VOLUME TWO

REFORMED ETHICS

THE DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

EDITED BY JOHN BOLT

HERMAN BAVINCK

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Editor's Preface

This preface will be relatively brief. Since the editor's preface to volume 1 provides details about Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics* manuscript and the story of the translation project, we will not repeat that here.[1] Our focus instead will be on the relation between the foundational content of volume 1 and Bavinck's exposition of the Decalogue in volume 2.

The heart of Bavinck's understanding of the Christian life in volume 1 is found in chapter 9 with its emphasis on union with Christ and the imitation of Christ. We must first *believe* in Christ; he is our Savior and Lord, our prophet, priest, and king. But, says Bavinck, he is more: "He is also our example and ideal. His life is the shape, the model, that our spiritual life must assume and toward which it must grow."[2] The result is an ethic rooted in divine love that followers of Jesus must emulate, an ethic of Christian identity and character. On this point Bavinck learned his theological lessons from John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli.[3] We also observe that this is an emphasis that matches the current mood in contemporary theological ethics and Christian discipleship. Among the influential ethicists that come to mind here are John Howard Yoder, Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, Edward Vacek, Glen Stassen, and David Gushee.[4]

1. *RE*, 1:ix–xvi; see also "Introduction to Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics*," in *RE*, 1:xxi–xliii.

2. *RE*, 1:317.

3. See his doctoral dissertation, *De ethiek van Ulrich Zwingli*.

4. An abbreviated list of titles includes Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Hauerwas, *Community of Character*; Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*; Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*.

As Bavinck works out the concrete content of his ethics in this volume, however, he joins the long tradition of Reformed ethicists and turns to the Decalogue and the notion of duty. That move could be disconcerting for some who have recently turned to the "kingdom ethics" of union with and imitation of Christ because that emphasis is seen as a *counter* to the role of law and duty in Christian living. In fact, many who have turned to virtue and character ethics have done so because they regard the divine command ethical traditions that have traditionally schooled Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians in their discipleship to have failed.[5] Charges of "decisionism" and "legalism" accompany these critiques; it is important, so it is said, to get beyond rules and principles about right and wrong and focus attention on nurturing *persons* of character and virtue as people who *do* what is right by living the ethic of the kingdom of God.

John Howard Yoder sets this contrast clearly, asking whether the traditional use of the Ten Commandments for ethics really needs Jesus.[6] He wonders if the natural moral law discernible by human intelligence added to the Ten Commandments would not be sufficient for most Protestants. After all, for them, "the broad outlines of moral behavior are dictated by the orders of creation—the fact that the family, the school, work, and the state are instituted by God in creation and therefore binding upon us." He concludes with this: "If there had been no Jesus, our desire or capacity to be good might be defective. But what God wills, what he asks of the person who seeks to please him, would be just the same if there had been no Jesus." Yoder raises a challenging question that must be answered by those who seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ, particularly now when Yoder's general perspective is so popular among many Christian ethicists.

Yoder's own answer is to set the ethics of Jesus and his kingdom as a contradiction to any ethics using divine command or principles: "If, however, our ethics are to be guided by Jesus, then we reject the morality of common sense or reason or the 'orders of creation' because of its content and not because of its Source alone. It is an inadequate moral guide because its standards are wrong and not because humans can understand it."[7] The alternative, to put it starkly, would seem to be as follows: Christ *or* the Law; the imitation of Christ *or* divine command; the ethics of the kingdom *or* the ethics of Sinai supplemented by natural law.

5. This is the burden of Stassen and Gushee's *Kingdom Ethics* as well as Roman Catholic author Joseph Selling's *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics*.

6. Yoder, "Walking in the Resurrection," 39; the cited passages that follow are to this source. I am indebted to Jessica Joustra for this reference to Yoder. Jessica also read the first draft of this preface and offered a number of helpful suggestions.

7. Yoder, "Walking in the Resurrection," 40.

Clearly Bavinck did not buy into this bifurcation; he saw no contradiction between his decidedly christoform ethics and a commitment to notions of duty and obedience to divine command. Why? Because Bavinck recognized that duties are misconstrued if they are seen only in an impersonal, abstract, Kantian, deontological sense. The duties required of us are personal; they are duties *toward God* and bear a profoundly religious character. Furthermore, these duties are not external to us; they are not arbitrarily imposed divine commands; they accord with our created nature and are *revealed* to us. These qualifications are rooted in a trinitarian, covenantal framework and have a theological-metaphysical foundation that cannot be reduced to the historical Jesus. It is an ethic, in other words, that is understood as shaped by the imitation of Christ but not restricted to it in a narrow and literal sense.[8] Let us briefly explore each element of this frame.

Trinitarian

Bavinck regularly describes the essence of the Christian faith in trinitarian terms: "The essence of the Christian religion consists in the reality that the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God, and re-created by the grace of the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God."[9] This accents the importance of the doctrine of creation and the relation of redemption to creation. For Bavinck, the grace of redemption in Christ does not destroy the original creation, nor does it create a totally new world; grace *heals* and *restores* creation. Bavinck's eschatological vision denies "a destruction of substance" and sees the renewal of all things not as "a second brand-new creation, but a re-creation of the existing world. God's honor consists precisely in the fact that he redeems and renews the same humanity, the same world, the same heaven, and the same earth that have been corrupted and polluted by sin. Just as anyone in Christ is a new creation in whom the old has passed away and everything has become new (2 Cor. 5:17), so also this world passes away in its present form as well, in order out of its womb, at God's word of power, to give birth and being to a new world."[10] It is a mistake, then, to repudiate creation order and law in the name of Jesus and the kingdom of God. In trinitarian terms, the work of the Son would then undo the work of the Father, and that simply cannot be true.

8. These two sentences can be taken as the thesis and burden of my doctoral dissertation, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck's Two Essays on the* Imitatio Christi. A summary can be found in my *Bavinck on the Christian Life*, chaps. 3–5. In what follows I am providing Bavinck's hermeneutics of the *imitatio Christi*.

9. *RD*, 1:112; 2:288; cf. Bavinck, *Sacrifice of Praise*, 71; Bavinck, *Het Christendom*, 23, 62.

10. *RD*, 4:717.

COVENANTAL

Critics of command and duty ethics often seem to miss the covenantal character of Old Testament law, overlooking the prologue to the Decalogue: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod. 20:2).

But the oversight goes deeper and ignores the decidedly covenantal, legal character of God's relationship with the original parents of the human race. God's blessing to be "fruitful and multiply" and have dominion over creation (Gen. 1:28) was framed by a stipulation and curse: "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16–17). This language—stipulation, blessing, and curse—is legal and covenantal and gave rise within Reformed theology to the notion of a "covenant of works."[11] This doctrine has a number of important implications.

The most important is the shape it gives to our understanding of the saving work of Christ and the relation between the first and second Adam (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15). The disobedience of the first Adam plunged the world into darkness of sin and brought death to all, but the obedience of the second Adam achieved light and life to those who believe in him. Therefore, to deny the covenantal, legal character of God's relation to humanity in its original, created condition, even apart from sin, calls into question the need for and reality of our Savior's atoning death for sinners. As the apostle Paul observed concerning the bodily resurrection of our Lord, we would still be in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17).

