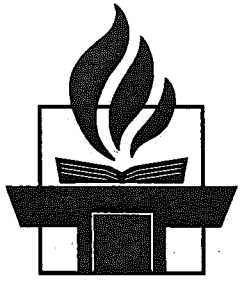
Reformation & Revival



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 3, Number 1 • Winter 1994

The Grace of God and Departures From It

Gary D. Long

The writer of Hebrews instructs believers: "Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them" (13:9).

This verse is immediately preceded by the words: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." The context makes it clear that the hearers of this Epistle were to remember those who had ruled over them and taught them the Word of God, namely, about Jesus Christ. And the warning of verse nine is that they are not to be carried about or away with strange doctrines (i.e., teachings which are foreign to biblical truth and practice and, especially, in this context, which lead away from the person of Christ). In order to prevent being carried about by such strange or false doctrines, the heart must be established by the principle of grace. It cannot be established by continued observance of empty rituals of an old religious order—the old covenant order which has been fulfilled and, thereby, done away with as covenantally binding by the resurrected Christ through the blood of the everlasting covenant (v. 20).

It probably is not an overstatement to say that all departures from the grace of God have at their beginning a departure from the doctrine of Christ, especially His cross-work which is the focal point of redemptive history. The apostle Paul believed this when he exclaimed: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

There is widespread misunderstanding within present-day Christianity over the lawful use of God's law (1 Tim. 1:8) in the Christian life. The misunderstanding does not exist over the doctrine of the cross proper, but over the role that God's law and its covenantal use has in relationship to sanctification of the new covenant believer. That the sanctification of the believer is vitally linked to the cross of Christ is freely admitted and confessed by all who are

evangelical in the faith. Differences (within Reformed theology in particular) over the Christian's relationship to the law and the gospel are not a willful departure over the nature and design of the cross-work of Christ; rather they are a departure resulting from misunderstandings of God's law as it relates to the flow of redemptive history, especially the meaning of "law" in the Epistles of Paul. It is no understatement to say that Paul's understanding of the law is an interpretive problem that encompasses one of the most intricate doctrinal and practical issues in New Testament theology.

In this article I will address, first, the biblical teaching of the doctrine of the cross and the doctrine of sanctification.[1] This will be accomplished by a brief exposition of each of these doctrinal themes, emphasizing, but not restricted to, selected passages from the book of Galatians. Second, the departure from the biblical teaching on each of these two doctrinal themes will be stated and illustrated. Then, third, the reason for the departure from the biblical teaching will be given. And, finally, a conclusion will be made concerning the departures from both the cross of Christ and the doctrine of sanctification followed by a solution to prevent departure from these two doctrinal areas.

The Grace of God and the Glory of the Cross of Christ

The Epistle to the Galatians deals with vital issues of Christianity—issues which concern the true nature of the gospel of Christ. False teachers were present among the churches of Galatia. They were deliberately perverting the gospel (1:7) that they might escape persecution for the cross of Christ (6:12), and so that they might glory (6:13) in causing the Galatian Christians to turn away from the gospel of Christ (1:6) and come again under the bondage of the Law of Moses (5:1). (Today, it may not be so much the bondage of the Law of Moses, but more the bondage of

human works—so-called "good works" apart from the cross of Christ.) But for the apostle Paul, persecution for the cross of Christ was not something to escape: just the opposite—it was something in which to boast, to glory. Thus he stops dictating to his secretary (amanuensis) at 6:10, and with his own hand he writes in large bold letters: "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14).

Paul's answer to the question, "How can the unjust be justly made just?", is the cross of Christ. The whole Epistle is full of the cross because salvation is possible only through the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross. That is why in his preaching, Paul placarded Christ clearly before the eyes of the Galatians (3:1). He presented the finished work of the cross to them so clearly that they could see its enduring benefits through the eye of faith as clearly as Abraham could see the stars when God promised Abraham as many descendants as there were stars in the heavens. Paul, like Abraham, had believed the gospel, and God had accounted their faith for righteousness. The way of salvation was the same in both the Old and New Testaments: justification by faith alone. God had declared them righteous by faith that it might be by grace (Rom. 4:16). That is why Paul gloried in the cross of Christ (6:14).

