 Ibid., 29.
The God who is love also requires love in the ethical realm. Jesus reveals the twin supporting principles of old covenant law in his declaration that “all the Law and the Prophets” (the commanding aspects of the OT) are dependant on or, literally, are “suspended from” the commandments to “love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself,” (Matt. 22:37-40).

*Apodictic laws* are those commands of God that are unconditional and absolute. We might call these perpetually binding laws or principles. The love God/love neighbor command is an example of apodictic law that Jesus authoritatively selected as a summary. The Jewish community has historically found other summaries of apodictic law in passages such as the eleven principles of Ps. 15; the six commands of Isa. 33:15; the three commands of Mic. 6:8; the two commands of Isa. 56:1; and the one command of Amos 5:4; Hab. 2:4; and Lev. 19:2. However, the most well-known summary of old covenant apodictic law is found in the Decalogue, also called the “Ten Commandments,” or more literally, the “ten words.” Under the old covenant, the Decalogue held a central place within the legal system. As Walter Kaiser points out “it is difficult to exaggerate the importance and the significance

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26 Jesus was been born “under the law” (Gal. 4:4). It has been argued herein that this phrase carries with it a sense of being under an ethical jurisdiction dominated by the Mosaic law. Jesus lived in the transitional period of redemptive history between the old covenant and new covenant. This can be seen in Jesus’ teaching about John the Baptist, who is identified as the last and greatest old covenant prophet and least in the coming kingdom that Jesus inaugurates (Matt. 11:11-14). Wayne Strickland points out that “It is sometimes difficult to discern whether Christ’s statements [concerning the law] apply to the pre-cross situation or the post-cross situation” (Strickland, 403). However, this is where the value of reading the Gospels along side Paul and the other NT writers, a coherent hermeneutical pattern emerges. For such a harmonization, see Frank Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity* (New York: The Crossroad, 1999).
27 Kaiser categorizes apodictic laws as either “positive laws” or “creational/moral laws,” the former being essentially bound to a given covenantal jurisdiction, the latter being perpetually binding. Kaiser, 30-31.
28 It will be argued in this chapter that specific rules and principles found in the Mosaic legal system are also part of the new covenant legal system, just as the universal ethical norms that existed before the Sinai covenant find repetition in the Mosaic legal system.
29 Kaiser, 81.
of the [Decalogue] for OT ethics. These “ten words” are referred to as “the words of the covenant” (Exod. 34:28) and the “tables of the covenant,” (Deut. 9:9-11). The first table expressed principles for how a person was to love God (commands one through four), and the second table for how a person was to love his neighbor (commands five through ten). A basic summary of the principles found in the Decalogue is as follows:

1. No other God.
2. No idols.
3. No blasphemy.
5. Honor parents.
6. No killing.
7. No adultery.
8. No stealing.
9. No false testimony.
10. No coveting.

Under the Mosiac law, the apodictic laws promulgated in the Decalogue and elsewhere are found explicated with casuistry, or case law, applying ethical principles or rules to particular situations in blocks of Scripture such as Exod. 20:22-23:33 (referred to as “the book of the Covenant,” cf. Exod. 24:7), Lev. 18-20 (referred to as “the Law of Holiness”) and Deut. 6-26 (referred to as “Deuternonomic ideals”), where groupings of similar cases are brought together topically. Below is a list of some of the casuistic blocks of text within the Pentateuch:

Cases involving Slaves (Exod. 21:2-11)
Cases involving Homicides (Exod. 21:12-17)
Cases Involving Bodily Injuries (Exod. 21:18-32)
Cases Involving Property Damages (Exod. 21:33-22:15)
Cases Involving Society (Exod. 22:16-31)

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30 Ibid.
34 Kaiser, 97, 112-126, 129.
These cases served as guides to elder-judges in Israel as they attempted to apply God’s law to particular situations (Exod. 18:25-26). For example, the apodictic law found in Exod. 20:15 which states “you shall not steal” is amplified and the consequence for its violation specified in Exod. 21:16 which states “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.” Much of what is found in the case law of the Mosaic covenant relates to societal ethics for a people living under a theocracy.

### The New Covenant Legal System

The *basis* for new covenant ethics is the same as that of the old covenant, namely, the person of God. Like the OT, the NT roots holiness and moral perfection in the character of God which is to be emulated by man (Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16). However, in the new covenant, Jesus is the embodiment of our ethical standard. Rom. 8:29 indicates that Christians were “predestined to be conformed to the likeness of” Christ. Ferguson contends

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35 Stephen Kaufman’s structuring of Deuteronomic laws, as summarized by Kaiser, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deuteronomy 5</th>
<th>Commandment</th>
<th>Deuteronomy</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:6-10</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>12:1-31</td>
<td>Worship</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13:1-14:27</td>
<td>Name of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:12-15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14:28-16:17</td>
<td>Sabbath</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16:18-18:22</td>
<td>Authority</td>
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<td>5:17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19:1-22:8</td>
<td>Homocide</td>
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<tr>
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<td>22:9-23:19</td>
<td>Adultery</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>23:20-24:7</td>
<td>Theft</td>
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<td>5:20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24:8-25:4</td>
<td>False Charges</td>
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<td>5:21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25:5-16</td>
<td>Coveting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kaiser, 129.
that “Perfect humanity, perfect holiness, is first of all expressed in him.”

“The goal of ethics is restoration of the divine image,” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Furthermore, our ethical obligations arise out of a response to what Christ has done for us. The indicatives of the gospel lead to the imperatives of ethics.

John indicates that God, in his very nature, is love (1 Jn. 4:10). Like the old covenant legal system, the new covenant legal system is also grounded on the loving character of God and has for its supporting principles a similar focus on precepts of love. The command of love is central in the writings of John, who writes in his first epistle, “Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you,” (1 Jn. 2:7-8).

Two questions warrant exploration from John’s statement. First, what does John mean in his epistle when he claims to be writing “no new commandment,” while “at the same time” calling his directive a “new commandment.” It would appear that John is highlighting two differing aspects of the commandment with the words “old” and “new.” As we have already suggested, the “love” command was central to the old covenant system. Certainly in this sense, then, it is old. However, John likely has a stronger and more direct connection to John 13:34 in mind. In this passage Jesus states to his disciples who are with him in the upper room, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another just as I have loved you.” To keep this command, Jesus said, would be an indicator that “you are my disciples.”

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37 Ibid., 142.
38 For a discussion of the importance of the indicative preceding the imperative in ethics, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 656-57.
According to Colin Kruse, the command was “old” in the sense that Jesus had given it to them during his earthly ministry. It was a commandment that the hearers of John’s epistles “had heard (themselves) from the beginning.” This perspective sees the commandment as “old” in that significant time had lapsed between the original teaching of Jesus in the early 30’s A.D. and John’s writing sometime in the early to mid 90’s A.D. The “ministry of the historical Jesus was long past.” So the teaching of Jesus in the third decade of the first century, while now considered historical, nevertheless was at the time of Jesus’ promulgation of it “a new commandment.” The “new commandment” that Jesus had spoken of and John had recorded in his Gospel had now become a well-worn saying within the Christian community some 60 years later.

A second, and more difficult, question remains: what is so new about a commandment to love? Jesus had already proclaimed that loving God and loving neighbor were the foundational principles upon which the entire Mosaic law was built (Matt. 22:37-40). It would appear that the concept of love itself is not new. As a generic principle it predated Jesus, and was clearly thought by some rabbinical schools to have something like the centrality that Jesus had given it (Mark 12:28-34). The difference between Jesus’ love commandment and that of the OT and the rabbis, however, seems to be found in the standard by which love is to be measured. God instructed the people of Israel to love their neighbor “as themselves.” The highest human example of love was found in one’s own self-interest. Human beings need not be taught to look out for their own interest. We do that naturally. What is unnatural and must be taught is to prioritize others’ interests before our own (Phil. 2:4). In the new covenant, Jesus Christ, the sinless God-man has come in the flesh. As a

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41 Kruse, The Letters of John, 83.
result, Jesus can give a new love command, that his people not only love as they naturally love themselves (which is a high standard), but love “just as [he has] loved [them],” (John 13:34). Jesus sets the standard of love upon himself. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends,” (John 15:13). The command is further enhanced when one considers the relationship of love that Jesus repeatedly shows between the Father and the Son (John 8:29; 10:18; 12:49-50; 14:31; 15:10) as a model for the “newly gathered messianic community.”[^42] So in the life of Jesus, the dual love command takes on a greater existential significance. In Jesus, the believer experiences both how one is to love God and how one is to love neighbor. Jesus is the Standard-bearer for both summary commandments.

