

The Establishment of the Law by the Gospel

Part 1

John Colquhoun

(1748-1827)

John Colquhoun was born in Scotland in January 1748. His early education was from the local school supported by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). At the age of 20, Colquhoun began his studies at the University of Glasgow. Once his pastoral ministry began, he labored faithfully for almost 50 years, and died in 1827. He was one of the greatest of Scottish preachers and writers. His works, include: *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, *A Catechism for the Instruction and Direction of Young Communicants*, *A View of Saving Faith*, *A Collection of the Promises of the Gospel*, *A View of Evangelical Repentance*, *Spiritual Comfort*, and a collection of sermons entitled *Sermons, Chiefly on Doctrinal Subjects*.

Although in the preceding chapter I have anticipated some of the thoughts which will be expressed here, yet the subject of this chapter is of such inexpressible importance that I cannot forbear considering it by itself. After the Apostle Paul had, in the third chapter of his epistle to the Romans, asserted and proved that all mankind are sinners, and that the justification of believing sinners in the sight of God is utterly unattainable by their own righteousness, and is entirely founded on the surety-righteousness of Jesus Christ, imputed by grace and received by faith; he has in the following words obviated an objection which he foresaw would be made to that fundamental doctrine: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31). One of the objections then made, and still urged, by the enemies of the gospel against the doctrine of a sinner's free justification for the righteousness of Christ received by faith is that it derogates from the honor and obligation of the law, nay, that it annuls or abrogates the law. "Do we then," says he, by asserting that a man is justified by faith only, and not by the works of the law, "make void," or nullify the obligation of the moral law? With deep abhorrence of such an insinuation, he replies, "God forbid"; far be it from us; on the contrary, we, by that doctrine, "do establish the law."

It is as if he had said, "We are so far from making void or annulling the law through faith that we thereby establish and make it stand in all its force." By the law here, the apostle cannot mean the ceremonial law; for by the word of faith as preached by the apostles of Christ this was made void, but the moral law, and that both as a covenant of works and as a rule of life. By faith, in this place, the apostle seems to mean both the doctrine of faith and the grace of faith. The doctrine of faith is the gospel strictly taken as distinguished from the law. The grace of faith is that grace of the Holy Spirit in the

hearts of regenerate persons by the exercise of which they receive that doctrine, and the righteousness and salvation exhibited in it.

It will be proper here, in order to prevent mistakes concerning what is afterwards to be advanced, to remark that to make the law void is so to abrogate, abolish, or set it aside as to prevent it from being any longer binding on the conscience. It is to annul the divine authority and obligation of its precepts and penalties. The moral law, as the law of the infinitely glorious Jehovah, is enforced by all His sovereign and immutable authority. His infinite authority enforces every precept of it, and lays every rational creature under the firmest obligations possible to yield perfect obedience to it. Now to make this law void is to set aside its high authority and obligation, or to decline the authority and dissolve the obligation of its righteous precepts. Not that any man can do this effectually, but his attempting either directly or indirectly to do it is as criminal as if he could accomplish his design. To make it void is also to attempt setting aside the perfection, spirituality, and great extent of it. A man may be said to make void the law when he practically declares that the perfection, spirituality, and vast extent of it are not to be regarded, or when he puts it off as a covenant with imperfect and even with carnal, selfish, superficial, and partial obedience. Every sinner is guilty of this who goes about to establish his own righteousness in order to his justification; or endeavors to satisfy the law with imperfect instead of perfect obedience; with carnal instead of spiritual performances, and with partial instead of universal obedience.

