

Moses, Westminster, and Your Ministry

By Dennis J. Prutow

Leviticus 18:5 is Moses' classic statements regarding works, *If a man does them, he shall live by them*. Paul refers to Leviticus 18:5 in both Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12. Bible commentaries, systematic theologies, commentaries on the Confession, and the Westminster Standards send mixed signals regarding these three texts and the Covenant of Works. Anthony Burgess, Westminster Divine, writing "On Works in the Mosaic Covenant," says, "I do not find in any point of Divinity, learned men more confused and perplexed (being like Abraham's ram, hung in a bush of briars and brambles by the head) as here."¹

We too are "confused and perplexed" at this point. While we may confess the Mosaic Covenant is an administration of the Covenant of Grace, we also misunderstand Moses and put believers under the law as a covenant of works. We do so because we do not understand Leviticus 18:5 and its New Testament references, Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12. When we follow the Westminster Assembly in its use of this triad of texts as Scripture proofs, we become more "confused and perplexed." My objective is to uncover this "confusion" in the Westminster Standards, offer some historical perspective, and briefly show that in our confusion regarding Leviticus 18:5 we often reverse biblical priorities. Practically speaking, we put works before grace.

To reach this objective, we take the following steps. *First*, we confirm that Leviticus 18:5 speaks of life in covenant with God.² *Second*, although this is the case, the Westminster Standards use the triad of texts as proof-texts to validate its teaching on the Covenant of Works. This use of these proof-texts implies that the Mosaic Legislation is a Covenant of Works. *Third*, we examine John Ball, a Puritan scholar respected by the Westminster Divines and a forerunner

¹ Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis* (London: James Young, 1647), 229.

² Expositions of Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12 and Paul's use of these texts are beyond the scope of this paper.

to the Assembly. He clearly teaches the Law of Moses is an administration of the Covenant of Grace. Ball does not use Leviticus 18:5, Romans 10:5, or Galatians 3:12 with reference to the Covenant of Works. *Fourth*, we see the Scripture proofs were not approved by the Westminster Assembly as a whole but were appended by Committee. *Finally*, I affirm effective gospel ministry requires us to take a clear position regarding the Mosaic Covenant. That is, our preaching ought not to place men and women under the law as a covenant of works, nor treat our moral obligations as aspects of the covenant of works, as we challenge righteous living before God.

We move first to an overview of Leviticus 18:1-5. The text is as follows,

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.”

“I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 18:1) reminds the people of how God spoke at Sinai and of the preface to the Ten Commandments. “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). Westminster Shorter Catechism 44 asks, “What doth the preface to the ten commandments teach us?” Answer: “The preface to the ten commandments teacheth us, That because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.” We rightly hold God gave the Ten Commandments to His redeemed people.

But God did not give Israel only Ten Commandments. We see this in our text. God tells the people, “You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes” (Leviticus 18:4). And again, “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments” (Leviticus 18:5). In each of these combinations, statutes and judgments or judgments and statutes, God is speaking of the whole Mosaic legislation. Westminster Confession of Faith 19:3 indicates, “Besides this law, com-

monly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances; partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly of divers instructions of moral duties.” And 19:4, “To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws. . . .” All the law and the covenant is in view in Leviticus 18:1-5.

In giving the people this law and covenant, God exhorts, “You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes” (Leviticus 18:3). God’s people are to have a quite different pattern for life than either the Egyptians or the Canaanites. Deuteronomy 4:5-8 gives a beautiful overview of this new pattern of life in covenant with God.

See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do *them*, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?”

God redeems His people and formally enters into covenant with them. The covenant outlines the way of life for the people. To be sure, the moral stipulations show the people their sin. At the same time, the ceremonial prescriptions, as our Confession notes, set Christ before the people in “His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits.” When the people sin, they repair to the tabernacle and seek God’s forgiveness in and through the prescribed ordinances. Thus the people live in covenant with their God.

We come then to Leviticus 18:5, “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.” We are interested in the clause, “by which a man may live if he does them.”

Walter Kaiser argues, “Leviticus 18 begins and ends (vv. 2, 30) with the theological setting of ‘I am the Lord your God.’ Thus law-keeping here was Israel’s sanctification and the grand evidence that the Lord was her God already.”³ Kaiser adds, “One of the ways of ‘doing’ the law was to recognize the imperfections of one’s life and thus to make a sacrifice for the atonement of one’s sins. Leviticus 18:5, then, is not referring to any offer of eternal life as a reward for perfect law-keeping: it assumed and provided for law-breakers as part of that law which was to be kept!”⁴

John Murray concurs.

