

The Debate of Hermeneutics

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Within modern day Evangelical Christianity the mention of the word ‘law’ almost consistently invokes a negative response. It is of such a nature that the message being offered is often tuned out by the listener, because they have concluded beforehand that this has no bearing on them. This negative response is the fruit of a theological teaching which has taught that ‘law’ and ‘gospel’ are the antithesis of each other. As a result of this theological emphasis the Old Testament as a whole has been dismissed as being irrelevant to the ‘New Covenant’ believer’s daily faith walk, because it is presumed to be primarily law based.

In ‘Permanent Value of the Old Testament’ Wheeler Robinson “calls to the attention of his readers the fact that the value of the Old Testament to the early Church was obvious and unquestioned; it formed, in fact, the Bible of the Church before there was a New Testament at all.”¹ This is also vividly borne out by the author of the Gospel of Luke who quotes Yeshua words to His disciples after His resurrection stating that, “This is what I meant when I was still with you and told you that everything written about me in the Torah of Moshe, the Prophets and the Psalms had to be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds, so that they could understand the *Tanakh* ...” (Luke 24:44, 45, CJB). The triad of Torah (Law), Prophets, and Psalms were the Hebrew Scriptures or what we would refer to as the Old Testament. This same author, the Apostle Luke, implies that the gospel is within the Old Testament in his account in the book of Acts of the Bereans who would examine the Scriptures, which could only have been the Old Testament, to verify what the Apostle Paul had taught in the synagogue that day (Acts 17:11). Even though the Apostle Paul spoke to this issue of the relevance of the entire corpus of Scripture in his epistle to Timothy (II Tim. 3:16) it was not long after his death that there were elements within the early Church that had embraced a distaste for the Old Testament. By the middle of the second century the opinions of Marcion of Sinope had created a stir amongst the Early Church Fathers. “For Marcion there was a radical discontinuity between flesh and spirit, law and gospel, the god of Israel and the Father of Jesus, the Old Testament and the New Testament.”² These opinions of Marcion were declared as heresy by the early Church, but with the dawn of the Reformation it seems as if the seed of these same ideas once again found fertile soil. For many believers’ today their ‘*halachah*’ (their daily walking out of their faith) would suggest that these ideals of Marcion have shaped and formed their theological paradigm. As Baker affirms, “It is clear therefore that the Modern Church, in spite of its official rejection of Marcionism and Nazism, has often allowed implicit Marcionism in practice.”³

Through out the Church’s history this ongoing discussion of law and gospel has had an audience. Since the Reformation it has taken on a new level of intensity and is ever

¹ D.L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 150.

² *Ibid.*, 45.

³ *Ibid.*, 85.

increasing in significance and involvement in the last several decades. “Several factors account for the radically different conclusions reached by biblical scholars and theologians, the most important of which is the diverse theological and hermeneutical frameworks that are used to order and arrange the various texts.”⁴ Within the scope of this reading research project I have read a cross section of materials written by various scholars upon this topic with the intent to understand the fundamentals of the ongoing discussion. From the reading an attempt will be made to reveal the most prominent theological and hermeneutical frameworks influencing this discussion today. Once each position is clearly articulated, another three essential components of this discussion will be presented and they are the Church’s perception of the law, the search for central unifying theme of Scripture, and continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments.

After the reading for this project came to a conclusion the scope of this subject vastness became apparent. In no way do I presume this review and discussion to be exhaustive, but the realization is evident that this project has merely a preliminary introduction to the entire issue of law versus gospel and the struggle to resolve the matter of continuity or discontinuity between the Testaments.

1. PROMINENT THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Lutheran Perspective

Luther’s revelation of justification by faith alone apart from works was the seedbed for a new emphasis in his approach to the Scriptures. “Luther himself saw Law and Gospel as discontinuous and made the distinction between these two basic to his theology.”⁵ He viewed each forming a very distinct and separate epoch of biblical faith which was separated by the incarnation of Messiah. As a result of their stance of discontinuity the Lutheran position views the Law of Moses as applicable only to the Jews and has no direct bearing upon those who have accepted Yeshua as Messiah. Moo writes that, “Paul teaches that Christians should not look directly to the Mosaic Law as their authoritative code of conduct but to “the law of Christ.” This “law” is not a set of rules but a set of principles drawn from the life and teachings of Jesus, with love for others as its heart and the indwelling Spirit as its directive force.”⁶ Thus whenever the New Testament Scriptures refer to the ‘commandments’ (John 14:21; I Cor.7:19; I John 5:3) it is presumed that these passages are referring to the ‘Law of Christ’ rather than the Torah or Mosaic Law. From within the theological framework that is implicit but lacking that presupposition it would be difficult to glean that from the text. The process of determining the ‘Law of Christ’ appears to involve a fair amount of individual subjectivity which is not necessarily reliant upon the Word of God.

This strong emphasis on discontinuity, the separation of Law and Gospel, sets the stage for those of this faith expression to place a greater emphasis upon the writings of the New Testament and licences an easy disregard for the Old Testament Scriptures.

⁴ Douglas Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 320.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 320-321.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 357.

Moo himself has stated that he believes, “that the traditional approach needs to be modified by greater attention to the salvation – historical perspective of the Scriptures.”⁷

The Dispensational Perspective

The foundation of the Dispensational framework is centered on the division of history into periods of time which are referred to as dispensations. “A dispensation is a period which is identified by its relation to some particular purpose of God – a purpose accomplished within that period.”⁸ Seven dispensations are usually outlined in the Classical Dispensational writings, but Blaising makes his reader aware of the ongoing debate over the last four hundred years as to the number, name and duration of the dispensations.⁹ There seems to be as many dispensational breakdowns as there were prominent scholars in their camp which poses the question to this systems objective grounding. From a mere reading of Scripture it would be difficult to see these dispensations clearly outlined within the text and as a result it is understandable that their determination would be somewhat subjective resulting in various opinions. This weakness demonstrates that the dispensational breakdown is strongly influenced by the presuppositions of man brought to Scripture rather than Scripture determining the way.

A couple distinguishing facets of the Dispensational framework is their emphasis of “a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church and discontinuity between the Old Testament and New Testament.”¹⁰ According to Blaising the teachings of Classical Dispensationalism state that, “In order to understand the Bible, one needed to recognize that God was pursuing two different purposes, one related to heaven and one related to the earth. In fact, they resulted in an anthropological dualism: a heavenly humanity and an earthly humanity.”¹¹ This anthropological dualism is worked out in viewing the Church as the heavenly humanity and national Israel as the earthly humanity. In essence there are two covenants at work in the Scriptures, a covenant of promise which is strictly for those who believe in Yeshua and a covenant of law which is for national Israel. Robertson explains: “Inherent in this distinction is not a “more biblical” consistency of interpretation. Instead, basic to the distinction is a metaphysical or philosophical dichotomy between the material and the spiritual realms. A form of Platonism actually permeates the hermeneutical roots of dispensationalism.”¹² When this teaching is taken to its extreme it paves the way for the concept of two modes of salvation one for the Jew and another for the Gentile. Evidence of this distorted understanding is seen within Messianic Congregations where the Jewish believers are expected to observe the

⁷ Ibid., 321.

⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1976), 40.

⁹ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell C. Block, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 118-119.

¹⁰ Joe M. Sprinkle, *Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethic Approach for Today of the Mosaic Regulations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2006), 6.

¹¹ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell C. Block, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 23.

