

John Spöbring

*Keep
His
Commandments*

*The place of Law
in the Christian life*

ERNEST F. KEVAN B.D. M.TH. PH.D.

THE TYNDALE PRESS

© The Tyndale Press

First Published

November, 1964

This monograph includes some material originally contained in the author's TYNDALE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY LECTURE, delivered in Cambridge on 4 July 1955, at a meeting arranged by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research, and subsequently published under the title The Evangelical Doctrine of Law.

5 FM 1

.24/ct

KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

THE PLACE OF LAW
IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

by

The Rev. ERNEST F. KEVAN, B.D., M.Th., Ph.D.

Principal, London Bible College

- 5 Reason necessary
7 the fall
9 Law in "New Creation"
10 the fall "in Law"
14 ceremonial Law
145 Sin
18 Law a means of grace
19 No covenant of works
20 Legalism
26 R 10,4
30 Legalism vs law

LONDON

THE TYNDALE PRESS

36 Law of Christ

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
I. BEHIND THE COMMANDMENTS	4
II. THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS	9
III. THE HISTORICAL PURPOSE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS	13
IV. THE GOSPEL AND THE COMMANDMENTS	24
V. NO ABROGATION OF THE COMMANDMENTS	31
VI. THE COMMANDMENTS TODAY	39

KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

IT is being asked in some quarters whether 'right' conduct is founded on some form of commandment which is unalterable, or whether it is a fluid concept, related to the changing circumstances of human life and the infinite variety of human experience. The problem is sometimes posed in the form of the question whether human conduct is to be governed by *law* or by *love*, it being supposed that these are opposite and contradictory. If the idea of *law* is accepted, the next question that arises is whether this law is 'natural', that is to say, known instinctively by all men everywhere, or whether it is to be identified more narrowly with the Ten Commandments. If it is the latter, then are these Ten Commandments applicable to those who have never known them? Further, if the Christian has been freed from the Law, are these Ten Commandments still binding on him? If, however, the idea of *love* is regarded as fundamental, it has to be asked how the behaviour of love is to be defined. Is everyone at liberty to do as he likes so long as he satisfies himself that he does it in love? And then, love for whom? For God? For himself? For his family and friends? For his 'neighbour'? For society in general? Further, what answer can man give to the sense of 'ought' that he finds within himself?

But are *law* and *love* necessarily in contradiction? Cannot a man love to do what he ought to do? Can he not do the thing he delights to do, and at the same time acknowledge that this is also what he ought to do? Would not the real 'love' in this take away servitude or priggishness? And would not the 'law' in this take away all caprice and humanistic egotism?

The apostle John seems to provide an answer in the words, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments',¹ and it is to an examination of the implications of this statement that the following pages are devoted.

¹ 1 Jn. 5: 3.

I

BEHIND THE COMMANDMENTS

It is important that the thinking on this subject should begin, not with an abstract conception of 'law', nor even with the clearly-formulated table of Ten Commandments, but with the awareness of the sovereignty of the Creator who has the right to command the spiritual beings whom He has made in His own image. Behind all *lex* is the *legislator*. Man is not answerable to abstract 'law' (if such a concept is intelligible), but to God. It is not by accident that the Bible opens with the majestic words, 'In the beginning God';² nor is it to be forgotten that the Decalogue begins with the affirmation, 'I am the Lord'.³

Behind the Law, then, is the Lawgiver. Law is law, only if God be God; and such is the connection between the Law of God and His personal majesty that, even if there had been no Law revealed, to know God Himself would thereby cause man to know His requirements. God's glory is the end of all creation, for the universe was created not only by God, but for Him.⁴ Man is to set God's glory before him at all times, and this means not merely that every departure from the Law of God is an affront to the glory of God — and so no sin may ever be called small — but also that the most indifferent action that can be conceived of shall nevertheless be done for God. The greatness of any sin must be measured, says William Perkins, not by what it is in itself, 'but by the offence it contains against God's majesty'.⁵ Man's creaturely relation, therefore, contains within it the admission of a personal obligation to his Creator whose demands are addressed to him in the form 'Thou shalt . . .'.⁶

The divine Law is the expression of the divine will, and in the absoluteness of that will God's right to command is valid, whether man consents to it or not. What, for purposes of distinction, has been called positive Law provides a conspicuous demonstration of the absoluteness of the divine right to command. Positive Law, in the strict sense of the word, is not necessarily connected with things that are essentially right or wrong, but is laid down independently. It gives voice to the absoluteness of divine authority in itself,⁶ and provides man with the opportunity of

² Gn. 1: 1. ³ Ex. 20: 2.

⁴ Rev. 4: 11. ⁵ *Golden Chaine*, in *Works*, 1591, p. 11.

⁶ The first appearance of positive Law is found in the prohibition made concerning 'the tree which is in the midst of the garden' (Gn. 3: 3).

expressing his homage to his Maker quite apart from any utilitarian or eudaemonistic considerations.

All law is essentially God's Law. It is that pattern of behaviour which God has written into everything that He has made.⁷ What are commonly called the 'laws of nature' are not much discussed in Scripture, if at all. God is regarded as immediately operative, and second causes are not explicitly recognized. Indeed, there is very much to be said for denying the use of the term 'law' to the physical sciences, for all they can deal with are the observed uniformities of nature. Law is ethical first: only in a secondary and metaphorical way can it be applied to what is physical.⁸ Law is an expression of will. The method of its realization may be by physical and necessary means, or it may be realized through the voluntary action of persons. Law in this latter aspect is by way of convenience commonly called 'moral' Law.

The moral Law of God is closely related to man's reason, and this is because man is a participator in that divine Reason which is at the heart of the universe. God is not the author of a great confusion, and it is consistent with His character as a 'faithful Creator'⁹ that the reason He has given to man and the sense of moral obligation shall not be at variance. Of all God's earthly creatures, man alone is aware of this divine Reason and of the obligation rightly to relate himself to it, and this, in turn, involves him in the further awareness of his obligation to obey the will of God as expressed in the divine commandments. This obligation of obedience — in distinction from the non-volitional aspect of conformity to Law in the lower orders of being — gives rise to the concept of moral Law.¹

⁷ Cf. R. Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

⁸ A. H. Strong remarks, 'Physical science, in her very use of the word "law", implicitly confesses that a supreme Will has set general rules which control the processes of the universe' (*Systematic Theology*, 1942 edn., p. 533). One of the important results of recent studies of Law has been the emancipation of the concept of Natural Law from its captivity to the empirical sciences and its reinstatement within the realm of moral studies. Such a reinstatement, however, opens up questions that have long been silenced and makes it necessary once again to endeavour to press behind ethical phenomena to their source in God the Creator. (See A. R. Vidler and W. A. Whitehouse, *Natural Law: A Christian Reconsideration*, 1946, p. 15.)

⁹ 1 Pet. 4: 19.

¹ The reservation of the term 'moral Law' to express this particular aspect does not deny that the whole of God's sovereignty over the universe is a truly moral government; for all His actions are directed to moral ends. It would nevertheless be incorrect to say that all parts of the divine creation are governed by the moral Law. God's government in all three realms of His creation — inanimate, animate, rational — is that of His sovereign will, but

Because the moral Law is so closely bound up with the rational nature of which man is possessed, it is sometimes spoken of as the Law of man's nature. This expression needs careful definition and is to be understood as meaning no more than that it is a Law derived from God's action in having made human nature in the way that He did. In the context of the present-day usage some ambiguity now attaches to the word 'natural', and it might be better to speak of 'primary' Law, rather than 'natural', for in the biblical sense a Law of nature means not a Law produced by nature, or merely perceivable in it, but a Law determinative of it. But perhaps it is too late in the day to suggest a new vocabulary.² Natural Law has no authority other than the authority of God through it, and it is never to be thought of as an entity in its own right.³ It should be further noted at this point that the fact that the moral Law and natural Law can be equated in this way implies nothing at all about man's present ability to obey the moral Law, nor even his power fully to perceive it.

Before the discussion of the natural aspects of the moral Law is left, it must be observed that any Law which was made by the Creator as one of the constituent principles of man's being, must also be an element of his *well-being*. Law is thus ever on man's side and is essential to his true liberty. The moral Law is 'not simply a test of obedience, but is also a revelation of eternal reality. Man cannot be lost to God, without being lost to himself.'⁴ 'The law is a fence, not only for ownership, but for care. God not only demands, but he protects. Law is the transcript of love as well as of holiness.'⁵ Nathanael Culverwel remarks that the possession of the Law is 'such a happy privilege' that violation of it is 'an injury to man's being',⁶ and Richard Hooker affirms that men find the Law to be the very 'mother of their peace and joy'.⁷ Indeed, not only is the Law suited to the nature

in the life of man, that government is effected through the reciprocal action of the human will.

² Richard Baxter uses the word 'primary' in *An End of Doctrinal Controversies*, 1691, p. 114.

³ An unguarded use of the word 'natural', in such an expression as 'the natural moral consciousness of the heathen', leaves open the inference that this 'natural moral consciousness' may be removed from the realm of the normative to that of the descriptive, thus reducing the entire moral life to a mere response to physical stimuli. The only safeguard against such a false inference is to insist that this moral consciousness is the reflection of the Law of God.

⁴ A. H. Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 539.

⁵ A. H. Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 542.

