

## **A Review of the book *All Old Testament Laws Cancelled* by Greg Gibson**

### **Full description of book:**

Greg Gibson, *All Old Testament Laws Canceled – 24 Reasons Why All Old Testaments Laws Are Cancelled And All New Testament Laws Are for Our Obedience* (JesusSaidFollowMe Publishing, USA, 2009)

### **Review:**

This book is an interesting addition to the relatively new paradigm called New Covenantal Theology, a paradigm gaining currency in former Dispensationalist Baptist circles which have discovered the Doctrines of Grace. It focuses on the topic of the relation of Law to the Christian and puts forward and attempts to defend the position that “All OT laws are cancelled while all NT laws are for our obedience”. The author’s goal as stated in the back cover is to “write the clearest and easiest to understand explanation of the law”, and as such to “translate scholar-speak into pew-speak with 7 diagrams and 20 charts”. In this, Gibson proceeds to apply Scripture to the various issues he brings up in this book, in an effort to be faithful to the teachings of Scripture.

The book is divided into five main parts. The first part in the Introduction is where the author puts forward his hypothesis and contrasts his position on the relation of the Law to the Christian with 5 other popular views (Orthodox Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Theocracy Reformed Covenant Theology, Non-theocracy Reformed Covenant Theology, Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology, and Antinomianism) (p. 9). After explaining his position on the topic, he proceeds to the other four sections of the book. The first section deals with 9 objections to his position that “All OT laws are cancelled”, the second section gives 8 reasons why all OT laws are cancelled, the third section deals with 3 objections to “All NT laws are for our obedience”, while the last section deals with 4 reasons why NT laws are for our obedience (and sanctification). In this, Gibson gives us an easy-to-read format to understand the arguments he advances for his central thesis statement, and allows us to easily follow his reasoning process throughout the book.

Before I continue my review of the book, it must be said that I am a Reformed Covenantal Theologian advocate. Nevertheless, as with all Reformed Covenantal Theologians, I would endeavour to evaluate all things according to the Scriptures, for we believe in the principles of both *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone) and *Tota Scriptura* (All of Scripture). Furthermore, as a Scripturalist<sup>1</sup>, I believe that everything is to be derived from Scripture and Scripture alone. Tradition is an aid and a guide but is not determinative of truth.

With that, let us evaluate the book in greater detail

### **POSITIVES**

#### **Easy readability and understandability**

As it has been stated, the book is easy to read and understand. In this reviewer’s opinion, Gibson has indeed succeeded in his explicit goal of translating “scholar-speak into pew-speak”. In an age of

---

<sup>1</sup> Scripturalism is the belief that Scripture has a systematic monopoly on truth and is foundational for all of our knowledge. [cf W. Gary Crampton, *The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark* (The Trinity Foundation, USA, 1999)]

growing theological illiteracy, Gibson's easy to understand book would surely aid in educating the theological illiterate on this topic.

### **Enunciating the liberty of Christians from obeying the letter of the Law**

In his attempt to show that OT law is not applicable to us, Gibson shows us how the various types and shadows mentioned in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Covenant. A good example is the discussion of the Sabbath. In his seventh clear fact about the Sabbath (p. 34), Gibson made it clear that we enter into God's eternal Sabbath rest by believing the Gospel, basing the idea on the concept of rest as taught in Heb. 4, thus refuting strict Sabbatarianism.

### **Drawing typological parallels between Moses and Jesus**

The typologies drawn in pages 52-54 are indeed good in showing us the parallelism between Moses and Jesus in the Law each of them passed down, thus setting forth a contrast between the law as given by Moses and the law as given by Christ, distinguishing the Old and New Covenant respectively. While there is disagreement over how the two related to each other, yet the parallelism is good inasmuch as it shows us that Jesus is the new lawgiver who governs us, which brings us to the next point.

