

## Evaluating Progressive Covenantalism’s Approach to the Application of the Mosaic Law

by Ken Casillas<sup>1</sup>

The 2012 publication of *Kingdom through Covenant* formally launched progressive covenantalism (PC) as a system for analyzing the redemptive plan of God and the storyline of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> PC’s *via media* made a splash in the world of biblical theology and generated a plethora of reviews from across the theological spectrum. The negative reactions were largely predictable. In the realm of ecclesiology, for instance, covenant theologians pushed back on PC’s arguments for credobaptism. And in terms of eschatology, dispensationalists could not accept PC’s denial of a land for national Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Another concern that has been noted but not substantially developed is PC’s understanding of the role of the Mosaic law in the Christian life. Given that PC rejects the traditional tripartite division of the law, it is not surprising that some covenant theologians suspect an antinomian drift in PC.<sup>4</sup> Progressive covenantalists have not ignored such challenges. The 2016 book *Progressive Covenantalism* included several essays related to the Christian use of the Mosaic law,<sup>5</sup> including a chapter on PC and ethics by Stephen Wellum.<sup>6</sup> In 2017 Wellum spoke on a podcast episode entitled “Is Progressive Covenantalism Antinomian?” He affirmed that PC upholds God’s moral law and said that progressive covenantalists needed to do more work to flesh out their system’s approach to using the OT law for ethics.<sup>7</sup> One example of this effort is a 2018 doctoral dissertation Wellum chaired regarding PC and

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<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Though now a bit dated, Wade Loring Kuhlewind’s work remains a helpful entrée into the critiques of PC: “‘I Will Plant Them in This Land’: An Analysis and Critique of Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant* with Special Attention to the Progressive Covenantal Land-Promise View” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Michael S. Borg, review of *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *PRJ* 5, no. 1 (2013): 259–62. Compare Samuel Renihan, “*Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, A Review Article,” *JIRBS* 1 (2014): 153–76.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> “Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics,” in *ibid.*, 215–33. This material was incorporated into the second edition of PC’s main text. See *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 782–98. Benjamin L. Merkle also rehearsed the material in *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational & Covenantal Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 123–27.

<sup>7</sup> “Is Progressive Covenantalism Antinomian?—An Interview with Dr. Stephen Wellum,” *Conversations from the Porch* episode 42; accessed July 15, 2022, <https://biblethumpingwingnut.com/2017/02/13/cftp-episode-42-progressive-covenantalism-antinomian-interview-dr-stephen-wellum/>. Compare the Books at a Glance “Interview with Stephen Wellum, co-editor of *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*—Part 2”;

homosexuality.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, that same year progressive covenantalist Thomas Schreiner found himself in an awkward situation. Pastor Andy Stanley used a statement of Schreiner about the Mosaic law to bolster the idea that the church should “unhitch” from the OT.<sup>9</sup> Schreiner responded that his statement had been taken out of context.<sup>10</sup> That appears correct, but the incident again drew attention to the question of how PC approaches the role of the Mosaic law today.

Concern over PC’s approach handling of the law has arisen even from the dispensational camp. Acknowledging that critics have often accused his own system of antinomianism, dispensationalist Mark Snoeberger has recently written:

The progressive covenantal view of law is much more attractive [than the traditional covenantal view] to the dispensationalist, but differences remain—differences that (if this may be said without unfair censure) render the progressive covenantalist more vulnerable to the charge of antinomianism than the dispensationalist is. This is because the progressive covenantalist, with his penchant for suppressing primary authorial intentions in favor of Christological ones, risks the suppression of transcendent elements that remain imbedded in the Mosaic law. It seems to me, at times, that the arrival of Christ so thoroughly shuts down law in the progressive covenantal model that all continuing pedagogical value of Moses for “us on, whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11) is jeopardized. The progressive covenantalist correctly observes that the Mosaic law is given not merely to point men to Christ (if at all) but to serve as a custodian for fallen man in the absence of a more comprehensive solution. But the arrival of that more comprehensive solution (Christ) does not cancel all pedagogical value of Moses for the present day. Indeed, Moses continues to offer us a window into God’s immutable nature and the kinds of civility that stabilize fallen society in every era. It is for this reason that Paul finds *in Moses* vivid ethical instruction for the NT saint about immorality, idolatry, testing God, complaining, and so forth (vv. 6–10). Paul preaches Christ, to be sure, as the only source of *redemption*, but he also preaches civility, morality, and restraint for all persons in God’s image as we live out our citizenship in God’s *other government*—the civil sphere. And far be it from us to abandon this part of God’s message in our OT homiletics.<sup>11</sup>

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accessed July 18, 2022, <https://www.booksataglance.com/author-interviews/interview-stephen-wellum-co-editor-progressive-covenantalism-charting-course-dispensational-covenantal-theologies-part-2/>.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Winton Powell, “Gay Christian? A Progressive Covenantal Response to David Gushee, James Brownson, and Matthew Vines” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> “Jesus Ended the Old Covenant Once and for All”; accessed January 18, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/october-web-only/andy-stanley-irresistible-response-to-foster.html>.

<sup>10</sup> “The Old Covenant Is Over. The Old Testament Is Authoritative.”; accessed January 18, 2023, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/old-covenant-response-andy-stanley/>.

<sup>11</sup> Mark E. Snoeberger, “A Traditional Dispensational Response,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, ed. Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022), 245–46. Throughout the present article all emphasis in quotations from sources is original.

The issues raised above call for fuller assessment of PC's understanding of the current role of the Mosaic law. In this article I move in that direction by briefly summarizing and evaluating key writings of four authors in the PC camp. Two of these develop a framework for the PC approach to the law: Thomas Schreiner and Stephen Wellum. The other two propose more specific methodologies for applying the law: James Todd and Jason DeRouchie. In an effort to represent their views accurately, a number of direct quotations are provided. Given space constraints, the discussion will not go into depth on progressive-covenantal exegesis of individual biblical texts. Rather, the focus will be on the core ideas in PC's theology and practice of the contemporary application of the Mosaic law.

