

Moses Was Not A Legalist

**A Defense for Understanding Paul's Words in Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12
as Arguing Against the *Misuse* of the Mosaic Covenant
rather than the Mosaic Covenant Itself**

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to justify the claim *Paul did not think Moses taught salvation by works in the Mosaic Covenant*, especially in light of the seemingly apparent words to the contrary in Rom 10:5 and Gal 3:12. Rather both Paul and Moses considered the Mosaic Covenant to be what the Reformed tradition refers to as an administration of the Covenant of Grace and therefore a covenant graciously given by God to Israel to affirm His gospel promises and tell them how they were to live as those He had graciously redeemed to be His chosen people.¹ Though the Mosaic Covenant can be said to have been unilaterally and graciously initiated by God it also had a bilateral destination in that His people were to respond in faith *and* repentance.² This paper will argue that when Paul said “Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law” (Rom 10:5) and “the law is not of faith ” (Gal 3:12) he was not describing the form of the Mosaic Covenant *in its entirety* (that is, what Moses actually intended to teach) but rather that he was describing how the laws of the Mosaic Covenant, or the *works of the law*, functioned when wrongly isolated from their clear gracious substructure by those seeking to justify themselves by doing the works of law instead of by faith alone in Jesus.

The following pages will first look at the ‘proof text’ of Lev 18:5 used by Paul in each case to demonstrate Moses was not teaching salvation by works but rather what is often referred to by many esteemed theologians as “evangelical obedience.”³ Second, this paper will argue Paul does not see himself writing against what Moses wrote per se (meaning the essence of Mosaic

¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 220; J. Nicholas Reid on the Westminster Confession of Faith in “The Mosaic Covenant,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 152–53.

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 264.

³ D. Blair Smith, “Post-Reformation Developments,” in *Covenant Theology*, 371; Ligon Duncan, “Foreword,” in *Covenant Theology*, 28; J V. Fesko, *Galatians*, Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Powder Springs, GA: Tolle Lege Press, 2012), 186; William Perkins, *A Commentary on Galatians* (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 165.

Covenant) but rather a self-righteous misunderstanding of the law.⁴ Paul described this misuse and abuse of the Mosaic Covenant as an attempt to secure righteousness apart from faith in Jesus and instead through the diligent performance of the *works of the law*.⁵ Finally, this paper will demonstrate in survey fashion that Paul is in full agreement with Moses (and the Mosaic Covenant) in that both agree faithful obedience follows God’s gracious redemptive work and flows from true faith in Christ as its necessary fruit.

What Did Moses Write?

“For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them” (Rom 10:5). It *seems* fairly obvious that Paul thinks Moses explicitly taught works-based salvation. This reading seems to be confirmed by Paul’s earlier comment “it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the *doers* of the law who are righteous before God” (Rom 2:13).⁶ Additionally, up to this point in Romans Paul seems to maintain an antithesis between *law* and *faith* (Rom 3:21; 27; 4:4-5; 13; 6:15). Paul’s comments in Galatians also seem to confirm this teaching, “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” ... But *the law is not of faith*, rather “The one who *does* them *shall*

⁴ Jonty Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple: Understanding God’s Unfolding Promises to His People* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014), 169.

⁵ This diligent performance of the *works of the law* involved two layers; both a legalistic attitude towards all the laws in general (moral, ceremonial, and civil) as well as a more specific insistence that the ceremonial aspects of the law (such as circumcision, observance of Jewish Feast days etc) continued into the era of the New Covenant. Paul engages both insisting on the one hand that justification is by faith alone and not by works of the law and on the other hand that the ceremonies of the old Covenant, which pointed forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, no longer serve a positive purpose but rather negatively have become yokes of slavery that pull people away from the person and work of Jesus. See Guy Prentiss Waters, “Galatians,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*, ed. Michael J. Kruger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 252–54, 260–61.