Lev. 18:5 is in a context in which the claims of God upon his redeemed and covenant people are being asserted and urged upon Israel. In this respect, Lev. 18:1-5 is parallel to Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21. The preface “I am the lord your God” (Leviticus 18:2) corresponds to the preface to the ten commandments. The whole passage is no more “legalistic” than are the ten commandments. Hence the words, “which if a man do, he shall live in them” (vs. 5) refers not to the life accruing from doing in a legalistic framework but to the blessing attendant upon obedience in a redemptive and covenant relationship.⁵

Here now, however, begins the difficulty. As indicated at the outset, Bible commentaries, systematic theologies, commentaries on the Confession, and the Westminster Standards themselves send mixed signals. We therefore turn to an examination of the use of the triad of texts, Leviticus 18:5, Romans 10:5, and Galatians 3:12, in the Westminster documents.

Westminster Confession of Faith 7.2, “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” The proof-text for the first clause is Galatians 3:12, a quotation of Leviticus 18:5. One of the proof-texts for the second clause, “*wherein life was promised to*

³ Walter Kaiser, *Toward and Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 112.

⁴ Walter Kaiser, “Leviticus and Paul: ‘Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?),’” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society*, 14 (1977): 26.

⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 2:249.

*Adam, and in him to his posterity,”*⁶ is Romans 10:5 and a clear reference to Leviticus. 18:5. The use of these texts to validate the covenant of works suggests both Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12 speak of a covenant of works. The implication is, therefore, that the Mosaic Legislation is a covenant of works.

Westminster Confession of Faith 7:3 goes on to say, “Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace, whereby He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved. . . .” In contrast to the covenant of works, the covenant of grace freely “offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved.” One of the proof-texts for these clauses of the confession is Romans 10:6, where Paul seems to oppose Moses, on one side, with salvation by grace through faith on the other. Romans 10:5-6 reads, “For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness [a reference to Leviticus 18:5]. But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows. . . .” Paul continues to expound the gospel. The implication from this seeming contrast, and the theological conclusion of many, is that the Mosaic Legislation is a covenant of works.

Westminster Confession of Faith 19:2, “God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.” The proof-texts for this paragraph of the Confession included, but are not limited to, Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12.

Turning to the Westminster Larger Catechism, Answer 20 speaks of “The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created. . . .” God’s providence included “enter-

⁶ Emphasis added.

ing into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience.” The proof-texts for this section of Answer 20 are Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12. Once again, Romans 10:5 refers to and Galatians 3:12 quotes Leviticus 18:5.

When A.A. Hodge expounds Confession of Faith, Chapter 7, God’s Covenant with Man, he includes Larger Catechism 20 in his discussion. Hodge says,

That the promise of the covenant was life is proved—(a.) From the nature of the penalty, which is recorded in terms. If disobedience was linked to death, obedience must have been linked to life. (b.) It is taught expressly in many passages of Scripture. Paul says, Rom. x. 5: “Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that he which doeth these things shall live by them.” Matt. xix. 16, 17; Gal. iii. 12; Lev. xviii. 5; Neh. ix. 29.⁷

Note that Hodge connects Romans 10:5 to the covenant of works. As further proof, Hodge points to Galatians 3:12 and Leviticus 18:5.

Westminster Larger Catechism, Answer 92, reads, “The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the estate of innocence, and to all mankind in him, besides a special command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the moral law.” The proof-texts for this answer include Romans 10:5, but there is no indication as to the portion of the answer to which the proofs apply. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer 40, corresponds to Larger Catechism 92. “The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law.” The two proof-texts are Romans 2:14-15 and Romans 10:5.

Westminster Larger Catechism 93 is more specific.

What is the moral law? Answer: The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding every one to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man: promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.

⁷ Archibald Alexander Hodge, *A Commentary on the Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1869), 170-171.

Larger Catechism 98 reminds us, the “moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments.” Answer 93 then teaches the moral law “binds every one to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience . . . promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.” The proof-texts are Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:10 and 12. In addition, the language Larger Catechism 93 uses is the same that the Catechism uses with regard to the covenant of works or covenant of life *and* the proof-texts are the same. Answer 20 speaks of God “entering into a covenant of life with him [Adam], upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience.” Here there is a more direct connection between the Mosaic Legislation as summarized in the Ten Commandments and the covenant of works.

Finally, in Westminster’s “Sum of Saving Knowledge,” the section titled “Practical Use of Saving Knowledge” begins,

The chief general use of Christian doctrine is, to convince a man of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment, John xvi. 8. partly by the law or the covenant of works, that he may be humbled and become penitent; and partly by the gospel or covenant of grace, that he may become an unfeigned believer in Jesus Christ, and be strengthened in his faith upon solid grounds and warrants, and give evidence of the truth of his faith by good fruits, and so be saved.

