

# “The Ceremonies and Symbols of the Law Have Ended”

## An Exposition of Article Twenty-Five of the Belgic Confession

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### Article 25: The Fulfillment of the Law

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end,<sup>1</sup> so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to his will.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mt 27:51; Rom 10:4; Heb 9:9-10 <sup>2</sup> Mt 5:17; Gal 3:24; Col 2:17 <sup>3</sup> Rom 13:8-10, 15:4; 2 Pt 1:19, 3:2

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As believers in Jesus Christ, who are saved by grace through faith, the question inevitably arises, “what do we do with Moses and the Ten Commandments?” One of the major themes running throughout the New Testament is the thorny relationship between a Christian under the new covenant and the law of Moses which lies at the heart of the old covenant. Not only is this a prominent theme in the ministry of Jesus—as for example, Luke 24:44, where Jesus states that “*that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled*”—but this is a major theme in the letters of Paul. In Romans 10:4, Paul writes that “*for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*” What do we as Christians do with those ceremonies, feasts, and practices associated with the covenant God made with Moses at Mount Sinai, after Christ has come and has declared all of these things are fulfilled in him?

We now treat two articles which deal with themes related to the work of Christ as our high priest and the sole mediator of the covenant of grace. These two articles (Twenty-Five and Twenty-Six) follow the discussion of faith, justification, and sanctification (articles Twenty-Two through Twenty-Four) because how we understand the covenant God made with Moses and Jesus Christ’s present mediation on our behalf (the subject of article Twenty-Six) will impact considerably our conception of the Christian life and the nature of those good works which we now do because we are justified on the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ which we have received through the means of faith.

Why, for example, do we eat pork and worship on Sunday (not Saturday)? Why do we not sacrifice animals, celebrate the Passover and other Jewish feasts, or insist that our ministers are priests who are descendants of Levi? And yet, why do we still insist that Christians must obey the Ten Commandments out of a sense of gratitude for all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ? Why obey the commandments and not observe the ceremonies? Obviously, these are very important and rather practical questions. Answering them correctly requires a proper understanding of the relationship between Jesus and Moses. The coming of Jesus marks the decisive mid-point of redemptive history and drastically changes how we as God’s people relate to everything which came before.

While controversies over the Christian's relationship to Moses and the law date from the New Testament era—the Book of Galatians being a prime example—as we address our confession's summation of the biblical teaching on this topic, we must keep in mind the fact that our confession was written against the backdrop of Roman Catholicism during the time that the Council of Trent was meeting (1541 until 1563) to respond to the emerging Protestant movement. The fact that Rome defended a number of its distinctive doctrines, especially the idea of a sacrificing priesthood, by appealing to the types and shadows of the Old Testament sacrificial system which had been instituted under the Mosaic covenant, explains why the ceremonial aspects of that covenant are specifically dealt with here in the manner in which they are. This historical context explains why our confession is concerned about types and shadows, and substance (in particular), and not with a discussion of law, gospel, and covenant (in general).

If it can be shown that Christ fulfills the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic covenant through his death for sin (in addition to fulfilling the demand for perfect obedience to the covenant of works and the Ten Commandments), it becomes clear that a sacrificing priesthood is no longer a necessity under the new covenant. Christ is our high priest. All believers are now priests of God through their union with Christ. All of us have equal access to God and there is no special class of “go-betweens” (priests) who stand between the sinner and Jesus Christ. God hears the prayers of all of his people, not just the prayers of the “holiest” among us.

But this also means that a sacrificing priesthood, such as that practiced by Rome, becomes a direct affront to the gospel, since the gospel is based upon Christ's once for all sacrifice for sin, offered by Jesus Christ, the great high priest and that one to whom the Old Testament priesthood had pointed. Therefore, this topic was a major point of contention at the time our confession was written, and it remains a controversial topic in our own age.

