

In a time when many Christians, led by various theological and ideological influences, lost their awareness that their Saviour is also their King, a great need emerged for prophetic voices that will renew Church's sense and even its longing for the whole of Scriptures to speak relevantly and authoritatively to our lives. The book *Law and Grace* is one such balanced, biblically grounded and practical voice. It displays a Christocentric view of the Law, inviting us to extract from Old Testament Law timeless principles, principles that reflect God's holy character, and then to apply them to life in today's world. I heartily recommend it to every believer, pastor and theologian.

**Miroslav Balint-Feudvarski, pastor,  
Baptist Church Nova Gradiška, Croatia.**



Aleksandar Trajkovski

# **Law and Grace**

## **Antinomianism Refuted: Case Closed**

Novi Travnik, 2019

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Publisher:

**Christian Baptist Church**

(Kršćanska baptistička crkva, Novi Travnik, Bosnia & Herzegovina)

[www.kbcent.net](http://www.kbcent.net)

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## ABBREVIATIONS

*BBR – Bulletin for Biblical Research*

*CTSJ – Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*

*ISBE – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr (ed.).

*JETS – Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

*JSNT – Journal for the Study of the New Testament*

*NIDNTT – The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown (ed.), Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1981.

*NIGTC – New International Greek Testament Commentary*, I. Howard Marshall, W. Ward Gasque (eds.).

*o. c. – opus citatum*

*s. v. – sub voce*

*TDNT – Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, (eds.).

*TMSJ – The Masters Seminary Journal*

*TrinJ – Trinity Journal*

*WTJ – Westminster Theological Journal*



## FOREWORD

Many writers agree that a relationship between the Law and grace is one of the most difficult Bible topics. In order to look at it thoroughly, especially in the light of modern theological discussions and trends, one is required to invest a great amount of time studying the Bible and theological literature. However, I am encouraged to learn that this topic is not impossible to understand and that is not reserved for intellectual elite only. This is especially important because this is not a side topic that we can skip without serious consequences. Correct understanding of this topic is essential for everyday life of each believer.

The relationship between the Law and grace does not interest me out of pure curiosity, but out of practical reasons. I need to know what to believe and how to live. I clearly understand that God saved me by grace through faith, but how am I to live now? How to act in certain situations and choose that which is better and pleasing to God? How do I know what God sees as sin? Perhaps it is wrong to submit to God's written word because some people say that that is legalism and life in the flesh? Do rules and commandments help or kill grace and joy in my life? Should I read the Bible? Do I need to keep what is written in it? Should I keep commandments from the Old Testament or from the New Testament?

These are important questions that demand clear answers. And that is the purpose of this study.<sup>1</sup> I believe that these lessons can encourage and establish our Christian life. For those who desire to look at this topic in more depth I have provided bibliographical and other notes.

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<sup>1</sup> This book is a compilation of a series of revised sermons.



## THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW AND THE CHRISTIAN

What is the Law? What is the place of the Law in the New Testament believer's life? Has the Law been abolished or not? In this chapter I will outline the main views in evangelical theology regarding the Law and the place of the Law in the New Testament believer's life.

### 1. A Definition of the Law

The word *law*<sup>2</sup> is frequently mentioned in the Bible. It does not always have the same meaning. Some mentions of the law are the law of sin, the law of flesh, the law of faith, the law of work, the Law of God, the Law of Christ, the Law of Moses, the law of freedom, etc. Some of these terms can have the same or different meanings. The first five books of the Bible are called the Law of Moses (the Pentateuch). However, the word *law* does not always refer only to the Pentateuch but can include other parts of the Bible also. The New Testament uses it to refer to the Psalms and Prophets (Matt 5:17) and other parts of the Old Testament. Furthermore, the term *law* is used to describe the commanding aspect of the Law.<sup>3</sup> It is often used for a particular command (Rom 7:2) or a compilation of commands (Rom 13: 8-10). Sometimes it differs from grace or the Gospel (Joh 1:17, Rom 6:14). It can include the idea of legalism (Gal 4:21-5:4)<sup>4</sup> or it can refer to a principle. (Rom 7:21)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Heb. Tora, gr. Nomos. Can be translated as a law or teaching. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness*, in "Five Views on Law and Gospel", Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996, 192-194.

<sup>3</sup> *TDNT*, 4:1069-70.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel & Law: Contrast or Continuum?*, Fuller Seminary Press, 1982, 86-88.

<sup>5</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, vol.4, 2005, 135. For another possible interpretation of the word *law* in Rom 7:21 see Brice L. Martin, *Christ and The Law in Paul*, Eugene, Oregon,

## 2. The Law and the New Testament

The question about the relation of the Law (or the Old Testament) and the New Testament takes us to one of the greatest debates in evangelical theology, as well as to one of the most important questions for Christian life. The Bible reveals that the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was only a shadow, not the true reality. The New Covenant is established on much better promises than the Old (Heb 8:9). A Christian is no longer bound by the Old Covenant or the Covenant which God had established with the Israelites on Mount Sinai, but by the New Covenant in Jesus' blood. But what about the Old Covenant Law, which is closely connected with the Old Covenant which is established in the Law? The Bible teaches that Christians have died to the Law. Does it mean that they are without the law? Does the Law no longer have any value for believers today? There are different answers to these questions.

### Reasons for Misunderstanding

If we only quote a few verses from the New Testament, it would be clear why theologians offer different answers to these questions. In Galatians 2:19 Paul writes: *For through the Law I died to the Law so that I might live for God.* In another places:

*Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.* (Rom 7:4)

*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.* (Gal 5:18)

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Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001. 27,28. E. F. Kevan, *The Evangelical Doctrine of Law*, London, Tyndale Press, 1956, 22-25.

Furthermore, the apostles had strongly opposed those who wanted to be *under the Law* or taught that Christians must be circumcised, observe certain days and feasts and eat certain foods. It looks as if these verses are saying that a Christian has nothing to do with the Law, while other verses seem to be saying something different. The Law is regarded as the highest standard and far from it being abolished. Jesus said:

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.* (Matt 5:17, 18)

The apostle Paul wrote:

*Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the Law.* (Rom 3:31)

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* (2 Ti 3:16, 17)

Paul states that all Scripture is needed and profitable. In one instance it seems that the Law is abolished, while in another that it is affirmed. How, then, are we to understand the relationship between the Old Testament Law and the the New Testament believer?

## **Main Theories**

We will look at the main theories about the place of Law in the New Testament, that is in the life of the New Testament believer.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Here is given just the essence of different views. Compare Jack Hughes, "The New Perspective's View of Paul and the Law", *TMSJ* 16/2 (Fall 2005) 262-266.

**(1) The Written Law is no Longer Needed.** Those who hold and advocate this view say that in New Testament times written law is no longer needed because believers fulfill the law through the Spirit. Furthermore, they state that the written law is harmful or unproductive because it breeds wrath and multiplies sin.<sup>7</sup> No law is needed, especially not the Law of Moses. Its role was just to frighten and point us to Christ (even this is sometimes denied).

While it is true that we fulfill the Law through the Holy Spirit, this does not deny the need of Law or the commandments whether in oral or written form. If commandments are not needed, then why did Jesus say: *Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you?* Why are the epistles filled with commands? Why did Paul write the following words to the Thessalonians: *For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus?*<sup>8</sup>

The Law is needed, and most evangelical Christians accept this, but they differ in their opinions regarding the nature and the content of the Law. We will look at the interpretation of those who accept the need for the Law.

**(2) The New Testament is the Law for the Church.**<sup>9</sup> This teaching holds that a Christian is not bound by anything that is written in the Old Testament unless it had been repeated in the New Testament. The Law for a believer is only that which is

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<sup>7</sup> This is generally the belief of dispensationalists (not all). See previous footnote. We can also call this *antinomianism* (*anti* = against, *nomos* = law). For more views see Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul*, 55-59. *o. c.*

<sup>8</sup> For a short explanation and refutation of this view see: Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Abolition and Fulfilment of the Law in Paul." *JSNT* 35 (1989) 52-55.

<sup>9</sup> This is the teaching of some dispensationalists and the "New covenant" theology (Fred G. Zaspel, John Reisinger, John Zens). Some claim to keep this position, but it is more accurate to place them in the first group. That's why Greg Bahnsen is right to call this position antinomianism (*The Theonomic Antithesis to Other Law-Attitudes*, <  
<http://www.cmfnw.com/articles/pe054.htm> >).



written in the New Testament (some accept the entire New Testament and some just the part from Acts to Revelation or less). For many of those the New Testament Law is not of the same nature as the Old Testament Law.

There are several variations of this teaching and it is hard to explain or refute them briefly, but I'll mention only one verse.<sup>10</sup> The apostle Paul has written:

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* (2 Ti 3:16, 17)

The New Testament teaches that not only one part of Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for a Christian, but all Scripture, and that includes the Old Testament.

### **(3) All That is Not Abolished in the New Testament is Valid.**<sup>11</sup>

The Old Testament is God's word which is obligatory for a Christian. Only that which is clearly abolished in the New Testament does not apply. These include sacrifices, days and festivals, precepts about food and the Levitical priesthood. Those theologians teach that the Law of Moses contains three parts: moral, civil and ceremonial. It is clear that the ceremonial Law is abolished, and since the church today does not have its own state, the laws which apply to the state governing do not apply today (some believe that they still apply).<sup>12</sup> Those theologians usually

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<sup>10</sup> Paul R. Schmidtleicher, in his article: "Balancing the Use of the Old Testament", *CTSJ* 8 (July-September 2002), 40, 41, mentions only some of the problems caused by this understanding.

