

*The*  
**LAW**  
*and the*  
**GOSPEL**

LECTURE NOTES



## John Colquhoun

1748–1827

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John Colquhoun (ka-hoon) was a minister in the Church of Scotland and a prolific writer. He was born in the parish of Luss (Dunbartonshire) in 1748 and was led to conversion as a teenager by the answer to the Shorter Catechism’s question “What is effectual calling?” He immersed himself in the writings of Thomas Boston, then studied at the University of Glasgow. He was ordained as minister of St. John’s in South Leith in 1781, where he served for forty-six years. He died in 1827.

Colquhoun was a Reformed experiential preacher. His sermons and writings reflect those of the Marrow brethren, whose theology was more like that of the Secession churches than like that of Colquhoun’s fellow evangelicals in the Church of Scotland. Though Colquhoun, as a Church of Scotland minister, was not allowed to recommend Fisher’s *Marrow of Modern Divinity* because the General Assembly had condemned it, he felt free to recommend Thomas Boston’s notes.

Colquhoun’s writings are theologically astute and intensely practical. He wrote on the core doctrines of the gospel, particularly on experiential soteriology. He wrote *A Treatise of Spiritual Comfort* in 1813, then, three years later, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*. He also wrote books on the covenant of grace (1818), the covenant of works (1821), saving faith (1824), the promises of the gospel (1825), and evangelical repentance (1825). Then, too, he wrote a catechism for young communicants (1821) and a volume of sermons that was published posthumously (1836) with a brief memoir.

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# The Law and the Gospel

The law and the gospel are like the two hands of God, by which He reaches out to save us by grace and lead us to glory. Both law and gospel are essential parts of the Holy Scriptures. We cannot neglect either of them without rejecting the Word of God. But how do law and gospel relate to each other, and how do we use them properly?

To find answers to those questions, we turn to a classic Reformed book, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, by John Colquhoun (ka-hoon), who was born in 1748. John's father was a farmer in the Scottish Lowlands. Young John may have seemed to be headed for a life of caring for sheep, but God used a schoolteacher to direct the boy to consider his need for salvation in Christ, and then to encourage the young convert to read books of Christian doctrine. Sensing a call to ministry, Colquhoun studied at the University of Glasgow and briefly at the University of Edinburgh. The presbytery at Glasgow licensed him to preach the gospel in 1780. The following year, he was ordained to ministry in the Church of Scotland in South Leith (pronounced Leeth), where he served for the rest of his life. His preaching was systematic, evangelical, biblical, Reformed, experiential, and practical. He remained active in the ministry of the Word until a year before his death at 79 years of age in 1827. Robert Burns, a Scottish minister who would later become professor of theology at Knox College, Toronto, wrote to Colquhoun's widow, "I have always looked upon Dr. Colquhoun as one of our most valuable scriptural divines, while his life and labours afforded a bright pattern of the sanctifying tendency of the doctrines he taught, and which are truly doctrines according to godliness."<sup>1</sup>

Colquhoun's *Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, first published in 1815, is a masterpiece of balanced biblical teaching concerning faith and obedience. Colquhoun was no innovator but drew his water from the well of Reformed covenant theology. He brought this theology to his readers in a way that was both understandable and practical for Christians.

Here, then, is a book that opens up the biblical doctrine of how God uses both commandment and promise to bring us himself. Here we see how law and gospel complement each other to form the conscience and by grace to renew the heart. The law shows us why we need the gospel, and the gospel gives us the motivation in Christ to obey the law. Apart from the gospel, the law can only condemn us for our sins. When received with faith in Christ crucified for our sins, the law shows us how to live, how to love, and how to enjoy true liberty.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in "Memoir," in Colquhoun, *Sermons*, xiv.

# Questions

1. Why was John Colquhoun well qualified to help us to understand the law and the gospel?

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2. What are the major topics that Colquhoun covers in this book?

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3. Why is it important for us to know what God says about the law and the gospel?

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4. What are four practical conclusions that can be drawn from the introduction? Of these, which is most relevant to you and why?

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Lecture  
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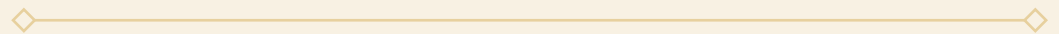
# The Law of God

God's law didn't start with Moses. The law started with Adam and binds all mankind to obedience to our Creator. This is the lesson we learn in the first chapter of John Colquhoun's *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*.