### *Thomas Schreiner*

Thomas Schreiner's research on the law significantly predates the publication of *Kingdom through Covenant* and is too extensive to examine comprehensively here.<sup>12</sup> His work focuses on the doctrine of justification and the New Perspective on Paul but also addresses broader issues regarding the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic law. Schreiner's question-answer book on the law provides handy access to his views and serves as an ideal starting point for studying the PC approach.<sup>13</sup>

### Summary

Schreiner takes pains to explain that Christians are not "under the law." Based especially on Galatians 3–4, he understands that Pauline phrase as a redemptive-historical reference to "the time period when the Mosaic covenant was operative" (73). Since Israel could not keep the law, this era was tantamount to living under the dominion of sin (Rom 6:14–15) (74–75). Gentiles were never technically under the law, yet unsaved Gentiles are "still considered to be in the realm of law" (80). This is because Romans 2:12–16 and a few other texts indicate that Gentiles intuitively know God's expectations for their lives. In any case, the Mosaic Covenant was a temporary administration (2 Cor 3; Gal 3:15–18) (67–69).<sup>14</sup> It was abolished because it was fulfilled by Christ: the law reached its goal in him (Rom 10:4) (69). Thus, Christians are not under the Mosaic Covenant. "The laws are not authoritative as stipulations of the old covenant since that covenant has passed away" (67).

Furthermore, "strictly speaking, the [Reformed] idea that believers are under the third use of the law [the law as a rule of life] is mistaken, for we have seen that the entire law is abolished for believers" (99). Likewise, the Reformed distinctions of moral, civil, and ceremonial laws are not exegetically airtight (90). More importantly, "Paul argues that the entirety of the law has been set aside now that Christ has come. To say that the 'moral' elements of the law continue to be authoritative blunts the

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<sup>12</sup> See especially Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> A doctoral dissertation chaired by Schreiner developed at length the limitations of the Mosaic Covenant. It was by Jason C. Meyer, who also became associated with PC. The work was published as *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, NACSBT (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009). Compare idem, "The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 69–99.

truth that the entire Mosaic covenant is no longer in force for believers” (90).<sup>15</sup> Along these lines, Schreiner discusses some specific laws but gives special attention to the Sabbath (209–17). Since the Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant, it is not in force today. Paul teaches as much in Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:16–17. The creational Sabbath does not establish a weekly Sabbath for all ages but foreshadows “the eschatological rest of the people of God (Heb. 4:1–10)” (214). Additionally, Scripture does not present the Lord’s Day as the Sabbath.

Despite his emphasis on the discontinuity between the Testaments, Schreiner sees an ongoing role for the OT law in the Christian life. He explains that in the first century it was sometimes advisable to follow Mosaic laws voluntarily for the purpose of evangelizing Jews (1 Cor 9:20) (75) or maintaining fellowship with Jewish believers (Acts 15) (181–84). More significantly, Schreiner says that the idea of the third use of the law “is not entirely wrong” since some of Paul’s many exhortations “are from the Old Testament law, and surely they function as a standard for the lives of believers today.” What makes them authoritative is not that they are in the Mosaic law but that “they represent God’s character. Even though the Old Testament is not literally binding upon believers, we see the principles and patterns and moral norms that still apply to us today since the Old Testament is the word of God” (99). Because the law teaches such moral norms, even the moral-civil-ceremonial “distinction has some usefulness” (93). Here Schreiner agrees with Dorsey that the Mosaic law “continues to be ‘binding . . . in a revelatory and pedagogical sense” (94).<sup>16</sup>

This includes creation ordinances that are embedded in the law, though identifying these ordinances is not always a simple matter. Since the Sabbath issue is a major point of contention between covenant theology and progressive covenantalism, it was appropriate that in *Progressive Covenantalism* Schreiner expanded on his arguments concerning the Sabbath. There he gives four reasons for *not* considering the Sabbath a creation ordinance. (1) God did not require the patriarchs to observe the Sabbath. (2) The appearance of an element in the creation account does not automatically make it a creation ordinance. For example, God does not require all human beings to be farmers like Adam. (3) Identifying a creation ordinance involves canonical confirmation. For instance, homosexuality is proscribed throughout the canon, and this confirms the conclusion that male-female marriage is a creation ordinance (Gen 2:24). However, the progress of the canon indicates that the Sabbath is not mandatory in the present era. (4) Exodus 20:8–11 appeals to the creation account only as an analogy for Mosaic Sabbath observance, not as a grounding rationale.<sup>17</sup>

Returning to Schreiner’s *40 Questions* book, his ethic foregrounds not the law of Moses but “the law of Christ” mentioned in Galatians 6:2 and 1 Corinthians 9:21. He defines this contextually as “the law of love,” especially as exemplified by the life of Christ (103). Yet Schreiner also upholds Paul’s teaching that love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:13–14). Schreiner explains that while obeying commandments does not exhaust the meaning of love, “love fulfills the moral norms that reflect the character of God. . . . Moral norms stipulate the nature of love, clarifying what is

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<sup>15</sup> This was the statement quoted by Andy Stanley in the blogpost cited in footnote 9 above.

<sup>16</sup> Citing David A. Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise,” *JETS* 34, no. 3 (1991): 325.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers,” in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 168–70.

righteous and what is unrighteous” (106). Thus, the moral norms taught by the Mosaic law are included in the law of Christ (103–4). These moral norms deserve to be preached today (227–30). Schreiner even sees a pattern for Christian experience in the complex statements the psalmist makes about the law in Psalm 119. “God’s commands by the work of his Spirit cast believers onto the grace of God, and God uses the commands in conjunction with his Spirit to strengthen believers so that they rely upon God’s grace to please him” (87).

### Evaluation

In assessing Schreiner’s approach to the Mosaic law, one could quibble with his discussions of the Sabbath. A traditional covenant theologian would, of course, want to maintain the tripartite division of the law and would argue for the normativity of the Sabbath. Yet even apart from the input of theological systems, Schreiner’s arguments concerning the Sabbath are not equally weighty. For instance, the argument that God did not require the patriarchs to observe the Sabbath is an argument from silence that may or may not be convincing. As with the Sabbath, we have no record that God had instituted a distinction between clean and unclean animals prior to the Mosaic Covenant. Nevertheless, God assumes such distinctions in his commands to Noah (Gen 7:2, 8; cf. 8:20).

On the whole, however, Schreiner maintains the fine balance needed between the continuity and discontinuity of the Testaments. He emphasizes that Christians are not under the OT law, but he believes the law teaches ethical standards that continue into the church age. Schreiner might have avoided Andy Stanley’s misrepresentation by further nuancing some of his statements. Yet a careful reading of Schreiner’s entire work exonerates him from concerns of antinomianism. In fact, in 2013 dispensationalist William Combs commended Schreiner’s *40 Questions* book as “probably” one of the two “most helpful” works on the issue of the Mosaic law.<sup>18</sup> Combs agrees with Schreiner on Dorsey’s formulation: the law remains binding on the believer “in a revelatory and pedagogical sense.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise, dispensationalist Myron Houghton argued against contemporary Sabbath observance in ways that parallel Schreiner’s approach.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps because of the broad scope of his work, what Schreiner lacks is detail regarding the contemporary application of the Mosaic law. In addition to discussing the Sabbath, he does have a chapter arguing that the tithe is not a requirement or standard for giving today (219–21). These negative examples are helpful enough, but the reader is left wishing for more positive examples as well as guidelines for deriving moral norms from the Mosaic law. One has to look to other progressive-covenantal authors for this kind of material.