⁶ *Light of Nature*, 1652, pp. 29, 30, 46.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, I. xvi. 8.

of man, but, as Stephen Charnock says, it would not have 'been agreeable to the goodness of God' that man be without a Law.⁸

The question is sometimes raised as to whether the moral consciousness in man may be called by the name 'Law' and, if so, how this Law was made known to man. One of the answers to this is found in Romans 2: 14, 15, RV: 'For when Gentiles which have no law do by nature the things of the law, these, having no law, are a law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts.' The meaning of this passage appears to be that, although the Gentiles did not possess the Law in the form of the Mosaic system, they most certainly found that Law within themselves. There was a Law written⁹ on their hearts to which their consciences gave testimony. The account of this Law as having been 'written' in the heart of man implies that his knowledge of the moral Law was something more than the simple possession of rationality. It means that man was, from the very first, the recipient of a special revelation of the moral relation in which he stood to God and that this was part of his initial endowment as a being made in God's image.

With man's fall into sin the knowledge of the will of God became dimmed. His 'foolish heart was darkened', and he 'changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator'.¹ This loss of the clear knowledge of God's commandments is graphically described by John Flavel as 'the very unmaning of men'.² Man's knowledge of the Law of God was not completely extinguished, however, and remnants of it are evident in the witness of conscience to sinful men in 'their conflicting thoughts'³ by which they either 'accuse' or 'excuse' themselves. It is on the basis of this continuing knowledge that, in the judgment of God, sinners will be 'without excuse'.⁴ Man is, no doubt, a spiritual ruin, but, as with all ruins, the remains give a hint of what was previously glorious.

The definition of the effects of the Fall on man's knowledge of the Law is one of the most keenly-discussed problems of

⁸ *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 1682, in *Works*, II, p. 27.

⁹ Grammatically, the word 'written' is construed with 'the work', but it is clear that Paul is thinking, not narrowly of the actions themselves (see also verse 14), but of those actions *as required by the Law*. This is the sense supported by most New Testament scholars and is adopted by the RSV in its rendering, 'They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts.'

¹ Rom. 1: 21, 25.

² *The Reasonableness of Personal Reformation*, 1691, p. 3.

³ Rom. 2: 15, RSV.

⁴ Rom. 1: 20

present-day theology. Does fallen man possess any continuing knowledge of the Law of God? The answer to this question cannot be given independently of the view that is held of natural Law. Belief in a continuing knowledge and belief in natural Law stand or fall together. Without the latter the former would have no content; and without the former the latter would have no relevance. The same evidence that is available in support of the doctrine of natural Law is equally applicable to that of the continued knowledge of it, and C. H. Dodd gathers this evidence from both the Old Testament and the New.⁵ In doing this he provides the reply to the charge of J. Ellul that the doctrine of a continuing knowledge of the Law of God is built 'upon one single text'.⁶

The dimming of this knowledge of the Law of God occasioned the need for a fresh promulgation of it, and God purposed to do this in two ways. It was to be written 'in tables of stone', that is to say, presented in an outward manner; and it was to be written in the 'fleshy tables of the heart', that is to say, communicated in an inward manner.⁷ The former was the giving of the Law at Sinai under the 'Old Covenant', and the latter was the fulfilment of the 'New Covenant' in which God promised, 'I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.'⁸ In both of these fresh promulgations of the Law God is at work in saving and restoring grace.

⁵ *Natural Law in the Bible*, 1946.

⁶ *The Theological Foundation of Law*, Eng. trans., 1961, p. 62.

⁷ 2 Cor. 3: 3. ⁸ Je. 31: 33.

II

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The inquiry now to be made is whether the Ten Commandments express this primary Law which lies deep within man's moral awareness. Is there an essential identity between 'natural' Law and 'revealed' Law? The answer to this question cannot be found along the lines of anthropological research, because the moral judgments of fallen men are so seriously vitiated. The discussion must be conducted theologically. God is consistent with Himself. The Law of God written in man at his constitution, and which requires his moral likeness to God, can have been no other than the transcript of God's own perfections in the form of moral demands. Further, because man was made in God's image, the moral Law written within him must be part of that image.

When the Decalogue is examined, it is found to embody the highest conceivable ideas of worship and life; in other words, it expresses the same 'image of God' which is reflected in the primary Law of man's being.⁹ Moreover, it is this 'Law' which was in the heart of Christ,¹ obedience to which made Him so well-pleasing to the Father. The spiritual identity between the requirements of the Decalogue and the primary Law of man's being is demonstrated most clearly of all in the way of man's salvation. In the prophecy of the New Covenant, the recovery of man is presented in the form of a promise of God to put His Law into the hearts of His people. The fulfilment of this is expounded in the New Testament in such terms as being renewed 'after the image of him that created him',² and 'conformed to the image of his Son'.³ From this it is not difficult to conclude that the Ten Commandments truly express those moral requirements of God which were first impressed upon man as the bearer of the divine image.

A further element in the theological argument that shows an inward identity of the primary Law with the Ten Commandments is the evidence to be found in the Old Testament that the Law of God applied to men before the Sinaitic promulgation of

⁹ The New Testament affirms that 'the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good'; and all this is because 'the law is spiritual' (Rom. 7: 12, 14).

¹ Ps. 40: 8.

² Col. 3: 10.

³ Rom. 8: 29.

it. Patrick Fairbairn rightly points out that this evidence cannot be found by hunting for 'fragmentary indications' of the Law in the earlier period of mankind,⁴ nor even in the positive Law given to the progenitors of the human race, except in so far as this implies their knowledge of the commanding will of God in other respects, of their moral obedience to which the positive Law provided a test. 'Underneath those commands, and presupposed by them, there must have been certain fundamental elements of moral obligation in the very make and constitution of man.'⁵ These elements of moral obligation are grounded in the rational and volitional nature of man, that is to say, in his power to know and to choose that which is commanded, together with an initial desire to perform it. There is clear teaching in the New Testament that although the earlier generations were not under the Law in one sense, they were in another: 'for they were throughout generations of sinful men, subject to disease and death on account of sin, and sin is but the transgression of law; "where no law is, there is no transgression".'⁶ Strengthening this recognition of the divine imperative there is that in man which answers to it, an answering voice to which the name conscience is usually given. The important thing here is that it was 'not the authority of conscience merely, but the relation of this to the higher authority of God' that must have been man's assured conviction in the beginning of his moral life, and in so far as he disobeyed its warning voice he could not but know that it was the voice of God that he was virtually disobeying.⁷ Fairbairn points out that, strictly speaking, 'man at first stood *in* law, rather than *under* law — being formed to that spontaneous exercise of that pure and holy love, and which is the expression of the Divine image, and hence also to the doing of what the law requires'.⁸

During the early period, however, there are unmistakable tokens of God's sovereign relation to man and of His intention to visit with judgment man's rebellion against His will. Although no formal statements of Law were made, it is abundantly clear that God regarded man as in a relation of Law to Himself. The expulsion of man from the Garden, the overthrow of the sinful race in the Flood, and the destruction of the iniquitous Cities of the Plain are sufficient to demonstrate the existence of the

⁴ *The Revelation of Law in Scripture*, 1869, p. 64.

⁵ P. Fairbairn, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁶ P. Fairbairn, *op. cit.*, p. 34, where he quotes Rom. 5: 12, 13; 4: 15; 6: 2, 3.

⁷ Cf. P. Fairbairn, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

divine Law which man knew himself under obligation to obey. In the days of the Patriarchs, as in New Testament times, 'grace reigned through righteousness; and the righteousness at times ripened into judgment', and 'it was not left them to doubt that the face of God was towards the righteous, and is set against them that do wickedly'.⁹

The close connection between the Ten Commandments and the primary Law of God for man has recently been both challenged and defended, and a valuable discussion of the subject is conducted by Gustaf Wingren in *Creation and Law*. He affirms that it was '*their correspondence to the natural law*' which constituted the positive value of certain of the Old Testament commandments, for 'if we reject the concept of a natural law, then the Law of the Old Testament becomes an insoluble problem'.¹ The 'unrecognised demand', or the Law of conscience as it has more customarily been called, reveals itself to be at one with the Mosaic, and this is the generally understood meaning of Paul's words in Romans 2: 13-15.²

The commandments, then, do not stand alone, either in some inherent authority of their own, or in isolated dependence on the circumstances of their promulgation. They are continuous with the Law of God in man's spiritual nature and derive from the Being and sovereignty of God the Creator.

The identity of the Decalogue with the primary Law was the firm conviction of the Reformers and the Puritans who followed

⁹ P. Fairbairn, *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 78.

¹ *Creation and Law*, 1961, p. 124.

² Gustaf Wingren emphasizes the theological importance of thinking within the framework 'Law and Gospel', rather than in the neo-orthodox 'Grace and Law'. He contends that 'If, with Barth, we change law and Gospel into "Gospel and law" — in that order — something of the Bible's own content disappears' (*The Living Word*, 1949, p. 148n.). The arguments of this Swedish scholar were anticipated by a few years in the discussions reported in *The Biblical Doctrine of Justice and Law*. The question then raised was: 'Is the foundation of Christian ethics, and therefore of the Christian doctrine of law, to be found in the biblical message of the Lordship of Christ, as Karl Barth and others maintain? Or is it rather to be sought in the biblical doctrine of God's work as Creator and Preserver of his world through the law? Lutheran theologians such as Nygren and Aulén maintained this second position in opposition to Barth's Christological one' (H. H. Schrey, H. H. Walz, W. A. Whitehouse, *op. cit.*, 1955, pp. 38, 39). This protest against the neo-orthodox formula 'Gospel and Law' is not a denial that in the history of redemption the Covenant of Grace antedated the Sinaitic Law, but it draws attention to the priority of man's creature relation to God over his 'new-creature' relation. There cannot be any fundamental difference between 'natural' and 'Christian' ethics. 'Indeed', says Wingren, 'to raise this question means that we have failed to think of God as the One who acts in the universe and whose dealing with humanity will culminate in His Judgment of the whole world on the last day' (*Creation and Law*, p. 57).

them. Calvin writes, 'The very things contained in the two tables are, in a manner, dictated to us by that internal law, which, as has already been said, is in a manner written and stamped on every heart. . . . The Lord has given us his written Law, which, by its sure attestations, removes the obscurity of the law of nature.'³ Among the Puritans, for example, Richard Greenham affirms that 'the Patriarchs knew the moral law of God',⁴ and William Ames, anticipating a question at this stage, writes: 'But it may be objected, that if the moral were the same with the Law of Nature, it had no need to be promulgated either by voice or writing, for it would have been written in the hearts of all men by Nature.'⁵ The answer to this he finds in the fact that the Law of Nature was so 'expunged' that the special revelation of the moral Law became necessary in order to renew fallen man in the knowledge of it.