To make the law void is likewise to invalidate the perpetuity of it. Not that any sinner has it in his power effectually to do this — for the moral law continues to be of immutable and eternal obligation upon all who are under it — but he attempts to abolish the perpetuity of it, with respect to himself, by persuading himself that although it originally obliged him to perform perfect obedience, yet now, in consequence of the mediation of Christ, it obliges him to yield such obedience no longer (Jude 4), and by presuming to satisfy the requirements of it as a covenant with sincere instead of perfect obedience, as if it ceased to require perfection of obedience any longer. Moreover, when sinners under the curse of it labor to persuade themselves that it cannot now exact from them perfect and perpetual obedience on pain of its tremendous curse, or when they stifle their convictions and try to keep their consciences easy under the condemning sentence of it, they do what they can to make it void. In few words, they may be said to make the law void when they deliberately set aside any of the uses of it. Though it cannot, since the entrance of sin into the world, justify sinners on the ground of their own obedience to it, yet, as was observed above, it is of standing use to sinners as well as to saints. Now if sinners set aside any of its uses, or refuse to “use it lawfully,” they thereby treat it with contempt, as if it was useless and insignificant. It is in these ways especially that self-righteous men attempt to make void the law of God.

I shall now endeavor to show that all true believers, through faith, not only do not make void the moral law, but on the contrary establish it or make it stand in all its force. To establish the law is, as was hinted above, to make all the infinite authority and obligation of it stand firm, or to place them on their original and immovable basis, and instead of

invalidating to confirm or strengthen them. Believers, then, by faith, that is, by the doctrine and the grace of faith, establish the law.

In the first place, by the doctrine of faith, they do not make the law void, but establish it, and that both as a covenant of works and as a rule of life.

1. By the doctrine of faith, or the gospel strictly taken, all true believers and faithful ministers of the Word, establish the law as it is a covenant of works. For, in the first place, it is the doctrine of faith that shows men how firm and irreversible the law as a covenant is, and how infinitely concerned the glorious Majesty of heaven is for the stability and honor of that holy law. According to that doctrine, He will save no transgressors of it but upon condition of His only begotten Son's being their Surety, and of His answering completely all the demands of it in their stead. He will not save them from the full execution of its righteous and awful penalty but upon Christ's enduring it for them, nor account them righteous and entitled to eternal life but upon His performing as their substitute the perfect obedience which it requires as the condition of life. Thus, by the doctrine of faith, the sovereign authority of the law in its covenant form is acknowledged and declared; its infinite obligation on sinners of mankind is confirmed; and its honor is completely secured.

Second, according to the doctrines of grace in general, and to the doctrine of a sinner's justification by faith without the works of the law in particular, the law in that form is, as has been already said, of standing use to convince sinners of their sin and misery, to discover to them their need of a better righteousness than their own, and so to render Christ and His perfect righteousness precious to such as believe. A sinner must be convinced by the law that justification on the footing of his own obedience is absolutely impossible before he will listen to what the gospel says of Christ and His righteousness (Romans 7:9). Accordingly, the Spirit of God does not lead a man to Christ by the gospel without first convincing him of sin and of his want of righteousness by the law.

Third, by that doctrine we are informed that the law received a complete answer to all its high demands by the unsinning obedience and satisfactory death of the Lord Jesus, the Surety of elect sinners. We are thereby instructed that He came into the world "not to destroy, but to fulfil the law" (Matthew 5:17), and that He "is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:4). According to the doctrine of faith, the law as a covenant receives from our divine Surety all the obedience and satisfaction which it can demand. He, in the room, and as the representative of an elect world, fulfilled all the righteousness of it (Matthew 3:15). He yielded to it perfect holiness of human nature, perfect obedience of life, and complete satisfaction for sin; and from His divine nature, united to the human in His infinitely glorious person, His whole righteousness has derived such infinite value as to be strictly meritorious of eternal life for His spiritual seed. According to that doctrine, the law in its federal form is far more honored by the righteousness of the second Adam than it was dishonored by the disobedience of the first. It is represented as honored not only by a perfect righteousness, but by the righteousness of God, the righteousness of Him who is God as well as man. In proportion to the stupendous humiliation of the Son of God, who

stooped so low as to become subject to a law which was adapted only to creatures who as such are infinitely beneath Him, is the honor done to the precept and penalty of that law by His obeying the one and His enduring the other. It required only a human righteousness, but it is infinitely honored with one which is divine (2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 42:21). Now by this consummate, transcendently-glorious righteousness which is revealed in the gospel, the sovereign authority and high obligation of the law are most illustriously displayed and most firmly established.

