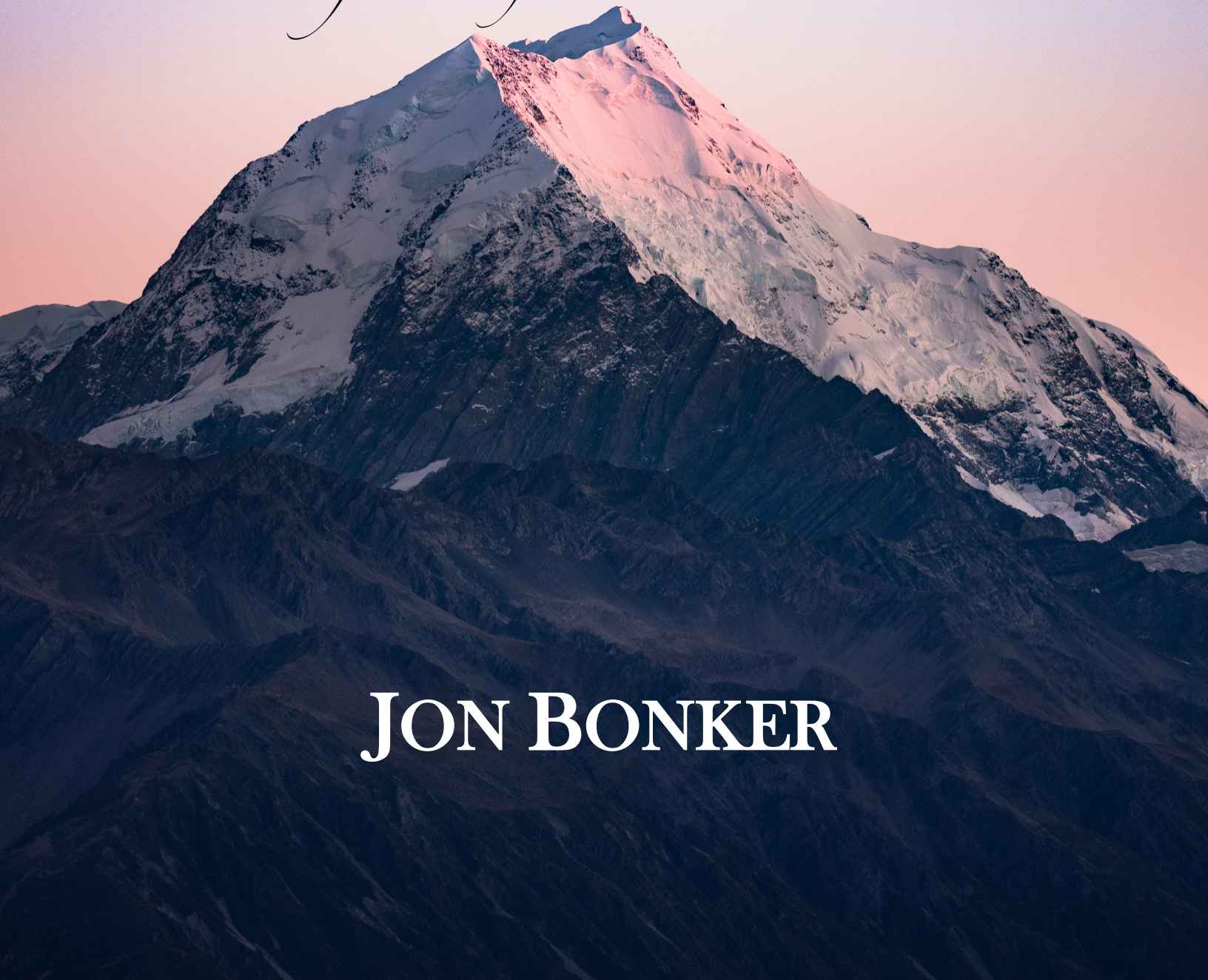
Does Sinai belong to the Covenant of Grace?

What the Puritans said about the nature and function of the Mosaic Covenant



Jon Bonker

A
RuinandRedemption.com
Teaching Series

© 2018 Jon Bonker. All rights reserved.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the general rule given above must be approved by us here at Ruin and Redemption. Please also be sure to include the following statement on any distributed copy: " © 2018 Jon Bonker. All rights reserved. " Thank you so much!! And Enjoy.

Does Sinai Belong to the Covenant of Grace?

Table *of* Contents

1. John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace,* p5

2. Anthony Burgess, *Vindication of the Law,* p9

3. Francis Roberts, *The Mystery and Marrow of Divinity,* p13

4. Thomas Blake, *The Covenants of Works and Grace,* p18

5. William Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant,* p21

6. William Strong, *Discourse of the Two Covenants,* p23

7. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* p27

8. John Flavel, *Vindication of the Law and Covenant,* p31

Introduction

It's been said that the most difficult point in all the study of divinity is understanding the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai. Is it a *legal* covenant? Or is it a *gracious* covenant? Is it a Covenant of Works, or is it a Covenant of Grace? It's difficult to deny that Sinai belongs to the Covenant of Grace. But for those who accept it as such, there are difficult questions to grapple with. One of the most difficult questions is this: If the Mosaic Covenant truly belongs to the Covenant of Grace, how do you explain that the requirement of the Law was perfect obedience? Here's why this question is so difficult: What God requires in the Covenant of Grace is faith; and actually, faith *alone*. That's God's requirement in the Covenant of Grace. But though some try to deny it, it's obvious from a clear reading of passages such as Galatians 3:10-12 and Romans 5 (cf. Deuteronomy 27:26 and Leviticus 18:5) that at Mt. Sinai, God was indeed requiring perfect obedience of Israel. Faith and perfect obedience are two mutually exclusive systems. So, how do you reconcile the tension? How can you defend the fact that Sinai was indeed part of the Covenant of Grace (requiring faith), if it's clear that God required perfect obedience under Moses?

Most people don't know it, but the Puritans wrote extensively about this issue in particular. If I can use the analogy, they wrestled long and hard like Jacob with the angel, and they prevailed. But, much like buried treasure, their writings have long since been largely forgotten. These are abstracts attempting to summarize the thoughts of several of the Puritans on this particular issue. It has been an immense blessing to me to uncover these precious nuggets; and I pray it would be the same for you. Enjoy.

JB, *Ruin and Redemption*

John Ball
A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace, 1645

Ball begins his treatment of the Mosaic Covenant by citing the prevailing opinions on the matter. The first two views which he references are the *Republication* view and the *Subservient* view. It's significant that, at least for Ball, he lumps these two views together as being the two views on Sinai that regard the Mosaic Covenant as something different in substance and kind than the Covenant of Grace, and not just different in degree. This is clear from his words: "But not to examine these things particularly [IE, the details of the Subservient view], by this explication it appears, *the Divines of this opinion, make the old Covenant differ from the new in substance, and kind, and not in degree of manifestation,* as also did the former [IE, the Republication view]. [Whereas] Most Divines hold the old and new Covenant to be one in substance and kind, to differ only in degrees. . ." (p95). Having covered the first two views, both of which he deems as viewing the Mosaic Covenant different in substance and kind from the Covenant of Grace, Ball asserts that, "Most Divines hold the old and new Covenant to be one in substance and kind, to differ only in degrees, but in setting down the differences they speak so obscurely, that it is hard to find how they consent with themselves." (p95). After describing several commonly held distinctions between the old and new covenants, Ball acknowledges, "how all these differences should stand, if they be not Covenants opposite in kind, it is not easy to understand", but he then refers to two ways which those who hold to the Majority view have labored to reconcile them (p96): The *first* of these is the view that the Law, in a way that was plain and clear, and in order to convince men of their unrighteousness so as to drive them to Christ, did indeed promise life on the hypothetical condition of perfect obedience; but the Law also, in a way more hidden and discreet, promised life upon the condition of gospel repentance and faith in Christ (mostly prefigured through the sacrifices and other ceremonial laws). The *second* of these views is actually the Mixed view, which sees the Mosaic Covenant as a mix of both the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace; the distinction being that the Moral Law was given as a covenant of works, while the second giving of the Law, in Exodus 34, was given to Israel as the Covenant of Grace (cf. pp96-101). It's noteworthy that Ball here classifies the Mixed view under the Majority view.

Ball determines that neither of these two explanations fully satisfies (p101): *"Not the first,* because it cannot be conceived how the old covenant should as a condition of the covenant exact perfect obedience deserving life as necessary to salvation, and yet promise pardon to the repentant believers; for these two are contrary the one to the other. *Not the second,* because the 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 draught of prime nature, and [IE, but] with moderation also, as the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace likewise, when the Covenant is but one, and the conditions the same[?]" (p102).

Ball then offers another explanation, to which he himself adheres: "the Law, as it was given upon Mount Sinai [was] the Covenant of Grace for substance, though propounded in a manner fitting to the state of that people, time and condition of the Church." (p102). What does he mean? "It was so delivered as it might serve to discover sin, [to] drive the Jews to deny themselves and flee to the mercy of God revealed in Jesus; but it was given to be a rule of life to a people in Covenant, directing them how to walk before God in holiness and righteousness, that they might inherit the promises of grace and mercy." (p102).

Ball argues that the Law is called a Covenant, and this covenant was none other than the Covenant of Grace, in which God promises to be Israel's God and they His people—a holy nation and kingdom of priests (pp102-103). Ball notes that Jesus summarizes the Law by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4, which commands us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our might, concluding that "it is most apparent, that in this first precept we are enjoined to take God to be our God, to choose him to be our portion, to cleave unto him, to trust in him as our only Savior. And it can hardly be questioned, whether that Covenant wherein we are bound to take God to be our Father, King and Savior be the Covenant of Grace or no[t]." (p105). In short, the requirement here is to embrace the Covenant of Grace from the heart. And if this be the case, then though love is *explicitly* commanded, faith must be just as *implicitly* commanded, seeing that love comes through faith: "by the same reason it is manifest that the Law requires faith as well as love and obedience, and does build these upon it as a foundation. *It prescribes faith in the first place, and throughout, namely, that we acknowledge God the Law-giver to be*

the Lord our God, the only true God, and testify that faith unto him, by a universal and uniform obedience to that whole Law and every title thereof." (p105). Ball thus argues that throughout the Law God is implicitly commanding faith—for us to cling to Him by faith—and in turn to prove the reality of our faith in and through a life set apart to Him. After all, doesn't Scripture teach us that whatever is not of faith is sin—and doesn't that include even good works of a legal character? "Certainly, whatsoever is not of faith is sin; even all works, though good in show, and for substance seeming agreeable to the rule of the Law, if they issue not from faith, they are vain and hypocritical; if they be not quickened and enlivened by faith, they are but the carcass of a good work." (p106). Ball concludes, "Therefore the Lord in covenant commanding the observation of His Law, exacts faith also, without which the Law cannot be obeyed in an acceptable manner. For when the Law is spiritual, and commands true worship and invocation, how can it be observed without faith?" (p106). And indeed, Christ cannot truly be the end of the Law, if the Law does not direct us to Him, and require faith in Him (p109). After all, even a good schoolmaster does indeed instruct and teach as well as beat and discipline (p109).

Ball argues that *the nature* of the "life" which was set before Israel in the Law was indeed *eternal* life (pp132ff), but again, that *the condition* for obtaining that life, reoccurring throughout the Law, must be interpreted evangelically. In other words, what God required of Israel was not perfect legal works—but the obedience of faith. The "If" condition on which all the promises rested—including Canaan as a type of heaven, length of days, God's Tabernacle presence, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life—was embracing the covenant from the heart by faith. As Ball clearly says, *"The condition of this covenant* (in the sense aforesaid) *is faith in the promised Messiah."* (p134; cf. pp130ff). Only then did works find their proper place; not as the condition for salvation, but rather as its proof; not as the basis for salvation, but as its fruit. As Ball puts it: "True it is the promises run upon this condition: 'If you obey My voice and do My Commandments.' But conditions are of two sorts, antecedent or consequent. *Antecedent,* when the condition is the cause of the thing promised or given. . .*Consequent,* when the condition is annexed to the promise as a qualification in the subject. . . And in this latter sense, obedience to the Commandment was a condition of the promise; *not as a cause why the thing promised was vouchsafed, but a qualification in the subject capable, or a consequence* of such great mercy freely conferred." (p133). And again: "These words, 'Do this and live,' must not be interpreted, as if they did promise life upon a condition of perfect obedience, and for works done in such exactness as is required; but they must be expounded evangelically, describing *the subject* capable of life eternal, not *the cause* why life and salvation is conferred. . .[these] 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" (pp136-37; cf. p110).

Ball tells us that many of the New Testament passages that seem to oppose the Law and the gospel—such as 2 Corinthians 3, where Paul describes the Law as a ministry of death and condemnation—are not to be understood as speaking of the Law in and of itself, but only "as it was separated from Christ and the gospel, of men who did rest in the Law, and sought to be justified by it; whereas Christ was the end of the Law, which the Jews not perceiving, they erred from the truth, and perverted the true sense and scope of the Law." (p120). And again: "In the epistle to the Galatians, the apostle opposes the Covenant of Grace to the Law in many things. . .But it is to be remembered, that in those passages the apostle disputes against the Jews, who trusted in the works of the Law, and thought by the blood of bulls and goats to be purged from their sins, or of them that joined the Law with Christ in the matter of justification. . .The contrariety [IE, opposition] then of the Law or Old Testament. . .unto the New Testament, or Covenant of Grace, is not in themselves, but in the ignorance, pride, and hardness of heart of them, who understood not, or did pervert the right end of the Law, as if it was given for justification." (p121).

Having said all this, Ball does also make other statements that seem to considerably alter what he had previously affirmed. We've seen that Ball rejected the notion that the condition the Law required was perfect obedience; asserting that what the Law required was truly to embrace the Covenant of Grace from the heart by faith; and whatever works were required were only to prove the reality of salvation and not to be conditions for salvation; works described the *subjects* of salvation, not its *cause*. Elsewhere though, Ball writes: *"The Law in itself considered exacted perfection of works as the cause of life;* but when that was impossible to man by reason of the infirmity of his flesh, it pleased the Lord to make known to his people by the ministry of Moses, that the Law was given, not to detain men in confidence of their own works, but to lead them unto Christ." (pp113-114). This seems to be quite different than what Ball had

elsewhere affirmed. Ball had clearly stated that the condition which the Law required was actually to embrace the covenant from the heart and to prove it with an evangelical obedience—the obedience of faith. But here Ball seems to just as clearly affirm something entirely different—that what the Law required was indeed a perfect, exact obedience *as the cause of life*. (It's noteworthy that Francis Roberts later quotes this very passage from Ball as setting forth the principle of *abstraction;* cf. Roberts, p774. This becomes significant in the next few paragraphs). Ball goes on: "For though the Law of righteousness promise a reward to the keepers thereof; yet after it has shut up all men under sin, it does substitute another righteousness in Christ, which is received by faith" (p114). And again: "the Law. . . exacts perfect obedience of man in his own person" (p114); and a little later: "justification by faith in Christ is opposed to justification by the works of the Law; because he only is justified before God by the Law, whose acts being examined by the Law, are found just and righteous according to that which the Law requires; but he is justified by faith, who being in himself ungodly, believes in Christ for salvation." (pp114-115).