The insistence that duty and law be covenantally framed is especially important for the Reformed tradition because its special temptation is legalism and moralism. For Bavinck, covenant is more than the frame for morality; it is foundational to human life; it is "the usual form in terms of which humans live and work together," including "love, friendship, marriage, as well as all social cooperation in business, industry, science, art, and so forth."[12] The same is true of religion. "In Scripture 'covenant' is the fixed form in which the relation of God to his people is depicted and presented. And even where the word does not occur, we nevertheless always see the two parties, as it were, in dialogue with each other, dealing with each other, with God calling people to conversion, reminding them of their obligations, and obligating himself to provide all that is good" (569). Without covenant, the Creator God would remain "elevated

11. Since we are summarizing Bavinck's views here, we do not need to enter into the contentious discussion about the covenant of works. Bavinck's defense of the doctrine is found especially in *RD*, 2:567–88.

12. *RD*, 2:568; parenthetical page references that follow in the text are to this work.

above humanity in his sovereign exaltedness and majesty," but "religion in the sense of fellowship" would not be possible and the relation between God and humanity would be "exhaustively described in the terms 'master' and 'servant'" (569). Therefore, "if there is truly to be religion, if there is to be fellowship between God and man, if the relation between the two is to be also (but not exclusively) that of a master to his servant, of a potter to clay, as well as that of a king to his people, of a father to his son, of a mother to her child, of an eagle to her young, of a hen to her chicks, and so forth; that is, if not just one relation but all relations and all sorts of relations of dependence, submission, obedience, friendship, love, and so forth among humans find their model and achieve their fulfillment in religion, then religion must be the character of a covenant" (569). When we speak of law and duty, we are talking about our *covenantal relation* to our Creator and Redeemer.

Remarkably, Bavinck goes on to say that covenant gives human beings *rights* before God. Although by virtue of our existence alone we cannot make any claims upon God—we have nothing by which to merit such claims—nonetheless, "the religion of Holy Scripture is such that in it human beings can nevertheless, as it were, assert certain rights before God. For they have the freedom to come to him with prayer and thanksgiving, to address him as 'Father,' to take refuge in him in all circumstances of distress and death, to desire all good things from him, even to expect salvation and eternal life from him. All this is possible solely because God in his condescending goodness gives rights to his creature" (570).

Finally, covenant bestows responsible moral agency on human beings, giving them freedom and dignity. God created men and women as "rational and moral beings," maintained them as such after the fall, and continues to treat them the same way. "He deals with them, not as irrational creatures, as plants or animals, as blocks of wood, but goes to work with them as rational, moral, self-determining beings. He wants human beings to be free and to serve him in love, freely and willingly (Ps. 100). Religion is freedom; it is love that does not permit itself to be coerced. For that reason it must by its very nature take the shape of a covenant in which God acts, not coercively, but with counsel, admonition, warning, invitation, petition, and in which humans serve God, not under duress or violence, but willingly, by their own free consent, moved by love to love in return" (570–71). The sentences that immediately follow this quotation are especially germane to our concern in this preface: "At bottom religion is a duty but also a privilege. It is not work by which we bring advantage to God, make a contribution to him, and have a right to reward. It is grace for us to be allowed to serve him. God is never indebted to us, but we are always indebted to him for the good works we do (Belgic Confession,

art. 24). On his part there is always the gift; on our part there is always and alone the gratitude. For that reason, religion is conceivable only in the form of a covenant and comes to its full realization only in that form." Our dutiful response of law-full obedience is an expression of gratitude and praise for who God is and for what he has done.

Theological-Metaphysical Foundation

The preceding can be summarized with the obvious maxim that moral truth is grounded in *reality*, the created reality brought into being and maintained by the Triune God. Our human capacity for responsible moral agency is structured into our very nature as image-bearers of God and the ability to tell what is right from what is wrong. There is a correspondence between our subjective human faculties and the objective reality of moral truth that is external to us.[13] In Bavinck's words: "From the beginning creation was so arranged and human nature was immediately so created that it was amenable to and fit for the highest degree of conformity to God and for the most intimate indwelling of God" (560). The doctrine here is that of the Logos. Bavinck frequently observes that the same Logos who became flesh is the one by whom all things were created.[14] Creation and redemption are unified as fully trinitarian works: "It is the Father who—not apart from the Son but specifically through the Logos and the Spirit—produces all the forces and gifts present in nature and unregenerate humankind (John 1:4–5, 9–10; Col. 1:17; Pss. 104:30; 139:7). And this Logos and Spirit who dwell and work in all creatures and humans are the same agents who as Christ and the Spirit of Christ acquire and apply all the benefits pertaining to the covenant of grace."[15] Here we have the trinitarian metaphysics that is the foundation of Bavinck's worldview. Two things follow from this.

1. The historical Jesus must never be separated from the union of his human nature with the eternal Logos, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. A truly christoform ethics is indissolubly linked to the moral order of creation brought into being by the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit.

2. An ethic exclusively based on the imitation of Christ is incomplete, particularly in its application of the Sermon on the Mount to contemporary

13. The best access to Bavinck's epistemology is his *Beginselen der psychologie* (ET: *Foundations of Psychology*).

14. E.g., *RD*, 3:235: "The Logos, who was with God and by whom all things were made, is the One who became flesh."

15. *RD*, 3:225.

life. Such an ethic is always a negative ethic—against participation in coercive power, against swearing oaths, voluntary poverty, and so on—and provides little or no constructive guidance to life in business, science, the arts, and other enterprises. To the extent that Christians participate in the public, civic square, it is as countercultural critics.

But what about Yoder's question? Does Jesus then make no moral difference at all?

First things first. The New Testament's primary concern is "restoring our proper relationship with God. The cross of Christ, therefore, is the heart and mid-point of the Christian religion. Jesus did not come, first of all, to renew families and reform society but to save sinners and to redeem the world from the coming wrath of God."[16] Redemption does not mean a radical *nova creatio*: "The differences that are present in creation by the will of God are not set aside by the Son in redemption."[17] At the same time, nonetheless, the gospel does change things.[18] How it does so is expressed both compactly and comprehensively in the final paragraph of the address by Bavinck quoted just now:

> Redemption does change matters however. From the principle of reconciliation with God, all other human relationships are given a new ordering and led back to their original state. God is the owner of every human being and their possessions; we are simply tenants, renters, and must give an account of our stewardship (Luke 16:2; Matt. 25:14ff.). Husbands and wives (Eph. 5:22; Titus 2:5; Col. 3:18), parents and children (Eph. 6:1–4; Col. 3:20–21), masters and slaves (1 Cor. 7:21–22; Eph. 6:5–9; Col. 3:22), civil authorities and subjects (Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Tim. 2:1–2; 1 Pet. 2:13–16, etc.), are all brought into proper relationship with each other. Distinctions in our social life remain but they lose their sharp edge. The New Testament is overflowing with warnings against riches (Matt. 6:19; 19:23; 1 Tim. 6:17–19, etc.), but poverty is no virtue and the natural is not unclean in itself (Mark 7:15ff.; Acts 14:17; Rom. 14:14; 1 Tim.

16. Bavinck, "General Biblical Principles," 443. This is an address Bavinck prepared for the Christian Social Congress held in Amsterdam, November 9–11, 1891. Full title: "According to Holy Scripture, What Are the General Principles [Provided for] a Solution to the Social Question and What Pointers toward This Solution Lie in the Concrete Application Given to These Principles for Israel by Mosaic Law."