¹² O Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1981), 213-214.

requirements of the Law, whereas the Gentile believer is free from that obligation. The positive consequence of this theology within the broader Church is a reawakening of our obligation to the Jewish people (Rom. 11:11) and the Israeli state.

“Traditionally, dispensationalists have emphasized the discontinuities between Law and Gospel, basing their teaching especially on the Pauline contribution to the issue.”¹³ This has fostered a strong belief that the Mosaic Law has no relevance in relation to sanctification of the believer. Strickland argues, “... it is not the moral law of the Mosaic code that the Holy Spirit employs to supervise the believer; rather, it is the law of Christ that is made imperative by the Spirit.”¹⁴ Once again we have a theological framework that rejects a written code for holiness or sanctification and relies upon a subjective code which is individually arrived at and determined upon our level of walking in the Spirit.

Dispensationalism is a theological framework that has been involved in a constant evolution and transformation. In the course of our reading there have been three distinct flows mentioned within this camp and they are:

- i) Classical - the period from John Nelson Darby to Lewis Sperry Chafer.
- ii) Revised - from the late fifties to the late seventies. (Ryrie, Walvoord, Pentecost)
- iii) Progressive Dispensationalism – which began in the early eighties bringing “dispensationalism closer to contemporary evangelical biblical interpretation.”¹⁵ They are no longer emphasizing the dual hermeneutic of the classical era, but have embraced the grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture.

Progressive Dispensationalists no longer view each dispensation standing alone but, “as successive arrangements in the progress revelation and accomplishment of redemption.”¹⁶ Blaising and Block present a more united covenant based view of dispensationalism which brings their entire framework closer to the written Word and tends to move the pendulum from viewing the Testaments as completely discontinuous to mildly conceding to a greater openness to a measure of continuity between the Testaments.

The Covenantal Perspective

“Covenant theology begins with continuity rather than discontinuity, not because of any priori bias, but because Scripture itself moves from promise to fulfillment, not from one distinct program to another and then back again.”¹⁷ As the name of the theological framework suggests, it is structured around the concept of a covenant agreement which God and humankind have entered into. Searching through the Scriptures for evidence of

¹³ Wayne G. Strickland, “The Inauguration of Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 240.

¹⁴ Wayne G. Strickland, “Response to Willem A. VanGemeren,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 80.

¹⁵ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell C. Block, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 48.

¹⁷ Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 20.

the existence of covenants at least nine distinct covenants¹⁸ present themselves. There might be some argument about the Edenic covenant, since the word covenant does not appear in Scripture until Genesis 6:18 in relation to the Noachic Covenant. Yet, this covenant is affirmed in the writings of the Prophet Hosea when he refers to a covenant which the Lord made with humankind which was broken by Adam (Hosea 6:7). Both Robertson and Horton cite rabbinic scholars who affirm that Adam's disobedience in the Garden was implied in this text's reference to breaking covenant.¹⁹ In spite of Horton's claim of Scriptural bases for this theological perspective he goes on to mention three covenants which present a challenge in being directly implied in the Scripture unless the Word is approached with certain presuppositions. He reminds the reader of, "the traditional Reformed concept of three overarching covenants: the covenant of redemption (an eternal pact between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit), the covenant of creation (made with humanity in Adam), and the covenant of grace (made with believers and their children in Christ)."²⁰ The covenant of redemption is a covenant that I had not encountered before and appears to be a theological concept that is brought into Scripture. Just consider for a moment his premise that this was a covenant made between the members of the Trinity. That flies in the face of the basic understanding of covenant which is an agreement entered into by two distinct parties, is not our Lord ONE. Robertson questions the validity of this premise stating that:

A sense of artificiality flavours the effort to structure in covenantal terms the mysteries of God's eternal counsels. Scripture simply does not say much on the pre-creation shape of the decrees of God. To speak concretely of an intertrinitarian "covenant" with terms and conditions between Father and Son mutually endorsed before the foundations of the world is to extend the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety... . . . In view of more recent light on the character of the biblical covenants, the feasibility of a "covenant" among the members of the Trinity appears even less likely."²¹

The second overarching covenant which Horton refers to is the 'covenant of creation' (or as some scholars refer to as "covenant of works") which was made with Adam before the 'fall'. As stated earlier there are Scriptural grounds for this covenant which has been affirmed by both rabbinic and covenantal scholars. The third overarching covenant brings together all the covenants which God made with fallen humankind and is referred to as the covenant of grace. Although I can grasp the logical flow of this framework I am left with a deep unease that this entire concept has been imposed upon Scripture to make a theological statement, rather than allowing Scripture to speak for itself. Horton himself alludes to this logic when he states: "In fact, the architects of federal theology clearly

¹⁸ Edenic (Gen. 1:26-31; 2:15-17), Adamic (Gen.3:14-23), Noachic (Gen. 8:13 - 9:17), Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1-3), Mosaic (Exodus 19:3-8, 24), Davidic (II Sam. 7:1-17), Phinehas (Num. 25:10-31), Palestinian (Deut. 30:1-14), and New (Jer. 31:27-40).

¹⁹ A. Cohen, *The Twelve Prophets, Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary* (New York, NY: The Soncino Press, Ltd., 1994), 23, quoted in Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, 22n3 and Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology*, 95n36.

²⁰ Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 77.

²¹ O Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1981), 54.

recognized that their covenant of works – grace scheme arose from their prior commitment to the distinction between law and gospel.”²²

The Reformed view of the law is integrated with an understanding of covenant. *Covenant* denotes relationship that the Lord sovereignly and graciously establishes and maintains, whereas *law* denotes the order that is required for that relationship to be meaningful. ...in God’s relationship with humans, the moral law reveals his will and character, the observance of which enhances order.²³

Since the position of Covenant Theologians is that the law reveals God’s will and character this in turn becomes the foundational premise for their theological stance that the moral law should be as unchanging as our Lord (Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 102:25-27). The law is seen as an instrument which aids and assists the believer to become conformed to the image of God. It is humanities guidebook to understand what righteousness would look like and how to walk it out in such a manner that it would fully express our love for God.

In addition Covenant Theologians view the law as being divisible into three distinct categories: moral, ceremonial, and civil.

The moral law being based on the character of God that does not change, remains forever applicable. Ceremonial law (modern Biblical scholars often label these cultic laws) refers to those laws having to do with religious ritual or ceremonies: the sacrifices, the festivals, the tabernacle, laws of clean and unclean and the like. ...unlike the moral law, the ceremonial laws are no longer directly applicable to Christians but have been supplanted by Christ. Civil law gives regulations to be enforced by the theocratic, national state of Israel in order to maintain a civil society. ...since the Church is not a nation, civil laws are not directly applicable to the Church...²⁴

Horton explains that the ceremonial and civil laws were given to establish a specific type of society which functioned under theocratic governance. When that specific approach to governance came to an end these laws which were given for that precise purpose were no longer applicable without the theocracy.²⁵

Within every theological framework there are differing perspectives or emphasis on the same basic fundamental truths. Covenant Theology has an emphasis referred to as the Theonomic approach which views the application of the three above mentioned categories of law somewhat differently. They argue that not only does the moral law apply today, but also the civil. Bahnsen argues that, “If God expected them [(gentile nations surrounding Israel)] to uphold and enforce the civil provisions of his law, the natural inference would be that magistrates outside the Old Testament Israel in the

²² Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 85.

²³ Willem A. VanGemenen, “The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 46.

²⁴ Joe M. Sprinkle, *Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethic Approach for Today of the Mosaic Regulations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2006), 2-3.