³ *Institutes*, II. viii. 1. ⁴ *Sabbath*, 1599, in *Works*, p. 162.

⁵ *Conscience*, 1639, Book V, pp. 107, 108.

III

THE HISTORICAL PURPOSE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Having acknowledged that the Ten Commandments represent essentially the primary Law found in the heart of man, we must now examine the historical place of those commandments and interpret their purpose. Historically, 'the law was given by Moses',⁶ that is to say, it was at a specific time and in specific circumstances; but this is not to be regarded as confining its purpose. It is important, therefore, not to lose sight of the fact that the Law of Sinai, though given to the Hebrew people, was fundamentally a revelation given to mankind as a whole. In a historically conditioned revelation, this primary limitation of it to one nation was to be expected. God made use of Israel, His 'servant', as the vehicle of revelation for the republication of that moral Law which had been originally written in man's heart. The giving of the Law must therefore be regarded as part of God's over-all purpose of revelation to the world at large.

The word 'law' in the Old Testament has a twofold use. Sometimes it stands for the divine imperative as such, and sometimes for the entire body of saving ordinances which belong to the divine covenant of salvation. This latter use seems to be merely an instance of the naming of the whole by the part, with the added recognition, however, that the saving covenant itself contained obligations within it.

The principal Old Testament word for 'law' is *torah*, coming from *horah*, meaning 'to point out', and it stands in the Bible for 'authoritative direction'.⁷ Other words standing for 'law',

⁶ Jn. 1: 17.

⁷ It is repeatedly remarked by writers on the Law of God that *torah* is not to be identified with commanding Law, but that it stands for the covenant instructions given by God to His people. In his examination of the Greek words for law, C. H. Dodd gives his opinion that *torah* is so closely represented by *nomos* (law), that it is almost identical with it. He points out that *didache* (teaching) is never used to stand for *torah*, and, although in one sense *nomos* is a misleading translation of *torah*, it sheds light on what *torah* became for Hellenistic Judaism (*The Bible and the Greeks*, 1935, p. 33). T. W. Manson reiterates the inadequacy of the translation of the word *torah* by 'law', but says that one aspect of God's sufficiency to His people as their king 'consists in his being the final authority on matters of right and wrong', and that this authoritative direction is embodied in the *torah*. He contends that although 'the idea that underlies the word *Torah* is not primarily the formulation of a series of categorical commands and prohibitions', this may be accepted as 'part of its meaning' (*Ethics and the Gospel*, 1960, pp. 28, 29). The impression gained from many of the discussions of *torah* and *nomos* is that the concessions

and with their own particular emphases, are: *mishpat*, meaning judgment, and more properly a decision given in an individual case and then established as a precedent; *hoq*, *huqqah*, meaning statute, from the verb 'to engrave' and hence signifying a fixed ordinance such as would be engraved in stone; *mizwah*, a general term meaning commandment; together with a number of less frequent use.

The history of the Old Testament reveals that *torah* had a threefold character: it was moral, ceremonial and judicial. It would not be correct to separate the laws into three divisions — for the Mosaic Law is one inseparable whole — but there are certainly some differences of character to be seen. A few recent writers profess to be unable to see these differences, but their arguments seem to ignore the significance of the attitude of Christ to the ceremonial aspects of the Law and to brush aside the treatment given to the Law in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Decalogue is undoubtedly the quintessence of the whole legislation and receives such outstandingly reverential treatment as invests it with a special and basic significance.

Attention is here given to the Law of God in its moral aspects, and the phrase 'the moral Law' will be used to indicate this. An account of the function of the moral Law in the historical purposes of God may be presented in two ways.

a. Law and sin

The close relation between Law and sin is exhibited in the vocabulary which the Bible employs on the subject of sin. *Chattath* means a 'missing of the mark', to which corresponds the New Testament word *hamartia*. The idea of 'losing one's way' or 'to be wanting' is also present in this word. The second term is *pesha'*, which means 'rebellion',⁸ and thence by inference 'transgression'; and the corresponding New Testament word is *parabasis*. The attitude signified by this term is that of revolt, or a refusal of subjection to rightful authority, a positive transgression of the Law. A third important term is *awon*, meaning 'perversion', or 'distortion'. In the New Testament this is *adikia*, signifying 'unrighteousness', a condition of being out of the straight. Each of these terms relates sin to Law, either

made to the customary idea of Law are sufficiently great to regard the theological difference of the words as negligible.

⁸ See N. H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, 1944, pp. 63, 64.

directly or indirectly, and it is impossible to define the biblical conception of sin except in such a relation. John sums it up by saying that sin is *anomia*.⁹

The Bible teaches that it was the entry of sin into the world that provided the occasion for the formal promulgation of the Law. 'The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane.'¹ This is demonstrated also in the negative aspect of the Decalogue.

The relation of Law and sin receives careful treatment in the writings of Paul. 'The law entered, that the offence might abound.'² He did not mean by this that the Law was non-existent until sin appeared, but that, when sin occurred as an event in the life of man, the Law was taken up by God as an instrument for dealing with it. In the Epistle to the Galatians the question is asked, 'Wherefore then serveth the law?' To this the reply is given, 'It was added because of transgressions.'³ The word *charin*, translated 'because' in this place, can point either backward to 'cause' or forward to 'purpose'. If the word be taken in the purposive sense — and this seems to be the way in which the apostle is using it here — the phrase means 'in order to set upon already existing sins the stamp of positive transgression of law'.⁴

⁹ 1 Jn. 3: 4. ¹ 1 Tim. 1: 9. ² Rom. 5: 20. ³ Gal. 3: 19.

⁴ M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 1887, Vol. IV, p. 123. Lightfoot says that this interpretation agrees with Paul's language in the Epistle to the Romans and seems also to be required by the expressions in the context. H. Alford also dismisses the suggestions that the phrase could mean 'for the detection' or 'for the repression' of transgressions, because 'the Apostle is not now treating of the detection of sin, or of the repression of sin, . . . but of the Law as a preparation for Christ, vv. 23, 24: and therefore it must be regarded in its propaedeutic office. . . . Now this propaedeutic office was, to make sin into TRANSGRESSION' (*Greek Testament*, 1863, in loc.; italics and capitals his). Frederic Rendall writes, 'But there could obviously be no transgressions until the Law existed, however grievous the moral degradation. The real meaning is that it was added with a view to the offences which it specifies, thereby pronouncing them to be from that time forward transgressions of the Law. . . . These sins prevailed before the Law, but by pronouncing them to be definite transgressions it called in the fear of God's wrath to reinforce the weakness of the moral sense and educate man's conscience' (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, in loc.). P. Fairbairn does not feel happy about this way of understanding the sentence, but nevertheless seems to come round to it as the substantial meaning of the words. He writes, 'The sense of the passage will then be, the law was given on account of the proneness of the people to transgress; pointing merely to the fact, but with a certain implication in the very manner of expression, that the evil would not thereby be cured, that transgressions would become but the more conspicuous.' The tendency of the Law was thus to render transgressions 'both more palpable and more aggravated' (*The Revelation of Law in Scripture*, p. 394).

The New English Bible captures this meaning in its rendering, 'It was added to make wrongdoing a legal offence.'

Viewed in its deepest aspects, sin has always been transgression: it has ever been a violation of the holy Law of God. That Law written in the heart of fallen man asserted itself but feebly, however, and the habitual sinner could live in relative unconcern.⁵ Not until Law had been explicitly defined, therefore, as it was at Sinai, could the seriousness of human sin be exhibited. Legal concepts of sin are not on any account to be dismissed as artificial: rather are they the necessary expression of sin's heinousness and of the abhorrence with which God must view it.⁶ Law, therefore, does not give to sin its awful, wrath-deserving nature: it merely provides a category in which to express this terrible fact. This is the meaning of such statements as 'where no law is, there is no transgression';⁷ 'until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law';⁸ and 'the law entered, that the offence might abound'.⁹ This form of the relation between Law and sin may be regarded as belonging to the judicial function of the Law.

But there is a relation between Law and sin which may be called psychological, and the apostle writes: 'Sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting: for apart from the law sin is dead. . . . But when the commandment came, sin revived, . . . and the commandment, which was unto life, this I found to be unto death: for sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled me, and through it slew me.'¹

Anyone who has taken the problem of right conduct seriously knows how provocative a law can be to the breaking of it. A box labelled 'Do not open' creates an almost irresistible desire to open it. A book placed on a list of prohibited volumes, 'Not to be read', becomes at once a book which the average person immediately wants to read. John Bunyan has depicted this situation most clearly. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* Christian finds himself in the house of one called the Interpreter. The Interpreter then took him by the hand, says Bunyan, 'and led him into a very large parlour, that was full of dust; because never swept;

⁵ Rom. 5: 13; 7: 9.

⁶ This is what Olaf Moe means when he writes, 'The law produces a qualitative intensification of sin: sin becomes guilt' (*Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Vol. I, Article Law, p. 689).

⁷ Rom. 4: 15.

⁸ Rom. 5: 13.

⁹ Rom. 5: 20.