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<sup>18</sup> William W. Combs, “Paul, the Law, and Dispensationalism,” *DBSJ* 18 (2013): 21–22.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>20</sup> *Law and Grace* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist, 2011), 171–75.

*Stephen Wellum*

Stephen Wellum has not written on the Mosaic law as much as Schreiner. Yet his primer on ethics mirrors Schreiner's approach and provides useful categories for understanding the progressive-covenantal theology of the law.<sup>21</sup>

Summary

In his introduction Wellum points out that PC would agree with many of covenant theology's conclusions about what God requires today. The two systems differ, however, in *how* they arrive at those conclusions (216). Wellum then lays out five steps PC follows as it "seeks to determine what the moral law is and thus establish the biblical norm for doing ethics," and these become the way PC avoids the charge of antinomianism (216).

First, "all Scripture is authoritative and thus provides the norm for Christian ethics" (216).<sup>22</sup> Here Wellum appeals to 2 Timothy 3:15–17, which highlights the authority of the OT as God's Word. "Although Christians are not 'under the law' as a *covenant*, it still functions as *Scripture* and demands our complete obedience" (217). Scripture reveals the character and will of God, which form "the objective standard of morality" (217). Nevertheless, understanding Scripture and its application requires noting the covenantal location of any passage. This process shows that certain divine requirements, e.g., circumcision, do not carry over from one covenant to another. Consequently, Wellum makes a distinction "between biblical morality and Christian ethics" (217).

Second, before expanding on this distinction, Wellum makes a negative point: "The tripartite distinction of the Mosaic law is *not* the means for determining what is morally binding for Christians today" (218). Three factors lead to this conclusion. (1) "Scripture views the old covenant as a unit or package, and it does not appeal to the tripartite distinction as *the* means by which the continuity and discontinuity of moral law is established for Christians today" (218). While the Bible does sometimes distinguish types of laws (e.g., Matt 23:23), it still upholds the unity of the entire law covenant (e.g., Gal 5:3; Jas 2:8–13). (2) "Scripture teaches that the entire law covenant was temporary in God's plan, serving a number of purposes, but ultimately pointing forward to its fulfillment, *telos*, and terminus in Christ (Rom 10:4; Gal 3:15–4:7; Heb 7:11–12)" (219). (3) Since Christ has come, "the NT teaches that Christians are no longer 'under the law' as a covenant, and thus it no longer functions as a 'direct authority' for us (e.g., Rom 6:14–15; 1 Cor 9:20–21; Gal 4:4–5; 5:13–18)" (220). Here Wellum emphasizes Paul's distinction between the Mosaic law and the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:20–21). The law of Christ includes the moral norms expressed in the Mosaic law. Likewise, the Mosaic law is a tool God uses to instruct us in wise living. But that does not mean the Mosaic law as such is our authority. This seems to be why the NT speaks of Christians "fulfilling" the law rather than "doing" or "keeping" it.

Wellum's third step gets to the heart of PC: "Viewing all Scripture through the lens of Christ and the New Covenant determines what is morally binding upon Christians today" (222). The OT laws

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<sup>21</sup> "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 215–33.

<sup>22</sup> I have slightly reformatted Wellum's five points from the header style in which they appear.

about sacrifice provide an illustration. Since Christ has fulfilled the animal sacrifices, we no longer offer such sacrifices, but they still teach truths that apply to our lives. Something similar holds for all the laws: “No part of the law is applied to us without first placing it in its covenantal location (immediate and epochal context), and then asking how the entire covenant is fulfilled in Christ (canonical context)” (222). Through Christ the New Covenant has both *replaced* the Old Covenant and *fulfilled* it. Matthew 5:17–20 comes to the fore here. “Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in that they point forward to him, and Jesus is the one who brings them to their intended end. The Law *and* the Prophets, then, have a *prophetic* function as they foreshadow and predict the coming of Christ” (224). But additionally, as seen in the antitheses of Matthew 5:21–48, “in his *teaching* Jesus *fulfills* the law not simply by extending, annulling, or merely intensifying it but by demonstrating ‘the direction in which it [OT law] points.’ In so doing, Jesus views himself as ‘the eschatological goal of the OT, and thereby its sole authoritative interpreter, the one through whom alone the OT finds its valid continuity and significance’” (224–25).<sup>23</sup> Correspondingly, Christ’s followers look to their Lord’s work and teaching to determine how to apply OT laws in the present age. Here we should avoid two extremes. (1) We should reject the assumption that a law is in force unless the NT explicitly modifies or abrogates it. This assumption echoes the *a priori* tripartite view and ignores covenantal progression. (2) We should also reject the assumption that an OT law is *not* in force unless the NT repeats it. For instance, the OT prohibitions of bestiality (Exod 22:19; Lev 18:23; 20:16) and cursing the deaf (Lev 19:14) stand, even though they are not mentioned in the NT.

Wellum’s fourth step provides some guidance for discerning moral norms. “The *doing* of ethics requires a careful unpacking of the Bible’s story line and categories” (226). This involves “both the Bible’s progressive unfolding of the covenants *and* the larger biblical-theological framework of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation” (226). Here the concept of creational norms comes into focus. Wellum returns to the example of bestiality. The consistency between the law’s prohibition and the qualitative creational distinction between humans and animals (Gen 2:18–25) strengthens the case against bestiality. Ethical matters are not settled simply by noting Sinaitic requirements (227):

In order to discern God’s moral will, we need first to begin in creation, then think through how sin has distorted God’s order, walk through the covenants, and discover how God’s redemptive promise will restore and transform the created order—a reality that has now been realized in Christ. At every stage in redemptive history, the covenants reflect God’s moral demands, thus explaining why we expect *and* find a continuity of moral demand across the canon.”

Elsewhere Wellum puts it this way: “Differences exist between the old and new covenants in the detailed stipulations but not in the content of righteousness.”<sup>24</sup>

Wellum’s fifth step clarifies his approach by analyzing several specific laws: “Consider some illustrations of doing ethics from a ‘whole Bible’ and under the new covenant” (“Ethics,” 228). The

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<sup>23</sup> Here Wellum is citing D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:144.