²⁵ Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 177.

modern world are likewise charged with obedience to the same provisions.”²⁶ The civil laws are to be applied to modern societies that willingly embrace them with the ultimate goal of restoring the theocracy which was lost because of Israel’s disobedience.

The Epigenetic Perspective

The focus of the Epigenetic Perspective is upon the progressive revelatory nature of Scripture as a whole. This requires the allowance of Scripture to speak forth without forcing presuppositions upon the text to affirm their theological framework. As Kaiser states: “If the text is to be allowed to first speak for itself before our assessments are made, then we would vigorously like to propose that the element of the “promise” is the center which may be demonstrated from every era of the canon.”²⁷ This element of the “promise” has its beginning in Genesis 3:15 with the promise of a child through whom the redemption of the world (creation) and the human race would be realized. It is this promise that we find at the heart and core of every covenant within the corpus of Scripture. As the narrative of Scripture progressively unfolds the details of this promise are revealed in greater measure within each era and covenant. Virkler explains this hermeneutical concept of progressive revelation as the epigenetic theory which he compares to the growth of a plant. He explains that, “The epigenetic theory views revelation as analogous to the growth of a tree from a seed, to a seedling, to a young tree, and then to a fully grown tree.”²⁸ Kaiser in light of that analogy states, “Just so, the central idea matures as revelation progresses into the NT era.”²⁹

The approach in which the epigenetic perspective views the law is very similar to that of the Covenant theologians. They accept the premise that there is a three part division of the law including moral, ceremonial and civil. Kaiser stresses that, “The moral law of God took precedence over the civil and ceremonial laws in that it was based on the character of God. The civil and ceremonial laws functioned only as further illustrations of the moral law. That is why holiness and love could serve as veritable summaries of all that the law demanded.”³⁰ The typical tension between law and gospel found in many of the previous theological frameworks is not found in the epigenetic perspective. Their emphasis that, “the whole of the canonical text must be received on an equal level”³¹ diffuses this dichotomy and shapes their perspective that the entire corpus of Scripture is relevant for the believer today, including the law. That is not to say that the element of discontinuity is not found in this system, but it is not a tension that defines this theological perspective. In Kaiser’s response to an essay written by Douglas Moo he

²⁶ Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 130.

²⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), ix.

²⁸ Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 133.

²⁹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 22.

³⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Law as God’s Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 190.

³¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 15.

makes this salient point that, “The amount of discontinuity found in such a radical separation of Law and Gospel into respective eras “before” and “after” Christ will not fit the biblical evidence.”³² In the epigenetic perspective law and gospel complement each other and are found within each other as they have the same source that being God. Law is most definitely understood as being relevant for the modern day believer and “any solution that quickly runs the law out of town certainly cannot look to the Scriptures for any kind of comfort or support.”³³ Kaiser argues for the continuity within Scripture by pointing out that, “The continuity of terms, identities, and meanings throughout both testaments is more than a mere accident. It is a remarkable evidence of a single-planned program and a unified single people of God.”³⁴

The Principalizing Approach Perspective

The Principalizing Approach does not advocate the premise that there is within Scripture a tension between law and gospel. It views law as an important and relevant part of Scripture which maintains within our modern society a measure of practical application. In order to discover a contemporary application for the law, “it is necessary to look at each law and ask what principle – moral or religious – underlies this regulation.”³⁵ This theological framework embraces the completeness of Paul’s instruction that, “All Scripture is God breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living;...(II Tim. 3:16). In spite of this understanding it does not deny the element of discontinuity within the Scriptures. “Fundamental to this approach is to recognize that the law has changed since the advent of Christ. ...the fulfillment of the law by Christ nevertheless has transformed the way in which we apply OT laws.”³⁶

It is with this in mind that the Principalizing Approach acknowledges that laws such as “don’t harvest all the way to corners of your field,” (Lev. 19:9) cannot be literally applied in a modern day urban setting or even in a North American farming community. Although they believe that in spite of the difficulty of a literal application there is a truth within this ‘law’ that has practical application for today. Sprinkle points out that,

The underlying principles of the law transcend their original cultural and covenantal setting. This is achieved by a process of principalization: starting with a particular law, then going up the “ladder of abstraction” (Kaiser’s term) to find a more general moral or religious principle that undergirds that law. The principle so derived is then reapplied today taking into consideration the changed cultural and theological setting under the new covenant.³⁷

³² Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Response to Douglas Moo,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 394.

³³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Law as God’s Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 178.

³⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 103.

³⁵ Joe M. Sprinkle, *Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethic Approach for Today of the Mosaic Regulations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2006), 20.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

William J. Webb in “Slaves, Women & Homosexuals” explains that the ‘ladder of abstraction’ as the process of moving a culturally bound command upward to discover the transcultural principle that would reveal the very nature and will of God. The transcultural principle of Leviticus 19:9 that we could apply in our present day society either urban or rural are helping to feed the poor, thus demonstrating love for our neighbour. This explanation of the ‘ladder of abstraction’ affirms the Principalizing Approach’s view that the law is a reflection of God’s holy character, although within their viewpoint the law is not broken down into different categories with difference relevance.

The Principalizing Approach places high value upon the Old Testament Scripture declaring them as the Word and truth of God. As Sprinkle points out, “Any interpretation of John 1:17 that sees in John a sharp contrast between law and truth is rendered dubious on the basis of John’s statements elsewhere that assume the truth of the Mosaic law.”³⁸ Within this theological framework the Scripture is once again honoured in that it is allowed to explain itself without the constraints of its framework directing its articulation of ‘truth’.

2. TREATMENT OF THE LAW

Law versus Gospel

The Unacknowledged Underlying Tension

The Law versus Gospel debate which the major theological frameworks use as one of their defining principles is not in my view a Biblically grounded discussion. Upon reading through the ongoing discussion in the books selected for this research project there has not been a convincing argument that would alter that viewpoint. The perception that continues to nudge at me is the concept of presuppositions being the motivation behind much of the arguments presented. Sprinkle quotes Keener’s observation that, “John does not encourage his readers to forsake their Jewish past, but to recognize that following Christ, the embodiment of Torah, his community fulfills the highest demands of Judaism.”³⁹ Most of the arguments for discontinuity in this debate seem to be an effort to separate the Christian community from its Jewish (Judaic) roots. There seems to be no other explanation for the aversion for the Mosaic Law that continues to arise within the debate. Eusebius the earliest known Church historian alludes to the prevailing mindset towards the Jewish people of the Early Church when he writes, “it is my intention, also, to describe the calamities that swiftly overwhelmed the whole Jewish nation, in consequence of their plots against our Saviour;...”⁴⁰ In this short sentence the attitude that the Jewish nation was antagonistic towards the gospel is subtly implied. The great reformer Martin Luther affirmed that the Catholic Church’s view of the Jews had not changed from that of the Early Church when in 1523 he writes, “For they have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs and not human beings.”⁴¹ It only took twenty years of

³⁸ Ibid, 31.

³⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁰ Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 13.

⁴¹ Martin Luther, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, reprinted in Frank Ephraim Talmage, ed., *Disputation and Dialogue: Reading in the Jewish-Christian Encounter* (New York: Ktav/Anti-Defamation League of

fruitless striving in his attempt to evangelise Jewish community that his writings began to reflect a deep seated contempt for the Jewish community which became the ‘seedbed’ for the Nazi’s final solution. Luther’s later life opinions concerning the Jewish community reflected the ferociousness of the Early Church Fathers in every respect. As in the days of the Early Church Fathers the desire to remove the Gospel from its historical Jewish moorings maybe the unacknowledged underlying tension in this entire debate.