Ball also consents to the fact that, "The Law does not so *directly* and expressly teach faith in Christ, but require obedience, yet does it lead us to Christ, and more *obscurely* command faith in Him." (p113). This becomes significant when we pair it with what we learned in the last paragraph. At the outset, Ball had referenced one way in which Divines who held to the Majority view had reconciled the differences between the old and new covenants: "Some few have [held] that the Old Testament does promise life eternal *plainly* under the condition of moral obedience perfect, that is, under a condition altogether impossible. . .but *covertly* under the condition of repentance and faith in the Messiah to come prefigured by types and ceremonies. . .that by such a pedagogue they might be led to Christ, who was more obscurely manifested under those shadows." (p96). Ball had rejected this view (p101). But now we find him affirming everything about it: both that the Law did in and of itself exact perfect obedience as the cause of life (pp113-114); and that though it did require faith obscurely—it required obedience directly.

Ball also concedes that the Law and the gospel have *different functions,* for he says, "Moses gave the Law in tables of stone, but could not give power or ability to do what the Law required; but Christ writes the Law in the heart, and enables the faithful in some measure to do what he commands . . .the Law prefiguring Christ, and redemption in him, and teaching and commanding what ought to be done, but neither giving grace to do it, nor containing the substance of the thing prefigured, was given by Moses; but grace to do what was commanded came from Christ, in whom also the substance of what was prefigured by the ceremonies, is fulfilled." (pp118-119). And Ball seems to affirm the common Puritan distinction of *abstraction,* that is, viewing the Law both *strictly* and *largely* considered, when he says: "the Law animated by Christ is pleasant and delightful, but as it is barely considered in opposition to Christ and to the gospel, [namely,] as it exacts perfect obedience, but gives no ability or power to perform what is required, it wounds, terrifies, kills and works wrath." (p120). And again, "Of the Law there is a twofold use and consideration. One as it is a rigid exactor of entire obedience, and hand-writing against us for sin, and thus of itself barely considered, it wounds, but heals not. . .The other, as it points to Christ in whom salvation is to be found, and directs how to walk in all well-pleasing before the Lord, and thus it is an easy yoke. The Law considered *without Christ* wounds, kills, and revives sin by reason of our corruptions. But the Law considered *in Christ,* and as it points unto him, kills corruption, and converts the soul." (pp120-121). Ball seems to echo this same thought later when he says: "Perfect obedience is *commanded,* that if a man will trust in his works to be justified thereby, he must either bring that which is every way complete, or be cast in judgment. Sincere obedience, though imperfect is *approved,* that the imperfection of their best works being covered, and their transgressions graciously pardoned, they might be accepted by faith in Christ, who is the end of the Law, as righteous unto eternal life. . .*The Law requires perfect and exact obedience*. . .and he that trusts in his works, if he continues not in everything that is written in the book of the Law to do them, he is accursed. But to them that be in Covenant, the Law was given with such moderation, that *sincere obedience was accepted* of them. . ." (p135). So then, in these statements, Ball tells us that though a perfect, moral obedience is truly *required;* yet in Christ, an evangelical obedience is *accepted*. There is a marked difference, though, between *what the Law requires* and *what God accepts*. Ball is not saying *here* that the Law requires both a perfect legal obedience on the one hand, but also an evangelical obedience on the other. He is saying that though God accepts our imperfect evangelical obedience in Christ, what the Law actually requires is a perfect, exact obedience.

This is significant. Elsewhere, Ball had told us that what the Law *required* was an evangelical obedience—not a perfect exact obedience, but rather the obedience of faith. But scattered throughout his writings, we also have these statements affirming something entirely different: that though God in Christ *accepts* our imperfect (evangelical) obedience, still, what the Law *requires* is perfect, moral obedience. *On the one hand,* then, Ball tells us that the condition of the Law is evangelical; that is, the Law requires faith and only gospel obedience insofar as it proves the reality that one has embraced the covenant from the heart. This is how to understand all those "if" statements throughout Deuteronomy. *But on the other hand,* Ball also tells us in other places in his volume that the Law did indeed *in and of itself* actually require a perfect obedience, binding under a curse all who might break the least command. In other words, Ball seems to give us two very different answers to the question: *did the Law require an evangelical obedience or a legal obedience?* How do we reconcile Ball's diverse thoughts on the function of the Law in the Mosaic Covenant? Did the Law require an evangelical obedience or a perfect, exact, moral obedience?

It's not easy to answer this question. It seems imprudent to suggest that Ball didn't himself realize he was advocating two very different lines of thought on the question of what did the Law require. Perhaps he was himself conflicted on the matter—maybe he was himself torn on the issue. Or perhaps he saw some particular passages, in Deuteronomy, for example, as requiring perfect, exact, legal obedience; while he saw other passages as requiring not a legal obedience but evangelical—the obedience of faith. Maybe he saw, for instance, the passages that speak of "doing" and "keeping" all God's commandments as requiring a perfect obedience, but the passages that speak of "listening to the voice of the Lord" as operating on a very different system—that this listening was nothing less than the hearing of faith (cf. Isaiah 55:3; Galatians 3:2,5; Hebrews 3-4). Or perhaps Ball initially believed that the Law required an evangelical obedience, but later became convinced that there was a legal element involved, and so inserted the statements that the Law indeed required a perfect obedience later into his manuscript (but again, was too torn over the matter to remove his other earlier thoughts)? Or visa versa? Or was it that Ball's greatest area of contention was not ultimately with *what* the Law required—but rather with *why* it was required? This seems to make the most sense. Ultimately, Ball's real dispute was not *that* the Law does indeed require perfect moral obedience as the cause of life—but that we so easily follow in the footsteps of the Jews, misunderstanding *why* it is that the Law requires this. Indeed, it becomes clearer the more we read Ball that his real quarrel was not that God's Law did require an exact obedience as the cause of life—but that we misunderstand God's intention in doing so: for God never gave us this command in order that we might actually try to earn life—but in order to lay us low that we might flee to Christ to find life in Him alone. Ball seems to say just this when he affirms that, "the condition of obedience, which God requires and man promises, is the chief thing urged in the Law; but free and gracious pardon, wherein consists the happiness of the Saints is therein promised and proclaimed. They under the Old Testament lightly following the letter, mistook the meaning, not looking to the end of that which was to be abolished, whereunto Moses had an eye under the veil. For they perceived not so well the grace intended by the legal Testament, which the perfection of the Moral Law, whereof they could not but fail, should have forced them to seek, and the imperfection of the typical Law, which made nothing perfect, should have led them to find, but they generally rested in the work done, as was commanded by either Law, when as themselves were unable to do the one, and the other was in itself as insufficient to help them." (p106).

Ultimately, all we can say with certainty is that Ball gives us two different answers to the question: *Did the Law require an evangelical obedience or an exact obedience?* What we can't do, if we want to be faithful to Ball's writing, is simply dismiss, discard, or ignore one aspect or the other. Ball said both. So at the least, we have to present both if we want to faithfully represent Ball's thoughts on the issue. *On the one hand,* Ball presents the Law as requiring an evangelical obedience—it commands faith. But *on the other hand,* he presents the Law as requiring an exact obedience as the hypothetical condition of eternal life.

The last thing we can take away from Ball's writings is that, at the least, Ball saw the Law as *functioning* in two ways: it functioned differently depending on if it proceeded "in" Christ or "apart from" Christ (pp120-121). For those *outside of Christ,* the Law condemned. But for those *in Christ,* the Law was a means of grace. It functioned in both ways; not either or. It's a significant thing that Ball refused to deny either use of the Law. We find him affirming both the first use and the third use of the Law. He realized he didn't have to pick one over the other. And neither do we. After all, as C.S. Lewis teaches us, Aslan is good, yes; but he's not safe. Though He can be as a puppy with his children—he still has sharp teeth.

Anthony Burgess
Vindiciae Legis (The Vindication of the Law), 1647

The most relevant and substantive section in Burgess' work, *Vindiciae Legis,* is found in Lecture 24, and in particular on pages 231-237. Burgess begins this lecture by proving that the Ten Commandments were indeed given *as a covenant* (pp229-231). Having done this, Burgess goes on to set forth a taxonomy of the major different views among the learned as to how to understand the Mosaic Covenant. This is probably the most quoted passage from Burgess' work, as it lays out such a clear and concise synopsis of the major views of his time. In his words: "Having proved it is a Covenant, all the difficulty remains in declaring what Covenant it is; for here is much difference of judgements, even with the learned and orthodox; and this does arise from the different places of the Scripture, which, although they be not contrary one to another, yet the weakness of our understandings is many times overmastered by some places. Some (as you have heard) make it [IE, the covenant at Sinai] a Covenant of Works, others a mixed Covenant, some a subservient Covenant, but I am persuaded to go with those who hold it to be a Covenant of Grace; and indeed, it is very easy to bring strong arguments for the affirmative, but then there will be some difficulty to answer such places as are brought for the negative; and if the affirmative prove true, the dignity and excellency of the Law will appear the more." (pp231-232).

So, Burgess makes it clear that his position is that the Mosaic Covenant was an administration of the Covenant of Grace. But what Burgess goes on to say after this is by far what is most significant. Having affirmed that Sinai was part of the Covenant of Grace, Burgess proceeds to set forth—not this time a taxonomy of the *different views of Sinai among the learned*—but rather a taxonomy of the *different positions among those who take Sinai to be part of the Covenant of Grace*. In particular, Burgess begins to address the question of the tension in the Mosaic Covenant: how is it explained by proponents of the Majority View, that the Mosaic Covenant was indeed part of the Covenant of Grace, when throughout the Law we seem to be confronted with the fact that perfect, personal obedience is set forth as the necessary condition of eternal life? He later sets forth the tension in this way: "although the Law, given by God to the Israelites, was a Covenant of Grace, yet in some sense the Law and Gospel do oppose and thwart one another." (p240). And to explain how this may be resolved, Burgess gives some common explanations, along with his own thoughts on the matter. And so he begins: "Now, before I come to the arguments, which induce me hereunto, consider *in what sense* it may be explained, that it is a Covenant of Grace:

1) "Some explain it thus, that it was indeed a Covenant of Grace, but the Jews, by their corrupt understanding, made it a Covenant of Works, and so opposed it unto Christ and therefore, say they, the Apostle argues against the Law, as making it to oppose the promises and grace; not that it did so, but only in regard of the Jews' corrupt minds, who made an opposition where there was none. This has some truth in it, but it is not full." *Notice here that Burgess somewhat affirms this but is not wholly satisfied.*

2) "Some make the Law to be a Covenant of Grace, but very obscurely, and therefore they hold the gospel and the Law to be the same, differing only as the acorn while it is in the husk, and the oak when it's branched out into a tall tree. Now if this should be understood in a popish sense, as if the righteousness of the Law and the gospel were all one, in which sense the Papists speak of the old Law and the new, it would be very dangerous and directly thwarting the Scripture." *Burgess doesn't like this.*

3) "Some explain it thus: God (say they) had *a primary or antecedent* will in giving of the Law, or [and?] *a secondary and consequent.* His primary will was to hold out perfect and exact righteousness, against which the Apostle argues, and proves no man can be justified thereby; but then God knowing mans impotency and inability, did secondarily command repentance, and promise a gracious acceptance through Christ, and this may be very well received, if it be not vexed with ill interpretations." *So far, this is the view that Burgess most heartily affirms. But he continues to cite one more position:*

4) "But lastly, this way I shall go: The Law (as to this purpose) may be considered *more largely,* as that whole doctrine delivered on Mount Sinai, with the preface and promises adjoined, and all things that may be reduced to it; or *more strictly,* as it is an abstracted rule of righteousness, holding forth life upon no terms, but perfect obedience. Now take it in *the former sense,* it was a Covenant of Grace; take it in *the*

latter sense, as abstracted from Moses' administration of it, and so it was not of grace, but works. This distinction will overthrow all the objections against the negative." *This is Burgess' preferred explanation.*

We should pause to note here that this was not the first time Burgess had spoken of the Law as both largely and strictly understood. In Lecture 15, Burgess had expressed himself this way: "the word 'Law' may be used in diverse senses; and, before this or that be asserted of it, you must clear in what sense you speak of the Law. . .for we may either take the word 'Law' for *the whole dispensation* and promulgation of the commandments: Moral, Judicial, and Ceremonial; or else *more strictly,* for that part which we call the Moral Law; yet with the preface and promises added to it; and in both these respects the Law was given as a Covenant of Grace (which is to be proved in due time); or else *most strictly,* for that which is mere mandative and preceptive, without any promise at all; and in this sense, most of those assertions which the learned have concerning the difference between the Law and the Gospel, are to be understood; for, if you take (as for the most part they do) all the precepts and threatenings scattered up and down in the Scripture, to be properly the Law; and then all the gracious promises, wheresoever they are, to be the gospel, then it's no marvel if the Law have many hard expressions cast upon it." (p147).

Now coming back to Lecture 24, Burgess continues, "Nor may it be any wonder that the Apostle should consider the Law so differently, seeing there is nothing more ordinary with Paul in his Epistle, and that in these very controversies, then to do so; as for example, take this instance, Romans 10:5-6, where Paul describes *the righteousness of the Law* from those words, 'Do this and live,' which is said to have reference to Leviticus 18:5—but we find this in effect, [IE, of the same kind, namely] Deuteronomy 30:16 —yet from *this* very chapter the Apostle describes the righteousness which is *by faith.* And *Beza* does acknowledge, that that which Moses speaks of *the Law,* Paul does apply to *the gospel.* Now how can this be reconciled, unless we distinguish between *the general doctrine* of Moses which was delivered unto the people in the circumstantial administrations of it, and *the particular doctrine* about the Law, taken in a limited and abstracted consideration? Only this take notice of, that although the Law were a Covenant of Grace, yet the righteousness of works and faith differ as much as heaven and earth." (pp232-233).