The Biblical Teaching. Christ's death was first a substitutionary sacrifice. In approaching the biblical teaching of the cross-work of Christ, it may be asked, why did Paul glory in the cross of Christ? What did Christ do on the cross? By way of brief exposition, consider these three statements: He "gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age" (1:4); "the Son of God . . . loved me and gave Himself for me" (2:20); and Christ redeemed Jewish believers from "the curse of the [Old Covenant] law" (3:13). Christ, Paul says, became "a curse for us" that we who receive the promise of the Spirit through faith might be justified, that is, declared

righteous, like Abraham (3:13–14). But how could the curse of the broken law—whether Jewish Christians previously under the Law of Moses or Gentile Christians under the curse of the law written in their hearts (Rom. 2:14–15)—how could the curse of the law rest upon Christ who was sinless? The answer: Christ was our substitute! The context makes it clear that Christ died not only for the benefit of, but that crucified, He also stood in the place and substitutionarily bore the guilt and penalty of those who seek by grace the righteousness of God by faith. This doctrine, Paul says elsewhere (Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 1:23), is a stumbling stone to unbelieving Jews and foolishness to unbelieving Gentiles, "but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18), "it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). This is the gospel of the cross of Christ, and Paul and whoever believes it is not ashamed of it (Rom. 1:16; 9:33). The gospel that the believer glories in is the gospel of Christ, the gospel that teaches the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. The doctrine of Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2) is what the apostle Paul and every Christian glories in. So, *the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ lies at the heart of the doctrine of the cross of Christ.*

Second, Christ's death is penal sacrifice. Another aspect of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ is penal. There are many theories of the atonement, but only substitutionary atonement saves from God's wrath to be justly and fully poured out upon sinners at the return of Christ. When the cross of Christ is said to be a substitutionary atonement, it is meant that *Christ's death was, most importantly, a representative, penal–satisfaction for the guilt and penalty due from the sin of those whom He represented.* His death renders God propitious toward sinners. Christ's death satisfies God's punishing justice on behalf and instead of those for whom Christ died. God will not pour out His wrath upon those who by grace believe in Christ as their substitutionary Savior.

They will not suffer the eternal torments of God's wrath in hell. No, by blood atonement Christ's voluntary sacrifice of Himself appeased the righteous wrath of God for those whom the atonement was designed to save. As a result, through the gospel, God's people are converted one–by–one throughout time and brought into a saving relationship with Christ through the miracle of the new birth and placed into spiritual union and communion with Christ and His body, the church, by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). The Spirit's sovereign application of the benefits of the atonement always results in the spiritual twin fruits of repentance and faith. *So the penal–substitutionary sacrifice lies at the heart of the doctrine of the cross of Christ.*

Third, we say that Christ's death was effective sacrifice. Because Christ's death was a penal sacrifice, it was also an *effective sacrifice*; that is, actually designed to accomplish redemption for those whom Christ died. This means that the atonement of Christ was designed to save only some, not everyone, *not the whole world without exception but the whole world without distinction of whether those saved be Jew or Gentile, male or female, bond or free.* Why did not Christ die for everyone? Because, to say that Christ died for everyone without exception is the quickest way to prove that He died for no one effectively. Why? Because Christ was either a substitutionary Savior for the guilt and penalty of sinners, or He was not. If He was (and He was), then He died either for all sinners or some: if for all, then all must come to faith in Christ. *So an effective, penal–substitutionary sacrifice lies at the heart of the doctrine of the cross of Christ.*

