

In Defense of Moses: A Confessional Critique of Kline and Karlberg

D. Patrick Ramsey

I. Introduction

It would be hard to overstate the importance of understanding the correct place and role of the Mosaic Covenant in redemptive history.¹ This is so because it is directly tied to the proper relationship between law and grace, which is fundamental to many important doctrines. As John Newton once observed, “Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes.”² It should not surprise us, then, that “differing systems of theology often have radically different conceptions of the proper relationship between Law and Gospel.”³

Notwithstanding such importance, the church as a whole has not been overly successful in discerning the Christian’s relationship to Moses. Some within the church have idolized him,⁴ others have hated him,⁵ and still others are simply bewildered by

D. Patrick Ramsey is pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church, London, Ky.

¹ Alexander Stewart writes, “That the *Mosaic Economy* was a dispensation of the *Covenant of Grace*, is a highly important position. An error on this point is fundamental . . . the Church was as really under the *Covenant of Grace* at Sinai, as Abraham at Mamre, or the Christian Church at the present day” (*The Tree of Promise: The Mosaic Economy a Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace* [1864; repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1999], 28-29; emphasis his).

In his book on *Divine Covenants*, A. W. Pink says, “We deem it of great importance that a clear conception be obtained of the precise nature and meaning of that august transaction which took place at Sinai, when Jehovah proclaimed the Ten Commandments in the hearing of Israel.” Online: http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Divine_Covenants/divine_covenants_05.htm.

John Murray concludes that a good deal of misconception pertaining to the relation of the law to the believer is due to “the misrepresentation of the Mosaic economy and covenant in relation to the new covenant” (*Principles of Conduct* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], 195).

² John Newton, “Letter XXX” in *The Works of John Newton* (repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1985), 1:340. See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “God’s Promise Plan and His Gracious Law,” *JETS* 33 (1990): 289; Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 181.

³ Wayne Strickland, preface to *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian* (ed. Wayne Strickland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 9.

⁴ E.g., legalists like the Judaizers.

⁵ E.g., antinomians like John Agricola who declared, “The Decalog belongs in the courthouse, not in the pulpit. All those who are occupied with Moses are bound to go to the devil. To the gallows with Moses!” Interestingly, Agricola believed he was following Luther who taught that Moses is dead for the Christian and that the believer is free from the Law of Moses though bound by natural law or conscience and the NT. See

him.⁶ Sadly, all too few have clearly and properly assessed and appreciated his role in the history of redemption.

It is my conviction that the historic Reformed faith, as it is expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, has essentially understood the correct purpose of the Mosaic Covenant in redemptive history. This is not to say, however, that the Reformed community has been and is agreed upon this issue. There have always been some within the Reformed camp who have departed from the position stated in the Confession. Two contemporary examples are Mark W. Karlberg and his mentor Meredith G. Kline.⁷

Although they claim to hold to the classic form of covenant theology,⁸ this article will attempt to demonstrate that their view is incompatible with the Westminster Standards. In order to do so I will first summarize their view of the Mosaic Covenant, then present some reasons why this view is inconsistent with the Westminster Standards, and finally answer some possible objections.

Peter Lillback, *The Binding of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 69, 72; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 310-11.

John Stott, following Luther, says, “God’s dealings with Abraham and Moses were based on two different principles . . . God’s dealings with Abraham were in the category of ‘promise,’ ‘grace,’ and ‘faith.’ But God’s dealings with Moses were in the category of ‘law,’ ‘commandments,’ and ‘works.’ The Christian religion is the religion of Abraham and not Moses, of promise and not law; and Christians are enjoying today the promise which God made to Abraham centuries ago” (*The Message of Galatians* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1968], 86-87).

Similarly the note on Exod 19:5 in the *New Scofield Bible* says, “To Abraham the promise preceded the requirement; at Sinai the requirement preceded the promise. In the New Covenant the Abrahamic order is followed. The Christian is not under the conditional Mosaic Covenant of works, the law, but under the unconditional New Covenant of grace.” Cited by O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 216.

⁶ John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London: Simeon Ash, 1645), 95.

⁷ Mark W. Karlberg, “Reformed Theology as the Theology of the Covenants: The Contributions of Meredith G. Kline to Reformed Systematics,” in *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator* (ed. Howard Griffith and John R. Meuther; Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press, and Jackson, Miss.: Reformed Theological Seminary, 2000), 235.

⁸ Meredith G. Kline, “Gospel until the Law: Rom. 5:13-14 and the Old Covenant,” *JETS* 34 (1991): 434. See Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray’s and Meredith G. Kline’s Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1999), 237.

This seems to be a reversal of Kline’s earlier declaration that Theonomy, which is certainly at odds with his view of the Mosaic Covenant, was the view of the WCF. See his “Comments on an Old-New Error: A Review Article,” *WTJ* 41 (1978): 173.

II. *Kline and Karlberg's View of the Mosaic Covenant*

According to Kline and Karlberg the Mosaic Covenant is to be interpreted as a covenant of works, although not exclusively. As Mark Karlberg writes, "The Mosaic Covenant is to be viewed in *some sense* as a covenant of works."⁹ In fact, sound biblical exegesis requires that one "not reduce the Mosaic Covenant to a covenant of 'pure grace,' with no element of works in its administration."¹⁰

To understand properly the role of works one must divide the Mosaic Covenant into two distinct spheres or levels.¹¹ There is a foundational level, which deals with the spiritual or eternal salvation of Israel. According to this aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, the Israelites were saved by grace through faith. The Mosaic Law was never offered to Israel as a way to earn or receive eternal life. Spiritually and eternally speaking, the Mosaic Covenant was part and parcel of the Covenant of Grace. Hence, Karlberg writes, "According to the Scriptures, OT religion is one in substance with the New. There is no other name under heaven whereby one must be saved from wrath and condemnation that is coming."¹²

The second, or upper, level of the Mosaic Covenant refers to the temporal life of Israel in the Promised Land. This aspect of the Mosaic Covenant operates according to a "works" principle. Hence, God related to Israel differently in spiritual matters than He did in temporal ones. Furthermore, this temporal relationship came to an end when the New Covenant was inaugurated, thereby prohibiting its application to the church today.¹³

The promise of the "upper level" is temporal blessing and prosperity whereas the threat is temporal cursing and removal from the Land. The promises and threats of this temporal relationship are found in such places as Lev 26. Thus, the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant refer to the "upper level."

The condition of the "upper level" is "work" or "obedience to the law." In this sphere the Israelites, both individually and corporately,¹⁴ lived under a works/law/merit-inheritance principle. Israel would prosper in the Promised Land *if* they obeyed the law but would be removed *if* they transgressed. As Karlberg writes, "Under the Sinaitic arrangement obedience to the law (i.e., 'work') was the means of inheriting temporal reward, prosperity in the land of Canaan."¹⁵

⁹ Mark W. Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant," *WTJ* 43 (1981): 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹ Kline, "Gospel until the Law," 435. See Karlberg, "Theology of the Covenants," 245.

¹² Karlberg. "The Search for an Evangelical Consensus on Paul and the Law," *JETS* 40 (1997): 565.

¹³ Karlberg, "Justification in Redemptive History," *WTJ* 43 (1981): 236.

¹⁴ Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Overland Park, Kans.: Two Age Press, 2000), 322; Karlberg, "Justification in Redemptive History," 233.

¹⁵ Karlberg, "Evangelical Consensus," 568.

This condition is both similar and dissimilar to the condition of the Covenant of Works. It is similar in that the condition is obedience to the law apart from faith in Christ. In other words, the principle of works/law-inheritance is distinct from and antithetical to the faith-inheritance principle. Karlberg writes:

Israel's retention of the land was contingent upon her own compliance with the law of Moses. The grounds for the temporal reward was legal obedience. To paraphrase Scripture: "Do this and you, ancient Israel, will live and prosper in the land I have given you. Otherwise, I, the Lord your God, will bring a curse on the land." In the period from Moses to Christ theocratic Israel was placed on probation, subject to the stipulations and sanctions of the covenant established at Sinai.¹⁶

Likewise, Kline asserts that the "law" in Rom 5:13b "refers to the old covenant, the covenant that was not of faith but of works."¹⁷ In short, if Israel wanted to remain in the Promised Land, they would have to obey (as opposed to trust and obey).

For this reason, Kline draws a "radical contrast" between the Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant.¹⁸ And Karlberg claims that "in some very crucial sense the law of Moses is deemed to be contrary to the law of Christ."¹⁹

The "upper level" condition is dissimilar from the condition of the Covenant of Works in two respects. First, the condition of works in the Covenant of Works was related to eternal life, whereas in the Mosaic Covenant it was related to temporal matters only. As Kline writes, "The works principle in the Mosaic order was confined to the typological sphere of the provisional earthly kingdom which was superimposed as a secondary overlay on the foundational stratum."²⁰ Legalism occurs when one applies this "works" principle beyond temporal matters to spiritual ones (i.e., the "foundational level") as was the case with the Pharisees.²¹

Second, the Covenant of Works required perfect obedience while the works-inheritance principle under Moses only demanded "the necessary measure of corporate righteousness."²² Kline explains, "Flawless obedience was the condition of Adam's

¹⁶ Ibid., 577. See Karlberg, "Justification in Redemptive History," 222.