17. Bavinck, "General Biblical Principles," 443.

18. In addition to this quotation, see Bavinck, "Christian Principles and Social Relationships." Here Bavinck insists that the worth of the gospel does not depend on its effects: "Even if Christianity had resulted in nothing more than this spiritual and holy community, even if it had not brought about any modification in earthly relationships, even if, for instance, it had done nothing for the abolition of slavery, it would still be and remain something of eternal worth. The significance of the gospel does not depend on its influence on culture, its usefulness for today; it is a treasure in itself, a pearl of great price, even if it might not be a leaven" (141). But this is a contrary-to-fact conditional; the gospel *has* transformed society and culture.

> 4:4). Work is commended and tied to food and wages (Matt. 10:10; 1 Tim. 5:18; Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10). In Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus himself removes for his followers all anxious concern about this earthly life. Because the redemption in Christ renews but does not eliminate the various earthly relationships in which we find ourselves, there remains a large place for the ministry of mercy. Just like the poor (Matt. 26:11; John 12:8; Rev. 13:16), so, too, the many needy will always be with us. In the same way that Jesus the compassionate High Priest is always deeply moved by those in need, so, too, he directs his followers especially to clothe themselves with the Christlike virtue of compassion ([Matt. 5:43–47]; Luke 6:36). Having received mercy from Christ, his followers are expected in turn to show mercy to others (1 Pet. 2:10; Matt. 18:33). It is for this reason that the church has a distinct office for the ministry of mercy.[19]

Thanks to Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, the world *has* changed and so has our moral conduct.

The completion of this volume comes with many personal debts for which I need to say "thank you." Harry Van Dyke served as the translator for the important first draft, handling a challenging task on a difficult manuscript with skill and efficiency. Our editorial team of Jessica Joustra, Nelson Kloosterman, Antoine Theron, and Dirk van Keulen scrutinized every sentence and word in our intensive summer sessions and fully deserve their mention on the title page. Others who helped with translation challenges are mentioned in the notes at the appropriate place. Calvin Theological Seminary student Adam Ramirez helped with the critical apparatus and bibliography. The editorial team at Baker Academic has once again been unfailingly helpful and supportive. Finally, the Hekman Library at Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary, especially its Rare Book Room, has been indispensable to my work on volume 1 and again on volume 2. However, because of restrictions on library access during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to personally make final bibliographic checks on a dozen or so items. William Katerberg, newly appointed Curator of Heritage Hall, and theological librarian Paul Fields kindly chased down these references for me at the last minute. For that work of supererogation and all the others I mentioned above, thank you so very much.

This volume is dedicated to Rich Mouw, emeritus president of Fuller Theological Seminary and a longtime professor of philosophy with special interest in ethics, faith, and public life. Mouw's scholarly and popular work on Dutch

19. Bavinck, "General Biblical Principles," 443–44.

neo-Calvinism was directed more to Abraham Kuyper than to Bavinck, but in recent years he also mentored a number of doctoral students, including a member of our editorial team, to study and write about Bavinck. For that mentoring work and for his success in popularizing the vision of Kuyperian neo-Calvinism alone, he deserves a dedication of a volume such as this. Yet it is above all for his commitment to keep the tradition of divine command ethics alive but never at the expense of union with Christ that he is selected for this honor. His book *The God Who Commands* has a section, "The Triune Commander," that mentions Bavinck's imitation-of-Christ emphasis in contrast to the triumphalist appeals to creation order and kingship found in Abraham Kuyper,[20] but more importantly the trinitarian structure of Mouw's thought is thoroughly Bavinckian; his neo-Calvinist intuition anticipated Bavinck's ethical road map as we have now come to know it. Rich, you are a dear friend, and we thank God for you.

John Bolt

20. Mouw, *God Who Commands*, 156, 159; the entire section covers pp. 150–75.

Book III

HUMANITY AFTER CONVERSION

13

Duties, Precepts and Counsels, Adiaphora

The notion of duty or obligation involves binding human conscience to law and is an integral dimension of ethics. Duties can be divided into absolute obligations that arise from the good itself and relative or desirable duties, a categorization that leads to distinctions between morality and legality, between the necessary and the permissible, between precepts and counsels. Beginning in the early church and throughout the Middle Ages these duties were usually considered in terms of virtue, eventually becoming the four cardinal virtues of prudence or wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance, along with the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. For Protestants, duty was primarily viewed through the lens of the third use of the law—the rule of gratitude. Notwithstanding Immanuel Kant's emphasis on duty in the categorical imperative—Thou Shalt!—modern theology gradually moved away from duty and legal obligation to a morality centered in the person of Jesus Christ.

The proper ethical question to be posed to Holy Scripture is not "What is our duty?" but "What is the relation of believers to the law?" Law is not only an Old Testament notion; Jesus came to fulfill the law, and his own conduct and teaching honor the law. Jesus does and says nothing to abolish the law. He does, however, promote a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, intensifying the commandments and giving them a spiritual depth. The apostles, including Paul, were personally devout concerning the Torah but also moved beyond Jewish ceremonial practices and insisted upon Christian liberty. The law cannot give life but also no longer condemns those who are in Christ. Freed from the external authority of the law, believers are free to

live according to its content. What is itself spiritual and ethical in the law already in the Old Testament is and remains eternal. Our good works do not save us; they demonstrate the new life in us and are done according to God's commandments.

Reformed ethics, therefore, was centered on the Decalogue and in opposition to both nomism *and* antinomianism. *It therefore resists all gnostic attempts to emancipate the flesh and free us from the bonds of law and authority by appealing to the special prerogatives of genius or statecraft and politics. Both God's nature and our own created human nature bind us to the law. The reality of law obligates us.*

Just as the law is summarized in one word—love—so too can all duties be reduced to a single maxim: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). But this one duty can be distributed among many duties resulting in many questions and debates.

The Stoic distinction between precepts for all and counsels for a small group of the wise who sought a higher morality was soon adopted by the Christian church and applied to martyrs and monks ("the religious"). Precepts were obligatory, counsels voluntary. Protestants rejected this dual morality and also repudiated the scriptural warrants used by Roman Catholic defenders of the distinction. It was acknowledged that Jesus (and Paul) did grant that for some it may be profitable, for the sake of the kingdom, not to marry, but this is not a counsel that goes beyond the law and provides greater value, rank, and reward in the kingdom of heaven. Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7 is a concession, not a commandment. *The same is true of Jesus's challenge to the rich young ruler to sell everything and give it to the poor. For the rich young ruler this was not a matter of choice but a command. The notion that Christianity in its perfection is unattainable for all but a few aristocratic spirits, for extraordinary moral heroes, is more pagan and Pelagian than biblical. The moral law is for everyone, but each individual believer is uniquely called in different circumstances to use his or her gifts and fulfill their vocation before God.*

There has also been a vigorous debate in the Christian church about the adiaphora, the so-called indifferent things. During the time of the Reformation much of this revolved around Christian worship: liturgies and prayers, clerical vestments, altars, images, candles, incense, the use of Latin. Some, like Spener, rejected the category of adiaphora altogether, insisting that the true Christian must be completely distinct from the world. Others went to the opposite extreme and claimed that certain things were indifferent with respect to the law altogether. Most modern theologians reject the idea of the permissible in ethics, restricting it to civic life.