A similar teaching is found in Gal. 6:2. Paul here exhorts the Galatian church to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Paul says that when the Galatian believers sacrificially helped to carry another’s burden, they were acting like Christ, and thereby fulfill Christ’s “law.” In the same epistle, Paul earlier cites the second part of the great commandment “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” and like Jesus before him, announces that “the whole law is fulfilled” in this commandment. Paul makes a similar statement in Rom. 13:8 in saying “the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” Like John’s concept of the “new commandment,” the “law of Christ” has at its center the “paradigm, exemplification, and explanation of love”[^43] in the person of Christ.[^44]

We have shown how under the old covenant, the Decalogue was a summary of *apodictic law* that held a central place within the Mosaic economy. The question we must

now consider is whether the Decalogue should continue to be the normative center of apodictic law under the new covenant?

Many Evangelical approaches to ethics use the Decalogue as an organizational principle of Christian ethics. John Frame, for example, finds in the Decalogue a “uniqueness of … hermeneutical centrality,” arguing that “when we think about God’s standards for ethics…we should look especially at parts of the Bible that are specifically and directly concerned with that.”45 Mark F. Rooker, a Baptist scholar, has titled his recent book on ethics, The Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty-First Century,46 suggesting that the Decalogue is the center of Christian ethics. “These ancient Commandments are for many Christians the ten pillars of moral wisdom, the ten foundation stones of social welfare, the unquestioned axioms of any religious morality.”47

We must acknowledge that the task of articulating a coherent Christian ethical system may be accomplished in a variety of forms. Organizing Christian ethics around the Decalogue is a longstanding practice in many Christian traditions. Such a presentation methodology has merit. After all, Jesus, Paul and other NT writers either cite or allude to commandments from the Decalogue in their ethical discourse.48

However, we would contend that there is something redemptive-historically out of place in using the Decalogue directly as the centerpiece for new covenant ethics. We would argue that the place of a passage of Scripture in salvation history should drive the question of “hermeneutical centrality” for ethics more so than any given passage’s perceived quality to

47 White, Biblical Ethics, 18.
48 Paul does refer to various laws from the Decalogue that are part of the new covenant legal system in places such as Rom. 7:7; 8:10; 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 7:19; Eph. 6:2. This will be discussed below.
“specifically and directly” give ethical precept. The fuller revelation given in the NT should always authoritatively inform how any passage from the OT is to be applied to Christians, regardless of whether the OT passage conveys an ethical standard.49

To remove the Decalogue from its redemptive historical context in the old covenant and make it also the centerpiece of new covenant ethics seems to overlook the progress in redemptive history. The “stone tablets” served as the charter document50 of the Mosaic covenant given to Israel that is now, according to the NT, obsolete.51 As Wells and Zaspel note, “That which is ‘written and engraved in stones’ (2 Cor. 3:7) and ‘the handwriting of ordinances which was against us’ (Col. 2:14) refer not to civil or ceremonial applications of the Decalogue, but to the Decalogue itself.”52 The Decalogue was given to frame some basic ethical principles in the context of the covenant with Israel. It was a redemptive-historical advancement, giving the Jews greater clarity for how to live ethically before God under the theocracy of Israel.

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49 This hermeneutic is applied when Covenant Theologians rightly interpret certain passages from the OT about the restoration of Israel and Judah to be fulfilled in the multi-ethnic church of the NT.
50 Willem VanGemeren refers to the Decalogue as “the summary of the moral law,” “the basic constitution of Israel,” and the “charter.” See William VanGemeren, “The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective,” in Five Views on Law and Gospel, Stanley N. Gundry, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 29, 379. The following passages show the inseparable connection between the stone tablets/ten words and the Mosaic 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.” So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. (Exod. 34:27, 28)

And he 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)

When I went up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the Lord made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. And the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words that the Lord had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And at the end of forty days and forty nights the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. (Deut. 9:9-11)

51 See, e.g., 2 Cor. 3:11, 13; Heb. 8:13.
52 Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, New Covenant Theology, Description, Definition, Defense (Frederick: New Covenant Media, 2002), 151.
As Moo argues, when Paul says that “the commandment came” in Rom. 7:9 he is referring to “the experience that [Paul] and all the Jews have gone through as part of the people of Israel.”\(^53\) The Mosaic Law took the “work of the law written on the heart” (Rom. 2:15) and objectified it within a particular covenantal context.

We are not suggesting by the statements above that certain laws and/or principles of the Decalogue do not appear in the new covenant ethical system, but merely that, as Moo suggests, “no commandment, even those of the Decalogue, is binding simply because it is part of the Mosaic law.”\(^54\) Even though we are not directly under the Mosaic law, that does not mean that we are without an ethical standard. Moral principles existed prior to the Mosaic economy. As Wayne Strickland notes, “Just as God was able to sufficiently implement his moral standards without the Mosaic moral legislation prior to the Mosaic economy, so he is able to communicate and enforce his ethic without the Mosaic covenant after the end of the Mosaic economy.”\(^55\)

Evidence of this new covenant “body of ethical demands”\(^56\) is manifest in Paul’s writing, for instance, in places like 1 Cor. 4:17 (“That is why I sent you Timothy, …to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church), 1 Thess. 4:1-2 (“we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know

\(^53\) Douglas J. Moo, *Romans: NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 227. Moo combines the historical and autobiographical understanding of this passage. For a more thorough analysis of this perspective, see Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 423-31.

\(^54\) Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ,” *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testament, Essays in honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, John S. Feinberg, ed. (Westchester: Crossway, 1988) 217. Where the position of this thesis may differ from some within the WCF tradition is that the view herein does not believe it is hermeneutically warranted to deem all Decalogue commands as perpetually binding on the ground that they appear in the Decalogue. As has been argued in this thesis, the Sabbath commandment seems to militate against such a perspective.

\(^55\) Strickland, 405.

what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus”); and 2 Thess. 3:6 (“keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us”). Frank Thielman points out that one does not find “detailed legislation in which, to paraphrase Hebrews, every transgression and infraction receives a commensurate penalty.”

Rather, the new covenant legal system contains “specific ethical guidelines backed up by a general promise of blessing for obedience and woe for disobedience.” In the NT there are thirteen virtue lists and twenty-three vice lists, which contain representative samplings of basic principles for godly living.

All of the above discussion is suggestive to us that it is perhaps more precise to affirm each of the Decalogical laws in their new covenant manifestation as binding on the new covenant believer rather than affirming the Decalogue as a unit of Mosaic law to be directly binding in the new covenant era.

In the NT there is also a kind of casuistry, but of a different nature than what one finds in the old covenant. While there are certainly some systematic presentations of ethics (e.g., Eph. 5:1-6:9), one does not find a codified body of case law in the NT similar to that of the OT. The ethical norms are not presented amidst a theocratic backdrop. Most NT casuistry appears in the form of epistles written to first century churches with specific ethical issues.