2. By the doctrine of faith, the law is also established as rule of life to believers. According to this doctrine, it is established in the hand of the Son of God, the glorious Mediator, whom the eternal Father "hath given for a Commander to the people" (Isaiah 55:4), and has set as His King and Lawgiver "upon His holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6). In the hand of the adorable Mediator, the sovereign authority of the law, as the instrument of government in his spiritual kingdom and as the rule of duty in His holy covenant, is confirmed; and the high obligation of it is not only confirmed, but increased. Although believers are, in their justification, delivered from the law as a covenant of works (Romans 7:4-6), yet according to the gospel they are represented as "being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2). In the doctrine of faith, the eternal obligation of the law on them is declared; obedience to it is enforced by the strongest motives, and represented as performed under the best influences, from the best principles, and for the best ends. According to that doctrine, all believers are bound by infinite authority to obey; they are enabled sincerely to obey; they are constrained by redeeming love to obey; they resolve and delight in dependence on promised grace, to obey; and they cannot but obey the law as a rule of duty. The love of Christ, as revealed in the gospel, urges them; the blood of Christ redeems them; the Spirit of Christ enables them; and the exceeding great and precious promises of Christ encourage them to obey and yield spiritual and acceptable obedience. The holy law as a rule is written on their hearts, and therefore they consent unto it that it is good, and delight in it after the inward man. While they do not obey it for life, but from life, they account obedience to it not only their duty, but their privilege and their pleasure. Thus, according to the doctrine of faith, they present, in the hand of faith, perfect righteousness to the law as a covenant of works; and they perform, as the fruit of faith, sincere obedience to it as a rule of duty. And so effectually do they, by the doctrine of faith establish the law as a rule of duty that they never account their obedience to any of the precepts of it sincere and acceptable but in proportion as their performance of it flows from the unfeigned faith of that doctrine. In their view, nothing is obedience to it but what proceeds from evangelical principles, and is excited by evangelical motives.

In the last place, by the grace of faith also, believers establish the law, and that both as a covenant of works and as a rule of life.

1. By the grace of faith, they do not make void the law, but on the contrary they establish it as it is a covenant of works. Sinners who are destitute of, the grace of faith have such mean, disparaging notions of the holy law as to offer to it, in answer to its demand of perfect obedience as the condition of life, with their own partial, superficial,

and polluted works instead of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. But true believers have such high and honorable sentiments of the authority and obligation, as well as of the perfection, spirituality, and vast extent, of the divine law in its federal form, as to receive and present, in the hand of faith, to it the consummate and glorious righteousness of their adorable Surety. Instead of making void the law, they, by the habit and exercise of their holy faith, consult in the most effectual manner the stability and honor of its precepts and penalties. Instead of presuming to put it off as a covenant with their own mean and imperfect performances, they, by the exercise of their faith, appropriate and present to it the infinitely perfect and meritorious righteousness of their divine Redeemer as the only ground of their security from eternal death, and of their title to eternal life. By faith they receive and exhibit to it Christ's holiness of human nature and obedience of life in answer to its demand of perfect obedience as the condition of life, and His suffering of death in answer to its demand of infinite satisfaction for sin. Thus, by the habit and exercise of their faith, they recognize and assert the sovereign authority and high obligation of it as a covenant; and so they establish and make it honorable in that form. By presenting to it the only righteousness which can fully satisfy its just demands, they practically assert the divine and immutable authority of it as well as the equity and reasonableness of its demands. "Surely shall one say, 'In the Lord have I righteousness and strength; even to Him shall men come. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory'" (Isaiah 45:24-25). "I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only" (Psalm 71:16). "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. . . that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:8-9). "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will magnify the law and make it honorable" (Isaiah 42:21).