¹⁷ Kline, "Gospel until the Law," 441.

¹⁸ Ibid., 438.

¹⁹ Karlberg, "Evangelical Consensus," 566.

²⁰ Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 321.

²¹ Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation," 56; and "Theology of the Covenants," 248. Thomas Schreiner rightly points out that if this were true, one could hardly blame the Pharisees for being legalistic since the typological aspect was dominant in the Old Testament. See his *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 248-51.

²² Karlberg, "Justification in Redemptive History," 223. See also Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation," 47; Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 322. One wonders why God would establish a covenant of law (not to mention how God could), even in the temporal

continuance in the Garden; but Israel's tenure in Canaan was contingent on the maintenance of a measure of religious loyalty, which needed not be comprehensive of all Israel nor perfect even in those who were the true Israel."²³ Thomas Schreiner helpfully summarizes these points:

Karlberg . . . thinks that the Mosaic covenant has a double character. Under the Mosaic covenant justification in the spiritual sphere was by faith alone and not by works. But the Mosaic covenant functioned in a different way in the earthly sphere; in time and space the covenant was based on "works-inheritance," so that obedience brought blessing but disobedience punishment . . . Karlberg contends that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works at the earthly and temporal level.²⁴

The purpose of the "upper level" relationship was to typify the Covenant of Works with the goal of leading Israel to Christ.²⁵ The curses of the Mosaic Covenant were to convict Israel of their sin and inability to be saved while the blessings typified Christ's fulfillment of the Covenant of Works, as Karlberg explains:

Just as the ceremonial laws of Moses typify the work of Christ, so does the reward of temporal blessing for Israel's obedience typify Christ's ultimate fulfillment of the covenant of works broken by Adam . . . The work of Christ, in conjunction with the law-principle of inheritance, is depicted in the typological system of Old Testament revelation. At the same time, the law-principle has served as Israel's pedagogue pointing her to Christ and

realm, that required less than perfect obedience. Moreover, this view seems to be at odds with Deut 27:26 and Gal 3:10. Another problem is that this condition suffers from ambiguity. What exactly is "the necessary measure of righteousness"? How would Israel know when they met the standard? Keep 51% of the commandments 51% of the time and they get to stay in the land?

²³ Meredith G. Kline, "Deuteronomy," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (ed. Everett F. Harrison and Charles F. Pfeiffer; Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 163-64.

²⁴ Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 247.

²⁵ *The New Geneva Study Bible* apparently follows Kline and Karlberg. (See Karlberg, "Evangelical Consensus," 568 n. 14.) The note on Neh 9:29 says, "The Mosaic covenant offered life for obedience (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5). Israel's failure to merit life in the land testified to the universal need for a Substitute through whom the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met on behalf of those who could not meet these terms on their own (Rom. 8:3-4)." Ironically, this "Reformed" study Bible is closer to *The New Scofield Study Bible* than *The NIV Study Bible*. The note on Lev 18:5 from *The NIV Study Bible*, which is much more judicious, says, "*Live*. With God's full blessing. The law was the way of life for the redeemed (see Eze 20:11, 13, 21), not a way of salvation for the lost (see Ro 10:5; Gal 3:12)."

training her in the way of faith-righteousness, which is unto eternal life (antitypical).²⁶

Consequently the “upper level” is often referred to as the “symbolical” or “typological” sphere.

The biblical support for this view is in part as follows: (1) Leviticus 18:5 (see also Ezek 20:11; Luke 10:28; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12) teaches that the blessings of God are obtained on the basis of obedience (i.e., the works-inheritance principle).²⁷ (2) The Babylonian exile is evidence that Israel was under a works-inheritance principle.²⁸ (3) Second Corinthians 3 can only be explained by the works-inheritance principle.²⁹ (4) Leviticus 26 and Deut 26-28 set forth the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant, which indicate that Israel was under a works-inheritance principle.³⁰

In short, it is only by means of dividing the Mosaic Covenant into two distinct levels that one can maintain the continuity (one way of salvation) and discontinuity (OT works vs. NT grace) of the covenants found in Scripture. Kline asserts that his view

recognizes that the old Mosaic order (at its foundation level . . .) was in continuity with previous and subsequent administrations of the overarching covenant of grace. But it also sees and takes at face value the massive Biblical evidence for a peculiar discontinuity present in the old covenant in the form of a principle of meritorious works, operating not as a way of eternal salvation but as the principle governing Israel’s retention of its provisional, typological inheritance.³¹

III. *Reasons why Kline and Karlberg’s View of the Mosaic Covenant is Incompatible with the Westminster Standards*

1. A similar view of the Mosaic Covenant (Subservient Covenant) was rejected by the Westminster Assembly.

²⁶ Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation,” 56-57. See also Karlberg, “Justification in Redemptive History,” 224; and “Evangelical Consensus,” 578 n. 41.

²⁷ Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 321; Karlberg, “Justification in Redemptive History,” 222, 226, 235; and “Moses and Christ—The Place of Law in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism,” *TJ* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 18.

²⁸ Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation,” 55. See Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 322.

²⁹ Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation,” 56. See also Karlberg, “Justification in Redemptive History,” 227-28; Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 321; and “Gospel until the Law,” 440.

³⁰ Karlberg, “Justification in Redemptive History,” 222-23.

³¹ Kline, “Gospel until the Law,” 434. See Karlberg, “Evangelical Consensus,” 568.

Generally speaking, there were four different views concerning the nature of the Mosaic Covenant espoused by the seventeenth-century Puritans.³² First, the Mosaic Covenant was a covenant of works. Second, the Mosaic Covenant was a subservient covenant. Third, the Mosaic Covenant was a mixture of the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. Fourth, the Mosaic Covenant was the Covenant of Grace.

The difficulty in classifying the various Puritans according to these four categories is that “many of them held several of the different views in varying combinations.”³³ As a result, some divines seemed confused and contradictory.³⁴ Other divines use the same terminology of the various classifications but in different senses.³⁵ Moreover, many theologians within the same general category differ on the various details of the Mosaic Covenant.³⁶ Nonetheless, if we are careful to make the necessary distinctions, these four classifications are both necessary and useful. After all, the Puritans themselves employed them.

The view that bears the closest resemblance to Kline and Karlberg is the Subservient Covenant.³⁷ If this view is proven to be contrary to the Westminster Confession of Faith, then it must follow that Kline and Karlberg do not hold to the classic form of covenant theology (at least as it is expressed in the WCF) and that their view is also rejected by the Confession.³⁸

a. The Subservient Covenant view

³² See Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, n.d.; repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), 113.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Ball writes, “Most Divines hold the old and new Covenant to be one in substance and kind, to differ only in degrees: but in setting down the differences they speak so obscurely, that it is hard to find how they consent with themselves.” After listing the differences between the two covenants according to these divines, Ball concludes, “And many things herein are spoken truly, but how all these differences should stand, if they be not Covenants opposite in kind, it is not easy to understand” (*A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 95-96). (In this and other quotations from Ball’s *Treatise*, I have updated the English.)

Note similar observations by Daniel Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 51, cited by Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation,” 38; and Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869; repr., Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996), 154, 157 n. 1.

³⁵ E.g., the word “subservient.”

³⁶ E.g., the various interpretations of Lev 18:5.

³⁷ T. David Gordon, “Critique of Theonomy: A Taxonomy,” *WTJ* 56 (1994): 36.

³⁸ For a refutation of the Subservient Covenant view see Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; trans. G. M. Giger; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 2:262-69; Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh: Robert Brown, 1655), 57-65.

Following John Cameron,³⁹ a precursor to Amyraut,⁴⁰ some Puritans saw three distinct covenants in Scripture: (1) *foedus natura*: the covenant made with man before the fall; (2) *foedus gratiae*: the covenant of grace made with us in Christ; and (3) *foedus subserviens*: a subservient covenant.

The *foedus subserviens*, or Subservient Covenant, is the Mosaic Covenant. God established this covenant at Mount Sinai with Israel alone. It was limited in duration, being abrogated by the New Covenant.

The Subservient Covenant was not a covenant of grace nor a covenant of works nor a mixed covenant; rather, it was a third covenant. It was preparatory to the covenant of grace being midway between the Covenant of Nature (works) and the Covenant of Grace. Samuel Bolton explains: “The subservient covenant, which was called the old covenant, was that whereby God required obedience from the Israelites in respect of the moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws. Blessings in the possession of Canaan were promised to obedience, and curses and miseries to those who broke the covenant.”⁴¹

The promises of the Subservient Covenant were temporal blessings in the land of Canaan. This covenant had nothing whatsoever to do with the eternal state. Bolton unequivocally states, “It had no relation to heaven.”⁴² This is not to say that eternal salvation and condemnation were not a reality in the lives of the Israelites. They were, but not according to the Subservient Covenant. The promise of eternal life was given to Israel on the basis of the Covenant of Grace made with Abraham while the threat of eternal condemnation stemmed from the Covenant of Works.