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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 The NT virtue lists are found in 2 Cor. 6:6–8; Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 4:32; 5:9; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:12; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; 3:10; James 3:17; 1 Pet. 3:8; and 2 Pet. 1:5–7.
60 The NT vice lists are found in Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:21–22; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:10–11; 6:9–10; 2 Cor. 6:9–10; 12:20–21; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 4:31; 5:3–5; Col. 3:5, 8; 1 Tim. 1:9–10; 2 Tim. 3:2–5; Titus 3:3; James 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:1; 4:3, 15; Rev. 9:21; 21:8; 22:15.
61 These lists of rules are not meant to be exhaustive, as is shown by Paul's comments in Gal. 5 wherein the vice list ends with the phrase “and things like these” (v. 21) and the virtue list with “against such things” (v. 23).
62 Schreiner rightly points out that the Pauline virtue and vice lists were likely shaped by the needs of the particular church to which they were given. See Schreiner, New Testament Theology, 660.
63 A term coined by John Frame.
Ethical casuistry in the epistles takes an “occasional” rather than statutory/judicial flavor. For instance, one of the issues Paul addresses in his first letter to the Corinthians is “a man having his father’s wife,” (1 Cor. 5:1). In applying a principle forbidding gross sexual immorality that is “not tolerated even among pagans,” (i.e., a universal ethical norm), Paul instructs the Corinthian church: “Let him who has done this be removed from among you,” (v. 2). Paul has taken an ethical principle, applied it to a situation, and given a prescriptive exhortation.

A second example appears later in the same epistle. A question has arisen in the Corinthian church as to whether a convert to Christ should divorce his wife if she is not a believer (1 Cor. 7:12). The confusion may have arisen from a perceived ethical conflict between OT teaching concerning the marrying of pagan wives (cf. Ezra 10:11, 14) and Christ’s teaching that divorce was only permitted for marital unfaithfulness, but had not given specific direction on this precise case. Paul, here, is called upon to select the appropriate rule that governs this situation and then authoritatively apply it to the case at hand. Accordingly, Paul exercised his unique apostolic authority to rule on that matter: If “she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her,” (7:12). 65

64 Richard Hays correctly points out that:

Paul nowhere sets forth a systematic presentation of “Christian ethics.” Nor does he offer his communities a “manual of discipline,” a comprehensive summary of community organization and duties. Such summaries were not uncommon in the ancient world: in various ways, the genre is represented by the Community Rule (1QS) found among the Dead Seas Scrolls, the presentation of Jesus’ teaching in the Gospel of Matthew, the Didache, and the codification of Jewish Halakah in the Mishnah. Paul, however, does not formulate such a code . . . . Instead, he responds ad hoc to the contingent pastoral problems that arise in his churches (Hays, 17).

65 This passage makes clear that Paul and “the Lord” Jesus both authoritatively speak to the church at Corinth. Jesus had not explicitly given direction on this specific point of casuistry in his ministry, but Paul now speaks authoritatively to settle the matter (“I, not the Lord”). See Simon J. Kistemaker, 1 Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 222-223.
Most often, casuistic law in the new covenant is centered on the paradigm of Jesus as direct and binding authority. Imitation of one’s master is one of the main aspects of what it meant to be a disciple in antiquity, and what it means today. Jesus said, “It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master,” (Matt. 10:25). Believers are to “walk in the same way in which he walked,” (1 Jn. 2:6). In John 13:14-15, 17, Jesus said to his disciples “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you…. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

The believer’s aim must be to become who the teacher is. Schreiner comments that “The righteousness of Jesus functions as the standard for believers (1 Jn. 2:29).” God is not impressed with mere external compliance to law. One’s righteousness must “exceed that of the Pharisees” who Jesus characterizes as “whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness,” (Matt. 23:27).

Transformation of the heart is what God has always been after. Character development is critical. In the new covenant, heart-transformation becomes a reality through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit that Christ has sent to be in all his followers. The law is no longer designed for hard-hearted and stiff-necked people (Matt. 19:8), but those who have a heart of flesh and are led by the Spirit. The role of the law of God is no longer to confront us as a

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66 Longnecker well summarizes the Pauline methodology in the epistle to the Galatians as: Animated by an understanding of the character of the life of Christ, in contrast to the character of the life of nomistic observance. Whereas the scriptures record the story of the life of ethnic Israel which had proven itself to be persistently unfaithful to God, Paul recalls the story of the life of Jesus who had shown himself to be faithful to God (Longnecker, Bruce W. “Defining the Faithful Character of the Covenant Community: Galatians 2.15-21 and Beyond,” in Paul and the Mosaic Law. James D.G. Dunn, ed. Tubingen: J.C.B Mohr, 1996, 94).

67 Michael J. Wilkins, Following the Master (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

68 Schreiner, New Testament Theology, 643.
“guardian” (paidagwgo, n), a chaperone or disciplinarian. Jesus’ teaching drives beyond demands for mere external conformance and aims for inward renewal.69

The call for imitation of Christ sometimes comes indirectly. While Paul exhorts other believers to imitate himself (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:7; 3:9), he is always penultimate in the chain. On two occasions when Paul calls his readers to imitate himself, Christ is presented as the true focal point for imitation (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6).70

Furthermore, as Michael Wilkins observes, even in Eph. 5:1, where the command is given to imitate God, “the example given is Christ: his forgiveness, love, and sacrificial service (Eph. 4:32; 5:2). Christ is the incarnate example of God for believers to emulate in their daily experience.”71

Much more frequently, Scripture makes the connection directly. As Peter writes,

21 Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example,72 so that you might follow in his steps 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; 23 when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly,” (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

Likewise, the author of Hebrews writes, “Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted,” (Heb. 2:18). Paul exhorts the church at Ephesus to “put off the old self” and “put on the new self,” grounding his exhortation on Christ.

Speaking of following vices such as “sensuality, greed and impurity,” he writes, “that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,” (Eph. 4:19-21). Similarly in Colossians 3, he instructs believers

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69 Hays rightly remarks that the moral vision of Matthew’s Gospel balances a tension between “his stable deontological moral categories and his message that the coming of the kingdom transforms everything, including the people who live under accountability to those categories,” (Hays, 98).

70 Wilkins, Following the Master, 308.

71 Ibid.

72 The Greek word translated “example” is u`pogrammo,j, which in its literal sense refers to a teacher’s copper-plate which trains the child how to write letters. See Ferguson, 153.
to “put away” evil and “put on” righteousness, letting “the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,” (Col. 3:16). Likewise, Paul sets up Christ as the moral example for love, unity and humility in Phil. 2:1-11. In Rom. 15:1-7, Paul exhorts believers to forego pleasing themselves because Christ did not please himself (15:3).

In the new covenant legal system, then, one can see a decisive shift in that Christ becomes the ethical center in various ways.\textsuperscript{73}

\textbf{Specific Changes in Laws}

So far it has been argued that there are systematic statements in places like 1 Cor. 9 and Hebrew 7 that suggest a change in legal systems between old and new covenants. We have also provided a basic structure for understanding both the old and new covenant laws, while showing that the new covenant legal system evidences a new centrality in the person of Christ. We now turn to address some more conspicuous discontinuities between the specific laws of the two covenantal jurisdictions.

There are numerous examples within the pages of Scripture that simply assume that substantive changes \textit{within} the legal system have, in fact, taken place. That is to say, various teachings found in the NT pertaining to the non-perpetuity of specific laws of the old covenant make clear that the legal system that was once applicable to the nation of Israel under the old covenant jurisdiction is not the same system applicable under the new covenant jurisdiction. Consider several examples.

\textsuperscript{73} O’Donovan is correct that “a distinct behavior is demanded by the resurrection of Jesus,” and not that “the same behavior is demanded which was demanded anyway . . . clearer and more cogently perceived” (O’Donovan, xi).
Food Laws

A pericope in the Gospel of Mark recounts an incident wherein a group of Pharisees press Jesus for an explanation as to why his disciples did not wash their hands before eating, as was the pharisaic custom (7:1-5). Jesus takes the opportunity to show the utter hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who criticize others for not keeping human traditions (here, washing hands), while violating the word of God (here, the fifth commandment concerning the honoring of one’s parents). Jesus then continues his teaching in a slightly different direction. He states to the crowd: “Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him,” (vv. 14-16). After making this statement, Jesus takes his disciples inside for a private teaching on the significance of what he has just made known to the crowd. He explains that “whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (vv. 18-19). Was it the case under the Mosiac law that what an Israelite ingested into his stomach could not defile him? Consider one example from Leviticus:

4 Among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these: The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. 5 And the rock badger, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. 6 And the hare, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. 7 And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. You shall not eat any of their flesh, and 8 you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you. (Lev. 11:4-8).

