

***THE LAW
IS NOT OF
FAITH***

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Introduction

When you ask people what the Scriptures reveal the purpose of the law to be, you receive various answers. Even Christians are often confused regarding this issue.

The Apostle Paul asked this question of the believers in the region of Galatia: “*Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*” (*Gal. 3.2* emphasis added) In very strong terms he labeled these Galatian Christians “*foolish*” and asked who it was that had “*bewitched*” them into trying to mix the two. Today, this same question must still be asked.

In order to put the answer in the proper context and perspective, it might be helpful to ask a few follow-up questions:

- Are we saved by keeping the law or by faith?
- What place did the law have in the Old Testament vs. the New Testament?

- Why did God give the law?
- Was the law given for a specific period of time, or is it in force forever?

These are all important issues that need a fair and honest inquiry. In fact, Christians have a responsibility to address these questions and to find their answers in the inspired Word of God. God has clearly addressed the topic and he very much wants us to know the truth(s) concerning the role of the law in our lives.

Are we saved through Law or Faith?

“And the law is not of faith...” (Gal. 3.12)

What does that mean? Paul is contrasting the principles of law and grace. He is pointing out the dramatic distinction between the two.

When taken simply at face value, Paul’s statement could not be any clearer. Similarly, in his letter to the Christians in Ephesus Paul declares *“For by grace (defined by Webster as “...the freely given, unmerited favor and love of God) are ye saved through faith...” (Eph. 2:8)* Nonetheless, many believers were lapsing back into the (mistaken) belief that salvation is through works by the keeping of the law.

Paul then forcefully states that mankind cannot keep the law and that in fact, the law can only deliver a curse. Yet the heart of “Paul’s gospel” (i.e. good news) is that “*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.*” (**Gal. 3.13**) The law is the “*ministration of death.*” (**II Cor. 3.7**) Paul clearly argues that “*no man is justified by the law*” (**Rom. 3.20**) in the sight of God. Rather, we must be saved and live by faith alone.

Again, in his letter to the *Romans* the apostle declares that law and grace are opposites. “*And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*”(**Rom. 11.6**) Regarding our salvation, it is one way or the other. Grace and works are opposite concepts.

Now once we have accepted salvation from sin’s penalty of death (justification) by God’s grace, there should follow “ordained works” or “works of faith.” (**Eph. 2.10 / Jam. 2.22 / Heb. 11.8**) Yet Paul’s consistent teaching is that all of our works flow from grace and faith, rather than visa versa. We are saved by grace and must continue to live by grace.

To put it in the simplest terms, we read “*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by*

faith without the deeds of the law.”(Rom. 3.28)
In his letter to the *Galatians*, Paul similarly proclaims “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”(Gal. 2.16 emphasis added) (also see Gal. 2.20; 3.2-5; 3.12; Acts 13.19; 15:10 - 11)

We are dealing with two different things when we talk about works of the law and grace. The former depends entirely on a system of earned personal merit, and the latter simply upon the “unmerited favor” of God.

What place does the Law have in New Testament times?

Another reason the law was given is stated in *Galatians 3.24*: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” The law was a schoolmaster until Christ came and then in the very next verse Paul declares “But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” (Gal. 3.25)

Many sincere believers miss the point that in the Old Testament times people were saved by

grace through faith. The same is true today; *“For by grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not by works lest any man should boast.”* (**Eph. 2.8**)

David, who is described as a *“man after God’s own heart,”* knew this. (**I Sam. 13.14**) He broke several laws that demanded death but in **Psalm 51** we discover that he knew he was saved by grace. As he cried out to God for forgiveness, notice that he didn’t pray that he would be saved again but rather that the joy of his salvation would be restored.

Paul also argues that even Abraham was justified by faith. *“For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”* (**Rom. 4.13**) This “father of faithful” knew his redemption had nothing to do with the keeping of rules and regulations (works) or some code of ethics, but rather it came through faith alone. He had faith in the promise made to him by God. (Also see **Col. 2. 14-16; Jn 1.17; II Cor. 3.11; Rom. 6.14**)

Why then was the Law given if it couldn’t save?

D.L. Moody once asked how a person could tell whether a stick is crooked or not. He

answered that it is by putting a straight one down next to it. The law is like a straight stick that reveals the crookedness or sinfulness of human nature. The law is “*holy, just and good.*” Well, if it is all of these things and more, why not live by and keep the law? Let’s examine the Scriptures and see why the law was actually given.

It must be understood that the Ten Commandments were only a part of the total law. Someone has counted and said that there were 613 rules, regulations and commandments that were a part of the law. Yet the Scripture also declares that the law is “*one*” and cannot be divided up, as many people want to do.

For example, James was clear when he insisted “*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*” (***Jas. 2.10***) In other words, if you have a 10-point contract on your house, but you break just one point, the whole contract is made null and void and you lose your house. Or, think about a man hanging by a chain over a cliff; he will fall to his death even if only one link breaks. (Also see ***Gal. 3.10-12; 5.3*** and ***I Tim. 1.7-8***)

The Law was given so that we might know we are sinners.