³⁹ John Cameron (c. 1579-1625) was the first to teach a three-fold division of the covenants in Scripture. He was a Scotsman who spent most of his teaching career in France. It was during his time as a travelling scholar that “he expounded his covenantal ideas, affirming a three-fold covenant between God and man (a covenant of nature, covenant of grace and the old covenant made at Sinai)” (James Kirk, “Cameron, John,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* [ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 123). See also Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:262; Robert Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1985), 453.

⁴⁰ *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (ed. John McClintock and James Strong; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1867-1887; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 2:54; John Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (repr., Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press, 1995), 60-63.

⁴¹ Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (1645; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1964), 95. See Samuel Annesley, “Sermon XII: The Covenant of Grace,” in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689* (1845; repr., Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 5:183-84.

⁴² Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 99. See also John Owen, “An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Works of John Owen* (ed. William H. Goold; Johnstone & Hunter, 1854-1855; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1991), 22:85-86; Annesley, *Puritan Sermons*, 5:185.

The condition of the Subservient Covenant is, in general, the same as the Covenant of Works, namely, “Do this and live.” This is in contrast to the condition of the Covenant of Grace, which is “Believe and you shall be saved.” The reception of the promises was contingent upon the works of the Israelites. Hence, this covenant was a legal covenant, condemning sin and approving righteousness. The New Covenant, on the other hand, was a gracious covenant, pardoning sin and renewing fallen man.

This condition of works required perfection and was antecedent to the promise. Sincere, gospel obedience was not acceptable in this covenant. Israel was to obey for the blessings and “not trust and obey to be happy in Jesus.” Samuel Annesley writes, “. . . their legal covenant neither admitted of faith in the Redeemer, nor repentance of sin . . . But to speak of the legal promises as legal, so they are of temporal good things; and they were made to works, not to faith.”⁴³

In this way, the Subservient Covenant parallels the Covenant of Works. The difference, however, is that when Israel sinned, God did not immediately pour out the curses upon them. In fact, Israel sinned repeatedly, yet God did not remove them from the Land until the Babylonian captivity. But even then He brought them back, and Israel still continued to transgress the commandments of the covenant.

How is this discrepancy to be explained? According to Bolton, the Subservient Covenant differed from the Covenant of Works in that it was capable of renovation because of the Covenant of Grace:

When [Israel] had broken [the Subservient Covenant], they were not to think the case hopeless, but had liberty of appeal from the law to the Gospel, from God’s justice offended to God’s mercy pardoning and covering their sin, as we find the people frequently doing when they implored mercy and pardon for His Name’s sake: “For thy name’s sake forgive, and for thy name’s sake cover our transgressions”; under which expressions Christ was darkly foreshadowed.⁴⁴

John Owen had a somewhat different explanation. He realized that if God dealt with them according to the prescribed terms of the covenant, Israel would have long been cast out of the land. But this would have frustrated God’s purpose to preserve Israel as a separate people until the promised seed should come. Consequently, Owen asserts that God reserved the right not to pour out the full measure of the curses upon Israel until His great end was accomplished.⁴⁵

Another distinctive characteristic of this covenant is that it provided no strength to obey the commandments. As a result, the Subservient Covenant slavishly forced sinful Israel to obey and so naturally terrified the conscience and generated a spirit of bondage.

The purpose of this covenant was primarily to lead the Israelites to Christ. It did this by preparing them for faith through exposing their sin and highlighting their failure

⁴³ Annesley, *Puritan Sermons*, 5:184-185. See also Owen, *Works*, 22:69.

⁴⁴ Bolton, *True Bounds*, 98.

⁴⁵ Owen, *Works*, 22:84.

to keep the law. Furthermore, it inflamed their hearts with desire for the coming Messiah, who would come and deliver them from the Subservient Covenant. A secondary goal was to restrain sin until the coming of the Spirit (of adoption), who would govern them with a more free spirit.

The primary reason for holding to the Subservient Covenant is the contrast and opposition found in Scripture between the old and new covenants (2 Cor 3:6-9; Gal 4:24-26; Heb 7:22; 9:15-20).⁴⁶ Since the Mosaic Covenant is a covenant, it must either be a covenant of works, a covenant of grace, or some other covenant. Clearly it cannot be a covenant of works, since, among other reasons, that would annul the promise.

The Mosaic Covenant cannot be *the* Covenant of Grace. For the glory of the New Covenant is that we are freed from the law as a covenant and not just its legal or administrative aspect. Accordingly, it cannot be part of the Covenant of Grace for we are never set free from it. Hence, the Mosaic Covenant must be a third covenant, one that is not contrary to the promises of grace, though one that could be set aside, namely the Subservient Covenant.⁴⁷

b. Comparison of Kline and Karlberg's view and the Subservient Covenant

Agreements

1. The way of eternal salvation has been the same throughout the history of redemption, that is, by means of the Covenant of Grace.
2. The blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant refer to temporal blessings in the land of Canaan.
3. The Mosaic Covenant is distinct from the Abrahamic and New Covenants.
4. The Mosaic Covenant is distinct from the Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace.
5. The condition of the Mosaic Covenant is works apart from faith in Christ.
6. The Mosaic Covenant was designed to lead people to Christ by exposing their sin.

Disagreements

1. For the Subservient Covenant view, the condition of the Mosaic Covenant was perfect obedience whereas for Kline and Karlberg, less than perfect obedience was acceptable to obtain the blessings.
2. Kline and Karlberg teach that the righteousness of Israel in the Mosaic Covenant was typical of Christ's righteousness whereas the Subservient Covenant view does not teach this at all.

c. The Subservient Covenant is incompatible with the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The Westminster Confession of Faith 7.6 asserts that "There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations." All that is required, therefore, to demonstrate that the Subservient

⁴⁶ Ibid., 22:76.

⁴⁷ Bolton, *True Bounds*, 98-99.

Covenant is incompatible with the Confession is to show that it is a covenant different in substance. This we will do by the following observations.

First, the nature of the Subservient Covenant. It becomes a covenant that is different in substance from the Covenant of Grace in that it is distinct and separate from the Abrahamic and New covenants, contains the same condition as the Covenant of Works, terrifies the conscience without any comfort, creates bondage and slavery, and only condemns sin and approves righteousness. Rightly does John Ball say of the Subservient Covenant, “But not to examine these things particularly, by this explication it appears, the Divines of this opinion, make the old Covenant differ from the new in substance, and kind, and not in degree of manifestation, as also did the former [view that saw the Mosaic Covenant as a strict covenant of works].”⁴⁸

Second, the explication of the Subservient Covenant. Consider the following statements:

- “I shall propose sundry things which relate unto the nature of the first covenant [Mosaic Covenant], which manifest it to have been a *distinct covenant*, and not a mere administration of the covenant of grace.”⁴⁹
- “These things being observed, we may consider that the Scripture doth plainly and expressly make mention of *two testaments, or covenants*, and distinguish between them in such a way, as what is spoken can hardly be accommodated unto a *twofold administration* of the same covenant. The one . . . the covenant that God made with the people of Israel in Sinai . . . The other is the new or gospel covenant. And these two covenants, or testaments, are compared one with the other, and opposed one unto another . . . Wherefore we must grant *two distinct covenants*, rather than a twofold administration of the same covenant merely, to be intended.”⁵⁰
- “The old covenant is abrogated as to the impossible condition of perfect obedience.”⁵¹
- “It was a covenant which, though it stood upon opposite terms to the covenant of grace, served the purpose of the covenant of grace subserviently.”⁵²
- “We are freed from the law as a covenant, and if the law were a covenant of grace, only more legally dispensed and administered after a more legal manner, it might seem better to say that we are freed from this aspect of it rather than to say we are freed from it as a covenant. Therefore, if they say we are freed from it as a covenant, it cannot possibly be held to be the covenant of grace.”⁵³

Third, the contradiction of the Subservient Covenant. Bolton contrasts his view from one that taught that the Mosaic Covenant was

⁴⁸ Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 95.

⁴⁹ Owen, *Works*, 22:77; emphasis his.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 22:76; emphasis his.

⁵¹ Annesley, *Puritan Sermons*, 5:196.

⁵² Bolton, *True Bounds*, 112.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

the same covenant in respect of its nature and design under which we stand under the Gospel, even the covenant of grace, though more legally dispensed to the Jews. *It differed not in substance from the covenant of grace*, but in degree . . . in the economy and external administration of it . . . the new and old covenants, the covenants of the law and Gospel, are both of them really covenants of grace, *only differing in their administrations*.⁵⁴

One who is familiar with the language of the Westminster Standards can immediately recognize the similarities with the above quote. The Westminster Confession of Faith 7.6 states, “This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law . . . There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.”