<sup>11</sup> This understanding can be affiliated with the reformed theology. Compare with the article from a previous footnote.

<sup>12</sup> For a fuller presentation of different views see: David A. Dorsey, "The Law of Moses And The Christian: A Compromise", *JETS* 34/3 (September 1991) 322-325.

emphasize the Ten Commandments as the heart of the moral Law (including the fact that the fourth commandment in the New Testament is changed).

I regard this view as very good. However, many theologians object to this view saying that the Bible nowhere divides the Law into parts, but looks at it as a whole. In chapter nine I'll prove that this statement is not true. There is another view of the Law which can be combined with this one, and that is:

**(4) Principlism.**<sup>13</sup> Even though the Old Covenant has passed away, each word of God is still important today. Every word in the Scripture comes from God's mouth and reflects God's will and character. It reveals what God is like and what He does or does not like. The same eternal truth is packed in time and the circumstances into which it had been spoken. This means that every one of God's commandments holds eternal principles. Therefore, the relationship between a Christian and the Old Testament Law can be described in the following words: **a Christian is bound to fulfill the spirit of the Old Testament Law, but not always the letter of the Law.**<sup>14,15</sup> This approach is well illustrated by some New Testament examples.

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<sup>13</sup> See J. Daniel Hays, "Applying the Old Testament Law Today", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158: 629 (2001): 21-35. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (introduction), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996, 164, 165. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Rediscovering The Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1991, 147-166.

<sup>14</sup> See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Rediscovering The Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1991, 155-166. Compare Dorsey, *The Law of Moses, o.c.*, 331. This does not seem to be the view of J. Daniel Hays because even though he holds to principlism, he considers as binding only that which is repeated in the New Testament. However, it is not clear how this view can agree with the basic idea of his article, that is with principlism.

<sup>15</sup> This is not about spiritualising the text but reading the principle out of the text.

*For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? (1 Co 9:9-11)*

The apostle Paul quotes the law of Moses as an authority: *You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.* (Deut 25:4) However, he is not teaching them to tread the grain or feed an ox, but is taking out a principle and applies it to the worker, that is the preacher of the Gospel. Just as the working ox needs to receive his payment (in this case food) so the worker deserves his payment. This principle also applies to the preachers of the Gospel. Most people have never owned oxen or tread out grain, but they are all the same obligated to keep this law of Moses, not the letter, but the spirit or the principle of the Law. *Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake ...* Paul is clear: the Law is for our sake, and the one who rejects the Old Testament Law is in error.

Sometimes the letter and the spirit of the law are the same. For example: *Do not steal!* We must keep both the letter and the spirit of this law. We can't obey the principle unless we obey the letter of the Law.

## **Conclusion**

What is then the Law for a Christian? The Law is an entire Bible, or in other words, the principles of each of God's commandments or teachings interpreted in the light of New Testament revelation.

Even though this chapter has been explained in brief terms, I think it is very clear. We have seen that there are three main approaches

regarding the relationship of a Christian to the Law of Moses. First, we don't need the Law. Second, the New Testament is the law for a believer or, in other words, whatever is not repeated in the New Testament is not binding for a believer. Third, whatever is not abolished in the New Testament still has an authority for a believer. In the following chapters I'll explain and prove the truthfulness of the third approach to the Law. I'll aim to do so by emphasizing not only the heart of the Law – the Ten Commandments but will look at each of God's commands in the light of the approach labelled as *Principlism*.

## **JESUS AND THE LAW** **(Matt 5:17-20)**

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus reviews the question of the Law. For a Christian this topic is of great importance. A few important questions need to be asked: Do we need God's commands? Must we obey them? Could we neglect some since we live in time of grace? Does Christ contradict Moses? Does the Law contradict Grace?

Jesus' words will show that Christ and Moses don't contradict each other. The Law and Grace do not contradict (or rather, they don't contradict in the way that some would interpret). Keeping God's commands does not contradict the Gospel.

### **1. Some Modern Ideas on the Sermon on the Mount**

Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17-20 are a thorn in the flesh for many because they don't fit into their theological system, or parts of that system. Therefore, they want to do away with them. But how? Some theologians have concluded that Jesus' Sermon is not for our time, but for the future. They say Jesus was talking about the Law which applies in the millennial kingdom, not during the age of the Church. They claim that the millennial kingdom was supposed to arrive immediately – while Jesus was still on earth. However, since the Jews did not accept Him, its arrival was postponed. The millennial kingdom is yet to come, and it is then that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount will be applied.<sup>16</sup> The text does not support such ideas and thus I believe that Jesus' Sermon is valid for today. This does not mean only those who are not dispensationalist hold such a view. Here is what Dr. John MacArthur Jr. had written about the Sermon on the Mount:

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<sup>16</sup> See Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1995, 96-101.

*And his challenge here erases any possibility that the Sermon on the Mount is truth for some prophetic tomorrow; Jesus is preaching to people in the here and now, and his message is urgent.*<sup>17</sup>

Some believe that Jesus is teaching about salvation by works. This couldn't be further from the truth.<sup>18</sup> Jesus' Sermon is nothing else but the preaching of the Gospel (Matt 4:23).<sup>19</sup>

## **2. Christ's Coming and the Law (Matt 5:17)**

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

This verse doesn't stand in isolation; it is part of Jesus' teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount. While travelling and teaching around the Galilee, Jesus went up on the hill and there he taught His disciples and the crowds of people. He told them many things, but the basic teaching was about living a righteous and godly life.

### **Definition of Terms**

When using the phrase *The Law and the Prophets*, Jesus was referring to the Scriptures (only the Old Testament had been written then). Later, He used the word *Law*. In the narrow sense He referred to the Five Books of Moses and in the broader sense to the entire Old Testament.

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<sup>17</sup> John F. MacArthur, *Evandjelje po Isusu* (Gospel According to Jesus), Koprivnica, Baptistička crkva, Krapina, Teološka biblijska akademija, 2006, 219.

<sup>18</sup> For several different interpretations see: Thomas L. Constable, *Notes On Matthew*, Sonic Light, 2005, 70-74.  
<<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/matthew.pdf>>.

<sup>19</sup> MacArthur, *o. c.*, 219.

## **An Answer to a Specific Situation**

Let's take a look at Jesus' reaction and response to a specific situation. *Do not think that I came to abolish ...* Apparently some believed that Jesus was abolishing the Law. Or perhaps, Jesus wanted to forestall such beliefs because these words were spoken at the beginning of His ministry.

Why would someone believe that Jesus was abolishing the Law? According to the writings of some later Jewish rabbi's, there were beliefs that the Messiah would abolish the Law or, at least, alter it.<sup>20</sup> However, there is no adequate proof to uphold such views.<sup>21</sup> Jewish teachers were saying that someone abolishes the Law by not keeping it.<sup>22</sup> Jesus certainly didn't abolish or break the Law. His life and teaching were vastly different than the life and teaching of the Pharisees and the Scribes, and this is probably the most likely reason for some people thinking that Jesus might be the one abolishing the Law.

### **Jesus Doesn't Abolish the Law, but Fulfils it**

**Firstly**, Jesus doesn't abolish the Law. In verse 17, He explains the relation between the Law and His coming. *Do not think that I have come to abolish...* This declaration is different from the statement of many Christians and preachers who claim that *we are no longer under the Law!* as if that means that the Law is abolished.

The New Testament doesn't abolish the Law. The Gospel doesn't abolish the Law. Grace doesn't abolish the Law. Apostles do not

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<sup>20</sup> *Commentary on Matthew* by John A. Broadus, s.v. "Matt 5:1".

<sup>21</sup> See Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Abolition and Fulfilment of the Law in Paul", *JSNT*, 35 (1989) 51, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Downers Grove, IVP, 1993, 57.

abolish the Law. Christ doesn't abolish the Law. When God was speaking about the New Testament or the Covenant through the prophet Jeremiah, He didn't announce the abolition of the Law, but confirmed it.

*Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. I will put my Law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer 31:32-33)*

It is interesting that the New Covenant which God was announcing was not without the Law, but with the Law written on their hearts. Apparently, the Old Testament is saying that the Law will not be abolished in the New Testament.<sup>23</sup> Jesus also declares that He didn't come to abolish it. In his letter to Romans, Paul asks: *Do we then overthrow the Law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the Law.* (Rom 3:31) There is certainly nothing here about the Law being abolished.

**Secondly**, Jesus *fulfils* the Law. Matthew often uses this word when quoting the Old Testament: *In order to fulfill what was declared by the Lord through the prophet...* Jesus fulfils the Law in three ways:

(1) He came to fulfil the Law's prophecy regarding Himself. We can conclude that from Matthew's use of the word *fulfill* and from Matthew 5:18

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<sup>23</sup> For arguments against the "New Torah" and "Zion Torah" see: Schreiner, *o. c.*, 51, 52.



(2) He came to completely meet the requirements of the Law, which is to live under the Law. We know that Jesus kept the Law and verses 19-20 speak about keeping the Law.<sup>24</sup>

(3) He came to fully reveal and explain the Law so that the people of God would understand and follow its true meaning.<sup>25</sup> In Matthew 5:21-48 we see His correction of the rabbis' interpretations.

As we consider the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, we must understand their nature. There is direct prophecy such as: *A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son ...*, and figurative or symbolical prophecy. Some things like ceremonies or festivals (also individuals and events) can be prophecies. These are typological prophecies. That means that Jesus, by His coming and His work, didn't just fulfill direct prophecy, but also pictures, ceremonies and rituals.