The Departure from the Biblical Teaching. Departure from the biblical teaching of substitutionary atonement not only occurred in Galatia at the middle of the first century, but it has also occurred throughout church history, and it is everywhere prevalent today in all three aspects of Christ's

death as an effective, penal and substitutionary sacrifice. In the nineteenth century, this was openly admitted by an American theologian, Daniel Fisk. Concerning the penal–satisfaction view of the atonement, Fisk said in an 1861 issue of the theological periodical, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, that it "leads, by logical necessity, either to the doctrine of a limited atonement, on the one hand, or to the doctrine of universal salvation, on the other." Fisk clearly understood that a penal–substitutionary sacrifice meant an effective or definite atonement, as it has rightly been called; yet, he rejected such an atonement because he believed that Christ died for everyone—characteristic of that system of theology known as Arminianism which stresses the human sovereignty of one's "free" will in choosing Christ for salvation. Believing in universal atonement, then, Fisk could not hold to Christ's death as penal substitution, for penal substitution means an effective atonement, one that definitely accomplishes redemption for all for whom Christ died (Luke 1:68). Fisk believed that Christ died for everyone if they would choose Christ. But, if Christ's atonement was a penal substitution, everyone must be saved. However, that would be universalism, and universal salvation for everyone without exception, he knew, was certainly not biblical. What enables some and not all to be saved is the exercise of one's "free" will, not God's will (but see John 1:12–13; James 1:18).

The Bible declares that the way to destruction is broad (Matt. 7:13). There will be multitudes responsibly in hell because of unbelief in Christ as a substitutionary Savior. How else could they be saved except Christ be their substitute? But if Christ died for some with a specific purpose to save them, they will come to faith in Christ and be saved. This is the doctrine of election and particular redemption or definite atonement. This is quite simply the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of Christ in Isaiah 53:10–11, which states that Christ "will see His offspring, . . . He shall see of the

travail of His soul (KJV), and be satisfied." How could this be true if God had not before determined it? How could this be true if God had not purposed to save a particular people, His seed, for whom Christ died? But He did purpose it (2 Tim. 1:9).

Therefore, any departure in understanding the true nature of the atonement being a penal–sacrifice or substitution is a departure from the doctrine of the cross and will quickly result in one's denying the particular design of the atonement. History is filled with individuals (such as Daniel Fisk) as well as churches and denominations that deny the true nature of the atonement being a penal–satisfaction, and that deny the particular design of the atonement; that is, that Christ died a substitutionary atonement only for those given to Him by the Father—His elect (John 17:2). Perhaps you have departed from the biblical teaching of substitutionary atonement. If so, may God grant you the grace to believe that without Christ dying as a sacrifice for the guilt and penalty of sins, as a substitutionary Savior, there can be no salvation. If you do not believe in the substitutionary death of Christ for sinners with *some* [2] degree of understanding and trust, you are lost and hell-bound. You who have yet to believe savingly in Christ—may the sovereign God grant you the grace of repentance and faith to believe in Christ alone for your eternal salvation and your deliverance from this present evil age (Gal. 1:4). Do not be led astray by any teaching that knowingly or unknowingly denies or distorts the true nature and designing purpose of the cross of Jesus Christ, not even if it comes from an apostle or an angel from heaven (Gal. 1:8).

The Reason for the Departure. There are two, interrelated, major reasons for the departure from the biblical teaching of the cross of Christ. The first one is doctrinal; the second is personal.

The doctrinal reason. The doctrinal reason involves the

substitutionary principle; i.e., the principle of imputation—the doctrine that sin, guilt, obedience and righteousness of one can be justly reckoned to the account of another. But the actualization of this principle, the Bible teaches, was unique to two persons only. The first man, Adam, and the last Adam, the God–man, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:20–28, 45, 47). The doctrine of the representative headship of the two Adams is a series of messages in itself. But for now, let it be understood that anyone who believes that Christ died for his or her sins; i.e., that He died in place of the ungodly, taking the curse of God upon Himself for sinners, because of their having sinned against God's holy law revealed in them by nature and by divine covenant—that person trusts in Christ as a substitutionary Savior. But often times when that person starts to say in his mind—which has been polluted by sin (Isa. 64:6)—when that person starts to say, "I believe that Christ died for me and for the sins of everyone," he is denying substitutionary atonement. That one is either knowingly or unknowingly, in effect, denying the true nature of the atonement, that Christ's death was a penal–substitution, that Christ paid for and satisfied God's holy justice and wrath for the guilt and penalty of the sins of His people—a multitude beyond number from every tribe, tongue, people and nation (Rev. 5:9).

