

## **“NEW WINE AND OLD WINESKINS.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Sermon Texts: Mark 2:21-22; Hebrews 8:13; 10:1-4**

**Belgic Confession Article 25**

### **Introduction.**

Articles 22-23 dealt with Christ's work of justification. Article 24 dealt with Christ's work of sanctification. Article 26 will deal with Christ's work of intercession. So what's up with this little article about OT ceremonies and laws? It doesn't seem to fit, so why did Guido de Bres insert it?

There was something going on in the history of that time that prompted de Bres to say something about Christ's work on the cross being so perfect and complete that the OT ceremonies were fulfilled and obsolete. To understand the history we need to back up to the beginning of the church.

Soon after Pentecost the church of Jesus Christ began to differentiate and separate itself from the Jewish customs and ways. Worship became much simpler. The trappings of temple worship were replaced with worship that centered on preaching, prayer, Lord's Supper and fellowship.

But as the centuries progressed new rites and rituals and ceremonies began to be reintroduced into worship. Fancy vestments, altars, images and icons. Before long additional sacraments were added. Then more and more emphasis was placed on the sacraments as the primary means of God's grace and preaching began to take a back seat.

By the time of the Reformation worship was exceedingly elaborate, full of much pomp and display. The attention of the people was drawn away from Christ to holy things, holy places, holy days and holy people.

***The appeal was to the eye more than to the ear.***

Worship struggles continue to this day. We are not free from those battles. Over the past several decades there has been much talk about the so called worship wars, discussions and debates over how we should worship. What instruments in worship, what kind of songs or hymns, how should they be played, what elements should be included and what excluded?

All kinds of different styles and practices are being tried and experimented with. Candles, liturgical dance, loud bands, video screens, and on and on.

We are a visual culture and the church is trying more and more to appeal to what the culture wants. ***We are sacrificing the verbal on the altar of the visual.*** In many protestant churches all over the world ***the appeal again is to the eye and not so much to the ear.***

We no longer have Christ alone, but Christ plus everything else. The gospel is being obscured. The glory of the cross is being robbed.

***The book of Hebrews*** played a central role in helping guide the Reformers in what worship should look like and why and how the ceremonial laws were to be set aside.

The Reformation brought a huge change to worship. But the much needed reformation split into several directions.

The Anabaptist rejected much of the OT, lock, stock and barrel.

Others like Luther wanted to keep some of the rituals and rites, so Lutheranism and Anglicanism keep the altar, vestments and robes, and the liturgical calendar.

The Calvinist reform followed a different path. They said that only what God plainly commanded in Scripture should be kept and practiced. They maintained there was a unity between the OT and the NT.

Statements like Article 25 gave clarity and guidance about what was to be still practiced and Biblical reasons for why certain parts of the OT were not to be practiced.

### **Belgic Confession, Article 25.**

“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. Yet the truth and substance of these things remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled.”

In a brilliantly brief article Guido de Bres shows the law is both canceled and continued. Jesus completely fulfilled it but it's not completely done away with, it's still useful for us under the gospel.

The book of Hebrews as I have said many times is a wonderful commentary that interprets and explains the OT. Hebrews is clear in teaching that the old system of religion under the old covenant with all its practices is abolished in Christ.

**Hebrews 8:13** In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

**Hebrews 10:1** 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.

The new covenant makes the old covenant obsolete. The former was a shadow of good things to come and now the good things have come.

The reason the old covenant was obsolete was because the shadows and symbols and ceremonies couldn't take away sins and couldn't give decisive cleansing. They only pointed to a coming reality that would.

The ceremonial laws were the shadows. We no longer need the tabernacles and temples, the altars and sacrifices, the priests and Levites, the kosher foods and required feasts and festivals.

There was no longer a need for special holy places or special holy things. We no longer needed a mediator between us and God. Christ is the perfect High Priest, the perfect sacrifice, the perfect mediator.

Most of all it was clear in the NT that God was no longer teaching us by symbols and ceremonies and rituals, but by the preaching of the gospel, by the proclamation of Christ crucified.

### ***Calvin illustration.***

Calvin describes the difference between the law and the gospel using the example of a great artist. Before an artist paints a picture he first lightly sketches out what he wants to do with a pencil. It's a rough sort of outline. The lines and shapes are very helpful, they are a guide, but they are only a vague representation of the beautiful finished picture in all its living color.

Both the sketch and the final picture point to Christ. Jesus is the goal of both the OT and the NT.

**Luke 24:27, 44-45** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that *everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.*" 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Here is a clear example of how the OT is to be fruitfully and profitably used. It preaches grace and points to Christ.