Let's try to unpack this a bit. In this paragraph, Burgess is seeking to prove what he had just previously affirmed, which is the explanation that he believes to best reconcile the tensions stated earlier; namely, to understand the Law as both *largely* and *strictly* taken. He begins by stating that it is an exceedingly common thing for Paul to distinguish between the Law in this way; IE, as largely taken or strictly taken. To cite one example then of how Paul does this, Burgess refers to Romans 10:5-6. Now in *verse 5,* Paul speaks of the righteousness *of the Law;* whereas in *verse 6,* he speaks of the righteousness *of faith.* And in Romans 10:5, Paul refers to Leviticus 18:5 ("Do this and live") and understands it as speaking of the righteousness *of the Law.* Burgess then affirms that this *same language* of "Do this and live" is found also in Deuteronomy 30:16. And yet, going back to Romans 10:6, Burgess points out how Paul, in *this* verse, appeals back *to the very same chapter of the Law* (Deuteronomy 30) to explain the righteousness *of faith.* Now how can it be, that according to Paul, Deuteronomy 30 on the whole describes the righteousness of faith, and yet Deuteronomy 30:16 (that uses the same language as Leviticus 18:5) describes the righteousness of the Law? At this point Burgess cites Beza, but not necessarily in an approving way. For in his *second* explanation above, Burgess vehemently disagrees with any teaching that equates the Law and gospel (as an acorn in the husk), calling it popish. And indeed, Beza seems to do just this, asserting that the same Scripture Moses speaks of *the Law*—Paul then applies to *the gospel* (cf. p97). This Burgess sees as ridiculous—but how else can one resolve this tension? By this same precious distinction. For though *strictly* taken, Leviticus 18:5 (and Deuteronomy 30:16) do describe the righteousness *of the Law,* yet *largely* taken, Deuteronomy 30, and indeed the whole of the Law, describe the righteousness *of faith.*

Burgess goes on to clarify one further issue: "But the papists, they make *this* difference: The *righteousness of the Law* (says Stapleton, in *hunc locum)* is that which *we of our own power have and do* by the knowledge and understanding of the Law; but the *righteousness of faith,* they make the righteousness of the Law, *to which we are enabled by grace through Christ.* But the righteousness of faith they [thus] make [into] the righteousness of the Law, to which we are enabled by grace through Christ; so that they compare not these two together, *as two contraries* (in which sense Paul does) but as an imperfect righteousness with a perfect. But we know that the Apostle excludes the works of David and Abraham, [and even those works] *that they did in obedience to the Law, to which they were enabled by grace*; so

necessary is it in matter of justification and pardon to exclude all works, anything that is ours. . .Nor does it avail us, that this grace in us is from God, because the Apostle makes the opposition wholly between anything that is ours, howsoever we come by it, and that of faith in Christ." (pp233-234).

To summarize so far: Burgess recognizes that there is a very real question that needs answering for those who take Sinai as being part of the Covenant of Grace; namely, how do you explain the fact that the Law seems to require nothing short of perfect obedience, cursing all who fall short and rewarding with eternal life those who might attain to this impossible standard? Burgess says that among those who take Sinai as being part of the Covenant of Grace, there are at least four sub-views as to the reason for the opposition between Law and Gospel in the New Testament. *The first* of these seems to be the position that John Ball often refers to (cf. pp120-121); namely, that Paul's opposition was not directed against the Law, but rather against the Jews who perverted the Law, making it into a self-willed Covenant of Works in order to earn righteousness thereby. *The second* seems to be a particular way of explaining exactly how it was that the Law revealed the gospel only obscurely. No one objected that the Law revealed Christ and the Covenant of Grace obscurely, but Burgess seems to be calling out a particular explanation for why this was the case, that seemed to lump Law and gospel together as the same kind of righteousness. Burgess calls this view dangerous, clarifying later why he uses such strong language when he says, "although the Law were a Covenant of Grace, yet the righteousness of works and faith differ as much as heaven and earth" (p233). *The third explanation* is that in the Mosaic Covenant, God promises eternal life on the grounds of two contrary and opposite conditions; the one being perfect obedience; the other being faith in Christ. It's of note that John Ball seems to refer to this same explanation in his work (cf. Ball, p96); where he describes how eternal life was set forth *plainly* on the condition of perfect obedience, while it was also set forth more *obscurely* on the condition of faith in Christ. It's also of note that while Ball ends up largely rejecting this view (at least *he says* he does, p101, though he seems to contradict himself later), Burgess embraces it. But Burgess finishes by *fourthly* advocating the common Puritan distinction of the Law being both *largely taken* on the one hand and *strictly taken* on the other. John Ball indeed also advocates this distinction and heartily embraces it. And Francis Roberts later defines this view perhaps most clearly as he expounds Romans 3:21-22, telling us that the righteousness that is based on faith is both "apart from the Law" (as *strictly* taken) but also no less "witnessed by the Law" (as *largely* taken). That is, the Law bears witness to Christ over and over again. But within the Law largely taken, there is also a more strict sense, the sense where the Law truly does demand exact obedience as the hypothetical condition for eternal life. Burgess tells us that this is ultimately the best way to reconcile the tension.

A few things are of note here. *First,* Burgess does not completely reject the first three explanations in favor of the fourth. He in fact agrees with some of them (to differing degrees), which tells us that one is not bound to hold to just one of these explanations. *Secondly,* Burgess does not indeed equally affirm each of these four explanations. Though he does tentatively agree with the first of them, we would be misrepresenting Burgess to say that this is how he ultimately resolves the tension (cf. Kevan, *The Grace of Law,* p132). *Thirdly,* and perhaps most significantly, though Burgess is an ardent advocate of the Majority view—that the Mosaic Covenant was indeed without question a manifestation of the Covenant of Grace—still, he ultimately defends most strongly the notion that the Law is to be both largely and strictly understood (see above); which means that Burgess sees no contradiction in saying that though the Mosaic Covenant belongs to the Covenant of Grace, yet the Law still demands perfect obedience. Burgess in fact uses *the strongest language possible* in speaking of wrongly equating the righteousness of faith and works.

Burgess proceeds on pages 234-237 to lay out a case for taking the Mosaic Covenant as belonging to the Covenant of Grace. He argues that this is proven by these truths: 1) the privileges at Sinai were the same as the Covenant of Grace; 2) the presence of God's mercy and forgiveness at Sinai is the same as the Covenant of Grace; 3) the duties imposed at Sinai were gospel duties as in the Covenant of Grace; 4) the ceremonial law points to the Covenant of Grace; 5) the ratification of the covenant with blood points to the Covenant of Grace; and finally that, 6) the essence or substance of the covenant at Sinai is manifestly the same as that of the Abrahamic Covenant, which was a manifestation of the Covenant of Grace.

Burgess lastly gets back to the tension at hand and adds a few final considerations. He numbers these final thoughts from *first, second,* etc; but because they seem to be further answers to the same original question, we continue the numbering from earlier. He says, "Now to all this, there are strong objections

made from those places of Scripture, where the Law and faith, or the promise, are so directly opposed, as Romans 10, before quoted, so Galatians 3:18; Romans 4:14; so likewise from those places, where the Law is said to be the ministry of death, and to work wrath. Now to these places, I answer these things:

5) "First, that if they should be rigidly, and universally true, then that doctrine of the Socinians would plainly prevail, who from these places of Scripture do urge, that there was no grace, or faith, nor nothing of Christ, vouchsafed unto the Jews; whereas they read they had the adoption, though the state was a state of bondage." *In other words, though Law and gospel are indeed separate, they are not wholly opposed.*

6) "In the second place consider that as it is said of the Law, it works death, so the gospel is said to be the savor of death, and men are said to have no sin, if Christ had not come; yea they are said to partake of more grievous judgements, who despised Christ, than those that despised the Law of Moses; so that this effect of the Law was merely accidental through our corruption; only here is the difference, God does not vouchsafe any such grace, as whereby we can have justification in a strict legal way; but he does whereby we may obtain it in an evangelical way." *Burgess here says something significant that may be somewhat original. Though others (such as Roberts) assert that the Jews turned the gospel into a ministry of death through perverting it's teaching; Burgess says something a bit differently here; namely: Paul is not saying that they turned the gospel into a ministry of death to others—but that the gospel functioned as a ministry of death to themselves; not through the perversion of their teaching, but because of their own unbelief.*

7) "Thirdly, consider that the Apostle speaks these derogatory passages (as they may seem to be) as well of the Ceremonial Law; yet all do acknowledge here was Christ and grace held forth." *Burgess goes on,*

8) "Fourthly, much of these places is true in a respective sense, according to the interpretation of the Jew, who taking these without Christ, make it a killing letter, even as if we should the doctrine of the gospel, without the grace of Christ. And certainly, if any Jew had stood up and said to Moses, 'Why do you say you give us the doctrine of life [?]; it's nothing but a killing letter, and the ministry of death'—would he not have been judged a blasphemer against the Law of Moses? The Apostle therefore must understand it as separated, yea and opposed to Christ and his grace." *See again Burgess' first explanation for more here.*

9) "And lastly, we are still to retain that distinction of the Law in *a more large sense,* as delivered by Moses; and *a more strict sense,* as it consist in precepts, threatenings and promises upon a condition impossible to us, which is the fulfilling of the Law in a perfect manner." (p237). *This is his conclusion.*

And this point Burgess continues to emphasize once again just a few pages later: "still remember to carry along with you the different use of the word [Law] as to this point; *for if you take Law strictly, and yet make it a Covenant of Grace, you confound the righteousness of works, and of faith together, as the Papists do; but if largely, then there may be a happy reconciliation.*" (p240).

This then, is a summary of Anthony Burgess' view. He gives us several things to think about as it relates to the tension at hand. With some of them he disagrees (such as the second explanation); with most of them he agrees; but he sets forth one of them in particular as the primary explanation for understanding how to reconcile Paul's statements in the New Testament that seem to put the Law and the gospel at odds with one another: *We must learn that Scripture speaks of the Law both as largely and strictly understood.*

Francis Roberts

God's Covenant with Man: The Mystery and Marrow of the Bible, 1657

Roberts begins by addressing the three other major positions on the Law and Sinai; namely, 1) that the Law was a republication of the Covenant of Works (pp739-45); 2) that the Law was given as a Mixed covenant of works and grace (pp745-48); and 3) that the Law was given as a separate Subservient covenant (pp748-53). He then propounds his own view: that the Mosaic Covenant is one in substance and essence with the Covenant of Grace (pp753ff). The evidence Roberts gives for seeing Sinai as part of the Covenant of Grace include the following: 1) Scripture tells us that the *essence or substance of the Mosaic Covenant* was the same as the Abrahamic Covenant, which is the Covenant of Grace (cf. Deuteronomy 7:12; 29:10-13); 2) Scripture tells us that the *privileges of the Mosaic Covenant* were evangelical promises (cf. Exodus 19:4-6 with 1 Peter 2:9); 3) Scripture tells us that God's *promise in the Mosaic Covenant* is the same as the Covenant of Grace; namely, to be Israel's God (cf. Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 29:13); 4) Scripture tells us that the *context of the Mosaic Covenant* is the same as the Covenant of Grace; namely, that God gave His Law to those He had redeemed (cf. Exodus 20:1-2); 5) Scripture tells us that the *content of the Mosaic Covenant;* namely, the Law itself, points us again and again to Christ and the Covenant of Grace through its types and ceremonies, typical mediator, and pardoning of sin; 6) Scripture tells us that the *duties required of Israel in the Mosaic Covenant* were gospel duties; namely, to love Him with all their hearts and cling to Him; and 7) Scripture tells us that the *signs and seals of the Mosaic Covenant* (circumcision and the Passover) are the same as in the Covenant of Grace, since they both pointed to Christ who was to come, and are now fulfilled in baptism and the Lord's Supper in the new covenant.

One of the most valuable arguments that Roberts sets forth for taking Sinai as being part of the Covenant of Grace is from Romans 10. Having proven the *content* of the entire Mosaic Covenant pointed to Christ (the ark, the mercy-seat, the sacrifice, the table of show-bread, and the veil), Roberts goes on to prove that the *requirement* of the Mosaic Covenant was likewise *faith in Christ*. He points out that Paul in Romans 10:5-6 contrasts the righteousness of the Law with the righteousness of faith. And yet, to what text did Paul go to describe the righteousness of faith? To the Law itself—for in describing the righteousness of faith, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 30:11-14. Roberts concludes, "Whence had this description of the righteousness of faith; but from Moses describing the Law or Sinai Covenant? And Paul excellently expounds the words of Moses, as peculiarly intending to set forth the righteousness of faith. We cannot wish a better commentator." (p767).

Having laid out the evidence for Sinai belonging to the Covenant of Grace, Roberts begins to address the various objections to this view (pp764ff). In doing so, he refers to principles such as that of *administration* (pp768-70), *emphasis* (p771), *comparison* (pp 770,84,86), and *abstraction* (p767-68; 773-75). The objection that Roberts deals with in most detail is: how does one reconcile the Mosaic Covenant being part of the Covenant of Grace with the fact that the condition required in the Mosaic Covenant seems to be doing rather than believing? In his words: "The condition upon which life and happiness is held forth in the Law or Sinai-Covenant, is perfect doing; for, 'Moses describes the righteousness which is of the Law, that the man who does those things, shall live by them' (Romans 10:5 with Leviticus 18:5; Galatians 3:12). And he denounces a curse upon the least failing: 'Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10). But the condition upon which life and happiness is tendered in the Covenant of Faith is believing in Christ (Romans 10:6-12). Doing and believing; works and faith; are two contrary conditions of life; consequently the Law or Sinai Covenant which requires doing unto life cannot be a Covenant of Faith, but must needs be a Covenant of Works." (p772).

This question Roberts takes to be the most challenging, saying, "This objection, as it is most obvious to everyone that reads the epistles of Paul to the Romans, and to the Galatians; so it is (in my judgement) of greatest difficulty to be clearly and satisfactorily answered." (p772). Before giving his own answer, Roberts cites the view of the respected John Ball. Quoting Ball, Roberts explains: "These words, 'Do this and live', must not be interpreted as if they did promise life upon a condition of perfect obedience, and for works done in such exactness as is required; but they must be

expounded evangelically, describing the *subject* capable of life eternal, not the *cause* why life and salvation is conferred." (pp772-73). Roberts explains that Ball labored to reconcile this tension by understanding these requirements and conditions as describing *who* are those who will attain to life rather than *why* they attain to life; showing us *who* are justified and not *why* they are justified (pp772-73). But Roberts concludes that this argument doesn't quite measure up. Many passages in Scripture may be interpreted this way, but not the passages being considered here in the Law, for, he says, "*Do this and live,* has something more in it than those other passages of Scripture alleged by him. *They* may be interpreted evangelically, but *this phrase* in the passages objected can hardly be so interpreted." (p773). This is so, "partly, because doing, in those Scriptures is directly opposed to believing," and partly because "failings in evangelical obedience are covered, not cursed." (p773).

Roberts then sets forth his own explanation; namely, that one needs to rightly differentiate between the Law *largely* and *strictly* understood (the principle of abstraction). In his words: "Others [interpret these passages] thus, that the Law may be considered, *more largely,* as comprehending the whole doctrine and administration of the Sinai-covenant, as delivered by Moses on Mount Sinai; [but also] *more restrictively,* as it is an abstracted rule of righteousness consisting in precepts, threats and promises; holding forth life upon a condition absolutely impossible to lapsed men; *viz,* perfect and perpetual personal obedience to the Law; but denouncing the curse and death upon the least contrary failing. In the *latter sense* Paul understands the Law in Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12; and in this sense, the righteousness of the Law stands in perfect doing: 'the man that does them shall live in them'. . .In the *former sense,* which is more complexive and comprehensive, Paul understands the Law in Romans 10:4 and in Galatians 3:23-24; and the Law thus taken is a Covenant of Faith in Christ Jesus, holding out life and happiness only upon condition of believing in Christ. . .To this effect says one, *'The Law in itself considered, exacted perfection of works as the cause of life; but when that was impossible to man by reason of the infirmity of his flesh, it pleased the Lord to make known to his people by the ministry of Moses, that the Law was given, not to detain men in confidence of their own works but to lead them unto Christ'*. . .For though the Law of righteousness promise a reward to the keepers thereof; yet after it has shut up all men under sin, it does substitute another righteousness in Christ, which is received by faith, not purchased by merit of works.' [cf. John Ball]. In both the *former* and *latter* sense, the word 'Law' seems to be used in that passage, [Romans 3:21-22]: "But now apart from the Law (IE, *strictly taken)* the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law (IE, *largely taken)* and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe". . .[Thus] the Law *largely taken,* holds forth life on condition of believing in Christ, and in this notion it was given in the Sinai-covenant, which therefore is a Covenant of Faith [IE, Grace]; [but] the Law *strictly taken* requires perfect doing, and in that sense Moses gave it not, nor is it a Covenant of Faith but of works." (p773-75).