⁶ Emphasis added. See also that God “will render to each one *according to His works*: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, He will give eternal life... glory and honour and peace for everyone *who does good*” (Rom 2:6-8); emphasis added.

live by them.”” (Gal 3:10-12). That Moses at least offered salvation by works as an option (whether hypothetical or real) *seems* fairly straightforward.⁷

However, the problem with reading Paul as teaching Moses taught salvation by works is what Moses actually taught. The proof text Paul appears to be referencing in both Rom 10:5 and Gal 3:12 is Lev 18:5 which reads, “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person *does* them, *he shall live* by them: I am the LORD.”⁸ The Hebrew of Lev 18:5 reads אָשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אִתָּם literally “that the man will do them and will live by them.” The Septuagint (LXX) loosely follows the Hebrew with ἃ ποιήσας ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς, literally “that the man who does will live by them.”⁹ In Rom 10:5 Paul writes ὅτι ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς (“because the man who does them will live by them”) and in Galatians 3:12 ἀλλ’ ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς (but he who does them will live by them). The ESV uses the word “commandments” to translate αὐτὰ in Rom 10:5. The point to note is that despite minor variations the linguistic dependence of Rom 10:5 and Gal 3:12 on Lev 18:5, particularly from the LXX, is obvious. In other words Paul is almost certainly referring to Lev 18:5 in both cases.

How does any of this advance the argument of the paper? One might be forgiven for thinking the problem is simply being restated over and over again albeit in a variety of

⁷ Bryan D. Estelle, “Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:1-14 in Biblical Theological Development,” in *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, ed. Bryan D. Estelle (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 110; John Calvin, *Harmony of the Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, & Deuteronomy*, vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 204.

⁸ Emphasis added. The ESV does not identify the reference in Rom 10:5 as a *direct* quote unlike Paul’s use of Deut 30:12-13 in the next verse which is placed in quotation marks and unlike the reference to Lev 18:5 in Gal 3:12. It is interesting to note that the NASB likewise does not place the reference in quotation marks whereas the NIV does. See discussion in Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 381.

⁹ Every time someone references the LXX Dr Ross grows a new pair of wings... More seriously, the LXX exchanges the Imperfect יַעֲשֶׂה verb for a weaker participle ποιήσας and assumes the direct object for the participle, in this case αὐτὰ (for the Hebrew אִתָּם), from the previous clause; yet the fundamental meaning remains. See Frank Thielman, *Romans*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 490.

languages.¹⁰ To acknowledge Lev 18:5 is the verse Paul has in mind proves Paul did not consider Moses to be teaching a works based salvation for the simple reason that in Lev 18:5 Moses is clearly not teaching man can be saved by the works of the law but is writing about Israel's sanctification.¹¹ Moses was actually writing about the faithful obedience that should be the *response* to God's grace and that *flows from* faith in God as is its necessary fruit; that is evangelical obedience. On a pure semantic level, whether in Hebrew or Greek or English, the semantic range of the word *doing* is not limited to *earning* but can just as easily encompass actions that are inherently *responsive*. Additionally that the person who does them *will live by them* could just as easily mean *will live well* or *will enjoy their covenantal communion with God* (Coram Deo as it were) by doing the law as it may mean *will be saved* or *justified* or *have eternal life* by doing the law. There is nothing inherent in the words Moses used that demand we read him as saying a man can be justified and secure eternal life by keeping all of God's commands. To say "do this and live" *could* mean "keep these laws to earn salvation" and yet *it could just as easily* mean "keep these laws to live in blessed communion with the God who has saved you." The actual meaning can only be discovered by appreciating the context of the words and broader theological concerns.

The immediate context of Lev 18:5 argues *against* Moses teaching justification by works because God is addressing the people He has *already* redeemed and accepted as His own. In Lev 18:2 God tells Moses to "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD *your* God" (Lev 18:2). God identifies Himself with these people to such a degree that they can claim

¹⁰ Just for fun here is Lev 18:5 in Latin "quæ faciens homo, vivet in eis."