It is important to remember that the primary biblical reason that some divines held to the Subservient Covenant was because they understood the Scriptures to teach that the Old Covenant was abrogated as a covenant. The contrast was not found to be in mere administrations but in covenants. As we have already seen, they themselves understood their view of the Mosaic Covenant to differ in substance with the Covenant of Grace. This is why they taught a “third” covenant, distinguishing it from the “same in substance” position. Consequently, the Subservient Covenant is distinguished from and opposed to the Confession’s understanding of the nature of the Mosaic Covenant.

Fourth, the influence of John Ball upon the Westminster Confession of Faith. This great divine taught that “the Mosaic Covenant is wholly devoid of any administrative element of works-merit.”⁵⁵ It is noteworthy, therefore, that “no one probably was more highly esteemed as a judicious divine by the fathers of the Assembly” than John Ball.⁵⁶ The exposition of the Ten Commandments found in the Larger Catechism was partially derived from Ball’s catechism.⁵⁷ Moreover, chapter 19 of the Confession is a summary of his views.⁵⁸ According to Alexander F. Mitchell, “The later and most remarkable treatise of Ball, on the ‘Covenant of Grace,’ was published with recommendatory notices by Reynolds, Cawdrey, Calamy, Hill, Ashe, and Burgess at the very time the Assembly began to frame its Confession, and it contains all that has been

⁵⁴ Ibid., 99-100 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁵ Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation,” 37.

⁵⁶ B. B. Warfield, “The Westminster Doctrine of Holy Scripture,” in *Selected Shorter Writings* (ed. John E. Meeter; 2 vols.; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001), 2:565.

⁵⁷ Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (London, 1883; repr., Edmonton, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1992), 420. See B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Cherry Hill, N.J.: Mack Publishing, 1972), 65.

⁵⁸ Ernest F. Kevan, “The Law and the Covenants—A Study in John Ball,” in *Puritan Papers: Volume 1* (ed. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2000), 57.

admitted into the Westminster Standards, or generally received on this head among British Calvinists.”⁵⁹

Fifth, the conclusions of contemporary scholars. Again, consider the following statements:

- E. F. Kevan: “It is not possible to make an accurate classification of the Puritans on the basis of their views about the Mosaic Covenant, because many of them held several of the different views in varying combinations. On the whole, however, they can be divided into two groups on this subject; those who regarded the Mosaic Covenant as a Covenant of Works, and those who regarded it as a Covenant of Grace . . . The outcome of the Puritan debate was that, on the whole, it was agreed that the Mosaic Covenant was a form of the Covenant of Grace; and this view was embodied in the *Confession of Faith* [the author references WCF 7. 5-6].”⁶⁰
- Sinclair Ferguson: Ferguson identifies John Owen’s view of the Mosaic Covenant with that of Samuel Bolton and distinguishes it from the positions of John Ball, John Calvin, and the Westminster Confession of Faith.⁶¹
- Jan Rohls: “With their thesis of the double administration of the substantially identical covenant of grace, the Westminster Confession and the Helvetic Consensus Formula oppose the thesis advanced by John Cameron and Moysse Amyraut in the school of Saumur, which holds that there are three substantially different covenants of God with humanity: namely, the covenant of works or of nature, the covenant of grace, and the covenant of law (*foedus legale*).”⁶²
- James Kirk: In commenting upon Cameron’s view of three covenants, Kirk writes, “This seemed at variance with the Calvinist emphasis on two covenants and gave rise to suspicions that Cameron favoured Arminianism.”⁶³

⁵⁹ Mitchell, *Westminster Assembly*, 377. See Charles Lincoln, “The Development of the Covenant Theory,” *BSac* 100 (January 1943): 153; Edward D. Morris, *Theology of the Westminster Symbols* (Columbus, Ohio: Champlin Press, 1990), 361-62; Geerhardus Vos, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 240-41. In light of this we find that Karlberg’s description of Ball’s view as a “variant form” of covenant theology to be quite incredulous. See “Reformed Interpretation,” 35. He does, however, in a later article admit that “some identify Ball as the representative thinker on the covenant doctrine” (“Moses and Christ,” 18).

⁶⁰ Kevan, *The Grace of the Law*, 113, 114, 117.

⁶¹ Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1987), 28.

⁶² Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (trans. John Hoffmeyer; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 90. See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1:489.

⁶³ *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, 123.

On the basis of the above observations we are compelled to conclude that the Westminster Confession of Faith clearly and unequivocally rejected the Subservient Covenant position. Consequently the Confession also closes the door on the similar position of Kline and Karlberg.

2. The Westminster Standards differ with Kline and Karlberg on the blessings and curses.

Kline and Karlberg assert that the blessings and curses in general and of the Mosaic Covenant in particular refer to the works-inheritance principle, and are antithetical to the Covenant of Grace and were abrogated by the coming of Christ. The Confession, on the other hand, believes that they are part of the Covenant of Grace and applicable to the New Testament believer.

WCF 19.6: It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and, not under grace.

According to this section of the Confession, the curses (“threatenings”) of the Mosaic Law teach the regenerate what temporal afflictions they may expect when they sin while the blessings (“promises”) instruct them concerning the benefits they may expect when they obey.⁶⁴ Saving faith “trembles” at these curses and “embraces” the blessings “for this life, and that which is to come.”⁶⁵

To establish a connection between obedience and blessing and disobedience and cursing is for many—notably antinomians—to establish in some sense a covenant of works.⁶⁶ The divines were certainly aware of this possible misunderstanding. After all,

⁶⁴ That the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant are being referred to here is clear from the proof texts, namely Lev 26:1-14 and Ps 89:30-34.

⁶⁵ See WCF 14.2. Notice that the Confession does not make a sharp dichotomy between the temporal and the eternal, as do Kline and Karlberg. The WCF understands that God relates to His people in the temporal and typological spheres in the same way as He does in the spiritual.

⁶⁶ Ezekiel Hopkins asserts, “And, therefore, the Antinomian is to be abominated, that derogates from the value and validity of the Law: and contends, that it is to all purposes extinct unto believers, even so much as to its preceptive and regulating power; and that no other obligation to duty lies upon them who are in Christ Jesus, but only from the law of gratitude: that God requires not obedience from them, upon so low and sordid an account, as the fear of his wrath and dread severity; but all is to flow only from the principle of love, and the sweet temper of a grateful and ingenuous spirit. But this is a

they debated this issue for years. Consequently, they made it explicitly clear that such a connection does not in any form or fashion indicate that man is under a covenant of works. They accomplish this by repeating themselves three times.

The divines wrote that though we may be afflicted for sin, we are “freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law” and though we are blessed, it is not on account of our works as “by the law as a covenant of works.”⁶⁷ They then immediately restate it: “So as, a man’s doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and, not under grace.”

most pestilent doctrine, which plucks down the fence of the Law, and opens a gap for all manner of licentiousness and libertinism to rush in upon the Christian world . . .” (“An Exposition Upon the Commandments,” in *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins* [ed. Charles Quick; Philadelphia, 1874; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995], 1:251). See also Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 185.

Daniel Doriani, though by no means an antinomian, succumbs to this view when he writes, “Legalists also misconstrue the motives for obedience. They motivate by guilt: If you don’t obey, God will be angry or withhold his blessings. They motivate by fear: If you don’t obey, he will punish you” (*Putting the Truth to Work* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001], 127).

John Murray is much more sound. He writes, “Is it proper to be afraid of God? The only proper answer is that it is the essence of impiety not to be afraid of God when there is *reason* to be afraid . . . The Scripture throughout prescribes the necessity of this fear of God under all the circumstances in which our sinful situation makes us liable to God’s righteous judgment . . . To aver that the fear of God’s wrath and of the judgments which execute his wrath is an improper motive to action is to go counter to all that sound reason would dictate . . . It is quite obvious that the Scripture represents the dread or terror of God’s wrath as belonging to the total concept of the fear of God. Even where there is no sin, and therefore no existent wrath, we cannot eliminate the fear of incurring God’s displeasure as one motive deterrent to the commission of sin” (*Principles of Conduct*, 233-35). See also B. B. Warfield, *Faith and Life* (1916; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1990), 295.

⁶⁷ It is clear that the Divines made a distinction between being rewarded on account of your works and according to your works, that is to say between legal obedience and gospel obedience. See WCF 16.6 and Larger Catechism 45. For more on this vital distinction see Robert Dabney “The Moral Effects of a Free Justification,” in *Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney* (1891; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1982), 1:86; William S. Plumer, *The Law of God* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864; repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1996), 58-59; Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (1692; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 16; Kevan, *The Grace of the Law*, 187-90, 216-23; Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 184-85.

