

## Faith, Grace, & God's Law (1)

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In our last 2 lessons we examined the role of God's grace, our faith, and works. God's grace is His role in the redemption plan of mankind and includes everything He did to accomplish the salvation of man. Obviously there must be a response from man in order for God's grace to work. If everything God did to save man required no response then everybody who ever lived would be saved irregardless of how they lived. Jesus makes it clear that this is not the case in, Matthew 22:14, "*For many are called, but few are chosen.*"

The required response to God's gracious offer of salvation is summed up in God's word as "*Faith*", and as a comprehensive Biblical term includes everything man does in response to God's grace. Grace is God reaching down from Heaven to mankind with an offer and a means of salvation. Faith is man reaching upwards to God in realization of His doomed state in hope of God's grace. Grace is God reaching down to man. Faith is man reaching up to God.

Any response whatsoever from mankind is a work. A work is defined as a mental or physical action which produces a result.

God's grace and man's faith work together to produce a result. Both grace and faith are works. Grace is the work of God. Faith is the work of man. Human works, though necessary, do not negate the need for God's grace or our faith. Both grace and faith are indispensable to the salvation process and both of them are works. Thus we rightfully conclude that if works were not necessary, then salvation would be possible without any response from man whatsoever. Jesus makes it crystal clear in Matthew 7:21 that this is not the case.

We also saw that works cannot save us by circumventing God's grace or our faith. Works cannot save us by repaying God what His grace cost Him. Works cannot save us by compelling God to offer His grace. God's grace is a gift freely offered completely exclusive of man's works. Works cannot save us by earning, paying for, or deserving salvation in any way. If works could save us, we wouldn't need God's grace. In



Can response to God's law be put aside in the name of grace?

these ways, works cannot save us, but faith is a work (I Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:11), so even though there are some ways in which works cannot save, they are necessary nonetheless.

So where does God's law fit in to all of this? This is an important question because there are those who claim Christ as savior and make the claim that there is no law under the new covenant. I have heard it said among some that the old covenant is 'law and no grace' and the new covenant is 'grace and no law'. The purpose of this lesson is to make an examination of God's law and how it fits in with God's Grace and our Faith.

### 1. What is law?

Law is a rule or a set of rules, enforceable, regulating the behavior of those under which it has authority. The short definition is a rule of conduct.

### 2. Is there law under the new covenant?

There are two laws spoken of in the new testament. The most common one directly mentioned as law is in reference back to the law of Moses. In Acts 13:39, Paul made a reference to the law of Moses that is of particular relevance to this lesson. Paul said, "*And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*" Paul made a reference here to the law of Moses and in doing so he made a very important observation. The law of Moses cannot justify anyone. The word justify means to 'make just' or to declare one to be innocent. The Hebrew writer further explains this in Hebrews 10:4, where he wrote, "*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*" The animal sacrifices under the law of Moses were incapable of taking away the sins of the people. All they did was to accomplish what is referred to as atonement. Atonement is another word for appeasement. The animal sacrifices were only capable of appeasing God's wrath for a period of time. The Hebrew writer tells us when this time was in Hebrews 9:15, where we read, "*And for this cause he [Jesus Christ] is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*" Under the law of Moses, the sins of the people were only atoned for until the death of Christ on the cross at which time His blood then provided the total and complete forgiveness of their sins.

In the first century times, there was a lot of confusion and resistance from several Jews who just wouldn't let go of the law of Moses. A large portion of the new testament is devoted to explaining the difference between the old and new covenant and it is vital to our understanding of God's law that we rightly understand the difference. Much religious error today comes from the inability of some to distinguish between the law of Moses and the law of God under the new covenant.

For example, let's look at a particular verse which is contrasting the two laws we find in scripture and from there, we will make some observations and then build on this study of whether or not there is new testament law.

Galatians 2:16

*"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.*” In the book of Galatians, Paul dealt with Judaizers who had crept into the gentile churches and were convincing them that they should follow after the law of Moses. Paul’s singular purpose for writing the letter to the Galatians was to correct this false teaching brought in by those who refused to let go of the law of Moses and were bringing Christians back under the old law of Moses.

So let’s take the text of Galatians 2:16 and for a moment, let’s look at it from the perspective that Paul is speaking from all the law of God in general and not just the law of Moses. When Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:16 is taken from its proper context, it can, and is, used to set forth the belief that there is no law under the new covenant. Those who want to go to heaven but don’t want to commit their lives to serving God acceptably convince themselves that they are safe from God’s condemnation based on the misguided belief that the inabilities and inadequacies of the law of Moses apply to all of the law of God in general. This belief allows them to live any old way they want because they believe that the new covenant release from the law of Moses releases us today from our obligations to new covenant law.

So let’s deal with this issue first. Is there law under the new covenant?