¹ Rom. 7: 8-11, RV.

the which, after he had reviewed it a little while, the Interpreter called for a man to sweep. Now, when he began to sweep, the dust began so abundantly to fly about, that Christian had almost therewith been choked. Then said the Interpreter to a damsel that stood by, Bring hither water, and sprinkle the room; the which when she had done, it was swept and cleaned with pleasure.

'Then said Christian, What means this?

'The Interpreter answered: This parlour is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the Gospel: the dust is his original sin, and inward corruptions that have defiled the whole man. He that began to sweep at first is the law; but she that brought water, and did sprinkle it, is the Gospel. Now, whereas thou sawest that so soon as the first began to sweep, the dust did so fly about, that the room by him could not be cleansed, but that thou wast almost choked therewith; this is to show thee, that the law, instead of cleansing the heart (by its working) from sin, doth revive, put strength into, and increase it in the soul, even as it doth discover and forbid it; for it doth not give power to subdue.'

'The law acts as a spur and provocative, rousing the power of sin to conscious activity. However good in itself, coming into contact with man's evil flesh, its promulgation is followed inevitably by transgression. Its commands are so many occasions for sin to come into action, to exhibit and confirm its power.'² This can scarcely be called the purpose of Law, but belongs rather to its effects.

There is, however, another result of the work of the Law in the conscience of the sinner which may truly be regarded as belonging to its purpose. This is directly connected with the salvation of the sinner,³ and is seen in the power of the Law to bring conviction of sin.⁴ 'By the law is the knowledge of sin.'⁵ 'I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.'⁶ The Law brings sin home to the conscience, and when the apostle demonstrates how sin is 'shown to be sin', and rendered 'exceeding sinful', he says it is 'by the commandment'.⁷

² G. G. Findlay, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 1897, pp. 213-4.

³ 'The Law is ancient grace', Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, I. vii.

⁴ Cf. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1892, Vol. I. pp. 265-6.

⁵ Rom. 3: 20.

⁶ Rom. 7: 7, RV.

⁷ Rom. 7: 13.

' Lord, how secure my conscience was,
 And felt no inward dread!
 I was alive without the law,
 And thought my sins were dead.
 My guilt appeared but small before,
 Till terribly I saw
 How perfect, holy, just and pure,
 Was Thine eternal law.
 Then felt my soul the heavy load,
 My sins revived again,
 I had provoked a dreadful God,
 And all my hopes were slain.⁸

' The Law itself made me leave the Law ' is how Lukyn Williams paraphrases Galatians 2: 19.⁹ It is the sharp needle of the Law that makes way for the scarlet thread of the gospel. The Law is that jailor who keeps the sinner in ward, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed;¹ it is that *paidagogos* who disciplines the youth into an understanding of right and wrong;² it is the guardian and the steward who take charge of a boy's affairs until he enters upon the liberties of full 'sonship';³ it is that system of the temporal world which provides the elementary lessons of spiritual reality.⁴

The Law, therefore, is in no way against the promises of God.⁵ On the contrary, it is a means of grace. 'The law is intermediate between the ancient covenant and the completed gospel — between the promise and the fulfilment. It was a divinely-appointed means of revealing human need and of hastening its satisfaction. We thus see how completely is the law auxiliary to the gospel of grace and faith in the historic development of the Kingdom of God.'⁶

b. Law and life

The relation between Law and life needs to be considered negatively first of all, and it must be understood that the Law was never given by God as a way of salvation. It is true, of course, that the demands of the Law, with the severe penalties attaching to the breach of them, lent some plausibility to the notion that

⁸ Isaac Watts. ⁹ Galatians, 1910, p. 52. ¹ Gal. 3: 23. ² Gal. 3: 24.

³ Gal. 4: 1, 2. ⁴ Gal. 4: 3. ⁵ Gal. 3: 21.

⁶ G. B. Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament*, 1899, p. 366.

a man might be saved by Law-keeping; but this appearance of plausibility was due to an entire misconstruction of the purpose of Law and was the result of isolating it from its place in the Abrahamic covenant of grace.

To speak of man being delivered from the Law as a 'covenant of works'⁷ is to speak mistakenly, for the Law never was such a covenant. The inscription of God's Law in the heart of the first man was at no time a means of *securing* life: it was the expression of a life that was already *possessed*. God gave man spiritual life and then gave man His Law. Similarly, in the subsequent promulgation of the Law at Sinai, the Law was given, not that the people might thereby earn salvation, but because after the manner of the Old Testament dispensation they were *already* a saved people.⁸ In so far, however, as the Law given at Sinai was not something entirely new, but was the underlining of a Law that was already written within man's heart, it had the effect of putting strength into the condemnations registered by conscience. The Law of Sinai drew attention to the Law written within man's own being, and it confronted man afresh with the kind of moral conduct that was expected of him.

Certain passages in the New Testament are sometimes thought to imply that the Old Covenant was a way of salvation by works, but a careful weighing of their meaning yields no such conclusion. The Lord's words to the rich young ruler⁹ were spoken by Him, not to encourage the young man to press on with his Law-keeping, but to teach him the opposite, and to help him to see the futility of expecting salvation from that quarter. The Lord is using the Law as a 'schoolmaster' (*paidagogos*) to bring him to faith.¹

The same is true of Paul's words when he says, 'The law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.' He is merely confronting the Judaizers on their own ground in order to show them that salvation by Law — if its possibility were to be conceded — rested on a totally different principle

⁷ What is known as Covenant Theology lacks scriptural foundation so far as a 'covenant of works' is concerned, for there seems to be no trace of it in either the Old Testament or the New. The 'covenant of grace' is present everywhere, and with this part of the Covenant Theology there can be no disagreement. If there was any element of 'covenant' in the original relation between God and men, it was a 'covenant' that partook of the nature of grace rather than works. The Covenant Theologians themselves acknowledged this element of grace in the so-called 'covenant of works', and this adds all the more to the confusion of their teaching on this particular point.

⁸ Cf. A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, 1904, p. 281.

⁹ Lk. 18: 18-23. ¹ Gal. 3: 24.

from salvation by faith.² After ruling out the idea of salvation by Law-keeping as contrary to the principles of the gospel, the apostle goes on in this section of his Epistle to point out that grace was historically prior to law, and that the divine covenant of grace 'that was confirmed before of God, in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect'.³

The failure to perceive the historical purpose of the Law constitutes the spiritual tragedy of the Jewish people. It is summed up in the sorrowful words of the apostle Paul who describes his fellow-countrymen as those who, 'being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God'.⁴

This great perversion of Law goes by the name of 'legalism'. Legalism may be defined as a doctrine of salvation by conformity to Law, as distinguished from salvation by grace, and it shows itself in a tendency to observe the strict letter of the Law rather than its inner spirit. It is the state of mind in which fellowship with God is gauged by the amount of religious rites performed.⁵

It cannot be too emphatically stated that the Old Testament is not legalistic.⁶ The foundations of Israel's relation to God were those of grace and faith. When the Old Testament makes blessedness to depend upon obedience to Law, this is not the same as affirming that Law-keeping is the basis of the divine favour. The divine favour is present from the beginning, and the Law provides at once the test and the nourishment of faith for those who walk with God. The Law of Sinai belongs to the covenant of grace. Israel's knowledge of God began with the call of Abram and in the faith with which he responded to that

² Gal. 3: 12, quoting Lv. 18: 5. This latter passage does not teach justification by Law-keeping, but merely lays down the terms of the life of the people of God who have already gained acceptance with God on the basis of divine grace. Only as the people walked in the way of God's commandments would they truly 'live', for God's commandments were made for man's joy. P. Fairbairn has a note on Romans 7: 10, 'the commandment, which was ordained to life' (lit., which was for, or unto life), and affirms that it 'cannot mean that it was given to confer life, or to show the way of obtaining it, for this is denied of any law that ever could have been given to sinful men (Gal. 3: 21). It simply means that the law was given to subserve or promote the purposes of God in respect to life' (*The Typology of Scripture*, 1882, Vol. II, p. 165). This same stress is made in connection with the life of the Christian (where no question of salvation by works is implied) in Romans 8: 6 where the apostle says, 'To be spiritually minded is life and peace.'

³ Gal. 3: 17. ⁴ Rom. 10: 3.

⁵ W. S. Bruce, *The Ethics of the Old Testament*, 1909, p. 79; cf. also the definition in the *Oxford Dictionary*.

⁶ W. S. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

call. This is described clearly enough in the book of Genesis;⁷ it is listed in the story of faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews;⁸ and it is made the basis of a crucial argument in Galatians.⁹ Faith is ever the subjective condition of Old Testament religion: it is the active religious principle as much of the Old Testament as of the New. The promulgation of the Law of the Lord by Moses is, therefore, at the farthest possible remove from the introduction of a legalistic principle into religion. It is plainly demonstrable from the Old Testament that the works which are of any religious value are themselves the fruit of faith. The same truth is echoed by Hosea¹ and Micah.² The scribe who accosted our Lord about the chief commandment of the Law well understood that for a man to love God with all his heart was more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices,³ and our Lord told him that he was not far from the kingdom.

Legalism enters when obedience to the commandment does not stand in direct relation to faith. Some individual commandments — particularly the ceremonial ones — were capable of being *outwardly* performed without faith. This was an inevitable weakness in a system that consisted of external ordinances: it belonged to the limitations attaching to the educational purpose of many of the Old Testament ordinances. The rank and file of the people, whose spiritual insight was not of that high quality that the book of Psalms represents, lapsed again and again into a state of legalistic irreligion. It is for this reason that the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament may be described as a resistance to the tendency to turn a religion of faith into a religion of legality. At the heart of Old Testament religion there lies the reverent fear and love of God, and it comes to glorious fruit in the high virtues of Old Testament piety.