<sup>24</sup> *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd ed., 395.

first illustration concerns sexual matters. Like Schreiner, Wellum maintains the OT's prohibition of homosexuality because homosexuality is a violation of the creational norm of heterosexual marriage. But what about the fact that God allowed polygamy in earlier stages of redemptive history? The creational norm of monogamy and the revelation of the Christ-church relationship in marital terms together argue that polygamy is not tolerable in the New Covenant era. Thus, in some cases the NT standard is actually higher than the OT's. This includes the NT's more developed teaching on love. Wellum also touches on a few of the more challenging OT laws (231):

In regard to such demands as not sowing two seeds in a field, not eating unclean foods, the need to circumcise our male children, or the treatment of blood disorders, etc., we do not directly obey these commands as covenantal obligation. However, *as Scripture*, the law covenant is for our instruction. As we apply these commands, we must think through whether old covenant commands are tied to creation, whether they are tied solely to the old era, and how they are fulfilled in the NT. By following this procedure, we learn how to apply all of Scripture to us in Christ.

We should follow this approach even with the Decalogue. For instance, Paul's quotation of the fifth commandment in Ephesians 6:2 helps us see that the requirement to honor one's parents holds today. Yet verse 3 expands the promise of long life in Canaan to cover the whole earth, "thus giving further confirmation that the law covenant is applied to us today in and through Christ and his glorious new covenant work" (233).

### Evaluation

In evaluating Wellum's approach, one could focus on particulars. For example, "fulfill" in Matthew 5:17 is a significant crux, and commentators have suggested other interpretations besides the one Wellum prefers.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the brevity of Wellum's illustrations leaves questions in the reader's mind. For instance, regarding the Mosaic food laws he writes (231),

Even though they no longer apply to us directly, they are instructive for us. In thinking through why God gave them in the OT *and* how they are fulfilled in Christ, we discover that their primary purpose was to separate God's people from the nations and to instruct them about their need for

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<sup>25</sup> For example, John Nolland writes, "'Fulfil' must be taken in a manner that allows it to be an appropriate counterpart to 'annul'. The chosen sense must also illuminate what is coming in 5:21–48: it is clear that Matthew is not simply reaffirming the status quo. Jesus is functioning in the role of teacher throughout this sermon (see 5:2 and the form of the material content of the sermon); so 'to fulfil' must focus primarily on what Jesus offers as a teacher. If this framework of constraints has been rightly constructed, then many of the proposed senses of 'fulfil' can be dismissed: to add to the Law; to replace the old Law with a new one which transcends it; to replace the Law with the spirit of love; to confirm the validity of the Law; to live out (perfectly) the requirements of the Law; to empower others to live out the Law's demands; to fulfil the prophetic content of the Law and the Prophets. . . . The fulfilment language represents a claim that Jesus' programmatic commitment, far from undercutting the role of the Law and the Prophets, is to enable God's people to live out the Law more effectively." *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 218, 219. Compare David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 162–63, and Richard E. Averbeck, *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church: Reading the Torah in the Light of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022), 225–54.



internal heart transformation (Mark 7:1–23; Acts 10–11). Although these purposes have ended in Christ, we as new covenant believers are still instructed by them. In fact, the Jerusalem Council had to resolve the theological and practical implications of these issues; otherwise the entire gospel was at stake (Acts 10–11; 15; Rom 14:1–15:13; Gal 1:6–10).

These comments are useful as far as they go, but one still wonders precisely how the food laws instruct us today. If their purpose has been accomplished, what lessons do they continue to teach?

While such details matter, the bigger picture of Wellum’s approach deserves primary consideration. He ends his discussion where he began: “Most Christians, regardless of their commitment to covenant or dispensational theology, will arrive at similar conclusions. But, as noted above, where the important difference lies is in *how* we get there” (233). This difference is clear when one compares PC with covenant theology’s moral-civil-ceremonial scheme. I find Wellum’s arguments against that scheme to be compelling.<sup>26</sup> But comparisons between PC and other theological systems become fuzzy. One reason is that, as reflected in his footnotes, Wellum’s major arguments rely heavily on scholars who do not, to my knowledge, subscribe to PC as a theological system—specifically Douglas Moo,<sup>27</sup> Brian Rosner,<sup>28</sup> and Michael Hill.<sup>29</sup> This raises the question as to how distinctive the progressive-covenantal approach to the law actually is.

The matter only becomes fuzzier when one considers dispensational statements about the law. For Combs, Moo—one of Wellum’s main sources—is the other “most helpful” author in this field besides Schreiner. In fact, Combs says that Moo’s “modified Lutheran” approach “is in agreement with the traditional dispensational view of the Law” and is slightly preferable to Strickland’s explicitly

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<sup>26</sup> In my monograph *The Law and the Christian* I wrote the following (21–22): “I question their [Reformed theologians] division of the law into moral, ceremonial, and civil categories. The Bible does make some commandments more important than others (e.g., Matt. 22:37–40) and also subordinates certain matters of worship to more fundamental moral/spiritual concerns (e.g., Mic. 6:6–8; Matt. 23:23). But it also emphasizes that the Mosaic law is an indivisible unity (e.g., Gal. 5:3; James 2:10–11).

“Although the three proposed categories are reasonable, the Bible does not make these rigid distinctions, nor does it make such distinctions the basis for determining application. Here again, contemporary Reformed writers have critiqued their own tradition and have issued helpful correctives [citing Knox Chamblin, Vern Poythress, and John Frame]. In fact, I once heard a Reformed Old Testament scholar [Bruce Waltke] argue that even the Ten Commandments cannot be equated exactly with ‘moral law,’ or else Christians would need to observe the Sabbath on Saturday instead of Sunday.”

<sup>27</sup> See especially Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Christ As the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 319–76, as well as Moo’s responses to the other views expounded in this volume. Moo has said that New Covenant Theology is “close to the right” perspective on the continuity and discontinuity of the Testaments. Foreword to Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant, 2002), xiv. Moo similarly thinks PC is “on the right track.” Nevertheless, he rebuts some of Gentry and Wellum’s argumentation. In fact, Moo says, “I am not so sure that ‘covenant’ is *the* structuring element of the biblical story, although the authors make a good case for it.” “Kingdom through Covenant: A Review by Douglas Moo; accessed January 18, 2023, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/kingdom-covenant-douglas-moo/>.

<sup>28</sup> See Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> See Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias, 2012).

dispensational view.<sup>30</sup> One can identify additional common ground between PC and dispensationalism. Houghton harmonizes Paul's negative and positive statements about the law by distinguishing between "the law itself and the righteous standard of the law. . . . Spirit-controlled believers are free from the law of sin and death, but exhibit the righteous requirement of the law in their lives."<sup>31</sup> Chou writes that the Mosaic laws "are actually *applications and demonstrations of transcendent theological realities, ones established at creation*. . . . While we may not be under the law itself, we are still under what the law pointed to: the character of God and what he established at creation."<sup>32</sup> Such comments from dispensationalists convey the essence of what Wellum says about how the Christian should approach the law. Admittedly, some dispensationalists will not agree with Wellum that the church is under the New Covenant.<sup>33</sup> More will argue that PC's focus on "redemptive history" is too narrow to embrace the fulness of Scripture and the plan of God. From what I can gather, however, these issues have little or no practical impact on the question of the application of the OT laws today.<sup>34</sup> Wellum strives to avoid antinomianism, and he does so in a way that overlaps considerably with dispensationalism.