The divines repeat themselves for the third time in paragraph 7 of chapter 19. Here they point out that the uses of the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Law are not contrary to the “grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it.”⁶⁸

The minutes of Session 699 of the Westminster Assembly state the matter with greater clarity and intensity:

Neither is it an evidence that a man is under law, and not under grace, when he refrains from evil and doeth good, because the law encourageth to the one, and deters from the other, but rather a sign of the power of God’s grace in him, when his heart is subdued conscientiously to live according to the Rule, though in things contrary to the dictate of corrupt nature, from the consideration of God’s goodness in rewarding freely those that do well, and of his justice in punishing them that do ill.⁶⁹

How the regenerate can be afflicted according to the threatenings (curses) of the law yet at the same time be freed from the curse of the law is explained by Thomas Boston:

For though believers ought never to fear that they shall be condemned and cast into hell, yet they both may and ought to awfully to regard the threatenings of the holy law: and how they ought to regard them, one may learn from the Westm. Confess. chap. xix. art. 6, in these words, “The threatenings of it [viz.: the law] serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law.” Thus they are to regard them, not as denunciations of their doom, in case of sinning, but as a looking-glass wherein to behold the fearful demerit of their sin; the unspeakable love of God in freeing them from bearing it, his fatherly displeasure against his own for their sin, and the tokens of his anger to be expected by them in that case. So will they be influenced to eschew evil and do good, being thereby filled with hatred and horror of sin, thankfulness to God, and fear of the displeasure and frowns of their Father, though not with a fear that he will condemn them, and destroy them in hell.⁷⁰

Therefore, the Westminster Divines strongly affirmed that blessings and curses do not reflect a works-principle. Furthermore, the Mosaic sanctions are applicable to saints (i.e.,

⁶⁸ The phrase, “Neither are the forementioned uses of the law,” includes the uses of the blessings and curses as is clear from paragraph 6.

⁶⁹ A. F. Mitchell and John Struthers, eds., *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly* (1874; repr., Edmonton, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991), 274.

⁷⁰ Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, with notes by Thomas Boston (repr., Edmonton, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991), 201.

the “regenerate”) in the Old and New Testaments (note that Matt 5:5 and Eph 6:2-3 are cited as proofs texts).

A proof text used in this section that is worth commenting upon is Ezra 9:13-14. Specifically, this text is used to prove that the “threatenings [of the law] serve to show what even [believers’] sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them.” In this text Ezra prays: “What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor?” The punishment that Ezra refers to is the Babylonian captivity. According to Kline, this exile is evidence that Israel was under a works-inheritance principle. In fact, Kline contends that the “loss of the national election given to Israel in the Mosaic Covenant compels all who confess the sovereignty of God’s saving grace to recognize the presence of a works principle in that covenant.”⁷¹ Apparently, the Westminster Divines, who most certainly confessed the sovereignty of God’s saving grace, did not feel compelled to come to the same conclusion.⁷²

*WCF 30.3: Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from the like offenses, for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.*⁷³

Church discipline is necessary in order to prevent the wrath of God falling upon the corporate body of Christ. God is just in “cursing” His Church “if they should suffer His covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.” One example, according to the Confession, of God’s wrath or curse falling upon the

⁷¹ Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 322.

⁷² The Confession’s use of Ezra 9:13-14 is identical to the NT’s use of the curses suffered by Israel in 1 Cor 10:1-13 and Heb 3:7-4:11. Hos 11:5 (see 1 Kgs 8:46-53; 2 Kgs 17:7-18) makes it quite clear that Israel was cast out of the land because they refused to repent and not due to breaking a covenant of works. In commenting upon 2 Kgs 17:7-23, Matthew Henry writes, “. . . the same sin that kept them out of Canaan turned these out, and that was unbelief” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary On the Whole Bible* [McLean, Va.: MacDonald, n.d.], 2:793).

Likewise, in the NT Jesus says to the individual and the church, that if they refuse to repent, they too will be excommunicated (Matt 18:15-17; Rev 2:4-5). Jay Adams notes the close relationship between the exile in the OT and excommunication in the NT in *Handbook of Christian Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 79-80.

⁷³ The Confession’s proof texts are 1 Cor 5; 1 Tim 5:20; Matt 7:6; 1 Tim 1:20; 1 Cor 11:27ff.; Jude 23.

church is found in 1 Cor 11.⁷⁴ In this passage God afflicts his people with sickness and even death because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper.

WCF 17.3: Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

The clear testimony of Scripture and the Confession is that true believers can fall into grievous sin. One of many possible consequences is that believers may "bring temporal judgments upon themselves." The two proof texts to support this teaching are 1 Cor 11:32 and Ps 89:31-32. The former refers to the Corinthians' abuse of the Lord's Supper and the ensuing temporal judgments of sickness and death. The latter refers to the threat of punishment to David's sons who fall away from the Lord: "If [David's] sons break My law and do not walk in My judgments, if they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes."

It is significant that the Confession uses Ps 89 as a proof text, for according to Karlberg, this passage refers to the works-inheritance principle that was limited only to Old Testament Israel.⁷⁵ By contrast, the Divines believed that it taught that when God's people (OT or NT) fall into sin they fall under God's fatherly displeasure and are liable to temporal judgments.⁷⁶ In other words, the Westminster Divines understood the obedience sanctioned by blessings and curses to be gospel obedience (trust and obey) and thus applicable in the Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, they believed that God would restore ("bless") His people when they "humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance."⁷⁷

The purpose of the curses for God's people in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is not to place them under a type of covenant of works but to "chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends."⁷⁸

WLC 133. Q: What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment, the more to enforce it?

⁷⁴ For further biblical examples see Rev 2-3; Luke 17:1-2; Acts 5:1-11.

⁷⁵ Karlberg, "Justification in Redemptive History," 225.

⁷⁶ See Thomas Boston's notes in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 26.

⁷⁷ WCF 11.5.

⁷⁸ WCF 5.5. Note carefully the proof texts used: 2 Chron 32:25-26, 31; 2 Sam 24:1; 2 Chron 12:7-9; Ps 73. See Ezekiel Hopkins, "The Doctrine of the Two Covenants," in *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins*, 2:165.

A: The reason annexed to the fifth commandment, in these words, That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, is an express promise of long life and prosperity, as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good, to all such as keep this commandment.

The temporal blessing of long life and prosperity is promised to all those who keep the fifth commandment. That this promise is not restricted to Old Testament Israel is evident by the use of Eph 6:2-3 as a proof text. James Durham comments, "From the annexing of this promise to the command, these two things clearly follow: 1. That there are temporal promises made to godliness. 2. That a godly man has that right which none other has to inherit the earth."⁷⁹

WLC 114. Q: What reasons are annexed to the third commandment?

A: The reasons annexed to the third commandment, in these words, The Lord thy God, and, For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain, are, because he is the Lord and our God, therefore his name is not to be profaned, or any way abused by us; especially because he will be so far from acquitting and sparing the transgressors of this commandment, as that he will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment, albeit many such escape the censures and punishments of men.

James Durham asks how the threatening of the third commandment is to be understood. In answering he distinguishes between the godly and ungodly, that is to say, between those who turn to Christ for pardon and those who do not. With respect to the believer, Durham says that it may lead to "temporal judgments, as it did on David (2 Sam. 12)."⁸⁰

WLC 110. Q: What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it?

A: The reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it, contained in these words, For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments; are, besides God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us, his fervent zeal for his own worship, and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom; accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him, and threatening to punish them unto divers generations; and esteeming the observers of it such as love him and keep his commandments, and promising mercy to them unto many generations.

It is certain that children will not suffer eternal punishment because of their parents' sin even as they will not be saved due to their parents' faith. Nonetheless, godly children of ungodly parents are liable to experience temporal punishments due to their

⁷⁹ Durham, *Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (ed. Christopher Coldwell; Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 2002), 308.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

parents' sins. On the flip side, children are subject to blessing if their parents love the Lord. Thomas Ridgeley comments:

For understanding this language, let it be considered that, though God does not punish children with eternal destruction for the sins of their immediate parents, yet these often bring temporal judgments on families These judgments fall more heavily on those children who make their parents' sins their own Whatever temporal judgments may be inflicted on children for their parents' sins, shall be sanctified, and redound to their spiritual advantage, as well as end in their everlasting happiness, if they do not follow their bad example. Accordingly, it is farther observed that God "shows mercy unto thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments." These are very motives and inducements to enforce the observance of all God's commandments, and this in particular.⁸¹

The proof text for the phrase, "and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom" is 1 Cor 10:20-22. This indicates that the Divines understood the sanctions of this commandment to be applicable in the New Testament.

3. The Westminster Standards differ with Kline and Karlberg on the discontinuities and continuities between the Old and New Testaments.

WCF 7.6: There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.

WLC 33. Q: Was the covenant of grace always administered after one and the same manner?

A: The covenant of grace was not always administered after the same manner, but the administrations of it under the Old Testament were different from those under the New.