The sum of the covenant of works, or the law, is this: “If thou do all that is commanded, and not fail in any point, thou shalt be saved: but if thou fail, thou shalt die.” Rom. x. 5. Gal. iii. 10, 12.

The sum of the gospel, or covenant of grace and reconciliation, is this: “If thou flee from the deserved wrath to the true Redeemer Jesus Christ, (who is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him,) thou shalt not perish, but have eternal life.” Rom. x. 8, 9, 11.⁸

This introduction to “The Practical Use of Saving Knowledge” clearly connects the law with the covenant of works. The proof-texts affirming the law is *the* covenant of works, not only *a* covenant of works, are Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:10 and 12. Once again remember, Romans 10:5 refers to Leviticus 18:5 and Galatians 3:12 quotes Leviticus 18:5.

⁸ Westminster Confession of Faith (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1997), 326.

Here is the dilemma. On one hand, the expositions of the Ten Commandments in the catechisms pointedly affirm the law was given to a redeemed people.⁹ Here is Larger Catechism Answer 101,

The preface to the ten commandments is contained in these words, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Wherein God manifesteth his sovereignty, as being JEHOVAH, the eternal, immutable, and almighty God; having his being in and of himself, and giving being to all his words and works: and that he is a God in covenant, as with Israel of old, so with all his people; who, as he brought them out of their bondage in Egypt, so he delivereth us from our spiritual thralldom; and that therefore we are bound to take him for our God alone, and to keep all his commandments.

Interestingly, one of the proof-texts to the words, “therefore we are bound to take him for our God alone, and to keep all his commandments,” is Leviticus 18:30. The foundation for obedience is, “I am the LORD your God.” Leviticus 18:2 contains this same reminder. “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘I am the LORD your God.’” Leviticus 18:5, as previously indicated, therefore refers to an already redeemed people. On the other hand, the proof-texts used in the Westminster documents strongly imply, and Westminster’s “Sum of Saving Knowledge” explicitly states, the law is the covenant of works.

To help gain perspective on the teachings of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, we turn to John Ball (1585-1640). His *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* was published in London, after his death, in 1645 by Simeon Ash. Alexander Mitchell puts Ball in a favorable light in his own *The Westminster Assembly, Its History and Standards*.

With respect to the doctrine of the Covenants, which some assert to have been derived from Holland, I think I myself now, after careful investigation, entitled to maintain that there is nothing taught in the Confession which had not been long before in substance taught by Rollick and Howie in Scotland, and by Cartwright, Preston, Perkins, Ames, and Ball in his two catechisms in England. . . . The later and most remarkable treatise of Ball, on the ‘Covenant of Grace,’ was published with recommendatory notices by Reynolds, Cawdrey, Calamy, Hill, Ashe, and Burgess at the very time the Assembly began to frame its Confession and it con-

⁹ Larger Catechism 101 and Shorter Catechism 44.

tains all that has been admitted into the Westminster standards, or generally received on this head among British Calvinists.¹⁰

Mitchell again mentions “Ball, whose treatise on the Covenant of Grace was published in 1645, and recommended by several members of the Assembly. . . .”¹¹ According to Mitchell, Ball sets forth a standard presentation on the covenant for that era. We therefore repair to Ball’s treatise to shed light on our present subject. We first look at what Ball says about covenant in general and the Covenant of Works in particular. Then we review his teaching regarding the Covenant of Grace in general and Mosaic administration of the Covenant of Grace in specific.

“The essence of the Covenant properly consists in the Promise and the stipulation: But the words of the Covenant contain obedience required of God, and promised of them in the Covenant, and so by a Metonymy are called the Covenant.”¹² The Promise [Capital P] is “the giving of some future good.” The promise [lower case p] is the “retribution of some performance.”¹³ Retribution is the just response in the performance of the duties the covenant stipulates.

Ball follows this definition in framing the Covenant of Works. “The Covenant which God made with our first parents, is that mutual contract or agreement, wherein God promised eternal happiness to man on condition of entire and perfect obedience to be performed in his own person.”¹⁴ Ball is quick to note God’s grace. “This Covenant God made in justice; yet so as it was of Grace likewise to make such a free promise, and to bestow great things upon man for his obedience.”¹⁵ At the same time, “The Author of the Covenant is God, not God and man, for God does enter into Covenant with man, not as his equal, but as his Sovereign, and man is bound to

¹⁰ Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly, Its History and Standards* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1884), 377.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹² John Ball, *A Treatise of the covenant of Works* (London: Simeon Ash, 1645), 4. I have put the original 1654 text in modern English.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

accept the conditions offered by the Lord. . . .”¹⁶ Then there is once again the note of grace.