When Colquhoun was newly converted, the Lord gave him a great hunger and thirst for the truth of God. Colquhoun's schoolteacher and spiritual advisor encouraged him to read Thomas Boston's *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*. In it, Colquhoun read the words of Boston, "A creature can no more be morally independent of God in its actions and power, than it can be naturally independent of Him. A creature, as a creature, must acknowledge the Creator's will as its supreme law."<sup>2</sup>

In the first chapter of Colquhoun's book, in the first two sections, we find the same doctrine. In its most basic form, God's law is the law of nature, founded on the righteousness of God's nature and human nature created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). This may be also called the moral law, for it is the moral standard for all mankind is and does. The law of creation is the law of nature revealed and engraved in the heart of man as originally created very good and morally upright by God (Gen. 1:31; Eccles. 7:29). As long as God is God and man is man, the moral law comes to us with sovereign authority and supreme obligation. Furthermore, God gave to the law the form of the covenant of works, promising life for obedience but threatening death upon disobedience to a particular, positive commandment that test man's loyalty to his Maker, as we see in Genesis 2.

However it may come to us, the law of God remains the law of God—grounded in His unchanging righteousness, authority, and majesty. We remain God's creatures, obligated to obey our Creator.



2 Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964), 39.

# Questions

1. What is the law of God?

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2. What is the law of nature? Why does it bind us all?

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3. What is the covenant of works? What does it demand of mankind?

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4. How do the law of nature and the covenant of works show us our need for Christ?

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Lecture  
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# The Grace of the Law

In the last video, I mentioned that Colquhoun's school teacher encouraged him to get a copy of Thomas Boston's book, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*. Boston traces the work of God in human life from our first creation in innocence to our fall into the state of sin, the regeneration of sinners into spiritual life by union with Christ, and the eternal joy of believers with Christ and the eternal misery of the wicked in hell. It is a marvelous book that God has used to bless many.

Colquhoun was so determined to get this precious book that he walked twenty-five miles to Glasgow to obtain a copy. His zeal to know God better and do to His will illustrates the truth that Boston explained when he wrote, "Regenerating grace is powerful and efficacious, and gives the will a new turn. It does not indeed force it, but sweetly, yet powerfully draws it, so that His people are willing in the day of His power."<sup>3</sup> The Holy Spirit, Boston said, "is the Spirit of life, and makes them live unto righteousness, 'And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes' (Ezek. 36:27)."<sup>4</sup>

In section three of chapter 1 of Colquhoun's *Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, he explains that the believer's attitude toward and experience of the law of God is very different from that of an unbeliever. For the believer relates to the law in Christ, according to the covenant of grace. The covenant of works that the Lord God made with Adam in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15–17) says, "Do this and live"—live in fellowship with God and receive eternal life. It also says, "Do this, or die"—die spiritually God and die eternally in hell. On the other hand, the covenant of grace that God made with Christ and all who belong to Him says, "Live in Christ and do this," and also, "Christ delivered you from condemnation, therefore do this."

Therefore, while the moral law of God does not change in its content of what it commands and forbids, we relate to the law in very different ways depending on whether it comes to us in Adam or in Christ.



3 Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, 213.

4 Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, 295.



# Questions

1. How does the law come to believers as the law of Christ?

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2. Does the law come to us in Christ with its full authority and obligation? Why or why not?

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3. How does the believer's justification by faith in Christ change how he relates to the law?

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4. How can a person tell whether his good works are heathen morality, pharisaic righteousness, or true holiness in Christ?

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# The Law of Moses

The law of Moses is complex. The thunder and fire of Mount Sinai display the wrath that God's law brings on sinners. But the law itself, summarized in the Ten Commandments, came to Israel as a gift of their gracious Redeemer who had already saved their nation. How can we reconcile the wrath and grace that God showed when He gave the law to Israel?

Welcome back to our study of John Colquhoun's *Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*. As a pastor settled in Leith, Scotland, Colquhoun lived near the Firth of Forth, a major waterway opening to the North Sea. No doubt at times he witnessed tremendous storms of howling wind and flashing lightning. Perhaps he had such a storm in mind when he wrote in one of his books, "What can it avail [a man], though all the world smile upon him, if he be under the infinite, the tremendous, frowns of almighty God? They cannot, for a moment, screen him from the impending storm, nor secure him from the consuming fire."<sup>5</sup> The fiery storm of God's holiness—this is what God revealed to Israel on Mount Sinai.

And yet, as Colquhoun teaches in the second chapter of his book, God embedded the Ten Commandments in His grace to Israel. The Lord did not give His laws to the people and say, "If you obey me, I will save you." Rather, He saved the people from slavery in Egypt, and said, in effect, "I am the Lord your God who rescued you. Now keep my commandments." Therefore, while there are echoes of the covenant of works in the law of Moses, the law itself is part of God's covenant of grace, continuing the grace shown to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And at the same time, the law of Moses has special reference to Israel as a nation. As such, its promises and threats have much to do with Israel's material prosperity in the land, which is but a type and foreshadowing of the believer's eternal inheritance with God.