### **What is the right use of the law?**

*Article 25 concludes with this:*

“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.”

Remember the writer of Hebrews said though it's a shadow, it's a shadow of good things to come (Hebrews 10:1). The shadow still had its benefit. In as much as it revealed Christ and salvation and righteousness it was useful.

The OT is Christianity in seed form. The OT is the bud, the NT the flower. The OT is the shoot, the NT is the full ear of corn.

What is coming is new, but it will confirm the old and write it on our hearts. He will take the deadness of the old and revive it with His Spirit. The old bones will come alive again.

If Christ is the fulfillment of the law, then what remains? What are the abiding principles behind the ceremonies that we should preserve?

*There are three kinds of laws, civil, ceremonial and moral.*

*The purpose of the civil* law was to guide the nation of Israel and to set them apart as separate from the rest of the pagan nations around them. When Israel ceased to be an independent nation the function of the civil law ceased. But many of the civil laws are universal and abiding principles and are kept by many nations.

*The purpose of the ceremonial* law was to guide Israel in their worship of God.

The ceremonial law focused on four things:

Holy things: sacrifices, altars, furnishings, writings, vows, tithes, gifts, the ark, etc.

Holy places: tabernacle, temple, cities of refuge, etc.

Holy persons: High Priest, priests and Levites, Nazarites.

Holy days and seasons: feast days, Passover, Pentecost, Sabbaths, year of Jubilee.

Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial law by showing how all of it related to and pointed to Him. It was preparing the way for the one who was greater than Moses and greater than the priests and greater than the sacrifices, the true lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus fulfilled and replaced all of these holy things. The moment Jesus died the curtain in the temple was torn in two, thus removing God's blessing on the temple and the sacrificial system. The once and for all sacrifice was now made.

Most of all, the ceremonial laws point us to the atoning work of our Savior, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. They confirm to us the gospel, they point to it, that we might more fully understand and appreciate what Christ has gained for us.

Because some of these ceremonial aspects had crept back into the church by the time of the Reformation, the reformers had to address that issue.

***The purpose of the moral law is threefold:***

The first use was to show us our sin and drive us to Christ.

The second use was the to restrain sin in society.

The third use was to guide our life of gratitude and holy living; to regulate our lives.

**Application and Conclusion.**

When we read the laws of the OT we should ask ourselves what is the reason behind it. The truth and substance behind the law should be kept alive.

***First***, they remind of us God's authority over us and His claim on us and our worship. We owe Him all our worship.

***Second***, they distinguish us from unbelievers who have no heart or love for God.

***Third***, they keep us from idolatry and from putting things over God. They show us the path of obedience.

***Fourth***, they were to create a longing for the coming Messiah, stirring our hearts to love for God.

All the law together reminds us that our lives are not compartments, all of life is religious, all of life is about God. God is sovereign over all spheres of life. God gives guidance for all aspects of our life and world. God has something to say about all our relationships, our relationship with God, with our families, with our friends, with our culture and government.

There is nothing that is really secular, it's all sacred.

**Romans 11:36** For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.

When we preach the law to unbelievers it's to convict of sin, to show them their separation from God and how far they have missed the mark. Preaching the law to unbelievers is to call them to repentance.

When we preach the law to believers it is encourage them to love and good works. What is the summary of the commandments but to love God and love each other. The law is the believers guide to how he can show love and gratitude to God and to his neighbor.

The life of obedience and holiness flows out of our gratitude for God. When we consider all He has done for us it is cause for worship and gratitude, expressed not only in corporate worship but in daily worship as we offer up to God a living sacrifice of our lives in service to Him.

We should daily desire His grace to live in a way that pleases Him. All His Word leads us in how to do that.

True Christians delight in the law.

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

**Psalms 119:105** Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

**Psalms 19:7** The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;  
8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9 the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;  
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.  
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.  
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, God of righteousness, holiness, purity and perfection, we claim to love you and follow you, yet we drift along in complacency, we neglect the weighty things, and ignore the most important things. We seek to excel in things that are temporal, trivial, temporary and not in the things that are eternal, true and lasting. Holy Spirit, wake us up, stir our hearts, create a real dissatisfaction with our spiritual condition, give us a holy discontent with anything less than a real desire to know you and love you and follow your ways, all your ways. Give us ears that hear the call to high righteousness not as a call to legalism or drudgery but as a call to life and a call to glory and a call to what most truly satisfies our deepest longing as men and women. Help us hear it as a call to an authentic Christian life.