The Old Testament worship, its sacrifices and ceremonies were only a picture of the heavenly reality, because God had instructed Moses to make everything according to the pattern he saw on the mountain (Heb 8:5). Most of the Old Testament Law consists of ceremonies and festivals. Christ has fulfilled all those typological prophecies which point to Himself. **That is why they are done away with, not because they have suddenly been abolished, but because they were fulfilled.** In today's worship the lamb is no longer required because the lamb was a picture of Christ. The Temple, sacrifices, Sabbaths, days and festivals, regulations about food and similar have ceased because their meaning was fulfilled in Christ. This implies that any changes we see in the New

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<sup>24</sup> Some interpret verse 20 as talking about imputed righteousness. Such interpretation does not have any confirmation from the context. See John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978, 155, 156.

<sup>25</sup> See Vincent Cheung, *The Sermon on The Mount*, Reformation Ministries International, <http://www.rmiweb.org/books/sermonmount.pdf>, 2004, 52.

Testament concerning the Law are not ascribed to its abolishment, but to the fulfilment **of its certain parts**.<sup>26</sup>

**Important:** Whatever has not been fulfilled is still valid because the Law does not include only prophecies (ceremonies and sacrifices), but also includes moral principles. These principles will not be fulfilled by a certain event, but only by observing them. However, the things that were fulfilled are important to us because those are the pictures of heavenly realities, and the pictures contain principles which are valid in reality.

Some misinterpret Jesus' words because they are a thorn in the flesh to them. They agree that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfil it. However, their interpretation concludes that word *fulfill* actually means *abolish*, because, they claim, the Law and the Prophets ended when John the Baptist began to preach (or when Jesus died on the cross).<sup>27</sup>

Jesus, however, clearly states how long the Law is valid: *until heaven and earth pass away* – that means forever. As far as I can see, heaven and earth are still in existence, and so is the Law.

### **3. The Law and the Believer**

Here is the central question: What is the relationship between the Law and the believer?

#### **The Believer Must Keep the Law**

This truth is discarded by many and labelled as legalism. If this is true, then Jesus was a legalist too since this is what He said:

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<sup>26</sup> Cheung, *o. c.*, 53.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Gordon D. Fee, Douglas Stuart, *Kako tumačiti Bibliju* (How to Read the Bible for all its Worth), Osijek, Izvori 1999, 165.

*Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:19)*

This statement begins with the word *so* and closely connects it with what was said before, which is that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law and that it will remain until heaven and earth pass away. Therefore, the word *whoever* refers to any person until the end of human history. If Jesus didn't abolish the Law, then no one else has any right to abolish it.

### **The Believer's Righteousness Must Exceed That of the Pharisee's**

The believer is not only required to keep the Law, but he must keep it better than the scribes and the Pharisees. These were shocking words to Jesus' hearers. Who could be more righteous than the scribes and the Pharisees? The Jews had a saying: *If only two people go to heaven, one will be a scribe and the other a Pharisee*. They were highly esteemed and viewed as righteous in people's eyes. However, the Gospels reveal that their righteousness was only external. They appeared righteous, but their thoughts were full of robbery and self-indulgence. This is hypocrisy, not the righteousness required by the Law. Believer's righteousness cannot only be external, but must be in the heart, which is why Jesus was telling the Pharisees to clean the inside so the outside will be clean also.

Some assume that Pharisees were legalistic because they kept the strict letter of the Law. That is not true. They were legalistic because they tried to obtain justification by obeying the Law. Besides, they kept the letter of the Law only in certain areas avoiding commands which they didn't like. They changed and

shaped them according to their liking (they were the ones abolishing the Law, not Jesus). Jesus' further teaching in the Sermon corrects their interpretation of the Law.<sup>28</sup>

The Pharisees' sinned because they kept the Law partially and with wrong motives. Believers should obey all of God's commands. Jesus said: *Teach them to obey all that I have commanded you*. Keeping God's commands is not legalism. We must not think that the Gospel gives us freedom from keeping the Law or that it reduces its righteous demands.<sup>29</sup>

Some have completely misunderstood the Gospel and the Law. It's known that the Law condemns and therefore believers think that they will be free from its condemnation if they abolish it. That is not the Gospel. In the Gospel, condemnation is abolished because Christ was condemned for us, and He gives us strength to meet the righteous requirements of the Law. Jesus came to cleanse us from our sins, not to abolish the Law.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not to abolish it. He kept the Law and taught from it. Christ's work on the cross changed the outward form of Mosaic Law because it was only a picture of reality, and the reality is Christ. But even though the outward form has changed, its spirit and essence is the same. The principles are eternal, and everyone is required to keep the Law.

In the rest of this book I'll do the following: (a) prove the eternal validity of the Law based on the rest of the New Testament, (b)

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<sup>28</sup> For a further interpretation of Jesus' Sermon with this view see: John R. W. Stott, *Kršćanska kontra-kultura* (Christian Counter-culture), Zagreb, Duhovna stvarnost, 1984.

<sup>29</sup> It does not reduce, nor does it enlarge.

<sup>30</sup> See Schreiner, *o. c.*, 57, 58.

interpret New Testament texts which at first seem to support the Law's abolishment, and which are used by those who teach that the Law is abolished, (c) explain the purpose and the role of the Law for today, (d) explain how Old Testament Law should be interpreted and applied today.



## THE APOSTLES AND THE LAW

We saw in the previous chapter that Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. The believer is required to keep the Law and teach others to do the same. This is the only natural interpretation of the text we have studied. However, some texts in the epistles seem to say the opposite. Therefore, some people have concluded that the Law is abolished and that it does not need to be kept. Before we analyse those texts, we will consider the texts which confirm the validity and the authority of the Law for the New Testament believer.

If my interpretation of Jesus' teaching is correct, then the same interpretation or attitude towards the Law and the prophets should be found in the writings of the apostles.

### 1. The Apostle Paul

The apostle Paul uses the word *Law* more than anyone else. One of the greatest problems for theologians is to understand Paul's usage of this word and his teaching about the Law. Some believe that more research should be undertaken in order to arrive at a definitive conclusion and an agreement between experts. But if we were to wait for theologians to agree about this issue (and many others), we are in for a long wait (perhaps another two thousand years). We need to live, follow and please Christ today. The question of the Law is not a side issue, but is of great importance for Christian life. I think that the question of the Law is not as unclear as some wish to present it. It is unclear when viewed from the wrong theological position. Let's take a look at the texts in Paul's epistles which confirm the permanent validity of God's law:

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that*

*the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*  
(2 Ti 3:16, 17)

What is the text saying about the Law and its role in the life of the New Testament believer? Words *all Scripture is God-breathed* refer to the whole Bible – the Old and the New Testament. Professor Wayne Grudem<sup>31</sup> claims that the word *Scripture (grafe)* must refer to the Old Testament because the word *Scripture*, which appears in the New Testament fifty one times, always refers to the Old Testament. Also, *the Holy Scriptures* of the Old Testament is what Paul is speaking about in verse 15. He also says that in two places (1 Ti 5:18 and 2 Pe 3:16) the word *Scriptures* refers to the New Testament as well as to the Old Testament. Therefore, *all Scripture* is the whole Bible, although at that time the New Testament was not yet completed and the *Holy Scriptures* which Timothy knew (2 Ti 3:15) is the Old Testament Law and the Prophets. Understanding that *all Scripture* is in fact both the Old and New Testament, let's look at what Paul says.

Firstly, Scripture is inspired by God. God is its real author.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, it is useful to the man of God for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. This speaks about the permanent validity of the Old Testament Law. This Law is not just a reliable historical account<sup>33</sup> but an authority for the New Testament believer who needs to be taught on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and that includes the Old Testament as well. Furthermore, the believer must be admonished, corrected and trained in righteousness on the basis of both the Old and the New Testament.

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<sup>31</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1994, 74.

<sup>32</sup> See Paul D. Feinberg, *Značenje nepogrešivosti Svetog pisma*, Evangeoski biblijski institut, 1998, 10-14.

<sup>33</sup> Some deny even that.



If the Law and the Prophets are not valid today, then we must ask how can we teach someone by using the Old Testament? Or, how can we reproof, correct or train him in righteousness? How can we reproof or correct a person with the Law which is not valid? This person can rightly ask: *Why do you reproof or correct me with the Law when the Law is abolished?* Regardless of this text, some still claim that the Law is abolished, and that the New Testament believer is not obligated to keep it. If this is so, then we cannot use the Law to correct anyone, nor can we apply the teaching which the apostle Paul gave to Timothy. The only option that we are left with is to twist the meaning of the text.

We will look at several texts which prove that the apostle is using the Law to teach, reproof, correct and train in righteousness the New Testament believers.

### **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.* (Eph 6:1-3)

The apostle is quoting one of the Ten Commandments. This is not just sound advice, but a commandment; not human, but God's commandment. The apostle is using all Scriptures to teach, reproof, correct and train. This is a clear proof that the Apostle believes in the permanent validity and the authority of the Law. The New Testament is not without the Law. The Gospel is not without the Law. Grace is not without the Law. The Spirit is not without the Law. The Law in the New Testament is not useless, nor counterproductive, nor harmful, but good, useful and necessary.

This commandment is not quoted completely as it has been written in the Ten Commandments, and so some conclude that it is valid because it is repeated in the New Testament (otherwise it would not be valid).<sup>34</sup> If this is true, then all Scripture is not useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training (or maybe this is valid only for Paul and Timothy). We will take a closer look at this teaching later.

### **1 Corinthians 14:33, 34**

*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. (1 Co 14:33-34)*

The apostle gives a commandment about order in the church. I will not analyse the complete meaning of these verses, but will emphasize Paul's reference to the Law. The apostle gives a commandment for women to submit to their husbands on the basis of the Law as the binding authority. What other conclusion can we make? Many commentators agree that the apostle is referring to Genesis 3:16. There are other texts in the Law which apply to the submission of women. If the Law was abolished, then it wouldn't have any authority for the apostle either, and he would certainly not refer to the Law. Paul is using all Scripture in this case as well.