The personal reason. The personal reason for departing from the biblical teaching of the cross of Christ is due to the proud "idol of free will" that consciously or subconsciously resides in the breast of every morally responsible human being. The "idol of free will" and its out–working in self–righteous pride, by nature, causes all of us, apart from the grace of God, to desire to merit our own salvation by good works rather than the merits of Christ's righteous life and substitutionary death. To bow in submission to the Christ of Holy Scripture and renounce one's own deluded, self–righteous ways is offensive to fallen, sinful man (Rom. 3:10–12), and it stirs up opposition against the true doctrine of the cross. It does so because the teaching of the cross tells us some very "hard–to–swallow" truths about ourselves when we are outside of Christ, namely, that we are sinners under the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 3:23), and that we cannot save ourselves (Eph. 2:8–9; Gal. 3:21). John R. W. Stott writes:

> So nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self–righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size. And of course men do not like it. They resent the humiliation of seeing themselves as God sees them and as they really are. They prefer their comfortable illusions. So they steer clear of the cross. They construct a Christianity without the cross, which relies for salvation on their works and not on Jesus Christ's. They do not object to Christianity so long as it is not the faith of Christ crucified. But Christ crucified they detest. And if preachers preach Christ crucified, they are opposed, ridiculed, persecuted. Why? Because of the wounds which they inflict on men's pride.[3]

The Grace of God and Sanctification

The first half of Galatians 6:14 serves as the basis for teaching the doctrine of the cross of Christ and the utter tragedy of departing from the substitutionary sacrifice of the Son of God for all who were ordained to believe upon Him by the enabling grace and sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. The last half of the verse and the next two verses serve as the basis for the biblical teaching of the sanctification of the new covenant believer as a member of the church of God, which is Christ's body (Eph. 1:22–23).

"Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:15–16).

The Biblical Teaching. When one's glory and boast are in the cross of Christ, he departs fellowship with the world. Paul says, "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (6:14b). He also says: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (2:20). With the apostle Paul, the one who has been justified by faith is by the leading of the Spirit to wait for the hope of righteousness through faith working by love (5:5–6).

In the whole Epistle to the Galatians, especially in the context of the closing verses of chapter six, Paul is contrasting the false religion of works–righteousness with the true religion of faith–righteousness that issues into love and fulfilling of the law of God (5:14). In the case of the Galatian Christians, especially the Jewish Christians among them, external obedience to the old covenant Law of Moses was being pressed upon them by the false teachers, not only as a way of justification, but also as a way of life, the way of sanctification. They were being led astray from the finished work of the cross of Christ in redeeming them and from the inward work of the Spirit in their hearts in quickening and sanctifying them to a life of spiritual union and communion with Christ. They had not fully understood that the gospel of Christ and the great salvation that it proclaims is a sovereign work of grace which is inward and spiritual, having its fruit in a faith working through love. And so they were in danger of turning away from the new life they had in Christ, having received the promise of the Spirit through hearing and believing the gospel of Christ (3:1–3, 14). They were in danger of going back to a wrong use of the Law of Moses as a way of justification and a way of life (see Rom. 9:31–32). Paul is quick to tell them that what really counts with God is the new creation (Gal. 6:15) and the gift of the Spirit, for the promised Spirit is the earmark and the guarantee of the new covenant (3:14; see Heb. 8:8–13). The gospel of Christ, Paul says to the Galatian Christians—and by application to all Christians—is the norm or standard of measurement in the Christian life for all things under the new covenant, and especially for moral or ethical and spiritual matters. "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). This is the new covenant believer's "canon principle," or rule of life! The cross of Christ forms its starting point, and the new creation forms its realization. Everything must be measured by this new covenant standard.[4]