### **Good arguments against Antinomianism**

In general, the arguments advanced in parts three and four in pages 108-135 against Antinomianism are excellent in their presentation of the validity of obeying Christ's laws under the New Covenant. Although we are not bound by the Law for salvation, we are to obey Christ's commands and are not free to sin as we please (Rom. 6), for we are not slaves to sin anymore but slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:18)

### **NEGATIVES Denigration of Logic**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn. 1:1)

The Greek word Logos (λογος) in Jn. 1:1 have various meanings, and a look at its uses especially in the Gospel of John would show us that it is better translated as the logic, the doctrine, the mind, the wisdom of God<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, unbelieving reprobates are called *aloga zoa* (αλογα ζωα) in both 2 Peter 2:12 and Jude 1:10, where the phrase is translated as 'irrational animals' or 'unreasoning animals' respectively in the ESV. Since *aloga* etymologically is derived from the negation of logos (a – logos), the relation between God being the rational God and faith being reasonable and rational can be seen.

In this book by Gibson, it is very unfortunate that a statement denigrating the use of logic is found within the pages of the book. On page 29, Gibson wrote that "It's safer to build our doctrine on explicit exegesis, than implicit reasoning". This is a not-so-subtle attack on the Reformed doctrine of Necessary Consequence, which is a concept in logic and is taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith as thus:

---

<sup>2</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *The Johannine Logos* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Trinity Foundation, USA, 1989), 51

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: ... (WCF, Chapter I: Of the Holy Scripture, Paragraph VI)

The Reformed teaching has always been that doctrines which are legitimately deduced from Scripture are indeed Scripture, and have the same authority as Scripture. It is based upon the idea that logical thinking and a sound mind is indeed biblical as taught in Jn. 1:1 and irrationality is the manifestation of unbelief. Just as God the *Logos* is indeed the divine Wisdom and Logic, so as we deduce truth using a sound mind, we think God's thoughts after Him. Rejection of the theory of Necessary Consequence therefore implies irrationality<sup>3</sup> and thus undermines the perspicuity and authority of Scripture. Although God is not logic ontologically, logic is the way God thinks and is therefore co-extensive with God.

This denigration of logic is thus a most unfortunate statement in the book. As it can be seen in the next section, this has manifested itself in various logical fallacies found within the book.

### **Committing various logical fallacies**

Various logical fallacies are committed in this book, which sometimes severely undermine the arguments the author is trying to put forward.

One such logical fallacy is the positing of false dichotomies by the author. On page 20, the reason why God did not distinguish the Ten Commandments from the rest of the law according to Gibson was that "they [the Ten Commandments] are the Old Covenant's foundational document, not the eternal, unchanging, moral law of God". However, why must the choice be an either/or instead of a both/and? The two ideas of the Ten Commandments put forward do not contradict each other so why the false dichotomy?

Based on the claim that since the Ten Commandments are the foundational document of the whole Old Covenant, Gibson claims we can equate the phrase "Ten Commandments" with the phrase "the Old Covenant" (p. 22, 81). This commits the logical fallacy of composition, of making what is applicable to the part applicable to the whole. Alternatively, this may also lead to the fallacy of division (making what is applicable to the whole to the part) when the direction is reversed as when the Law is equated with the Ten Commandments. Obviously, there are certain cases whereby what is applicable to the parts **is** indeed applicable to the whole and vice versa, but each case has to be proven separately instead of making such a logically fallacious blanket generalization. A trivial example of the fallacy of composition would be to say that since straw is weak, therefore a brick which is made up of straw is also weak.

An example of the fallacy of division taking root can be seen on page 56, in which Gibson interprets the covenant mentioned in Jer. 31:31-34 to mean the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments. What this equivocation presupposes is that the Decalogue is only meant to be for the Old Covenant only (the fallacy of false dichotomy), of which such is not proven. Another error of course would be to disregard the fullness of the Mosaic Covenant and reduce its complex nature into a single subject matter of the Decalogue, thus being very reductionistic in the interpretation of Scripture at that point. The prophesying of the coming New Covenant in Jer. 31:31-34 for example would lose a lot of its meaning if the focus was merely upon the Decalogue which is not featured at all in the passage.