WLC 34. Q: How was the covenant of grace administered under the Old Testament?

A: The covenant of grace was administered under the Old Testament, by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the passover, and other types and ordinances, which did all foreshadow Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation."

WLC 35. Q: How is the covenant of grace administered under the New Testament?

⁸¹ Thomas Ridgeley, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (1855; repr., Edmonton, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993), 2:334-35.

A: Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same covenant of grace was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fulness, evidence, and efficacy, to all nations.

These passages of the Confession and Larger Catechism teach that there is continuity in “substance” and discontinuity in “administration” between the Old and New Testaments. Such teaching, however, runs counter to the view of Kline and Karlberg. For a covenant that is radically contrasted with the Abrahamic Covenant and contains a condition of works, which is opposed to faith, must necessarily be a covenant differing in substance.⁸² At the very least, the Puritans would have certainly thought so since they considered the Subservient Covenant position to be different in substance.

Notwithstanding, Kline and Karlberg do not claim to deviate from the Westminster Standards. They maintain that their view is compatible with the “same in substance” view because they strongly believe in only one way of salvation. Saints in the Old Testament were saved in the exact same way as saints in the New Testament.

This acknowledgement by itself does not escape the charge of holding to a “differing in substance” view of the Mosaic Covenant, for the Puritan adherents to the Subservient Covenant position also strongly believed in one way of salvation. Hence, Kline and Karlberg further teach that the Mosaic Covenant is not a distinct covenant but a typological one. The works element was a typological administration of the covenant of grace. Therefore, there is only one covenant of grace and the difference is found in the administration.

At first glance, this position might now seem compatible with the Confession. Upon closer inspection, however, it is far from it. Where does the Confession describe or refer to the Mosaic Covenant as a typological works covenant that is merely an administration of the Covenant of Grace? According to Karlberg, there is a glimmer of hope to be found in WCF 19.3-4:

The Westminster Standards reaffirm its commitment to the traditional Reformed understanding of the similarities and differences between the Old (Mosaic) Covenant and the New Covenant. The Confession concludes with the statement: “There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations” (VII. 6; *cf.*, Larger Catechism Q. A. 33–35). The Confession stresses that the purpose of the law of Moses is as a rule of life and righteousness (XIX. 2). It has been commonplace in Reformed theology from the beginning to speak of the law as a “rule” for life both in creation and redemption. This is different from the use of the law with respect to the principle of inheritance in which there is an antithesis between law and grace and an abrogation of the law with respect to soteric justification. But the law of

⁸² For an explanation of “same in substance,” see Ball, *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, 108, 163-64; Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 71-72.

Moses also contained “several typical ordinances,” as part of the ceremonial laws which have all been terminated by Christ (XIX. 3). The civil or judicial laws have likewise expired, except as they can be applied now to civil legislation according to the principle of “general equity” (XIX. 4). The civil laws no longer carry any typological meaning as they did in the Old Covenant. With respect to the typological picture, these civil laws of Moses signify the eternal, antitypical state of consummation glory. The Westminster Confession has left the door open to a diverse range of interpretation in giving detailed expression to the law-character of the Mosaic covenant of grace.⁸³

Karlberg claims that the Westminster Confession of Faith opens the door wide enough to allow the works-inheritance principle to be encapsulated in the now abrogated ceremonial and/or civil law. This proposal has some devastating flaws.

First, this argument is fallacious in that it is a *non sequitur*. The fact that these laws have been abrogated or expired does not imply that they were part of a covenant of works. Nor does the fact that God made a national typical covenant with Israel imply that the typical aspect reflected a works principle. Colquhoun, who adhered to the national covenant (third covenant) aspect of the Mosaic Covenant says just the opposite. He writes, “As the Israelites, even in their civil capacity, were a typical people, and their obedience a typical obedience, so their obedience was to be so connected with their temporal privileges as to resemble the obedience of God’s spiritual Israel in its connection with their spiritual privileges under the gospel.”⁸⁴ This understanding is much more reasonable. Since Canaan is a type of the kingdom of God,⁸⁵ it does not make sense that Israel would receive the blessings in the type in a different fashion than they are received in the anti-type.⁸⁶

⁸³Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation,” 40-41. See Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology*, 44.

⁸⁴John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* (New York: Wiley and Long, 1835; repr., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), 68. Colquhoun seems to be following Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (trans. William Crookshank; London, 1822; repr., Escondido, Calif.: The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), 2:181-82.

⁸⁵See Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 68-69.

⁸⁶Dabney has a similar critique of Cameron’s position. He writes, “The French divines, Camero and Amyraut, proposed an ingenious modification of the legal theory of Moses’ covenant: That in it a certain kind of life was proposed (as in the Covenant of Works) as a reward for an exact obedience. But that the life was temporal, in a prosperous Canaan, and the obedience was ritual. This is true, so far as a visible church standing turned on a ritual obedience. *But to the Hebrew, that temporal life in happy Canaan was a type of heaven, which was not promised to an exact moral obedience, but to faith*” (*Systematic Theology*, 453 [emphasis mine]). See Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened*, 60.

Second, it is both contrary to the Confession and absurd to consider the ceremonial law as a covenant of works.⁸⁷ How is it possible that laws—which, according to WCF 19.3, prefigured “Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits,” and which were “for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation” (WCF 7.5)—were part and parcel of the works-inheritance principle? How is it possible that “the sacraments of the old testament,” which were “for substance, the same with those of the new” (WCF 27.5), were part of a covenant of works?

Finally, and more importantly, Karlberg’s interpretation leads to an unacceptable conclusion. The works-inheritance principle established with Israel was not restricted to certain aspects of the law. It was a subservient covenant involving the whole law (moral, ceremonial, and civil), which was to be applied individually and corporately. Since, according to the Confession, the moral law (including the blessings and curses) and the general equity of the civil law are still binding, the works-inheritance principle must be still applicable, at least on the personal, temporal level. Did Ananias and Shapphira and the members of the Corinthian church die on account of the works-inheritance principle (Acts 5; 1 Cor 11), which could now be applied to the world (Rom 4:13; Eph 6:1-3) as they awaited the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 11:10; Rev 21)? One wonders how Karlberg explains the temporal blessings and curses that we find in the New Testament (see also Rev 2-3; Luke 17:1-2).

WCF 20.1: The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers under the law. But, under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.

This section of the Confession outlines the liberty believers have in the gospel both for Old and New Testament saints. Believers in all ages are free from “the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation.”

⁸⁷ For similar comments in this regard see John Flavel, “*Vindiciae Legis Foederis*,” in *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1997), 6:323-24; Thomas E. Peck, “The Moral Law,” in *Writings of Thomas E. Peck* (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1895-1897; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1999), 2:156.

And, their freedom consists “in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind.” How could this be if Israel were under a works-principle, the form of the Covenant of Works or an extreme form of the rigor of the Law?⁸⁸

The freedom of New Testament believers is further enlarged. They are free from the ceremonial law, have greater boldness to approach God, and have a fuller measure of the Spirit of God. There is no hint of the abrogation of the blessings and curses. Nor is it mentioned that God’s people were set free from a works-inheritance principle, the form of a covenant of works,⁸⁹ the rigor of the law, or the Subservient Covenant. This observation is all the more conspicuous when we realize that the Savoy Declaration (1658), under the influence of John Owen, augmented the liberty of New Testament believers to include freedom from “the whole legal administration of the covenant of grace, to which the Jewish church was subjected.”⁹⁰

a. *The Westminster Standards’ Use of Second Corinthians 3*

As has been mentioned, Kline and Karlberg in defending the works-inheritance principle of the Mosaic Covenant use 2 Cor 3. Such an appeal, however, runs counter to the Confession’s interpretation. This chapter of Scripture, according to the Divines, teaches us that the covenant of grace was administered differently in the Old Testament, that is, by the ceremonial laws which were sufficient to teach the elect the way of salvation but certainly not able to save in and of themselves.⁹¹ Hence a new covenant with better promises was required (Heb 8).

⁸⁸ Note that the Subservient Covenant compelled obedience and produced a spirit of fear and bondage.

⁸⁹ According to William Ames NT believers were set free from the law as a form of the covenant of works. He writes, “The testament is new in relation to what existed from the time of Moses and in relation to the promise made to the fathers. But it is new not in essence but in form. In the former circumstances the form of administration gave some evidence of the covenant of works, from which this testament is essentially different . . . Freedom comes, first in doing away with government by law, or the intermixture of the covenant of works, which held the ancient people in a certain bondage” (*The Marrow of Theology* [ed. and trans. John D. Eusden; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997], 206).

⁹⁰ Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 367-402.