Love Replaces Law.

Two of the theological frameworks Lutheran and Dispensational, which advocate the discontinuity between the testaments also, are adamantly dismissive of the Mosaic Law. In the ongoing debate Moo (Lutheran) states, “I do not think that the Christian is directly responsible to obey any part of the Mosaic law.”⁴² Later on in his essay he goes on to make the point that, “Paul’s claim that the commandment “Love your neighbour as yourself” sums up (anakephalaioō) all the other commandments (Rom. 13:9) surely points in this direction. If love for others ‘sum up’ the commandments, the implications is that the one who truly loves will have no need of these commandments.”⁴³ This premise of loving your neighbour is presented by Moo almost as if it is some new theological concept of Paul’s, but a reading of Leviticus 19:18 will bear out that this command was actually part of the Mosaic Law. The renowned Rabbi Hillel lived in the early part of the first century, dying of old age by 10 C.E. This places his time of greatest influence as the leader of the School of Hillel well before Yeshua’s first appearance in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52). Hillel actually taught that love for your fellowman, which he referred to as the Golden Rule, was the essence of the whole Torah. As the story goes:

A certain gentile once came to Hillel and said, “I am ready to become a Jew, but only if you can teach me the whole Torah while I stand here on one foot.” Hillel answered him, “What is hateful to you, don’t do to your fellowman; that is the whole Torah, and the rest...is just a commentary. Go then and learn it!” (Shabbat 31a)⁴⁴

For anyone to claim that love is the new path which was brought in by Yeshua and Paul just shows their lack of consideration of the Jewish context from which the Gospel originated. Moo himself states that, “Jesus, therefore does not suggest that love is to replace the law, but that love is central and vital to the law.”⁴⁵ When placed within its context one will discover as VanGemeran (Covenantal) argues that in the Old Testament “law and love are not opposed but complementary. Peter C. Craigie sees rightly law and covenant in the context of love: “The Decalog was representative of God’s love in that

B’nai B’rith, 1975), p. 33; quoted in Michael L. Brown, *Our Hands Are Stained With Blood* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1992), 18.

⁴² Douglas Moo, “Response to Willem A. VanGemeran,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 84.

⁴³ Douglas Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 357.

⁴⁴ Yitzhak Buxbaum, *The Life and Teachings of Hillel* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1994), 95.

⁴⁵ Douglas Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 354.

its injunctions, both negative and positive, led not to a restriction of life, but to fullness of life.”⁴⁶ When we consider the directive given to the Old Testaments saints to walk in love that it was no different than the admonition taught by Rabbi Hillel, Yeshua and Paul from this we have evidence not of a brand new way, but rather of continuity within the Scriptures between ‘Law’ and ‘Gospel’. Horton (Covenantal) brings this thought to a powerful conclusion stating that, “Law and love go hand in hand in Scripture. To obey God is to love him, and if one wants to know how to love God, the answer the Bible clearly gives is the law.”⁴⁷ All the theological frameworks included in this research project, but the two mentioned before hand, would concur that the law being referred to is the Mosaic Law.

The Misleading Impression of Law

W. A. Whitehouse has said, and rightly so, that the translation of the Hebrew *torah* by the Greek *nomos* and the English *law* has created a misleading impression of the way God had dealt with Israel to make them His people. It obscures the wider and more personal communication which is partly suggested by ‘teaching,’ and implies that Israel is bound to God in a relation which is adequately expressed by strict obedience to a code of law.⁴⁸

If in every place that the Hebrew word *torah* appears in the text of Scripture we replace it with the English word *instruction* or *teaching* we would come to grasp Whitehouse’s valid point. Torah was never meant to be understood as a legal code, but rather as instructions to a community of faith. The heart and soul of the Old Testament faith is summed up in the Shema (Deut. 6:4-6), which is a call of relationship not a call of strict obedience. Within the Torah it has been made clear that Adonai in His selection of Israel was looking for a people with whom He could commune and dwell (Exodus 25:8) as before sin’s entrance in the world. Milton clarifies the intended Hebraic meaning of the word *torah* by stating that its, “primary frame of reference is not a code of law but a *covenantal relationship*.”⁴⁹

Jewish Misapplication of the Law

Moo touches upon another important perspective within this debate when he explains that, “Paul’s contrast between “the righteousness that is by the law” and “the righteousness that is by faith” (Rom. 10:5-8; cf. 9:30-32; 10:2-3) is a contrast between God’s way of making people righteous and a Jewish misinterpretation that elevated the law into a means of salvation.”⁵⁰ This is at the very heart of Paul’s epistles when he argues that justification can only come through faith not through the works of humankind. When the call for repentance came forth from John the Baptist and the

⁴⁶ P. C. Craige, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 150, quoted in Willem A. VanGemeren, “The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 46.

⁴⁷ Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 84.

⁴⁸ John P. Milton, *God’s Covenant of Blessing* (Rock Island, Ill: Augustana Press, 1961), 160.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

⁵⁰ Douglas Moo, “Response to Wayne Strickland,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 312.

Apostles of Yeshua they were calling the people of the covenant to return to the precepts of Torah, rather than man's misinterpretation and misapplication of Torah.

Paul speaks forcefully in Galatians 4 of two covenants, two mountains, and two mothers. A covenant of law is established at Mount Sinai, engendering an earthly Jerusalem, which is identified with Hagar the slave; and a covenant of promise is given to Abraham and his seed, engendering a heavenly Jerusalem, which is identified with Sarah the free women. Confusion of these two covenants, Paul believed lay at the heart of the Galatian heresy...⁵¹

Horton explains in great detail the differences between the Mosaic (Law) and Abrahamic (Gospel) covenants as stated in this Pauline allegory. But consider for a moment that an allegory is a symbolically laden story used to explain a truth or concept about humanities experience. Then why are we to automatically conclude that the two covenants being referred to are the Mosaic and Abrahamic? Here again I feel that nudge of presuppositions being brought to the text. Could not the context be allowed to explain the meaning of the allegorical story? Paul is dealing within the letter to the Galatians with a misinterpretation and misapplication of justification; this is the thesis of his argument. If we could step back from our persuppositional position for a moment, that is the Law verse Gospel paradigm, and look at the allegory a fresh there are two keys words which can unfold Paul's intended meaning. These are the words *flesh* and *promise*, which are found in verse 23, which do speak to the context of the epistle with clarity. *Flesh* has the connotation of striving to accomplish something within our own means. If one would look at the narrative of Hagar and the birth of her son Ishmael it is apparent that Ishmael was the result of Abraham and Sarah attempt to assist Adonai to bring about the promise. They took matters into their own hands – they self-crafted a path and executed a means in an attempt to force the covenantal promise's fulfillment. In other words they were looking for a human-centered means to realize the promise that Adonai had given to Abraham. Whereas the word *promise* within the context of the allegory carries with it the concept that Adonai could only be the source of its fulfillment. The promise was something that was beyond human ability and required complete and total reliance upon Adonai. Why else would Adonai wait until Sarah was ninety years old before He decided to open her womb (Gen. 18:10-14), he could have done that at any time unless there was a specific purpose for His unique approach. It was to demonstrate that the promise was not something man could bring about by his own efforts, but it required total and complete reliance and faith in Adonai. This is the difference between the covenant of the slave woman and the covenant of the free woman. The slave woman strived and failed; the free women relied upon Adonai and received.