Despite its complexity, the law of Moses has very practical applications for our lives. God's patience and mercy to Israel help us to trust in His patience and mercy toward us. We learn of God's faithfulness at Mount Sinai because the Lord was keeping the promises that He made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier. God remains faithful to keep His promises today. The strictness of the law and terror of God's consuming fire warn us that if we try to approach God on the basis of our own good works, we will never stand on judgment day. We must have Christ, and it is to Christ that the ceremonies and sacrifices point us. In many ways, the law is "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ," as Paul said (Gal. 3:24).



<sup>5</sup> John Colquhoun, *A Treatise of Spiritual Comfort*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Thomsons, Brothers, 1822), 58.

## Lecture 4

# Questions

1. Why should we view the Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai as part of the covenant of grace?

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2. How was the law of Moses given in a way that also points to the covenant of works?

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3. How did the law of Moses function as a national covenant between God and Israel?

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4. How do these truths help us to see the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant?

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## Lecture 5

# The Glory of the Law

The Lord commanded Joshua, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night” (Josh. 1:8). Why spend so much time meditating on the law of God? One reason is the glorious attributes of the law, which Colquhoun sets forth in the third chapter of his *Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*.

Colquhoun said, “understanding aright the perfection, spirituality, and great extent of the divine law is necessary to qualify believers for delighting in it after the inward man and for performing acceptable obedience to all its precepts.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, we cannot rejoice in God’s law and obey it with willing hearts until we see its beautiful attributes.

What are the attributes of God’s moral law? Colquhoun lists seven. (1) The law is universal. It speaks to every human in every place and every time. Indeed, its principles govern every part of human life. (2) The law is perfect. That means it is complete in its moral instruction, and we neither should nor need to add anything to it. (3) The law is spiritual. It regulates not only our behavior but our hearts. It requires obedience that possible only when the Holy Spirit working in the human spirit. (4) It is holy, the very image of God’s holiness as it should be reflected in those who bear His image. (5) It is just, teaching us exactly what we owe to God, to our neighbor, and to ourselves. (6) It is good. Obeying God’s commandments is good in itself and brings many rewards of His grace. (7) The law is of perpetual obligation. It is not a temporary arrangement, but an eternal command rooted in who God is and who we are.

Of course, the law has these qualities because it expresses the will of God. The attributes of the law reflect the attributes of God, the author of the law.

Meditate on what a good and glorious gift God has given us in His law. Sadly, we sinners often resent God’s law and long to escape it. We think of the law as an evil, oppressive, destructive thing—a cage that imprisons us. How very different is our perspective when the Spirit opens our eyes to see loveliness of the law! As James says, it is “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25). Cherish God’s law, study it, and set your heart to obey it by the grace of Christ.

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6 John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023), 79.

# Questions

1. How would you explain what it means that the moral law is (1) universal, (2) perfect, (3) spiritual, (4) holy, (5) just, (6) good, (7) of perpetual obligation?

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2. If the law is holy, just, and good, why do we not love it with all our hearts? How can we come to delight in the law of the Lord?

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3. How do these qualities of the law show us our need for the righteousness of Christ to be imputed to us?

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## Lecture 6

# The Heart of the Law

The Ten Commandments are not just about avoiding crimes like murder and theft; they give principles that direct one's whole life in obedience to God's will.

John Colquhoun believed that God has revealed not just a few rules to keep but a system of righteousness that guides believers in Christ to please God in everything we do. For that reason, Colquhoun catechized the members of his congregation in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which unpacks the law and each of the Ten Commandments over the course of forty-six questions and answers (Q. 39–84). The Westminster Larger Catechism devotes more than eight thousand words to the law of God in its detailed analysis of its applications. Furthermore, every Friday evening Colquhoun welcomed all who would come to talk about the Christian life—meetings frequently attended by ministerial students among others. One can only imagine the conversations they had. Colquhoun was known as a man of mature spiritual experience, thorough knowledge of both doctrine and ethics, and skill in speaking to the particular cases and questions of individuals.

It might be asked, however, how one can use the moral law that way when all the Ten Commandments do is to present some rules like, “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not steal.” Colquhoun explained that the larger context of the Bible shows us that those simple principles contain a wealth of moral wisdom. For example, the commandment that prohibits stealing, also implies the duty to do the opposite, as Paul says, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28). Or, the commandment against murder teaches us that any attitude of malice or sinful anger—which can lead to murder and is effectively murder in the heart—is also wrong, as Christ taught in Matthew 5:21–22. Or again, each commandment implies the duty to do what we can to influence others to keep it. Thus, “honour thy father and thy mother” (Ex. 20:12) implies that parents should conduct themselves in an honorable and reasonable way so that their children will find it easier to honor them.