The Departure from the Biblical Teaching. At this point I want to briefly address a problem that presently exists within Reformed theology. It is a situation that is not so much a departure in doctrine as it is an honest misunderstanding of a right or lawful use of the law (1 Tim. 1:8), for it is not a willful departure or perversion of the truth, as was the case in the teaching of the false teachers among the churches of Galatia. Specifically, it is a misunderstanding of the relationship of God's law to the Christian under the new covenant dispensation of the Spirit.

This misunderstanding may be related, but it is not to be equated, with the Galatian error, for all within Reformed theology desire a godly walk in the life of every Christian, and desire to see the Christian ethic based solidly upon the Word of God. But the difference arises over the role that the law of God has in sanctification. One movement within contemporary Reformed theology, known as "Theonomy," holds that the whole law of God, including the "Older Testament commandments," are binding upon the Christian "as a pattern of sanctification." Theonomy holds to the abiding validity of Old Testament law upon the New Testament believer, including not only the Ten Commandments but also all of the case laws of the Bible. A second element within Reformed theology, what may be called the modern

Westminster Confession element, holds that the eternal moral law of God "is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments."[5] A third element asserts that the law of God cannot be rightly understood or applied to the Christian life until the distinctives of God's eternal moral and covenantal law are understood in their administration under the old and new covenants.

The positions of the Theonomy and Westminster elements stress that the moral law as summarily comprehended in the Mosaic Decalogue is binding upon the Christian today as a rule of life. The new covenant element of Reformed theology, especially that which is baptistic and sovereign grace in theology but which usually does not use the term Reformed in its name, stresses that the Christian today is not without law (1 Cor. 9:21) or left to live without an objective standard or rule of life. This element does not accept the letter and covenantal aspect of the Ten Commandments as the believer's rule of life under the new covenant.[6] This group, consistent with one older confessional tradition, affirms that "all believers are a holy and sanctified people, and that sanctification is a spiritual grace of the new covenant, and an effect of the love of God manifested in the soul, whereby the believer presses after a heavenly and evangelical obedience to all the commands, which Christ as head and King in His new covenant has prescribed to them.[7] All groups agree concerning the abiding nature of moral law, yet they disagree over *how it is covenantly administered.* The third group's position has a distinctive new covenant emphasis concerning biblical law and ethics which finds its basis in the new covenant administration of the law of God as the law of Christ. The former two positions have a distinctive emphasis upon the Ten Commandments of the old covenant, equating, for all practical purposes, God's eternal moral law with the Ten Commandments (some except the fourth commandment). The

distinction between the old and new covenant is minimized by both, but especially by those of the Theonomy position. In summary, then, the basic difference over the lawful use of law in the Christian life is one of hermeneutics—one of interpreting the Bible. To unravel the difference will take time and much precise exegesis of the Holy Scripture[8]—something that can only be mentioned in this article. Now that the misunderstandings of the role of God's law in sanctification have been identified, let us look briefly in a little more depth at the reason for the departure or misunderstandings within Reformed theology.

The Reason for the Departure (Misunderstanding). Many factors stemming from a different approach to interpreting the Bible have resulted in serious misunderstandings. They have arisen out of sincere motives but a wrong use of God's law by those who stress the moral law as summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments as the believer's rule of life. But there are only two factors which I will mention here, and the first one is a result of the second. They are: (1) *failing to distinguish doctrinally between the absolute and covenantal distinctives of God's law;* and (2) *equating, in practice and emphasis, the Ten Commandments with God's eternal moral law and the law of Christ.* For example, more than one-third of the Westminster Larger Catechism is devoted to questions and answers on the Ten Commandments (57 out of 154 pages in my edition, or thirty-seven percent).