The old covenant legal system contained a law that prohibited eating “unclean” animals. Eating animals such as the camel, the rock badger, the hare and the pig was an activity that would defile a person. Having ingested any of these animals into the stomach would be considered a defilement of that person, notwithstanding its eventual expulsion from the body.
In his private teaching with his disciples, Jesus appears to abrogate the prohibition against eating such food. To leave no uncertainty that Jesus’ statements are to be interpreted this way, Mark includes a final parenthetical statement to the pericope: “Thus he [Jesus] declared all foods clean,” (Mark 7:19).

The change in the law related to unclean foods can be seen in other places in the NT as well. Peter, in Acts 10, after receiving a vision from heaven in which he was directed to eat “unclean” foods (v. 14) that had been lowered down in a sheet (v. 11), reports to the Jerusalem church that the heavenly voice had made it clear that “what God has made clean, do not call common,” (11:9). The apostle Paul is likewise clear on this point. In his instructions to the Roman church exhorting the congregation to stop judging one another, he comments that he “know[s] and [is] persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself” (Rom. 14:14), and that “everything is indeed clean,” (14:20). This is the underlying assumption behind his exhortation to the weak brother not to “pass judgment on the one who eats.” For Paul, the kind of food one eats does not matter. However, under the Mosaic law there was a distinction between clean and unclean foods. To eat unclean food would be a sin, not a matter of adiaphora, or indifference, as Paul clearly implies in his exhortation to the Roman church. It is instructive to further note that in the surrounding context of this passage,

74 Given the context of a private teaching and the fact that Jesus lived under the old covenant jurisdiction, as a man “without sin” (Heb. 4:15) who had been born “under the law” (Gal. 4:4), it is doubtful that Jesus was instituting the immediate abrogation of the food laws. For in doing so he would have led faithful old covenant members to violate their own jurisdictional law. The fact that Jesus takes the disciples inside for a private explanation and that Matthew with his Jewish sensitivities does not record Mark’s parenthetical (Matt. 15:1-28), seems to add further support of such a view. As Moo states, “Jesus occupies a kind of salvation-historical transition phase as the Old Covenant was still in effect even as the New was in the process of inauguration” (Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ,” 206). Pinpointing exactly when the legal system changed is unclear, but could be pinpointed at either Jesus’ death or resurrection or Pentecost. Significantly, Peter is seemingly surprised by the command to eat unclean food in the vision of Acts 10:9-16. See especially v. 14.

75 The traditional view that Peter was Mark’s primary source for his Gospel material may suggest a connection between Peter’s Joppa experience and Mark’s parenthetical in Mark 7:19. See Simon J. Kistemaker, Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1975), 282.
the “weaker” brother (viz., the offended person) is the one who maintains the dietary restrictions, and Paul numbers himself among those “who are strong,” (15:1). In other words, this passage indicates that the former Pharisee, Paul, who autobiographically prior to his conversion referred to himself as “a Hebrew of Hebrews” and “blameless as to righteousness under the law” (Phil. 3:5-6), no longer keep the kosher dietary laws. In looking at the NT evidence on the subject there is little doubt that a major change has happened with respect to the food laws of the old covenant legal system.76

Circumcision

God gave Abraham the rite of circumcision as “a sign of the covenant” God made with him (Gen. 17:11). Every male born or brought into Abraham’s household was to receive circumcision, as a sign of “an everlasting covenant,” (vv. 12-13). Any male who went uncircumcised was to “be cut off from his people,” (v. 14). In Acts 7:8, Stephen refers to the rite given to Abraham as “the covenant of circumcision.” In Exod. 4:24-26, God nearly strikes Moses dead for failing to circumcise his son. Only after Moses’ wife, Zipporah, performs the ritual herself is Moses spared. Lev. 12:3 brings the practice into the Mosaic legal system, requiring that all male children born in Israel are to be circumcised on the eighth day. As Joshua brings the Israelites into the promised land he circumcises the entire generation of males before entering the land (Josh. 5:1-8).

Yet despite its importance in the old covenant, in 1 Cor. 7:19 Paul writes, “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commandments is what counts.”77 Here Paul unequivocally indicates that circumcision has no objective significance for the Corinthian believers. It is “nothing.” Furthermore, Paul refers to

77 Similar statements are found in Gal. 5:6 and 6:15.
circumcision as an activity that is not one of “God’s commandments.” In other words, for Paul circumcision has nothing to do with keeping God’s law.\textsuperscript{78} Under the old covenant, circumcision was a binding law. It was “God’s commandment.” Under the new covenant jurisdiction, circumcision is not.\textsuperscript{79}

**Observance of Days**

In Col. 2:16-17, Paul writes, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” In this passage, Paul uses a common biblical three-part description of holy days,\textsuperscript{80} which refers to annual (“feasts”), monthly (“new moons”), and weekly (“Sabbaths\textsuperscript{81}”) days of observance.\textsuperscript{82}

Similarly, Paul writes in Rom. 14:5-6, “One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord.” The message here is clear: holy days are like circumcision; one can observe them or not observe them without any ethical significance.\textsuperscript{83}

A few words should be mentioned about the weekly Sabbath commandment. There has been a diversity of opinion as to how this commandment of the Decalogue applies to the

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\textsuperscript{79} Schreiner writes concerning Paul’s references to commandments: How do we account for the fact that Paul proclaims the obsolescence of the Mosaic law and yet cites commands from the law as authoritative? Perhaps we can say that the commands are not normative merely because they are Mosaic. Some of the laws in the OT are included in the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). But the law of Christ should not be restricted to the moral norms of the law; nor does the law of Christ call attention primarily to the Mosaic law but rather to the fulfillment of the law in and by Jesus Christ (Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 655).

\textsuperscript{80} Neh 10:33; 1 Chr 23:31; 2 Chr 2-4; 31:3; Ezek. 45:17; Hos. 2:11.
\textsuperscript{81} See discussion on Sabbath observance below.
Christian.\textsuperscript{84} John Frame has helpfully identified six distinct \textit{Reformed} views that have arisen on this issue, placing each view on a relative continuum from the least to most restrictive view with respect to Sabbath observance.\textsuperscript{85} The representatives of the various views include D. A. Carson, John Calvin, the Canons of Dort, a later and earlier view of Meredith Kline, and the Westminster Standards. Frame points out that Calvin and Carson have very similar views on the least restrictive side of the spectrum.\textsuperscript{86} On the other side of the spectrum is the Westminster Standards, which takes the most restrictive Reformed view that the Sabbath commandment requiring Christians to rest on the Sabbath from the work of the six days.\textsuperscript{87} Since great minds of Reformed theology have not found uniform agreement on this issue, this should engender a sense of charity and humility as we approach this subject. Nevertheless, our perspective herein leans in the direction of the Carson/Calvin end of the spectrum for various reasons including the following:

1. There is no imperative directed to man in Gen. 2:1-3, a common starting place for those who believe Sabbath keeping is a perpetually-binding moral law of God.

2. In Gen. 2:1-3, God explicitly makes the \textit{seventh day} of the creation week holy, not a cycle of “one day in seven.” This passage does not even mention the word “Sabbath” but does repeat the phrase “seventh day” three times. Thus, if anything is perpetually-binding in this passage it is “seventh-day-keeping.”

3. The Fourth Commandment merely uses the seventh day of the creation week as an \textit{analogy} for a weekly day of rest for the Jewish people. There is no indication that a seventh day of rest was already a normative practice for the Jews.