¹¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, vol. 2, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 51; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14, no. 1 (1971): 24. Contrary to this Estelle posits Moses is teaching conditionality regarding both the maintaining of and dwelling in the land as well as what he labels "entitlement to heaven" in "Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:1-14 in Biblical Theological Development," 118.

Him as their own God. God is affirming His covenant relationship with the Israelites.¹² He is *their* God. They don't need to keep God's commandments to *become* His people; they already *are* His people and He already *is* their God. Lev 18:3 continues "You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, *where you lived*, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, *to which I am bringing you*." The context, as the emphasis highlights, is that they have already been redeemed from the land of Egypt. God is speaking to an already-rescued people. The Israelites are not being asked to keep God's commandments in order to be saved but rather because they have been saved.¹³ Additionally, not only are they called to obey because God has delivered them from Egypt but because God *will* bring them into the promised land, "to which I am bringing you." The later conquest of the land is not something Israel will achieve for itself but it is something God will bring about for them.¹⁴ The God who graciously redeemed will also graciously provide (See Phil 1:6).

It is in light of God's gracious redemption and provision He then says "You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD *your* God [note again the language of covenantal possession and relationship]. You shall *therefore* keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD." Who God is and specifically who He is to the Israelites leads to the *therefore* of Lev 18:5. They are to do God's laws and so live by them because God has redeemed them and *not* in order to be redeemed by Him.¹⁵ To put it another way, Paul cannot be teaching Moses taught *works based salvation* in Leviticus 18:5 because Moses is plainly teaching about *salvation based works* in Lev 18:5. In the

¹² Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: The Lord's Holy People Living out His Holy Character*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), 4798.

¹³ Sklar, *Leviticus*, 479.

¹⁴ Daniel C. Timmer, "Joshua," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 165.

¹⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 251.

reformed tradition this is what the Formula of Concord first described as the third use of the law.¹⁶

One observation and two clarifications about the Mosaic Covenant should be made at this point. First, observe that it is not simply Lev 18 teaching that God's people are to respond to God's gracious redemption in faithful obedience but the whole Mosaic Covenant that teaches this point.¹⁷ To provide an important example of this principle one only needs to look at the Ten Commandments. In both presentations, they are not given to Israel as rules to be obeyed to earn God's favour but are rules given to Israel because they have experienced God's favour.¹⁸ The Ten Commandments in Ex 20:2 are introduced with a declaration of God's redemptive grace, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." The exact same pattern is manifested in Deut 5:6, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." At the heart of the Mosaic Covenant Grace precedes Gratitude; the fruit of the people is to follow and flow from the faith of the people in God's Grace.

Second, it is important to clarify and highlight that just as Moses was not teaching a works based salvation neither was he teaching or expecting God's people to live sinlessly after

¹⁶ "The Law of God was given... thirdly, that regenerate men... may have some certain rule after which they may and ought to shape their life" Philip Schaff, ed., "The Formula of Concord," in *The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical and Protestant Creeds*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 130–31; Reid, "The Mosaic Covenant," 158. See also WCF 19.6 "Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, *as a rule of life*." (Emphasis added) in Schaff, "The Westminster Confession of Faith," in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 641. The moral law at the heart of the Mosaic Covenant is the same moral law that reflects God's holy character and was written into the human heart when man was first created (Rom 2:14-15), it is the moral standards all men are called to live up to, the moral standards all men (save Jesus) fail to live up to, and it is the same moral law Christians have been saved to live by to the glory of God the Father, in the righteousness Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ Comparing the grace led obedience of the Mosaic Covenant to that of the Abrahamic Covenant Rhodes charmingly comments "when you look more closely... you realise it's the same girl in a different dress." Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 74.