Roberts had spoken of this distinction earlier: "Now here it is diligently to be observed, that the word 'Law', as used for God's Law given to Moses for Israel on Mount Sinai, is taken, *1) More largely; 2) More strictly;* and *3) Most strictly: 1) More largely and generally,* for the whole dispensation of all sorts of commandments: Moral, Ceremonial, and Judicial; given and promulged on Mount Sinai. . . *2) More strictly,* and specially for the Moral Law, or Ten Commandments, taken complexively with the preface prefixed, and the promises interwoven therein, as God spoke them on Mount Sinai out of the midst of the fire to Israel, and afterwards wrote them, and gave them to Moses. . . *3) Most strictly,* and restrainedly; the word [Law] is taken for The Law abstracted from Moses' administration of it, and precisely considered as an abstracted rule of righteousness, holding forth life merely upon terms of perfect and perpetual personal obedience and denouncing death and the curse upon every one, and that without mercy, in case of the least contrary failing. And in this sense the Apostle takes the word [Law] in his dispute about justification by faith and not by the works of the Law; opposing Law to Gospel and to Grace; works to faith; and justification by works, to justification by faith: *'For as many as are of the works of the Law, are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them." But that no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God, it is evident; for, "the just shall live by faith." And the Law is not of faith; but, the man that doth them, shall live in them'*. . . In these, and like passages, the word Law is considered in this most restrictive sense, as abstracted and separated from all other additionals in Moses' administration of it. And in this strictest sense, the Law is materially and for substance the

same with the Covenant of Works written in Adam's heart in innocency; which can justify none, because none can perfectly keep it; but [it] condemns all mankind. . ." (pp659-660).

It is in this way then, that Roberts explains passages such as Galatians 3:12: *"The Law is not of faith."* He says, "That this cannot be meant of the Law *absolutely taken,* (for then, you see, Paul should contradict himself, who proves the righteousness of faith from the Law, as revealed therein [Romans 10:6ff]; but must needs be intended of the Law in some limited and restrictive sense. That this cannot be meant of the Law, *more generally and complexively taken,* for the whole Sinai Covenant as dispensed by Moses; for in this sense the Law is of faith, principally intending justification by faith in Christ, as has been proved. *But it may be intended of the Law, more strictly and abstractively taken,* for the mere preceptive part of the Law, as declarative of, and in substance one with the Law of nature in Adam's heart, and as abstracted from Moses' administration thereof. . . and in this sense the Law is not of faith, nor held forth the righteousness of faith in Christ. . .this Sinai Covenant was in such sort administered, as to press upon them the perfect fulfilling of the Law, as most necessary to life and salvation, denouncing the curse upon the least failing; but withal revealing to them, that this perfect fulfilling of the Law in their own persons being utterly impossible, he was pleased to accept it in Christ their Surety, perfectly fulfilling it on their behalf, and bearing the curse for their offenses, according to the intimation of the many types and ceremonies in the Law. *By exacting of them perfect obedience, impossible to them, it takes them off their own seek[ing] for righteousness by their own doing; by representing Christ's perfect obedience and sufferings as a remedy, it teaches them to seek for righteousness by Christ's perfect obedience, through faith in him."* (pp767-68).

In the context of speaking of the Law in the more strict sense, Roberts at times makes reference to how the carnal Jews misunderstood the Law (pp660,768,774). But it's clear that Roberts is not saying that this distinction of the Law in its stricter sense was mistakingly thrust upon the Law by the Jews. No, the Law is properly understood as *inherently* affirming both a larger and stricter sense. The mistake of the Jews was not in their understanding of *what* the Law required—but rather in their lack of understanding *why* the Law in fact required perfect obedience of them. For God's *purpose* and *intention* in requiring perfect obedience (in the stricter sense) was never that the Jews might actually attempt to earn life thereby; but rather to break them of all self-righteousness, and to drive them to Christ, who was indeed pictured and promised in the Law in its larger sense. But the Jews cut Christ out of the Law and took it upon themselves to try to actually merit God's favor through the Law. Roberts is not saying that they were mistaken in taking the Law in a *strict sense*—but rather they were mistaken in failing to also take the Law in its *larger sense*. The Jews' mistake was not *adding* to the Law (the strict sense), but rather in *taking away* from it (cutting Christ out of the Law's larger sense).

Having affirmed the principle of abstraction as a suitable way to resolve this tension, Roberts goes on to supplement this view with a few additional considerations. What Roberts says here in this last section is absolutely full of insight. I personally consider this last section of his to be the single most valuable thing written by any of the Puritans on the nature of the Law and God's design and intention in giving it in the way He did. Roberts thus concludes in this way: "I add therefore, for the unfolding of this mystery more clearly, and for answering of this objection more fully, these few considerations touching the Law or Sinai Covenant, and the condition of life and happiness therein revealed, *viz:*

1) "That the Sinai-covenant was purposely so dispensed as to tender life and happiness upon two opposite and contrary conditions; *viz,* works and faith; perfect doing, and believing: *a) Upon perfect doing* all in the Law: Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:12 with Leviticus 18:5; the curse being denounced against the least failing, Galatians 3:10 with Deuteronomy 27:26. *b) Upon believing in Jesus Christ* the Messiah promised, Romans 3:21,22 and 10:6-12; compared with Deuteronomy 30:11-14. . .To deny this, which is so clear, will but tend to weaken Paul's authority, [and] to darken many Scriptures both of Moses and Paul, and to strengthen the objection."

2) "That, in this Sinai-covenant these opposite conditions, of perfect doing under pain of curse and death, and of believing in Christ, are very differently required and revealed. *a) Believing in Christ* is revealed very sparingly and obscurely; *b) perfect doing* very frequently and plainly. . .Whence (as Calvin notes) though the whole ministration of the Sinai-covenant belongs to Moses' office; yet that

function most properly and peculiarly seems to be ascribed to him, which consisted in teaching what the true righteousness of works was, and what rewards or punishments attend upon the observers or breakers of the Law. . ."

3) "That, though these two conditions of perfect doing, and believing, be thus differently revealed and required in the Sinai-covenant; yet believing in Christ unto life and righteousness was therein chiefly and ultimately intended, and perfect doing only urged upon Israel's subordination and tendency to that believing. . .perfect doing upon pain of curse and death was urged upon Israel only in subordination and tendency to believing and the righteousness of faith, [for]. . . *The Scripture,* peculiarly the Law, *hath hereby concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ may be given to them that believe. . ."*

4) "That, the condition of *perfect doing* under pain of curse and death, convincing the sinner of his sin and misery, leaves him hopeless in himself. . .but the condition of *believing* gives him hope, without himself, in Jesus Christ, to trust to him alone for justification."

5) "That the Sinai-covenant tendered life and happiness upon these two opposite conditions of perfect doing under penalty of curse and death; and of believing in Christ; because both these conditions were necessarily required to the sinners' happiness: [whether] in the sinner, or the sinners' Surety: *a) Perfect doing of all God's Law upon pain of death was required to the sinners' happiness:* because God's covenant of Works, at first made with Adam and with all his posterity in him, but broken by them, cannot be eluded or evaded. They must do it, or die; otherwise God himself should not be just and true. Do it, in their own persons, they could not, because the flesh was weak; therefore they lie under the curse and death. This covenant hereupon (such the contrivance of God's infinite wisdom and grace) reveals the sinners' Surety Jesus Christ, who alone could satisfactorily bear this curse upon himself, and perform the duty of the Law to the uttermost, for the sinners' redemption and righteousness. *b) Believing in Christ is also necessary to the sinners' happiness:* because without faith his Surety's perfect doing and enduring cannot become his by imputation."

6) "That, perfect doing on pain of death, and believing in Jesus Christ are so required and conditioned in this Sinai-covenant, as to let all men see, that the penalty and duty of the Covenant of Works, have their plenary accomplishment in the Covenant of Faith [IE, Grace] through Jesus Christ alone. . .Herein they are directed unto Jesus Christ by faith, for life and righteousness. Thus according to the tenor of the Sinai-covenant, the Covenant of Works has its perfect accomplishment in Christ—by doing and enduring, all which becomes ours—by believing. Thus the Covenant of Works is digested into, incorporated with, and wholly swallowed up by the Covenant of Faith. Thus *perfect doing* is attained by *believing."*

7) "That, the condition of perfect doing being thus attained by believing, with greatest ease unties the knots of many difficulties, and unveils the secret of many mysteries. As, *a) how mercy and truth have met together,* righteousness and peace have kissed each other. . . *b) How sin may be condemned, and yet sinners saved. . . c) How sinners are at once justified by perfect doing, and by believing. By perfect doing,* in Christ's person, to whom the Law drives them, by exacting impossibilities of them. *By believing,* in their own persons; whereunto the law allures them, by representing Christ as the scope and end of the Law to them. Thus it's no paradox for sinners to be justified, in the sight of God, both by works, and faith; by Christ's works, by their own faith. *d) How sinners can do nothing, and yet can do all things, the Law requires.* In themselves, through the weakness of the flesh, they can do nothing, as the Law requires; *viz,* exactly, without the least failing; and yet in Christ, the perfect Performer of the Law, embraced by faith, they can do all things perfectly; Christ's perfect obedience being imputed to them by faith. This Sinai-covenant therefore, requires perfect doing from the sinner under pain of curse, that it may drive him from himself who can do nothing; and requires believing in Christ, that it may draw the sinner unto Christ, who has done all things that so the righteousness of the Law may be fulfilled in him. *e) How sweetly the Law and gospel do agree in one. . .*In this Sinai-covenant, the Law was not administered without the gospel, nor the gospel without the Law; they were indivisibly conjoined, and inseparably married together; becoming a legal gospel, and an evangelical Law; a gospel, full of doing; and a Law full of believing. Hereby God will

have us know, that neither God nor man shall lose by substituting the Covenant of Faith instead of the Covenant of Works, but rather both shall gain; God shall gain a better observance of His Law in the second Adam, than He had in the first; and man shall gain a better righteousness in Christ by faith, than ever they had in themselves before the fall. Thus the gospel does not overthrow, but establish the Law, by setting forth Christ the most perfect Performer of the Law." (pp775-78).

Thus he says: "This Sinai-Covenant is much mistaken by very many, and but darkly apprehended by most. And because this Sinai-Covenant has been a very intierate mystery to myself, having heretofore been not a little puzzled in my notions about it, and finding very little clear satisfaction either in books, sermons, or conferences, though with godly and judicious ministers touching this Covenant expression. Whereupon I am the more desirous to impart the grounds and matter of my satisfaction to others, that they also may possibly receive some competent satisfaction with me." (p779).

And again, Roberts summarizes his findings in this way: "Hence, God's Israel of old was saved by the same Christ under the *Sinai* Covenant, whereby the Israel of God is now saved under the *Sion* Covenant. . .The same redemption, sanctification, justification, adoption and glorification, even the same complete salvation by Christ, was revealed in both covenants; though in different manners and degrees." (p784). And again, "The Sinai Covenant or Old Testament, and the Sion Covenant or New Testament, are for substance one and the same; though they differ never so much in the circumstance or manner of administration. For as much as the salvation of lapsed sinners by one and the same Christ through faith is the substance of them both; the chief matter and scope of them both; though differently set forth in them both. In that, Christ was set forth darkly, as to come afterwards, to the Jews only; in this, Christ is set forth clearly, as come already, and to all nations." (p786).

And again referring to the principle of abstraction, Roberts says: "This the Apostle testifies saying, 'But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets.' *The Law itself testifies that the righteousness of God (viz, which God has ordained, revealed, and will accept), is without the Law; that is, by faith without the deeds of the Law.*" (p787).

And finally: "Though the Sinai Covenant runs much—yet it does not run altogether—upon doing. It requires believing also, as has been showed. . .[But] The stream of the Sinai Covenant runs much upon doing, and perfection of doing; *partly,* to convince that carnal people of Israel (so addicted to acquiesce in their own works) that they could never be justified by their own doing, because they could not do perfectly without sin. *Partly,* to force men to seek out unto Christ by faith, who is the only perfect doer and fulfiller of all that the Law can exact to the uttermost. *Partly,* to let Israel see, that sinners cannot be justified, unless His Law be exactly fulfilled by sinners, or by their Surety Jesus Christ. *Partly,* to instruct them, that though God intended not their works and obedience as an antecedent condition requisite to their justification; yet he intended them as a consequent condition and qualification in justified persons, as fruits of true faith, and the way towards the attainment of the promises." And Roberts thus concludes by saying: "Hence, the Sinai Law was Israel's gospel. For the Sinai Law was given as a Covenant of Faith, and every Covenant of faith is pure gospel." (p788).

Thomas Blake
The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, 1658

The most relevant part of Thomas Blake's work for the question at hand is chapter 23. Here he begins by *first* establishing the fact that what God established with Israel at Sinai was indeed a covenant (p210). He *secondly* affirms that the covenant that was established at Sinai was indeed part of the Covenant of Grace (pp210-211). *Thirdly,* Blake establishes the fact that the Ten Commandments were part of this Covenant of Grace (pp211-212). Blake then *fourthly* notes that since the covenant established at Sinai was indeed a Covenant of Grace, it could not by definition be a Covenant of Works (pp212-213). In saying this, Blake is addressing especially those who hold a Mixed View of the Mosaic Covenant.

Blake goes on to articulate, *fifthly,* that how the Mosaic Covenant came to function for different kinds of people could not change its essential nature. He seems to also have in mind here advocates of some of the particular Mixed Views, especially perhaps those who held the view that the Mosaic Covenant was mixed especially in regard to how it came to function; namely, that it functioned as a Covenant of Grace for believing Israel but as a Covenant of Works for the Israelites who had not believed, to drive them to Christ (Boston held a similar view). Blake makes a helpful observation here, saying: "What this covenant is to any, that it is to all, whether it be of works or of grace; what it is itself in the tender and terms of it, that is the denomination of it. This is plain. Mens faith or unbelief, mens obedience or transgression, cannot diversify the nature of that which God does tender; and what God spoke to the people, he spoke to all the people, the same to all, that he spoke to any (Exodus 19:25 with 20:18), *and therefore that is a mistake in some that say, that the Law is doubtless a pure Covenant of Works to some men, but not to all;* [that] it is a Covenant of Works *occasionally* and *accidentally*. . .The Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Works are two distinct and opposite species. . .Therefore as an ox can by no occasion or accident, be a horse, or a horse a sheep, or a sheep a lion, or a lion a man, so a Covenant of Grace, can by no occasion or accident be a Covenant of Works; one and the same thing intended for one end, may occasionally and accidentally have another event [IE, effect]. . .but no occasion or accident can change the nature of any thing, into that which is of a kind opposite to it, and different from it. . ." (p213).