⁹¹ WCF 7.5 and Larger Catechism 33. Ball: “It may be said the Apostle shows the former covenant to be faulty, or that another covenant was lacking. But that is not mentioned to prove the covenants to be two opposite one to the other: but because the first testament did not contain the image of the things themselves, and therefore was not to be rested in, as if we could be justified by the works of the Law, or ceremonial observances annexed: but must be used as an introduction to lead us to Christ, who is the very image of the things themselves. The first covenant therefore could not be fulfilled

Moreover, this passage of Scripture reveals that the gospel in the New Testament is held forth in “more fullness, evidence, and efficacy to all nations” because “Christ the substance was exhibited” and Pentecost led to “fuller communications of the free Spirit of God.”⁹² In other words, the difference between the old and new covenants is comparative (in terms of degree and intensity) and not absolute.

The use of 2 Cor 3 to support a comparative difference between the covenants excludes the idea of a works-inheritance principle in the Mosaic Covenant. For such a principle is an absolute or antithetical difference.

In light of this, we may well wonder how the Puritans understood the phrases “ministry of death” and “ministry of condemnation” as found in 2 Cor 3 as well as the other New Testament passages that speak negatively of the law. The majority explained these denunciations of the law, not as it was given to Moses, but as the unbelieving Jews perverted it.⁹³ John Flavel writes:

This fatal mistake of the use and intent of the law, is the ground of those seeming contradictions, in Paul’s epistles. Sometimes he magnifies the law, when he speaks of it according to God’s end and purpose in its promulgation, Rom. 7:12, 14, 16. But as it was fatally mistaken by the Jews, and set in opposition to Christ; so he thunders against it, calls it a *ministration of death and condemnation*: and all its appendant ceremonies *weak and beggarly elements*. And by this distinction, whatsoever seems repugnant in Paul’s epistles, may be sweetly reconciled; and it is a distinction of his own making, 1 Tim. 1:8.⁹⁴

IV. Possible Objections Answered

Objection 1: *The Westminster Confession of Faith affirms the Mosaic Covenant as being a covenant of works because the terms used to describe the Covenant of Works are also used to characterize the Mosaic Covenant.*

The Mosaic Covenant is referred to as “law” while the New Covenant is labeled “gospel” (WCF 7.5-6). Old Testament saints are described as being “under the law” whereas New Testament saints are “under the Gospel” (WCF 20.1; 25.2). Since “law” also describes the Covenant of Works,⁹⁵ the Mosaic Covenant must be a covenant of works in some sense. To be “under the law” is therefore, according to the Confession, equivalent to being under a covenant of works.

or effectual, but by the bringing in of a second, which was prefigured thereby” (*A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, 118-19).

⁹² Larger Catechism 35 and WCF 20.1. See Ball, *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, 118; Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (trans. G. W. Williard; 1852; repr., Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.), 100.

⁹³ See Kevan, *Grace of the Law*, 130-34.

⁹⁴ Flavel, *Works*, 6:340.

⁹⁵ WCF 7.2; 19.1.

This objection fails to recognize the way the Confession is using the term “law.” It is synonymous with “Old Testament.” According to WCF 7.5, “This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel.” And WCF 25.2 says, “The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law) . . .” Clearly, “Law” does not refer to the Mosaic Covenant exclusively but to the whole Old Testament (including the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants). Therefore, to be “under the law” is not equivalent to the Covenant of Works but to be under (or living in) the old dispensation.

Objection 2: The connection between the first two paragraphs of chapter 19 of the Confession implies that the Mosaic Covenant was a covenant of works in some sense.

Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1 states that the law given to Adam was a covenant of law. Paragraph 2 begins with “This law,” obviously referring to the law described in paragraph 1. Since the law in paragraph 1 was described as a covenant of works, the law of paragraph 2 must be as well.

This objection cannot be sustained when one considers that the law was given for two different and distinct purposes. First, it was given to Adam alone (though later to Christ) as a covenant of works (cf. WCF 19.1; WLC 92). Second, the law was given to all men as a “perfect rule of righteousness” (WCF 19.2; WLC 95). The connection between paragraphs 1 and 2 of chapter 19 is that the content of the law is the same (except the law with reference to the tree of knowledge of good and evil). The discontinuity between the two paragraphs is found in the use or purpose of the same law as indicated by the respective qualifiers “as a covenant of works” and as “a perfect rule of righteousness.”⁹⁶

In paragraph 1 we read that the law was given to Adam as a covenant of works. Larger Catechism 92 explains that this law entailed the special command and the moral law. The qualifier “as a covenant of works” is crucial because the giving of the law does not necessitate “a covenant of works.” We have the law today though we are not under the Covenant of Works. In paragraph 2, “this law” refers to the moral law (see paragraph 3) but is not said to be given as a “covenant of works.” In fact the rest of the chapter indicates that “this [moral] law” given at Mount Sinai is the perfect rule of righteousness (paragraph 2) binding on all persons in all ages (paragraph 5) and is given to true believers not as a covenant of works (paragraph 6). Therefore, the Confession itself forbids us to infer that the phrase “as a covenant of works” is to be applied to the giving of the law to the people of God at Mount Sinai.

In his exposition of the Ten Commandments, James Durham notes that we must distinguish between the law as given to Adam from the law as given to Israel:

Then you would distinguish between this law, as given to Adam, and as given to Israel. For as given to him, it was a covenant of works; but, as given to them, it was a covenant of grace; and so from us now it calls for gospel duties, as faith in Christ (1 Tim. 1:5), repentance, hope in God, etc.

⁹⁶ See Kevan, *The Grace of the Law*, 148-51.

And although it call for legal duties, yet in a gospel-manner; therefore we are in the first commandment commanded to have God for our God, which cannot be obeyed by sinners but in Christ Jesus; the covenant of works being broken, and the tie of friendship thereby between God and man made void. So that now men, as to that covenant, are without God in the world, and without Christ and the promises (Eph. 2:21-13). And so our having God for our God (which is pointed at in the preface to the commandments) and Christ for our Savior, and closing with his righteousness, and the promises of the covenant (which are all *yea and amen in him*) must go together.⁹⁷

Objection 3: *The position of the Westminster Confession of Faith is somewhat ambiguous in that tensions or differences between the Puritans were not resolved. Hence the Confession allows for more than one opinion on the issue.*⁹⁸

It is certainly true that there was a great debate among the Puritans as to the nature of the Mosaic Covenant. Moreover, Reformed Presbyterians have continued the debate. However, this does not imply that the Puritans themselves did not come to a majority consensus. As we have already noted, the exhaustive research of E. F. Kevan concludes that they did: “The outcome of the Puritan debate was that, on the whole, it was agreed that the Mosaic Covenant was a form of the Covenant of Grace; and this view was embodied in the Confession of Faith.”⁹⁹

The Puritans debated church government. There were Presbyterians, Erastians, and Independents at the Assembly. Nonetheless, the Presbyterian view prevailed as is indicated by the text of the Confession itself. The section on church government is simply intolerant of any view other than Presbyterianism. The same is true concerning the nature of the Mosaic Covenant. A cursory examination of the Westminster Confession of Faith is all that is needed to know that the Divines clearly and unequivocally rejected any position that held a “works principle” to be operative upon believing Israel in the Mosaic Covenant. One wonders how they could have stated their position any more strongly or clearly.

Objection 4: *In expounding the covenant of works made with Adam the Westminster Confession of Faith uses Rom 10:5 and Gal 3:12 as proof texts. Both of these texts quote Lev 18:5, which refers to the Mosaic Covenant. Therefore, the Divines understood the Mosaic Covenant to be a covenant of works.*

The texts that the Westminster Standards used to expound the Covenant of Works are Gen 1:26-27; 2:17; Job 28:28; Eccl 7:29; Rom 2:14-15; 5:12-20; 10:5; Gal 3:10; 3:12

⁹⁷ James Durham, *Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, 62. See Francis R. Beattie, *The Presbyterian Standards* (repr., Greenville, S.C.: Southern Presbyterian Press, n.d.), 249; Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 15, 113.

⁹⁸ See Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation,” 41, 54; and “Moses and Christ,” 18.

⁹⁹ He footnotes WCF 7.5, 6.

(WCF 7.2; 19.1). None of these texts are from the Mosaic Covenant; however, Rom 10:5 and Gal 3:10, 12 quote verses from the Mosaic Covenant.

The reasons for appealing to these New Testament quotations of Moses vary among the writings of the Puritans. Some believed that they taught that the Covenant of Works was renewed at Mount Sinai though with evangelical purposes and intentions.¹⁰⁰ Edward Fisher, the author of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, taught that the Ten Commandments were delivered to Israel “as the covenant of works.” The matter and form of the Covenant of Works was given to Israel in that God truly offered life to Israel upon obedience to the Ten Commandments and Israel accepted the terms.¹⁰¹

The purpose or intention of this renewal was not for Israel to earn life by it. Fisher writes:

God never made the covenant of works with any man since the fall, either with expectation that he should fulfill it, or to give him life by it; for God never appoints any thing to an end, to the which it is utterly unsuitable and improper . . . Therefore, his purpose in renewing the covenant of works, was not, neither could be, to give life and salvation by working; for then there would have been contradictions in the covenants, and instability in him that made them.¹⁰²

So why then did God renew the Covenant of Works? It was, according to Fisher, added to the Covenant of Grace

by way of subserviency and attendance, the better to advance and make effectual the covenant of grace; so that although the same covenant that was made with Adam was renewed on Mount Sinai, yet I say still, it was not for the same purpose. For this was it that God aimed at, in making the covenant of works with man in innocency, to have that which was his due from man: but God made it with the Israelites for no other end, than that man, being thereby convinced of his weakness, might flee to Christ. So that it was renewed only to help forward and introduce another and a

¹⁰⁰ This view must be distinguished from the “strict” Covenant of Works view held by such men as Philip Cary.