The specific controversies within the Reformed tradition regarding the law of Moses have usually centered upon two different issues. The first is the so-called “antinomian” question, while the second has to do with the relationship between the law of Moses and those two covenants which predate the giving of the law, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

As far as the antinomian controversy goes (which has surfaced in a number of forms and circumstances over the last 450 years), the issue is simply this; “if Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the law through his own perfect obedience, and if we are justified by the merits of Christ, imputed to us through faith alone, why are we still bound to obey the Law of God?” The antinomian (*anti*–“against”, *nomos*–“law”) will answer, “no, we are not obligated to obey the Ten Commandments,” precisely because Jesus obeyed them for us and in our place. Some antinomians are so brazen as to argue that they can even continue to sin so that God's grace may be given a chance to abound. According to Romans 6, Paul already knew of such people—*“shall we sin that grace may abound?”*—and the apostle condemned them roundly—*“By no means, we died to sin!”*

Obviously, antinomianism stands in direct conflict with our confession of faith, yet we do need to be clear that what we are speaking of here is obedience to the commandments of God, not to the rules of men. While we must always be willing to give up our Christian liberty in the presence of those who may have scruples about something which may not be forbidden in Scripture but which nevertheless binds their own conscience (the so-called “weaker brother”), we should never surrender our Christian liberty to the self-righteous or Pharisees. As Paul says in Galatians 5:1, *“for freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”* This is why we as Reformed Christians

are concerned about obeying the Ten Commandments as a fruit of justifying faith and why we so militantly oppose the imposition of so-called “blue laws” or “house rules” typical of American fundamentalism: “don’t drink,” “don’t smoke,” “don’t dance.” While Christian liberty is not something to be flaunted—“look what I can do now”—it is to be exercised out of a sense of gratitude for all that God has done for us in Christ. Having been justified, the Law of God still serves as both the teacher of sin and the rule of a life of gratitude.

The other controversial matter within our tradition has to do with how the covenant God makes with Moses relates to the covenants of works and the covenant of grace, both of which predate the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Here the question is whether or not the law is essentially gracious, or, on the other hand, is the law related to the covenant of works, which God established with Adam on the grounds of his own perfect and personal obedience? Those who see the law as essentially gracious, also tend to argue that the law-gospel distinction is a Lutheran doctrine which is not in any sense compatible with the Reformed conception of the covenant, and therefore ought to be rejected.<sup>1</sup>

But it is clear from the history of our own tradition that Ursinus, Calvin, and even Calvin’s successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza, (hardly Lutherans by the way), whole-heartedly embraced the law-gospel distinction.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Theodore Beza wrote in his own catechism—which was completed three years before our own confession (*The Christian Faith*, 1558)—“We divide this Word into two principal parts or kinds: the one is called the ‘Law,’ the other the ‘Gospel.’ For all the rest can be gathered under the one or other of these two headings . . . Ignorance of this distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the principal sources of the abuses which corrupted and still corrupt Christianity.” Yet, the question as to what we as Reformed Christians do with Moses and the law is still an issue.

One key to understanding whether the law is gracious or works-based is to make a distinction between

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2000), 5. Shepherd states, “Scripture shows that the Mosaic covenant is not a covenant of works embodying a works/merit principle at its core. It is not a republication of an original covenant of works” (26-27).

<sup>2</sup> Historically, this is not a difficult point to argue, given the statements by Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83) in his *Larger Catechism*. Q.36 What distinguishes law and gospel? A: The law contains a covenant of nature begun by God with men in creation, that is, it is a natural sign to men, and it requires of us perfect obedience toward God. It promises eternal life to those keeping it, and threatens eternal punishment to those not keeping it. In fact, the gospel contains a covenant of grace, that is, one known not at all under nature. This covenant declares to us fulfillment of its righteousness in Christ, which the law requires, and our restoration through Christ's Spirit. To those who believe in him, it freely promises eternal life for Christ's sake.” In his *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 92., Ursinus writes, “Zacharias Ursinus. In What Does The Law Differ From The Gospel? The exposition of this question is necessary for a variety of considerations, and especially that we may have a proper understanding of the law and the gospel, to which a knowledge of that in which they differ greatly contributes. According to the definition of the law, which says, that it promises rewards to those who render perfect obedience; and that it promises them freely, inasmuch as no obedience can be meritorious in the sight of God, it would seem that it does not differ from the gospel, which also promises eternal life freely. Yet notwithstanding this seeming agreement, there is a great difference between the law and the gospel. They differ, 1. As to the mode of revelation peculiar to each. The law is known naturally: the gospel was divinely revealed after the fall of man. 2. In matter or doctrine. The law declares the justice of God separately considered: the gospel declares it in connection with his mercy. The law teaches what we ought to be in order that we may be saved: the gospel teaches in addition to this, how we may become such as this law requires, viz: by faith in Christ. 3. In their conditions or promises. The law promises eternal life and all good things upon the condition of our own and perfect righteousness, and of obedience in us: the gospel promises the same blessings upon the condition that we exercise faith in Christ, by which we embrace the obedience which another, even Christ, has performed in our behalf; or the gospel teaches that we are justified freely by faith in Christ. With this faith is also connected, as by an indissoluble bond, the condition of new obedience. 4. In their effects. The law works wrath, and is the ministration of death: the gospel is the ministration of life and of the Spirit (Rom. 4:15, 2 Cor. 3:7) *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 92.