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael L. Czapkay, *Are Baptists Rational?* (The Trinity Review, Jan-Mar 1993)

Rather, the focus was more upon the formal reason of the Covenant, as a means of Man getting right with God (salvation), rather than the Law which is only the material document of the Covenant.

One particularly interesting fallacy can be on page 74, where Gibson puts forward the following argumentation:

[Based upon 2 Timothy 3:16-17], the dilemma [for Covenantal Theologians] is:

1. "All Scripture" at that time primarily meant the whole Old Testament
2. If "teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness" includes obedience...
3. Then we must obey the whole Old Testament (including the so-called "moral ceremonial and civil laws.")

This argument however is fallacious. Premise 1 assumes that only the Old Testament is in view, while the Greek *πασα γραφη* (*pasa graphe*) can mean "everything that is Scripture". However, since our focus is on the Old Testament which is a subset of "all Scripture", we can grant that for the sake of argumentation. More importantly, since the idea is that obedience is included, not that obedience is **the** only purpose, therefore to state that obedience to the entire Old Testament laws is required is in error because obedience is not **the** only purpose embraced by Covenantal Theology. Rather, it could be that some parts of the Old Testament are for obedience and some for symbolism among others.

### **On theological nomenclature**

On page 24, Gibson suggests that "if you have to rely on words uninspired by the Holy Spirit (like "moral law") to explain your theology, then you probably have a different theology than the Holy Spirit". This is truly an astonishing claim, considering that important theological words/phrases like "Trinity" and "hypostatic union" are "words uninspired by the Holy Spirit" too, so does this mean that usage of any of these terms mean that the person utilizing it "has a different theology than the Holy Spirit"? Closer to home, Gibson himself does not practice the same standard he advocates. The term "believers' baptism" is not found anywhere in the Scriptures, neither are the terms "regenerate membership", "New Covenant Church" (p. 7), or "law of conscience" (p. 15). Since this is the case, Gibson's attempted argument against the use of uninspired words in theological discussion is in error and not practiced by him either. It would be of great help to peruse the Arian controversy where the difference between orthodoxy and the Arian heresy lies in the usage of the uninspired phrase "same essence" as opposed to "similar essence" in order to put this anti-intellectual and anti-theological argument to rest once and for all. Just because the Scripture is perspicuous does not mean that the things of God will always be easy to understand (2 Peter 3:16).

Such an error by Gibson follows from a chart he made on page 23 whereby he lists down the number of times various names were used to describing the Decalogue, in which the phrase "moral law" (not surprisingly) appears zero times in both testaments. But Gibson misses the entire point of theological nomenclature. Theological nomenclature is utilized to better express the truths of Scripture, not that the terminology itself is found in Scripture. Similar to the argument over the use of uninspired words, this whole argument does not understand the idea and rationale behind Theology in the first place.

### **Dispensational hermeneutic**

At various instance, a Dispensational hermeneutic is utilized on various doctrines for no particular reason whatsoever. For example, it is asserted on page 38 that Galatians 3 is only “about redemption accomplished for the corporate people of God in the 1<sup>st</sup> century”, while on the following page 39, Romans 7 with its use of the Law to convict sin was stated to be applicable to Jews only (which is strange since the Epistle to the Romans was written to at least a mixed church and probably even a purely Gentile church (c.f. Acts 18:2)). Such a limitation of the Word of God to particular epochs and to particular peoples are not substantiated by the Word of God at all in this book, and in this reviewer’s opinion impossible to do so. It has mere eisegesis to so limit the Word of God when the Word itself does not have warrant such a limitation on such passages.

## **Two Canons?**

Following on with the issue of Dispensational hermeneutics, Gibson in the promotion of two canons while denying a united canon of Scripture (p. 94) is problematic. There is no issue that there are historically two canons – one for the OT and one for the NT. But to state that since there is two canons in this sense (historically) does not therefore render false the idea that there is only one canon in another sense (theologically). The failure to differentiate between the senses of words and their usage in the Scriptures is one problem that is seen in this book with regards to terms like the Law.