¹⁸ Reid, "The Mosaic Covenant," 153.

the giving of the law. That the Mosaic laws were powerless in and of themselves to bring about heart transformation and produce obedience (Rom 8:3) is evidenced and clearly proclaimed within the Mosaic Covenant itself. The entire cultic system, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the literal geographical centrality of the Tabernacle, as well as the importance of the Passover and the Day of Atonement all spoke volumes to the perpetual and pervasive nature of Israel's sin, their inability to be perfect, and that God's gracious provision of atonement lay at the centre of their covenantal relationship.¹⁹

Finally, the presence of covenantal Curses for disobedience as well as blessings for Obedience within the Mosaic Covenant in no way undermines the gracious nature of the Mosaic Covenant. The curses reflect covenantal discipline designed not only to punish sin but to lead to repentance (Deut 30:1-3; Amos 4:6-11) as much as they picture the eschatological consequences for unbelief just as the blessings represent covenantal benefits for faithfulness (Pss 1:1-2; 2:12; 19:7-11; 32:1-2; 119:1-8, 9, 44-48, 52, 56, 98-100, 105, 130, 144, 156, 159, 165) as much as they represent eschatological rewards. This pattern of blessings and obedience is mirrored in the New Covenant with blessings to encourage and support faithful obedience (Matt 5:3-12; 6:4, 6, 14-15, 18, 33; Mark 10:29-31; Acts 20:35) and discipline to discourage and reprimand faithlessness (1 Cor 10:12; 11:29-30; John 15:6; Heb 3:12) as well as to restore the disobedient (1 Cor 5:4-5; 9-12; Heb 12:6).²⁰

¹⁹ Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*, 74; Reid, "The Mosaic Covenant," 152.

²⁰ Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 516; Gardner helpfully articulates that the consequences meted out on the Corinthians evidences the nature of the Lord's Supper as a "covenant meal" with their "covenant Lord."

Paul, Moses, and The “Righteousness that is Based on the Law”

If Moses wrote that works ought to flow from salvation, how can Paul say He writes that salvation might flow from works? This might seem to suggest that Paul incorrectly understands Moses but this cannot be the case given that Scripture cannot err (Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21; 3:16; John 10:35).²¹ This paper will now argue Paul himself is not misusing what Moses wrote because he is not arguing against what Moses wrote. Rather he is arguing against how what Moses wrote is being misused by his theological adversaries. Those who approach the law apart from faith, in a spirit of self-righteousness, and seek to justify themselves by adherence to the legal demands of the law; what Paul identifies as *the works of the law*.

It is apparent Paul himself doesn't misunderstand the Mosaic Covenant because his immediate counter argument to “the righteousness that is based on the law” is that Moses actually wrote about “the righteousness based on faith” (Rom 10:6).²² In Rom 10:6-8 Paul directly quotes and comments on Deut 30:11-14, “But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)” What does the righteousness based on faith say? It says what Moses said in Deut 30 which is the word of faith which Paul proclaims! This word of faith is in the hearts and mouths of the Israelites because it's in the very Covenant Moses is administering to them.²³

²¹ The inerrancy of the Scripture as God's Word written is assumed here on the basis that it is true. Fight me.

²² Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 52

²³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 653; Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 54.

Yet, how does what Paul writes in Rom 10:6-8 fit with his language in Rom 10:5 and Gal 3:12? Paul's language in each case is an appropriation of the arguments of his soteriological opponents.²⁴ Paul is not arguing against what Moses wrote but a misunderstanding of what Moses wrote. This is clear when the wider contexts of each New Testament text are taken into account. At the end of Rom 9 Paul explains, "Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works." (Rom 9:31-32). Paul says Israel was *pursuing* "a law that would lead to righteousness."²⁵ Yet, they failed to reach that law (of righteousness) because "they did not *pursue* it by faith." What did they fail to pursue by faith? Not simply righteousness, but *the law* of righteousness; they failed to pursue the law by faith. They were right in pursuing the Mosaic Covenant but wrong in pursuing apart from faith.²⁶ Rather they pursued it "as if it were based on works" (Rom 9:32), which it was not. Therefore they "stumbled over the stumbling stone" (Rom 9:32).²⁷ Paul's opponents pulled out verses such as Lev 18:5 to try and prove their argument but Paul's shows they are only proving they are not well-versed in Mosaic theology.