“The Covenant is of God, and that of his free grace and love: . . . it was of grace that God was pleased to bind himself to his creature”¹⁷

Ball adds these distinctions. On one hand there is, “The Covenant of Works, wherein God covenants with man to give him eternal life upon condition of perfect obedience in his own person.”¹⁸ On the other hand there is, “The Covenant of Grace, which God makes with man promising eternal life upon condition of believing.”¹⁹ The former God makes with Adam before the fall, and the latter God makes with man after the fall.²⁰ The Covenant of Works “was a Covenant of friendship not reconciliation; being once broken it could not be repaired; it promised no mercy or pardon, admitted no repentance, accepted no obedience, but what was perfect and complete.”²¹ As Ball progresses with his discussion, he repeats the thought that the Covenant of Works cannot be repaired once broken.

In all of his discussion of the Covenant of Works, Ball makes no mention of the triad of texts, Leviticus 18:5, Romans 10:5, and Galatians 3:12. Contrary to how the Westminster Confession and Catechisms use this triad of texts, he does not use these texts in any way to support the Scriptural doctrine of the Covenant of Works. Ball does say, speaking of the Covenant of Works, “The form of this Covenant stood in the special Promise of good to be received from justice as a reward for his work, *Do this and live*: and the exact and rigid exaction of perfect obedience in his own person, without the least spot or failing for matter or manner.”²² We might construe the words, “Do this and live,” as a reference to Leviticus 18:5. However, Ball makes no

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²² *Ibid.*, 9-10. Italics in the original.

such connection. He urges us to interpret these words Evangelically when he does use them in connection with the administration of the Covenant of Grace under Moses.

Ball begins his general discussion of the Covenant of grace with a definition.

The Covenant of Grace is that free and gracious Covenant which God of His mere mercy in Jesus Christ made with man a miserable sinner, promising unto him pardon of sin and eternal happiness, if he will return from his iniquity, embrace mercy reached forth, by faith unfeigned, and walk before God in sincere, faithful and willing obedience, as becomes such a creature lifted unto such enjoyment, and partaker of such precious promises. This Covenant is the opposite to the former in kind, so that at one and the same time, man cannot be under the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace.²³

Ball goes on to explain that

Materially the Law, that is, the matter and the argument of the Law, as a rule, stands in force: but if formally it did continue as a Covenant, there could be no place for repentance, nor for the promise of forgiveness, or mercy reaching to the pardon of sin, or the quickening of them that are dead in trespasses. The Covenant of works is of justice, the Covenant of grace is of grace and mercy, which cannot agree and take place in one and the same subject. . . .²⁴

Ball also quickly points out, that in the Covenant of Grace, God sets forth “mere and rich grace, and that to the creature which has deserved Hell.”²⁵ And since “This Covenant entered immediately upon the fall, and so may be called a Covenant of Reconciliation, not of friendship,”²⁶ it “was made with man a sinner, miserable and by nature the child of wrath.”²⁷ And again, “In the Covenant of Grace, man by nature the child of wrath, is made the child of God by grace and adoption.”²⁸ In the same place, Ball maintains, “The Covenant of nature [or of works]²⁹ was neither the last nor everlasting, but being first made way for a better, and being

²³ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Earlier, Ball begins a section of his argument, “How the Covenant made with *Adam*, called by some Divines the Covenant of Nature, agrees and differs from the Covenant of Grace” (page 24).

broken was antiquated and disannulled³⁰ to our singular comfort. . . .”³¹ The perpetuity of the Covenant of Works is therefore in the just punishment of wrath brought upon Adam and Eve and their posterity.³²

Ball turns to the place of good works in His general discussion of the Covenant of Grace. “Obedience to God’s commands is covenanted, not as the cause of life, but as the qualification³³ and effect of faith, and as a way of life.”³⁴ Ball then adds, “For manner of administration this Covenant is divers, as it pleased God in sundry manners to dispense it; but for substance it is one, the last, unchangeable, and everlasting.”³⁵ He spends an entire chapter showing, “The Covenant of Grace is either promised or promulgated and established. “Promised to the Fathers, first to *Adam*, and afterward to the Patriarchs, and lastly to the people of Israel Promulgated after the fullness of time came. . . .”³⁶ “The covenant of Promise then was that Covenant which God made with Adam, the Fathers and all Israel in Jesus Christ to be incarnate, crucified and raised

³⁰ To disannul means “to annul completely; to render void or of no effect; to cancel; to destroy” (*Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 740).