Along with Thomas Aquinas, Protestants acknowledge the presence of adiaphora in the abstract but insist that concrete actions that involve intention, goal, and circumstance cease to be indifferent, are to be guided by the moral law, and therefore are commanded or forbidden. Mediating positions that leave the area of the permissible to the judgment of the individual shortchange the universality of the law

and end up in destructive subjectivism. Others confuse the realm of the permissible with Christian freedom, forgetting that this freedom exists within the law. The realm of the adiaphora must not be confused with things that are physical, instinctive, or natural (such as stroking one's beard), things that are indifferent for children, and variations in people's developmental stages of faith. We must also acknowledge that consciences have been historically shaped in different ways.

Ethics, finally, is concerned with "ought" rather than "may." There are actions that are permissible because Scripture does not forbid them; and we are not obligated to do something Scripture does not command. The law both proscribes and prescribes; all proscription presupposes sin. Although many actions are neither necessary nor impermissible, if they are done, they should be done in accordance with the law.

§27. The Doctrine (Theory) of Duty

Historical Overview

In the Dutch and German languages the word for "duty" indicates a habit to which one has become accustomed and which gradually develops into an obligation from which one cannot withdraw.[1] Objectively, the habit becomes a law, command (cf. *ethos*)—subjectively, a duty. Duty consists in being bound in my conscience to the law. From the beginning, therefore, the doctrine of duty was incorporated in ethics.

The Stoics in particular emphasized obligatory conduct, by which they meant rational action as such, or moral action apart from the influence of emotions.[2] This became a good deed[3] when it was performed with the right disposition. But Stoic idealism had to distinguish between the (absolute) good and the desirable, the relative good. And this second class of the relative good was in turn classified as three subgroups: "those which are according to nature and therefore have a value (ἀξία), being desirable and preferable (προηγμένα) in themselves; those which are against nature, and therefore without value (ἀπαξία) and to be avoided (ἀποπροηγμένα); and finally those which have neither merit nor demerit, the ἀδιάφορα in the narrower sense."[4]

1. DO: *plicht*; GO: *Pflicht*; from the verbs *plegen* and *pflegen* = be in the habit of; cf. Burger, "Pflicht."

2. GO: *die vernunftgemässe Handlung als solche*; GrO: καθῆκον; Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, 244–54 (§§71–72).

3. GrO: καθόρθωμα.

4. Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, 249 (§71). Ed. note: In the margins Bavinck provided examples of each category: things desirable include beauty, health, life, honor, money; things reprehensible include sickness, death, poverty; whether the number of my hairs is odd or even is a matter of indifference.

As a result, the Stoics were also compelled to distinguish between absolute duties (by which humans strived for the absolute good) and relative duties (which aimed for the desirable), between "perfect duties" and "conditioned" or "intermediate duties."[5] This is the difference between the virtuous life of the wise and the good and the lower life of those who also seek the desirable, between morality and legality, between the necessary and the permissible, between precepts and counsels.[6]

The work of the Stoic Panaetius is also the basis of Cicero's *On Duties*, whose three books discuss (1) what is honorable, (2) what is expedient or to one's advantage, and (3) what to do when these two conflict.[7] In the Christian church, Ambrose followed Cicero in his *On the Duties of the Clergy*, where he adopted the four cardinal virtues, pronouncing them to be Christian virtues: wisdom as worship of God, justice as piety, fortitude as courage in God, temperance as moderation.[8] Augustine adopted them and grafted them onto the root of love. Cassiodorus (died after 560) had them as well, but added the virtue of contemplation, capacity for judgment, and remembrance.[9] To these four, Pope Gregory I added faith, hope, and love.[10] This was the basic framework throughout the Middle Ages, but occasionally a few other virtues were added. The concepts of virtue and duty were used interchangeably and overlapped.

The concept of duty was also part of Protestant ethics. While the the law was always viewed as a rule of gratitude for the regenerated, the law as such remained in force.[11] After all, the law had a threefold function or use: (1) *theological/elenctic/pedagogic*: convicting of guilt or impotence; (2) *political*: curbing and bridling sin; and (3) *normative* and *didactic*: guiding Christian conduct.[12] Because the political use really belongs to the sphere of jurisprudence, the Heidelberg Catechism deals only with the first and the third uses.

5. GrO: καθήκοντα τέλεια and καθήκοντα μέσα. Ed. note: Bavinck's terms come from the German text (Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen*[3], 3/1:265n2). The English translation of Zeller has καθορθώματα and μέσα καθήκοντα (Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, 249 [§71]).

6. LO: *praecepta*; *consilia*.

7. LO: *honestum*; *utile*. Ed. note: Marcus Tullius Cicero's *On Duties* (*De officiis*) is divided into three books: "I. Moral Goodness"; "II. Expediency"; "III. The Conflict between the Right and the Expedient." See *On Duties* (trans. Miller).

8. LO: *prudentia*; *iustitia*; *fortitudo*; *temperantia*; Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy* (*NPNF*[2] 10:33–89); cf. Gass, *Geschichte der christlichen Ethik*, 1:164–74.

9. Gass, *Geschichte der christlichen Ethik*, 1:179.

10. Gass, *Geschichte der christlichen Ethik*, 1:182.

11. See Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32.

12. LO: *usus legis*; *usus theologicus*, *elencticus*, *paedagogicus*; *usus politicus*; *usus normativus*, *didacticus*. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.vii.6–12; cf. Paul Lobstein, *Die Ethik Calvins*, 51–57.

The third use of the law receives less than its full and proper due in Luther.[13] The Reformed insisted that for the believer, only the curse of the law was abolished, not the law itself.[14] Therefore, they spoke of duties for the Christian.[15] The entirety of ethics was concerned with the doctrine of virtues or duties, and no distinction was made between the two.

It was especially in the age of rationalism that duties and virtues regained some honor, but they were also significantly weakened. Kant opposed this development and conceived of law—the inner "Thou Shalt!"[16]—as unconditional demand, as the categorical imperative, and once again paid homage to the majesty of duty. In this way Kant changed the entirety of ethics into lawful fulfillment of duty and failed to consider that we are unable to do this because of the radical evil[17] within us, and that the law alone can never make us moral. De Wette, in his *Textbook of Christian Morality*, therefore posited piety or godliness as the basic duty from which all other duties flow and sought the strength for their fulfillment in redemption through Christ.[18]

Schleiermacher was the first to venture into this more deeply. In his *Sketch of a Moral System*,[19] he talks about the structure of ethics and stipulates the highest good as our moral task, consisting in the unity of reason and nature.[20] In other words, the existence of rationality in nature is the highest good. Virtue is the required moral capacity consisting in the power of reason in nature. Duty is the form of moral conduct—that is, the movement of virtue toward the highest good. Rothe joins Schleiermacher in speaking about duties: duty is the formula that virtue needs for producing the highest good.[21] In normal moral development, law and duty would not be possible—for example, with angels and the saints, who *know* and who *will* the way and the manner of producing the highest good. In humanity's sinful state, duties are necessary, yet cannot be fulfilled because of sin. But now there is redemption in Christ,

13. Cf. Luthardt, *Die Ethik Luthers*, 39–49.

14. LO: *maledictio legis*.

15. LO: *officia*; DO: *plichten*. Ed. note: Bavinck provides as examples William Ames, Bénédict Pictet, and Johann Franz Buddeus.