What of Paul's language in Gal 3:12 that "the law is not of faith?" As in Rom 10:5, the 'proof text' offered is Lev 18:5. Here, as in Romans, there is contextual evidence that clarifies Paul is not claiming Moses taught salvation by works but that what Moses wrote is being misused apart from its gracious context by the Judaizers in Galatia. First, in Gal 3:11 Paul points to the prophet Habbakuk to demonstrate "it is *evident* that no one is justified by the law, for 'The righteous shall be by faith'" (See Hab 2:4).²⁸ This is significant as the ministry of the prophets was

²⁴ Guy Prentiss Waters, "Covenant in Paul," in *Covenant Theology*, 239.

²⁵ Literally "pursuing a law of righteousness" διώκων νόμον δικαιοσύνης.

²⁶ Guy Prentiss Waters, "The Covenant of Works in the New Testament," in *Covenant Theology*, 92.

²⁷ The fact they misunderstood is further emphasised in Paul's language in Rom 10:2, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but *not according to knowledge*. For, being *ignorant*..."

²⁸ Etienne Jodar, "Leviticus 19:5 and the Law's Call to Faith: A Positive Reassessment of Paul's View of the Law," *Themelios* 45, no. 1 (2020): 49.

to call God's people back to the faithfulness of the Mosaic Covenant; to the fruit bearing repentant faith in Jehovah that Moses wrote about.²⁹ Second, Paul's discourse throughout Gal 3 argues the law (read Mosaic Covenant) that came after the Abrahamic Covenant does not annul, make void, or conflict with the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal 3:17-18, 21) but rather it adds to it by imprisoning everything under sin (Gal 3:22) and acting as a temporary guardian (3:24-25). For what purpose? "So that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe... in order that we might be justified by faith" (Rom 3:22, 24). In other words Paul is very clear that Moses does not stand in contradiction to Abraham by teaching salvation by works in the law but the exact opposite. In the law Moses taught the problem of sin and salvation by faith in the coming saviour.

So how can Paul write "but the law is not of faith" if the law is of faith? Because the nuance of his language is understood from the wider context. The *law* that is not of faith in Gal 3:12 is not the Mosaic Covenant as it offered in its entirety. The *law* that is not of faith is shorthand for *law in isolation from the promises of grace*. In other words it is shorthand for the false system of self-righteousness held by those Paul previously described as "all who rely on works of the law" (Gal 3:10). These heretics do not rely on the Mosaic Covenant, that is the *entirety* of the law, but simply on the *works* of the law, ἔργων νόμου (Gal 3:10; See also ἔργων νόμου three times in Gal 2:16; then again in 3:2, 5).³⁰ When Paul sets *law* against *faith* in Galatians he is not pitting the Mosaic Covenant against the Gospel but rather he is pitting a misreading of the Mosaic Covenant against the gospel in the Mosaic Covenant. That Paul uses law in more than one sense may at first appear confusing but with a right appreciation for the

²⁹ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets: Abridged Edition* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 81, 93.

³⁰ Guy Prentiss Waters, "The Covenant of Works in the New Testament," 91; see also Rom 3:20 for ἔργων νόμου.

semantic range of the word *law*, the essential nature of the Mosaic Covenant, as well as the heresy being refuted much fog is cleared to help the reader understand how Paul can go on to ask a question such as, “Tell me, you who wish to be under the *law*, do you not listen to the *law*?” (Gal 4:21).