## **On the Law**

On page 42, Gibson made the statement that the law when referred negatively by Paul “often refer to regulation (Old Covenant contract)”. However, is that the case? Scripture indicates that the denigration of the law by Paul occur in the context of salvation, nor regulation. Salvation is by faith apart from works, as Eph. 2:8-9 tells us. Similarly, Gibson’s case regarding the Jerusalem Council in page 87 does not cut it, for the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was all about salvation as opposed to Legalism; obedience to God’s Law was not in the picture whatsoever in the deliberations. Gibson’s caricature of Covenantal Theology on page 59 is similarly puzzling. They may be a few Covenantal Theologians who “assume that “the law” when used positively must mean “the Decalogue *alone*,” but when used negatively it must “the whole law except the Decalogue,” but is that truly the position of any major Covenantal Theologian? I really doubt it and have not come across any who state such when what they say is interpreted in the larger theological framework they are advocating<sup>4</sup>.

## **Erroneous or incomplete understanding of certain theological issues**

All of these errors came to a head in misunderstanding various theological issues. One important aspect of good argumentation is that the issues are to be understood well and then interacted with either in agreement or disagreement. Furthermore, when it comes to meta-narrative paradigm doctrines such as Covenantal Theology, there are diverse viewpoints even between Covenantal Theologians. Therefore, it is not wise to over-generalize and thus caricature the position of Covenantal Theology on various issues as stating that Covenantal Theology teaches X or Y or Z, for most of the time such may be only one perspective among many. This is not to mention that it is probably not the majority perspective also. The present reviewer himself who is a Reformed,

---

<sup>4</sup> Isolating texts out of context may indeed show some Covenantal Theologians to write such, but knowing their Covenantal framework show them to understand the issue much differently than how anyone who approach their writings without such an understanding would do so. As Luther states, “this [the Ten Commandments] we do teach, but after the doctrine of faith” [Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Kregel Classics, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 1979), xii]. In other words, the obedience of faith is only taught after salvation, not before or during salvation. For the purpose of salvation or even continuing in salvation, there are no exception clauses whatsoever.

Covenantal Theologian does not recognize and own many of the so-called positions that are termed the position of Reformed, Covenantal Theology, of which a few would be looked at later.

Gibson has exhibited erroneous and/or incomplete understanding of certain theological issues throughout the book. For example, the doctrine of Infant Baptism is dismissed by saying that it is a “practice based on the Old Testament command for Abraham to circumcise all the males (infants and adults) in his household” (p. 6). That however is an overly simplistic caricature of Infant Baptism that is not accurate at face value. Gibson also does not show a true understanding of what the one Covenant of Grace actually refers to when he criticizes the idea of one covenant of grace (p. 65). Covenantal Theology has always held to both the one Covenant of Grace and the idea that the Covenant of Grace is worked out historically in multiple covenants in the Scriptures (ie Abrahamic, Noahic, Mosaic, Davidic, New Covenant). It is thus simply another false dichotomy to insist that there is no one Covenant of Grace because in Scripture the Old Covenant is contrasted with the New Covenant. The Covenant of Grace by the way refers to God’s covenant with His elect to save them as taught in Jn. 6:37-40; 44, Eph. 1:3-11.

In the same section on page 67, a strawman that is held by no Covenantal Theologians I know of is put forward: namely that “[Covenantal Theologians] assume the Old Covenant must be a covenant of salvation from sin”. Rather, Covenantal Theology of all known persuasions to this present reviewer believes that Old Covenant saints are saved by the one transcendent Covenant of Grace which is in the Old Testament administered according to faith in the anticipated Messiah, as the example of Moses as stated in the Scriptures show (Heb. 11:26)