16. GO: *Du sollst*.

17. GO: *das radikale Böse*.

18. GO: *Frömmigkeit*; de Wette, *Lehrbuch der christlichen Sittenlehre*, 205–12 (§§212–23).

19. Schleiermacher, *Entwurf eines Systems der Sittenlehre* (1835); this was subsequently republished by Twesten in 1841 under a different title, *Grundriß der philosophischen Ethik* (Outline of philosophical ethics); yet another version was produced by Ludwig Jonas in 1843 under the title *Die christliche Sitte nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt* (The Christian ethic), originally published in *Sämmtliche Werke*, div. 1, vol. 12. ET of selections from this volume: *Selections from Friedrich Schleiermacher's "Christian Ethics."*

20. GO: *Gestaltung der Sittenlehre*; *sittliche Aufgabe*.

21. GO: *Formel*; Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, 3:351–453 (§§798–858).

who gradually leads the abnormal moral development into the normal moral development. Duty and law are still necessary because no one is yet absolutely virtuous, absolutely redeemed. But neither are duty and law superfluous, since everyone included in redemption is still relatively capable of fulfilling them. Everyone needs law and duty, precisely in order that such a rule for their conduct can lead them more and more from an abnormal moral development to a normal one. That law can proceed only from the Redeemer, and naturally with the redeemed it increasingly ceases to be law and becomes increasingly superfluous. Rothe goes on to speak of "individual moral authority"[22] that turns *the* universal duty into *my* duty, about the permissible, and about Christ and his Spirit in the community (i.e., Christian morality as our law), about collision of duties, and the like.[23]

For Martensen, "what virtue is as fulfillment, *duty* is as demand; therefore, the whole doctrine of virtue may be treated as the doctrine of duty."[24] Duty is the relation of the law to the individual. A person will say, "This is my duty," and not "This is my law." Martensen does not elaborate on the concept of duty; later, however, he maintains the third, didactic use of the law for the believers, since the old Adam is still in them.[25] Often they must still force themselves to obey Christ. They often still have to summon the imperative of duty to help them, because they are not always inclined to perform their duty. But this use of the law becomes—and must become—more and more superfluous. The Ten Commandments must be retained in the catechism but interpreted Christianly in the spirit of the New Testament. The gospel is an *invitation*, but for the conscience it is also a *commandment of duty*.[26] Christ is not only the Giver, but also the holy, commanding Authority who says, "*Thou shalt* believe."[27] Burger appears to agree with him.[28] But others, like Vilmar, say that duty has no place in theological ethics, any more than virtue and the highest good, since they presuppose a legal obligation and a legal demand while the converted have liberty and spontaneity.[29] Nevertheless, Vilmar concedes that the word "duty" can also be used figuratively,[30] but at the risk of being misunderstood.

22. GO: *individuelle sittliche Instanz*.
23. Rothe, *Theologische Ethik*, §§805, 811, 820, 849.
24. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:344 (§113); emphasis original.
25. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:438–42 (§143).
26. GO: *Einladung*; *Pflichtgebot*.
27. GO: du sollst *glauben*.
28. Burger, "Pflicht," 571.
29. GO: *Rechtsobliegenheit*; *Rechtsforderung*; DO: *vrijheid en spontaniteit*; Vilmar, *Theologische Moral*, 2/3:107–8; cf. "Law."
30. Ed. note: The Dutch original has *oneigenlijk*.

Duty and Law in Scripture

In our view, to be sure, duty is not a biblical term; it occurs only a few times in the versified Dutch psalter—for example, in Psalm 19:6:

> So, I gather from my duty,
> a clear message, O God.
> What a beautiful prospect!
> He who trusts in you
> maintains your laws,
> for they contain great reward.[31]

Yet in itself that does not disqualify the term. Duty presupposes law. The question therefore is, What is the relation of believers to the *law*? In the Synoptic Gospels we find Jesus saying the following: Righteousness[32] is an attribute of the kingdom (Matt. 6:33), with which one must be clothed as with a wedding garment in order to enter (Matt. 22:11–14); only those who do the will of God are Jesus's family (mother and brothers; Matt. 12:50), and they alone can enter the kingdom (Matt. 7:21, 24).[33] This will of God is revealed in the law and the prophets (Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 22:40); that is Jesus's point of departure (Mark 10:19): "You know the commandments" (cf. Luke 10:26). And Jesus acknowledges and upholds the entire Mosaic law; the teachers of the law and the Pharisees sitting in the seat of Moses must be obeyed, even though they themselves do not obey Moses (Matt. 23:2–3). Jesus acknowledges sacrifice in Matthew 5:23–24: "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." He also recognizes fasting (Matt. 6:16–18), which even in the Old Testament was commanded only on the great Day of Atonement (Lev. 16 and 23). When he says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected

31. Ed. note: The reference to Ps. 19:6 is *not* to the biblical text but to stanza 6 in the Dutch Psalm book used in the Reformed churches; translation by Harry Van Dyke. DO:

> *Dus krijg ik van mijn plicht,*
> *O God, een klaar bericht.*
> *Wat is 't vooruitzicht schoon!*
> *Hij, die op U vertrouwt.*
> *Uw wetten onderhoudt,*
> *Vindt daarin grooten loon.*

32. GrO: δικαιοσύνη.

33. Holtzmann, "Zur synoptischen Frage II, III"; Klöpper, "Zur Stellung Jesu"; Kirn, "Das Gesetz in der christlichen Ethik."

the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others" (Matt. 23:23), he acknowledges the former as good, although it is not the most weighty. Jesus would not allow anyone to carry a vessel through the temple (Mark 11:16), because the temple is his Father's house (Matt. 23:21; Luke 2:49), which must not be turned into a den of thieves (Mark 11:17). He keeps the regular feasts in Jerusalem, eats the Passover (Mark 14:12); he orders the lepers to offer the sacrifice of purification (Matt. 8:4; Luke 17:14), and he pays the temple tax, the two-drachma tax (Matt. 17:27). In a word, Jesus did not come "to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17; Luke 16:17).[34] In fact, "not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18)—that is, until the end of the age, when "heaven and . . . earth pass away" (Luke 16:17). Jesus came to fulfill, not to set aside, abolish, or any such thing. "The law, however, in its Mosaic basis as well as in its prophetic development, is to continue in enduring force until the end of the world, or until each of its commandments is fulfilled, as he has come to fulfil them—then, indeed it will cease as law, but only in order that it may continue in its fulfilment."[35] Thus, Jesus is very conservative; he says no word, nor performs any deed to abolish the law.

On the other hand, Jesus nevertheless opposes the Pharisees. He rejects the "commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7),[36] demands a righteousness surpassing that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (Matt. 5:20). Therefore, in Matthew 5 he provides an internal and spiritual explanation of the law. Furthermore, Jesus seems to have had a more lenient view of the Sabbath when he permits his disciples to journey on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28 par. Luke 6:1–5; Matt. 12:1–8).[37] But in this instance, Jesus is not acting in conflict with the law, with the Old Testament Scripture (but only with the Jewish prescriptions), and hence appeals to the example of David. He points to the intention of the Lawgiver, that the Sabbath is made for humanity, and he claims the right as the Son of Man to interpret the law and to teach the true fulfillment of the

34. GrO: καταλῦσαι; πληρῶσαι.

35. B. Weiss, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 1:108 (§24). Is it then appropriate to speak of Jesus as a "legislator"? Trent thinks so (Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:442–59 [§§144–46]); and so do the Arminians (de Moor, *Commentarius Perpetuus*, 2:665); Eduard König investigates how Jesus related to each commandment of the first and second tables, Sabbath, ceremonial laws, and so forth. Christ came to accomplish the law, to carry out the whole law, but he also came to fulfill and perfect it, to clarify its deepest meaning. By declaring, "*I* say to you," he changed the character of the Sabbath, neighbor-love, etc. (König, "Der Christ und das alttestamentlische Gesetz").