the law in the broad sense—i.e., the entire Mosaic economy instituted by God and based upon the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai—and the law in the narrow sense—i.e., the Ten Commandments. Many Reformed theologians speak of the law in its broadest sense (including the types and shadows of the priesthood, animal sacrifice, the feast days, the temple, and so on) as a particular administration of the covenant of grace, while at the same time understanding the Ten Commandments (the law in the narrow sense) to be completely works-based (tied to the blessing-curse principle), and in some sense a republication of the obligations of the original covenant of works, now made explicit on the two tables of stone, as recounted in Exodus 24.<sup>3</sup>

The Mosaic economy as a whole is gracious as to its administration (since all external elements of this covenant point to Jesus Christ), while the Ten Commandments, on the other hand, are works-based, and a republication of the terms of the original covenant of works God made with Adam. While there is forgiveness of sin in the administration of the Mosaic covenant—i.e., the animal sacrifices, the priesthood, the temple, etc., there is no provision for forgiveness of sin in the Ten Commandments which promise blessing for obedience and threaten curse for disobedience. Therefore, properly understanding the types and shadows of the Covenant God made with Moses, and how these have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ while still impacting those who live after the coming of Jesus Christ, is very important—especially in light of the controversy with the Roman Catholic church at the time our confession was written and in light of the new confusion we find over this matter in our own tradition.

**T**he first thing the author of our confession does is to summarize the clear teaching of the New Testament to the effect that Christ has fulfilled all the types and shadows of the Mosaic covenant.

Our confession puts it this way. “We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with the coming of Christ, and that all foreshadowings have come to an end, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians.” The first matter to address is the question of what, exactly, is meant by the phrase “ceremonies and symbols of the law?” The ceremonial law can be divided into four categories: (1) holy persons, (the high priest, ordinary priests, levites and so on); (2) holy places (the tabernacle and the temple), (3) holy things (vows, tithes, sacrifices, altars, candlesticks, table of showbread, the ark, etc.) and (4) holy seasons (Passover, the Old Testament Pentecost [the feast of weeks], the feast of tabernacles, trumpets, day of atonement, the jubilee, etc.). With the coming of Jesus Christ (to whom these things pointed) all these things have been fulfilled, and therefore, are not to be observed by Christians.<sup>4</sup> They belong to the old order of things that passed away with the coming of Jesus Christ.

That this is the case is clear from a number of passages in the New Testament, and we can but survey a few of them. At the exact moment our Lord died on the cross, we read in Matthew 27:51, that “*behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.*” With the tearing of the temple veil, God’s blessing upon the sacrificial system was removed, since the once for all sacrifice for sin had now been made by his sinless Son—that event to which the perpetual shedding of animal blood by a levitical priest in the temple had actually pointed.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the essay by Mark Karlberg, “Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant,” in Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective (Wipf and Stock, 2000), 17-57.

<sup>4</sup> Beets, The Reformed Confession Explained, 194-195.