### **Hebrews 8:8-10**

The writer of the letter to Hebrews is quoting Jeremiah:

*For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the*

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1999, 351, 352.

*covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Heb 8:8-10)*

Does the establishment of the New Covenant abolish the Law and the commandments? Far from it. The New Testament confirms the Law. There are many texts which show that the Law has permanent validity for the apostle Paul. This is in line with what Jesus said: *I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.*

Therefore, *Do we then overthrow the Law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (Rom 3:31).*

## **2. The Apostle James**

The Apostle James, Jesus' half-brother, the son of his mother Mary, wrote one of the New Testament epistles. He was the elder of the church at Jerusalem and, according to Josephus Flavius, was killed in A.D. 62. He must have written the letter earlier. It is believed that it has been written before the Council of Jerusalem in A.D. 49.<sup>35</sup> It is most likely the first New Testament book to be written. The Gospels were written in the late 50s (Matthew, Mark) and up to the 80s or 90s (John).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, at that time the written word of God consisted only of the Old Testament. This is important to understand before we examine James' attitude towards the Law.

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<sup>35</sup> James D. Stevens, *James*, KJVBC, el. ed.

<sup>36</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Pregled Novog Zavjeta*, Zagreb, Illyricum, Beč, EBI, pp. 304, 305.

James refers to the Old Testament (the written word of God) in several places. He quotes the Old Testament or refers to the people and events of the Old Testament. James mentions the Law in the first chapter (1:25) and calls it the Law of freedom. Many are uncertain whether in this instance He refers to the Old Testament Law or to Jesus' teachings or the Gospel.<sup>37</sup> Further reading shows that James uses the word Law only in relation to the Old Testament text. In chapter 2:8 we read:

*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (Jas 2:8,9)*

It is clear that James is quoting the Scripture from the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18). Some overlook this fact and refer to the mention of this text in the Gospels. We have already seen that the Gospels have not yet been written at that time, therefore they could not have been referred to as the *Scripture*, and James is quoting the Scripture.

It seems that those who view the letter of James as an exposition of Leviticus 19:12-20<sup>38</sup> are correct. These verses speak about the relationship between people and conclude with the commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself.

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<sup>37</sup> Tom Schreiner believes that the phrase *the perfect law of freedom* refers to the Gospel, and not to God's Law. (*40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 200, 201.) He gives two arguments, but neither is convincing. The first argument is that James in his letter mentions the Gospel which brings freedom (the word), and the second is that he doesn't mention the ceremonial stipulations of the Law. It is not clear how these arguments, especially the second one, proves that *the perfect law of freedom* is not God's Law, but the Gospel, despite the fact that James uses the word *law* in every other place to refer to the Old Testament text. Besides, the perfect law of freedom is something that we need to look at and be committed to as faithful doers, and the Gospel is something that we need to believe in.

<sup>38</sup> See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *James' View of the Law*, MISHKAN 8/9 1988.

Is James against the keeping of the Law? On the contrary, he says that *you are doing the right thing if you obey the royal Law*. And if you don't obey, *you commit sin*. James specifically speaks against partiality, and Leviticus 19:15 says the same: *You are not to show partiality to the poor*. It should be clear that James has in mind the written law of God which is even more obvious in verses 10 and 11:

*For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (Jas 2:10,11)*

James quotes certain commandments from the Old Testament with the warning to keep them. It is important to James that believers keep all the commandments and don't become violators of the Law. If it were all the same whether they showed partiality or broke the Law, would he mention it in the first place? There is no time to thoroughly analyse these verses, but I believe that they are clear enough. In chapter four James again quotes the Scripture and upholds the authority of the Law.

*Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? (Jas 4:5)*

This verse presents a big problem for interpreters. The first problem is how to translate it, and the second is the lack of clarity as to which Old Testament verse James is quoting.<sup>39</sup> But interpreters also know that the New Testament writers did not

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<sup>39</sup> Because of this reason, and the meaning of the verse, some here see the argument to confirm the later date of the letter. See W. E. Oesterley, *James*, The Expositor's Greek Testament, W. Robertson Nicoll ed., p. 459.

always quote literally, but have sometimes combined several verses or presented the primary meaning of the text. *James alludes to the principle.*<sup>40</sup> It is possible that he has in mind Genesis 6:3, Exodus 34:14, and Zechariah 8:2.

Right after in verse 6 James quotes Proverbs 3:34. But if the Law is abolished, then the Proverbs are also abolished. In verse 8, he quotes Zechariah 1:3 or Malachi 3:7. But if the Law is abolished, then the Prophets are also abolished. Further in the text James continues to allude to some Old Testament pictures. Look at what he says in 4:11, 12:

*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?* (Jas 4:11,12)

The commandment or the law against criticizing is written in Leviticus 19:16. *You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people.* James refers to the Law of Moses and uses it to admonish, teach and warn the church. He doesn't want them to put themselves outside and above the Law by becoming its judges, but to keep the Law.<sup>41</sup>

Some people are afraid to keep the Law because they think that they will become legalists. Is James afraid to keep the Law? Far from it, rather he is afraid to break the Law. That's why he writes in chapter 1:25:

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<sup>40</sup> Stevens, *James*, KJVBC.

<sup>41</sup> "When thou claimest for thyself a power to censure above the law of God thou exemptest thyself from the duty of obeying the law." Calvin, *General Epistles*, s.v. "Jas 4:11-12".

*But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (Jas 1:25)*

James doesn't know any other Law but the one which has been written a long time ago, and that's the Law he quotes. He calls it the perfect Law of freedom because he sees the Law in the light of Christ's work on the cross and the freeing power of the Holy Spirit, who has enabled us to live the victorious life of faith and obedience.<sup>42</sup> James is not a legalist who wrongly understands the nature and the role of the Law, but one who understands the Law's true nature and purpose. For those who live under grace and follow the Spirit, the Law brings joy and blessings, not condemnation.

It is difficult for me to understand that despite such clear texts many theologians who are bothered with the Law still claim that James is not talking about the Law of Moses, but some new Law. They don't seem bothered with the fact that James continuously quotes the Old Testament Law as authority. Their writings seem to want to convince us that black is white and that white is black.

In the rest of the text James often refers to the Old Testament, but we don't have enough space here to analyse it all. Therefore, let us not be afraid of keeping the Law, but rather of breaking the Law.

## **Conclusion**

I believe I have given clear arguments that the apostles, and Jesus, never thought of abolishing the Law, but have emphasized its

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<sup>42</sup> Compare Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul*, Eugene, Oregon, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001, 24.

permanent validity.<sup>43</sup> We have seen that the Bible speaks about the abolishment of the ceremonial Law. It also speaks of the abolishment of condemnation, but never about the abolishment of eternal moral Law which was valid even before Moses, during the time of Moses, and today. We will see this more clearly in the following chapters.

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<sup>43</sup> Of course, we could go on and analyse the apostle John and the other apostles.



## THE LAW AND GRACE

We saw that the Law has eternal validity and now we will look at its true nature. We will also look at what grace is and the relationship between the Law and grace.

### 1. Goodness of the Law

In this chapter we will see that the Law is good and not bad, it is positive and not negative. We will see that it is good and necessary to keep the Law. We will consider what the Law can and cannot do, and its right use compared to its wrong use.

#### The Law is Good and Positive

It is important to know that the Law is essential, useful and good. It is given by God, it reflects His will and reveals His character. The Old and the New Testaments describe the Law in this way. The Apostle Paul said: *So the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and righteous and good.* (Rom 7:12) In verse 14 it says that the law is spiritual. This is how the psalmist David speaks of the Law:

*The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.* (Psa 19:8-10)

What a rhapsody to the Law! Not only is the Law holy, righteous and good, but it is pleasing and rejoices the heart. Paul said that even before his conversion he was delighted with the Law of God in his inner being. (Rom 7:22) Even today when non-believers read the Bible, they agree that it is good and that it would be great

if everyone would obey what's written in it. But not everyone thinks in this way because they have misinterpreted certain Bible verses and speak badly about the Law.

### **It is Good to Keep the Law**

Not only is the Law good, it is also good to keep the Law. We know that laws of a country are good and useful. Is it not better when the nation is governed by law and when the law is enforced? We feel comfortable and safe. However, when the law loses its power and lawlessness increases, life becomes very difficult. It is then that people want to run away to some other country where the law is being enforced. If the law of a country is able to bring peace and safety and is seen as good and needed, then how much more do we need God's law? How much more should we enjoy it? How much more should we keep it? When David was praising God's law and his commands, he said:

*Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psa 19:11)*

Or in Psalm 119:

*Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. (Psa 119:1-4)*

God has given His Law in order that it should be kept diligently, and David said that that is good. Is there anything bad then in the keeping of the Law? No. The Lord Jesus kept the Law. Only the breaking of the Law is bad.

While confronting the Pharisees, Jesus says to his disciples to do and keep whatever the Pharisees tell them, but not to do what they do, because they speak things but do not put them into practice. (Matt 23:3) It is strange then that some people believe keeping the Law is bad or legalistic. This wrong understanding comes from the incorrect interpretation of certain texts from the Acts and letters to the Romans and Galatians. Some theologians teach that Israel made a bad judgment by accepting the Law which God gave through Moses. They claim that by so doing, they rejected grace and accepted the Law.<sup>44</sup>

However, we have seen that the Law is good, not bad, and that it is good to keep the Law. We can rightly ask whether anyone needs to free us from the Law. Is it necessary for Christ to die in order to free us from the Law which is good, and holy, and righteous? Or to free us from the Law which is a delight to keep? The answer is obvious. There is no need for anyone to free us from God's law, nor can anyone do it. The law always was, and is and it will be in eternity. Whoever doesn't like the Law and obedience to God, he will never be able to enjoy heaven.