Rather than taking a superficial approach to God's law, we need to meditate on the full meaning of each commandment. To help us in this, Colquhoun's fourth chapter gives us several rules for interpreting the law. But these are not just rules of interpretation. They are opportunities to understand that spirit of the law, the heart of God behind the commandments.



# Questions

1. What is implied our duty when one of the Ten Commandments forbids us to do something? What does that show us about “Thou shalt not kill”? “Thou shalt not commit adultery”?

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2. What do the Ten Commandments imply about our responsibilities to help others to obey?

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3. What is the sum of all the commandments? How should this guide us in obeying them?

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4. Of the principles for applying the commandments, which was most helpful to you? Why?

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Lecture  
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# The Heart of the Law

What is the gospel? The apostle Paul says in his first epistle to the Corinthians that he had told them “the gospel” as a matter of “first” priority, namely that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1–4 KJV).

Colquhoun preached the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout his ministry as a pastor. His writings are full of the gospel. He also brought the gospel to people personally and individually as he visited them in their homes. He held monthly meetings with young people to evangelize them so that by grace they might trust in Christ alone for salvation and prepare them to become communicants in the Lord’s Supper, which requires a profession of faith in the gospel.

But what is the message of the gospel? In chapter 5 of *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, Colquhoun sets out to answer the question. He acknowledges that the word “gospel” can be used in the Bible in broad sense for the whole message of Jesus Christ and His apostles. But this does not help us to know the difference between law and gospel, for a significant portion of the New Testament consists of law and commandment. Furthermore, it is a mistake to think that the Old Testament is law and the New Testament is gospel, for there is much gospel in the Old Testament.

The gospel, as distinct from the law, has four characteristics. First, in the gospel God teaches us about God’s work of saving grace in Jesus Christ. In other words, the gospel is not about what we do so much as what God has done in Christ. Second, in the gospel God promises salvation as a free gift to everyone who repents and believes in Christ. Third, in the gospel God offers Christ and the saving benefits in Him to all sinful men, women, and children. Fourth, in the gospel God invites sinners to receive Christ as He is offered in the gospel to be the Savior of sinners. In sum, the gospel is not a new law that makes it easier for sinners, who cannot obey the original law of nature, to fulfill God’s conditions for salvation. On the contrary, the gospel is about Christ, who alone fulfilled the conditions of the covenant of grace by His righteousness, suffering, and death.

Colquhoun is careful to note, however, that no one is saved merely by knowing the gospel. Rather, he asks the readers of his book to examine themselves to see if they have an experiential knowledge of the gospel. Have you placed your trust, hope, and confidence in Christ alone? Do you love the gospel of His saving work? Is Christ the delight of your soul?





# Questions

1. What is the strict and proper meaning of the term *gospel*?

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2. How does the gospel relate to God's covenant of grace?

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3. How is the gospel God's offer of Christ to us?

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4. What questions can we ask ourselves to test whether we have experienced God's saving grace offered in the gospel? How would you answer those questions?

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# The Law and the Gospel in Salvation

When God calls someone to Christ for salvation, God both breaks the sinner's heart with the law and heals his soul with the gospel.

Colquhoun learned this biblical lesson in his personal experience. As a boy he attended a school sponsored by the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. His teacher instructed him in the Westminster Short Catechism. They came to the question and answer: "What is effectual calling? Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel."<sup>7</sup> By this means, God was pleased to begin a saving work in Colquhoun's heart.

Decades after his conversion, Colquhoun would write about these matters in the sixth chapter of his *Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*. Here he treats the uses of the law and the gospel. God uses the law reveal to mankind His holiness and righteousness, to inform them of their duty to God, and to restrain them of many external acts of sin by the fear of their consequences. But the special use of the law for unbelievers is to convince them of their sin and misery before God and to show them their desperate need for Christ.

God uses the gospel to reveal Christ as God's way of reconciling sinners to Himself. Through the gospel, God shows sinners that they have the warrant or right to trust in Christ for salvation. By the same gospel, God the Holy Spirit works to give them the new birth to a living faith in Christ. But the gospel also serves believers after they come to Christ, for it is through the good news that the Spirit continues to apply Christ so that they grow in holiness and joy.

Furthermore, God also continues to use the law in the lives of believers. The curse of the law against sinners moves believers to love Christ all the more for what He endured in their place. The law as a rule to direct their lives is God's instrument to humble them by uncovering their remaining sin, to comfort them by showing the reality of their sanctification, to guide them by teaching them the duty of obedience they owe to God, and to cultivate in them the fear of God by impressing on them the infinite authority of God to command them in His law.