³¹ Ball, 26.

³² For Ball, the Covenant of Works does not otherwise seem to continue in force. “[B]eing once broken it could not be repaired” (11). If “it did continue as a Covenant, there could be no place for repentance, nor for the promise of forgiveness, or mercy reaching to the pardon of sin, or the quickening of them that are dead in trespasses” (15). For Ball, “the Law, as a rule, stands in force.” (15) But with reference to fallen creatures that are under wrath, the Law continuing to bind them as a Covenant of Works excludes the possibility of grace. “The Covenant of works is of justice, the Covenant of grace is of grace and mercy, which cannot agree and take place in one and the same subject. . . .” (15) This construction seems to figure heavily in Ball’s approach to the Moral Law, good works, and the Mosaic administration of the Covenant of Grace.

³³ By *qualification* Ball means the presence of good works qualifies or substantiates the fact our faith is indeed saving faith. In other words, a “disposition to good works” (20), accompanies lively saving faith and qualifies this faith as actual saving faith.

³⁴ Ball, 19. Here is Ball’s statement: “Faith was that efficient cause of that precious oblation in Abel, of reverence and preparing the Ark in *Noah*, of obedience in *Abraham*: but it was the instrument only of their justification. For it does not justify as it produces good works, but as it receives Christ, though it cannot receive Christ, unless it brings forth good works. A disposition to good works is necessary to justification, being the qualification of an active lively faith. . . . Faith and works are opposed in the matter of Justification and Salvation in the Covenant, not that they cannot stand together in the same subject, for they are inseparably united, but because they cannot concur to meet together in the same Court, to the Justification or Absolution of Man. For in the Court of Justice according to the first Covenant [Covenant of Works] either being just he is acquitted, or unjust he is condemned: But in the Court of Mercy, if you receive the promise of pardon, which is done by lively faith, you are acquitted and set free, and accepted as just and righteous; but if you believe not, you are sent over to the court of Justice” (19-20).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

from the dead. . . .”³⁷ As Ball begins his discussion of the administration of the Covenant of Grace to Adam, he again distinguishes three major stages of administration as the Covenant of Promise. “First, from *Adam* until *Abraham*. Secondly from *Abraham* until the Covenant made with Israel upon the Mount. Thirdly, from *Moses* to Christ. . . .”³⁸

We move, then, to Ball’s exposition of the administration of the Covenant of Grace under Moses. Ball begins by setting forth four views of the Mosaic economy. First,

Some make the Old and New Testament, as the Covenant of works and grace, opposite in substance and kind, and not in degree alone: and that to introduce an unsound distinction, *viz.* of promise set against Covenant or Testament, as though God conferred grace unto the Fathers only by promise, and not by Covenant, leaving all that *Moses* puts under Covenant to be the Covenant of works and Old Testament. . . .³⁹

Ball dispenses with this position. “Neither can it be proved, that God ever made the covenant of Works with the creature fallen: but whenever the Scripture speaks of God’s entering into Covenant with man fallen and plunged into sin, and for sin deserving wrath, it must be understood of the Covenant of Grace”⁴⁰

Second,

Others make the Old Testament a Covenant subservient to the Covenant of Grace, and describe it to be that which God made with Israel on mount Sinai, to prepare them to faith, and to inflame them with the desire to the promise and Evangelical Covenant (which otherwise had languished in their minds) and to restrain them from wickedness as it were with a bit a bridle, until the time wherein God should send the Spirit of adoption into their hearts.⁴¹

“[I]n the Covenant subservient, God is considered as reprovng sin, and approving righteousness: in the covenant of Grace, as pardoning sin and renewing man in righteousness: the stipulation of the old Covenant is, *Do this and live*: Galatians 3:12. Of the New, *Believe and you will not come*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 93

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

into judgment. *Joh. 3:18.*”⁴² Ball adds, “The Old Testament was added to the Promise of Grace that went before. . . .”⁴³

Ball describes this second position as using one of our triad of texts, Galatians 3:12, to show the Mosaic Legislation differs in substance with the Covenant of Grace. Ball disavows this position, and this use of Galatians 3:12 which quotes Leviticus 18:5, “The one who does them shall live by them.” “[T]he Divines of this opinion, make the old Covenant differ from the new in substance, and kind, and not in degree of manifestation, as also did the former [position].”⁴⁴

Third, “Most Divines hold the old and new covenant to be one in substance and kind, to differ only in degrees. . . .”⁴⁵ So far so good. But then, “For most commonly they distinguish them thus: The old Testament promises life to them that obey the Law, and condemns all not perfectly conformable; the new does freely pardon sins, and gives salvation to them that believe in Christ.”⁴⁶ Ball adds several other comparisons and says, “[H]ow these differences should stand, if they are not Covenants opposite in kind, it is not easy to understand.”⁴⁷ Ball therefore disavows this third position.