### *James Todd*

James Todd is not a leading scholar in the PC camp. Yet he states that his book *Sinai and the Saints* "has strong affinities with two recently proposed theological systems: (1) New Covenant Theology and (2) Progressive Covenantalism."<sup>35</sup> This book deserves attention since it is written for laypeople and shows how someone influenced by PC fleshes out the relationship of the Mosaic law to the Christian life.

### Summary

Todd's introduction expresses special concern for apologetics and evangelism. Christians lose credibility before the world when it appears that we are arbitrarily picking and choosing which Mosaic laws apply today and which do not. After chapter 1 defines key terms such as *Torah*, chapter 2 surveys the various views concerning the Christian and the law. Here Todd highlights common ground among the views. "First, proponents of all the views affirm that the old covenant laws do not serve as the basis for a person's salvation. . . . Second, each view has some adherents who derive principles from the old covenant laws in order to apply them to modern believers. . . . A third area of common ground

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<sup>30</sup> "Paul, the Law, and Dispensationalism," 22. Compare Wayne G. Strickland, "The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensationalist View," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 229–79, as well as Strickland's responses to the other views expounded in this volume.

<sup>31</sup> *Law and Grace*, 119–20.

<sup>32</sup> Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel), 216–17.

<sup>33</sup> See Mike Stallard, ed., *Dispensational Understanding of the New Covenant* (Arlington Heights, IL: Regular Baptist, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> See Snoeberger, 163–79.

<sup>35</sup> James M. Todd III, *Sinai and the Saints: Reading Old Covenant Laws for the New Covenant Community* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 224n11, Kindle.

among the different views is the affirmation that the old covenant laws reflect God’s character” (31–32). Todd then focuses on the core difference among the views: “which old covenant laws modern Christians are under” (32). He speaks of “moral law Christians” (largely covenant theology), “Ten Commandments Christians” (the popular spun-down version of moral-law Christianity), and “No-Old-Law Christians.” The third group divides into subgroups that emphasize discontinuity: basically dispensationalism and Lutheranism. Todd’s own position represents a third subgroup within the “No-Old-Law” category (43):

I affirm that the old covenant was a temporary covenant God made with the nation of Israel for the purpose of setting them apart and using them to bless the other nations as his “kingdom of priests” (Ex 19:6). If Israel obeyed Yahweh’s commands, he would bless them and use them as his instrument to bless the nations. Unfortunately, Israel repeatedly broke their covenant with Yahweh. Therefore, the old covenant highlighted Israel’s sinfulness and led to a greater display of God’s wrath against them. Israel’s sin and God’s corresponding judgment demonstrated to the Israelites (and us, as later readers) that the old covenant could not produce righteousness in Israel and that God would have to do a greater work to produce this required righteousness in his people. This greater work came in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who fulfilled and thereby ended the old covenant and inaugurated the new covenant, a covenant that the authors of the Hebrew Bible foretold on numerous occasions. Christ’s followers therefore are not under the old covenant laws but under the law of Christ. Although there is some overlap between the ethical requirements of both laws, the motivation and ability to obey differ significantly between the law of Christ and the old covenant. Under the new covenant, God transforms his people’s hearts, blesses them unconditionally, and empowers them to live holy lives through his Spirit.

Succeeding chapters unpack Todd’s approach. Chapter 3 overviews the Pentateuch, and then chapters 4 and 5 detail the Pentateuch’s treatment of the Mosaic law. Todd shows how the law was given to a single nation in a specific historical setting in a unique covenant with God aiming at a particular purpose. But he especially demonstrates how the Pentateuch’s storyline establishes the inability of Israel to keep the law and thus points to a future divine solution. This theme is tied in with NT statements about the “condemning” role of the law in God’s redemptive plan (e.g., Rom 4:15).

In chapter 6 Todd goes on to deal with the Ten Commandments. The following statements summarize his bottom line (94–95):

Since Yahweh’s covenant with Israel serves as the historical anchor for these commandments, any argument for a broader application of these commandments must establish that Yahweh intended the Ten Commandments for a wider audience. Even though the New Testament authors do quote some of the commandments . . . we can demonstrate that one command did not extend to all nations. More specifically, Paul identifies one commandment that has no authority over Christians: the Sabbath.

In dealing with the Sabbath, Todd's arguments are similar to those of Schreiner, whom he footnotes. Todd gives some frank warnings to "Ten Commandments Christians." "The first potential way Christians can bring harm to the message of the gospel is through their hypocrisy regarding the Sabbath," that is claiming to live by the Decalogue but not observing the Sabbath the way the Decalogue requires (104). "The second potential way Christians can harm the witness of the church in the world is through modeling bad biblical interpretation," that is, a willy-nilly approach (104). "The third potential way Christians can damage the church's witness is by modeling a lack of love toward other believers," that is, by violating the teaching of Romans 14 as it relates to the Sabbath (105). On the Ten Commandments more broadly, Todd points out nuances in how the NT writers cite nine of the ten, nuances that should keep readers from viewing the Decalogue as an immediate authority over Christians. He concludes: "Paul's use does not mean Christians are under the jurisdiction of the Ten Commandments; however, some of them provide a good example of proper behavior under the new covenant" (107).

Interestingly, Todd's seventh chapter is entitled "Does This Mean I Can Do Whatever I Want?" His short answer to the problem of antinomianism is that "the law . . . of Moses is not the guide for the Christian; the guide for the Christian is the law of Christ" (109). He defines the essence of the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:20–21; Gal 6:2) as love for God and neighbor (Mark 12:28–34; Gal 5:14). And love for neighbor is specifically patterned after the self-sacrificing example of Christ (John 15:12–13). It is especially directed toward the community of believers but has an evangelistic impact on unbelievers (John 13:34–35). "One could obey all ten of the Ten Commandments and never come close to the sacrificial love demanded in the law of Christ. In this sense, the law of Christ requires a higher commitment and a greater sacrifice than the Ten Commandments" (112). From the law of Christ, Todd moves to natural law, and here one gets a better picture of how he views the Mosaic law (116):

When the ethical demands of the new covenant overlap with those of the old covenant, Christians should not conclude that we are still under the old covenant; rather, we should attribute the overlap to both covenants reflecting God's universal standards of right and wrong. In other words, some of the old covenant laws are expressions of God's universal moral law, but the old covenant laws themselves are not the moral law given to all people for all time. In particular, the Ten Commandments have a high degree of overlap with God's natural law, yet they are not identical. The old covenant laws that reflect God's universal natural law are historical and covenantal expressions of God's natural law.