The fact that the Mosaic covenant has come to an end is clearly taught by the author to the Hebrews, who states in the first five verses of Hebrews 10:

*For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me;*

When Christ died upon the cross, the priesthood, the sacrifice, and the temple had fulfilled their collective purpose; they prepared the way for the cross. Once Jesus Christ has offered that sacrifice which can take away sin, the ceremonies are to be no more.

In the previous chapter (Hebrews 9:8-10) we read of the turning point in redemptive history in these terms:

*By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.*

In Christ, the new order has come. In Colossians 2:17, Paul writes that "*these are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*" The ceremonies and symbols of the law (the broad sense of the Mosaic economy) have served their purpose. They prepared the people of God for the coming of the Messiah. But once the Messiah has come, the ceremonies and symbols of the law are no longer to be used by God's people—and to require as much is to say that Christ's death is not sufficient to remove the guilt of our sins.

Given the fact that the Roman church looked precisely to these Old Testament ceremonies and symbols to justify a sacrificing priesthood, the mass, the use of an altar, priestly vestments, and church architecture based upon Old Testament temple worship, a church calendar filled with feast and saint's days, it was vital for the author of our confession to clarify that the coming of Jesus Christ as our high priest, to offer a once-and-for-all, all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, put an end to the use of all such ceremonies.

It may also be of interest to note that this was the same premise upon which the Reformed tradition developed the so-called "regulative principle" of worship—only that which God commands in his word can be used in worship, and this explains why the liturgical forms of the Reformed churches are all based upon the text of Scripture—either directly or as a good and necessary inference.<sup>5</sup> In fact, in Article Thirty-Two of our confession we read the following: "Therefore we reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way."

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<sup>5</sup> Beets, The Reformed Confession Explained, 195.

Having stated that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have passed away with the coming of Christ, the following question must be answered. “If Jesus Christ fulfilled the shadows of the ceremonies and symbols of the law, what remains of the substance of the law?”

Our confession states, “yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. Nevertheless, we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God, according to his will.” This brings us to the problem of continuity and discontinuity between the two testaments. What has passed away and what remains? In order to answer this question, we need to consider the purposes of the shadows and ceremonies found in the Mosaic covenant. Why did God institute these particular things and ceremonies?

The stipulations of the Sinai covenant (including the Ten Commandments) not only make clear that YHWH is Lord over his people, and that the righteous requirements of the law not only reveal how God wants to be worshiped, but they distinguished Israel from all other peoples and religions. The Mosaic covenant intended to prevent idolatry, the law was meant to show Israel their sin, while at the same time promising redemption from that sin, as well as pointing the way to sin’s ultimate solution—the righteousness of someone who kept the entire law, as well as a sacrifice which could do what the blood of bulls and goats could not, take the guilt and break the power of sin.<sup>6</sup>

The ceremonies and symbols of the Mosaic covenant have served an essential purpose; to provide the context in which God could send his Son as the mediator of the covenant of grace, so that we might be saved from the guilt and power of sin. What passes away, then, are those things which have served their purpose, now that Christ has come. This would be the particular administration of the Mosaic covenant given at Mount Sinai. This is why Romans 10:4 Paul states that, “*Christ is the end of the law.*” When Jesus fulfills both the law and the demands of the covenant of works through his own obedience, he ends the old redemptive economy and commences a new one. Since the Jews thought the law was an end in itself, their allegiance remained to Moses, rather than to that one to whom Moses should have pointed them, namely Jesus. Although the Mosaic economy passes away and we are no longer bound to ceremonies and symbols, as justified Christian believers we are still bound to obey the Ten Commandments (the so-called Moral Law) because these commandments are written upon our hearts (Romans 2:13-14) and all ten of the commandments are reaffirmed as part of the ethical teaching of the New Testament. This can be easily demonstrated from the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

**1). “You shall have no other gods before me.”**

**Luke 4:8:** And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”

**John 17:3:** And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

**1 John 5:21:** Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

**2). “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”**

**John 4:24:** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

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<sup>6</sup> Beets, The Reformed Confession Explained, 196.