Colquhoun reminded us that a faithful preacher preaches both law and gospel, for God uses both law and gospel to do everlasting good to the souls of men and women.

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<sup>7</sup> James T. Dennison Jr., comp., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014), 4:357.

# Questions

1. How does God use the gospel in both believers and unbelievers?

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2. What are the uses of the law for unconverted sinners?

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3. How does the law serve believers in Christ?

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4. How have you experienced God using the law in your own life, before and after conversion?

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Lecture  
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# The Difference Between Law and Gospel

The law of God says, “Do this work and live.” The gospel of Christ says, “Live, for the work is done.” The difference between the two with regard to sinners such as us is the difference between proud presumption and well-grounded comfort.

Colquhoun’s first book was titled *A Treatise of Spiritual Comfort*. Comfort, it turns out, is all about Christ. In it, he said that believers should seek to grow to be “blessed with a settled tranquility of mind, and with a constant inclination of heart, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to delight in God, as his God in him.”<sup>8</sup> After fellow minister Archibald Bonar received a copy of the book, he wrote to Colquhoun, “I am more and more convinced that according to . . . the measure of our rejoicing in glorious Immanuel as our all, so will be our steadfastness and progress in all the other graces of the divine life.”<sup>9</sup>

The seventh chapter in Colquhoun’s *Treatise of the Law and the Gospel* presents several differences between the law and the gospel of Christ. This is not a merely academic discussion. Colquhoun rightly points out that mixing the law with the gospel, especially in the matter of our justification, will replace liberty with bondage, hope with fear, and humility with pride. This is the old Galatian error, which the apostle Paul called “another gospel” and denounced its preachers under the curse of God (Gal. 1:8–9).

Though the law and the gospel are both of God, they have significant differences. The law comes by necessity from God’s righteous character, is revealed in part in everyone’s conscience, and requires us to obey perfectly—as if we were still in a state of original innocence. The gospel is a free gift of God’s grace, is revealed only through His Word, and tells us of someone else who has already obeyed perfectly—the last Adam, Jesus Christ. When sinners look to the works of the law to be their righteousness, they end up in either guilty fear or proud boasting, or bouncing back and forth between the two. When sinners look to Jesus Christ alone to be their righteousness, they end up in humility, peace, and boasting in the Lord.

Let us beware of confusing law and gospel, lest we become self-righteous, dishonor Christ, undermine our peace and joy, and put our eternal destiny in jeopardy.

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8 Colquhoun, *A Treatise of Spiritual Comfort*, 374.

9 Cited in “Memoir of Dr. John Colquhoun,” in John Colquhoun, *Sermons, Chiefly on Doctrinal Subjects* (Edinburgh: J. & D. Collie, 1836), xiii.

# Questions

1. How are the law and the gospel different with respect to God's nature and revelation of Himself?

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2. What is the difference between the law as a covenant of works and the gospel of grace with respect to how we must become righteous before God?

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3. What is the difference between the law and the gospel with respect to the power of sin?

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4. Why is it essential to understand the difference between the law and the gospel if we are to find (or help each other to find) true spiritual comfort and liberty?

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# The Harmony of Law and the Gospel

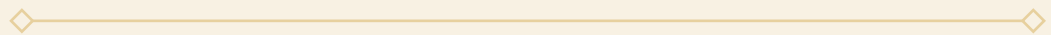
Though the law and the gospel are quite different, they are not enemies but friends. God appointed the law and the gospel to work together toward the common goal of saving lawbreakers and making them into law-keepers in Christ.

Growing up on a farm, Colquhoun's vocation was initially that of a shepherd and a weaver. One imagines that his family spent much time shearing the sheep, spinning wool into yarn, dying that yarn in various colors, and then weaving it on a loom. Different colors of yarn were woven together to form cloth with beautiful patterns. In the same way, God uses both law and gospel, different as they are, to weave the beautiful salvation of His people.

Colquhoun taught in chapter 8 of his *Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* that there is a lovely harmony between the two. The law commands perfect obedience to the will of God. The gospel offers us the righteousness of Christ, who perfectly obeyed the Father. The law condemns lawbreakers to suffer its curse. The gospel reveals Christ crucified, who redeemed sinners from the curse by bearing it in their place. The law makes the gospel precious to sinners and the gospel makes the law delightful to believers.