What therefore is the “righteousness that is based on the law” (Rom 10:5) and the “law [that] is not of faith” (Gal 3:12)? It is *not* the formal teaching of the Mosaic Covenant but the abuse of the Mosaic Covenant by the self-righteous. These false-teachers are going to the bare demands of the law, isolated from the Mosaic Covenant's gracious substructure, the *works of the law* themselves and treating them as rules to be obeyed for self-justification. When Paul writes that Moses wrote about this theology he is addressing the misuse of the ‘proof text’ not Moses’ original nor intended meaning.³¹ Paul is justified in saying “Moses wrote” not because Moses actually taught this theology but because the legal demands of the law, which Moses did write, when isolated from the context of grace, are nothing but rules promising some form of life. What else could this mean in isolation from grace apart from salvation by works? The hermeneutics of the Judaizers are like acts of spiritual redaction. They focus on ‘proof texts’ such as Lev 18:5 and argue that one must *do* the law in order to earn *life*; meaning one must *work* in order to be *saved* or justified before God.³² They sought justification by the *works* of the law, ἔργων νόμου (Rom 3:28), alone, but they did not seek justification in the way that they were supposed to, that is by using the *entirety* of the law; “For being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom 10:3-4). In both Romans and Galatians Paul

³¹ It was suggested by a fellow student that this is not dissimilar to when Jesus would say “You have heard it said...” (Matt 5:21; 27; 31; 33; 38; 43) to address a misconception of the law rather than the law itself.

³² As the old adage goes, “every heretic has their proof text.”

clearly displays an understanding that Moses did not teach salvation by works and also that his opponents were misusing the laws and select statements within the Mosaic Covenant to teach salvation by works. These opponents were neglecting *the gracious form* of the Mosaic Covenant and legalistically settling instead for *legal fragments* of the Mosaic Covenant. These men failed to appreciate that the laws of the Mosaic Covenant were given to function in what the Reformed Tradition describes as *the third use of the law* (a rule for the life of redeemed believers). Owing to their unbelief and sinful self-righteousness they treated the laws as meritorious conditions for salvation and so condemned themselves in light of the *second use of the law* (standards which show man his sinfulness, his liability for judgement, and his need for a saviour) which Paul speaks so frequently of throughout Romans and Galatians (Rom 3:19-20; 7:7-10; Gal 2:19; 3:10; 22).

The “Evangelical Obedience” of Moses in Romans and Galatians

This final section of the paper will briefly demonstrate the theological harmony between Paul and Moses; that faithful evangelical obedience to God’s moral law *follows* God’s gracious redemptive work and *flows* from true faith in Christ as its *necessary fruit*. Contrary to the view outlined in this paper, there are some voices within Christendom who read the Mosaic Covenant as fundamentally a works based administration, out of step with God’s gracious promises to Abraham. Dispensational theologians see in Gal 3 a clear antithesis between the two covenants, “Paul distinguishes between the Abrahamic Covenant as one of promise and the law of the Mosaic covenant.”³³ For other theologians the Mosaic Covenant, although graciously initiated by God, owing to its bilateral dimensions manifests a works based principle that creates a “tension”

³³ Darrell Bock, “Progressive Dispensationalism,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard James Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022), 127.

with God's previous promises; a tension that is only resolved with the coming of Jesus.³⁴ Even within the reformed tradition it has been argued the Mosaic Covenant stands distinct from the promises of grace as a republication of the Covenant of Works.³⁵ However, given the points made previously about the gracious substructure and form of the Mosaic Covenant it is better to understand it in line with the Westminster Confession, fundamentally one and the same with the Abrahamic and New Covenants as an administration or dispensation of the Covenant of Grace that differs not in its soteriology but in the manner it is ceremonially administered through types and shadows of the coming Christ.³⁶

Holding then that the Mosaic Covenant teaches obedience is to follow redemption flowing out of faith in God as redeemer, it remains to show that this is exactly what Paul teaches in Romans and Galatians. A simple survey will suffice to make the point. First, the book of Romans both opens and closes referencing Paul's gospel mission to bring about the "obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:26).³⁷ Second, in Rom 6 Paul explains how high-handedly continuing in sin is incongruous with true faith in Christ, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:1-2). The point is not that

³⁴ Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 95.

³⁵ "We must recognise that, according to Paul, it was this specific covenantal entity, the Sinaitic Covenant as such, that made inheritance to be by law, not by promise - not by faith, but by works." Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 23; Michael Horton, "Covenant Theology," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard James Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022), 40, 45; It should be noted that Horton does still hold the Mosaic Covenant to be an administration of the Covenant of Grace in the sense that "it served to further the interests of that gracious promise" Horton, "Covenant Theology," 47. See also Geerhardus Vos and Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 225

³⁶ WCF VII.V states "This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament" in "The Westminster Confession of Faith," in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 617-18.