Todd concludes chapter 7 by presenting contrasts between the old and new covenants, highlighting the sanctifying role of the Spirit as a provision of the new covenant.

Chapter 8 answers the question, "Why Should We Read the Laws?" Here Todd urges believers to study and apply the Mosaic laws, and then illustrates how to do so. His case studies take the form of analyses of OT themes such as the tabernacle, the sacrificial system, holiness, and kingship. These are related to NT developments, leading to general applications to the Christian life. For example, the tabernacle legislation helps the church understand its role as God's dwelling place and encourages believers toward holiness. In terms of the use of the Mosaic law for contemporary ethics, Todd

recommends this: “We need to derive principles from larger sections of laws or larger themes in the laws, and we must ground these principles in the work of Christ and his fulfillment of the Old Covenant. We should be very cautious about trying to derive a principle from every old covenant law. Such an approach can become extremely subjective and miss the big picture of the Pentateuch’s message” (142). In chapter 9 Todd returns to the storyline of the Pentateuch and sets forth how it anticipates God’s future work of “heart change, a coming king, and Israel’s return to the land” (153). He then traces these themes through the Prophets and into the NT. Then Todd’s conclusion deals with the Jerusalem Council as a way of reinforcing his argument that the Mosaic Covenant is not the Christian’s authority.

Todd’s appendices give key insight into his views. In the first one he makes a brief biblical and natural-law case against homosexuality. Yet he also says, “I urge modern Christians not to use Leviticus 18 or 20 in modern discussions over homosexuality” (191). The reason is that these chapters contain other Old Covenant laws that Christians do not follow, and the inconsistencies create confusion. The second appendix deals with the second commandment. Todd argues that this command’s prohibition of images of false gods is rooted in the uniqueness of Yahweh and therefore expresses a timeless divine requirement. However, OT theophanies and anthropomorphisms and especially the incarnation argue that visual images of Christ or even God the Father are permissible in the New Covenant age—not as objects of worship but as aids in worship. Todd’s final appendix responds to a couple of anticipated challenges to his position. The psalmist’s love for the law (Pss 19, 119) is consistent with Paul’s teaching that the law is good (Rom 7:12) but does not indicate that Christians should try to live under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Covenant. Nor does Matthew 5:17–20. According to Todd, this text teaches “that the entire Hebrew Bible finds its ultimate meaning in the Messiah” (203). This includes Jesus’ teaching that some specific laws are brought to an end (e.g., Matt 15:11; Mark 7:19) and the NT’s broader teaching that Jesus’ work brings an end to the Mosaic Covenant as a whole.

### Evaluation

Though only barely apparent in the summary above, Todd’s book brings together an impressive amount of biblical theology and presents it in an engaging style. While he focuses more on the OT data, his position largely parallels that of Schreiner and Wellum. It also parallels what dispensationalists have written. For instance, dispensationalist Paul Hartog’s definition of “the law of Christ” sounds like it could have been written by Todd: “the self-giving and burden-bearing ‘love of neighbor’ as taught by Christ, as exemplified by Christ (chiefly in his Gospel sacrifice), as empowered by the Spirit of Christ, and as communally observed within the Body of Christ.”<sup>36</sup>

Three specifics of Todd’s approach raise concern. First, while he speaks of Israel’s ministry to bless the nations, Todd does not draw attention to an aspect of that ministry revealed in passages such as Deuteronomy 4:5–8. In anticipating that Israel’s obedience would attract other nations to the wisdom and righteousness of Israel’s laws, this text implies that those laws revealed divine norms for

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<sup>36</sup> “The ‘Law of Christ’ in Pauline Theology and New Testament Ethics,” *DBSJ* 26 (2021), 82.

those nations. Dispensationalists such as Eugene Merrill highlight this point.<sup>37</sup> Israel's role as an ethical model to the nations is even acknowledged in *Kingdom through Covenant*.<sup>38</sup> Its absence in Todd's work is a significant lacuna that tends to lessen the universal relevance of Israel's laws.

Second, while Todd's drive for consistency and objectivity is commendable, I believe he goes too far when he tells us not to look for a timeless principle in each Mosaic law. If his point is that a particular law does not necessarily teach a principle that is distinct from principles taught by the other laws, there can be no objection. The laws overlap in their ethical significance. Additionally, identifying the specific reason for some laws is notoriously difficult. In fact, dispensationalist Rolland McCune has written,

Certain expressions of the Mosaic code do, in fact, appear to be arbitrary, for example, the separation laws which delineated clean and unclean animals, which prohibited plowing with an ox and a donkey hitched to the same implement, and which forbade sowing mixed seed (Lev 20:24–26; Deut 14:1–20; 22:9–11). These prohibitions do not seem to be intrinsically moral, not least since they are not binding today, even while they were, at that time, expressions of God's holy will. Other examples could be given (e.g., the Sabbath).<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, “arbitrary” laws can still teach ethical principles. Some items prohibited by the separation laws may have had pagan associations in the ANE context. Yet even if there was nothing inherently or associationally wrong with a particular prohibited item, each separation law evidently functioned as an object lesson on the importance of Israel's spiritual and moral purity.<sup>40</sup> Todd's viewpoint seems likely to minimize this kind of observation. Thankfully, at least in a footnote he encourages readers wanting a more thoroughgoing approach to consider Christopher Wright's paradigmatic approach to the Mosaic law (224n9).<sup>41</sup>

Third, though one can appreciate Todd's sensitivity about the difficulties of using Leviticus 18 and 20 to deal with the homosexuality issue, his approach is problematically restrictive. Brian Powell's dissertation tackles contemporary debates and presents a comprehensive biblical theology of homosexuality from a progressive-covenantal standpoint.<sup>42</sup> He upholds in detail the teaching of Leviticus 18 and 20 as part of the consistent biblical argument against homosexuality and answers the

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<sup>37</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 116–17.

<sup>38</sup> *Kingdom through Covenant*, 2nd ed, 364.

<sup>39</sup> *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Volume 2: The Doctrines of Man, Sin, Christ, and the Holy Spirit* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 46. Interestingly, for support McCune cites Reformed theologian Francis Turretin's distinction between “moral” and “positive” laws. See *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 2:2.