To assert that the Ten Commandments, the heart of the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 9:9, 11), given to the nation of Israel (Deut. 5:1–3) as a constitution, are a rule of life for the believer's sanctification under the new covenant causes untold confusion and often leads to binding the believer's conscience. One has only to look at the confusion and bondage that come from trying to make the fourth commandment binding as moral law upon the believer

under the new covenant. The fourth commandment, the seventh-day Sabbath commandment, was the sign of the old covenant (Ex. 31:12–17). But the believer under the new covenant is not governmentally under the old covenant nor its sign. By faith in Christ the new covenant believer has entered into an eternal Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:3a, 9–10), not just on the seventh day or on one in seven. By faith he is to observe the faith-rest of God every day. Yet, he does not forsake the assembly of the saints on the Lord's Day as was the apostolic practice of the New Testament church. This is a liberty that never existed in its fulness under the old covenant. It cannot be fully appreciated under the new covenant by those who with good intentions, but with a wrong use of old covenant law, bind the new covenant believer's conscience by equating the Ten Commandments with God's eternal moral law[9] and the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2).[10]

Now, I want to make it perfectly plain that I am not saying that there is no continuity between the law of Moses and the law of Christ, because, for example, Galatians 5:14, citing Leviticus 19:18,"You shall love your neighbor as yourself," establishes that there is a relationship. However, it needs to be noted that the commandment to love one's neighbor and to love God antedate and have divine priority over the covenant law of Moses. How so, you say. Because Jesus, the Lawgiver Himself, declared that loving God and one's neighbor are the first and second great commandments, and "on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:36–40). This means, among other things, that the old covenant law of Moses, the Ten Commandments and other statutes, depend or hang upon the first and second great commandments, not the other way around! The two great commandments are the eternal moral law of God ruling all mankind by virtue of man's being created in God's image. All rational human beings, beginning with Adam,

know by nature (Rom. 2:14–15) that they ought to love God with all their heart, mind and soul, and their neighbor as themselves. And as they so love God, they do well if they love their neighbor as themselves. In so doing they "keep the royal law found in the Scripture" (James 2:8). The *continuity* of God's law stems from these two great commandments which are absolute and eternally binding apart from covenantal administration. Indeed, they are integral to both the old covenant's Ten Commandments and the new covenant commandments of Christ.

But there is also a discontinuity.

For example, Paul contrasts the covenant of promise made by God with Abraham and fulfilled by Christ in the new covenant with the old covenant. What does the Scripture say in Galatians 4 concerning the law of Moses given as old covenant law at Mount Sinai? It says: "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son" (4:30). So the law of God is something wider and more inclusive than the law of Moses under the old covenant administration, as 1 Corinthians 9:20–21 should make clear. For the sake of this article, let me say this. Much confusion would be avoided if we would understand the term "the law of God" to represent the eternal moral law of God, the term "law of Moses" to represent the covenant law God gave to Israel through Moses under the old covenant, and the term "law of Christ" to represent the covenant law God gave to believers through Christ under the new covenant. Certainly, until we define what we mean by the term "law," we will never avoid misunderstanding the proper role that God's law and Christ's commandments have in the sanctification of the believer under the new covenant. Until we biblically define our terms and seek to live by the new covenant administration of the law of God, our Christian liberty is in danger of being bound to old covenant law which is no longer in force.

The Christian is not under the law of Moses (as old covenant law), yet he is not without law to God, being in–lawed to Christ (under the new covenant) (1 Cor. 9:20-21). The apostle Paul learned this distinction between the law and the gospel by direct revelation in the Arabian desert; the Christian ought to learn it by accurate handling of the objective revelation of the word of truth.