There is a similar harmony between the law as a rule to direct our conduct and the gospel. The law requires believers be holy; the gospel is God's means to work holiness into their lives. The law requires them to love God with all their hearts; the gospel presents God as infinitely lovely as He reconciles the world to Himself in Christ. The law demands that we mourn over our sins; the gospel depicts Christ as wounded for our sins so that believers mourn.

Both the law and the gospel are revelations of the holiness, righteousness, and justice of God. Therefore, no one can be an enemy of the gospel without being an enemy of the law. No matter how legalistic he may be, an enemy of the gospel is an antinomian—standing against God's law. Never oppose God's law because you think you are being a friend of the gospel. Never diminish God's grace because you think you are promoting obedience to God's law. Honor both law and gospel, and you will honor God.



## Lecture 10

# Questions

1. How does God use the gospel to honor the commandments of His law?

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2. How does God use the gospel to honor the law's condemnation of sinners?

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3. How does God use the law to highlight these great themes of the gospel: (1) our need for Christ, (2) God's love in sending Him, (3) the infinite value of His ransom, (4) the great happiness of the redeemed, and (5) their great obligation to their Savior?

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4. Why does Colquhoun say, "A man cannot be an enemy to the gospel without being, at the same time, an enemy to the law"?

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# The Law Established in the Gospel

God glorifies His law through the gospel of Christ, for the gospel makes men to hate sin and to love obedience to God's commands. And when we say, "God glorifies His law," what we mean is that God glorifies Himself. Welcome back to our study of John Colquhoun's book, *A Treatise of the Law and the Gospel*. In this video, we consider chapter 9 of the book.

Colquhoun's ministry was characterized by a wedding between doctrine and life. After he died in 1827, the following inscription was placed at the cemetery where his earthly remains rested: "Having studied deeply the doctrines of grace, and experienced their saving and sanctifying power in his own soul, he laboured earnestly and affectionately to communicate the knowledge of them to his fellow-sinners."<sup>10</sup>

Colquhoun understood that the gospel is not just about securing eternal life in heaven, though it certainly offers that. Rather, the gospel is about eternal life begun now through faith in Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ comes and lives within the believing soul through the indwelling Holy Spirit. And Christ, as we can see from His earthly life and ministry, loves God's law and obeyed it to its fullest extent.

Therefore, Colquhoun fully embraced what Paul wrote in Romans 3:31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." In other words, the gospel of justification by faith alone does not abolish the law as a binding obligation for obedience nor does it reduce the totality and spirituality of its demands. Rather, the gospel honors and strengthens the authority of God's law.

The gospel establishes the law as a covenant of works because it teaches us that God will accept no sinner unless Christ has endured the full penalty for sin in his place and has performed perfect obedience as his representative. When the law convicts a sinner of his sin and misery, the gospel agrees that only Christ can save him, and the Christ's obedience completely answers the law's demands.

The gospel also establishes the law as a rule of life for believers because Christ is the King, whose infinite authority upholds the obligation of the law and whose powerful grace sweetly moves believers to obey it, and to do so more and more.

Do not abuse the gospel as an excuse to escape the law. Use gospel motives to energize your obedience to the law.



<sup>10</sup> Cited in "Memoir," in Colquhoun, *Sermons*, xxiv.



# Questions

1. What does Paul mean by “make void the law” when he says, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Rom. 3:31)?

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2. How does the gospel establish the law as a covenant of works?

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3. How does the gospel establish the law as a rule to direct the lives of believers?

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4. If you have trusted in Christ alone for salvation, how has faith in Christ moved you to love His law?

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Lecture  
12

## The Believer's Death to the Law

The Christian life requires death and remarriage: death to the law and remarriage to Christ. Paul says in Romans 7:4, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

Colquhoun understood both death and remarriage on an earthly level. His first wife died just a few years after their wedding. He experienced the loss of bereavement and the radical separation that takes place when one's spouse died. Even more profoundly, however, he experienced the effects of dying to law as a covenant of works and becoming married spiritually to Christ to bear the fruit of a life lived for God.

In the first three sections of chapter 10 in *A Treatise of the Law and the Gospel*, Colquhoun explains what it means to be dead to the law through Christ. He shows how the believer in Christ has left behind the law's strict demand for perfect obedience in order to be acceptable to God and the law's condemnation upon sinners for the least violation of His holy precepts. He also points out that, before a person is saved, the law provoked him to greater acts of rebellion against God, but after the person dies to the law, it longer drives him this way.

Colquhoun meditates on Paul's words in Galatians 2:19 that "I through the law am dead to the law." He considers how the law itself, though unable to save us, becomes the occasion by which Christ breaks down our legalistic mindset to draw us to His grace and mercy. By revealing God's righteousness and majesty and the total devotion that He demands, the law punctures our foolish belief that we can be righteous by our own works and deflates our self-righteous pride. Colquhoun's treatment of the law is very experiential and deeply rooted in the Reformation tradition of how God uses His law, as can be seen in the writings of Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin.