The essence of Paul's allegory is inclusion into the covenant of faith, which is justification. A question we must consider is through whom was the promise to be realized – Ishmael or Isaac? The narrative of the book of Genesis states that it is the lineage of Isaac or the free women through whom that the promise will come (Gen. 17:17-20; Rom. 9:6-9). Actually Ishmael was neither part of the promise nor partaker of the Abrahamic or Mosaic covenants. He was outside the covenant community, just as those who ascribe to their own means of salvation relying on something other than faith.

⁵¹ Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 35.

No one of Jewish heritage would appreciate being called the offspring of Hagar! And in fact, while a promise is given to Ishmael (Gen 16:9ff, which can hardly be described in terms of “blessing”), there is no covenant made with Hagar or with her son Ishmael. Thus, from the outset of the midrash, while Paul specifically mentions two covenants, he actually still has only one covenant primarily in mind, the Abrahamic covenant. His purpose is to show how the true descendants of Abraham are to be reckoned, not to contrast the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants.⁵²

The allegory is directed at believers (covenant members) who have misinterpreted and misapplied the meaning of law, believing that covenant membership was achieved through the Mosaic covenant. They misunderstood that the Mosaic covenant was given to those already in covenant, already a part of the people of God, not to those seeking membership within the community of faith. That is why Paul presents this allegory using Mount Sinai in this manner to demonstrate and highlight the error of their thinking not to affirm the dichotomy between Law and Gospel. ““Law” in this context points to the misapprehension of the law’s purpose as reflected in Abraham’s misdirected efforts to provide a son for himself and in the Judaizer’s efforts to provide righteousness for themselves.”⁵³

Gospel (Grace) Found in Both Covenants

Advocates of the position of discontinuity in the Law versus Gospel debate argue that there is a clear separation between the dispensation of Law and Gospel. This line of distinction is so well defined in their theological framework that there seems to be no real mingling of the two. In a response to Bahnsen’s implication that the words of Messiah take precedence over the words of Paul, Strickland gives a response that highlights this definitive separation. “In any event, the testimony of Paul should not be rendered less authoritative than Christ’s statements. Keep in mind that Christ operated during the law epoch, not the church age, so that much of his teaching is addressed to people living during the law period.”⁵⁴ Just the tenor of this statement reminds me of the tenets of those who embraced the teachings of Marcion in the Early Church.

This clear line of distinction is not found in the pages of the Scriptures where law and gospel (grace) often are seen as intermingling. As Bahnsen argues,

If we allow the Bible to interpret itself and not infuse it with a preconceived theological antithesis between old and new covenant (Law and Gospel), we are compelled to conclude that the old covenant – indeed, the Mosaic Law – was a covenant of grace that offered salvation on the basis of grace through faith, just as does the Good News found in the New Testament.⁵⁵

Vischer goes so far as to argue that “in its nature and essence salvation under the old covenant was in no way different from ours.”⁵⁶ This is the same premise that the Apostle

⁵² Tim Hegg, *A Study in Galatians* (Tacoma, WA: Torah Resource, 2002), 168.

⁵³ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1981), 181.

⁵⁴ Wayne G. Strickland, “Response to Greg L. Bahnsen,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 162.

⁵⁵ Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 97.

⁵⁶ D.L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 227.

Paul argues in the Epistle to the Galatians when he uses Abraham as his example of salvation by faith, or in other words by grace (Gal. 3:6-9, 18).

Milton reminds us of the element of grace that was manifest in every visit to the tabernacle or Temple in the administration of the sacrifices. He writes, “It has been well said that “the sacrifice is not intended to be a basis for entrance into the experience of grace, but for continuance in grace.”⁵⁷ The life of an Old Testament saint was a life of a continual daily walk in the awesome grace of Adonai. Each sacrifice was a reminder that only by the actions of Adonai – or by His grace – could they enter into His presence.

This concept that grace is evident in both covenants is affirmed by Sprinkle when he states that, “The Heb. term *hesed*, despite some controversy, can rightly be translated grace (*charis*) by John [John 1:17]. The theological usage of *hesed* in the OT generally, and in Exodus 34:6 in particular, is that the God of the OT is a God of love and grace who forgives and maintains his covenant with Israel despite Israel’s betrayal of his love.”⁵⁸ Baker within his discussion about von Rad’s theological stance points out that “the transition from salvation based on grace to a legalistic religion was not made within the Old Testament.”⁵⁹

There are numerous accounts within the Old Testament narrative that demonstrate that grace was evident in the daily lives of Adonai’s covenant people. These include the incident with the Golden Calf when Adonai repented because of the intercession of Moses (Exodus 32:14) and when King David was allowed to live even in light of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the resulting murder of Uriah (II Sam. 2:12:13-14). To deny the mix of Law and Gospel (grace) in the Old Testament as in the New would be to disregard the validity of Scripture. As Milton sums it up so well, “The antithesis is not between a covenant of law and a covenant of gospel, as if there were no gospel in the “old” and no law in the “new”; the antithesis is between “the fullness” and that which is only “in part”.”⁶⁰

Three Divisions of the Law

The Reform or Covenantal Theologians have developed a unique approach to handle law which aids in resolving the question of continuity verse discontinuity. Kaiser states that, “This single law had three aspects or parts: the moral law, the civil law and the ceremonial law.”⁶¹ The moral law is a reflection of God’s nature and character and thus is unchanging just as Adonai (Yeshua) is unchanging (Ps. 102:25-27; Heb. 13:8). This is the plumbline used to discern right from wrong aligning humanities actions with Adonai’s own unchanging holy character. The civil law was given to Israel to establish a theocratic nation whose justice and order would personify the nature and character of God. When we look at the ceremonial law, its main focus is upon the chosen people’s

⁵⁷ John P. Milton, *God’s Covenant of Blessing* (Rock Island, Ill: Augustana Press, 1961), 157.

⁵⁸ Joe M. Sprinkle, *Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethic Approach for Today of the Mosaic Regulations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2006), 39.

⁵⁹ D.L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 285.

⁶⁰ John P. Milton, *God’s Covenant of Blessing* (Rock Island, Ill: Augustana Press, 1961), 218.

⁶¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 114.

access into the presence of their holy God. It involved ritual and sacrifice which would present the worshipper as qualified to enter or it would deal with the ‘fallout’ of sin, the failure to conform to the image of their God. The Temple, the residence of Adonai, which was to facilitate His goal of dwelling amongst his people and the place where He was worshipped, was the center and heart of this theocratic nation. With the introduction of the monarchy and, most of all, Israel’s domination by other nations the theocracy which once operated during the days of Moses and the Judges no longer existed. Horton touches upon the issue of continuity and discontinuity of the law by stating, “...the civil and ceremonial laws pertain exclusively to the theocracy and are no longer binding, the moral law is still in force.”

VanGemeren states that it was the ceremonial law that was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14) and was fulfilled through Yeshua’s death. When Yeshua died the curtain of the Holy of Holies tore from top to bottom opening the way for humanity to freely enter into Adonai’s presence. Through His death all humanity would now be ‘qualified’ to enter into God’s presence through a ‘*new and living way*’ (Heb. 10:19-20). This lines up with Peter’s vision in which he was instructed that all humanity was considered ‘clean’ (Acts 10:15, 28).

Although within Covenant Theology continuity is stressed, there is an admission of a discernable level of discontinuity between law and Grace. Of the various theological frameworks that have been studied Covenant (Reformed) Theology for the most part walks the middle ground in the debate, but leans more towards the side of continuity.