## **2. The Limits of the Law**

### **The Law was Not Given to Save Us**

This is an important truth if we are to understand the Bible. So far we have looked at the positive aspects of the Law. Now we will look at its limitations. The Law does not have any flaws or negative sides, but it has certain limits. It was not given so that a man is saved by observing it. Some theologians disagree with this view. They claim that there are two ways of salvation: by the Law and by grace. They agree that no one can be saved through the Law because no one is able to keep it perfectly, but they still hold

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<sup>44</sup> For example, see Lewis Sperry Chaffer, *Major Bible Themes*, el. ed.

that the Law is at least a theoretical possibility for salvation.<sup>45</sup> This view is one of the reasons that there exists such a huge difference between the Law and grace. I don't agree with this view because the Bible nowhere teaches that eternal life can be attained through the Law, nor that it is even a theoretical possibility. The Bible clearly teaches the opposite.

*I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Gal 2:21)*

*Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Gal 2:16)*

*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20)*

This is clear, but some say that this is true only because no human can perfectly fulfill the Law. If a person could keep the Law perfectly, then he could be saved through it. However, the Bible teaches that the Law was not given so that a person tries to be saved through the Law or that this is a theoretical possibility. That is what Paul said in the letter to Galatians:

*Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. (Gal 3:21)*

The text says that no Law had been given that could give us life. That kind of Law does not exist nor had it ever existed. Paul also asks whether the Law conflicts with God's promises. Truly, if salvation could be through the Law (even theoretically), then the

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<sup>45</sup> For example, see Thomas Schreiner, *"Works of Law" in Paul*, o. c., 238-241.

Law would be in conflict with God's promises. Salvation has always been through faith. A well-known theologian wrote:

*I would urge the Church to drop all statements that teach or imply that there is another way of salvation offered in the Bible – even if only hypothetically.*<sup>46</sup>

False interpretation of the Law was the main problem for Jews during the time of Jesus and the apostles. Jews believed that they could and needed to be justified through keeping the Law. This view is called legalism and Paul writes against it in his letter to Galatians. The Epistles to the Romans and Colossians also stand against this heresy.

**The problem was never that someone kept the Law, but when someone broke the Law or used it in a wrong way and for a wrong cause (for justification, that is salvation).**

There are texts in the Bible which speak that there is life through the Law, but the text nowhere says – eternal life. Those texts refer to the quality of life, present and future life.<sup>47</sup> Righteousness through the Law is not a theory but a practical need and necessity. However, this righteousness is not the source of salvation, but the outcome of salvation. Righteousness through the Law and righteousness through faith complement each other for one supports another. They don't oppose each other. Our faith must produce work, just as the Apostle James clearly says. To be justified by deeds or by the Law does not mean to earn God's justification, but to prove that God has justified us already.<sup>48</sup> This

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<sup>46</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. "God's Promise Plan and His Gracious Law," *JETS* 33/3 (September 1990) 294.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, IVP, Leicester, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1994, 731.

is true for both the Old and the New Testament and here there is no major difference between the Testaments.

If a person chooses to believe that he can be saved through the Law theoretically but not practically, I have no intention of persuading him otherwise. The real problem is if he believes in justification through the Law practically, which was the main problem Jews had during the time of the apostle Paul. The Law had not been given for salvation and that is one of the Law's limitations.

### **The Law Doesn't Provide Power for Obedience**

Another limitation of the Law is that it defines sin but it does not give strength not to sin. There is no salvation through the Law, but only the exact knowledge of the sin. The Law demands obedience, and unregenerate man is not able to obey. He can intellectually agree with the Law, but in practice he continuously breaks it. Many know that it is bad to drink, smoke, take drugs, commit adultery, steal and so on, but they still do it. Such a man does not feel comfortable with this Law. Therefore, he does not read the Bible nor does he like to hear about God or His holiness and righteousness.

The function of the Law is, therefore, to decree man a sinful being and to condemn him, not to save him. The Law reveals to man his sinful state and points him to seek salvation in Christ, not in the Law. So there is not a problem with the Law, the problem lies with man, with his sinful nature.

### **3. The Real Problem with the Law**

Since the Law does not provide strength for obedience which it demands, there is a problem for man with the Law. The real problem with the Law is that not only does it state what is good

and how one should live, but it pronounces judgment upon those who don't live in that way. This is the greatest problem for sinful man.<sup>49</sup>

Now, do we need help? Certainly! We need someone to save us from the Law. Not to save us from the need to keep the Law, but to save us from the Law's condemnation and to give us strength to obey this very Law. That is exactly what Christ does for us and that is God's grace. Grace is not in opposition to the Law, but is confirmed by the Law and the Prophets.

#### 4. Grace

Once we understand the true nature of the Law, its importance, limitations, and the problem we have, we can understand grace and its nature and role. Grace is God's undeserved love.<sup>50</sup> This word also describes the state of the saved man (Rom 5:2), and the salvation which God is offering to man: the **Gospel**.<sup>51</sup> Grace and

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<sup>49</sup> Some believe that the problem with the Law is that it increases sin (causes sinner to sin more). This interpretation is questionable, but even if it were true, the problem is not with the Law, but with the sin. Douglas Moo asserts that it is necessary for Christ to free us from Law's condemnation but also from the Law (the commands) because it increases sin. If this were true, then there should be no commands for a believer. Moo is aware of this problem and even though he confirms the need of commands for a believer, he wants to minimize its importance at any price. See Douglas J. Moo, *The Law of Christ as the Fulfilment of the Law of Moses: a Modified Lutheran View*, in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, Stanley N. Gundry ed., Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1999, 366, 370.

<sup>50</sup> We can see here why some see *animosity* between the Law and grace. Grace gives salvation without merits or works and the Law (according to them) by works and merits. For a quality biblical explanation see John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978, 195-201.

<sup>51</sup> For a detailed analysis of words see dictionaries (for example *ISBE*, s.v. "Grace"). Words "Law" and "grace" are used in different ways in the Bible and it is hard to make a comparison between them without emphasizing in what sense they are being used. "...the word "grace" sums up everything that by way of contrast with law is embraced in the provisions of redemption" (John

Law are not contradictory concepts, one does not exclude the other, they complement each other. They are not the same, but they are in agreement. The beach and the sea are not the same, nor do they have the same function (the beach is for sunbathing and the sea for swimming), but they go together. The car and the fuel are not the same, but they go together. We need both and far from it that we would take one and reject the other. It is the same with the Law and grace. The law is good and we need it, grace is essential and we need it.

**The Law and the Gospel (grace) are parts of God's grace which have different functions. One part shows us our sin, condemns us, and points us to Christ. The other part justifies and saves us and gives us power to live according to the Law. Both are needed today just like they were needed throughout all of history.**

Enoch walked with God, but he was saved by grace through faith. Noah walked with God, but he was saved by grace through faith. Abraham, the Father of our faith, kept God's law (Gen 26: 5) but he was saved by grace through faith. Israel was required to keep the Law, but they were delivered from Egypt by grace through faith (they received the Law after that). David kept God's law, but was saved by grace through faith. Isaiah kept God's law, but was saved by grace through faith. Zechariah and Elizabeth kept the Law (Luke 1:5, 6), but they were saved by grace through faith (Luke 1:77-79). Christians must keep the Law (Rom 2:13<sup>52</sup>, 8:4), but are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-10). This is not legalism, but a correct biblical view.

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Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1968, 1:229). In a wider sense the word "grace" applies to the whole Bible (Eph 20:32), and therefore includes the Law.

<sup>52</sup> Many interpreters say that this verse relates to a hypothetical possibility, however for a more accurate view see Thomas Schreiner, "Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works? Another Look at Romans 2." *BBR* 3 (1993) 131-158.



It is important to know that the Law always existed and was valid even before it was given through Moses in a written form. It is the same with grace and the Gospel: they always existed and were valid even before Christ died on the cross. Just because the Law was given through Moses in a written form it does not mean that it was not existent before (moral law existed). The Bible says that even pagans who did not have the written law knew the Law because it was written in their hearts. Just because grace and truth came through Jesus Christ it does not mean that they did not exist already. No one in the Old Testament was saved by works, but by grace through Christ's blood (which was yet to be shed for them in the future). Grace and truth came through Christ in the sense that the time for its full revelation in history had come (see John 1:17) in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, grace and the Law are not in contrast as some people understand it.<sup>53</sup>

Grace precedes, encompasses and surpasses the Law; or rather the Law is an integral part of grace. The Law has its foundation in grace.<sup>54</sup> This can be illustrated with the "first" commandment: *I am the Lord, your God who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery* (grace, or a foundation for what is to come). *Do not have other gods along with me* (the Law). So, to reject the Law is the same as to reject God's grace or the means of God's grace.<sup>55</sup> This is the basic meaning of these words.

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<sup>53</sup> See Rodney A. Whitacre, *John, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, <<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=4&source=1&seq=i.50.1.4>>. Compare Ruth B. Edwards, XAPIN ANTI XAPITOS (john 1.16) Grace and the Law in the Johannien Prologue." *JSNT* 32 (1988)3-15.

<sup>54</sup> Knox Chamblin, "The Law of Moses and The Law of Christ", in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments, Essays in Honour of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, John S. Feinberg ed., Illinois, Crossway Books, 1988, 184, 194.