4. Paul seems to teach abrogation of the Sabbath commandment (and fulfillment in the person and work of Christ) by calling it a “shadow” whose substance

\textsuperscript{84} For a detailed biblical, historical and theological investigation of this issue, see D. A. Carson, ed., \textit{From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation} (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1982).

\textsuperscript{85} See Frame’s discussion, Frame, 515-527.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 516.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 527.
belongs to Christ (Col. 2:16, 17) and by teaching that “strong” believers esteem all days alike, while “weak” believers esteem only one day (Rom. 14:5, 6).

(5) The book of Hebrews authoritatively interprets the creation rest as “God’s rest” (4:10), not man’s. In fact, the author of Hebrews, likely picking up on the fact that there is no “evening and morning” formula for the seventh day as there is for the other six days of creation, points out in Heb. 4:4-6 that this creation-week rest enjoyed by God has never ended and is available even now to be entered by those who cease from their evil works and trust in Christ.\(^88\)

It should be noted that whichever Reformed view is ultimately correct (if any), the consequence of any one of these perspectives represents a deviation from the literal Sabbath commandment as given in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. None of the Reformed perspectives advocate literally keeping the Sabbath precisely as prescribed in either of the Decalogue passages.\(^89\)

Returning now to the question of old covenant context, would an Israelite have had the freedom to disregard holy days given the norms of the old covenant jurisdiction? Clearly, he would not have had such liberty. In Leviticus 23, God gives Moses a very specific list of holy days that the Israelites were to observe, including the weekly Sabbath, Passover, the Feast of First fruits, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths. The final verse of the chapter concludes, “Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed feasts of the Lord,” (23:44).

Moving chronologically now to the end of the OT witness,\(^90\) Solomon comments as he prepares to build a temple to the Lord:

\begin{quote}
Behold, I am about to build a house for the name of the Lord my God and dedicate it to him for the burning of incense of sweet spices before him, and for the regular arrangement
\end{quote}

\(^{88}\) For a discussion of this view, see O’Brien, 167-168; Bruce, 106-107.

\(^{89}\) Even the most conservative Sabbatarian view of the Puritans does not follow a literal seventh-day observance. The proper issue in the debate, then, is in what way the Sabbath principle of the Decalogue is fulfilled in the new covenant with the coming of Christ.

\(^{90}\) 2 Chronicles is the last book of the OT according to the traditional Hebrew arrangement that Jesus acknowledges in Luke 24:44 as “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.”
of the showbread, and for burnt offerings morning and evening, on the Saturdays and the new moons and the appointed feasts of the Lord our God, as ordained forever for Israel (2 Chron. 2:4, emphasis added).

During intertestamental times, the binding character of Sabbath observance continued unabated. According to Josephus “eating unclean foods” and “violating the Sabbath” were considered by the intertestamental Jewish community to be the two greatest marks of covenant disloyalty. Given both the Mosaic standards and the intertestamental cultural setting, Paul’s statements regarding the Christian’s freedom with respect to the keeping of special days are nothing less than shocking.

Cultic Laws

The NT is also clear that the priestly and sacrificial laws have changed. As we have seen, the author of Hebrews makes this point abundantly clear. Jesus is the new priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The Aaronic priesthood no longer serves any function in the new covenant era. The laws regarding the priestly garments, the ephod, and the breastpiece along with the consecration rituals are all obsolete. Similarly, the laws of temple ritual have come to an end. The offerings, sacrifices, the temple/tabernacle, and the furnishings are all relegated to a bygone era of redemptive history.

All of what we have presented in this chapter so far has pointed to the fact that something significant has happened with respect to the law. We now turn to the task of showing how such changes are warranted in light of Christ’s incarnational work.

Christ as Hermeneutical Center

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Of the four Gospels, the Gospel of Matthew is considered the most “Jewish” in its presentation of the life of Jesus. One way in which this aspect of the Gospel is communicated is through Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus as the antitypical Moses. Matthew makes numerous connections in chapters one through five between the life of Moses and the life of Christ. Like Moses, Jesus is born under an oppressive ruler, escapes a decree to kill infant males, is called out of Egypt, and experiences temptation in the wilderness. The climax of these typological connections occurs when Jesus goes up on a mountain to instruct his disciples. In all of this there is no mistaking the significance of these events for a Jew – Jesus is a new Lawgiver. Jesus is the Prophet who is greater than Moses, the One to whom Moses instructed the Israelites to listen.

Jesus begins his “sermon” in Matt. 5:1-12 with a series of beatitudes, or ascriptions of blessedness, directed towards to those who possess certain virtues, illustrated by two metaphors urging his listeners to become salt and light to the world (5:13-16). Following these introductory comments, Jesus sets forth a paradigmatic statement (5:17-20) to aid his listeners in understanding the discourse that will continue through the end of Matthew chapter seven. This is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible concerning Jesus’ view of law, but it is one of the most difficult and controversial passages. It is difficult because it appears at one level that Jesus is advocating a degree of continuity between old and new covenants that is incompatible with the NT teachings examined above that show significant discontinuity. The passage is controversial because scholars have taken diverse

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95 Hays, 94-95.
approaches in trying to reconcile the tension between continuity and discontinuity from within their own theological tradition. Before moving on with further exegesis of this passage, it will behoove the reader to become acquainted with a popular way in which theologians of the past have attempted to solve the complexities of this passage.

A Breviary on the Tripartite Law of God in Historical Theology

One approach to solving the tension between continuity and discontinuity with respect to the law of Moses and the new covenant was developed in the thirteenth century by the theologian Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). Writing in the medieval scholastic tradition, Aquinas sought to explain the relevance of Mosaic laws for Christian usage by introducing the concept of a tripartite law code composed of moral, ceremonial and judicial precepts. For Aquinas, all moral law was reducible to the Decalogue. Underlying Aquinas’ approach was a belief in natural law. J. Budziszewski provides a useful definition of natural law as “moral principles that are both right for everybody and knowable to everybody by the ordinary exercise of human reason.” Certain norms within the law of Moses (such as loving God and one’s neighbor) were more self-evident than others, and therefore did not need re-promulgation. Other norms were considered less intuitively obvious, thus, explicit

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98 Carson, From Sabbath to Lord’s Day, 304-309.
99 Aquinas writes, “The moral precepts, distinct from the ceremonial and judicial precepts, are about things pertaining of their very nature to good morals.” Aquinas, Thomas, Summa Theologica, 1a2ae 100, 1; New Advent, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm, accessed April 26, 2011.
100 Aquinas writes, “The Old Law showed forth the precepts of the natural law, and added certain precepts of its own. Accordingly, as to those precepts of the natural law contained in the Old Law, all were bound to observe the Old Law; not because they belonged to the Old Law, but because they belonged to the natural law. But as to those precepts which were added by the Old Law, they were not binding on save the Jewish people alone.” Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1a2ae 98, 5.
publication of these norms of nature was necessary. These, according to Aquinas, are the kind of laws the Decalogue explicitly contains. A third kind of law was characterized as being evident only to the wisest of men, consisting of the most detailed commands found in the Mosaic law. These laws were reduced to and summarized by the Decalogue as well.\textsuperscript{102}

Four centuries later, the distinctions within the Mosaic law popularized by Aquinas were taken up by the Puritan divines of the Westminster Assembly as part of the fabric of their teaching on law in the \textit{Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)}.\textsuperscript{103} Chapter XIX of the WCF contains teaching on the three-part division of God’s Law into ceremonial, judicial, and moral aspects. We will briefly cite and comment on each of these three aspects.

Ceremonial Law

The \textit{WCF} speaks of the ceremonial law of God as follows:

…God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a Church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the NT.\textsuperscript{104}

The \textit{WCF} sounds a clear note of discontinuity between old and new covenant with respect to what it classifies as the “ceremonial laws” of the old covenant.