36. GrO: ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων.

37. GrO: ὁδὸν ποιεῖν.

law. He never breaks the Mosaic law (Luke 13:15; 14:4), yet states that it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath.[38] Jesus was so far from breaking the Sabbath commandment that he says, "Pray that your flight not be in winter or on a Sabbath" (Matt. 24:20), for refugees might feel bound to the rule not to travel on that day. Jesus also defends his disciples against the Pharisees' stipulation about washing hands (Mark 7:1–15; Matt. 15:1–11), against their stipuation about fasting (Mark 2:18–22), and against their permission of divorce (Mark 10:2–9). Jesus always upholds the law as divine and eternal, but he views that law spiritually, internally, and lets first things be first; he proceeds from the heart and core of the law, and summarizes law and prophets as teaching the love of God and neighbor (Mark 12:28–34; Matt. 7:12). Like the prophets, he ranks mercy above sacrifice (Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Mark 12:33) and elevates the internal above the external: "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him" (Mark 7:15). Thus, Jesus acknowledges the whole law as divine and enduring, but he interprets it not as the teachers of the law but as the prophets did—that is to say, spiritually. In no way does he say that the law will cease in part, except insofar as he foretells that the temple will be destroyed (Mark 13:2) and that he, who is greater than the temple (Matt. 12:6), will always be with them (Matt. 18:20). Jesus does not want to abolish the law except only in the way that arises through the true and complete fulfilling of the law (not even in Mark 2:21–22, where he warns "not against fasting, but against an untimely and immature abandonment of the old forms").[39]

The early church in Jerusalem, therefore, kept the law, continued in the temple (Acts 2:46), went up to it (Acts 3:1–2), prayed at set times (Acts 10:9), ate nothing unclean (Acts 10:14), is called "zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20) and "devout . . . according to the law" (Acts 22:12).[40] Stephen, too, said nothing against the temple and Jewish cultic practices (Acts 7). Nonetheless, at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), the gentiles were freed from the law. Measures were taken merely against damaging the mission to Israel. Nothing was said about whether it was permissible to have fellowship with gentile Christians, including meals. Some zealots opposed it, and at one time Peter gave in to them (Gal. 2). But all the other apostles thought more leniently about this.

Paul also considered the law of Moses as a revelation of God's will (Rom. 2:18; 9:4; 2 Cor. 3:3, 7); though a possession and privilege of Israel, it is the law

38. But what about John 5:8, 11? Ed. note: This is Bavinck's question, and he leaves it unanswered.

39. B. Weiss, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 1:112.

40. GrO: ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου; εὐλαβὴς κατὰ τὸν νόμον.

of God (Rom. 2:27; 7:22, 25), spiritual (Rom. 7:14), holy (Rom. 7:12).[41] And by law Paul understands the entire law, including the ritual portion, because in Romans 9:4 worship belongs to Israel's privilege.[42] The whole Old Testament is sometimes called the law (1 Cor. 14:21; Rom. 3:19).[43] However, this law does not bring righteousness (Rom. 8:3), but stimulates covetous desire (Rom. 7:7–8), arouses dormant sin (Rom. 7:8–9; 1 Cor. 15:56), provokes the wrath of God (Rom. 4:15; Gal. 3:10), pronounces curse and death (2 Cor. 3:6), and increases trespasses (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:19). Thus, it has come between God and us and is a guardian unto Christ (Gal. 3:24). If that is the meaning and intention of the law, then it is also transitory and temporary (Gal 3:25), and the believer is no longer under a guardian.[44] With the coming of faith in Christ the end of the law has arrived (Rom. 10:4); the law—that is, the Old Testament dispensation—is "done away" (2 Cor. 3:11).[45] "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal. 3:19).[46] As long as a child is a minor,[47] they are under a guardian, like Israel (Gal. 4:2–3), and are not free (v. 3), but entangled with a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1), under the dispensation of the law, which is symbolized by the son of the slave woman (Gal. 4:22–31).[48] That servitude to the law, however, has ceased, and freedom from the law is introduced by Christ, who himself submitted voluntarily to the law, "to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:5).[49]

Christ has therefore provided us liberty (Gal. 5:1), to which we are now called (Gal. 5:13), and has made us children of the Jerusalem that is above, like the sons of the free woman (Gal. 4:26–31). That freedom, objectively acquired by Christ, we receive subjectively in and through the Spirit: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17). "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18).[50] Just as a wife is set free from her husband through his death, so the believer who has died with Christ is set free from the law, to serve another lord—namely, Christ (Rom. 7:1–3; Gal. 2:19). Nonetheless this freedom of faith does not

41. GrO: νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ; πνευματικός; ἅγιος.
42. GrO: καὶ ἡ λατρεία.
43. GrO: ὁ νόμος.
44. GrO: ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν.
45. GrO: καταργούμενον; Johannes Weiss, *Die christliche Freiheit*.
46. GrO: ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα.
47. GrO: νήπιος.
48. GrO: ζυγῷ δουλείας.
49. GrO: υἱοθεσία.
50. GrO: εἰ δὲ πνεύματι ἄγεσθε, οὐκ ἐστὲ ὑπὸ νόμον.

abolish the law but upholds it (Rom. 3:31), for the "righteous requirement of the law" (Rom. 8:4)—weakened by the flesh (Rom. 8:3)—"[is] fulfilled in [those] who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4)[51]—in those who "are released from the law" in order to "serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code" (Rom. 7:6). That Spirit "gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6).[52] That Spirit must renew our mind[53] so "that by testing [we] may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 1:10), which is called a "law of the Spirit of life" over against the "law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

Although Paul now views himself "under the law of Christ"[54] (1 Cor. 9:21), as serving the Lord (Rom. 12:11; 16:18; 2 Cor. 5:9), often points to the example of Jesus and himself (Gal. 4:12; 1 Cor. 4:16, 17; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; Eph. 5:2), appeals to Christian custom (1 Cor. 11:16; 14:33), and he himself provides ordinances (1 Cor. 7:17; 11:2, 34; 16:1; Phil. 2:12), nevertheless, the Old Testament and the law remain authoritative for him. After all, everything in the Old Testament was written down for our instruction (1 Cor. 10:11; Rom. 15:4), and Paul repeatedly appeals to the Old Testament. For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul appeals to Genesis 3:16 for the submission of a wife to her husband. In 2 Corinthians 9:9, he appeals to Psalm 112:9 for an admonition to generosity. In 1 Corinthians 1:31 and 2 Corinthians 10:17, he appeals to Jeremiah 9:23–24 for a warning against boasting. In Galatians 5:14, he appeals to Leviticus 19:18 for the summary of the entire law in one commandment—namely, that of neighbor love. In Romans 13:8–10, many commandments of the law are enumerated and summarized in terms of love. In Ephesians 6:2, he cites the Fifth Commandment. And Paul urges the fulfilling of these commandments with an appeal to the mercy of God which has been shown (Rom. 12:1), to Christ (Rom. 15:1–3; 1 Cor. 1:10), to his readers' having been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20), to the Spirit whose temple they are (1 Cor. 6:19), to the living fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 6:15–16), to their Christian calling (Eph. 4:1), to doing good works (Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:10).