The Apostle Paul spent a great deal of time explaining the relation of the law to grace. First of all, the law served as a tool to regulate the civic lives of the Israelites in the land of Canaan for a specific period of time. It also created a ceremonial culture that made them very different from the other nations of the Gentiles. This was all certainly a part of God's plan. Yet, in these applications it is obvious that the law did not have a direct relationship to righteousness. But many believers would still ask, "What about the moral law?" Let's have the Scriptures answer that for us.

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (**Rom. 3.20**) We come to the knowledge that we are guilty as sinners through our understanding of the law, but the law itself cannot save sinners. The law is simply the straight stick next to a crooked one.

You see, we frustrate the grace of God when we try to approach Him through the keeping of the law. But the Apostle Paul declares *"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is*

dead in vain.”(Gal. 2.21) In other words, Jesus died in vain if we refuse the gift of eternal life by faith in what he did on Calvary.

Many Christians believe that they are initially saved by grace through faith, but then must keep a tight grip on their salvation by keeping the law through their works. Well, it is one way or the other; you can't have both. Again, Paul argues “*Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*”(Gal. 3.3) We are saved by grace, and we are kept and go on to sanctification by grace.

There is another example of how the law works. If you get your face dirty working in the garden and then come back in the house and look in a mirror, you will see the dirt on your face. But now, you need soap and water because the mirror is of no use for cleaning. Similarly, the law was given as a mirror to reveal our sin, but that is all it was ever meant to do. It takes the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from our sins.

Still, many Christians mistakenly continue to believe that the law gives and preserves our life. However, what does the Bible say concerning this issue? “*And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto*

death.”(Rom. 7.10) This is just the opposite of what many believe and teach. You see, the law was never intended as a tool with which we could produce or retain eternal life.

The Law makes Sin exceeding sinful.

In *Romans 7.13* it says, “*But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.*” The law is like a magnifying glass and spotlight that dramatically reveal sin’s large ugly stain so that no one can miss it.

Scripture tells us that sin was in the world long before the law was given. Sin is there in every soul from the time we are born and yet, many will not acknowledge their sinful condition. Nevertheless, the law is the holy and just standard of a holy God, openly declaring that all men fall short of the standard. We are sinful. The law simply makes sin exceedingly obvious.

The Law provides object lessons, types & shadows.

“Now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things as

they also lusted.” (I Cor. 10.6) We read further that “these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” (I Cor. 10.11)

Let’s take an example of the Israelite who brought a lamb to the Tabernacle in the wilderness. He slit the throat of that animal sacrifice that had no spot or blemish. He was to acknowledge that he was a sinner and deserved to die but that this substitute (sacrifice) would die in his place.

This, and many other similar ceremonies required by the law (in what the scripture variously describes as “ensamples” “types” or “shadows”) paints for us a picture and presents to us an object lesson pointing to our need and the reality of a coming Savior. “Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.” (**Jn. 1:29**) Christ is the perfect, unblemished sacrifice (substitute) that died in our place.

Everything in the Old Testament was pointing forward to that coming and needed Savior. “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers

thereunto perfect.”(Heb. 10.1) The writer of the letter to the Hebrews talked at length about putting away the types and shadows in order to embrace the reality and fulfillment of Christ. (Also see Heb. 8.5; 9.1-2; Col. 2.16-17)

How long was the Law to be in effect?

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.”(Rom. 10:4 emphasis added) The law was in effect from about 1500 B.C. to the cross. Now, we live under grace and in a dispensation of grace as Paul expounded in his writings. *“...If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward...” (Eph. 3:2)*

The law gave the Israelites limits and governed their social life but even in the Old Testament times when it was designed to be in effect, never saved a single soul. It was given for the Israelites to govern their lives in the land of Canaan. For example, if you are driving down a road doing 100 mph, eventually you will kill yourself. If you put up a speed limit sign (55 mph) you will know you are transgressing the law by breaking that speed limit, which was instituted to protect us as individuals and as a society.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the law was given to warn us that we are destined to die. *“Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.” (Rom. 4.1) “...for the letter (of the law) killeth...”(II Cor. 3.6) The law does not and indeed, can not give life. (Gal. 3.13; Rom. 7.10-11) “The law was the ministration of death written and engraven in stones.”(II Cor. 3.7)*

The law was against us and could not produce life or righteousness for anyone. *“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us and which was contrary to us.”(Col. 2.14)* The *“handwriting of ordinances”* refers to the law of Moses, to which many people cling for their salvation and righteousness. They mistakenly believe that by doing certain works they can earn their way into God’s favor and thus into heaven. Ironically, they cling to a teaching that can, in reality, send them to hell.

We are called by God to cling instead to the finished work of Christ at Calvary. There is no other way. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and we are saved by grace not by the law. *“Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” (Rom. 3.27)*

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