In a sense, for any of us to be saved, God must break the stranglehold that legalism has on our lives. We must die to the law, and this is what God does through Christ.



# Questions

1. How has Christ delivered believers from the law as a covenant of works in its (1) commanding power, (2) justifying power, (3) condemning power, and (4) irritating power?

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2. How does Christ deliver believers in their experience from the law from their anxious attempts to find salvation and righteousness in good works?

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3. How does Christ work “through the law” to make believers experientially “dead to the law” as a covenant of works?

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4. In light of Colquhoun’s teaching, how do Paul’s words “For I through the law am dead to the law” (Gal. 2:19) resonate with your own experience?

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Lecture  
13

## The Believer's Life in Christ

Though Colquhoun's first wife died, he later remarried. His second wife was a godly woman named Euphemia, who lived faithfully with him to the end of his life. They never had any children, at least none that survived infancy. But no doubt they would have considered themselves to have many spiritual children through the gospel. Their marriage bore fruit for eternity. In a similar way, Colquhoun explains, believers have died to their first spouse, the law, and are remarried to Christ. By union with Him, their lives bear spiritual fruit.

In chapter 10 of *A Treatise on the Law and Gospel*, Colquhoun has presented a deeply experiential meditation on Romans 7:4, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." In the first three sections of the chapter, Colquhoun focused on what it means to die to the law, indeed to say with Paul in Galatians 2:19, "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."

Colquhoun went on the fourth and fifth sections of that chapter to describe the results of dying the law and being married to Christ—namely, to live a fruitful life unto God. It is a life of love, admiring and adoring the Lord. It is a life of holiness, exhibiting God's image in our attitudes and actions. It is a life of comfort, finding peace in fellowship with God. In a word, it is a life of glorifying God.

Colquhoun reminds us it is impossible to live unto God unless we die to the law. For as long as we are under the law's condemnation, we can never have a right relationship with God. And without such a relationship, we can never receive God's grace to live for Him in obedience to His law. It is only by dying and rising with Christ that we can bear fruit for God.

Never think that the law in itself has the power to make you holy. Only union and communion with Christ sanctifies the believer. Find in Christ all that you need to obey Christ.



# Questions

1. What does it mean for a believer in Christ to live unto God?

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2. Why must a person die to the law as a covenant of works to live unto God?

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3. What does Colquhoun mean when he says, “The law in the hand of Christ as a rule of duty . . . is, as it were, a *chariot paved with love* for believers”? How is this so?

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4. In light of chapter 10, how would you explain to someone the meaning of Romans 7:4?

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## Lecture 14

# The Believer's Lawful Obligation

As long as God is God and we are His human creatures, we will owe God full obedience to His commandments. And when Christ brings us the law, all that Jesus has done for us only reinforces that obligation. This is what Colquhoun teaches us in chapter 11 of *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*.

Colquhoun loved the writings of Thomas Boston. He knew that Boston's promotion of an old book called *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* had gotten Boston into a lot of trouble with the Church of Scotland. But he fervently believed in the biblical principles of Boston and the way that he preached the gospel while establishing the law. When students of theology asked what books he would recommend for their reading, he would acknowledge that the Church of Scotland condemned the *Marrow of Modern Divinity* but wryly observed that it never condemned Thomas Boston's notes on the *Marrow*.<sup>11</sup>

When those students read Boston's notes on the *Marrow*, they would likely appreciate what Colquhoun said. The author of the *Marrow* somewhat recklessly said that in the covenant of grace, "there is no more for [the Christian] to do, but only to know and believe that Christ hath done all for him."<sup>12</sup> In the notes, Boston clarified that it is true that in the covenant of grace there is no more for a believer to do *to obtain eternal life and salvation*, but, "nevertheless, under this covenant there is much to do; a law to be performed and obeyed, though not for life and salvation but from life and salvation received."<sup>13</sup>

There remain weighty reasons why believers must obey God's law. Their obedience remains a matter of moral obligation. Christ is not merely a Priest to obtain forgiveness of sins. He is also a King to rule His people, and God's commandments are the instrument of His rule. God is still the infinitely worthy Lord, whose excellence and majesty bind us to do His will. We owe Him everything, for He created us and sustains us day by day. Indeed, He redeemed us from our sins by His own blood.

God's saving grace does not change that fact that we must "fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccles. 12:13). As the psalmist said, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Ps. 130:4).

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11 John Macleod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History since the Reformation* (1946; repr. Edinburgh: Knox Press and Banner of Truth, 1974), 219.