To answer this question, let’s look at two very key verses. The first is Romans 3:23 where Paul wrote, *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”* There is no one today who is accountable before God who has not sinned. All have sinned and fallen short. Now in 1 John 3:4, we learn that *“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”* So if there is no law at all under the new covenant and sin is a transgression of law, then how is it that all have sinned? What law was transgressed? For there to be a transgression of law, there must be a law to transgress. We cannot break a law where there is not one. If there’s no law against speeding then we can’t break the speed limit. It is not possible to transgress a law that does not exist. Indeed, in Romans 4:15, Paul wrote, *“for where no law is, there is no transgression.”*

Yes there is law under the new covenant. So what is it called? How do we know which law is being discussed when we see it referenced in scripture?

In referencing the new covenant law, Paul mentions this in Romans 8:2, *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”* Paul is contrasting two laws found in each covenant here. We have the law of the Spirit of life contrasted with the law of sin and death. We already know from this lesson that the law of Moses was incapable of the justification of anyone. The law of Moses was not a law that, when kept, could permanently free anyone from sin and condemnation. It is obvious that the law of sin and death is a reference to old covenant law. The law of the Spirit of life is a reference to a law. The word of God states that there is a law that, when kept, frees us from the old covenant law of sin and death. If there is no law under the new covenant, then it is not possible to be made free from the old covenant law. Yes there is law and in Romans 8:2 Paul called it the *“the law of the Spirit of life”*.

While writing his inspired letter to the Galatian Christians, Paul wrote in chapter 6 and verse 2, *“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”* This reference to a law cannot be about the law of

Moses. God gave the law of Moses to Moses on Mount Sinai centuries before Jesus Christ walked the earth. This was near the end of a letter that Paul wrote that was dedicated solely to the abolishment of the law of Moses and how it does no good to keep it. Now he makes mention of a law he says we are supposed to keep and he called it the law of Christ. We are not required to keep the law of Moses, but we are required to fulfill the law of Christ. If there were no law under the new covenant, then there would be no law of Christ to fulfill.

So far have 2 references to new covenant law. Paul has called it the "*law of the spirit of life*" and the "*law of Christ*".

In James chapter 2 and verse 8 we see another reference to new covenant law, "*If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.*" James called this a royal law. That cannot be a reference to the law of Moses because Moses was never a king. So then who is the king that James is talking about here? Paul answers that question in 1 Timothy 6:14-15, "*That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.*" Jesus is our king under the new covenant so the royal law can be nothing other than the law of Christ. One must ask, if there is no new covenant law, then what are the standards by which Jesus rules us? A king who reigns over a people must do so with rules of behavior. We simply call them law.

Paul called it the "*law of the spirit of life*" and the "*law of Christ*" and James called it the "*royal law*".

James isn't finished yet. He also made a reference to new covenant law a few verses later in James 1:25, "*But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*" What is this liberty that James is speaking of here? Those who believe and teach that there is not any law under the new covenant will tell you that this law of liberty is really freedom to live our lives free of any of the rules of conduct required by God and found in scripture. Is this true? We can put that to the test by reading what the text in the verse says, "*he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*" If the law of liberty freed anyone from keeping God's law, then no one would have to be a doer of the work in order to be blessed. Yes there is law in the covenant and James says we must be a doer of the work of this law of liberty. The law of liberty, liberates us from the sins which the law of Moses could not accomplish. The law of liberty does not liberate us from the need to obey God.

So far we we have the:

- 1) "*law of the spirit of life*", which Paul said would free us from the law of sin and death.
- 2) "*law of Christ*", which Paul commanded Christians to Fulfill.
- 3) "*royal law*", which James commanded Christians to Fulfill. The result of this fulfillment is love for their neighbors.
- 4) "and the "*law of liberty*", which James commanded Christians to continue in it and to do the work.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 9, verses 20 thru 21 we see one of the most informative verses of all regarding the laws found in each covenant.

1 Corinthians 9:20-21

*“And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;  
21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.”*

KJV

There is a parenthetical statement in there which Paul threw in there to make sure there was no misunderstanding. Paul say *“being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ”*. Another way of saying that would be *“though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law”* Paul made sure that the Christians he was writing to understood that he was still living under law. Paul was discussing various ways in which he engaged in his evangelistic efforts to both Jews and Gentiles. When trying to lead Jews living under the law of Moses to Christ, he made himself appear as if he were living under that law in order to get the opportunity to reach them with the truth. To those Gentiles who did not live under the law of Moses, Paul says he made it obvious that he was not living under the law of Moses.

And then Paul made one of the most important statements in all of scripture regarding the law under the new covenant. He said *“being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ”*, in other words, *“though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law”*. Paul declared to Christians that he and every single person on earth, both Jew and Gentile were not living without law. The law he was living under was the *“law to Christ”*. Of the laws Paul spoke of in this context, the law to Christ is the one he is living under.

Concerning the law of God, Paul wrote in Romans 8:7, *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”* A carnal mind is a sinful mind. In this context Paul was discussing the differences between those who live with and without sinful minds. He says those who live with sinful minds are not living in obedience to the law of God. If there were no law under the new covenant, then it would not be possible to live outside the law of God. There is law under the new covenant and in this verse Paul called it the law of God.