2. By the grace of faith, believers do not make void the law, but establish it likewise as a rule of life. Instead of setting it aside as the rule of duty, faith makes it stand in all its binding force. By the habit and exercise of their faith, the saints not only believe that the authority of the law in the hand of the glorious Mediator is infinite, immutable, and eternal, and that the obligation which it lays on them even to perfect obedience is firm and unalterable; but they derive from the fullness of Christ continual supplies of grace to enable them to perform sincere and increasing obedience to all the commands of it. By the exercise of faith, they receive from His fullness that conformity of heart to the holy law, which is perfect in parts, and that conformity both of heart and of life to it, which will afterwards be perfect in degrees. And when they shall attain perfect conformity, or ability to yield perfect obedience to it in the mansions of glory, this they shall attain as the end of their faith, as the completion of that eternal salvation which they receive by faith. All acceptable obedience to the law in the hand of Christ must be the obedience of faith, obedience springing from vital union with Him by faith as the principle of it, and performed in consequence of grace derived by faith from His overflowing fullness. As it is believers, and they only, who are under the law as a rule in the hand of the Mediator, so it is they, and they only, who are enabled to perform that sincere, holy obedience which flows from faith working by love. That faith is neither a true nor a living faith which is not accompanied with sincere and universal obedience to the law of Christ; and that

obedience is neither sincere, nor universal nor acceptable to God which does not proceed from the habit and exercise of a living faith (Hebrews 11:6).

Till a man has saving faith implanted in his heart by the omnipotent agency of the Holy Spirit, he can do nothing but transgress the commandments of God's holy law (Proverbs 21:4). He can trample upon the authority and despise the obligation of it, but he cannot, either in principle or in practice, establish it. It is only they who are justified and sanctified by the instrumentality of faith who begin and advance in such holy obedience as honors and establishes the law as a rule of duty. We may as soon suppose that a living man can be without vital acts as that a man who is by faith vitally united to Christ can live without yielding such obedience to His law. When that living faith which works by love is implanted and increased in his heart, vital motions and acts of spiritual obedience cannot but follow. Such a man will not only account it a privilege and a pleasure to yield sincere obedience to the law as the rule of his duty in time, but will rejoice in the cheering prospect of being able to honor it with perfect obedience through eternity. He delights in it after the inward man, and therefore he rejoices in the hope that, by the grace of his adorable Redeemer, he shall be eternally bound *by* it and eternally conformed to it.

Thus it is evident that true believers and faithful ministers of the gospel do not, either by the doctrine or the grace of faith, make void the law of God; but on the contrary they establish it, and that both as a covenant of works and as a rule of life.

From what has been said, we may learn what reason we have highly to esteem the divine law. The establishment of this holy law, both by the doctrine and the grace of faith, has entered deeply, into the wonderful plan of our redemption by Jesus Christ. That amazing scheme has been so devised as to secure, in the most effectual and astonishing manner, the stability and honor of the law as well as the manifested glory of the sovereign Lawgiver. As the ultimate end which God has proposed to Himself in our redemption is the glory of His infinite perfections, so His chief subordinate end, as the righteous Governor of the universe, is the honor of His holy law. Such is the inestimable value that Jehovah the Father sets upon His righteous law that, rather than suffer the honor of it to be in the least obscured, He would expose His only begotten, His infinitely dear Son, to the deepest abasement, the most direful anguish, and the most ignominious and tormenting death. He would have His only Son, in the human nature, to live a holy and righteous life, under the curse of His law — this was in order to answer its demand of perfect obedience as the condition of life — and to endure the infinite execution of that curse, due to His elect for sin, so as to be brought to the dust of death in order to answer its demand of infinite satisfaction for sin. The Lord Jesus, according to the everlasting covenant made with Him, must submit to all this humiliation, service, and suffering so that the honor of the divine law might be vindicated, and the sovereign authority of it established. Ought not we, then, to regard the law of God with the highest esteem and veneration, and to tremble at the most distant thought of ever disobeying any of its holy commands?