Blake goes on to note, *sixthly,* a common Puritan distinction in dealing with the covenant at Sinai; namely, that the Law did also indeed contain strict requirements, and that these were *more evident,* while the promises of grace more *obscure*. In his words: "The directive and maledictive part of the Law were clear and open, for discovery of sin, to work to a sense of danger, to put them in a posture to look for and long after the Messiah; but the promises [were] more obscure. . ." (p214). Blake says this was shown forth in Moses' veil, which was a figure of both the obscurity of the dispensation at Sinai, as well as the blindness of the Jews; and Blake continues by asserting that this "obscure dispensation meeting with that blindness that was in the judgements of that people, held them in such ignorance, that they saw little of grace in that covenant, but rather through their blind mistake, looked upon it (the generality of them) as a Covenant of Works. And this the Apostles signifies in the place before quoted, as also Romans 10:3, *'They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about the establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.'* This caused them so tenaciously to hold to the precepts of the Law. . .that they refused Christ the end of the Law for righteousness' sake. . ." (p214).

Let's take a moment to reflect on what Blake is saying here. He's telling us at least four different things in this section. *First,* there were strict requirements in the Law. Later he will get to how Christ and the promises of grace are revealed in the Law, but his purpose here is to inform us that the Law was indeed at times "directive and maledictive". *Secondly,* these maledictive commands were "frequent. . .clear and open," while the promises of grace in the Law were more obscure. *Thirdly,* the whole purpose of the directive and maledictive portions of God's Law was to drive men to Christ. But *fourthly,* many of the Jews failed to understand this, for failing to see that Christ was the end of the Law, they looked to the Law as a Covenant of Works. Being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about to establish their own.

It's important to note here that according to Blake, the mistake of the Jews was *not* to impose directive and maledictive meanings on the Law. The Law itself contained maledictive commands (see the 9th point below). Their mistake was *rather* misunderstanding why the Law contained these strict requirements.

God's intention in giving the strict demands of the Law was to break men of their self-righteousness in order to woo them to Christ, as revealed in the Law more broadly. But the Jews looked at these strict requirements as something to try to fulfill perfectly and thereby earn God's favor. In short, their mistake was not in misunderstanding the *demands* of the Law—but rather in misunderstanding God's *intention* in giving the Law. What they misunderstood was not *what* the Law required—but *why* it required it.

Blake notes *seventhly,* that even though the strict requirements of the Law were more clearly revealed and the promises of grace were more obscure, still, it's also true that there was so much of Christ in the Law that the Jews were held guilty for not seeing Him in the Law, so much so that Moses himself (rather than Christ) will be their judge. As he says: "There was yet so much of grace, and Christ held out in this covenant, that they were not only left without excuse, that were under it; but convinced of sin, if they saw not Christ and the grace of the covenant in it." (p215). Blake cites John 5:39-40, noting that, on the one hand, the Jews knew the Scriptures to be speaking of eternal life, but that they yet rejected the One who was so clearly revealed unto eternal life in those very Scriptures, for indeed: "in them, upon search, Christ may be found; there are such discoveries there, that hold him out, and eternal life in him, to those that search them." Blake then cites John 5:45-47, saying: "Moses, Moses in whom they trusted, in whom they pretended to repose confidence, it is *he* that is ready to accuse them, not of breach of the Law, or transgression of any command of his. . .but of unbelief *of Moses:* 'you have one that accuses you, even Moses, in whom you trust, for had you believed Moses, you would have believed me, for he wrote of me.' Unbelief in Christ, set forth in Moses, is a sin, which Moses' writings shall charge upon them." (p215).

Blake goes on to note, *eighthly,* in his own words: "There are those phrases in Moses, which are ordinarily quoted, as holding out a Covenant of Works, and in a rigid interpretation are no other; yet in a qualified sense, in a gospel sense, and according to Scripture use of the phrase, they hold out a Covenant of Grace, and the terms and conditions of it." (pp215-216). Blake then cites Deuteronomy 4:1, "Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes, and unto the judgements which I teach you to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you." (he also cites Deuteronomy 5:33; 6:24-25 and 30:16). Blake says, "We may so interpret those Scriptures (and the Jews, as it appears for a great part, did so interpret them) that they hold out a Covenant of Works, *when* grace was not at all acknowledged to assist in doing, nor Christ known at all to satisfy for failing, and to expiate for transgression. These [saw] nothing but a reward upon labor, and punishment in case of transgression. [But] They may yet be so interpreted as taking grace in the work for change of the heart, and putting it into a posture for obedience, according to that even in Moses: 'I will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live,' (Deuteronomy 30:6), and so these duties are only gospel qualifications of truth and sincerity of obedience. In this sense (which they may well bear, *and I take to be their native sense)* here is no more than what we find in the gospel, from Christ and the Apostles: 'They that have done good, shall rise unto the resurrection of life' (John 5:28-29); [and], 'To them that by patient continuing in well-doing, seek for glory and immortality, eternal life' (Romans 2:5). Where (as in many other places) we may see, that according to the new covenant, a man may make the attaining of life the end of his work, and the reader may see phrases of his nature to be new covenant, New Testament, and gospel language; unless they will charge Christ and the Apostles to have Old Testament spirits." (p216). Blake notes that for a man to save himself may be taken in a *legal* sense, opposed to the gospel and to grace; but it may also be taken in a *gospel* sense: "To strive to enter in at the straight gate, and to seek the Kingdom of God, and the righteousness of it, and so we find it used, and that more than once in Scriptures: 'Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; in so doing thou wilt save thyself, and them that hear thee.' (1 Timothy 4:16; p217). Blake goes on to quote texts such as Proverbs 20:2; Psalms 112:1; 119:12; 128:1; and James 1:25, concluding that: "A righteousness, which is the condition of the Covenant of Works; out of our own inherent strength and abilities, in an exact perfection, is denied; a righteousness, not of us, but through grace wrought in us, in sincerity, which the Covenant of Grace calls for, is asserted and required." (p218). It seems then, that Blake is here echoing Ball's description of these kinds of passages, asserting that they are teaching the *subjects* of salvation rather than the *cause*—that they are telling us *who* are those being saved rather than *how* it is we are saved. This gospel sense he sees as the *native* sense of these texts.

Blake notes *ninethly* and finally the common Puritan distinction of the Law as both *largely* and *strictly* understood. He had implicitly referred to the Law as taken strictly in his sixth point, but here he deals

with it more explicitly. Blake here asserts: "Though *the whole Law* that Moses delivered from God on Mount Sinai to the people. . .do contain a Covenant of Grace, yet the Law is taken sometime[s] *in that strict sense,* as containing a Covenant of Works, and holding forth life upon condition of perfect obedience. So the Apostle, [in] Romans 10:5-6 puts an opposition between the righteousness of the Law, and the righteousness of faith; so also Galatians 3:18, 'If righteousness be by the Law, it is no more of promise', so that there is a necessity of distinguishing between the Law *abstracted from* the promise. . . and the Law *including* this promise. . .so that the works of the Law, considered in *the bare mandatory part* of it, can save none. . .yet *the righteousness witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,* even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-22). . .brings salvation (Romans 3:21-22). . .So that the Law *abstracted from Christ. . .*was a ministry of condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:9). . .*but including Christ,* it was perfect, and saves the soul (Psalm 19:7)." (pp218-219).

Let's conclude by summarizing Blake's thoughts a bit. He begins by asking whether the Mosaic Covenant did indeed in substance and essence belong to the Covenant of Grace, and answers unequivocally in the affirmative *(points #1-5).* And yet grace was obscurely revealed at Sinai; and it was the strict demands of the Law that were more clearly held forth *(point #6).* Even so, the promises of grace through faith in Christ were indeed so clearly revealed in the Law that all who read it and believed not on Christ were rightly held guilty of not believing what Moses had written *(point #7).* Indeed, many of those passages that are said to hold forth the stricter sense of the Law and the content of the Covenant of Works (such as Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:33; and 6:24-25) are actually rightly interpreted as rather requiring sinners to embrace the Covenant of Grace from the heart, by faith *(point #8).* Yet, lest we think that Blake is affirming the fact that there are no such passages in the Law that call for strict and exact obedience, he clarifies that the Law is indeed rightly understood in both the *larger* sense (including gospel promises and demanding faith in Christ) as well as the *stricter* sense (containing the content of the Covenant of Works). The Law can *and must* be understood as both *abstracted* from the promise and *including* the promise; as both *abstracted* from Christ and *including* Christ *(point #9).* The mistake of the Jews was not to wrongly impose a strict understanding of the demands of the Law—but rather to wrongly cut out of the Law the larger context from which those stricter passages speak and direct us. For the whole intention of God in giving us the strict demands of the Law was to break us of all self-righteousness and drive us to Christ as revealed in the Law as largely propounded. And thus we understand Blake's view of the tension of Sinai.

William Bridge
Christ and the Covenant, 1667

We've been asking in these abstracts how it is that the Puritans resolved a particular tension relating to the covenant at Sinai: how is it that the Mosaic Covenant was part of the Covenant of Grace on the one hand, and yet that it required perfect personal obedience as the condition of life eternal on the other? Can these two things be reconciled? Bridge deals with the question at hand in his work, *Christ and the Covenant,* in the chapter entitled, Sermon III: The New Covenant of Grace Opened, on pages 47-49.

He begins by stating the question. In his words: "First of all, we must inquire whether there be any difference between the covenant made with the Jews in the day of the Old Testament, and the covenant made with us now. And in case there be, what is the difference and wherein it lies. And if you ask whether there be any difference; If I should answer, with divines ordinarily (wherein they speak the truth), I must say, that the covenant which God made with the Jews, *was for substance the same, though different in administration;* but give me leave to express my own sense in my own terms thus. . ." (p47).

Bridge begins by asking whether the Mosaic Covenant did indeed belong to the Covenant of Grace or not, and answers unreservedly in the affirmative. This is the position of the Westminster Confession. Bridge himself was a member of the Assembly, and as such he was involved in crafting the very language of the Confession as it related to the covenants. His position aligns perfectly with the Confession (7:5-6); namely, that the old covenant differs from the new not in substance or essence, but rather solely in administration. So then, according to Bridge, the Mosaic Covenant belongs to the Covenant of Grace.

He says: "It is plain and clear that the Jews that were saved in the time of the Old Testament, were saved by the same covenant that we now are saved by; for they were saved by the covenant that God made with Abraham, so are we (Luke 11; Romans 4; Galatians 3). Circumcision then was the seal of the covenant; and what was circumcision but a seal of the righteousness of faith? The ceremonies, types, and sacrifices, did not belong to the Covenant of Works, they were types of Christ, and therefore it must needs be the same covenant; if it was a Covenant of Works that was made with the Jews, God should have brought them from better to worse, for the Covenant of Grace was made with Abraham, 'but though the Law was added after the promise, it could not disannul the promise,' says the Apostle (Galatians 3). So that it is plain and clear, the Jews that were then saved were saved by the same covenant that we now are." (p48).

Bridge thus gives his evidences for taking the Mosaic Covenant as belonging to the Covenant of Grace. The proofs that he sets forth above are common Puritan arguments for understanding Sinai as being part of the Covenant of Grace. From these he concludes that Sinai could *not* be a Covenant of Works.

Bridge then proceeds to clarify something important: "But though those Jews that were saved were saved by the same covenant that we now are saved by, yet notwithstanding the Covenant of Works was *declared* and promulgated among the Jews: 'Wherefore then was the Law added?' says the apostle. Added then it was. As Sarah and Hagar, made types of the two testaments by the apostle, were at once in Abraham's house; so the old Covenant of Works, and the new Covenant of Grace were at once in the Jewish church. But though both these covenants were at once in the Jewish church, the one [was] *declared* and the other *made* with them; though Hagar was in the same house, yet it was in subserviency unto Sarah; and though the Covenant of Works was *declared* and was there at the same time, yet it was in subserviency unto the Covenant of Grace; 'It was added, wherefore?' says the apostle: because of transgression, to be a school master to bring to Christ. It was there in subserviency, and upon a gospel design." (p48).

What Bridge tells us here is multi-faceted. *First,* he asserts that though the Mosaic Covenant is part of the Covenant of Grace, it is no less true that the Covenant of Works was declared at Sinai. *Secondly,* he clarifies that he does not mean that the Covenant of Works was *made* or *renewed* at Sinai—but that it was rather simply therein *declared* (he uses this word three times). This is a vital distinction, since adherents of the Republication or Mixed views use the language of the former, while adherents of the Majority view, to which Bridge aligns himself, use the language of the latter. It was not that the Covenant of Works was actually *renewed* or *republished,* but only that it's demands were freshly *declared* or *repeated* at Sinai.

Thirdly, the content of the Covenant of Works was repeated at Sinai for a specific purpose; namely, as Bridge says, "upon a gospel design." In other words, the purpose and design of God in repeating the content of the Covenant of Works at Sinai was in order to drive men to Christ to be saved in Him. The illustration he gives to support his claim is taken from Paul's own analogy in Galatians 4: just as Hagar was in the same house with Abraham but was yet in subjection to Sarah, so too, though the content of the Covenant of Works was indeed repeated at Sinai, still, the demands of the Covenant of Works were only repeated under Moses in subjection to and in order to further the ends of the Covenant of Grace.

Bridge continues: "But then, though both these covenants were thus joined together, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace both joined together in one state, yet both together did not make a third and distinct covenant. I am no way of Cameron's mind, that there were three covenants, but of the apostle's mind clearly (Galatians 4), where he speaks expressly that there are two Testaments and no more; so that though both were upon the ground together (one declared then to make them sensible of their sins, and to bring them to the other covenant) yet both did not make up a third and distinct covenant. But because the commandment lay uppermost, the whole dispensation was called law, although the promise and the gospel lay at the bottom; as now, because the promise lies uppermost the whole of the covenant is called promise, though the commandment lies at the bottom." (pp48-49).

Here Bridge clarifies that he does not subscribe to the Subservient view articulated by Cameron (and propounded also by Samuel Bolton). His language in this section might make us wonder whether he did subscribe to the Mixed view of the Mosaic Covenant, if he hadn't so clearly articulated for us already his conviction that Sinai was clearly one in essence and substance with the Covenant of Grace.

Bridge then goes on to articulate how it is that the new covenant differs from the old, including the truths that the old covenant 1) revealed Christ more obscurely; 2) was more burdensome; 3) was mostly limited to the Jews; 4) brought forth fear and bondage; 5) contained the promises but not the realities; 6) was mediated by Moses rather than Christ; 7) proclaimed Christ in the hand of Moses, whereas now Moses is proclaimed in the hand of Christ; 8) is superseded by the better promises of the new covenant; and 9) is to be distinguished much in efficacy, in that the letter lacked the power to do what is done by the Spirit.