\textsuperscript{102} Aquinas writes, “The precepts of the decalogue differ from the other precepts of the Law, in the fact that God Himself is said to have given the precepts of the decalogue; whereas He gave the other precepts to the people through Moses. Wherefore the decalogue includes those precepts the knowledge of which man has immediately from God. Such are those which with but slight reflection can be gathered at once from the first general principles: and those also which become known to man immediately through divinely infused faith. Consequently two kinds of precepts are not reckoned among the precepts of the decalogue: viz. first general principles, for they need no further promulgation after being once imprinted on the natural reason to which they are self-evident; as, for instance, that one should do evil to no man, and other similar principles: and again those which the careful reflection of wise men shows to be in accord with reason: since the people receive these principles from God, through being taught by wise men. Nevertheless both kinds of precepts are contained in the precepts of the decalogue; yet in different ways. For the first general principles are contained in them, as principles in their proximate conclusions; while those which are known through wise men are contained, conversely, as conclusions in their principles,” Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologica} 1a2ae 100, 3.

\textsuperscript{103} A tripartite law was popularized in Reformed Christianity by the publication of John Calvin’s \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion} in the sixteen century. See Frank Thielman, \textit{Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 20-22.

First, the Westminster divines specify those who were obligated to keep the ceremonial law. Rather than being universal in nature, this law was given to “the people of Israel, as a Church under age.” The law is for a particular people (“Israel”) at a particular place in redemptive history (“a Church under age”).

Second, there is a suggested typological discontinuity between new covenant and old covenant use of the ceremonial laws. The cultic practices of Israelite worship are a “prefiguring [of] Christ.” In the person and work of Christ many of the old covenant religious rites and ceremonies find fulfillment.

Third, there is also said to be typological discontinuity with respect to “divers instructions of moral duties” within the ceremonial law itself that do not remain normative beyond the cult of Israel. More on the moral law will be discussed below.

Finally, the paragraph ends by unambiguously declaring all ceremonial law “abrogated under the NT.” That is to say, while the torah is still part of the Christian Bible, its ceremonial aspects are not directly binding as ethical norms for believers living in the redemptive-historical era evidenced in the NT.

Judicial Laws

The WCF goes on to speak about “judicial laws” as follows:

To them (the people of Israel) also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other, now, further than the general equity thereof may require. Here again, discontinuity between old and new covenant is the leading principle for the Westminster divines with respect to the judicial law. Three points in this statement are worth noting.

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105 See WCF I.  
106 WCF XIX, 4.
First, the judicial law is applicable only to “them,” that is, the same “people of Israel” discussed as those obligated to keep of the ceremonial law. Here, however, another distinctive aspect of Israel is highlighted, namely, its political nature. Israel was a nation, a theocracy with a political structure and governing rules of the land. The judicial law was given to this people as they constituted a distinct nation-state.

Second, the judicial law is said to have “expired” when the theocracy ended in Israel, and therefore, does not serve as binding or authoritative for any other people group or nation in contemporary society.

Third, the divines see a point of continuity between old and new covenants with respect to “general equity,” which in some cases transcends the theocracy of Israel. In support of this notion, those who drafted the *WCF* cite Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor. 9:8-10 where the apostle draws an ethical principle from the Mosaic law against muzzling one’s ox while it treads grain. Paul cites this law as support for his contention that full time ministers of the gospel should be paid for their labors.

**Moral Laws**

The third category of law discussed in the *WCF* is the moral law, which is defined in several paragraphs of chapter XIX:

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience;

…

This law, after his Fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon mount Sinai in ten commandments, and written in two tables;

…

[T]his law [is] commonly called moral.

…

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the
authority of God the Creator who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way
dissolve, but much strengthen, this obligation.\footnote{WCF, chapter XIX, 1, 2, 3 and 5.}

In stark contrast to the \textit{WCF}’s discussion of the ceremonial and judicial laws of Israel, which
were characterized as having almost complete discontinuity with other people groups outside
of national Israel and other periods of redemptive history outside of the Mosaic jurisdiction,
its discussion on the moral law of God seeks to show an exact continuity of these laws over
all peoples throughout all of history. Three features of the \textit{WCF}’s treatment bear further
comment.

First, the framers speak of a “covenant of works” given to Adam. Taking the
recurring biblical concept of covenant, the divines frame God’s first giving of moral law to
Adam as covenantal in nature. This covenant is a binding oath between God as the obligor
and Adam and “all his progeny” as the obligees, applicable as a “rule of righteousness” in
perpetuity.

Second, the framers’ equate of the laws given in the “covenant of works” with those
given in the Decalogue. Those unwritten moral laws that were originally given to Adam and
his posterity at creation are said to have been formally codified in the tablets of stone given
to Moses on Mount Sinai. Here of the framers appear to have been influenced by Aquinas’
natural law emphasis.

Third, the framers contend that moral law continues on into the new covenant era
without dissolution, reinforced and strengthened by Christ. In support of the perspective that
the moral law in the form of the Decalogue continues to directly bind believers in the new
covenant, the divines cite, \textit{inter alia}, Matt. 5:17-19 as evidence that the \textit{moral} laws (alone)
continue on, while the judicial and ceremonial laws do not.
Having examined the influences of the earlier Thomastic and later Westminster traditions who have utilized the “moral,” “ceremonial,” and “judicial” categories, let us now take up the exegesis of Matt. 5:17-20 to determine if this traditional approach best solves the dilemma occasioned by Matthew or whether there may be a better solution.

Matthew 5:17-20

Matthew records Jesus’ words of introduction to the “Sermon on the Mount” as follows:

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-20).

Several issues must be addressed in interpreting this passage in light of the rest of Scripture, the most important of which is what the term “fulfill” means. Some understand the term to mean “confirm” or “establish.” In this view, Jesus came to confirm the legal demands of the OT. However, as we have seen previously the NT witness will not permit such an interpretation given the clear examples where OT laws were not confirmed or established, but abrogated (e.g., laws of the priesthood, circumcision, observance of days, etc.). Some within the Westminster tradition understand Jesus to be saying that he has come to “confirm” or “establish” the moral law, which is equated with the Decalogue. This interpretation,
however, seems to miss the assumed *unity* with which Jesus speaks of the law. For “not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law.” What contextual basis does one have to eliminate any parts of the Mosaic legal corpus from this universal statement? It would appear that such categorization is foreign both to the context of this passage and the mind of the first century Palestinian Jew. Other approaches see fulfillment as “deepening” or “extending” the meaning of the Mosaic laws to a transcendent righteousness. However, these approaches again fail to address the minute detail that Jesus promises to be included in the scope of his fulfillment. For example, it is difficult to see how bringing circumcision to its full and intended meaning will, in and of itself, abrogate the “iota” and the “dot” of the circumcision commandment. It seems that any view that divides the law into parts runs afoul when attempting to make sense of why “fulfillment” means one thing with respect to part of the law and another thing with respect to a different part of the law.

We believe a better approach is to see the phrases “Law or the Prophets” and “Law” as referring, not to the legal system of Moses primarily, but to the OT Scriptures. Thus, Jesus begins his sermon by assuring his audience that he has not come to abolish the Hebrew Scriptures. The idea of fulfillment in this context deals with the redemptive historical

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110 F. F. Bruce has commented, “the distinction between the moral and ceremonial law is one drawn by Christian theologians, not by those who accepted the whole law as the will of God, nor yet by the NT writers” (Bruce, 167). G. J. Wenham has noted, “The arbitrariness of the distinction between moral and civil law is reinforced by the arrangement of the material in Leviticus. Love of neighbor immediately precedes a prohibition on mixed breeding; the holiness motto comes just before the law on executing unruly children (19:18-19; 20:7-9);” See G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, 34, cited in Strickland, 262).