<sup>40</sup> On the food laws, see Robert D. Bell, *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2010), 49–65; Rhett Powell Dodson, “Discerning Truths of Holiness: The Theology and Message of Leviticus 11–15” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1998). On the mixture laws, compare Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 289–90; Merrill, 300–301; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 242.

<sup>41</sup> See Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> “Gay Christian?”

objections raised against these passages. Whether or not the reader finds all of Powell's interpretations convincing,<sup>43</sup> he shows that PC need not avoid difficult passages in using Mosaic laws for ethics. While Todd aims at avoiding confusion, his dismissiveness toward Leviticus 18 and 20 may well confuse the laypeople he is trying to help. More seriously, it has the effect of undermining the authority of Scripture. In light of this and the other points I have made about *Sinai and the Saints*, Todd's approach illustrates how a PC-type approach has the potential for the kind of problem Snoberger warned about.

*Jason DeRouchie*

Jason DeRouchie has written on various elements of PC.<sup>44</sup> In his widely acclaimed textbook on OT interpretation, the chapter on practical theology discusses the Mosaic law. Though briefer than Todd's work, it is more programmatic, developing a method for analyzing each of the OT laws from a progressive-covenantal perspective.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See especially his handling of the prohibition of sexual intercourse during menstruation (Lev 18:19; 20:18). "Gay Christian?" 214–15, 226–29. Powell argues that this prohibition was a temporary law regarding cleanness/uncleanness that was fulfilled by Christ (Mark 1:40–45; 5:25–34; 7:1–23). He also points out that in discussing permissible abstentions from marital sex Paul does not mention abstaining due to menstruation (1 Cor 7:5). Thus, while the entire canon shows that the other sex acts listed in Leviticus 18 and 20 remain prohibited, intercourse during menstruation is permissible today. Though they may use different arguments, conservative commentators typically arrive at the same conclusion as Powell. One exception is Roy E. Gane. This is not surprising given that he is a Seventh Day Adventist. Nevertheless, his arguments remain thought-provoking:

"The penalty for deliberate violation of the ban on sex with a woman during her period is a grave one: divinely administered 'cutting off,' with no ritual remedy available (Lev. 20:18; cf. 18:19, 29). This absolute nature of the prohibition indicates that its applicability does not depend on the ritual system and continues after it has passed away. Reinforcing this conclusion, Leviticus 18 and 20 place the ban on sex with a menstruant among moral laws (cf. Ezek. 18:5–6; 22:10).

"It is true that ceremonial law provided a remedy for physical ritual impurity incurred through *inadvertent* violation of the prohibition (15:24). Now that the ritual system is gone, there is no ceremonial impact or need for such a remedy. However, this does not negate a timeless moral aspect that forbids a man from *deliberately* having intercourse with a menstruating woman, knowing that this is her condition.

"Perhaps a moral rationale for the prohibition can be found in 20:18, which describes a woman with any genital flow as *dawah* ('faint,' i.e., in a state of malaise; see also 12:2; cf. Lam. 1:13; 5:17). If so, this is a women's rights issue: The law protects 'the woman from unwanted advances by her husband during her period of weakness (R. Gane).'" *The NIV Application Commentary: Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 324–25, citing Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22, AB 3A* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1755. See further, Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 358–61.

Gane's position may be further supported by Leviticus 18:24–30. Here Yahweh looks back on the actions prohibited throughout the chapter—including sexual intercourse during menstruation—and says that he is judging the Canaanites for doing "all these" actions (v. 24; cf. 20:23). Thus, "all" the prohibitions applied to non-Israelites. With this in mind, one could argue that Paul did not mention menstruation as a reason for abstention from marital sex (1 Cor 7:5) because he was taking for granted the OT's prohibition.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Jason S. DeRouchie, "Father of a Multitude of Nations: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 7–38; Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions About Biblical Theology*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2017), 415–95.

### Summary

DeRouchie argues for a “redemptive-historical” “principlizing-paradigmatic” approach to the application of the Mosaic law (432n14, 434n16, 435n17). He begins by presenting three principles that guide him in handling the law. He does not provide detailed exegesis to establish these principles but summarizes relevant biblical texts and footnotes sources for further development.<sup>46</sup> DeRouchie’s first principle is that “Christians are part of the new covenant, not the old” (427).<sup>47</sup> As a result, “the Mosaic law is no longer the direct and immediate guide or judge of the conduct of God’s people” (428).

Second, “Christ fulfills the Mosaic law, and we appropriate it only through his fulfillment” (428). Here DeRouchie understands Christ’s fulfillment of the law (Matt 5:17) as “the ‘eschatological actualization’ of all that the Old Testament predicted, whether through direct or typological prophecy or through the overarching salvation-historical trajectory” (428). One implication is that “all the commanding parts of the Mosaic law are still instructive for his [Jesus’] followers, but *only when read in the light of his law-fulfillment*” (429). When read in this way, the OT laws are included in the “law of Christ” (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2) and instruct us as Scripture (2 Tim 3:16) (430–32). Exactly how does Christ’s law-fulfillment affect the application of the law? In short, “it depends.” Echoing Wellum,<sup>48</sup> DeRouchie visualizes his approach with an analogy: Christ and his work function like a *lens* that refracts individual laws in different directions. DeRouchie presents four such directions: the coming of Christ may (1) maintain, (2) transform, (3) extend, or (4) annul a particular law (430–31). “We must assess every law on its own terms in order to properly discern how it applies today” (431).

This leads to DeRouchie’s third principle: “The Old Testament law portrays the character of God, anticipates Christ, and clarifies the makeup of love and wise living” (433). Here DeRouchie affirms that “through Jesus, ‘every detail’ of the Mosaic law matters for Christians” (433). Likewise, citing passages such as Deuteronomy 4:5–8, DeRouchie asserts that “even within ancient Israel, the familial, social, economic, and political structures as revealed in the Old Testament bore a testimonial purpose and were intended to provide a contextual paradigm of the values God desires for all peoples and in all times” (434). In this regard, DeRouchie gives three reasons against compartmentalizing the law into moral, civil, and ceremonial categories. (1) “The Bible never differentiates laws in this way but treats the law as a singular entity” (437). (2) “All the laws express moral principles, and most of the so-called moral laws contain temporally or culturally bound elements” (438). (3) “We are to gain benefit from *all* the Old Testament, not just the moral portions” (439).

Building on his three principles, DeRouchie recommends three steps for applying each OT law. First, “establish the original revealed meaning and application of the law” (440). This involves identifying (1) the type of law (i.e., its content type: criminal, civil, family, etc.), (2) the original meaning and significance of the law, and (3) the original purpose of the law (440–41). Second, “determine the theological significance of the law” (441). This involves identifying (1) what the law teaches about

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<sup>46</sup> For a sample of his more detailed exegetical work in relation to the Mosaic law, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Use of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12: A Redemptive-Historical Reassessment,” *Themelios* 45, no. 1 (2020): 240–59.