Conclusion

In conclusion it needs to be stressed that the Christian's freedom from the Law of Moses covenantally administered was of great concern to the apostle Paul in his defense of the faith against the charges of false brethren who were trying to pervert the gospel (see Gal. 2:4 in context). The false brethren were spying out the Christian liberty of the Galatian saints so that they might bring them into bondage. The perversion of the doctrine of Christ in modern Christianity by a theological and personal denial of an effective, penal–substitutionary death, and the danger that is on the increase within Reformed theology of destroying the Christian's freedom from the Law of Moses must be checked with sound biblical exegesis and a bowing to the authority of Christ as Lord of the new covenant. The freedom that the apostle Paul is speaking about in Galatians, writes John Gill,

> is a freedom from the law, both the moral law, as in the hands of Moses, and as a covenant of works, though not from obedience to it as in the hands of Christ, and as a rule of walk and (manner of life).... This liberty is said to be had *in Christ* because Christ is the author it; it is that with which Christ makes His people free; and such as are made free by Him, are free indeed; and is what they come to enjoy by being in Him.[11]

I submit that the following articles, taken from Benjamin Cox's appendix[12] to the 1646 edition of "The First London Confession of Faith," clearly state a new covenant understanding of law, grace and covenant. They read:

> Article IX: Though we that believe in Christ, be not under the law, but under grace, Rom. 6:14; yet we know that we are not lawless, or left to live without a rule: "not without law to God, but under law to Christ" 1 Cor. 9:21. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a law, or commanding rule unto us; whereby, and in obedience whereunto, we are taught to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, Titus 2:11, 12; the directions of Christ in His evangelical word guiding us unto, and in this sober, righteous, and godly walking, 1 Tim. 1:10, 11.
>
> Article X: Though we be not now sent to the law as it was in the hand of Moses, to be commanded thereby, yet Christ in His Gospel teacheth and commandeth us to walk in the same way of righteousness and holiness that God by Moses did command the Israelites to walk in, all the commandments of the Second Table being still delivered unto us by Christ, and all the commandments of the First Table also (as touching the life and spirit of them) in this epitome or brief sum, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, etc.," Matt. 22:37, 38, 39, 40; Rom. 13:8, 9, 10.

The Solution: Galatians 6:14–16

The solution to the doctrinal departures and misunderstandings that we have been addressing is summarized in the text of Galatians 6:14–16 itself. There the Christian church's rule of life is said, in context, to be the cross of Christ and the new creation, not anything else, not even the moral law of God summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments. The rule that the apostle Paul sets forth in Galatians 6:16 is the rule of life for the new covenant Christian. It is this rule that the church and the individual Christian must walk by and continually conform to in doctrine and life. Only then will God's peace and mercy be upon us. Peace in our Christian life and with and among the brethren is impossible when we depart from this God–given

rule. I truly believe with John Stott when he says: "It is a sinful neglect of 'this rule,' . . . which is the main reason why the contemporary church seems to be enjoying so little of the mercy of God and so little internal peace and harmony."[13] May our sovereign God grant us the persevering grace and wisdom to obey His rule. I close with the final words of the apostle Paul to the Galatians: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."

End Notes

1 This article is a slightly edited version of an address delivered by the author at the Seventh Annual Sovereign Grace Fellowship Weekend Doctrinal Conference, Salado, Texas, October 12, 1980.

2 A person must believe that he cannot save himself but that Christ, who is God, is able to save him; otherwise there is no need of a Savior. Such an understanding is a minimum which one must believe in order to be saved by Christ. In this regard, it is Christ who saves: not one's purity (or impurity) of doctrine. But this does not mean that unsound doctrine is of no consequence. For, according to Scripture, unsound doctrine is heretical and divisive and, at best, results in a childish immaturity which causes one to be "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Eph. 4:14). Those who sincerely and truly believe in Christ but inconsistently proclaim and teach a non-effective, non-penal, non-substitutionary atonement will likely mislead others into rejecting Christ as no Savior at all or into believing that they can be true Christians without a substitutionary Savior. But "not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (see Matt. 7:21-23). This is why an effective, penal, substitutionary atonement lies at the heart of the doctrine of the cross of Christ.