<sup>55</sup> E.F. Kevan, *The Evangelical Doctrine of Law*, London, Tyndale Press, 1956, 12,13.

## Conclusion

I hope that we have gained insight into the true nature and role of the Law and its relationship with grace. The Law was given by grace and because of grace. Its role is to reveal God and his character, to show the right path, to reveal our sinfulness and the need for salvation by grace.<sup>56</sup> The role of grace is to free man from Law's condemnation and to give him power to keep the Law. The Law and grace are both needed and they always existed together, but their fullness was revealed in history gradually.

Do these truths mean anything for us? Do they change our understanding of the Gospel, grace and the Law? What are the practical outcomes of these truths in our lives?

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<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that the role of the Law in the life of a believer is different than in the life of unbeliever. The Law shows the unbeliever his need for salvation, and teaches the believer the righteous path.

## THE LAW AND GRACE IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS (1) (Rom 6:14, 15)

There are three texts in the letter to the Romans that are commonly used by those who teach the abolition of the Law. But those texts do not have the meaning which they ascribe to them. They don't contain even the smallest idea about the abolition of God's commandments or people's responsibility to keep them, regardless of whether they were written in the Old or the New Testament.

Many people claim that Romans 6:14-15 teaches about the abolition of the Law. *We no longer live under the authority of Moses' law*, they say.<sup>57</sup> Or, *the law of Moses doesn't have anything to say to a believer*.<sup>58</sup> Or, *the authority of the Law is replaced with the authority of grace*.<sup>59</sup> Altogether, they want to get rid of the authority of Moses' law (or the law in general). It's interesting that this text doesn't say anything about that. Besides, some who support the abolition of the Law also teach that not only the ceremonial law was abolished but the entire Law, even the Ten Commandments.<sup>60</sup> The Christian is only bound by what is written in the New Testament, mainly by what is written in the Epistles (and it seems not even by all that is written there).

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Romans*, Sonic Light, <<http://www.soniclight.com/>>, 2006, 68.

<sup>58</sup> William R. Newell, *Romans Verse-by-Verse*, Grand Rapids, MI, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/newell/romans.vii.html>> (pdf format pp.163, 164.). Prior to that Newell claims that this verse doesn't mean that we are not under the law of Moses, because Gentiles never were, but that we are under the legal principles (p. 161).

<sup>59</sup> Wayne G. Strickland, *The Inauguration Of The Law Of Christ With The Gospel Of Christ: A Dispensational View, Five Views On Law And Gospel*, N. Gundry ed., Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1999, 265.

<sup>60</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, Chicago, Moody Press, s.a. 350.

In order to correctly understand the verses we study, we should not read into them our opinions and ideas, but read the truth out of them. The context will greatly help us, that is what is written before and after these verses.

We can't arbitrarily decide what the phrases *under Law*<sup>61</sup> and *under grace* mean. The text and the context must define it. Other texts where these phrases are used will also help<sup>62</sup> but more importantly is what the text itself says about it, because the meaning of these same words can greatly differ from book to book and even from one sentence to another.

## 1. Facts from the Text

Now, what do the phrases *under Law* and *under grace* mean? The text says that sin will not have mastery over us because we are not *under Law* but *under grace*. This clearly shows that the phrase *under Law* indicates the state where man is enslaved by sin or where sin is his master, and the state *under grace* indicates that sin is not master over man.

Now, let's ask the following question: Does the phrase *under Law* refer to the state of man who is under the authority of the law of Moses in general, that is, does it refer to the state of the *believer* who is under the authority of the law of Moses? If so, then it follows that sin was master over every Old Testament believer. It was master over Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel and others. We know that they were not sinless, but far from it that sin was their master. We can say with certainty that they were under

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<sup>61</sup> The noun *Law* is without a definite article in the original text and that's why some translate it with a small letter, which would mean that it does not directly relate to the law of Moses.

<sup>62</sup> The phrase *under grace* is only used in this place in the New Testament. The phrase *under Law* is used nine more times.

grace in the same way as we are today.<sup>63</sup> **Thus the phrase *under Law* could only refer to the unbeliever who is under Law and its condemnation.** This will be clearer when we look at the context and see other phrases Paul uses to describe the condition *under Law*.

Is there anything else we find in this text that can help us clarify these phrases? Verse 15 contains important facts. Paul says: *What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!* It is clear here what it means to be under grace or rather what it does not mean. It does not mean that we have the right to break the Law, because to go on sinning means to break the Law. The apostle John says: *Sin is lawlessness* (1 Jn 3:4). The apostle Paul gives the same definition of sin: *Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.* (Rom 7:7), or, *but sin is not counted where there is no law* (Rom 5:13). In Paul's dictionary sin is breaking of the Law. Thus, we can paraphrase verse 15 like this: *Should we go on breaking the Law because we are not under Law but under grace? Of course not!*<sup>64</sup>

It should be clear that to be *under grace* does not mean that we have the right to break the Law (as many people teach). On the contrary, to be under grace means we have strength to keep the Law (Rom 8:4).

If the words *not under Law* would mean *not under the authority of the law of Moses*, then it follows that sin is master only over those who are under the law of Moses, that is, anyone who does not know the law of Moses is not in slavery to sin. It could then be said that Jews were not in slavery to sin until they received the

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<sup>63</sup> A. W. Pink, *Law and Saint*, <[http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Law/law\\_02.htm](http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Law/law_02.htm)>. John Murray, *The Epistle to The Romans*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977, 1:228, 229.

<sup>64</sup> See Greg L. Bahnsen, *The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel*, in *Five Views on Law And Gospel*, 107, o. c. Also Murray, *Romans*, 1:231, o. c.

Law. In that case, the very abolition of the Law would indicate freedom from slavery to sin.<sup>65</sup> Such ideas are absurd and they deny the need for the Gospel and Christ's sacrifice. All we need to do is to tear up the Law and everything would be great.

We have seen what it means to be *under Law* and *under grace*. Being *under Law* (on the basis of what we have seen so far) means to be unconverted, in slavery to sin and under the condemnation of the Law. Being *under grace* means to be a believer and free from sin, that is to have strength to keep the Law. We will yet conclude that these truths apply to both Testaments, because we have grace and the Law in the Old Testament just as we have in the New Testament.

## 2. Facts from the Context

The context offers additional data by which we can gain fuller understanding of the phrases *under Law* and *under grace*. **Actually, these phrases are not new thoughts which Paul is suddenly introducing in the letter.**<sup>66</sup> He has already explained their meaning in previous chapters, even though he didn't use the same words. Now he further explains it in the following texts.

### The Context and the Law

Paul has explained the doctrine of justification by faith prior to the verses we have looked at. In Romans 1:1-17, Paul in his greeting states that he is going to write about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that is, about the doctrine of salvation by faith (and that means about God's grace). In Romans 1:18 Paul explains why people need to be saved and from what:

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<sup>65</sup> Compare Charles C. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Philadelphia, Perkins, 1836, 149.

<sup>66</sup> Compare John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Edinburgh, Banner, 2005, Vol 4, 137.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

God's wrath is against the entire world because of the ungodliness and wickedness (that is, sin) of people. Humanity needs salvation from that wrath and from sin, because God's wrath is against sin. Paul further explains that both non-Jews, who don't have the written Law, and the Jews, who have it, are both guilty. Jews who have the written Law dishonour God by breaking the Law (Rom 2:23). After declaring the guilt of both Jews and non-Jews, Paul finishes with these words:

*What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are **under the law**, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rom 3:9-20, emphasis added).*

In Romans 1:18-3:29 we see what it means to be under Law.<sup>67</sup> It means to be in slavery to sin (under sin) and under condemnation of the Law, that is to be guilty before God (Rom 3:19). In Paul's

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<sup>67</sup> The phrase *under Law* in Rom 3:19 is not the same as in Rom 6:14. The phrase in Rom 3:19 can literally be translated *in Law*.

mind to be *under Law* is the same as to be *under sin* (Rom 3:9, see also Gal 3:22- 23).<sup>68</sup>

**The phrase *under Law* describes the condition of an unsaved man, who is enslaved by sin (under sin) and who is under the condemnation of the Law.**<sup>69</sup>

It should be clear why the man who is *under Law* is in slavery to sin. He is born as a sinner (see Rom 5:12-20) and the Law cannot help him to change, it only helps him to see his poor condition even more clearly.<sup>70</sup> Paul is emphasizing this because of Jews who thought that just possessing the Law was enough for justification. To possess the Law (and to keep external observances, even the entire Law), is of *great advantage*, but it does not justify anyone. The Law only defines sin and points to Christ.

The apostle also describes the condition *under Law* with the phrase *in the flesh* (Rom 8:9). A man in this condition is not submitted to God's Law, nor is he able to do so (Rom 8:7). This is true for both Jews and Gentiles. The condition *under Law* can also be called the condition *in Adam* (Rom 5:12-21).

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<sup>68</sup> See F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, NIGTC, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1982, 181.

<sup>69</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest wrote: "To be under law refers to an unsaved person who attempts to live in obedience to the law of God. To be under grace is to be a saved person who has been the subject of the surgical operation in which the power of the sinful nature has been broken and the divine nature implanted." *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English reader*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, Logos research system, electronic edition, s.v. "Rom 6:11-14". For a useful commentary see Murray, *Romans* 1:228,229, o. c., then John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Edinburg, Banner, 2005, vol. 4, 133-141

<sup>70</sup> This is exactly what Paul is describing in Rom 7:14-24. The Law didn't help him to get saved, but it has clearly shown him his wretched condition. These verses describe Paul while he was still an unsaved Jew.