So far we we have the:

- 1) *“law of the spirit of life”*, which Paul said would free us from the law of sin and death.
- 2) *“law of Christ”*, which Paul commanded Christians to Fulfill.
- 3) *“royal law”*, which James commanded Christians to Fulfill. The result of this fulfillment is love for their neighbors.
- 4) *“law of liberty”*, which James commanded Christians to continue in it and to do the work.
- 5) *“law to God”* Which Paul says he is not living without.

6) “*law to Christ*“, which Paul says he is living under.

7) “*law of God*“, which Paul says evil minded people are not subject to.

In Hebrews 8:8-13 we learn a very important fact about the new covenant and law.

Hebrews 8:8-13

*“8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:*

*9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.*

*10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:*

*11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.*

*12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*

*13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”*

There are a number of points that can be made from this context relative to our lesson today.

There was going to be a new covenant. And we know this new covenant is the new testament under which all Christians live. But notice carefully, that God says that this new covenant is going to have its laws written on our hearts and in our minds. This new covenant has laws. Being written on our hearts and minds means that Christians are going to follow this law from the heart out of love for God. Christians are going to follow the laws of the new covenant from their own free will, because they love God and want to obey Him. The new covenant which replaced the old covenant came with laws.

And finally, going back to James we see yet another reference to the law of liberty he had mentioned earlier in James 1:25

James 2:9-12

*“9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.*

*10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

*11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.*

*12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.”*

James is very obviously not speaking about the law of Moses here. The scriptures make it crystal clear that the law of Moses contained in the old covenant has been replaced by the new covenant whose laws govern us today. There are some important points we can take from these scriptures. First, it is a transgression of God’s law under the new covenant to show favoritism. Verse 11 lists adultery and murder as violations of new covenant law.

In Verse 10, James writes, *“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”* James lumps the entire new covenant law up into one system. There is only one lawgiver, and only one law. There are no transgressions of new covenant law that are more or less grievous to God. Any one transgression of any element of the law of Christ is a breach of the whole law because it breaks fellowship with the object of our faith, God. James is reiterating something Jesus said in Matthew 5:19, *“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”* There is no such thing as white lies or small sins. Any transgression of the law of Christ is a trespass of the whole law.

Another very important point we need to take from this context is found in verse 12, *“ So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.”* The law of liberty James spoke of, is going to be used to judge us in the end. In John 12:48 Jesus tells us that we will be judged by the things He spoke, *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”*

Let’s go back over what we have so far...

- 1) *“law of the spirit of life“*, which Paul said would free us from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:2)
- 2) *“law of Christ“*, which Paul commanded Christians to Fulfill. (Galatians 6:2)
- 3) *“royal law“*, which James commanded Christians to Fulfill. The result of this fulfillment is love for their neighbors. (James 2:8)
- 4) *“law of liberty“*, which James commanded Christians to continue in it and to do the work of that law. Our liberty is the freedom from sin, not a pass from obedience to God’s law. (James 1:25)
- 5) *“law to God”* Which Paul says he is not living without.
- 6) *“law to Christ“*, which Paul says he is living under. (1 Corinthians 9:21)
- 7) *“law of God”*, which Paul says evil minded people are not subject to but should be. (Romans 8:7)

8) The “New Covenant” will replace the old covenant and its laws will be imprinted on our hearts  
Hebrews 8:8-13

9) The “law of liberty” is transgressed by any violation of God’s will. (James 2:9-11)

10) The “law of liberty” is going to be used to judge us. (James 2:12)

The word of God teaches that there is most certainly law under the new covenant. And this law can be broken, meaning we are to obey new covenant law faithfully. And in the end, we are going to be judged by new covenant law. In order for there to be any judgment, there must be a standard or a set of rules by which we are judged. Yes, there is law under the new covenant and we must live by that law if we are to have any hope whatsoever of an eternal home in heaven with God.

In our previous two lessons on Faith, Grace and works, we established the need for all of these things working together in order to provide man with a means and method of salvation. Grace plus anything cannot be grace alone. If grace were all that were required then everybody on earth would be saved regardless of how they lived or how they believed. It’s by grace we are saved through faith so we know that it can’t be grace alone. We also cannot be saved by faith alone because without grace all the faith in the world would be useless to us. Works are a necessary component of faith, therefore we cannot be saved by works alone either. It takes all three of these things, grace, faith and obedience working together.

Add to these three things God’s law under the new covenant. God’s grace provided us with a means and a hope of salvation. It’s not grace alone because man has to make a response to what God has offered. Everything man does in his response can be summed up as faith. Grace is God reaching down to man with salvation. Faith is man reaching upward toward God in hope. Works are everything we do by faith. God does not owe us anything for them, they cannot save us by going around the blood of Jesus Christ. And finally, the new covenant law is what we have to do in order to live faithfully under the rule of Jesus Christ our king. Grace gave us hope. Faith, working is our response. Law is what directs how we are to live. If we did not have God’s law, we would not know what our response to God’s grace should be. Without God’s law, we would not know how he wants us to live.

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