Unfortunately, the lofty things that may be affirmed about the prophetic ministry of the Old Testament cannot be said about the Judaism of New Testament times. In its general character this was undiluted legalism. W.O.E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson give a judicious account of this legalism as follows: 'The main tendency in this development was that the observance of legal precepts came to be looked upon as meritorious. The merit acquired by observing the details of the Law's requirements justified a man in the sight of God, and thus constituted a claim for reward. It followed logically that the attainment of salvation

⁷ Gn. 15: 6.

⁸ Heb. 11: 8-19.

⁹ Gal. 3: 6-9.

¹ Ho. 6: 6.

² Mi. 6: 6-8.

³ Mk. 12: 33.

Did they make the Law or Law-keeping a god?

was a matter of purely human effort. Belief in divine grace was, of course, not absent; but the sense of justification felt by a zealous observer of the Law had the effect of obscuring the fact of the initial divine guidance; and in practice the fulfilment of works of the Law came to be looked upon as the means of salvation.⁴

Such legalism as this can be described in no other way than as an abuse of the Law. Any attempt to offer Law-keeping as a basis of acceptance with God, or any proposal to turn the religious life into the barren observance of Laws, is alien to the genius of the Old Testament and destroys the reality of religion.

The relation of Law and life must now be seen in its divinely-appointed positive aspect. The people of Israel were the object of the divine grace. Israel was a covenant people whom God had redeemed, and the Law was given to them in order to indicate the kind of behaviour that was to be expected in a redeemed people. The requirements of the Law 'are laid upon God's people as an unconditional obligation, as a distinctive mark whereby they are separated from all other people, and as a means whereby they may attain to their true blessedness'.⁵

In some respects the Law may be regarded as an amplification or exposition of the demand which God made upon Abraham at the time of the covenant. 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee.'⁶ It is in a context of this kind that Israel's sins are called a transgression of the 'covenant'.⁷ Covenant fidelity on the part of Israel meant life according to the will of God revealed in His holy Law. The Law is thus to be regarded as a rule of life for those who had been brought into saving relations with God, and the preamble to the Decalogue reminds Israel of this.⁸ The Law is the *torah*, which, as has been shown above,⁹ provides the 'authoritative instruction', or 'pointing out', which Israel's covenant life needed.

'It in no way conflicts with the fundamental idea of Old Testament salvation . . . that in the book of the covenant . . . God lays moral injunctions on His people, and makes "life" contingent on obedience to them. . . . No one can honestly enter into a covenant without intending to keep its conditions to the letter. Hence in Israel the law is certainly not, in the first instance, a mere demand of a moral kind, given to man as man. It is the unfolding of the divine life for this people and for this age. It

⁴ *Hebrew Religion*, 1937, p. 407.

⁵ T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, 1945, p. 291.

⁶ Gn. 17: 1, 2. ⁷ Ho. 8: 1. ⁸ Ex. 20: 2. ⁹ See p. 13.

is, in the first instance, a gift of grace. It shows the people a way of life which embraces and defines all the circumstances of their natural life. A non-Israelite or an unbeliever cannot fulfil it at all; but a believer will not feel its restrictions irksome. In so far as he is a believing child of his people, he cannot for a single moment refuse to obey it.¹

The Law, then, when rightly viewed, constitutes the rule of life for the people of God and is to be understood within the context of the Abrahamic covenant. The weals and woes are not so much judicial pronouncements as indications of the spiritual structure of life.²

¹ Hermann Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, 1892, Vol. II, pp. 36, 37.

² See Dt. 6: 1-25; 10: 12-21; 11: 1-32; 28: 1-68; 30: 15-20.

IV

THE GOSPEL AND THE COMMANDMENTS

At this stage in the present discussion it is necessary to examine the New Testament teaching on the continuance of the Law in the context of the gospel. Inquiring into the source of this teaching, it must be observed that our Lord had nothing derogatory to say about the Law. His opposition in this connection was not to the Law, but to the Pharisaic abuse of it.³ His denunciation of legalism implied no decrying of the Law. God's grace cannot destroy God's Law, any more than His Law can destroy His grace. To those who thought our Lord had come to abrogate the Law, He answered, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.'⁴ Our Lord held a high view of the Law and firmly deprecated any neglect of it. 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.'⁵ 'Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'⁶ He presented true religion as a keeping of the Law, but without any trace of legalism. James Denney draws attention to our Lord's expression of the Golden Rule⁷ and comments: 'Such summaries lift the soul above all that is statutory and positive in the law; in other words, they enable it to conceive of religion as the keeping of law, and yet as without any element of legalism.'⁸ 'It is clear', writes T. W. Manson, 'that Jesus set up a standard of obedience to God every whit as rigorous as the most rigorous exposition of the Law. It is a mistake to suppose that Jesus, in this matter, is nearer to the school of Hillel than to the school of Shammai. The exact contrary is the case.'⁹ Our Lord required

³ The parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard is an outstanding example of the repudiation of merit as a claim upon God's favour, and that of the Pharisee and the Publican is an exposure of the vain confidence of meritorious Law-keeping.

⁴ Mt. 5: 17, 18. ⁵ Mt. 23: 2, 3. ⁶ Mt. 5: 19. ⁷ Mt. 7: 12.

⁸ *Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. J. Hastings), Article *Law* (*In the New Testament*), Vol. III, p. 74.

⁹ *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 200.

something which went beyond the prescriptions of tradition: 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.'¹ The excess of righteousness which our Lord demands of His disciples is one that derives from an increased estimate of the Law. Says W. C. Allen: 'The contrast implied seems to be this: the scribes have what they call "righteousness", which is dependent upon observance of the Law; they are right, but, since the understanding of the law which I give you goes deeper than does theirs, your "righteousness" will necessarily be in some sense more abundant than theirs.'² In contemporary Jewish teaching righteousness was understood to be related to Law, and our Lord did not deny this in the least, but He spiritualized and deepened it.

In surveying the teaching of the apostle Paul, it is hardly necessary to quote the extremely familiar passages in Galatians and Romans where he rejects any and every suggestion that a man can secure justification by 'the deeds of the law'.³ The system by which righteousness is earned by merit, this 'tyranny of legalism', was broken for Paul when he was shown the righteousness which is of God by faith. At the same time, the apostle can think of no more exact way of expressing the behaviour of the Christian man than to say that 'the righteousness of the law' is fulfilled in him.⁴ 'He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law, . . . therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.'⁵

There are one or two statements made by the apostle, however, which require careful examination, because they seem to deny the compatibility of the keeping of the commandments with the liberty of the gospel. One of the most important of these is found in Romans 10: 4: 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.' What is meant by saying that Christ is the 'end' of the Law? There are two ways in which the word 'end' may be understood.

Many expositors, among whom is Augustine, understand the word 'end' to mean 'termination'. The sentence would then read, 'Christ is the termination of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth'. In a way that appears to be a little

¹ Mt. 5: 20.

² *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Article *Righteousness*, Vol. X, p. 784.

³ Rom. 3: 20; Gal. 2: 16.

⁴ Rom. 8: 4, an expression which must bear the meaning of *active* fulfilment in the believer's life, not merely Christ's fulfilment on his behalf in justification.

⁵ Rom. 13: 8, 10.

arbitrary and oblivious of a possible alternative meaning, *The New English Bible* fastens an interpretation on the sentence by rendering it, 'Christ ends the law'. By Erasmus, Calvin, Bengel, and others, the word is taken to signify 'completion' or 'fulfilment', and thus the sentence is understood to say that Christ is the realization of the aim or purpose for which the Law was given.

The resolution of the question raised by these two views must be attempted by a broad study of the context. Paul is here expressing his concern about those who are 'going about to establish their own righteousness'.⁶ They seek to do this by strenuous keeping of the Law, an endeavour which seems so plausible and right to the natural man. The sinful man finds, however, that the Law drives him with a rigour that exhausts him. The Law is too high in its demands, and man falls back from it defeated. This, of course, was the very purpose that God had in mind by thus confronting man with His holy Law. The Law entered that the offence might abound, and its particular function was not the production of a meritorious salvation but 'to fix upon us the bondage of a salutary despair'.⁷ The Law is disciplinary and morally educative, but it never could give life.⁸ It was 'weak through the flesh'.⁹ It would seem that there is room for both of these major interpretations of the word 'end', for the Law dispensationally considered reaches its terminus in the fulfilment of its spiritual purpose in directing the sinner to his refuge in Christ.¹

It is important to notice that the assertion about Christ being 'the end of the law' is made with particular reference to 'every one that believeth'. It is not a decree about the abolition or abrogation of Law. It is an experimental truth. The humble and contrite sinner who trusts in the saving work of Christ has given up confidence in 'the works of the law',² and thus 'Christ is the end of the law' so far as he is concerned. The terrors and demands of the Law have been terminated in Christ, the sinner has been led to Christ, and 'there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus'.³

⁶ Rom. 10: 3. ⁷ A. R. Vidler, *Christ's Strange Work*, 1944, p. 42.
⁸ Gal. 3: 21. ⁹ Rom. 8: 3.

¹ A number of the writers who favour the meaning 'termination' acknowledge that there is also a subsidiary purposive connotation in the word, and so the cleavage of opinion is not hard and fast.

² The Covenant Theologians and the Puritans maintained that Law as a 'covenant of works' was gone and it remained only as a 'rule of life'. The point is correct, but the terminology is wrong; because, as the Puritans themselves taught, the Law was never intended as a way of salvation.

³ Rom. 8: 1.