**Acts 17:29:** Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

**Colossians 1:15:** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

3). **"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."**

**Matthew 5:34–35, 37:** But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. . . 37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

**1 Peter 3:15:** But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

**James 3:10:** From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

4). **"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."**

**Mark 2:27–28:** And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

**Colossians 3:16:** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

**Hebrews 4:9-10:** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

5). **"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."**

**Matthew 15:4:** For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'

**Ephesians 6:1–3:** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

**Colossians 3:20:** Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

6). **"You shall not murder."**

**Matthew 5:21–22:** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

**Romans 12:20:** To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

7). **"You shall not commit adultery."**

**Matthew 5:27–28:** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

**Galatians 5:16:** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

**8). “You shall not steal.”**

**Matthew 15:19–20:** For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.”

**Ephesians 4:28:** 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

**9). “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”**

**Matthew 12:34–37:** How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

**Ephesians 4:15:** Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

**Ephesians 4:25:** Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

**10). “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”**

**Luke 12:15:** And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

**Romans 7:22:** For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being . . .

From the list of evidence taken from the gospels and epistles, it is clear that while on the one hand the Mosaic covenant has fulfilled its purpose and therefore passes away (the law in the broad sense), on the other hand all ten of the commandments are reaffirmed as binding upon the Christian (the law in the narrow sense).

Since this is the case, what application can we make?

First, we need to be clear about the doctrine of justification before going any further. Jesus obeyed all of God’s commandments perfectly in thought word and in deed, and his obedience to them is reckoned to us through faith. Thus we obey these same commandments, not to become righteous, but because we are already reckoned as righteous and our struggle to obey the commandments is a fruit of justifying faith. Having clearly understood this, we are now in a position to talk about how the Mosaic economy passes away, while the moral law (the Ten Commandments) remain in force and binding upon a Christian.

Understanding the roles played by Moses and Jesus in redemptive history is one of the most fundamental distinctions a Christian can make. We must see the covenant that God makes with Israel at Mount Sinai as a covenant which is, in a sense, an overlay, on top of two already existing covenants—the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. As to its administration, the Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace.

It is God who summons Moses and gives to him (as the mediator foreshadowing the coming of Christ) the two-tables of the law, which is a revelation of God’s will for his people. While the administration of the Sinaitic covenant is gracious since this includes sacrifices which remove the people’s guilt, priests who represent them before God and so on—the content of The Commandments is not gracious. What is written upon the two tables of the law is pure command, with blessings promised for obedience, and



curse threatened for disobedience. In this regard (the law in its narrow sense) reflects the original covenant of works, which God made with Adam on behalf of the human race. Confusing these two elements of the Mosaic covenant (the form of administration and Law itself), inevitably produces a confusion of law and gospel. The blood of animals offered by the priests (a particular administration of the covenant of grace) points ahead to that sacrifice which forgives sin. What is sin? Sin is any violation of the law of God.

This is why with the death of Jesus, all of the ceremonies and symbols of the law in the broad sense (the Mosaic covenant) have been fulfilled. There are no longer holy persons, (priests), holy places (such as the temple, or even the land of Palestine), holy things (sacrifices and altars) holy seasons (i.e., the Passover) in the Old Testament sense. All of these things pointed forward to Jesus Christ and are fulfilled in him. This is why we are not bound to the dietary laws, why we do not sacrifice animals, why we do not speak of a Christian nation (either Israel or the United States), and why ministers are not priests and why we do not celebrate the Mass. This is the point that our confession is making—all of the shadows have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Now that Christ has come and fulfilled everything written about him in the law, each one of us who have placed our trust in him is perfectly holy. In fact, we are all saints. In Christ, we are all priests, who offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto him. In Christ, we are reckoned as righteous law-keepers (not law-breakers), who see the forms of the Old Covenant as fulfilled in the doing and dying of Jesus. But we know that the substance remains. That substance is found in that one who lived for us, and died for us, who forgives our sins and covers us with his perfect righteousness so that we might walk in those good works which he prepared in advance for us to do (cf. Ephesians 2:10). And since the substance of the law remains in the person of Jesus Christ, this is why we strive to live lives of gratitude in obedience to the moral law, while no longer bound to ceremonies or symbols which have long since passed away. For us the types and shadows are gone. In Christ, all shadows have been fulfilled. Amen.