We might begin to conclude by saying that though what Bridge writes may be less in content than our other abstracts, it is no less important. In particular, Bridge's explanation does much to help those of us who adhere to the Majority view in demonstrating that the Puritans saw no contradiction in holding that Sinai did indeed belong to the Covenant of Grace on the one hand; and yet, it may be equally affirmed on the other hand that the content of the Covenant of Works was indeed declared and repeated to Israel under Moses in the Moral Law. There are many who seem to stumble at just this point in the Reformed tradition. *On the one side,* there are those who can't help but recognize that the Law requires nothing less than strict, exact, perfect obedience as the condition of life. And not understanding how this can be reconciled with taking Sinai as being part of the Covenant of Grace, they assert that the Mosaic Covenant must have been a republication or renewal of the Covenant of Works. *On the other side,* there are those who can't help but recognize that the Mosaic Covenant is set forth as belonging unequivocally to the Covenant of Grace. And not understanding how this can be reconciled with taking the Law as indeed requiring nothing less than strict, exact, perfect obedience as the condition of life, they seem to assert that the Law was given *only* as a rule of obedience to those already in covenant with the Lord. The former tends to shy away from seeing the Law as a *wonderful* thing for those in Christ (the 3rd use); the latter tends to shy away from seeing the Law as a *fearful* thing for those outside of Christ (the 1st use). And neither does full justice to the Westminster Confession. William Bridge helps us to understand that we don't need to choose *either/or;* we can emphatically embrace *both/and.* Was the Mosaic Covenant part of the Covenant of Grace? You bet it was. And did the Law in fact demand perfect obedience as the hypothetical condition of eternal life? You bet it did. And it did so precisely in order to show us our grave danger, so as to drive us to Christ, who was indeed also revealed in the Law. The Puritans saw no harm or contradiction in embracing both truths. And we would be wise to follow also in their footsteps.

William Strong
Discourse of the Two Covenants, 1678 (d. 1654)

We've been seeking to answer a singular question in these abstracts: How is it that the Puritans reconcile taking the Mosaic Covenant as belonging to the Covenant of Grace in light of the fact that the Law seems to demand perfect obedience as the condition of eternal life? Strong's work, *Discourse of the Two Covenants,* is in some ways like Burgess' work in that it is more difficult to find a single succinct section of his writing that deals with the question at hand. Though Strong does seem to deal with this tension most thoroughly on pages 87-90, what he says on the matter is not exclusively limited to these four pages.

Strong begins by setting forth the question at hand in this way: "It will be said that the way of justification and salvation by the Law, and by the promise, are directly contrary, or contradictory one to the other: 'the Law is not of faith'; 'if the inheritance be by the Law, it is no more of promise'; so that justification and salvation cannot be by them both, they cannot stand together, and therefore it should seem that God did repent of his promise to Abraham, and disannuled it, or else why would he for four hundred and thirty years after reveal the Law as a quite contrary way to heaven; one by *doing,* and the other by *believing?* It should seem therefore that the Law does make the promise of God of none effect, or at least, that God would have both stand together. For if a King should at first make a proclamation unto rebels, that they should live if they would accept of pardon, and then afterward should publish a new one, that they that would live should keep the Law; either a man would conclude, that the King had called in his former proclamation, and made it null, or else would have them both stand together; and so it is here: God did at first promise righteousness and life, to be had by believing, and afterwards he did publish a Law, requiring duty. Surely either the Lord did repent of the former, and so that Covenant is become of no effect, or else it seems he would have both joined together; and man should be justified and saved, partly by doing, and partly by believing." (p87). This is the very tension we're grappling with in these abstracts.

Strong begins to answer the question by referencing Galatians 3:17-19, stating that: "1) God's intention in giving the Law, was not thereby to make the promise void, and of none effect. . ; 2) God's intention was not to join the Law and the promise together in the matter of justification and life; because they be quite cross and contrary one to another. . .[and] do directly destroy each other; [for] if the inheritance be by the Law, it is no more of promise; and therefore no man can be justified by both. 3) Yet God having revealed the Law after the promise, and seeing he will have them both to be perpetual and lasting, they must stand together, and a way must be found out how they may, and not cross one another, nor destroy or disannul each other; for the Law is not against the promise of God, God forbid we should think so; then if they cannot stand together in a way of *ingrediency,* they may very well in a way of *subserviency;* if not *coordination,* they may in *subordination;* both tending to honor the mercy and grace of God in his Son; the one primarily, and the other secondarily, as an appendix or an addition thereunto. . .Seeing therefore these two must stand together, and the former cannot be disannuled by the latter; hence then it must needs be inferred, that God's intention was in publishing the Law, to do it in subordination unto the gospel, and the second covenant, and that so it is to stand and to be made use of by the Saints." (p87).

Strong believes the Galatians stumbled at this very point: "all men would work for life, and that is given as the reason why the Galatians were so greatly bewitched by false teachers, and drawn away from the truth of the gospel to join something of the Law with Christ in the matter of justification, because they did not know, wherefore the Law was given (Galatians 3:19-20). They seeing a Covenant made with Abraham, and a promise of free grace and of righteousness, and life without works, an inheritance by promise; and 430 years after *a Law given requiring works, and promising life upon perfect obedience thereof,* they did not know how to conceive, but that either God did repent of and revoke his former Covenant, or else they must be both joined together in the matter of justification and life. Now to answer this the Apostle acquaints them *with the end why God did give the Law:* it was not to set it up as a Covenant alone, that any man should attain righteousness and life thereby. . .neither was it published to make void the Covenant of Grace, but it was added, not by way of opposition but subordination, *that it might be as Hagar to Sarah; a handmaid to further the ends of the gospel, and to advance the grace of it, that it might be as the avenger of blood to the city of refuge,* and make men look for the Law in the Ark, Christ, who is the end of the Law for justification. . .[But] This men being ignorant of, they look upon the Law as a

Covenant of Works, and all that they do in obedience thereunto is to gain righteousness and life." (p29).

Observe that Strong is here asserting that though the Law was never intended to actually *bestow* life upon those who obeyed it perfectly—*this does not change the fact that the Law did truly set forth life upon the condition of perfect obedience*. The Law *was* indeed given "requiring works, and promising life upon perfect obedience thereof," but it was so propounded *in order to* drive men to Christ "as the avenger of blood to the city of refuge." (p29). Notice what Strong is saying. The mistake of the Galatians didn't have to do with the Law's *demands*—but rather with the Law's *design;* not with *what* the Law required but *why* it required what it did. Their mistake was never wrongly imposing upon the Law the demand of perfect obedience—but rather misunderstanding why the Law demanded what it did. For God's intention in giving the Law was never for men to try to be justified thereby—but rather to drive them to the Savior.

This becomes clearer still from Strong's thoughts on pages 88-89, where he returns to the favorite Puritan distinction of understanding the Law as both *largely* and *strictly* taken. He says: "Now that I may be understood, we are to consider that the Law is taken in Scripture two ways, as it was given by God upon Mount Sinai for a double end: 1) *It is taken largely,* for the whole doctrine delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, with the precepts and the promises thereof; and so grace is the Law written in the heart, it is the epistle of Christ ministered by us. 2) *It is taken strictly,* setting down an exact rule of righteousness, and promising life upon condition of personal and perfect obedience. And so the Apostle says, 'That *the Law is not of faith,* the righteousness of the Law speaks in this manner, *he that does them shall live in them.'* Now if we take the Moral Law as given upon Mount Sinai, in the first sense, so it is a Covenant of Grace; but if we take it in the latter sense, so it is a Covenant of Works; for the Lord's intention in giving the Law was double: unto the carnal Jews to set forth to them the old covenant which they had broken; and yet unto the believing Jews it did darkly shadow and set forth unto them the Covenant of Grace made with Christ; and therefore it was not only delivered as a rule of righteousness, but in the form and terms of a Covenant, *'this do and thou shalt live.'* " 1) *In the first sense,* the Law given upon Mount Sinai was a Covenant of Grace; for this Law does teach them, a) that the Lord was their God. . . b) there is no pardon but under a second covenant; c) all the sacrifices were types of Christ. . .and all things under the Law were cleansed and sanctified by blood (Exodus 24:23). Therefore the Law in the administration of it unto them was never intended by God to set forth a Covenant of Works, but it was a Covenant of Grace. . .So that the Law was given by Moses in God's intention, plainly as a Covenant of Grace unto all those that were able to look upon the intent of God therein. 2) *But yet the Lord's intention was also that it should be a copy of the Covenant of Works,* that God made with Adam before his fall, which was never wholly blotted out of the mind of man. . .and therefore it was delivered after a sort in the form of the Covenant of Works; and in this respect the Lord has made it a handmaid to the gospel, not that the Lord did intend it for a Covenant of Works, as if men should attain righteousness and life thereby, but as a subservient covenant, as that which in this manner God would make use of, to advance the ends of the gospel and the New Covenant." (p88). And Strong asserts again: "The Law is to be considered, as I told you, in two ways: 1) *Largely,* as containing all the doctrine delivered upon Mount Sinai, and all things that may be reduced thereunto, even the whole doctrine of Moses. . . 2) *Strictly,* for the precepts of the Moral Law, as holding forth a perfect rule of righteousness, and as promising life upon the terms of perfect and personal obedience thereunto; and so the Apostle takes it in Romans 10:5: *'The righteousness which is of the Law is thus described, "The man that does these things shall live in them."'* (p89).

Strong goes on to further clarify exactly what he means: "By all this you see that *a) the Covenant, of which circumcision was a sign and seal, was not the Covenant of Works,* but was the same that was made with Abraham, because the Covenant was the same; circumcision was the seal of the righteousness of faith, and continued among the Jews in this Covenant; and *b) that Covenant that binds to the observation of the Ceremonial, as well as the Moral Law, is not a Covenant of Works;* but the Covenant made upon Mount Sinai did bind to the Ceremonial Law also; *c) nor was the Covenant that God made with Moses a Covenant of Works, for Moses was a believer* (Hebrews 11:23), but [in] Exodus 34:27 it is called the 'covenant which I made with thee [IE, Moses], and with all Israel. . .' " Thus, Sinai clearly belongs to the Covenant of Grace. He continues: "But more particularly, the Lord did intend to make the Law given upon Mount Sinai *a copy* of the Covenant of Works, and to be materially and for substance the same that he did make with Adam, and with all mankind in him, in the state of his integrity. . .It is given in the form of a Covenant of Works, with a *this do, and you shall live;* and so it was afterwards by Christ, and by

the prophets also preached; it was to the carnal Jews plainly a Covenant of Works, not in God's intention, but by their own corruption, they going about to establish their own righteousness, and not subjecting themselves to the righteousness of God, it is set forth to them as a Covenant of Works." (pp88-89).

We should pause here to note what Strong is and isn't saying. It's clear from what he's said before and what he'll say later that he takes Sinai to be part of the Covenant of Grace. Strong adheres to the Majority view. Though he uses the word, "subservient," it's clear he doesn't hold the Subservient view. For one thing, the great majority of Puritans used this word without holding that view. And for another, the traditional Subservient view argues that the Mosaic Covenant was properly neither the Covenant of Grace *nor* the Covenant of Works; Strong seems to argue it is *both* in different degrees. This may cause us to think that Strong held to the Mixed view, but if we read him carefully, we find that this was not the case either. He argues that though the Law served as a "copy" and "after a sort in the form of" the Covenant of Works, still—ultimately, plainly and properly—it was given to Israel as part of the Covenant of Grace.

This is confirmed by what Strong had said about Sinai earlier in his volume: "when the Lord took the people of Israel unto himself as a peculiar people of all the nations of the earth, and entered into a Covenant with them; though God did not intend to set up this Law alone as a rule by which any man since the fall should attain righteousness and life, but as a Covenant of Grace with Evangelical offers of Grace to bring them to Christ, and therefore gave it in the hand of a Mediator; yet the Lord kept it in the form of a Covenant of Works, that it might be the more effectual to drive men to Christ, and so serve God's ends. But they stuck to the Law as a Covenant of Works, even the generality of that people, and did seek righteousness and life by the obedience of it. . ." (p23). So then, though the Law did take on the *form* of the Covenant of Works, the Mosaic Covenant *itself* was indeed part of the Covenant of Grace.

Strong concludes by further expounding these two truths, starting with the latter: "That the Law was given upon Mount Sinai as a Covenant cannot be denied; for the Scripture does plainly call it so (Deuteronomy 4:12-13; 5:2-3). It was the same Covenant that God before made with Abraham, for the substance of it. . .[And so] This Covenant was a Covenant of Grace; [for]]: 1) that Covenant wherein God promises to be our God since the fall, is a Covenant of Grace. . . 2) That Covenant which does hold forth pardon of sin, is a Covenant of Grace. . . 3) Circumcision was a seal of the Covenant of Grace (Romans 4:11), [and] this was the seal of the Covenant upon Mount Sinai. . . 4) That Covenant that [is] confirmed and ratified by blood, [is] a Covenant of Grace (cf. Exodus 24:8). . . 5) That Covenant that binds to the observation of the Ceremonial Law, that is a Covenant of Grace; for the ceremonies were all types of Christ and shadows of good things to come. . . 6) The Covenant made in the hand of a Mediator was not a Covenant of Works. . .[and] this was given in the hand of a Mediator, and therefore it was of grace." (pp89-90).

But returning again to the Law as strictly taken: "But if we consider the Law *strictly,* so it contains the sum of the Covenant of Works. . .And unto all men out of Christ in an unregenerate state, it remains as a Covenant of Works, binding them to personal and perfect obedience, if they hope to attain life. [For,] 1) The Moral Law is the same to the sinner out of Christ that it was unto Christ the Surety; for what it was to the Surety, that it was to the sinner; for he did put his name into our bond; only in us it was necessary, in him voluntary. But Galatians 4:4 [says] the Law was unto Christ a Covenant of Works; therefore to every sinner out of Christ it remains so. 2) That which teaches us justification and life by doing, that is a Covenant of Works; but so does the Law strictly taken; and it is therefore opposed unto the gospel; there is the righteousness of the law [IE, as one way to life], and the righteousness of the gospel [IE, as a very different way to life]. 3) The curse under which all unregenerate men are, is the curse of the Moral Law, but that is the curse of the Covenant of Works; therefore the Moral Law is a Covenant of Works. 4) Therefore the Apostle makes it a distinct Covenant from the Covenant of Grace. *The Law thus taken strictly* as a copy of the Covenant that God made with Adam, and containing the sum of the Covenant of Works, and being delivered in the form of this Covenant, this Covenant has the Lord made subservient and subordinate unto the Covenant of Grace, as Hagar to Sarah." (p90; for Hagar analogy cf. also p22).

Let's summarize a bit. According to Strong, the Mosaic Covenant properly belongs to the Covenant of Grace; this is quite clear from what he affirms throughout. But Strong finds no contradiction in yet asserting that the demands of the Covenant of Works were truly proclaimed at Sinai. How does one reconcile these things? By the vital Puritan distinction between the Law as largely and strictly taken.

Though the Mosaic Covenant belonged unequivocally to the Covenant of Grace, yet this did not nullify the fact that the Law, strictly taken, did set forth life upon the condition of perfect obedience. Though the Covenant of Works was not actually renewed at Sinai, it's demands were freshly proclaimed; and yet in a way subordinate to the Covenant of Grace, to which the Mosaic administration unquestionably belonged. For God's intention in setting forth these requirements was unto wholly gospel designs: the Law *strictly taken* was always meant to drive sinners to the Savior, revealed in the the Law *largely taken*. The Law does demand of us the impossible—but only so that we may be brought to take refuge in Christ.