Law Given to the Covenant Community

Kaiser makes an interesting remark, “To ask whether the law can bring salvation is to ask the wrong question as far as Scripture is concerned - in both the Old and New Testament! Never does either Testament affirm, imply, or even hint that this might ever have been the case.”⁶² These are strong words coming from Kaiser, but they resonant in light of the contradictory arguments that are posed concerning the Mosaic Law or/and Covenant. Often in the discourse of our reading the arguments have turned to the issue of salvation (justification) in regards to the Mosaic Covenant or Law. Yet, upon the completion of the reading I was taken back by the fact that scholars within every theological framework which we have studied readily admit that the Law was given to an already redeemed people. Strickland states,

As one studies the Mosaic Law, it becomes increasingly clear that its purpose was not to save, for it contains no clear message of salvation or redemption. The most convincing evidence for this observation is found in the Exodus. There God gave his law to an already redeemed or covenant nation (Ex. 20). Salvation came to the Hebrews prior to revelation of the law on Mount Sinai...⁶³

Sprinkle explains what the law’s intended purpose was, “The Law, rather than being a means of salvation, was a means of helping Israel to become a “holy people” set apart to

⁶² Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Response to Douglas Moo,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 394.

⁶³ Wayne G. Strickland, “The Inauguration of Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 233.

God (Ex. 19:6), for it defines holy behaviour.”⁶⁴ This being set apart or being sanctified was never meant to establish an introverted exclusive religious community. As a holy people they were destined to be a light unto the surrounding nations (Is. 49:6) to widen the circle of those included in the community of faith which was known as the commonwealth of Israel. This is demonstrated in the life of Abraham and Sarah before they even left Haran. Genesis 12:5 refers to “...the people [(souls)] they had acquired...” “The Rabbis take the word ‘souls’ to mean the proselytes whom Abram made among the men and Sarai among the women. These converts became subservient to God’s law and followed their master in his spiritual adventure.”⁶⁵ The question often arises how is it possible that Abram’s converts could follow the laws of God if they lived before the giving of the Mosaic Law.

VanGemeren argues for the existence of a moral order in creation prior to the publication of the will of God in the Mosaic covenant. This natural law reveals both the will of God and his attributes. It is for this reason that the human race was accountable to the same standard of righteousness even prior to the publication of the law of God under Moses.⁶⁶

Sanctification was not the only purpose for the Law, but obedience to its principles would release the blessings of God upon His people. As a result of their obedience they would then enjoy the covenantal blessing within their daily lives.

All the theological frameworks agree that the Law was never the intended means of justification, but rather for sanctification and blessing. Even in light of the Law’s application before the Mount Sinai event not all believe that it has any bearing on believers today. Both the Lutheran and Dispensational Perspectives disavow any relevance to the Mosaic Law and only look to what they refer to as the Law of Christ as having any influence upon the believer today.

Church, Shabbat and Israel

The theological frameworks which stress discontinuity also view the Church as having its beginning after the death of Messiah. Those of the Dispensational perspective believe that God has two distinct plans for the nation of Israel and those ‘in Christ’, the Church, thus two distinct beginnings. When reflecting upon the Lutheran position of discontinuity some of Luther’s insights concerning the genesis of the Church seem to be somewhat contradictory. Milton points out, “Though Luther may read too much of New Testament Christology in Gen. 12:5, he is quite correct when he speaks of Abraham’s companions as being more than domestic servants: they constitute “a true holy church,” who had been persuaded by Abraham’s preaching to share his faith in the living God and in his redemptive mercy.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Joe M. Sprinkle, *Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethic Approach for Today of the Mosaic Regulations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2006), 50.

⁶⁵ J. H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch and Haftorahs: Hebrew Text English Translation & Commentary* (New York, NY: The Soncino Press Limited, 1960), 46.

⁶⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Response to Willem A. VanGemeren,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 394.

⁶⁷ John P. Milton, *God’s Covenant of Blessing* (Rock Island, Ill: Augustana Press, 1961), 45.

Covenant Theology has a similar view as Luther's insight seems to state that the Church's beginnings were in the Old Testament. As Vos explains, "It will be noticed that Jesus speaks of 'His Church'. The idea is not that hitherto no Church existed. 'His Church' should be understood in contrast to the Old Testament organization which had now come to an end to make place for the Messiah's Church. In His rejection the Old Testament Church abrogated itself."⁶⁸ In Vos' words we have the concept that the Church replaced the Old Testament organization which is the basic tenet of Replacement Theology⁶⁹. This teaching is widely taught and has great influence upon the theological outlook of those from the Reformed or Covenant Theological perspective. Horton strongly disagrees with this assessment of Covenant Theology he argues that,

...instead of seeing the church as Israel's replacement, it regards it as Israel's fruition. ...and this is where the covenantal view expounded here differs sharply from those above – it is not distinction between Old Testament and the New, as if they provide for two different ways of salvation or communion with God. Rather, it is a distinction within both testaments, arising from two distinct covenants: a national covenant that Israel made with God at Sinai and a gracious covenant that God makes with believers and their children.⁷⁰

Whether we say 'replaced' or 'the fruition of' the end result is the same, Israel is no longer relevant, because the Church has taken up that role. As Horton defends his position he refers to Romans 9-11, but some how he has missed the entire concept that the Apostle Paul attempts to articulate.

Miskotte, on the other hand, affirms that in the Church Gentiles are 'grafted into the ancient tree of the Covenant people' (Rom. 11:12-18) and that it is Israel's election which is the root of the salvation of Christendom. Neither Jews nor Christians alone are Israel but rather the church and synagogue together form one congregation of God.⁷¹

Miskotte's perspective goes beyond the textual intent to include both the church and synagogue without any qualification. If one would read further in verse twenty it states that the qualification to be grafted in is faith. As a horticulturist this Pauline teaching speaks so clearly that the believing Gentiles are grafted into the Olive Tree which is the Israel of God. As Christians we do not replace Israel, rather we are incorporated into Israel. This is what Paul refers to as the '*mystery of the gospel*' (Eph. 2:11ff) when gentiles will be included into the commonwealth of Israel. Again Yeshua speaks about bringing another flock, into the flock that He already tends, so that they came become one flock under His care (John10:16). There is an element of continuity within this concept of Church which the Lutheran, Dispensational and Covenantal perspectives miss totally. Both Kaiser and Sprinkle allude to this truth, but do not develop it sufficiently.

⁶⁸ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1948), 400.

⁶⁹ Replacement Theology is the teaching that the Church has replaced the nation of Israel in the plan of God.

⁷⁰ Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 130-131.

⁷¹ D.L. Baker, *Two Testaments, One Bible* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 143.

Moo discussing the concept of the future renewal of the Mosaic Law writes, "Yet it is evident that the totality of the Mosaic law has *not* been reinstated as an authoritative source of life in the new covenant – its laws pertaining to food, sacrifices, festivals, and civil matter are not binding on Christians (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:9-16; Hebrews, *passim*)."⁷² As a biblical scholar Moo should take the time to acquaint himself with the Jewish culture of the Scriptures and maybe allow Scripture the freedom to speak. In his reference of Mark 7:19, what Yeshua is discussing with the Pharisees is the matter of unwashed hands making the food unclean. We must consider for a moment anything that would be considered as food in this context was only that which is kosher to begin with. Moo demonstrates so vividly that we force upon the Scripture presuppositions that are contrary to the culture and practice of its subjects. Our deep rooted desire to dismiss the kosher laws becomes the spectacles through which we view Scripture as demonstrated again in his reference from Acts 10: 9-16. Reading a bit further in this chapter, verse twenty-eight, Peter himself explains the meaning of the vision that of accepting the Gentile as equals in the kingdom, as 'holy or clean'.