Is the law established by the gospel? Surely the gospel, then, cannot have the smallest tendency to licentiousness, either in principle or in practice. If it tends to establish the sovereign authority of the divine law it cannot, surely, at the same time, tend to weaken or set aside that authority. The gospel, when it is accompanied with the demonstration of the Spirit of God, and is received in the love of it, not only excites the believer to obey the law as a rule of duty, but it is the only doctrine that can excite and dispose him to yield to it voluntary and sincere obedience. It not only establishes the law, but it is the only doctrine that infinite wisdom employs to establish it, the only "doctrine, which is according to godliness." It is true that this heavenly doctrine which God has made the city of refuge for guilty sinners is, by many, alas, made a sanctuary for sin, and so is wickedly abused to licentiousness. But it is one thing to view the gospel in itself, and in its genuine tendency, and another to consider it as it is perversely abused by wicked men (Romans 3:8). The immediate principle of all acceptable obedience to the law as a rule of life is supreme love to God; but we cannot love God supremely unless we first know and believe His love to us as it is exhibited in the blessed gospel. "We love Him," says the Apostle John, "because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). As the sun cannot be without light and heat, so the faith of Christ and of redeeming love as offered to us in the gospel, cannot be without that love to Christ and to God in Him which "is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10).

The second Adam's perfect holiness of human nature, and obedience of life to the precept of the law as a covenant, are as necessary to the justification of sinners as is His suffering of its penalty. The doctrine of justification by faith establishes the law, the whole law, the honor of the precept as well as that of the penal sanction. But this it could not do if it did not represent the righteousness of Jesus Christ as consisting in His active obedience as well as in His passive. Active obedience, strictly speaking, cannot be said to satisfy vindictive justice for sin. And, on the other hand, suffering for punishment gives right and title unto nothing, it only satisfies for something; nor does it deserve any reward, as John Owen mentions in his work on justification. Christ's satisfaction for sin could not render His perfect obedience to the precept unnecessary; nor could His perfect obedience make His satisfaction for sin by suffering the penalty unnecessary, because it was not of the same kind. The one is that which answers the law's demand of perfect obedience as the ground of title to eternal life; the other is that which answers its demand of complete satisfaction to divine justice for sin. The meritorious obedience of Christ to the precept could not satisfy the penal sanction; and the sufferings and death of Christ, could not satisfy the precept of the law. The commandment of the law as a covenant requires doing for life; the curse of that law demands dying as the punishment of sin. These, though they are never to be separated as grounds of justification, yet are carefully to be distinguished. The perfect obedience of Christ is as necessary to entitle believers to eternal life as His suffering of death is to secure them from eternal death. His satisfaction for sin, applied by faith, renders them innocent or guiltless of death; and His obedience makes them righteous or worthy of life (Romans 5:19). As the latter, then, is as necessary to complete their justification, according to the gospel, as the former, so it is as requisite as the former to establish the honor of the law.

It is evident also from the foregoing particulars that the righteousness of Christ which is revealed in the gospel, and which is presented in the hand of faith to the law as a covenant, is not only the meritorious cause, but the matter of our justification before God, and in the eye of the law. It is right, indeed, to call it the meritorious cause of justification; but this is not sufficient: it is also the matter of it. Many pharisaic professors of religion have admitted that the righteousness of Christ is the meritorious cause of justification; that is, as they understand the phrase, that Christ, by His righteousness, has merited that our own obedience should justify us. It is not enough, then, to say that His consummate righteousness is the meritorious cause, but also that it is the matter of our justification; the very righteousness for which, or on account of which, we are justified. The righteousness of our divine Surety, received by faith, and according to the doctrine of faith, imputed to us is that which justifies, that which is the immediate and the only ground of justification, and that only in which it can be safe, consistently with the authority and honor of the law, to stand before the dreadful tribunal of the omniscient and righteous Judge of the world.

The divine law is established and honored more in the salvation of one sinner than in the damnation of all the sons of men. In the justification and salvation of a believing sinner, both the precept and the penalty of the law are established and honored; but in the damnation of unbelievers it is the penal sanction only that is honored. The holy precept will never, in their case, be honored with obedience, far less with perfect obedience. The convinced and alarmed sinner who wishes to believe in the Lord Jesus may, for his encouragement, warrantably and successfully plead that at the throne of grace.