Thus the law is not nullified but is completely fulfilled for the first time in Christianity.[55] Christ is the true propitiation, the true Passover Lamb (1 Cor.

51. GrO: τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ νόμου.

52. GrO: τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζῳοποιεῖ. Ed. note: Bavinck has ζωοποιεῖ (without an iota subscript under the omega); this demonstrates once again that Bavinck is using an edition of the New Testament prepared by Tischendorf, who uses ζωοποιεῖ; later editions (Nestle-Aland) use ζῳοποιεῖ.

53. GrO: ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός.

54. GrO: ἔννομος Χριστοῦ.

55. Thus Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean* XIX.19 (*NPNF*[1] 4:239–52); B. Weiss, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 1:380–90 (§§74–75); 2:118–28 (§106). Ed. note: In addition to the passages Bavinck cites from Weiss, one more should be listed: 2:229–34 (§126).

5:7; Eph. 5:2); we are called to offer our bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1; 15:16). These are the true sacrifices, and the church is the true temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16). Thus, the Old Testament ordinances are "a shadow of the things to come" (Col. 2:17), Christ's sacrifice is the true atonement offering (Eph. 5:2), baptism in communion with Christ is the true circumcision (Col. 2:11), and spiritual worship is the true worship (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 3:3).[56] Thus Paul teaches that the law

1. has ceased to be able to give life and righteousness because it is "weakened by the flesh" (Rom. 8:3);
2. has ceased to be able to condemn us (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 3:13); and
3. has ceased being the institution of teaching immature Israel until the time of Christ (Gal. 3:24).

Over against all that, believers now stand under grace; they are freed, mature sons and daughters, led by the Spirit; the wall of partition between Jews and gentiles has been broken down (Eph. 2:14).[57]

Nevertheless, Paul does teach emancipation from the external authority of the law, although he in no way teaches the abolition of its content. There are many things that point to this conclusion. Even after his conversion, Paul views the law as Israel's privilege, insists that the law is confirmed by faith, and teaches that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled by the Spirit. Paul calls the law a law of God and declares it to be holy. He also acknowledges the Old Testament to be inspired (2 Tim. 3:16) and regards all things in it as having been written for our sake. He constantly appeals to the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments. From all of this, it becomes clear that, while Paul does teach an emancipation from the external authority of the law, he definitely does not consider believers to be liberated from its content. The moral calling of Christian believers remains the same as it was for the Old Testament people of God.[58]

The Spirit in no way reveals a different or higher content; the content is and remains identical. However, the Spirit does increase believers' personal wisdom and understanding of the purpose of their life (Col. 1:9)—for example, as children of God, to be like their Father (Eph. 5:1). The Spirit increases each person's perception of what is fitting for them as they acknowledge God and

56. GrO: σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων; λατρείαν.

57. Cf. de Moor, *Commentarius Perpetuus*, 2:662, who bases the abolition of the law on these same three things.

58. Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, 2:283–93; Ernesti, *Die Ethik des Apostels Paulus*, 63.

his law for their own regenerated being. With renewed minds, they are able to "[test and] discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). They are able to think about "whatever is true . . . honorable . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . and commendable" (Phil. 4:8). From this it follows that Paul continued to uphold the law in a threefold manner: First, he upheld it insofar as we are—by nature, and so also by our regenerated nature—obliged to fulfill it; this is the law's natural obligation, from which we are never released.[59] Second, the law brings us "knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Third, the law is a rule of gratitude—that is, a source of knowledge for a life well-pleasing to God.[60]

But, in addition, Paul appeals to various sources of knowledge: (1) To his own moral prescriptions. In 1 Corinthians 7:12–14 and 7:40, he appeals to what he has received by the Holy Spirit in contrast to the commandments taught in Scripture or by Jesus. (2) To the revelation of God in Christ, who is our example (1 Thess. 5:18). (3) To the Holy Spirit in the church, who is the rule of our walk according to the Spirit. (4) To Christian moral practice in the churches (1 Cor. 14:34; 11:16).[61] (5) Finally, as Jesus, so Paul teaches that the law has not been abolished but fulfilled, *spiritualized*, internalized. Hence what is itself spiritual-ethical (the moral law) already in the Old Testament is and remains eternal.[62]

The Law and Christian Liberty

Such, as a rule, was the healthy view of the Christian church, definitely also of the Lutheran and Reformed churches.[63] Luther maintained the necessity of good works by virtue of God's commandment, by virtue of the Christian's unique being, and by virtue of the gratitude that is due.[64] Luthardt makes the sound comment that Protestants posited as a hallmark of good works that they be done according to God's will, in contrast to Rome's self-directed religion.[65] They were thereby dependent on the revelation of God's will—that is, on the law.

59. LO: *obligatio naturalis*.

60. De Moor, *Commentaris Perpetuus*, 2:663.

61. GO: *Sitte*; GrO: κατὰ πνεῦμα; Ernesti, *Die Ethik des Apostels Paulus*, 68–71.

62. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:379 (§125). Ed. note: There are many different editions of Martensen's *Christian Ethics*; some earlier editions of vol. 1 are given the title *Christian Ethics, General Part*. The entire three-volume 1888–89 edition is often catalogued as *Christian Ethics, Special Part*; vol. 1 drops "General Part" and has the title "Martensen on Christian Ethics." Properly speaking, vol. 2 is "Special Ethics" and is divided into "Individual Ethics" (2/1) and "Social Ethics" (2/2).

63. For the Lutheran church, see Luthardt, *Die Ethik Luthers*, 38–39.

64. Luthardt, *Die Ethik Luthers*, 68.

65. Luthardt, *Die Ethik Luthers*, 70.

Accordingly, Protestant ethics was immediately given the form of the Decalogue, not because Protestants regarded the division into ten commandments as the best—because it was divine and on that basis they sought to revive the commandments, as Sartorius believed—but in order to highlight God's will over against the self-directed works of Rome.[66] Thus Lutheran ethicists, such as Buddeus, spoke of duties. Reformed ethicists, such as Calvin, van Mastricht, Witsius, and Alting also spoke confidently of duties.[67] The Council of Trent, too, anathematized all who say "that the ten commandments in no way pertain to Christians."[68]

With this view, we are opposing, on the one hand, the nomists, and on the other, the antinomians. Nomism turns the gospel into a new law, regards the Old Testament relation to the law as the only true one, confuses Old and New Testament dispensations, and denies the Spirit of liberty. This error is found first of all in Pharisaism, and then in the Christian church with Ebionism, Pelagian Catholicism with its many human traditions, and Pietism with its "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (Col. 2:21).[69] In nomism, humans always

66. E. Sartorius, *Die Lehre von der heiligen Liebe*, xix–xxii; more in Hase, *Evangelische-protestantische Dogmatik*, 146–47 (§120).

67. LO: *officia*. For the Reformed church, see Calvin, *Institutes*, II.vii; van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, I.viii.2, §48; Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, 2:174–87 (IV.4.xxvii–lvii); H. Alting, *Theologiae Problematica Nova*, 524–25 (X.xxiii); de Moor, *Commentarius Perpetuus*, 2:662–72; cf. Schneckenburger, *Vergleichende Darstellung*, 1:109–33.