12 Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2009), 132.

13 Thomas Boston's notes in Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 134–35.

# Questions

1. Why does God's being our Lord, Creator, and Preserver place us under obligation to obey His law even after He saves us in Christ?

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2. Why do the covenant of grace and the redemption in Christ increase the obligation of believers to obey the law of God?

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3. How do the benefits of keeping God's law oblige believers to obey it?

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4. Why must believers mortify their "legal spirit" to truly keep the law?

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Lecture  
15

# The Believer's Good Works

Salvation in Christ produces fruit. The visible fruit of salvation consists of good works.

Colquhoun grew up as the son of a Scottish farmer, and he no doubt appreciated that the labors of a farmer all aim at producing a harvest. In a similar way, he understood that salvation produces a harvest. Sanctification “is a fruit of vital union with Christ,” he said in one of his sermons.<sup>14</sup>

In the twelfth chapter of *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, particularly in the first two sections of that chapter, Colquhoun instructs us in the nature and necessity of good works performed by those saved by grace. He reminds us that, according to the Holy Scriptures, actions that God considers good works must be done in obedience to what He says in His Word. Such works must arise from a knowledge of Christ in the gospel and be motivated by faith, hope, and love. Our works of love are a response to God's works of love, especially the love shown in the life and death of Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal of every good work is to glorify God—that is, to show how glorious He is.

Good works are obviously good to do. But are they necessary? No, and yes, in different respects. Good works are not necessary to make God show us mercy, to give us the right to trust in Christ alone for salvation, to connect us with Jesus so that we are saved. Good works are also not necessary so that we deserve to grow in holiness or to deserve to go to heaven. However, in some very important ways, good works are quite necessary for the believer in Christ. Good works honor God's authority over us. The Father chose us to do good works, Christ redeemed us by His blood to do good works, and the Holy Spirit caused us to be born again to do good works. By good works, believers show gratitude to God, walk with God in the pathway that leads to heaven, show evidence that they have a true, saving faith, and encourage others to follow Christ.

Christian, devote yourself to a life full of good works, not to earn your salvation, but to honor your Savior.

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14 Colquhoun, *Sermons*, 171.



# Questions

1. What must be true of our works for them to qualify as “good works” in God’s sight?

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2. What are *not* reasons why good works are necessary?

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3. What are reasons why good works are necessary?

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4. How has reading this material motivated you to do good works?

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Lecture  
16

## The Preeminence of Christ

We come now to the final part of Colquhoun's *Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*. In section 3 of chapter 12, he argued that neither unbelievers nor believers in Christ can merit anything from God by their good works. Though he has stressed the importance of obeying the law, he equally stresses that we must never think that our good works deserve God's good gifts. This is to return to the covenant of works, a danger of which Colquhoun never ceases to warn us.

However, in the reflections at the end of the chapter, he returns to the great theme of union with Christ, saying, "Christ, who lives in believers, is the only source of all their good works" (p. 265). The relationship believers have with Christ continues to deepen and mature as they grow in Christ, resulting in riper, larger, more abundant fruit. Colquhoun said in one of his sermons, "The renewing in effectual calling is only a begun renovation, consisting in the implantation of graces, or in sowing the seed of grace: the renewing in sanctification is a gradual renovation, consisting in the Spirit's watering the seed of grace, and causing it to grow."<sup>15</sup>

In order that we may perform more and better good works in obedience to the law, we must exercise our faith in Christ in a richer appropriation of the gospel. Colquhoun said, "Reader, let it be your diligent endeavor to trust at all times in the Lord Jesus, for that great salvation which He has brought near to you in the offers and promises of the glorious gospel, and to trust in Him for it in order that you may thereby be enabled to perform good works" (p. 271). In the end, the duties of the law and the promises of the gospel prove to be inseparable.

Therefore, Colquhoun exhorts us, let us be careful and diligent to walk in the way of holiness, which is Christ Himself. Every day, move forward by exercising faith in Christ, love for God and our neighbor, and holiness in the keeping of God's commandments. Trust in Christ. Love people. And realize, as Colquhoun exclaimed, "much depends on your behavior!" (p. 273). For many eyes are watching us, whether to accuse Christianity on account of our sins or to imitate us as we imitate Christ.

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15 Colquhoun, *Sermons*, 173.

# Questions

1. Why cannot the good works of unbelievers or believers merit the least blessing from God?

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2. Why is Christ the only source of all good works, and union with Christ the only way to produce them?

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3. In what sense is it false to say that good works are necessary for salvation? In what limited sense is it true that good works are necessary for salvation?

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4. After reading this book, how would you summarize how the Christian should use both the law and the gospel to walk with God?

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