Francis Turretin
Institutes of Elenctic Theology, 1679-1685

The question with which we have been grappling in these abstracts is this: how exactly did the Puritans reconcile the tension that the Mosaic Covenant was indeed part of the Covenant of Grace on the one hand, with the fact that the requirement of this covenant seems to be more along the lines of "Do and live" rather than "believe and live", seeming to require works for salvation rather than faith?

Turretin deals with the question at hand in at least three places. The first section is found under the heading, *"The Twofold Economy of the Covenant of Grace"* (V2, pp216-232). Here Turretin tells us:

"And hence we can clearly gather what is to be determined about a question here agitated by some—whether the decalogue promulgated on Mount Sinai contained nothing except the Covenant of Grace and its pure stipulation [or not]. For since from what has already been said, it is evident that the manner of this lawgiving was terrific, smiting with fear their consciences and by the severity of its threatenings removing them from the sight of God, everyone sees that this was not the manner or the genius of the Covenant of Grace (which exhibits God to us as appeased and recalls sinners to itself by the sweetness of its promises). Besides, the law (contained in the decalogue) is of natural right, founded on the justice of God; while the Covenant of Grace is of positive and free right, founded on his good pleasure and mercy. The latter sets forth a surety, promises remission of sins and salvation in his satisfaction; not only demands but also effects obedience. But in the decalogue, no mention either of a surety or promise of salvation to be given to sinners occurs; but a bare promise of life to those doing and a threatening of death to transgressors. Hence the law of works (comprised in the decalogue) is everywhere contradistinguished by Paul from the law of faith and the promise of grace (Romans 3:27; Galatians 3:17-18) for as the law is not of faith (Galatians 3:12), so neither is faith of the law. So great is the contrariety [IE, opposition] between these two means that they are wholly incompatible with each other." (p226).

"This we do not say, as if we wished either to deny that the Covenant of Grace had then been made with the Israelites (which is expressly taught in Deuteronomy 5:2 and is easily inferred, both from its sanction given in Exodus 19:5 and from its solemn confirmation and ratification alluded to in Exodus 24:8-9 where mention is made of the sprinkling of the blood of victims and the approach of the elders to God). Or as if we supposed the decalogue had nothing in common with the Covenant of Grace and was nothing else than the Covenant of Works itself, renewed for the purpose of recalling the people to it, that they might seek life from it. For since the law was made weak in the flesh after sin (Romans 8:3), the way to life by it became altogether impossible for man. Hence Paul testifies that the law was not given that it might give life (Galatians 3:21) or that the promise first given might be abrogated (Galatians 3:17), but 'on account of transgressions,' that sin being uncovered by it, the necessity of grace might be the more clearly seen." (p226). Turretin then continues in the following paragraph: "Thus it is rightly said that the decalogue belonged to the Covenant of Grace; yea, in a measure flowed from it inasmuch as it was promulgated from the counsel of God that it might serve him—both *antecedently* as a schoolmaster, by convincing of sin, bringing to it men smitten with fear of death and despairing of themselves; and *consequently* as a rule, prescribing the measure of obedience and holiness demanded by God in the Covenant of Grace. Thus God willed that there should be in the decalogue various connections with the Covenant of Grace to recall the people to it, in order that from a knowledge of their own weakness and the terrible denunciation of death, they might not wholly despair of the grace of God. Even the preface (in which he professes himself to be the God of his people, who led them out of Egyptian bondage) and the promises annexed to the second and fifth precept, teach this with sufficient clearness." (pp226-227).

Again: "Meanwhile it pleased God to administer the Covenant of Grace in this period under a rigid legal economy—both on account of the condition of the people still in infancy and on account of the putting off of the advent of Christ and the satisfaction to be rendered by him. *A twofold relation* ought always to obtain [IE, be considered]: *the one legal,* more severe, through which by a new promulgation of the law and of the Covenant of Works, with an intolerable yoke of ceremonies, he wished to set forth what men owed and what was to be expected by them on account of duty unperformed. In this respect, the law is called the letter that kills (2 Corinthians 3:6) and the handwriting which was contrary to us (Colossians

2:14), because by it men professed themselves guilty and children of death, the declaration being written by their own blood in circumcision and by the blood of victims. *The other relation was evangelical,* sweeter, inasmuch as 'the law was a schoolmaster unto Christ' (Galatians 3:24) and contained 'the shadow of things to come' (Hebrews 10:1), whose body and express image is in Christ. Hence, as much of trouble and vexation as that economy brought in its former relation, so much of consolation and of joy it conferred in the latter upon pious men attending to it and seeking under that bark and veil the spiritual and evangelical truth (which the Holy Spirit taught them by a clearer revelation). God supplied more and greater helps according to the time, not only by promises and oracles often repeated, but also by more expressive types and more perfect shadows and figures, in which they had a more exact delineation of the thing itself and a more accurate picture of Christ crucified before their eyes as it were in types." (p227).

Turretin then continues and concludes: "According to that twofold relation, the administration can be viewed either as to the *external economy of legal teaching* or as to the *internal truth of the gospel promise* lying under it. . .eternal life [was set forth] according to the clause, 'Do this and live.' On the part of the people, it was a stipulation of obedience to the whole law or righteousness both perfect (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10) and personal and justification by it (Romans 2:13). But this stipulation in the Israelite covenant was only accidental, since it was added only in order that man by its weakness might be led to reject his own righteousness and to embrace another's, latent [IE, hidden] under the law." (p227).

So far, Turretin has told us a few things. *First,* there is a massive difference between the Law and the gospel, so that we can say not only that the Law is not of faith—but that faith is not of the Law. Indeed, these two systems are mutually exclusive, for one proclaims life and justification upon the condition of obedience, while the other proclaims life and justification upon the condition of faith. *But secondly,* despite what Turretin had just said—he denies that the Law was given as a renewed republication of the Covenant of Works—but that it rather belongs wholly and unreservedly to the Covenant of Grace. *How so?* In that it's demands served both to cause men to flee to the Covenant of Grace on the one hand, but no less to instruct those who belonged to Christ on the other. *Thus,* Turretin here distinguishes a *two-fold* function of the Law, arguing that we must understand the Law both as *legal* and *evangelical*. This is nothing less than the common Puritan distinction of the Law as both *largely* and *strictly* understood (though Turretin does not use those words here). *In particular,* the Law does indeed tell us: "Do this and live", but it does so intentionally in order to drive us to Christ that in Him we might *believe and live*.

The second section in Turretin that deals with our question is his next chapter in Volume 2, falling under the heading: *"The Difference between the Old and the New Covenants"* (pp233-239). Here, Turretin begins to apply the terms "broadly" and "strictly" taken—not just to the Law—but to the entire Old Testament (or old covenant) as a whole. *Broadly taken,* the old covenant contained "the doctrine of grace delivered to the ancients, promising salvation and life. . .under the condition of *repentance and faith* in the Messiah about to come" (pp233-234). *"Strictly,* however, it denotes the Covenant of Works or the moral law given by Moses—the unbearable burden of legal ceremonies being added, absolutely and apart from the promise of grace. The former [IE, the broader sense] was signified properly and of itself (if the scope and intention of the lawgiver be considered). . .not to abolish the promises, but to lead unto Christ. The latter [IE, the stricter sense] is accessory and accidental, springing from an ignoring of the true end and the devising of a false. The true end was Christ for righteousness to every believer (Romans 10:4), but the self-righteous Jews did not obtain this end. . .Hence they invented a false end, maintaining that the law was given in order that by its observance they might be justified before God and be saved (Romans 10:3-5). Against this error the apostle everywhere disputes from that hypothesis which takes the law strictly and opposes it to the promise. . .However, we readily grant that the Old Testament and the Mosaic Covenant *taken strictly and absolutely* as to the legal relation differ in entire substance from the New. Hence the law and Moses are opposed to grace and to Christ (John 1:17) and by Paul the letter and the Spirit, the ministration of condemnation and of righteousness (2 Corinthians 3:6-7). . . [But] *taken broadly* and with the other evangelical relation (clothed, namely, with its pedagogical circumstances), it did not differ as to substance, but only as to manner of dispensation." (pp234-235).

Turretin continues: "It is one thing for the old covenant strictly taken to differ essentially from the new. The apostle had this in mind in the allegory of Sarah and Hagar (Galatians 4:24), the former generating to freedom, the latter to bondage. He disputes against the false apostles who confounded the law and the

gospel, which is referred to also in 2 Corinthians 3:6-7, in the antithesis between 'the letter' and 'the Spirit,' 'the ministration of condemnation' and 'of righteousness.' It is however another thing (when broadly considered as to economy) to be opposed as to substance, which we deny." (p236). And again: "The opposition of the law and the gospel (in as far as they are *taken properly and strictly* for the Covenant of Works and Grace and are considered in their absolute being) is contrary. They are opposed as the letter killing and the Spirit quickening; as Hagar gendering to bondage and Sarah gendering to freedom, although the law more *broadly taken* and in its relative being is subordinated to the gospel. But the opposition of the Old and New Testaments *broadly* viewed is relative, inasmuch as the Old contained the shadows of things to come (Hebrews 10:1) and the New the very image." (pp236-37).

Again, let's try to summarize this second section from Turretin. Here he begins to flesh out the historic Puritan distinction between the law largely (or broadly) taken and strictly taken. The difference is that he is speaking actually of the old covenant instead of the Law—but his thoughts are one and the same. *Broadly taken,* the old covenant (or law) holds out Christ to us to be embraced by faith; but *strictly taken,* it demands of us nothing short of perfect obedience. Turretin clarifies for us that the reason we can take Sinai as belonging to the Covenant of Grace is that the Law (or old covenant) largely taken speaks to us of Christ. Though it is true, that the Law (or old covenant) strictly taken is a way indeed completely contrary to the gospel, still, because this strict sense is subordinated to the larger, broader sense in which the Law (or old covenant) is given, we can (and must) think of the whole as belonging wholly to the Covenant of Grace. The mistake of the Jews was not *adding* to the Law the stricter sense (for it was inherent in the Law), but rather *taking away* from the Law the broader sense—for Christ was indeed the end of the Law.

The third section in Turretin is found under the heading, *"The Limbus of the Fathers,"* and is in the context of objecting to the view that the Mosaic Covenant was a Subservient covenant. Turretin first explains this view (pp262-263) then argues against it (pp263-267). He afterwards seeks to further clarify exactly how it is that he understands the substance and essence of the Mosaic Covenant. In his words:

"The Mosaic Covenant may be viewed in *two aspects:* either according to the intention and design of God and in order to Christ; or separately and abstracted from him. In *the latter way,* it is really distinct from the Covenant of Grace because it coincides with the Covenant of Works and in this sense is called the letter that killeth and the ministration of condemnation when its nature is spoken of (2 Corinthians 3:6-7). But it is unwarrantably abstracted here because it must always be considered with the intention of God, which was, not that man might have life from the law or as a sinner might be simply condemned, but that from a sense of his own misery and weakness he might fly for refuge to Christ." (p267). Again: "The law is said 'to be not of faith' (Galatians 3:12), not as *taken broadly* and denoting the Mosaic economy, but *strictly* as taken for the moral law abstractly and apart from the promises of grace (as the legalists regarded it who sought life from it)." And a page later, Turretin writes: "The specific difference of a covenant cannot make a diversity of condition, expressed by the law and gospel—of the former imperfect obedience; of the latter in faith. It was not required in the same way, nor for the same end. For faith in Christ is demanded primarily and intended chiefly, but perfect obedience (under punishment of death and the curse) only subordinately and relatively to faith and the righteousness of faith. By convincing man of his sin and weakness, it forced him to seek a remedy in Christ by faith (as we have already said)." (p268). And Turretin concludes: "It is one thing to speak of the law in itself (which had the form of a Covenant of Works and was enacted not with the end of making alive, but to convict of transgression, extort the confession of debt and lead to Christ); another concerning the Sinaitic covenant itself, in which the law was enacted. In the former sense, the law is called a handwriting against us and the minister of condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:9; Colossians 2:14); but in the latter sense, that covenant had the lively oracles (Acts 7:38) and contained the saving promises of the grace of Christ." (p269).

This is a reaffirming of what Turretin had told us in the last section. What he continues to emphasize in this section here is the reason *why* it was that God saw fit to give the Law in the more strict sense. And he tells us that the intention of God in giving the Law in the stricter sense ("Do this and live") was never for us to try to actually earn our salvation by keeping the Law—but rather to show us just how sinful we are, and in order to drive us to Christ, as freely offered in the gospel contained in the Law as largely taken.

We'll finish with one last paragraph from Turretin (contained in the same section). It is wonderfully rich,

and reminiscent also of how Francis Roberts ends his thoughts on the Mosaic Covenant (though Turretin does so in a way that is much more condensed). He says: "Again, these two conditions are proposed because they are necessary to the salvation of the sinner: *perfect obedience in Christ* to fulfill the righteousness of the law. . .without which the justice of God did not permit life to be given to us; *faith however in us* that the perfect obedience and satisfaction of Christ might be applied to us and become ours by imputation. *Thus what was demanded of us in the Covenant of Works is fulfilled by Christ in the Covenant of Grace*. Nor is it absurd that in this way justification takes place by works and by faith— *by the works of Christ* and *by our faith*. And thus in sweet harmony the law and the gospel meet together in this covenant. The law is not administered without the gospel, nor the gospel without the law. So that it is as it were a legal-gospel and an evangelical-law; a gospel full of obedience and a law full of faith. So the gospel does not destroy the law, but establishes it (Romans 3:31) by giving us Christ, who perfectly fulfilled it. And the law is not against the gospel, since it refers and leads us to it as its end." (p268).

John Flavel (1630-1691)
Vindiciae Legis et Foederis (Vindication of the Law and Covenant)

This section from John Flavel was originally written to refute a book written by a man named Philip Cary. Cary published a book entitled *Solemn Call,* which was written in order to refute the doctrine of infant baptism. The premise of his book was that both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants belonged, not to the Covenant of Grace, but rather to the Covenant of Works. (The fact that the Abrahamic Covenant is part of the Covenant of Grace is truly fundamental to those of us who subscribe to the doctrine of infant baptism.) It seems that in order to refute this doctrine, Cary worked backwards, and beginning with the Mosaic Covenant, sought to demonstrate that not only was Sinai a Covenant of Works, but arguing the unity between the two, that the covenant with Abraham must have been a Covenant of Works as well. It was in order to refute Cary's book that Flavel wrote the following, which thankfully has been preserved for us in Flavel's *Works,* Volume 6, pages 318-378. The section most relevant for us is Flavel's response to what Cary had said about the Mosaic Covenant, which is mostly found on pages 323-325 and 335-340.