On two occasions the apostle speaks of believers as 'dead to the law',⁴ and, on another, he teaches that they are 'not under the law'.⁵ These expressions, which may be regarded as theologically synonymous, refer strictly to the doctrine of justification and mean that the believer does not look to the Law for his acceptance with God. They have no bearing on the continuing authority of the Law as a rule of life to the believer, and they certainly do not teach that it is the Law that is 'dead'.⁶

Another important statement of the apostle calls for attention, because in it he affirms that 'the law is not made for a righteous man'.⁷ Paul is not here undertaking a theological exposition of the use of the Law, however, but is simply making an observation which must be understood in relation to his immediate purpose. That immediate purpose seems to be to show that the primary aim of the Law is to deal with wrong-doing. It does not mean that the righteous man does not acknowledge the right of God to rule over him and to command his obedience. The main weight of the apostle's statement is that the Law is not directed against the righteous man: it neither condemns him, for he is justified in Christ, nor irks him, for the grace of God has given him a new delight in it.⁸ The Law is made — that is to say, promulgated in its statutory form — because of those who are unrighteous,⁹ and Anthony Burgess reasons that if Adam had continued in innocence there would not have been such a solemn declaration of Law by Moses, for it would have remained clear in men's hearts. The apostle's meaning, therefore, is that though God gave a positive law to Adam, for the testing of his obedience and the expression of his homage, yet He did not give it to him in this outward and formal way.

In his positive teaching, the apostle Paul describes himself as 'being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ'.¹ The believer is not *anomos*, but *ennomos*. He is not *without* the Law, but *in* the Law to Christ, that is to say, within the compass of the Law for both instruction and subjection.² The addition of

⁴ Gal. 2: 19; Rom. 7: 4. ⁵ Rom. 6: 14, 15.

⁶ Confusion sometimes arises on account of the AV rendering of Romans 7: 6. This should read as in RV. ⁷ 1 Tim. 1: 9.

⁸ Cf. Ps. 119: 20, 35, 113; Jb. 23: 12. ⁹ Cf. Gal. 3: 19. ¹ 1 Cor. 9: 21.
² *Ennomos*, 'in the law', is the positive way of stating what was negatively expressed by the phrase 'being not without the Law', but because of the ambiguity of *ennomos*, aggravated by the unfortunate AV mis-translation, it is better to state the concept in its negative form and understand Paul to mean that he and other believers are 'not outside' God's law. Cf. a good discussion by F. Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 1893, Vol. II, pp. 38, 39, and by G. G. Findlay, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, in loc.

the word *Christou* (of Christ) is significant: it is, as Origen picturesquely puts it, 'Jesus who reads it to us'.³

Thus, although commandment-keeping is not constitutive of Christian life, the believer is not for that reason to be regarded as out of relation to Law. This is borne out by the many applications of the various commandments which Paul and other New Testament writers make to bear on Christian behaviour. The apostle James points out that believers who sin become 'convinced of the law as transgressors';⁴ while those who continue in 'the perfect law of liberty'⁵ and 'fulfil the royal law'⁶ are blessed.

The New Testament nowhere teaches that the believer is finished with the Law. Most of the arguments against the Christian practice of the Law are based on a confusion of justification with sanctification. The believer has certainly ended his relations with the Law so far as his justification is concerned, but justification does not stand alone. Justification must lead to and find its proper fruit in sanctification; and it is in this respect that the believer has by no means finished with the Law of God. Obedience to the Law now becomes characteristic of his new life, just as disobedience to it had been characteristic of his old life. J. N. Darby — whose opinions still influence many people today — is a writer who reflects the constantly recurring tendency in evangelical thought to confuse justification with sanctification.⁷ He is quite right when he says that the Law which has not been kept must condemn the sinner, but he cannot be held to be right when he infers from this that the Law has no other function. The Law still voices the requirements of God. The condemnatory aspects of the Law have been met for the sinner by the Saviour's death, but the obligation of the creature to the Creator still remains. Because a man has been pardoned for his failures he will endeavour not to repeat them and will not presume to think that the original Law of his being no longer holds any authority. J. N. Darby perpetuates the sentiments of the Antinomians⁸ of the seventeenth century whose slogan was, 'You cannot be under the mandatory power of the Law without the damnable.' This false assertion was sufficiently answered by the orthodox Puritans at the time. Samuel Bolton, one of these Puritans, remarks, 'The law sends us to the Gospel, that

³ Quoted by A. R. Vidler, *Christ's Strange Work*, p. 50.

⁴ Jas. 2: 9.

⁵ Jas. 1: 25.

⁶ Jas. 2: 8.

⁷ See *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, ed. Wm. Kelly, Vol. X.

⁸ See below, section V, p. 33.

we may be justified, and the Gospel sends us to the law again to enquire what is our duty being justified.⁹

This insistence on the place of the Law in the life of the believer is sometimes pilloried as 'legalism'. The biblical way of describing legalism is found in Paul's account of those who desired to be 'of the works of the law'.¹ Thomas Bedford uses this phrase and asks the question, 'But what is it to be of the works of the Law? Is it to take directions from the Law for our ways and walking? Is it to yield obedience to the Law? No: it is to seek justification and salvation by the merits of works done in obedience to the Law.'² The essence of the current controversy over the alleged legalism of this teaching about the Law is found in the distinction which Thomas Bedford draws and which so many modern writers seem not to perceive.

A perusal of recent books on Christian ethics reveals no little evidence of an inability to distinguish between Law and legalism, between what is 'legal' and what is 'legalistic'. Why must obedience always be deprecated as 'blind'?³ Why must T. W. Manson speak of 'cast-iron Law' when describing the Law of the Old Testament?⁴ Why must the phrase 'Law and Legalism'⁵ meet the reader everywhere he turns, as if Law could not exist without legalism? Christ undoubtedly 'undermined legalism', as S. Cave affirms,⁶ but He did not thereby undermine the Law. This author seems to think that to use such a phrase as 'a legal conception of God'⁷ is sufficient to silence all further argument, but the expression needs definition before it can be effectually employed. It is easy enough to become indignant about 'the tyranny of legalism',⁸ and to proclaim Paul's 'radical breach with legalism',⁹ about which nobody disagrees. But what support does this give to the opinion that the Law is no longer a valid expression of man's relation to God?¹ It requires a great amount of reading of alien ideas into Paul's words to believe that he ever thought of the Law as among the 'antagonists' of man and 'severed from God'.² This is an outstanding example of the contemporary confusion between the concepts of Law and legal-

⁹ *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 1645, p. 98.

¹ Gal. 3: 10.

² *An Examination of the chief Points of Antinomianism*, 1646, p. 13.

³ W. Lillie, *The Law of Christ*, 1956, p. 25.

⁴ *Ethics and the Gospel*, p. 66.

⁵ S. Cave, *The Gospel of St. Paul*, 1928, p. 132.

⁶ *The Doctrines of the Christian Faith*, 1931, p. 66.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

² Cf. *The Gospel of St. Paul*, p. 130. The 'hypostasization' seems to be overdone.

ism.³ 'Legalism' is an 'antagonist' and a 'tyrant', but not Law. J. Fletcher makes a pungent remark exposing this superficial identification of 'legal' and 'legalistic' when he says, 'Pharisees are no more truly legal than antinomians are truly evangelical.'⁴

Once legalism is distinguished from 'law', it can be seen for what it really is. It is the abuse of the Law as a means of attaining a meritorious standing before God; it is the use of the Law 'as pharisaically conceived',⁵ and an employment of it in its outward form without regard to its inward demands. That the natural man has an inclination to legalism no-one can doubt: he 'is always prone to conceive his relation to God in terms of law', and to 'turn his obedience into a yoke of bondage'.⁶ He thinks that the Law can 'be tamed and used as a means to self-justification',⁷ and, having adopted a legalistic attitude, he defends himself in it by an appeal to the negative form of the Decalogue.⁸

The temptation to take a legalistic view of life is an ever-present danger and may not be ignored in any assessment of the present situation within the Christian Church. Emil Brunner reveals the same confusion about legalism,⁹ but his remark that 'we are not Antinomians because we do not wish to be legalists'¹ could be equally well reversed and affirmed in defence of the position taken here that 'we are not legalists because we do not wish to be Antinomians'.²

³ Cf. J. S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, 1935, pp. 113, 291, 292.

⁴ *Second Check on Antinomianism, 1771-1775*, in *Works*, Vol. I, p. 338.

⁵ A. B. Bruce, *St. Paul's Conception of Christianity*, 1894, p. 300.

⁶ C. A. A. Scott, *Christianity according to St. Paul*, 1927, pp. 41, 45.

⁷ H. H. Schrey, H. H. Walz, W. A. Whitehouse, *The Biblical Doctrine of Justice and Law*, p. 89.

⁸ L. H. Marshall, *The Challenge of New Testament Ethics*, 1946, p. 44.

⁹ See the article, *Legalism*, by the writer, in *Vox Evangelica*, ed. R. P. Martin, 1963, pp. 50-57.

¹ *Divine Imperative*, Eng. trans., 1937, p. 138.

² See Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 1964, pp. 257-261.

NO ABROGATION OF THE COMMANDMENTS

The Bible gives no warrant for the opinion that the Law has been abrogated. There is no hint anywhere in the New Testament that the Law has lost its validity in the slightest degree, nor is there any suggestion of its repeal. On the contrary, the New Testament teaches unambiguously that the Ten Commandments are still binding upon all men.³

Certain arguments to the contrary have been brought forward, however, and these require some attention.