[I]t cannot be conceived how the old Covenant should . . . exact perfect obedience deserving of life as necessary to Salvation, and yet promise pardon to the repentant believer: for these two are contrary to one another. . . . [T]he Covenant that God made with the Jews is but one, and how should we conceive the Law in one, and the same Covenant to be propounded as a rigid draft of prime nature, and with moderation also, as a Covenant of works, and the Covenant of Grace likewise, when the Covenant is one, and the conditions the same[?]”⁴⁸

Fourth, “Some Divines hold the old Testament, even the Law, as it was given on Mount Sinai, to be the Covenant of Grace for substance. . . . [I]t was given to be a rule of life to a people

⁴² *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

in Covenant, directing them how to walk before God in holiness and righteousness. . . .”⁴⁹ The first position is that the Mosaic legislation is a Covenant of Works. The second and third position are that the Mosaic legislation is a hybrid, both a Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. The fourth position is that the Mosaic legislation is an administration of the Covenant of Grace. “This,” says Ball, “I take to be the truth, and it may be confirmed by many strong reasons out of the word of God.”⁵⁰ Ball then proceeds to explain the biblical position.

“The Covenant of Grace is expressed in these words, “*I will be your God and you shall be my people*: Wherein God promises to be favorable to the iniquity of his servants, and to remember their sins no more: and to bless them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things.”⁵¹ For Ball, this is the heart of the Covenant. “When God then says to Israel, *I am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt*; does he not propound himself as their King, Judge, Savior, and Redeemer: Spiritual Redeemer from the bondage of sin and Satan, whereof that temporal deliverance was a type[?]”⁵²

Ball then deals with the preface to the Ten Commandments. “And it is further to be noted, that as these words, *I am the Lord your God*, are prefixed to the first commandment in the Law, so are they annexed to all others in sundry places of Scripture, as an argument to move to sincere obedience.”⁵³ Here Ball specifically references Leviticus 18:5 as one of those texts to which the words, *I am the Lord your God* is a prefixed. Ball reiterates and calls the Law “the rule of life prescribed to them of the true and only God, who is theirs by Covenant.”⁵⁴ Ball’s reference to Leviticus 18:5, indicates he takes the words, “The one who does them shall live by

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 104

⁵² *Ibid.*, 104-105.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

them,” not as a Covenant of Works but as a statement of the Law as a rule of life for those in covenant with God.

As a rule for life, “The Law was given for this end, that it might instruct us in faith, which is the mother of a good conscience and love. Christ and faith is the end and soul of the Law”⁵⁵ Ball references Romans 10:4, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” He continues, “The sum of the Law is faith or love, and both these carry the same sense, because though *Moses* makes mention of love, and *Paul* of faith, yet that love does comprehend faith, and this faith does contain love.”⁵⁶ In this context, Ball also references Deuteronomy 10:12. “Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” As Ball says, love comprehends faith and faith contains love. “Therefore the Lord in Covenant commanding the observation of this Law, exacts faith also, without which the Law cannot be obeyed in an acceptable manner.”⁵⁷ Ball therefore holds that the Law is not opposed to faith. Rather, the Law teaches faith. “As God is the one who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith: without question in the Covenant of Grace he taught the Circumcision to seek justification by faith and not by the works of the Law.”⁵⁸

How then do we interpret Leviticus 18:5?⁵⁹ “These words, *Do this and live*, must not be interpreted, as if they did promise life upon condition of perfect obedience, and for works done in such exactness as is required: but they be expounded Evangelically, describing the subject ca-

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

⁵⁹ The words, *Do this and live*, are shorthand for the complete verse, “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, *by which a man may live if he does them.*”

pable of life eternal, not the cause why life and salvation is conferred”⁶⁰ Ball then proceeds to list several verses which are similar to Leviticus 18:5. He concludes such “passages are to be understood of sincere and upright walking, and show who are justified, and to whom the promises of life pertain, but not why they are justified.”⁶¹ Thus Ball understands the words, *Do this and live*, from within the Covenant and Evangelically. “And in like manner that of the Apostle, *The doers of the word are justified* [Romans 2:13], may be expounded Evangelically, not of them that fulfill the Law, which should be justified by their works, but of them that soundly obey, who are justified of grace by faith, not for their works.”⁶²

To insure we understand Scripture opposes all works to justification by grace through faith and such works are never meritorious but also quite necessary, Ball immediately includes the following.