Most of Evangelical Christianity dismisses the observance of the Sabbath in light of the Mosaic Law being no longer relevant to Christians. Moo (Lutheran) addresses the lack of a Scriptural directive for the neglect of the Sabbath. He writes, "While he does not clearly teach the abrogation of the Sabbath command, he redirects attention from the law to himself, the Lord of the Sabbath, and thereby sets in place the principle on which the later church would justify its departure from Sabbath observance."⁷³ Justify is an interesting choice of words in this context. Strickland (Dispensational) takes the same approach in his argument against Sabbath observance using Acts 20:7 and I Cor 16:2 as his evidence that the Early Church had taken up worship on the first day of the week. An understanding of the Jewish background of the text would clarify that the Acts 20:7 scene would most likely have been a Havdalah service⁷⁴ in which the Jewish community gathered to conclude the Sabbath.⁷⁵ As far as I Cor. 16:2 reference used to deduce that Sunday worship was practised is to overlook the principle that, "Judaism prohibits handling money on such days."⁷⁶ Both Moo's and Strickland's handling of the Scriptures demonstrates that it is their theological framework which influences their view of Scripture in greater measure than the reading of the text. Strickland himself alludes to this in the conclusion of his essay when he states, "Perhaps the reason that the dispensational treatise and Moo's treatise have concluded similarly that the Mosaic law is not directly binding on the believer today is due to similar stresses on epochal shift."⁷⁷

Robertson writes that,

⁷² Douglas Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 346.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁷⁴ A special traditional ceremony that has been observed within the Jewish community for over two thousands, this involves the lighting of a special candle to signify the end of the Sabbath.

⁷⁵ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 297-298.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 490-491.

⁷⁷ Wayne G. Strickland, "Response to Douglas Moo," in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 402-403.

“Neither antinomianism nor dispensationalism may remove the obligation of the Christian today to observe the creation ordinance of the Sabbath. The absence of any explicit command concerning Sabbath-observance prior to Moses does not relegate the Sabbath principle to temporary legislation of the law-epoch. The creational character of God’s Sabbath-blessing must be remembered.”⁷⁸

Yet, in spite of that strong stance by Covenant Theologians tying the Sabbath command to creation they have shifted the observance of the Sabbath (seventh day) to Sunday (first day). Moo criticizes this stance by pointing out that, “...there is no biblical evidence for Sabbatarianism that argues that the Sabbath rest has been transferred from the seventh day to Sunday.”⁷⁹ Once again we have the theological framework reading intent into Scripture rather than allowing the Scriptures to speak.

3. CENTRAL FOCUS OF SCRIPTURE.

Covenant

The initiative to discover a central focus or theme embedded within Scripture which unites both the Old and New Testaments often concludes with the concept of covenant. It is interesting to notice that even the ‘new’ Progressive Dispensational framework places more emphasis upon covenants than dispensational scholars have done in the past. Milton argues that covenant (berith) functions as that central uniting theme in Scripture and this is what Scripture itself affirms.

If we were to follow up all the words associated with the word ‘berith’ we would find that the concept of covenant is like a tree with a wide-spreading and deep-reaching roots, and with equally far-flung and fruitful branches; for it is not something superimposed upon the Biblical material as a literary framework only, but it permeates all the material and unifies it, so as to make of the Biblical message a living whole.⁸⁰

Beecher strongly agrees that covenant or as he calls it ‘*promise*’ is the heart and soul of the Scriptures, which is firmly grounded in the Abrahamic Covenant. He explains that,

This is the prevailing note in both Testaments – a multitude of specifications unfolding a single promise, the promise serving as a central religious doctrine. This biblical generalization of the matter may be best thus formulated: *God gave a promise to Abraham, and through him to mankind; a promise eternally fulfilled and fulfilling in the history of Israel; and chiefly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, he being that which is principle in the history of Israel.*⁸¹

⁷⁸ O Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1981), 69.

⁷⁹ Douglas Moo, “Response to Willem A. VanGemeren,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 81.

⁸⁰ John P. Milton, *God’s Covenant of Blessing* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1961), xii.

⁸¹ Willis Judson Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company Publishers), 178.

This is the same ‘*promise*’ which Paul in the book of Acts referred to in his preaching to King Agrippa (Acts 26:6-7) and to the Gentiles of the Congregation of Ephesus when he refers to the covenants as ‘covenants embodying God’s promise’ (Eph. 2:12). Paul was not alone in his understanding of the promise, Peter in his Pentecost sermon assured his listeners that the ‘*promise*’ was for them (Acts 2:39).

Not every page in Scripture mentions covenant, but the thrust of the biblical narrative is clearly the unfolding of the promised redemption of Adonai’s people, which comes to its climax in the person and ministry of Yeshua (who was promised in Genesis 3:15). As Horton explains, “it is not a matter of reducing everything in the Bible to the covenant, but of recognizing the rich covenantal soil in which every biblical teaching takes root.”⁸² Blaising affirms this notion by stating that, “In the Book of Revelation, much of the imagery echoes concepts presented in the Old Testament. These allusions convey a link to Old Testament teaching and hope, which serves to underline the perception that Revelation details the climatic chapter of the story of the promise of God.”⁸³

One Verses Eight

We must not overlook the fact that there is a unity and continuity of purpose between the several covenants mentioned in the Old Testament which makes them essentially one covenant, and this is a covenant of revelation and redemption. God reveals himself in the making and keeping of covenant; the covenant which from the beginning had as its gracious purpose and goal the salvation of the world, a redeemed humanity, a people of God’s own possession, a holy nation (Ex. 19:6; I Peter 2:9).⁸⁴

The ‘*promise*’ began with the promise of a ‘*seed*’ in Genesis 3:15 which would bring about for humankind this future redemption and restoration of all that Adam had lost in the Garden of Eden. With each successive covenant there came to light, a greater revelation of the means of this redemptive work and the breadth of its application. Each covenant builds upon the previous covenant, using the preceding covenant as its foundation. As Robertson explains, “The Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants do not present themselves as self-contained entities. Instead, each successive covenant builds on the previous relationship, continuing the basic emphasis which has been established earlier.”⁸⁵ With the implementation of each ‘*new*’ covenant it results in bringing the people of God closer to the ultimate realization of the initial ‘*promise*’ of Genesis 3:15. As we read the narrative of Scripture it begins in the Garden (Gen. 2:15ff) with loss, but ends in the Garden (Rev. 22:2) with the ushering in of a new order which fully restores humanity’s previous loss. The ultimate climax of this restoration is the Lord dwelling in the midst of His people (Rev. 21:1ff) as He had done with Adam and Eve. Robertson concludes that, “A covenantal unity characterizes God’s dealing with man from creation to consummation.”⁸⁶

⁸² Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 23.

⁸³ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell C. Block, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 90.

⁸⁴ John P. Milton, *God’s Covenant of Blessing* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1961), 16.

⁸⁵ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1981), 28.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

Old Verses New

In any discussion of the new covenant we need to be reminded to whom was this covenant given. Jeremiah 31:31 reads, “Here, the days are coming,” says *ADONAI*, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra’el and with the house of Y’hudah.” This covenant was made with the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:12), Adonai’s chosen people. Yet, many believers have taken this covenant as the possession of the Church, but it is interesting to note that the Church is not mentioned as its initial recipient. Once we have its Scriptural recipients correctly placed within our minds our perspective of this covenant and all that it implies will change and we will see the wondrous continuity with in the covenants.