The first may be called a *moral argument*, and it is based on the fact of the Fall. It is urged that because fallen man is unable to keep the commandments he is therefore under no obligation to do so. But to whom was the Law of Sinai given, if it was not to fallen man? So far from being abrogated by the Fall, the Law presupposed it. Moral inability does not cancel obligation. The Law is 'a rule of our duty, not of our strength'.⁴ A man is not released from his debt merely because he has squandered his money and has no means of paying it. John Barret remarks that such a view is 'as if a subject, by breaking the Law, could make himself lawless', and he regards it as altogether unreasonable to think that God would 'take man's failing in his duty as a ground of excusing him from his duty'.⁵ There cannot, therefore, be any diminution of the demands of the Law while man continues to be man. The duty of obedience is based on a law, says David Clarkson, 'whose obligation arises from our very nature and being, and is founded in the relation between God and man'.⁶ Man's obligation to his Maker is indelible, and this is because it is 'the authority of God' which constitutes 'the formal object of our obedience, or the reason why we observe the things he hath commanded'.⁷

A second argument against the universal and permanent applicability of the Ten Commandments is a *historical argument*. It is inferred that because the Ten Commandments were given to the

³ See above, section IV, pp. 24ff. and Jn. 14: 15, 21; 15: 10; Rom. 1: 18-3: 20; 7: 12; 8: 4; 13: 8-10; 1 Cor. 7: 19; Gal. 5: 14; 1 Jn. 2: 3-8; 3: 22-24; 5: 2, 3.

⁴ Thomas Blake, *Covenant of God*, 1653, p. 107.

⁵ *Treatise of the Covenants*, 1675, pp. 76, 77.

⁶ *Justification*, 1675, in *Works*, Vol. I, p. 297.

⁷ Stephen Charnock, *Attributes*, in *Works*, Vol. II, p. 494.

Hebrew people, they applied only to them and not to the world at large.

Part of the reply to this is found in the arguments which have demonstrated the relation of the Ten Commandments to the primary Law of man's being. These show that the Ten Commandments are valid for all men everywhere and for all time; they are absolute and admit of no historical or geographical limitation. The Scripture allows no exceptions to the authority of the Law of God, even among those who are said to be 'without the law', that is to say, those who never had the clear enunciation of it that was given by Moses. All men are without excuse, every mouth is stopped, and the whole world is proved to be guilty before God.⁸

A third argument which denies the universal validity of the Ten Commandments is a *philosophical argument*. In the existentialist reconstruction of the concept of commandment it is maintained that no-one is truly under the commandment unless he has it spoken to him. According to this philosophical view the only reality is the one that is experienced: the command of God therefore has no existence outside of the mind of the man to whom it is particularly directed. The existence of the commandment is therefore entirely subjective to man himself. This is a view which removes all culpability from men for their wrongdoing, because they have never truly 'heard'. The arguments of existentialism lead to an outright rejection of the Law of God from the position of dignity and authority which it holds in the Bible. If it is necessary to accept premises of this kind in order to deny the applicability of the Law of God to all men everywhere, then so serious a departure has been made from the plain teaching of the Scripture that the denial need no longer detain the discussion.

If the Law is not abrogated by man's failure, neither is it abrogated by his recovery. Grace does not destroy Law. God never abdicates His throne, even in grace, and when God in Christ became the Saviour of men He did not cease to be their Sovereign. Grace ever reigns 'through righteousness',⁹ and the answer which the apostle Paul gave to the question, 'Do we then make void the law through faith?' was, 'God forbid: yea, we establish the law.'¹ The Law is established not only in the substitutionary death of Christ on behalf of the believer, but also in the 'newness of life'² in which the believer is enabled to walk by virtue

⁸ Rom. 3: 19. ⁹ Rom. 5: 21. ¹ Rom. 3: 31. ² Rom. 6: 4.

of the resurrection life of Christ.

It has been observed above that the Antinomian argument was that, with the end of the condemning power of the Law, there came also an end to its commanding power. But Anthony Burgess refutes the argument that the Law cannot be a law unless it be a cursing law, by asking what kind of Law that was which was given to the holy angels and to Adam in his innocence,³ and he reasons with considerable cogency that if the Law be abrogated to believers under the New Covenant then it must also have been abrogated to believers under the Old.⁴

As a formal doctrine, Antinomianism broke out violently at the time of the Reformation, through a misunderstanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. John Agricola put forward the view at Wittenberg in 1538 that, since our Lord had satisfied the demands of the Law, the believer was free from all obligation to it even as a rule of duty. Needless to say, the Reformers repudiated such a view, and it has always been rejected by the healthy conscience of the Christian Church.

A positive statement about the relation of the Law to the Christian is provided in the famous exposition of this given by the Reformers in the Formula of Concord in 1576. The Formula reads: 'It is established that the Law of God was given to men for three causes: first, that a certain external discipline might be preserved, and wild and intractable men might be restrained, as it were, by certain barriers; secondly, that by the Law men might be brought to an acknowledgment of their sins; thirdly, that regenerate men, to all of whom, nevertheless, much of the flesh still cleaves, for that very reason may have some certain rule after which they may and ought to shape their life.'

Berkhof points out that 'There is some difference between the Lutherans and the Reformed with respect to this threefold use of the Law. Both accept this threefold distinction, but the Lutherans stress the second use of the Law. In their estimation the law is primarily the appointed means for bringing men under conviction of sin and thus indirectly pointing the way to Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners. . . . The Reformed do full justice to the second use of the law, . . . but they devote even more attention to the law in connection with the doctrine of sanctification. They stand strong in the conviction that believers are still under the law as a rule of life and of gratitude.'⁵

³ *Vindiciae Legis*, 1646, p. 6. ⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 215.
⁵ L. Berkhof, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1941, p. 615.

While it is perfectly true, as another passage from the Formula of Concord says, that the works of the regenerate are performed as freely and spontaneously 'as if they have never received any precept', it is still also true that the Law has a place in the believer's life. It has an important didactic function. On this Calvin remarks: 'For although the Law is inscribed and engraven on their hearts by the finger of God, that is, although they are so excited and animated by the direction of the Spirit, that they desire to obey God, yet they derive a twofold advantage from the law. For they find it an excellent instrument to give them, from day to day, a better and more certain understanding of the divine will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the knowledge of it. . . . In the next place, as we need not only instruction, but also exhortation, the servant of God will derive this further advantage from the law; by frequent meditation on it he will be excited to obedience, he will be confirmed in it, and restrained from the slippery path of transgression.'⁶

The Law is of use to believers 'as a standard of obedience to God in the life of faith, within which the fruits of the Spirit may be brought forth'.⁷ When the believer reckons himself 'dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God',⁸ what content is he to give to the concept of being 'alive unto God'? It is the content of doing His will and pleasing Him in all things. But what is this will and pleasure of God, and how is it known? The answer is found in the Law of God provided for the redeemed as a rule of life. It may well be that when believers are perfectly sanctified and glorified they will have no need for explicit legislation, but, as Paul has written, 'the law entered because of transgressions', and so long as sin dwells in the believer he needs the instruction of the heavenly *torah*, the light of the holy Law of God.

Wesley has learned from Calvin here. He writes: 'The third use of the law is, to keep us alive. It is the grand means whereby the blessed Spirit prepares the believer for larger communications of the life of God. I am afraid this great and important truth is little understood, not only by the world, but even by many whom God hath taken out of the world, who are real children of God by faith. . . . Allowing, then, that every believer has done with the law, . . . yet, in another sense, we have not done with this law: for it is still of unspeakable use, first, in convincing

⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II. vii. 12.

⁷ A. R. Vidler and W. A. Whitehouse, *Natural Law*, p. 25. ⁸ Rom. 6: 11.

us of the sin that yet remains both in our hearts and lives, and thereby keeping us close to Christ, that His blood may cleanse us every moment; secondly, in deriving strength from our Head into His living members, whereby He empowers them to do what His law commands; and, thirdly, in confirming our hope of whatsoever it commands and we have not yet attained — of receiving grace upon grace, till we are in actual possession of the fulness of His promises. . . . On the one hand, the Law continually makes way for, and points us to, the gospel; on the other, the gospel continually leads us to a more exact fulfilling of the Law.'⁹

If the experience of the grace of God has any influence at all on the believer's obligation to fulfil the Law of God, it is rather to increase that obligation than to diminish it.

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

The continued authority of the Law in the life of the Christian believer finds its basis primarily in man's creaturely relation to God. The believer never ceases to be a creature under moral obligation to his Maker. The fact that he is a 'new creature' gives him the moral ability to obey, which in his fallen state he had lost, but it leaves him a creature still. To deny the requirement of obedience to the Law of God is to deny man to be man, and also to deny God to be God. It is by His Law and its accompanying sanctions 'that *God continues to be God* and to rule His Creation'.¹ The challenge to God's sovereignty contained in man's fall must be matched in his restoration by the renewed recognition of that sovereignty.

This means that obedience shall be rendered to the Law *as law*. Believers will do what is right, not merely because it conforms to their renewed ideas, but because it is commanded. There is an 'ought' in the New Testament² which must not be ignored. The situation is clearly described by Anthony Burgess when he says that the question is not whether the things of the Law are done, but whether, when these things are done, they are done by the believer is commanded by the Law of God.³ Obedience, therefore, is to be given, not merely on the basis of its congruity with reason, but ultimately on the authority of God. It is to be rendered, not because of an inclination to do so, but solely because

⁹ Wesley, *Christian Theology*, ed. Thornley Smith, pp. 175, 176, 179.

¹ G. Wingren, *Creation and Law*, p. 66 (italics his).

² 1 Jn. 2: 6; Rom. 8: 12. ³ See *Vindiciae Legis*, pp. 51, 277.

the Law of God requires it. To understand that Law is to be obeyed *because it is law* is of primary importance for the establishing of an adequate biblical doctrine of sanctification. The insistence on this truth carries the subject into the very citadel of the believer's will. Only the heart that can say, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God',⁴ can be adjudged truly constituted godly. Calvin writes, 'The Lord, in delivering a perfect rule of righteousness, has reduced it in all its parts to his mere will, and in this way has shown that there is nothing more acceptable to him than obedience.'⁵

The 'law of Christ'⁶ which determines Christian behaviour is real Law: it has the character of specific injunctions and of authoritative demands. Any change in relation to Law that occurs in Christianity is not in the Law but in the believer. Law is the same all the time: it still condemns and it still commands. To say that Christian conduct is now governed by holy principles is a convenient expression if it is the motives of Christian life to which attention is to be drawn, but it is incorrect to employ it as if it meant any withdrawal or modification of the Law. The believer's joyous use of the Law is consistent with the highest ideas of ethics, but it does not change Law into 'not-Law'.