[H]ence it appears what works the Apostle opposes to faith in the matter of justification: not only perfect works done by the strength of nature, of which there be none at all: but works commanded in the Law as it was given to Israel, such as *Abraham* and *David* walked in after they were effectually called, such as without whose presence faith itself could not be existent, such as are necessary in the person justified: these works are opposed to faith, in the matter of justification, not that faith can be without them, but because they cannot be causes together with faith in Justification.⁶³

Ball therefore insists Leviticus 18:5 is not a statement of the Covenant of Works, but rather a statement of the law as a rule of life for those who are already in covenant with God. In fact the law, summarized in statements such as Leviticus 18:5, includes trust in God’s promises

⁶⁰ Ball, 137.

⁶¹ Ibid. Ball says, “*Do this and live*, what is it more than this, *If you will obey my voice, and do my Commandments, you shall be to me a peculiar treasure* [Exodus 19:5]. *Blessed is the man that fears the Lord and delights greatly in his Commandments* [Psalm 112:1]. *Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that does righteousness at all times* [Psalm 106:3]. *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart* [Psalm 119:1-2]. *Who so look into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being a not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed* [James 1:25]. *To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, eternal life* [Romans 2:7]: which passages are to be understood of sincere and upright walking, and show who are justified, and to whom the promises of life pertain, but not why they are justified.”

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

and faith in Christ. Christ is the end and goal and soul of the law. Where Ball references Galatians 3:12, he outlines a position on the law and a use of this text he disavows. Finally, when Ball references Romans 10:5 along with Romans 10:4 and 10:6, he is discussing Israel's perversion of the law. "And therefore the Apostle does reprehend⁶⁴ the Jews as perverters of the true sense and meaning of the Law, when they sought to be justified by their works, and shows that *Moses* taught them to look for Salvation in the Messiah, and seek for the righteousness which is by faith."⁶⁵ Ball's position is therefore that our triad of texts, Leviticus 18:5, Romans 10:5, and Galatians 3:12 ought not to be used to verify the Mosaic Legislation as a covenant of works.

The focus of this study is the use of the triad of texts, Leviticus 18:5, Romans 10:5, and Galatians 3:12, by the Westminster Assembly as Scripture proofs. The Assembly uses these texts to affirm the Mosaic Legislation was an administration of the covenant of works. How were these texts appended to the Confession and what debate was involved? "By the 4th December 1646 the Confession of Faith was finished, and on that day it was presented by the whole Assembly to the House of Commons, and on the 7th in the same way to the House of Lord's."⁶⁶ The House of Commons requested the Assembly to add Scripture proofs. A committee of the Assembly, not the Assembly as a whole, then presented the Confession of Faith with Scripture proofs in the margin.⁶⁷ This took place on short notice, perhaps, within one week, April 22, 1647 to April 29.⁶⁸ The Assembly did send its rationale to the House of Commons for not originally including Scripture proofs. Among these reasons, the Assembly reported that

most of the particulars [of the Confession], being received truths among all churches, there was seldome any debate about the truth or falsehood of any article or clause, but rather about the manner of expression and the fitness to have it put

⁶⁴ To reprehend means "to reprimand; reprove; chide; blame; censure," (*Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 2114).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁶ Mitchell, 366.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 367

⁶⁸ *The Creeds of Christendom* (3 vols.), Phillip Schaff, Ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker book House, 1990), 1:757.

in the Confession. . . . [W]er[e] any texts debated in the Assembly, they were never put to a vote.⁶⁹

It therefore appears the Scripture proofs for the Confession were hurriedly added by a committee and without the debate and vote of the Assembly. “The Larger Catechism was completed on 15th October 1647, read over the Assembly on 20th . . . and on the 22d was carried up to the two Houses.”⁷⁰ As in the case of the Confession, proof-texts were added later. “It was presented with proofs on 14th April 1648.”⁷¹ Mitchell rightly observes, it was the proof-texts “which contributed so much to give the doctrinal standards of the Assembly such a firm hold on the minds of the lay members of the Church”⁷²

We may add the influence of Westminster’s proof-texts upon the ministerial members of the church and seminary professors as well. The linkage of the triad of texts, on which we focus in this paper, with the covenant of works by way of Westminster’s proof-texts, clearly implies the giving of the law at Sinai is an administration of the Covenant of Works. Larger Catechism 93 is more explicit regarding this linkage including the use of proof-texts.