Therefore, Paul is not using the phrase *under Law* (in Rom 6:14) to speak about the authority of the Law, but about man's condition in relation to the Law. He wants to show that the Law is powerless to save a man, but it has power to condemn and declare him a sinner, for the Law's function was to serve the purpose of God's grace and not stand on its own.

## Context and Grace

Now we can look in more detail what it means to be *under grace*. The apostle explains this from chapter 5 onwards in Romans.<sup>71</sup> Grace is not in opposition to the Law. Grace is *confirmed by the Law and the Prophets* (Rom 3:21-24, Gal 3:21). The Law has always confirmed that grace is the only way of salvation, and it is never by the Law or by works. In Romans 3:27 to 4:25 he gives an example of Abraham and David to prove that salvation was always by grace through faith and that the Law teaches the same. It was very important for Paul to show this truth to his readers because at that time (like today) the dominant belief was that man is saved by keeping the Law, that is, by works.<sup>72</sup> That was a completely wrong understanding of the Law, its role and ability.<sup>73</sup> (We must keep this thought in mind if we want to correctly understand the entire Epistle and individual texts as well.)

Paul says that we enter into grace by faith (Rom 5:2) and he proves that by using the Old Testament. We are justified and reconciled to God by faith (Rom 5:1). We receive the Holy Spirit by faith (Rom 5:5, Gal 3:2). We are saved from God's wrath by

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<sup>71</sup> In chapter five he would call that the state *in grace* (Rom 5:2).

<sup>72</sup> The apostle explains this in Rom 9.

<sup>73</sup> When we look at the phrase *under Law*, we must keep in mind this fact also. Not only were the unsaved Jews enslaved by sin and under Law's condemnation, they were trying to receive justification or salvation by keeping the Law (Rom 9:31,32). Legalism is the basic meaning of the phrase in Gal 4:21 (in connection with Gal 5:4).

faith (Rom 5:9). To be under grace means to be justified, reconciled with God, and saved.

As we have seen earlier, when a man is under grace sin no longer has power over him. He is dead to sin (Rom 6:2). Our sin-laden body is rendered powerless (Rom 6:6). This is the glorious message of the Gospel because it is God’s power for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom 1:16). The state under grace Paul also calls the state in the Spirit (Rom 8:9, see also Gal 5:18). This freedom from condemnation and slavery does not come through the Law, but through Christ, it does not come through works, but by faith.

<i>Under Law</i>	<i>Under grace</i>
not saved under the power of sin under condemnation in the flesh in Adam legalist	saved free from sin justified in the Spirit in Christ Christian

Is it not strange then that some believers and preachers think that they are enslaved by sin and they identify themselves with Paul in Romans 7:14-24? Isn’t the message of the Gospel clear: *For sin will not have mastery over you, because you are not under Law but under grace.* The one who is under grace is free from sin in the sense that sin is not his master any longer. This does not mean that he will never sin or that sin will not sometimes lead him away (or that he won’t be tempted to sin), but it must be clear that sin does not have power over him. The believer has received grace and power to resist sin, and also to repent and turn away from every sin.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Even though the verb in the first part of the verse is in the future tense, this is not something that will be true only in the future, but it is true now. That is seen

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Some people think that this is not true. They say: *I am saved, but sin keeps me enslaved. I love to eat chocolate and I can't repent from that.* This only confirms that they don't understand what sin is. **Sin is breaking God's Law.** Does the Law forbid someone to eat chocolate? The one who eats chocolate is not sinning because he is not breaking the Law. He should accept this truth by faith and be free from unnecessary guilt.

Isn't it wonderful to have God's Law which clearly defines sin so we don't have to be burdened by unnecessary guilt and allow Satan to manipulate us? But some people sin, not because they are not able to resist sin, but because they don't want to. Others sin because they don't know the fullness of gospel truth, they are not aware that they have power to resist sin. Along with this Satan also has a big role in deceiving believers.

## Context and Keeping of the Law

It's essential to confirm the truth based on the context. We have said that to be *under grace* does not mean we have the right to break the Law or are free from keeping of the Law. Such an idea is not found in the letter to the Romans (or anywhere in the Bible). The New Testament speaks about the abolition of the ceremonial Law, because it has been fulfilled in Christ, but the moral Law is still valid.<sup>75</sup>

Regarding the letter to the Romans and the Law, things are clear. The one who breaks the Law dishonours God (2:23). The one who does not submit to God's Law is God's enemy (8:7). The glory of

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in the second part of the verse, where the verb is in the present tense, and also in the entire context.

<sup>75</sup> The problem with today's theologians is that they don't want to admit the possibility of the Law being divided into ceremonial and moral law. They claim that the Law is a unit and cannot be divided. However, it is important to know that division of the Law is necessary for their theological systems. They divide the Law in very unusual ways. See chapter 9.

the Gospel is that in us who don't live according to sinful nature but according to the Spirit, the righteous demand of the Law is fulfilled (8:4). Love is the fulfilment of the Law (8-10).<sup>76</sup> Paul says that those who follow the Law are justified, not those who hear the Law (2:13). This doesn't mean that they will be justified by works, but that their works will prove that they are under grace and are justified by faith.<sup>77</sup> Paul writes chapter six to show that grace is not an excuse for sin. Grace justifies men, but it also gives power (and responsibility) to follow the Law. He wants to show that justification by faith is not separate from one's practical life. Isn't the wrath of God revealed because of sin? (1:18) God's grace not only brings justification from guilt, but also brings new life, life in the Spirit. The Spirit's law of life in Christ sets us free from the Law of sin and death. From chapters 6 to 8, Paul teaches that grace is not and cannot be an excuse for breaking the Law or for sin, and explains how and why that is so.

### **3. David, James, John and Paul**

One who carefully reads the Bible can still remain somewhat confused when he sees that David and Paul often present the Law in two different ways. David delights in God's law. It brings joy to his heart and gives light to his eyes. It makes him wiser than his adversaries, etc. On the other hand, Paul says that the Law kills and condemns him, enslaves him, and so on. How is that? The answer is very simple. David speaks of God's law as a believer.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Loving One Another Fulfills the Law*, <[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/AuthorIndex/26/879\\_Loving\\_One\\_Another\\_Fulfills\\_the\\_Law/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/AuthorIndex/26/879_Loving_One_Another_Fulfills_the_Law/)> 22.3.2007.

<sup>77</sup> See Thomas Schreiner, "Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works? Another Look at Romans 2." *BBR* 3 (1993) 131-158.

<sup>78</sup> See Allen P. Ross, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Discontinuity", in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments, Essays in Honour of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, John S. Feinberg ed., Illinois, Crossway Books, 1988, 166, 167.

While Paul speaks about God's law in relation to unbeliever. To unconverted man the Law doesn't bring freedom, joy, or wisdom, because he does not submit to God's law nor can he do so. The Law condemns him and shows him his wretched condition. That's why the sinner doesn't like the Law.

In order to enjoy God's law one must be born again, must come to God by grace through faith. It is then that he begins to enjoy the Law. The Law is no longer a letter that kills, but becomes the perfect Law of freedom, just like it was for James and the believers to whom he was writing. The Law is no longer a heavy burden, but the truth which brings freedom. That's why God's commands are not burdensome for the apostle John (1 Jn 5:3) because he has faith, that is, he is under grace.<sup>79</sup> The believer can sing along with David: *How I love your instruction. Every day it is my meditation.*

Paul probably uses the term *Law* or phrase *under Law* in relation to the unbeliever because the Jews were officially under the authority of Moses' law, but in general they were not converted. They were under Law, but that was not a blessing for them, it was a condemnation and slavery. Therefore, Paul's use of the term *Law* comes from the Jews' general experience with the Law. That is the standard use of God's law in relation to the unbeliever.

## Conclusion

Taking into account all that has been said, we can conclude that in the letter to the Romans Paul is not principally contrasting two covenants or two eras or something similar, but is contrasting believer and unbeliever. The unbeliever is under Law (because he

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<sup>79</sup> Knox Chamblin, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ", in *Continuity and Discontinuity* 185, 194, o.c. Brice L. Martin, "Paul on Christ and The Law", *JETS* 26/3 (September 1983) 273.

is under the power of sin and under Law's condemnation), and the believer is under grace (in peace with God, free from slavery to sin and from condemnation).

Where are you? Are you under Law or under grace? Is sin your master or not? Is anger your master? Is covetousness? Is slandering? Is lying? Is anxiety? Is drugs? If so, then you are under Law, not under grace, and you don't know Christ.

## THE LAW AND GRACE IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS (2) (Rom 7:1-6, 10:4)

*Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. (Rom 7:1-6)*

*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Rom 10:4)*

The campaign against the Law is very strong, and when those who are under its influence read these verses, they conclude that a Christian no longer has to keep the Law. For them, *you have died to the Law* means: *you no longer need (and must not) keep the Law*.<sup>80</sup> This is nothing else but reading something into the text. I

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<sup>80</sup> "Since we died with Christ we no longer have to live according to the Mosaic Law" (Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Romans*, <Sonic Light, <http://www.soniclight.com/>>, 2006, 73.). "This is one of several passages that reveal that as Christians we have no obligation to keep the Law of Moses (cf. 10:4; 14:17; Mark 7:18-19; John 1:17; Acts 10:12; 1 Cor. 8:8; 2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:12; 9:10; Gal. 3:24; 4:9-11; 5:1)" Ibid, 74. "He who abstains from

don't know of a single text in the Bible that permits anyone to sin and break the Law.