3 John R. W. Stott, *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians,* 1968 (Downers Grove, Illlinois: InterVarsity Press), 179.

4 See Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, 1953 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 226

5 Larger Catechism, Question 98, *Westminster Confession of Faith*. This understanding of the law is held not only by Reformed denominations in particular, but more broadly by Reformed Baptist churches which are Reformed in their theology, but differ due to the form of church government and the subjects and mode of Christian baptism.

6 Seventy-five years ago G. B. Stevens saw this issue when he wrote:

> The whole Old Testament system, in all its parts, was taken up into the process of fulfillment and that all its elements of permanent value and validity have been made part and parcel of the gospel. To the old system as such we have no need to go back, because the gospel is its completion, and we have no occasion to supplement Christianity by additions from Judaism. . . . If it be asked, Is not the Christian under the authority of the ten commandments? the reply is, In their Old Testament form and as part of that system, he is not. The essential substance of the ten commandments consists of changeless principles of righteousness, and is therefore a part of Christianity; in that sense the Christian is under the commandments, and no other. . . . The truth which we are considering, stated on its positive side, is that Christianity is complete and sufficient in itself as a guide to faith and action. The whole philosophy of the subject is [revealed] in that most expressive figure of Jesus [where He affirms that] His gospel is not a patch to be sewed on the old garment of Judaism, but a wholly new garment. . . . While, then, we are not under the old system at all, it must always have the greatest value in helping us to understand historically its

> own fulfillment in Christianity. To speak in Paul's language, the Old [Covenant] is glorious, but not with "the glory that surpasseth" (2 Cor. 3:10); that is, it has its true glory in the fact that its mission was to prepare for and to usher in a more perfect system. It was glorious, not so much in itself, as in the great [eschatological] end which it contemplated. In this view it will be seen that the old [covenant] system could well be both temporary and divine [bracketed words are mine].

7 Article XXIX, *The First London Baptist Confession of Faith*, 1646 ed.

8 Complicating the resolution of the differences within Reformed theology is the theology and practice of "The New Charismatics," known as the "Third Wave" movement in twentieth-century charismatic theology. The teachings and practice of this movement are spreading throughout the ecumenical world, emphasizing that the miraculous gifts of signs and wonders were spiritual gifts, not only for the apostolic era, but for the church today. The theology of this movement, which departs from the "second blessing" doctrine of earlier forms of Pentecostal and charismatic theology, will have to be seriously dealt with in many important doctrinal areas, especially the biblical doctrine of sanctification, if such doctrines are to be handled accurately from the Scripture. The author's forthcoming book, titled *The Sovereignty of God the Holy Spirit in Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Part IV, will be an effort to help accomplish this task.

9 The old covenant as a governing code was fulfilled and done away in the institution of the new covenant (Matt. 5:17; 2 Cor. 3:6-18; Heb. 8; 9:15).

10 See John Murray's bondage experience on "Sabbath keeping" in the special 1975 memorial issue to him in *The Banner of Truth*, 22-23.

11 John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, 2. London: Matthews and Leigh, 1809. Also in the reprint ed., vol. 9, *Galatians to Revelation, Gill's Expositor* (Streamwood, Illinois: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979).

12 Printed in 1646 and reprinted with the 1646 edition of *The First London Confession of Faith* in 1981 by Backus Book Publishers, Rochester, New York.

13 Stott, *Galatians*, 181.

Author

Dr. Gary D. Long is executive director of Sovereign Grace Ministries of Colorado, founded in 1980. He is author of several books, including: *Definite Atonement* (1977) and *Biblical Law and Ethics: Absolute and Covenantal* (1981). He completed the Th. M. and Th. D. degrees at Dallas Theological Seminary. Readers may wish to write for other helpful resources from Dr. Long at: P.O. Box 2092, Canon City, Colorado, 81215.