The use of the word 'Law' has proved too strong for some. The fear of becoming 'legalistic' has intimidated them into refraining from employing the word in connection with Christian experience, and they have substituted 'morality' in its place. This is begging the question, and assumes that morality is to be defined in terms of an end or an ideal rather than a Law. Whatever decorative name may be proposed for this aspect of spiritual life — and some such term as 'ruling principle'⁷ is often proposed — the concept of Law is inescapable. 'The moral ideal or end towards which our action is directed not only exercises an attractive power over us, but manifests itself also as an authority which makes demands upon us.'⁸

It must never be forgotten, however, that Law and obedience

⁴ Ps. 40: 8. ⁵ Institutes, II. viii. 5.

⁶ Gal. 6: 2. See the author's *The Law of God in Christian Experience*, 1955, for a more extended account of what this implies for Christian behaviour, and cf. also C. H. Dodd.

⁷ It is a complete misrepresentation, for example, to say that the 'principle of Law' has been replaced in the gospel by the 'principle of love', for in a truly active and submissive manner 'love is the fulfilling of the law' (Rom. 13: 10).

⁸ Ehrhardt, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Article *Nomism*, Vol. IX, p. 380.

hold their important place as the *form* of the moral life, not as its *substance*. To substitute form for substance is to stray into that legalism which is an abuse of the Law; but to ignore the form is to lapse into a mystical type of piety which may soon become a cloak for impiety.⁹

There is a welcome return in some recent works to a more theological view of ethics. C. J. Barker, for example, writes, 'No ethics that are not religious can be finally satisfying. . . . They cannot give the final ground of their own precepts, nor answer the questions to which they inevitably give rise.'¹ The commandments 'are addressed by a personal Being to personal beings', says A. R. Vidler, and God's will confronts men 'as a demand'.² This is a recognition that the dimly-perceived 'I ought' of natural morality is not displaced by the revelation of God, but is overshadowed by the 'Thou shalt' of the divine imperative.³ Lukyn Williams, who considers 'the law of Christ' to be not a series of commands, but subjection to a Person, remarks nevertheless that 'of course, in one sense, moral obligation to a Person is the highest Law of all'.⁴ In opposition to the subjectivism of humanistic ethics, C. H. Dodd writes, 'Paul certainly did not mean to say that there is no law for the Christian except his own "inner light". . . . It is, indeed, difficult to maintain, in face of the New Testament, the once-popular view that Christianity is a "religion of the spirit" in a sense which contrasts it with "religions of authority". Its basic postulate is the Kingdom of God; and a kingdom implies authority. . . . Clearly, then, it would be a mistake to think that the difference between the "administration of the written word" and the "administration of the spirit" is precisely that between objective and subjective standards, or between authority and freedom. . . . The law of the new covenant . . . is aboriginal. It is the law of our creation, and its field of application is as wide as the creation itself.'⁵ All the while that a subjective or humanistic standard is accepted, there will be inadequate conceptions of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

⁹ See Ehrhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

¹ *The Way of Life*, 1946, p. 13.

² *Christ's Strange Work*, pp. 7, 24.

³ Cf. N. H. G. Robinson, *Christ and Conscience*, 1956, p. 76. R. W. Dale writes, 'What conscience requires is the strong support of a Supreme Personal Will, enforcing righteousness; and where the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the apostles is frankly received this support is given. Men are not left to order their life according to an ideal law, the ideal law is expressed and asserted in the Will of the Personal God; and to keep the law men have to obey Him' (*The Old Antinomianism and the New*, 1887, *op. cit.*, p. 16).

⁴ *Galatians*, p. 131.

⁵ *Gospel and Law*, 1951, pp. 70, 71, 79.

T. W. Manson points out that in the Old Testament 'the last ground of moral obligation is the command of God', and he attacks the 'ethic of self-realisation' by saying that it is this 'which leads to the explicit or implied corollary that wrongdoing is most harmful to the wrong-doer. So we get in many quarters a general attitude that forgets the wrongs done to the victims of crime . . . in concern for the psychological health of the criminal and enthusiasm for reforming him. The Prodigal does not say, "I am the victim of a psychological upset"; he says, "I have sinned *against heaven* (i.e., God) and in thy sight" (Luke xv. 21)'.⁶

⁶ *Ethics and the Gospel*, pp. 19, 64 (italics his).

VI

THE COMMANDMENTS TODAY

The problem which constantly crops up throughout any discussion of the Law of God is that of trying to understand the precise significance of the Commandments today.

An examination of the Sinaitic Law in its Old Testament context draws attention to its dispensational limitations. While it is eternal in its principles, it was presented in the garments of specific time and place.⁷ The Commandments were given to a particular people, and at a critical moment in their history. They were related to the act of God in delivering them from slavery in Egypt and were concerned with their appropriate behaviour in view of this. At the time of their promulgation the Commandments were written on stones and then placed in the 'ark of the covenant', the sacred chest that was associated with the local manifestation of God's presence.

Circumstances of this kind put the Decalogue on the same dispensational level as the other enactments of the Mosaic dispensation. These enactments constitute a unity, and are treated as such in the New Testament. This gives some justification for thinking that it would be proper to regard the Decalogue as sharing in the typical character which belonged to the whole Mosaic legislation.

The dispensational transition from the Mosaic Law to the Law as it is 'in the hands of Christ' must, therefore, be understood as proceeding in a way parallel to the dispensational transition from the Levitical sacrifices to Christ's 'one sacrifice for sins for ever'. The same essential principles are operative in both. The Sinaitic form of the Law of God comes to its 'fulfilment' in the promulgation of its unaltered demands under the terms of the gospel. It sheds its dispensational garments, but continues in its nature as law. From being a law of condemnation and provocative of rebellion, it has become the Law loved and obeyed with spiritual freedom, no longer exerting its pressure on unwilling hearts, but finding a response of inward delight to all its demands.

⁷ Some of these dispensational limitations are seen, for example, in the physical circumstances reflected in the Commandments themselves, such as the references to a neighbour's ox and ass. Allusions to items of property of this kind tend to make the Decalogue appear to be somewhat irrelevant to modern times. Perhaps the particular form of the Sabbath Law might also fall within the category of dispensational limitation.

This difference in the appearance and effects of the Law comes about through the fulfilment of God's new covenant promise that He would write His Law in the hearts of His regenerated people. From this it can be seen that the change is not strictly a change in the Law at all, but in the heart and will of the believer.⁸

What, then, shall be said of the Commandments today? To the believer they remain both unchanged in their nature as commandments, and undiminished in their requirements. The Commandments are still commandments, and the Law is still law. It has been demonstrated above that although the believer is a 'new creature' he is none-the-less still a creature and subject to his Creator's Law.

The Law of God comes in this 'new covenant' form, however, only to those who are 'in Christ', and it is this fact which provides the answer to a further question which asks more precisely about the application of the Ten Commandments to the non-Christian. The non-Christian, who, by definition, is one who keeps himself 'outside' of Christ, by that same act keeps himself outside of the blessings that come through Christ, and so is directly answerable to God in terms of His holy Law. In this respect, the typical nature of the Mosaic Law is not without serious significance to the unbeliever. A type not only looks forward to its antitype in historical fulfilment, but also looks back to its antitype in the form of the 'original' of which it is the representation. This 'original' is the primary Law of man's obligation to his Maker, nothing of which has been abrogated. The Ten Commandments thus confront the non-Christian with the clear enunciation of the Law of God which he already finds in his conscience and by which he is to be judged at the Last Day.

'To love God is to keep his commands; and they are not burdensome.'⁹

⁸ This has one of its clearest demonstrations in the positive summary of the Law given by Christ in the form of the two demands of love: Mt. 22: 34-40.

⁹ 1 Jn. 5: 3, NEB.

SOME TYNDALE PRESS BOOKS

An Introduction to the Old Testament

By Professor E. J. YOUNG. Writing in the *Bulletin of the Society for Old Testament Study*, Dr. H. H. Rowley comments as follows: 'The author of this full-scale Introduction is well known as a conservative scholar who is widely read and who is at pains to give his readers a fair account of the views he is unable to share. All of these qualities are well exemplified here. . . . Of the conservative books on this subject this is easily the best and the most enlightened in its treatment of others. . . .'

432pp. 21s.

New Testament Introduction

By DONALD GUTHRIE, B.D., M.Th., Ph.D., Lecturer in New Testament Language and Literature, The London Bible College. A thorough, clearly-written, scholarly introduction to each of the New Testament books with an analysis of the contents. The conclusions reached are based on a most careful study of the evidence. Full account is taken of all recent literature, and there are detailed bibliographies.

Part 1: The Gospels and Acts *In preparation.*

Part 2: The Pauline Epistles 320pp. 18s. 6d.

Part 3: Hebrews to Revelation 320pp. 18s. 6d.

The Book of the Law

Studies in the Date of Deuteronomy

By G. T. MANLEY, M.A. This is a positive and objective treatment of the question of the origin of Deuteronomy. It examines the structure, style and narrative of the book, also considering the evidence from geographical data and from comparison with legal codes. The question is of considerable interest and importance because of the wider issues involved.

192pp. 12s. 6d.

The Acts of the Apostles

The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary by F. F. BRUCE, M.A., D.D., Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester. An important book for all students of the New Testament.

Second Edition. 512pp. 25s.

Write for Catalogue to the Publishers

THE TYNDALE PRESS

39 BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1