The next example of something that does not seem to be understood by Gibson is the issue of the Sabbath. Gibson rightly points out that the Sabbath as a ceremony is fulfilled in Christ’s eternal rest. However, here he confuses the sign with the ceremony when he discusses the issue of the Christian Sabbath. No doubt, the strict Sabbatarianism found in many Reformed and non-Reformed circles is an easy target due to their inconsistency on this topic, but it should be expected that he should at least know how the term came about historically, which is not an equivalence to the Jewish Sabbath but rather a memorial day, the Lord’s Day, to commemorate Christ’s death and resurrection. Gibson may disagree with the terminology of “Christian Sabbath”, but to misunderstand the term is another story altogether. Closely linked to this is his objection that “no Gentile heathen convert has ever testified to knowing his duty to keep the Sabbath” (p. 60), but that is to miss the heart of the issue. For since the Sabbath points to God’s rest, all unbelievers know that they should seek that eternal rest, and therefore there is no problem with the Decalogue constituting the moral law in this regard. As a note, there are no problems with seeing the Decalogue as a Covenant document along the lines of a suzerainty treaty (p. 33) and still as constituting the essence of the Moral law, and we reject any false dichotomy which may attempt to split the two.

One aspect of Baptist theology which Gibson tries to promote in his book is the doctrine of Believers’ Baptism or credobaptism. In page 58, Gibson claims that the New Covenant is an individual’s covenant that includes only the regenerate, and in fact, he claims the principle of “Regeneration alone” as one principle in the “New Covenantal Reformation” (p. 7). While this reviewer will not be reviewing the issue of pedobaptism versus credobaptism, it must be noted that it is simply naïve to claim that practicing credobaptism would automatically result in a pure church consisting of only regenerate people, even if church discipline is practiced properly. After all, credobaptism can only judge the profession of a believer and probably his life, but living a moral life and professing the faith does not mean that the person is necessarily regenerate.

We will finish this section by looking at a chart in the book which shows the errors and misunderstandings of Covenant Theology present in it – the Comparison Chart of Covenant Theology vs. the Word of God on page 96- 107.

#### Evaluation of an example Comparison Chart

The first comparison on the Canons in the first row has already been dwelt with above, so we would look at the next row. The Covenant of Works first of all is not unanimously endorsed by all Covenantal Theologians, but regardless the critique in this book shows forth a lack of understanding of the teaching of the Covenant of Works. The issue is not whether Adam had spiritual life before he sinned, but whether he would gain eternal life by **not** sinning, so the critique here missed the point.

The third row is not much better off. The Covenant of Grace that God made with Adam after the Fall as stated in the WCF (Westminster Confession of Faith) is what is known as the *protoeuangelion* or the proto-evangel in Gen. 3:15, which prophesied the defeat of Satan at the hands of the offspring that comes forth from the woman. Certainly, God spoke curses which apply to all three persons, but the proto-evangel in Gen. 3:15 is there amidst the curses, offering humanity a ray of hope for redemption.

In the fourth row, the WCF and thus the position of Reformed, Covenantal Theology is misrepresented. Nowhere in that paragraph in the WCF can it be shown that “The Old Covenant was the Covenant of Grace”. Rather, what it says is that the Covenant of Grace works through the instrumentality of the rites and rituals, the types and shadows of the Old Covenant. The two are not identical, and the critique here thus falls flat.

The fifth row on the idea of one versus many covenants shows the false dichotomy embraced by the Gibson, as well as misunderstanding what the Covenant of Grace actually teaches.

With that, we come to the section of the Law of God, which is not better by far. The first row is on the division of the law into its three parts, of which the critique does not comprehend that the division of the Law into three parts is a theological construct meant to be used in understanding the use and function of the Law, and which has nothing to do with salvation at all. The second row misunderstands the relation of the Moral law to the Decalogue, of which the two are not identical. The Moral law is best presented in the Decalogue but is not the Decalogue itself. So therefore, the passage in Rom. 1-2 which talk about the sins of Jews and Gentiles shows rather that the Jew violated the Moral law as known through the revealed law and especially the Decalogue, while the Gentiles violated the Moral law as known through their conscience which conforms to the standards of the Decalogue.