³⁷ Paul's argument throughout the book then unpacks the relationship between obedience and faith. Moo puts it well, when he says the words faith and obedience are "to be mutually interpreting; obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience." Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 52.

perfection follows redemption but that the life of the redeemed should be marked by a continual running from the sin that used to define them; they have been united to Christ that they “might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).³⁸ Union with Christ means believers are to “consider [themselves] dead to sin and alive to God” (Rom 6:11) and “present [themselves] to God... as instruments for righteousness” (Rom 6:13). The faithful are further described as having become “slaves to righteousness” (Rom 6:18-19) and having been set free from sin “have become slaves of God [with] the fruit [that] leads to sanctification” (Rom 6:22). Their sanctification flows from their justification.³⁹ Third, the good law (Rom 7:12) then continues to serve the Christian by convicting them of their sin and leading them to Christ (Rom 7:24-25). Fourth, the law is then fulfilled in all of those who trust in Jesus Christ and so walk according to His Spirit (Rom 8:3-4). It is in union with Jesus and by the power of His Holy Spirit that believers are enabled to live in obedience (Rom 8:7-11).⁴⁰ Fifth, believers are spiritually and morally transformed by the truths of the gospel that both renew their minds (Rom 12:1-2) and by the work of the Holy Spirit empower them to fulfill the moral law at the heart of the Mosaic Covenant (Rom 13:8-10).⁴¹

Paul makes the same argument in the book of Galatians. Christians have been set free from the yoke of slavery for freedom (Gal 5:1).⁴² Yet this freedom is not an unbridled freedom that excuses evil and sin but a freedom to fulfill the moral law that lies at the heart of the Mosaic Covenant, “Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the *whole law* is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbour as

³⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1986), 304–5.

³⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1997), 135.

⁴⁰ “God’s commands have now become God’s enablings.” Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 153.

⁴¹ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 161.

⁴² That is set free from 1) the ceremonies of the Mosaic Covenant and 2) from the natural and sinful inclination to pursue salvation according to the works of the law (rather than according to the grace of the law).

yourself” (Gal 5:13-14). Christians are not obliged to keep the ceremonial laws (Gal 5:18) but by faith, being united to Christ and led by the Spirit, the fruit of salvation is produced in them (Gal 5:22-24) and they are commanded (and enabled!) to fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 5:14; 6:2).⁴³

Conclusion

For Paul, as for Moses, obedience follows faith as its natural fruit. Salvation is not from works but works are from salvation. When writing about what ‘Moses writes’ in Rom 10:5 and what the ‘law is not’ in Gal 3:12 Paul was not addressing the teaching of the Mosaic Covenant per se but its misuse by the self-righteous. The form of both the Mosaic Covenant for Moses and the New Covenant for Paul is that transformation ought to follow redemption; gratitude ought to follow grace; fruit ought to flow from faith. Paul did not misunderstand Moses. Paul did not think Moses taught salvation by works. Paul knew Moses taught the word of faith he proclaimed (Rom 10:8) and Paul knew the obedience that is so strongly emphasised in the Mosaic Covenant was not unique to what Moses wrote but forms an inseparable part of the Spirit’s work in the life of the believer. The one who through faith in Christ is forgiven their sin, imputed with His righteousness, and united to Him in his death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-8) is filled with His Holy Spirit that they might no longer sin (Rom 6:1;15; Gal 5:13; 19-22) but instead be transformed (Rom 12: Gal 5:16) to live their lives in joyful obedience to Christ and His commands (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:13-14).

⁴³ Timothy George, *Galatians*, The Christian Standard Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2020), 465; J V. Fesko, *Galatians*, 186; David B. McWilliams, *Galatians*, Mentor Commentary (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2009), 212.

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