When we consider the word ‘new’ what comes to our minds is something fresh which has never before existed. But Kaiser argues that, “the word “new” in this context would mean the “renewed” or “restored” covenant (cf. Akkadian *edēšu* “to restore” ruined temples, altars, or cities; Hebrew *hds̄* connected with the new moon and Ugaritic *hdt*, “to renew the moon”). We conclude then that this covenant was the old Abrahamic-Davidic promise renewed and enlarged.”⁸⁷ Horton brings to light the understanding of the ‘new covenant’ of an Israeli sect called the Essenes who were in existence during Yeshua’s earthly ministry. “The “new covenant” for them is clearly a covenant of law. ...the Essenes saw the new covenant precisely as the repristination or renewal of the legal oath of the people. The new covenant is in truth a renewal of the old.”⁸⁸

The author of Hebrews states that there was nothing defective with the former covenant, but the problem lay with the people (Heb. 8:7, 8). It was their lack of observance of the covenant which was the weakness of the covenant itself. There would be no reason to create a ‘new’ instruction or law when the heart of the people remained unchanged. Milton referring to the Prophet Jeremiah states,

...he does not even speak of the abolition of the law: the point at issue is not so much a new law as a new power. God will write his law in the hearts of His people. The thought of Jeremiah moves along the same track as that of Paul in Rom. 8:3-4, when he says God sent His Son not only to save from condemnation of the law of sin and death but “in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”⁸⁹

Tim Hegg affirms this basic concept by stating that the ‘heart’ of a human (Hebraically thinking) is one’s will and as the Torah (law) is written on the heart it implies that, “one’s life [is] governed by Torah [(law)].”⁹⁰ This ability or influence to be ‘governed by Torah’ is entirely an impartation of the Holy Spirit, the new power.

⁸⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 234.

⁸⁸ Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 59.

⁸⁹ John P. Milton, *God’s Covenant of Blessing* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1961), 191.

⁹⁰ At a workshop entitled “The Torah Divine Invitation or Covenant Obligation” hosted by Congregation Beit Mashiach (Edmonton, June 28/08), the guest speaker Tim Hegg made these remarks and included them in the hand-out.

Lutheran, Dispensational and Covenant theological frameworks all dismiss the concept of the Torah (law) being written on the heart is being the same as that of the ‘*old covenant*.’ They view this law to be the ‘*law of Christ*’ which although is new may have remnants of Torah; it is totally new in substance.

Salvation History

Biblical Theology is a theological approach which begins from the premise that the study of the Old Testament will reveal the truth within the New. It promotes the concept of continuity through the progressive revelation of salvation history. Vos states that, “...Biblical Theology deals with the material from the historical standpoint, seeking to exhibit the organic growth or development of the truths of Special Revelation from the primitive pre-redemptive Special Revelation given in Eden to the close of the New Testament canon.”⁹¹ The concept of progressive revelation is compared to the seed having basically the same substance as its resulting fully grown tree. They are viewed as being at different stages of growth, the seed not revealing as much as the fully mature specimen. In the same way Vos sees each part of Scripture, within the Old and New Testaments, as progressive stages of growth (or revelation) of the redemptive process. These different stages of growth are not merely selected by subjective observation but are tied to the covenants. This “the principle of successive Berith-making (Covenant-making), as marking the introduction of new periods plays a large role in this, and should be carefully heeded.”⁹²

As Vos expounds upon the principles of Biblical Theology there seems to be present a very distinct undercurrent of Reformed or Covenant Theology that noticeably shows through. The focus upon salvation history as the center of Scripture is admirable, but it seems to result in Covenant Theology being presented in an alternative fashion that comes to the same theological conclusions.

Sailhamer takes Biblical Theology down a path of his own making. He purposes using the canon of Scripture as the source of the history that shapes and determines the salvation story. According to Sailhamer, “The task of biblical theology is to allow the fixed reality of the narrative world to shape and inform our understanding of the real world, not the other way around.”⁹³

Sailhamer maintains that, “a recurring theme of biblical theology has been its attempt to relate the message of the Scriptures themselves, apart from traditional and orthodox systems.”⁹⁴

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Through the progression of this research project the influence of the theological framework has been brought out so powerfully. This study has demonstrated that the

⁹¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1948), v-vi.

⁹² *Ibid*, 16.

⁹³ John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 70.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 156.

theological framework which one holds is often imposed upon the Scriptures and results in it requiring certain conclusions to maintain its integrity. Within several perspectives, such as Lutheran, Dispensational and Covenantal this is the case. Their greatest source of influence is the tension that is brought to Scripture with the Law verses Gospel dichotomy. As we have pointed out before, many of their conclusions such as Sabbath observance are not based upon what is written in Scripture, but upon logical deductions applied to Scripture to affirm their unique stance.

Both the Lutheran and Dispensational perspectives are dismissive of the Mosaic Law and stress the discontinuity of Scripture. It is as if Adonai's first plan with mankind failed and He had to create a new approach to correct His past failure. It was within these two perspectives that the Marcionism influence in their daily practise was most likely to be evident. In spite of Covenant Theology embracing the moral law as having eternal value and affirming the premise of continuity within the Scriptures there still is a struggle within it of discontinuity. This struggle seems to have at its roots the dichotomy of Law verses Gospel which at times makes their position contradict itself. A great example of that type of contradiction is the manner in which it explains the Sabbath transfer to Sunday.

The Epigenetic and the Principalizing Approach both readily allow Scripture to speak without the constraint of a predefined theological framework. They both readily embrace the fundamental premise that the entire Word of God has daily application and have relevance to believers in the here and now. As a Messianic leader the Epigenetic perspective was the approach I have been using with Scripture and reading Kaiser's work has been very informative and affirming. With our approach to Scripture there are some curious questions that come up with making Scripture applicable without becoming absurd. The Principalizing Approach with its 'ladder of abstraction' has given the answer for retrieving application for those laws and Scriptures which are culturally bound. This is an awesome approach to allow the Word of God to not only become alive, but so much more relevant to every day life.

The entire issue of Scriptural continuity or discontinuity rests totally upon which theological framework that is chosen. From this study I have personally been impressed on the importance of stressing the continuity of Scripture. This has been so wonderfully demonstrated in the Epigenetic and the Principalizing Approach, but also in the studies which view covenant as the center of Scripture. Milton's study on covenant has impacted me most deeply on its balance and consistency for stressing the continuity between the Old and New Testament.

This project has introduced a new approach to the study of Scripture and that is Biblical Theology. After reading both Sailhamer and Vos I have been encouraged to revisit their material to grasp in a more comprehensive manner their individual perspectives. Sailhamer's emphasis on the text being the focus, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture has really provoked a deeper interest. In the future I will spend time to reread his book and hopefully having gone through it once before, will gain a deeper grasp of its premise. Most definitely I have been convinced that Biblical Theology is relevant for us in bringing a complete understanding to Scripture.

The most sufficient thing that I have gleaned from this project is a deeper confidence in my personal approach to Scripture, knowing that it falls well within the main stream of Evangelical Christian expression. Through this process a well rounded understanding of

other perspectives has also been gained which will facilitate a more informed understanding of differing theological conclusions.

This study has affirmed the belief that the Mosaic Law does have an important role to fulfill in the believer's daily life. It is a source of blessing to those who obey and a Scriptural expression of our Love for the Lord. Every part of Scripture holds truth which can be used to aid and assist the believer to become conformed into the precious image of our Lord. There is no greater calling or expression of Love.

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