The third row commits the fallacy of equivocation and composition in linking the Ten Commandments to the Old Covenant. The fourth row is an astonishing misquotation of the WCF, of which it is stated as saying:

“God gave to Adam a law ... in ten commandments ....” (W.C.F. 19:1-2)

This is the original section, with the quoted words in bold:

I. **God gave to Adam a law**, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling,

and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it. (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:17; Rom. 2:14-15, 10:5, 5:12, 19; Gal. 3:10, 12; Ecc. 7:29, Job 28:28)

II. This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, **in ten commandments**, and written in two tables (Jas. 1:25, 2:8,10,12; Rom. 13:8-9; Deut. 5:32, 10:4; Ex. 24:1): the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man (Mt. 22:37-40).

[WCF, Chapter XIX: Of the Law of God]

As it can be seen, a lot of information is removed which qualifies the statement of the kind of law God gave to Adam. Gibson therefore misrepresents the WCF as teaching that “God gave Adam the Ten Commandments at Creation”.

The fifth row on the Law of God section is on the topic of the Ten Commandments and whether it is still binding to us today. As with the second row on the Law of God, this comparison suffers from the fallacy of equivocation, this time between the Law and the Ten Commandments. The varying senses of the term “the Law” are ignored and assumed to always refer to the Decalogue, when it is clear that the Law as a phrase is often used especially in Pauline writings to refer to the works of the Law ie works-righteousness as seen in Rom. 6:14 and Gal. 4:21-5:1, 18-23, not to the Decalogue per se but to its usage in the area of salvation.

With regards to the last row on the section of the Law of God, it is admitted that the WCF does not talk about the Law of Christ because it assumes that the Law of Christ is synonymous to the Law of God which is expounded in chapter 19 already, so the comparison can only reflect the difference in terminology at the most.

Lastly, we come to the section on the Sabbath – by far the most contentious section. The first row mentions that the WCF dictates “Holy times” while New Covenantal Theology calls on people to worship God always. This however is a strawman and unfair characterization of comparing apples and oranges. The WCF is first and foremost a church document and as such it does not mention individuals, but it is assumed that Christians are to worship God always, especially since one of the rallying cries of the Reformation is *Soli Deo Gloria*, the glory of God alone. Coupled with the emphasis on the sanctified calling of believers in their vocations and we can see that the Reformers and the Westminster divines do indeed teach that we are to worship God always.

The second row mentions the idea of the Sabbath being one day in seven as opposed to the seventh day, while the third row talks about the revelation of the Sabbath. Noticeable in both of these sections is the selective quotation from the WCF. Reading the full text of the WCF on these two matters will show that the comparison is in error, since the WCF is spiritualizing the Sabbath in its teachings here. Similarly, the fourth, fifth and sixth rows on the idea of the shifting of the Sabbath to Sunday from Saturday, of the Lord’s Day being the Sabbath, and of the continuation of the Sabbath (**not** its binding nature – that is a misrepresentation) is based upon the same reasoning. Only in light of Gibson’s literal rendering of the Sabbath as part of the Old Covenant can the WCF reasoning not make sense, for the WCF teaching on the Sabbath is based upon the idea of one Covenant of Grace, the function of the Law in the Scriptures, and the usage of non-Dispensational hermeneutics. In other words, the idea of the Christian Sabbath is based upon a deductive spiritualization of the Sabbath based upon other doctrines which NCT denies. That does not make it sub-biblical, for as we have seen, the theory of Necessary Consequence means that these doctrines have the same authority as Scripture if the foundation for these doctrines is biblical and the reasoning to derive it is valid.



The last two rows in this section deals with the sign of the Old Covenant and God's eternal Sabbath rest. Both of these subjects are not covered in the WCF however.

With this, we conclude our look at this example comparison chart.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this book by Gibson is indeed interesting, thought-provoking and very readable. It suffers from many argumentation errors, yet its arguments do demolish surface level argumentation in support of Covenantal Theology, and as such it useful for Covenantal Theologians to check their beliefs if they conform to Scripture. Also, as mentioned, it is a welcome addition to this new field of New Covenantal Theology, and certainly the arguments from a New Covenantal perspective against Antinomianism are appreciated as they can be used against Antinomians who are functionally Marcionites in the arena of apologetics.