111 For an example of this view, see W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 29-30.

112 This hermeneutic would seem to necessitate equivocation in the use of the term “fulfill.”


114 The accusation of abolishing the OT was common in the first century. Stephen was charged with “speaking blasphemous words against Moses” and teaching that “Jesus of Nazareth will . . . change the customs that Moses delivered” to them (Acts 6:11-14). Paul was likewise accused in Acts 21:21, 28.
climax that has occurred in Christ himself. As Vern Poythress states, “Jesus in His person
and His ministry brings to realization and fulfillment the whole warp and woof of Old
Testament revelation, including the revelation of the law. The whole law points to Him, and
its purposes find their realization in Him.” Jesus is the telos for all the laws of the OT in
his teaching, just as he is the “fulfillment” of OT prophesies by his person and life. Frank
Thielman points out that in Matthew’s Gospel:

“the thing spoken” (to rhethen) by a certain prophet “was fulfilled” in some aspect of
analogy, in the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount, the ethical teachings of Jesus
“fulfill” what “was said” (errethe) in the Mosaic law by bringing it to its divinely
intended goal.

The practical result of such an understanding of fulfillment means that all 613 laws of the
Mosaic system, that is the “commanding aspects of the OT,” are included in the act of
fulfillment, and no one transformational principle of fulfillment need apply to every law.

Laws may be intensified, extended or even abrogated as the consequence of passing through
the fulfillment lens of the Messiah. Thus, the phrase “these commandments” (v. 19) refers to
all the laws of the OT as they are transformed into their Christ-fulfilled form.

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115 For a defense of this interpretation, see Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel* (Rome:

116 Poythress, 268.

117 For a defense of this interpretation, see Carson, *Matthew*, 142-45. A similar view is held by Richard
Hays: “Jesus . . . ‘fulfills’ the Torah, in the sense that his life is the typological completion of numerous OT
prophecies and stories” (Hays, 96).

118 Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament*, 52. In agreement with this view are Poythress, 266;
Carson, *Matthew*, 143-144.

119 Moo, “The Law of Moses,” 350-51; see, also Matt. 7:12.

120 John Frame, while coming to different ultimate conclusions, agrees at this point, stating:
In one sense, no law of God is ever set aside or abrogated (Matt. 5:17-20). But there are some laws that,
because of events in redemptive history, we come to observe, in our new covenant age, in very different
ways from what God asked of the old covenant Israelites. The commands to worship God by sacrifice, for
example, continue to be normative, but we now worship by the sacrifice of Christ . . . . What I mean [by
abrogation or set aside] is that such laws are no longer to be literally obeyed (Frame, 210, n. 14).

121 The phrase “these commandments,” tw/n evntolw/n (v. 19) would then refer, not to every
individual law of the OT simpliciter, but every OT law as fulfilled in Christ. Later in Matt. 28:19, containing the
last sentence of this Gospel, Matthew makes clear that the authoritative commandments binding upon Christians
This approach suggests that all Mosiac commandments – whether systematically classified as moral, judicial or ceremonial – must pass through the hands of Jesus, who provides the authoritative meaning of those commands as they are to be applied in the age of the new covenant. D. A. Carson contends that “We must rid ourselves of conceptions of fulfillment which are too narrow. Jesus fulfills the entire Old Testament…in many ways.”

We must avoid the tendency to reduce ethics to a simplistic formula of either accepting all Mosaic commands as binding unless the NT specifically tells us otherwise, or alternatively, ruling out every Mosaic command unless it is specifically reissued in the NT. Both options neglect the nuances of the NT and overlook our Lord’s role as Moses’ fulfiller and completer.

While we do not have detailed legislation in the new covenant, the NT witness nonetheless gives guidance in applying the Mosaic law to the Christian life. We must be the kinds of ethical interpreters like the “scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven…who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old,” (Matt. 13:51). This is precisely the way Matthew has presented Jesus’ handling of the Mosaic law in his Gospel. Some Mosaic commandments are received into the new covenant virtually unaltered, e.g., “Honor your father and mother” (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:2-3). Others are intensified, e.g., to the command “You shall not kill” (Exod. 20:13) is added the internal component of not

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3. Wells and Zaspel, 158; cf. 33-41.
5. As has been suggested throughout this thesis, even those laws that seem to be most fundamentally universal and perpetually binding on all people nevertheless still bear the mark of having been “handled” by Jesus.
exhibiting unrighteous anger (Matt. 5:21, 22)).

Some Mosaic commandments are used as general principles that are reapplied to other contexts, e.g., “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain” (Deut. 25:4) is transformed into a principle giving the “workman in the Lord” the “right to refrain from working for a living” (1 Cor. 9:1-12).

Finally, others come into the new covenant as being fulfilled in the person and work of Christ and become completely abrogated as to their original form, e.g., temple and food laws (Col. 3:16, 17). Jesus, either directly or by the Holy Spirit through his apostles, “determines what details remain and in what form, and it is in this form only that the law remains binding in this Messianic age.”

This understanding does justice to the tension found in Scripture between “fulfillment of all” and “abrogation of some.” The Mosaic law is not destroyed outright as a unit, but continues as a unit in a Christ-fulfilled form. Only the NT can provide the hermeneutical

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127 Our perspective upholds the continuing relevance of the Decalogue in its Christ-fulfilled form. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals the end to which the sixth, seventh, and ninth commandments pointed (an end which heightens the commandments’ rigor from their literal formulation on the stone tablets, while assuming the continuing validity of the more basic Decalogue principles).

128 In our view, it can also be persuasively demonstrated that Matthew labors to show that Jesus authoritatively fulfills the Sabbath commandment not by reinforcing its literal Mosaic observance, but in his person, as he does with the food laws and the sacrificial system of Israel. The Sabbath pericopes of chapter 12 are preceded by Jesus announcing that he will give “rest” to those who “labor and are heavy laden” (11:28). The historical examples Jesus uses from the OT in response to the charge against his disciples’ grain “harvesting” are not garnered to justify his disciples’ actions as being permissible within the bounds of the law. He does not engage in defending his halaka as being lawful under the Mosaic law. Rather the precedents are cited to show that if the Levites generally and David specifically had authority to overrule a Sabbath law with a temple law, how much more does the one “greater than the temple” (12:6) and “Lord of the Sabbath” (12:8) have the right to develop the law by his own highest authority (in the same fashion that he does with kosher laws). That is to say, Jesus is less concerned with exonerating his disciples than he is to remove the need to do so.

In Col. 2:16-17, Paul makes explicit what Matthew shows implicitly when he states: “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” Paul here equates food laws with the yearly, monthly and weekly holy days as all having been “substantiated” in Christ. Cf. Rom. 14; Heb. 4:8-11.

129 Wells and Zaspel, 127.

130 Moses is not struck down. Moses did not ‘fall’ (Luke 16:17). Nor was he ‘destroyed’ (Matt. 5:17) Moses is ‘fulfilled.’ In Christ, Moses reaches maturity and emerges in full bloom” (Ibid., 157).
data necessary to determine how any given Mosaic law is fulfilled.\textsuperscript{131} All of this is to say, new covenant law is “Christocentric.” Jesus is the Prophet greater than Moses and the Lawgiver.\textsuperscript{132} Our hermeneutical priority as new covenant believers should be to listen to him\textsuperscript{133} as the hermeneutical priority with respect to our moral obligations as he speaks directly and indirectly through the NT witness.

Jason Meyer points out that “The coming of Christ has caused a paradigm shift that calls for recalibrating all former commands in light of [Christ’s] centrality.”\textsuperscript{134} Circumcision of the flesh points forward to the circumcision of heart accomplished by Christ’s work on the cross (Col. 2:11-12) and the Spirit’s work in our hearts (Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3).\textsuperscript{135} The symbolism of circumcision was played out on the cross when Christ bore the covenant curse and was “cut off” (cf. Gen. 17:14) from covenantal relationship with the Father in place of and for the sake of his people (Gal. 3:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:21). Food laws and the language of “uncleanness” are applied to the ethical sphere as Christ has taken the “uncleanness” upon himself and through the Spirit empowers us to live ethically pure lives. Believers need not separate themselves from ceremonially unclean environments, but should rather live amidst the tainted world at large unstained from sin and in pursuit of that which is pleasing to God (John 17:15; James 1:27).