¹⁰¹ Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 53, 57-62. On p. 58 Fisher writes, “And doth not the apostle Paul give evidence that these words were the form of the covenant of works, when he says, Rom. x.5 . . . and when he says, Gal. 3:10?” Thomas Boston concurs with Fisher and argues that this is the position of the WCF. See his notes on pp. 55, 58, 59. Compare Fairbairn’s analysis of Fisher and Boston in *The Revelation of Law in Scripture*, 156-57.

For similar positions see Flavel, 6:323, 339; Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 55-64; Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations on the Pentateuch and the Psalms* (1612; repr., Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1991), 1:587-88.

¹⁰² Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 62.

better covenant; and so to be a manuduction unto Christ, viz.: to discover sin, to waken the conscience, and to convince them of their own impotency, and so drive them out of themselves to Christ.¹⁰³

A similar position stated that these passages taught that the Mosaic Law contained a restatement of the principle of works. It was not re-established or renewed, only republished and repeated in order to drive men to Christ.¹⁰⁴ Herman Witsius explains:

And first, we observe, that, in the ministry of Moses, there was a repetition of the doctrine concerning the law of the covenant of works. For both the very same precepts are inculcated, on which the covenant of works was founded, and which constituted the condition of that covenant; and that sentence is repeated, “which if a man do he shall live in them,” Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11, 13 by which formula, the righteousness, which is of the law, is described, Rom. 10:5. And the terror of the covenant of works is increased by repeated comminations; and that voice heard, “cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them,” Deut. 27:26. Now the apostle declares, that this is the curse of the law, as the law is opposed to faith, or the covenant of grace, Gal. 3:10, 12 . . . Secondly, we more especially remark, that when the law was given from mount Sinai or Horeb, there was a repetition of the covenant of works . . . Thirdly, we are not, however, to imagine, that the doctrine of the covenant of works was repeated, in order to set up again such a covenant with the Israelites, in which they were to seek for righteousness and salvation . . . The Israelites were, therefore, thus put in mind of the covenant of works, in order to convince them of their sin and misery, to drive them out of themselves, to show them the necessity of a satisfaction, and to compel them to Christ. And so their being thus brought to a remembrance of the covenant of works tended to promote the covenant of grace.¹⁰⁵

A third Puritan position understood the proof texts used by the Westminster Confession of Faith to refer to the Law absolutely or separated from the Gospel.¹⁰⁶ When

¹⁰³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁰⁴ See, e.g., James Fisher, *Exposition of the Shorter Catechism* (1765; repr., Southampton, England: Berith Publications, 1998), 108; Jonathan Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:547.

¹⁰⁵ Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, 2:182-84. Compare Fairbairn’s analysis of Witsius, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture*, 155.

¹⁰⁶ See Ball, *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, 117-22; Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 105-9; James Fergusson, “A Brief Exposition of the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians,”

the Mosaic Law is taken out of its context, then and only then does it become contrary to the Gospel by becoming the matter (describes the righteousness required in the Covenant of Works) and/or form (offers life by works) of the Covenant of Works. Hence, passages like Deut 27:26 and Lev 18:5 did not, in their original intent, renew or repeat the Covenant of Works.

The Pharisees and Judaizers of Paul's day distorted the Law by separating it from the Gospel and used it for their justification before God. Paul's quotations of Moses in Romans and Galatians are thus referring to the Jews' perversion of the Law. In so doing the apostle expounds the principle of works, which is applicable to the Covenant of Works made with Adam.

Of these three possible explanations for the use of Gal 3:10, 12 and Rom 10:5 as proof texts for the Covenant of Works, the third is the most likely. This is so because the Divines did not use Lev 18:5, Deut 27:26, or any passage pertaining to the Mosaic Covenant as proof texts. If they had understood the Mosaic Covenant to be a renewal or republication of the Covenant of Works, they probably would have appealed to the Law of Moses directly, as many Puritans did.

For our purposes, however, it does not matter which view provides the best explanation for the proof texts. All of them disagree substantially with Kline and Karlberg. The third sees no aspect of works in the Mosaic Covenant while the other two do but in a different manner.

The Puritans who believed that the Covenant of Works was renewed or repeated at Mount Sinai understood the condition of obedience to be limited to the Ten Commandments (i.e., the moral law).¹⁰⁷ The promise of life upon obedience was more hypothetical than real since this "offer" was directed and applied only to the unregenerate in Israel for the purpose of converting them to Christ. For "when the Law as a Covenant of Works had driven the Israelites to Christ, then it was dissolved to them in that respect and its covenant frame was to be dissolved."¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, this function or application of the Law of Works still continues today.¹⁰⁹

By contrast, Kline and Karlberg believe that the works-principle, which involved the whole law (moral, civil, and ceremonial), was not merely hypothetical, but actually applied. Kline says:

in *The Epistles of Paul and The Epistle to the Hebrews* (1656-1674; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1978), 38, 51.

¹⁰⁷ A distinction was sometimes made between the first and second writings of the Ten Commandments. The first writing was the renewal of the Covenant of Works, whereas the second was the renewal of the Covenant of Grace. See Fisher, *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 56-78; Ball, *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, 96-101; Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 62-63.

¹⁰⁸ Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 114. See Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 74. Contra Karlberg's interpretation of Fisher in "Reformed Interpretation," 35.

¹⁰⁹ See Boston's notes in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 57. See also Edwards, *Works*, 1:547; Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (1845; repr., Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1992), 195.

The law's principle of works was not just something hypothetical. It was actually applied—and with a vengeance. It was the judicial principle that governed the corporate life of Israel as recipient of the national election and controlled Israel's tenure in the typological kingdom of Canaan. Termination of that typological order and Israel's loss of the national election in the divine execution of the covenant curse in the Babylonian exile and again in A.D. 70, exactly as threatened in the Torah treaty, emphatically contradict the notion that the law's stipulations and sanctions were mere hypothetical formulations.¹¹⁰

This real application of the works-principle was established with all Israel, regenerate and unregenerate alike, and abrogated with the coming of Christ.

Consequently, at best this objection can be used to demonstrate that the Westminster Confession of Faith is compatible with the renewal/repetition views of the Covenant of Works in the Mosaic Covenant. But by no means can it be used to support the position of Kline and Karlberg.

Objection 5: Larger Catechism 93 defines the moral law which includes, "promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it." Larger Catechism 98 says that the moral law was summarized in the Ten Commandments, which were delivered upon Mount Sinai. Connecting these two ideas, one must logically conclude that the law given to Israel promised life and threatened death. Hence, Israel was under a covenant of works, at least in some sense.

This objection proves too much. We are under the moral law today, so we would have to conclude that we, like Israel, are under the Covenant of Works. Furthermore, this objection fails to take into account an important distinction the Puritans used, namely the Law apart from Christ and the Law in the hand of Christ. Larger Catechism 93 considers the moral law by itself or apart from Christ, whereas Larger Catechism 98 refers to the moral law as given to Israel in connection with Christ and the Covenant of Grace, as John Ball explains:

The distinction of the Law and Gospel as they are opposed one to another is clean and evident: but as the Law was given to the Jews it is not opposite, but subordinate to the Gospel. The Law in itself considered exacted perfection of works as the cause of life: but when that was impossible to man by reason of the infirmity of his flesh, it pleased the Lord to make known to his people by the ministry of Moses, that the Law was given, not to detain men in confidence of their own works, but to lead them unto Christ. Whatsoever the Law teaches, whatsoever it promises, whatsoever it commands, always it has Christ for the scope thereof.

¹¹⁰ Kline, "Gospel until the Law," 435.

The Law was never given or made positive without the Gospel, neither is the Gospel now without the Law.¹¹¹

V. Conclusion

Presbyterian and Reformed theologians have disagreed over the nature of the Mosaic Covenant since the Reformation. The debate has by no means abated in our day. However, this is not to imply that the Presbyterian and Reformed creeds have not reached a majority consensus on this matter. The Westminster Standards is a majority consensus, and it is not tolerant of any position that holds to a “works principle” operative upon believing Israel in the Mosaic Covenant. In order for the Presbyterian and Reformed community to be faithful to her heritage she must relate to Moses as a friend and not a foe.

¹¹¹ Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 113-14, 102.