Flavel writes on page 323: "[Cary's] Position: *That the Sinai Law is the same with Adam's Covenant of Works, made in paradise.* The difference betwixt us here is not: 1) Whether both these be called covenants in Scripture? Nor, 2) Whether there was no grace at all in both, or either of them; for we are agreed, it is grace in God to enter into covenant with man, whatever that covenant be. Nor, 3) Whether the Sinai law be not a Covenant of Works to some men, by their own fault and occasion? Nor, 4) Whether the Scriptures do not many times speak of it in that very sense and notion wherein *carnal justiciaries* apprehend and take it; and by rejecting Christ, make it so to themselves? Nor, 5) Whether the very matter of the *law of nature* be not revived and represented in the *Sinai law?* These are not the points we contend about. But the question is, Whether the Sinai law do in its own nature, and according to God's purpose and design in the promulgation of it, revive the law of nature, to the same ends and uses it served to in Adam's covenant; and so be properly and truly a Covenant of Works? Or whether God had not gracious and evangelical ends and purposes; [namely:] By such a dreadful representation of the severe and impracticable terms of the first covenant, instead of obliging them to the personal and punctual observance of them for righteousness and life, he did not rather design to convince them of the impossibility of legal righteousness, humble proud nature, and show them the necessity of betaking themselves to Christ, now exhibited in the new covenant, as the only refuge to fallen sinners. The latter I defend according to the Scriptures, the former Mr. Cary seems to assert and vehemently argue for."

Here Flavel tells us a few things in particular about his view of the Mosaic Covenant that relate directly to the question we've been grappling with. *First,* in Point 5, he acknowledges that "the very matter of the law of nature" was indeed "revived and represented in the Sinai law"; and again later, that there was indeed at Sinai "a dreadful representation of the severe and impracticable terms of the first covenant", which is another name he uses for the Covenant of Works. So then, Flavel has no problem affirming that the content and terms of the Covenant of Works were indeed declared at Sinai. But *secondly,* Flavel asserts that this content was set forth at Sinai with a very different design; namely, with "gracious and evangelical ends and purposes", in order that fallen sinners might thereby seek refuge in Christ alone. He goes on:

"*Secondly:* In this controversy about the Sinai law, I do not find Mr. Cary distinguish (as he ought) betwixt the Law considered more *largely and complexly,* as containing both the *moral and ceremonial law,* for both which it is often taken in Scripture, and more *strictly* for the *moral law* only, as it is sometimes used in Scripture. These two he makes one and the same *Covenant of Works;* [and] though there be some that doubt whether the mere *moral law,* may not be a *Covenant of Works;* yet I never met with any man before, that does affirm the *ceremonial law,* which is so full of Christ, to be so; and to this Law it is that *circumcision* appertains." (pp323-324). Here we see Flavel appeal to the traditional Puritan distinction between the Law as largely and strictly taken. He argues that Cary failed to do this, perhaps intentionally, because his agenda had been to refute infant baptism, which traces its roots to circumcision.

"*Thirdly:* The moral law, *strictly taken* for the Ten Commandments, is not by him distinguished (as it ought to be, and as the Scripture frequently does) *according to God's intention and design in the promulgation of it,* which was to add it as an appendix to the promise (Galatians 3:19) and not to set it up

as an opposite covenant (Galatians 3:21), as [did] the carnal Jews, *mistaking and perverting the use and end of the Law,* and making it to themselves a Covenant of Works, by making it the very rule and reason of their justification before God (Romans 9:32-33; Romans 10:3). These things ought carefully to have been distinguished, forasmuch as the whole controversy depends on this double sense and intention of the Law; yea, the very *denomination* of that Law depends hereon; for I affirm, it ought not to be denominated from the abused and mistaken *end* of it amongst carnal men, but from the true scope, design and end for which God published it after the fall; and though we find such expressions as these in Scripture, 'The man that doth them shall live in them;' and, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things,' etc, yet these [are] respecting the Law, *not according to God's intention,* but man's corruption and abuse of it; [and] the Law is not thereby to be denominated a Covenant of Works. God's end was not to justify them, but to try them by that terrible dispensation (Exodus 20:20), whether they would still hanker after that natural way of self-righteousness; *for this end God propounded the terms of the first covenant to them on Sinai,* not to open the way of self-justification to them, but to convince them, and shut them up to Christ; just as our Savior, [in] Matthew 19:17, puts the young man upon keeping the commandments not to drive him from, but necessitate him to himself in the way of faith." (p324).

Flavel says a good bit here so let's try to summarize. In the last point, Flavel claimed that Cary had failed to differentiate between the Law as *largely and strictly taken*. Here, Flavel's dispute is that Cary had failed to demonstrate *God's true intention, design, and purpose in promulgating the Law* in its stricter sense. We have to read Flavel carefully here, remembering also his immediate context, that he is disputing with a man who takes Sinai to be nothing but a full-fledged republication of the Covenant of Works. Flavel is *not* saying that God didn't propound the content of the Covenant of Works to the Jews at Sinai. He had already said this earlier, and he indeed reaffirms it here once again when he says, "for this end God propounded the terms of the first covenant to them on Sinai. . ." His dispute here has to do with the reason *why* God propounded the terms of the Covenant of Works at Sinai. For God never spoke the words, "The man that doth them shall live in them" with the intention that men might actually seek eternal life by keeping the Law (it seems that this is what Cary was arguing). What Flavel wants to get across is that in propounding the terms of the first covenant (IE, the Covenant of Works), "God's end was not to justify them. . .but to convince them [of their sin], and shut them up to Christ. . ."

Flavel concludes: "The Law in both these senses is excellently described [in] Galatians 4, in that allegory of Hagar and Sarah, the figures of the two covenants. Hagar, in her first and proper station was but a serviceable *handmaid* to Sarah, as the Law is a *schoolmaster* to Christ; but when Hagar the handmaid is taken in[to] Sarah's bed, and brings forth children that aspire to the inheritance, then says the Scripture, 'Cast out the bond-woman with her son.' So it is here; take the Law in its primary use, as God designed it, as a *schoolmaster* or *handmaid* to Christ and the *promise,* so it is consistent with them, and excellently subservient to them; but if we marry this handmaid, and espouse it as a *Covenant of Works,* then are we bound to it for life (Romans 7), and must have nothing to do with Christ. The believers of the Old Testament had true apprehensions of the right end and use of the Law, which directed them to Christ, and so they became children of the *free-woman.* The carnal Jews trusted to the works of the Law for righteousness, and so became the children of the *bond-woman;* but neither could be children of both at once, no more than the same man can naturally be born of two mothers." (pp323-325).

All this Flavel had written as an introductory overview of the nature of his dispute with Cary. Afterwards, he gets back to addressing these things in more detail. He later continues his thoughts, where he writes:

"I read [in] Galatians 3:19, for what end God published the Law 430 years after the promise was made to Abraham, and find '*it was added because of transgression';* it was put to, not set up by itself alone as a distinct covenant, but added as an *appendix* to the *Covenant of Grace;* whence it is plain, that God added the Sinai *law* to the *promise,* with *evangelical ends and purposes. . .*The Law was added because of transgression, that is, to restrain sin in the world, and to convince sinners under guilt, of the necessity of another righteousness than their own, even that of Christ, and for the same ends God added it to the promise." (p336). He continues: "It is plain to me, that in the publication of the Law on Sinai, God did not in the least intend to give them so much as a *direction* how to obtain justification by their most punctual obedience to its precepts, that being to fallen man utterly impossible; and beside[s], had he promulged the Law to that end and purpose, he had not added it, but directly opposed it to the promise;

which it is manifested he did not; [thus] Galatians 3:21, 'Is the law then against the promise of God? God forbid.' And verse 18 makes it appear, that had it been set up to that end and purpose, it had utterly disannulled the promise; for '*if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more by promise.*' What then can be clearer, than that the Law at Sinai was published with gracious gospel ends and purposes, to lead men to Christ, which Adam's covenant had no respect or reference to? And therefore it can never be a pure Adam's *covenant. . .*neither is it capable of becoming a pure *Covenant of Works* to any man, but by his own fault, in rejecting the righteousness of Christ, and seeking justification by the works of the Law, as the mistaken carnal Jews did (Romans 10:3), and other legal justiciaries now do. And upon this account only it is that Paul, who so highly praises the Law in its subserviency to Christ, thunders so dreadfully against it, as it is thus set by ignorant mistaken souls in direct opposition to Christ." (p336).

Again Flavel says: "And further, to clear this point, the apostle tells us [in] Romans 10:4, 'For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.' Whence I argue, that if Adam's *covenant* had an end, namely, the justification of men by their own personal obedience; and the Law at Sinai had a quite contrary end, namely, to bring *sinners* to Christ by faith for their righteousness; the one to keep him within himself, the other to take him quite out of himself, and bring him for his justification to the righteousness of another, even that of Christ; then that Sinai *law* cannot possibly be the same thing with Adam's *Covenant of Works.* But the antecedent is true and plain in the fore-cited text, therefore so is the consequent." Flavel continues, quoting Romans 10:4: *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.* Take the Law here either more strictly, for the *moral law,* or more largely, as it comprehends the *ceremonial law,* still *Christ is the end of the law.* The moral law shuts up every man to Christ for righteousness, by convincing him (according to God's design in the publication of it) of the impossibility of obtaining justification in the way of works. And the *ceremonial law* many ways prefigured Christ, his death and satisfaction, by blood, in our room, and so led men to Christ their true propitiation; and all its types were fulfilled and ended in Christ. Was there any such thing in Adam's *covenant?* You must prove there was, else you will never be able to make them one and the same *covenant.*" (pp336-337).

Flavel then concludes this section with the following summary: "But yet, though what I have said destroys your false position, I am not willing to leave you, or the reader ignorant, wherein the truth lies in this controverted point betwixt us; and that will appear, by a due consideration of the following particulars:

1) It is plain and uncontroverted, that Adam's covenant in *paradise,* contained in a perfect law and rule of natural righteousness, founded both in God's nature and in man's; which, in its perfect state of *innocency,* was every way enabled perfectly to comply therewith. For the Scripture tells us [in] Ecclesiastes 7:29, that '*God made man upright';* and his punctual complying therewith, was the righteousness by which he stood." (p338).

2) This *Covenant of Works* being once broken, can never more be available to the justification and salvation of any fallen man. There was not now a law found that could give righteousness. The broken *Covenant of Works* lost immediately all the blessings and privileges which before it contained, and retained only the *curse* and *punishment;* in token whereof, *cherubims,* with flaming swords, turning every way, were set to keep the way of the tree of life (Genesis 3:24)." (p338).

3) Soon after the violation of the *Covenant of Works,* God was graciously pleased to publish for the relief of mankind, now miserable and hopeless, the *second covenant,* which we call the *Covenant of Grace* (Genesis 3:15), which is the first opening of the grace of God in Christ to fallen man. And though this first promise of Christ was but short and obscure, yet it was in every age to be opened clearer and clearer, until the promised seed should come. After the first opening of this new covenant, in the first promise of Christ, the first covenant is shut up forever, as a covenant of life and salvation; and all the world are shut up to the only way of salvation by Christ (Galatians 3:23), it being contrary to the will of God, that two ways of salvation should stand open to man at once, and they so opposite one to another, as the way of works, and the way of faith are (Acts 4:12; John 14:6; Galatians 2:21)." (pp338-339).

4) It is evident, however, that after the first opening of the promise of Christ (Genesis 3:15), God foreseeing the pride of fallen man, who naturally inclines to a righteousness of his own in the way of doing, *was pleased to revive the law of nature, as to its matter,* in the Sinai dispensation; which was 430

years after the first promise had been renewed, and further opened unto Abraham, of whose seed Christ should come. And this he did, not in opposition to the promise, but in subserviency thereto (Galatians 3:21). And though *the matter and substance of the law of nature be found in the Sinai covenant, strictly taken for the ten commandments;* yet the ends and intentions of God in that terrible Sinai dispensation were twofold: I) To convince fallen man of the *sinfulness* and *impotency* of his nature, and the impossibility of obtaining righteousness by the Law, and so by a blessed necessity, to shut him up to Christ, his only remedy; and, II) To be a standing rule of duty, both towards God and man, to the end of the world. But if we take the Sinai *covenant* more largely, as inclusive of the *ceremonial* with the *moral law* (as it is often taken, and is so by you, in the New Testament;) then it did not only serve for a *conviction* of impotency, and a *rule* of duty; but exhibited and taught much of Christ, and the mysteries of the new covenant in those its ceremonies, wherein he was prefigured to them." (p339).

5) Whence it evidently appears, that the Sinai *covenant* was neither repugnant to the *new covenant* in its scope and aim; 'The law is not against the promise,' (Galatians 3:21), nor yet set up as coordinate with it, with a design to open two different ways of salvation to fallen man; but was added to the promise in respect of its *evangelical* purposes and designs; on which account it is called by some a covenant of faith, or grace, in respect of its subserviency unto Christ, who is the end of the Law for righteousness (Romans 10:4), and by others a subservient covenant, according to Galatians 3:23-24. And accordingly we find both tables of the Law put into the ark (Hebrews 9:4), which shows their consistency and subordination with and [un]to the method of salvation by Christ in the *new covenant."* (p339).

6) This design and intention of God was fatally mistaken by the Jews, ever since God promulgated that Law at Sinai, and was by them notoriously perverted to an end quite contrary to that which God promulged it for, even to give righteousness and life, in the way of personal and perfect obedience; [as we read in] Romans 10:3, 'For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.' Hence Christ came to be slighted by them, and his righteousness rejected. For they rested in the Law (Romans 2:17), were married to the Law as an husband (Romans 7:2-3), and so might have no conjugal communion with Christ. However, Moses, Abraham, [and all the] elect, discerned Christ as the end of the Law for righteousness, and were led to him thereby." (pp339-340).

7) This fatal mistake of the use and intent of the Law is the ground of those seeming contradictions in Paul's epistles. Sometimes he magnifies the Law, when he speaks of it according to God's end and purpose in its promulgation (Romans 7:12,14,16). But as it was fatally mistaken by the Jews, and set in opposition to Christ; so he thunders against it, calls it a *ministration of death* and *condemnation:* and all its appendant ceremonies *weak and beggarly elements.* And by this distinction, whatsoever seems repugnant in Paul's epistles, may be sweetly reconciled; and it is a distinction of his own making, [as we read in] 1 Timothy 1:8, 'We know that the law is good if we use it lawfully.' There is a good and an evil use of the Law. Had you attended to these things, you had not so confidently and inconsiderately pronounced it a pure *Covenant of Works."* (p340).

So Flavel ends his section on the Mosaic Covenant. Let's conclude by summarizing his thoughts a bit. It's vital to remember, once again, the context of what he says here about Sinai. He's writing to refute a man who wrote a book about how not only the Mosaic Covenant—but also the Abrahamic Covenant—belonged not to the Covenant of Grace but to the Covenant of Works. This helps us understand not only his tone, but also his focus and emphasis. Flavel nowhere says that the content of the Covenant of Works wasn't repeated at Sinai; in fact he says the opposite. But he's writing to refute, not someone who denied that Sinai contained the content of the Covenant of Works, but rather someone who denied that Sinai belonged to the Covenant of Grace. Thus while he affirms throughout that Sinai did contain the terms and matter (as he calls it) of the first covenant (the Covenant of Works), his emphasis is on proving the fact that this content was repeated and declared at Sinai to further the ends of the Covenant of Grace. It was this fact that the Jews (and it seems, Cary) overlooked, and perverting the intention of God in giving the Law, sought to actually obtain life through its demands rather than be driven to Christ to seek refuge in Him alone for salvation. Thus we learn of the view of John Flavel on our particular question.