Ed. note (repeated from *RE*, 1:8n48): To understand how we are referencing van Mastricht's *Theoretico-Practica Theologia* it is helpful to know that it is divided into two parts: "how one is made spiritually alive and, being alive, how one lives to God." The first part (eight books) is a systematic theological treatment of what we need to know about God; the second part is about living before God. This second part in turn is divided into moral theology (*Idea Theologia Moralis*; three books) and the practice of piety (*Hypotyposis Theologia Ascetica, de exercitio pietatis*; four books). Bavinck usually cites the four-volume Dutch translation of this work, *Beschouwende en praktikale godgeleerdheit*. Since this work is currently being translated into English, we are citing this work by the title *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, then by part (with part I = *Theologia* [*Godgeleerdheid*], part II = *Idea Theologia Moralis* [*Zedelyke Godgeleerdheid*], and part III = *Hypotyposis Theologiae Asceticae, de exercitia pietatis* [*Plichtvermanende Godgeleerdheit*]), book (in lowercase Roman: i, ii, iii, etc.), chapter (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.), and paragraph (§); thus, a reference such as I.ii.2, §3. Bavinck's own references (to the Dutch edition of 1749–53) are usually given simply in terms of the Dutch *volume number* (I–IV) and the page. In those instances, we will provide Bavinck's refences in square brackets [ ] after the full reference; thus III.i.2, §4 [IV, 677].

68. LO: *decem praecepta nihil pertinere ad Christianos* (session 6, canon 19); de Moor, *Commentarius Perpetuus*, 2:672.

69. LO: *traditiones humanae*; see Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:382–406 (§§126–30). Ed. note: Bavinck added an interlinear reference here to Immanuel Kant; perhaps he had in mind Martensen's reference on p. 405 to Kant's essay *Zum ewigen Frieden* ("To Everlasting Peace"), on the challenge of maintaining both moral integrity and moral liberty: "A true political philosophy, therefore, cannot advance a step without first paying homage to the principles of morals, and, although politics taken by itself is a difficult art, yet its union with morals removes it from

stand under the law as slaves, and the law always stands above them as a threat, never becoming the law of liberty. This explains why the law is never viewed and interpreted in its entirety or according to its basic principle, but always in its separate commandments and with scrupulous precision and in minute detail. On the other hand, the threat of antinomianism is found already in apostolic times among those who wanted to misuse grace in order to sin and who wanted to misuse freedom as a "cover-up for evil" (1 Pet. 2:16). After that came Manichaeism, which said that *either* the Old Testament is from the true God—and then Christians are still bound to keep all his commandments—*or* the law is not binding, and then it is from a god other than the true God.[70] The same goes for all the gnostics, who believe they have transcended the limits of finitude and are equal to the gods, and who exalt themselves, together with their ideas, above the law. Antinomianism therefore is not a violation of the law[71]—every sin is that—but it is the doctrine that justifies going against the law; antinomianism is sin itself, forming itself into an ethics, under the guise of idealism. It has reappeared many times, throughout the Middle Ages among various sects: Paulicians, Cathari, Albigensians, Amalricians, the sect of the Holy Spirit (Amalric of Bena and David of Dinant), Petrobrusians, and more.[72] Then again, in the age of the Reformation, we encounter antinomianism among the Anabaptists and with Agricola and those in the Lutheran church who taught that good works were harmful for salvation. Within the Reformed churches we find antinomianism among the English, and from there to the Dutch province of Zeeland in the Hattemists and Hebrewers.[73]

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the difficulties of art. For this combination of them cuts in two the knots which politics alone cannot untie, whenever they come into conflict with each other" (Kant, "Eternal Peace," 118; the translation from *Zum ewigen Frieden* in the note is taken from this work rather than the English translation of Martensen's *Christian Ethics*). Kant's essay was first published in 1795.

70. Cf. Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testamentes*, 115.

71. GrO: ἀνομία.

72. Ed. note: The Paulicians were an Armenian Christian dualistic sect that flourished between 650 and 872, when the emperor Basil I ended their military power. The Cathari were a neo-Manichaean, dualistic sect that flourished in Western Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Albigensians were a Cathari group in southern France; their name came from the district of Albi (ancient Albiga). The Amalricians were a thirteenth-century pantheistic and free-love movement named after Amalric of Bena; the thought of David of Dinant was also foundational; they influenced the Brethren of the Free Spirit, an antinomian sect that flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Petrobrusians were followers of the popular French religious teacher Peter of Bruys, who was accused of opposing church teaching on infant baptism, encouraging iconoclasm, denying the efficacy of sacraments, and deriding good works. The preceding pastiche was cobbled together from a variety of online sources including Encyclopaedia Britannica, Catholic Encyclopedia, and Wikipedia.

73. De Moor, *Commentarius Perpetuus*, 2:665–72. Ed. note: The Hattemists were followers of Pontiaan van Hattem (1645–1706), who was accused of heresy because he overemphasized the love of God, denied his wrath, and sought union with God in a quietist fashion

Today, too, we live in an age of antinomianism, emancipation of the flesh, emancipation of women, all sorts of ways to free ourselves from the bonds of law and authority.[74] It is evident, for example, in the way that some people judge great geniuses, artists, and poets mildly as if they should be judged according to a different law and have a different morality. This is similar to the gnostic distinction "between psychical and pneumatic men—between those who are bound to every-day morality, to the conventional and tradition, the 'external,' and those who have attained the stage of perfections, where everything external is indifferent."[75] In this view,

> the true Gnostic . . . lives in an uninterrupted contemplation of the divine. And just because he is so highly exalted above the sensual, which with him is reduced to be the indifferent, he can freely addict himself to all the pleasures of the flesh: for this immersion in sensuality cannot introduce any taint into his inmost being. We combat lust by addicting ourselves to lust. It is no great thing to abstain from pleasure when one has not experienced it; but the great thing is to find oneself in the midst of pleasure and enjoyment, and not to be conquered by it.[76]

This rationalization is explained by a water metaphor: "It is only the small stagnant waters which become impure when anything dirty is cast into them. The ocean, on the other hand, can receive anything into its depths without being thereby sullied. The true Gnostic *is an ocean of spiritual power*, and cannot be sullied by anything; for the impurity is at once washed away by his exalted devotion."[77]

(van der Linde, "Hattem"). "Hebrewers" is another name for "Verschoorists," followers of Jacobus Verschoor (1648–1700), who, having been denied candidacy for ministry in the Dutch Reformed Church after several attempts in different jurisdictions, began his own conventicle meetings outside the structure of the organized churches. The sect derived its name "Hebrewers" from its criticism of the "official" Dutch *Statenvertaling* of the Bible and its practice of reading the original Hebrew and Greek in its worship services. See Grosheide, "Hebreën (Secte der)."

74. Nitzsch, "Die Gesammterscheinung des Antinomianismus."

75. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:385 (§127).

76. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:385 (§127).

77. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, 1:385–86 (§127); emphasis original. Ed. note: Bavinck refers to a father-and-son team who exemplified this; he took this from Martensen, who provides a fuller description: "Representatives of such tenets may be instanced in Carpocrates of Alexandria (second century), and his genial son Epiphanes, who died from the effects of debauchery at the age of seventeen (Faustus and Don Juan combined), after having written a work on uprightness (περὶ δικαιοσύνης), in which he expressed the opinion that the law of nature is the highest law—that the phantasies of sin proceed from those human laws which fight against the law of nature, and the dispositions implanted in man" (*Christian Ethics*, 1:386 [§127]).