Is the holy law as a rule of life put into the reader's mind and written on his heart? Then it rejoices his heart. "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:8). The Apostle Paul accordingly says, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7:22). When a man is justified and, as an evidence of that, is sanctified, he rejoices to think that the law as a covenant is honored and established by the righteousness which his faith receives for his justification, and that the law as a rule is established by the grace which his faith derives from Christ for his sanctification. He rejoices to reflect that as the law is established forever, so it is holy, just, and good. Instead of wishing that it were less extensive or spiritual or strict, he rejoices that every command, and even every threatening, are what they are. He meditates on the holy commandments of God with delight, and takes pleasure in hearing them explained to him and enforced upon him. Nothing, perhaps, is a surer symptom of reigning hypocrisy in a man than to take pleasure in hearing the promises and blessings of the gospel preached to him, but to disrelish all such discourses as, even by evangelical motives, enforce the duties of the law upon him. It is only the man who is secretly resolved not to perform all his duties who commonly is unwilling to hear of them.

What has been said may serve to suggest to us how deep and inveterate the depravity of human nature is. Unregenerate men either suspect that the law is made void if it is asserted that a man is justified by faith without the works of it, or they suppose that good works are unnecessary. The spirit which is in them is either that of the pharisee or

that of the libertine. They are ready to conclude that, if they are not to be justified on the ground of their own obedience to the law, the authority of the law is annulled (Galatians 3:19), or that, if their works are to form no part of their righteousness for justification, they need not perform good works at all. They choose to be at liberty either to establish their own righteousness in the affair of justification, or to continue secure in the love and practice of sin; either to expect justification by the law as a covenant, or to trample upon the authority of the law as a rule. They either quarrel with the gospel, as if it made void the law, or dishonor the law, as if it was an enemy to the gospel. To leave the self-righteous man no works of his own to boast of is too humbling to be endured. It appears strange to him that he himself should do nothing to merit his justification. Whenever he reads or hears that justification is by faith only, without the deeds of the law, he is disposed to count it a licentious doctrine. He can see no necessity for his obedience but to merit divine favor and eternal life by it. And no sooner does a man, under the dominion of enmity to God and His law, pretend to be justified without his own works than he neglects good works, as if they were wholly unnecessary. Thus, unregenerate men reveal their inveterate enmity both against the law and the gospel of God.

Was it requisite that the Lord Jesus, in order to repair the honor of the law, should, as the Surety of elect sinners, endure the full execution of its condemning sentence due to them for sin? We may hence see what a malignant, detestable, and horrible thing sin is. How exceeding sinful, how infinitely displeasing to the Lord, and how injurious to the honor of His righteous law must it be, when even His own dear Son must suffer infinite punishment, and that without the smallest abatement, in order to satisfy His justice and vindicate the honor of His law! How inconceivably detestable must it be to the holy Lord God, seeing He chose rather that His only begotten Son should endure all the tremendous punishment of it than that it should pass unpunished! Should not we, then, learn to abhor, to repent of, and to forsake all manner of sin?

Is it by the doctrine and the grace of faith that we establish the law? Then it is plain that they who transform the gospel or doctrine of faith into a new law requiring faith, repentance, and sincere obedience as the proper conditions of salvation thereby make void the law. By substituting sincere faith and sincere obedience in place of perfect obedience as grounds of title to justification, they make void the law as a covenant; and by inventing what they call "gospel precepts," requiring sincerity only in place of those old and immutable precepts which require of believers perfect obedience, they invalidate the authority of the law as a rule. By asserting that Christ has satisfied for the breach of the old law of works, and has procured and given a new law, a remedial law, or a law of milder terms than the old, suited to our fallen state and accepting sincere obedience instead of that perfect obedience which the old law required; that Christ has, by His death, obtained that our sincere obedience to this remedial law should be accepted for a gospel righteousness, and that we are truly justified before God by gospel works. The act of faith as the principle of all sincere obedience is our righteousness, which entitles us to justification and eternal life. And the act of faith is our justifying righteousness not as it receives the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but as it is our obedience to that new law.