The temple is fulfilled in the person of Christ, who became the temple of God in the flesh (John 2:18-22) and “tabernacled” among us (John 1:18, literal translation). The temple of Christ’s body was destroyed and restored in three days (Matt. 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 131 In some cases, it may not be possible to know with certainty.  
132 Vern Poythress, 252-255.  
133 Deut. 18:15.  
135 Schreiner, Magnifying God in Christ, 212.
15:29; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4) and now believers, corporately (1 Cor. 3:16) and individually (1 Cor. 6:19), are the temple of God on earth. The details of the sacrificial system all point to Christ as the “lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,” (John 1:29). He is our once-for-all Sacrifice of atonement as well as our great High Priest who continually intercedes for his people (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:1, 10).

Even the commands of the Decalogue are transformed in Christ, as John Frame has summarized: 136

1. The first commandment teaches us to worship Jesus as the one and only Lord, Savior, and mediator (Acts 4:12, 1 Tim. 2:5).

2. In the second commandment, Jesus is the one perfect image of God (Col. 1:15, Heb. 1:3). Our devotion to him precludes worship of any other image.

3. In the third commandment, Jesus is the name of God, that name to which every knee shall bow (Phil. 2:10-11; cf. Is. 45:23).

4. In the fourth commandment, Jesus is our Sabbath rest. In his presence, we cease our daily duties and hear his voice (Luke 10:38-42).

5. In the fifth commandment, we honor Jesus who has brought us as his “sons” (Heb. 2:10) to glory.

6. In the sixth commandment, we honor him as the life (John 10:10, 14:6, Gal. 2:20, Col. 3:4), Lord of life (Acts 3:15), the one who gave his life that we might live (Mark 10:45).

7. In the seventh commandment, we honor him as our bridegroom who gave himself to cleanse us, to make us his pure, spotless bride (Eph. 5:22-33). We love him as no other.

8. In the eighth commandment, we honor Jesus as our inheritance (Eph. 1:11) and as the one who provides all the needs for his people in this world and beyond.

9. In the ninth commandment, we honor him as God’s truth (John 1:17, 14:6), in whom all the promises of God are Yea and Amen (2 Cor. 1:20).

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136 Frame, 400-401.
10. In the tenth commandment, we honor him as our complete sufficiency (2 Cor. 3:5, 12:9) to meet both our external needs and the renewed desires of our hearts.

Christian ethics is Christ-centered. He is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. As Sinclair Ferguson has stated:

The new covenant believer does not receive the moral law in the same way as did the believer under the Mosaic administration; now it is received in Christ who has fulfilled its ordinances and suffered the penalty of its breach in our place, as well as in the power of the Spirit who energizes Christ’s people to fulfill it in their own lives. The fruit which the Spirit produces fulfills and exemplifies all that was in view in the negatively-given Decalogue. ‘If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law’ (Gal. 5:18; cf. Rom. 6:14-15).  

The Utility of the Old Testament in Christian Ethics

Paul states in 2 Tim. 3:16 that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” Since the NT canon was still forming, Paul’s primary referent to “Scripture” was the Hebrew Bible (the Christian OT). So how does one affirm the whole canon as “profitable” in light of what has been argued above. We suggest several ways.

First, as we have argued above, there are individual laws from the Mosaic covenant that are taken up into the law of Christ. In fact, nine of the Decalogue commandments are incorporated as direct moral precepts in the law of Christ, and the Sabbath is taken up and applied as the NT has determined.

Second, Mosaic laws help to fill out the law of Christ where the application of a precept may extend further than what is explicitly set forth in the New Testament. Zaspel gives the example of the NT prohibition against porneia (“sexual immorality”). He argues

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137 Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 166.
138 The following three points arise out of Moo’s categories in Moo, “The Law of Christ,” 376.
that while the range of meaning is not spelled out explicitly in the NT, the OT helps us define the term to include bestiality, incest and other sexually deviant behaviors.\textsuperscript{139}

Third, the Mosaic law is an earlier witness in redemptive history to the person and work of Jesus Christ. All of “the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44) should expand our understanding and deepen our delight in and gratitude towards our Savior, who is the figure to which everything in the Scriptures ultimately points. Nothing in the Mosaic law is wasted. Every law serves its purpose honorably in directing us to the One who fulfills it.

Summary of the Chapter

The change of covenantal jurisdictions did not merely bring about a \textit{subjective} change through the empowering Spirit, but also an \textit{objective} change in the legal system flowing therefrom. In the words of Oliver O’Donovan:

Paul did not tell the Galatians that now, in the power of the Spirit, they could keep the circumcision and food laws of the OT without being overwhelmed by the burden of them. Nor did…Peter conclude that the Gentile Christians were perfectly able, in the power of the Spirit, to bear the yoke “which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10). If they had their gospel would have been a gospel of Spirit alone.\textsuperscript{140}

We have argued above that in the transition from the old to new covenant jurisdiction, not only is there a new relationship that is created between the covenant member and the Spirit, but in a surprising turn of events, there is a change of legal systems as well. The Scriptures make programmatic statements that the law has changed. Both the old and new covenant laws can be presented using the same basic structure, containing a common ethical basis in the nature of God and a common supporting principle of love. The element of discontinuity is significant, however, in the new focus on Christ as the ethical center of the law, which takes

\textsuperscript{139} Wells and Zaspel, 158.
\textsuperscript{140} O’Donovan, 23.
the apodictic and casuistic laws in a Christocentric direction. Significant discontinuity arises with respect to certain laws, which the NT clearly abrogates. However, the tension between the fulfillment of all of the OT laws and the abrogation of some of them is resolve in the person of Jesus, who fulfills the Mosaic law in his person and in his teaching, which leads to multiple ways in which OT laws are brought into the new covenant legal system.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Above we have presented a proposal for a Christian meta-ethic, or a set of foundational principles, upon which a Christian ethical system should be established. The text of Scripture has been our authority and guide in these matters, as we have attempted to present a biblical approach to the topic. In addition to being biblical, we have also sought to be Christ-centered. As Jesus is the focal point of redemptive history, so too he is the focal point for a distinctively Christian approach to ethics. Christ’s incarnation, sinless life, death, resurrection and glorification are the starting point for ethics.

We have presented three foundational pillars for Christian ethics. The first pillar recognizes that Christ’s coming affected a singular shift in redemptive history. The old covenant jurisdiction has come decisively to an end, and the long-promised new covenant jurisdiction has come to fruition. The old covenant was characterized by the law of Moses, sin, and ethical futility. However, in the new covenant “God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do,” (Rom. 8:3). He sent his Son to break into human history. “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.” (8:3-4).

The second pillar establishes a subjective element in showing the new relationship that the Holy Spirit has with the people of God in the new covenant. Unlike the members of
the old covenant, the new covenant members are universally regenerate and indwelt by the Spirit. The unbelieving branches of ethnic Israel are cut off, leaving the believing remnant, and believing Gentiles are grafted into the tree of true Israel. This new believing community is Spirit-led, divinely-enlightened, and freed to exercise ethical discernment spontaneously in the various situations of life.

The third pillar established an objective component of new covenant ethics in examining the nature of ethical norms under the new covenant jurisdiction. While we discovered that certain basic ethical principles were perpetually binding in all generations of mankind, the new covenant brings with it a distinctive legal system that has as its ethical center the person and work of Christ. The new covenant believer still places value on the OT, but no longer lives under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic legal system.

Thomas Schreiner sums up the distinctiveness of new covenant ethics by reminding us that “Keeping the law of Christ is possible only because the new age has been inaugurated in Christ and because the Spirit has been poured out into the lives of believers.”¹ May God continue to grant by his Spirit what he commands in accordance with his Divine will.

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