<sup>47</sup> I have slightly reformatted various statements of DeRouchie from the header style in which they appear.

<sup>48</sup> “Ethics,” 222; cf. 224–25.



God and his ways, (2) how Christ's law-fulfillment affects the law, and (3) stating the love principle behind the law (441–42). The first step (interpretation) and the second step (theological analysis) lead to the third step (application): “Summarize the lasting significance of the law for today” (442).

DeRouchie goes on to illustrate his steps with four case studies. Each one represents one of the ways that Christ's law-fulfillment may affect the ongoing relevance of a particular law. DeRouchie provides considerable detail for each case study, but his basic conclusions are as follows. (1) Christ's coming *extends* the requirement of roof parapets (Deut 22:8) to all areas of home construction (443–44). (2) Christ's law-fulfillment *maintains* the prohibition of cross-dressing (Deut 22:5) (444–49).<sup>49</sup> (3) Christ *transforms* the Sabbath (Deut 5:12) into an already-not-yet eschatological rest for God's people (449–53). (4) Christ *annuls* the Mosaic food laws (Lev 20:25–26), and his doing so moves us to celebrate his triumphant work (453–59). Indeed, “*bacon is victory food!*” (459).

### Evaluation

DeRouchie not only steers clear of antinomianism but also displays a contagious fervency for glorifying God through Christ-reliant, Spirit-empowered obedience and holiness. He emphatically upholds the pedagogical role of the OT as Christian Scripture and, unlike James Todd, he believes that in some way each Mosaic law teaches timeless divine morality. DeRouchie draws on a host of scholars from a variety of traditions. In fact, he includes Combs' dispensational view in a list of redemptive-historical approaches similar to his own (432n14). DeRouchie goes beyond other writers in the PC stream in detailing and illustrating specific ways in which Christ's coming relates to individual laws. This greatly helps to concretize PC's sometimes vague statements about viewing the law through Christ. DeRouchie's analysis of select laws genuinely advances the conversation, and his discussion is rich with insights.

On the other hand, DeRouchie's fourfold categorization may raise more problems than it solves. He leaves the reader wondering *how* one can determine whether a particular Mosaic law has been maintained, extended, transformed, or annulled in Christ. Furthermore, upon close inspection these four categories become blurry. For instance, the parapet-building law is in the “extends” category specifically in connection with Jesus' teaching on the image of God in man and love for neighbor. Undoubtedly, the motivation and power to love are radically deepened by Jesus' teaching and example. I fail to see, however, how this is actually “extending” the parapet law. The Mosaic law was paradigmatic from the outset, and Yahweh expected the Israelites to apply to new situations the principle or pattern expressed in particular laws.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the parapet law should have been “extended” even under the Mosaic Covenant. Additionally, the “extends” and “maintains” categories overlap. Though DeRouchie deals with the cross-dressing prohibition under the “maintains” category, he

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<sup>49</sup> Here the discussion is condensed from Jason S. DeRouchie, “Confronting the Transgender Storm: New Covenant Reflections on Deuteronomy 22:5,” *JBMW* 21, no. 1 (2016): 58–69.

<sup>50</sup> This is a foundational concept throughout Wright's *Old Testament Ethics*, which DeRouchie relies on considerably. See also Douglas K. Stuart, “Preaching from the Law,” in *Preaching the Old Testament*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 95–111, and Joshua A. Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 107–17.

focuses on the underlying principle of gender differences and “extends” this as he applies Deuteronomy 22:5 to the contemporary arena of “gender identity.”

DeRouchie’s other examples also raise questions. One could argue that the “transformation” of the Sabbath includes a kind of “annulment” in that Christians are not required to observe a Sabbath on the seventh day of each week. Furthermore, DeRouchie sees the following “love principle” in the Sabbath law: “*Loving God and neighbor requires carrying out the 6+1 pattern of life as a witness to the kingdom hope of ultimate rest*” (451). What exactly the 6+1 pattern requires of Christians today is not entirely clear from the remainder of DeRouchie’s discussion. But he does argue that the Sabbath law teaches us to show compassion to the marginalized and to get sufficient physical rest (451–52). This sounds like the law is being “maintained” or “extended” as well as “transformed.” So evidently the “lens” of Christ can bend a law in more than one direction? Finally, even though Christ has “annulled” the food laws and their resulting ethnic separation, do these laws not continue to teach the importance of discernment and separation from the values and customs of the unregenerate world (“extends” category)?<sup>51</sup> Such questions about the fluidity of DeRouchie’s fourfold categorization are reminiscent of his own critique of the traditional threefold categorization of the Mosaic law.

### *Conclusion*

Despite any differences of emphasis and nuance, progressive covenantalists share a common perspective on the role of the Mosaic law in the Christian life. Jason Meyer provides a helpful summary:

I propose that one should begin with Christ and not with the individual Mosaic commands. The coming of Christ has caused a paradigm shift that calls for recalibrating all former commands in the light of His centrality. This approach recognizes that the law of Moses in its entirety has come to an end in the sense that the believer does not start by asking, “What did the law teach?” The believer begins at the point where his Christian life began: Christ. The believer found new life in Christ and so now comes to Christ to find out how to live out his new life.<sup>52</sup>

Start with Christ. There is something about that spirit that should resonate with all Christians, regardless of their theological systems.

The rub is explaining what precisely this entails regarding the ongoing role of the Mosaic law. Here PC has yielded much worthy reflection. At the same time, some potential problems have surfaced. As Snoeberger and others have worried, PC—or at least approaches like it—*may* end up minimizing the role of Mosaic legislation for ethics. The present study has detected this tendency in James Todd’s book. Nevertheless, the study has also found that such a tendency is *not* representative of PC proper.

Snoeberger suggested that PC may suppress the ongoing pedagogical value of the Mosaic law specifically because of the system’s Christological focus. Ironically, however, the Christological focus

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<sup>51</sup> See the first two sources cited in note 40 above.

<sup>52</sup> *The End of the Law*, 283.

becomes the very tool PC uses to determine precisely how a particular Mosaic law relates to the present age. Some of PC's conclusions in this regard are confusing and/or unconvincing. Nevertheless, as seen especially in DeRouchie's discussion, PC has shown a keen interest in identifying and applying the ethical truths taught by the OT laws. Toward this end, one hopes that progressive covenantalists will further refine their approach as they continue to meditate on the Torah of Yahweh.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> I thank Fred Zaspel for reviewing this article and providing valuable input.