Practically, this influence reaches into the pew in worship, in preaching, and in other areas of ministry. While we maintain that right standing with God is by grace alone through faith in Christ alone, when it comes to the implementation of moral standards we often falter. We may not be truly settled as to whether the Mosaic Legislation is an administration of the covenant of works, an administration of the covenant of grace, or some sort of a hybrid administration. Scott Clark observes, “One of the tensions, which remained unresolved in the 16th and 17th Centuries, was the matter of Israel’s relations[hip] to the Covenant of Works.”⁷³ Burgess’ “confu-

⁶⁹ Mitchell, 367-368, n. 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 425.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ R. Scott Clark, “A Brief History of Covenant Theology,” (Escondido: Westminster Seminary California Website, 2001).

sion and perplexity” is with us today. If it remains unresolved, it affects our ministry. Allow me to offer some simple examples with regard to worship and preaching.

Our worship, albeit unintentionally, may have a legalistic or negative edge. As Reformed men and women who hold to the Regulative Principle; we are rightly concerned about biblical standards in worship and God honoring worship. As a result, we press ourselves, and others, to conform to these biblical standards. We may emphasize our own responsibilities and duties and fail to emphasize adequately God’s gracious covenantal presence and work in worship. We reverse the biblical priorities. Practically speaking, we put works before grace.

A typical Invocation may include confessions of our inability to perform adequately the required tasks and live up to our obligations, along with pleas for God to accept us and our meager worship because Christ is our Advocate. This posture sets the tone for our worship. To be sure, Christ *is* our Advocate. But this is not the point. An invocation, by definition, is an invoking of or praying for the presence of God in worship among His people in order to apply His covenant to His people as He promises. Again, we may reverse the biblical priorities. Practically speaking, we put works before grace.

As we enter into worship with an emphasis on covenant renewal, we stress our covenant responsibilities and the proper use of the biblically ordained elements of worship. Worship may then place more emphasis on what we do than upon what God has done, is doing, and will do among and for his people. Again, we reverse the biblical priorities or have a hybrid view. Week after week we must return to renew our covenant pledge because week after week we fail. Practically speaking, we put works before grace. But God’s covenant declaration to us is simple and clear. “I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (Leviticus 26:12). This is the commitment of the Living God to His people. Do we fail? “If we are faith-

less, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). God’s word stands and God’s commitment to His people stands.

Our preaching may place men and women under the law as a covenant of works or treat moral obligations and duties as aspects of the covenant of works. With such an emphasis our preaching may take on a legalistic or negative emphasis. Sermon applications may major on what men and women must do and how successful they are in accomplishing their duties. We may expect one of two responses to such ministry. Here are two examples. Although anecdotal, these are real responses of confessing Christians to teaching in Reformed churches which, I perceive, to be negative or even legalistic. The first response is a question, “Why does going to church have to feel like being sent to the principal’s office?” The second response comes as a result of sitting under such ministry over a period of time. “I know I am not Catholic but I always feel as though I cannot measure up.” Once again, the root problem may be that we reverse the biblical priorities. Practically speaking, we put works before grace.

Preaching worthy of the name declares the message of grace to people always needing this message. The heart of the message is, “Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7), or in the New Testament, “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9). The great wonder is that this living, reigning God and King enters into covenant with miserable, sinful, fallen creatures and commits Himself to them. “I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (Leviticus 26:12). As His covenant people, God graciously gives them His Law as a way in which they may display their love for God and for others. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). The priority in this relationship is God’s love for His people. In turn, God’s people may then express love for Him and for others. “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:9).

Here is where we stand. In context, Leviticus 18:5 speaks of the rule of life God gave to Israel. Paul refers to Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 and quotes Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12. The Westminster standards use these texts to validate their teaching on the Covenant of Works. The implication from this use of these texts is that the Mosaic Legislation is a Covenant of Works. It appears, however, the Scripture proofs, were not approved by the Assembly as a whole but appended by Committee. The result is an ongoing tension with regard to the Mosaic Legislation. John Ball, a Puritan scholar respected by many of the Westminster Divines and a forerunner to the Westminster Assembly clearly teaches the Law of Moses is an administration of the Covenant of Grace. Ball affirms our understanding of Leviticus 18:5 and does not use Leviticus 18:5, Romans 10:5, or Galatians 3:12 with reference to the Covenant of Works.

Westminster's use of Leviticus 18:5, Romans 10:5, and Galatians 3:12, may indeed reveal an unresolved tension among the Westminster Divines regarding the Law of Moses. Burgess affirms this is the case. The proverbial ball, however, is now in our court. Effective gospel ministry and preaching requires that we resolve this tension lest by default and despite our confession we become preachers of works rather than ministers of grace. Our preaching ought not to place men and women under the law as a covenant of works, nor treat any of our moral obligations and duties as aspects of the covenant of works, as we challenge holy and righteous living before God.