By these assertions, I say, they set aside the obligation of the moral law and so make it void. Though such men have usually been called “legalists,” yet, perhaps, they may, with more propriety, be termed “antinomians,” or “enemies to the authority and honor of the divine law (see Charles Simeon’s *Helps to Composition*). They undermine, as was already hinted, the whole authority and honor of it, both as a covenant of works and as a rule of life. Reader, the moment you rely on your faith and obedience for a title to justification before God, you thereby rob the law as a covenant, both of its commanding and condemning power; and no sooner do you satisfy yourself with yielding merely sincere obedience, instead of pressing on to perfection, than you invalidate the high obligation of the law as a rule of duty.

Finally it may hence also be inferred that it is the first duty of every unregenerate sinner to come to Jesus Christ, and to trust cordially in Him for deliverance from the law as a covenant, and for ability to perform acceptable obedience to the law as a rule. Be assured, O secure sinner, that you cannot otherwise be delivered from the law as a covenant of works than by union with the second Adam, and communion with Him in His righteousness; and that without deliverance from the dominion of the law as a covenant you cannot be saved from the guilt and dominion of sin. “The strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). Now it is absolutely impossible for you ever to attain union with Christ, and communion with Him in His righteousness, otherwise than by a true and living faith. “The righteousness of God,” of Him who is God in our nature, “is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Romans 3:22). Believe then in the Lord Jesus, that by means of faith you may be found in Him and be justified in Him. Trust in Him who is “Jehovah our Righteousness” for justification and complete salvation. Receive the gift of His glorious righteousness and, as a guilty sinner, rely upon it for all your title to justification before God. Present it in the hand of faith as your justifying righteousness, to the law as a covenant of works in answer to its just demands of perfect obedience, and of complete satisfaction for sin. So shall you, by faith, establish the law as it is a covenant of works.

Trust in Christ also for grace and strength to perform sincere obedience to the law as a rule of life. Rely on His consummate righteousness for all your title to sanctification and glorification; trust in Him with all your heart for sufficient supplies of sanctifying and comforting grace to enable you to yield acceptable obedience to the law as a rule, and to press on toward perfection of obedience. And by this obedience of faith you will establish His law as a rule of duty. By well doing, you will put to silence the ignorance of such foolish men as presume to say that the doctrine and faith of the gospel are unfriendly to the interests of true morality.

This reminds me of what Theodorus long ago replied to Philocles, who was often hinting that he preached doctrines which tended to licentiousness because he enlarged diligently and frequently upon faith in Jesus Christ: “I preach salvation by Jesus Christ,” said Theodorus; “and give me leave to ask, whether you know what salvation by Christ means?” Philocles began to blush, and would have declined an answer.

“No,” said Theodorus, “you must permit me to insist upon a reply. Because if it is a right one, it will justify me and my conduct; if it is a wrong one, it will prove that you blame you know not what, and that you have more reason to inform yourself than to censure others.”

This disconcerted him still more, upon which Theodorus proceeded. “Salvation by Jesus Christ means not only a deliverance from the guilt, but also from the power of sin. ‘He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and redeem us from our vain conversation,’ as well as deliver us from the wrath to come. Go now, Philocles, and tell the world that, by teaching these doctrines, I promote the cause of licentiousness. And you will be just as rational, just as candid, just as true, as if you should affirm that the firemen, by running the engine and pouring in water, burnt your house to the ground, and laid your furniture in ashes.”

Indeed, both the doctrine and the grace of faith, are evidently, yea, and designedly injurious to heathen morality as well as pharisaic righteousness. But with regard to true morality, which forms a necessary part of godliness or evangelical holiness, instead of being, in the smallest degree, injurious to this, they directly tend to it; yea, and they are the necessary, the fundamental principles of it. Sooner might fire be without heat, and a solid body be without weight, than a true faith of the gospel be without evangelical holiness.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [Reformed Perspectives Magazine Forum](#).

Subscribe to Reformed Perspectives Magazine

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [Reformed Perspectives Magazine](#), please select this [link](#).