In this chapter we will see that being dead to the Law refers to being dead to the condemnation of the Law, not to freedom from keeping the Law (and dying to sin is freedom from the power of sin). In Romans 6, Paul teaches that the believer has died with Christ (Rom 6: 3,4, 6), is buried with Christ (Rom 6:4), and is also raised with Christ (Rom 6:4,5; Eph 2:5,6) so that he may live an entirely new life. New life is freedom from the condemnation of the Law and freedom from sin.<sup>81</sup>

### 1. Dead to the Law (Rom 7:1-4)

Chapter seven begins by stating the truth which those who know the Law<sup>82</sup> should know: *Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?*<sup>83</sup> Paul illustrates this truth with an example from marriage; a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives. But if he dies, she is free from the **law which had bound her to him** and can marry another man.<sup>84</sup>

Is the woman free from the whole Law when her husband dies? No! The text says that she is free from the **law of marriage**. Not from the whole Law, but from a certain aspect of the Law. **Even though verse three says that she is free from the law, it is clear**

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murder simply because the law forbids it is a wicked man, and not a believer" (William Kelly, *The Epistle to The Romans*, s.v. "Romans 6").

<sup>81</sup> Charles C. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Philadelphia, Perkins, 1836, 146, 147.

<sup>82</sup> The word should have a capital letter because it most likely speaks of the Law of Moses (see John Murray, *The Epistle to The Romans*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977, 1:240).

<sup>83</sup> Or with the words *Don't you know*, which show that Paul just continues the explanation that he began in chapter six.

<sup>84</sup> That is all that Paul wants to say with this illustration.



**that she is only free from the law which bound her to her husband.** What is the apostle saying then? In verse four he says: *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.*

While we were living in the *flesh*, led by our sinful nature, the Law declared us as lawbreakers and condemned us to death (Rom 6:23a). Looking at God's law we were increasingly aware of our sinfulness and inability to escape God's judgment. Nothing except death could free us from the condemnation of God's law. We had two basic problems in life: we were not able to free ourselves (1) from the slavery to sin and (2) from the condemnation of the Law. Death was unavoidable. But thanks be to God, Christ took our condemnation and set us free. Even more, through our union with Christ he has set us free from the power of sin. In Christ we have received all – both death and resurrection. And that is what Paul is saying in these verses.

*You have died to the Law (to Law's condemnation) so that you may belong to another (to Christ) and may bear fruit for God (life in righteousness and not in sin).*<sup>85</sup>

Can we deduce from these texts that we have died to the whole Law, that is, to every aspect of the Law, or should we conclude that we have died to one aspect of the Law, which is the Law's condemnation?<sup>86,87</sup> Since the woman in this illustration is only free from one aspect of the Law, who can say that believers are free

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<sup>85</sup> We are free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2).

<sup>86</sup> "In this way we die to the condemnation and dominion of the Law, though not to the Law itself, or absolutely, for we have the law, even when we are no longer under the Law." (Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1976, 109).

<sup>87</sup> Some read into the text that the Law is dead, but the text says that we have died with Christ, not the Law.

from the whole Law? On what basis? The illustration and the text do not give us that right.

We will take a closer look at verse four in order to solve our dilemma. The translation of these verses is good, but is not the most accurate. A more accurate translation would be like this: *Likewise, my brothers, you also were killed* (or were put to death) *to the law through the body of Christ ...Not just died, but killed.*<sup>88</sup>

Why would someone need to be killed to the Law? Because the Law requires a death penalty for sin. It is written that the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). And the Law must be satisfied. Because our punishment for sin fell on Christ, we came out free, but not to live again for ourselves, but for the one who died and rose for us (2 Co 5:14). Therefore, there is nothing here that speaks of some freedom from keeping the Law

If we look at the context we will see that in chapters six and seven alone death or dying is mentioned 25 times. In these texts death is always (except for the illustration) connected with sin. It is connected with sin whether in respect to Christ's death, which was because of our sin, or our death, which was also because of our sin, or the freedom from the slavery to sin. That is why dying to the Law can only refer to death as the consequence of sin, that is, death which the Law pronounces as the condemnation for sin. This is clearly shown by the immediate context. In Romans 6:23 Paul states that *the wages of sin is death*, and in the light of these words he continues to speak about dying to the Law. Then again in 7:5 he says that death came because of sin.

Dying to the Law does not in itself contain any idea about dying to our responsibility to keep the Law, but is about dying to the Law's condemnation. (Therefore, it is strange that many

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<sup>88</sup> See William Hendriksen, *Romans, New Testament Commentary*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1980, 216.

commentators read such meaning into the text.)<sup>89</sup> This is confirmed with the following verse:

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* (Rom 8:1)

It is true that the Law requires obedience while it does not provide power to obey. However, the complete truth is that the Law does not require obedience from a sinner, but death. The one who is condemned to death is not required to obey, but to undergo the death penalty. That is why we were not able to come to Christ and instantly escape the Law's condemnation. We first had to die.

We have seen in Romans 6:14-15 that the phrase *under Law* describes the state of the unbeliever who is enslaved by sin and under the Law's condemnation. The state *under grace* marks the forgiveness of sins, peace with God and new life in righteousness. Therefore, the one under Law is the unbeliever who is awaiting the death penalty, not the Old Testament believer. By accepting Christ as one's Lord and Saviour, man is free from condemnation because Christ was condemned instead of him and he is now in a state of grace.

There is absolutely nothing in these verses that speaks of the Law as a unit that is abolished and that the believer should not and must not keep it.

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<sup>89</sup> There are other ideas too that have been read into the text, for example: ... *we are free from the obligation to obey the Law as a condition for justification...* (Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, electronic edition, s.v. "Rom 7:1-6"). But we know that something like this never existed except in the corrupt understanding of Jews.

## 2. The Letter and the Spirit (Rom 7:6)

Romans 7:6 says that we should *serve in the new way of the Spirit, not in the old way of the written code*. Written code refers to the letter of the Law. What does it mean? Remember that the Apostle Paul looks at the Law in relation to unbelievers (David, James and John look at the Law in relation to believers). The Law reveals God's will to sinners, it clearly defines sin, pronounces judgment over sin, but does not give any power for obedience. The Law bears witness that justification comes by faith alone and not by works.

Jews have neglected these truths and tried to receive justification by the works of the Law. Therefore, they became legalists.<sup>90</sup> The Law could not change their sinful heart, only the Holy Spirit could change it through faith. They wanted to keep the requirements of the Law with a corrupt and sinful heart. The result was that they looked righteous outwardly, but were corrupt in heart. They were circumcised physically, in accordance with the written Law, but not in their hearts, by the Spirit through faith. They were content to have the Law on tablets of stone but did not consider it necessary to have it in their heart. In Romans 2:27-29 Paul says:

*Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*

We don't serve God in the old way of the written code, that is, with uncircumcised hearts trying to establish our own righteousness by works. We serve God with circumcised hearts

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<sup>90</sup> This text (Rom 7:6) shows and proves that the phrase *under Law* also includes legalism.

because we are justified by faith and by the Spirit we meet the righteous requirements of the Law (just like true believers in the Old Testament did). The Law is nullified<sup>91</sup> in relation to us, that is, we have died to the condemnation of the Law in order to belong to another. Only in union with another, which is Christ, can our life be changed and lived to God's glory.

It should be noted that serving God in the *old way of the written code* is a human invention, not God's revelation. Those who serve in the old way are those who are unconverted and are trying to establish their own righteousness by works. That is solely their invention. They did not serve God at all, nor were they able to, because they were under the condemnation of the Law. The Old Testament service to God had to begin with faith that is with a circumcised heart, just like New Testament service. (Rom 9:31,32)

### **3. The End of the Law (Rom 10:4)**

There are several interpretations of this text and three are important. There are also three basic translations of this text. We will look at the translations first.

The first translation: *Christ is the culmination and the end of the Law* (Croatian Bible), the second: *For Christ is the end of the law* (ESV), the third: *Christ is the goal of the Law* (CEB). The first translation is more like an interpretation because in the original text there is only one word *telos*, and it means the culmination or the end of the Law.

Actually, it is not so important how the text is translated but how it is interpreted. Each translation can be accurately interpreted. However, interpretations which say that our responsibility to keep the Law has ended must be dismissed. Why? Because neither the

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<sup>91</sup> Croatian translation (Knežević).

text, nor the context, nor the rest of Scripture allows for such an interpretation. I'll briefly introduce three acceptable interpretations and will especially support one of them.

**The first** interpretation says that *telos* should be translated as the *goal* or *purpose*, and its interpretation is that Christ is the goal or purpose of the Law. The Law points to Christ, that is, it teaches that justification is by faith in Christ.<sup>92</sup>

**The second** interpretation says that *telos* should be translated as *the end*. Christ is the end of legalism, i.e. the end of the use of the Law for justification because the context speaks of legalism.<sup>93</sup>

**The third** interpretation says that *telos* should be translated as *the end*. Christ is the end of the Law's condemnation (like in Rom 7:4), that is the end of that state of those who are under Law (as we said earlier for Rom 6:14, 15).<sup>94</sup>

The third interpretation is acceptable to me for two reasons: it takes into consideration the use of the term *Law* in Romans, that is, the message of the Epistle, and the text itself supports this understanding. However, because of the immediate context the first interpretation seems to me the most acceptable. The context talks about the Jews who refused to submit to God's righteousness, i.e. to believe in Christ, but they wanted to establish their own righteousness, i.e. righteousness by works (9:30:32). They did not understand the real place and role of the

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<sup>92</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness", in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, Stanley N. Gundry (ed.), Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1999, 179-188.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Paul's View of The Law in Romans 10:4-5.", *WTJ* 55 (1993) 121-124. Schreiner in his article also gives overviews of other interpretations of the text (p. 113-121).

<sup>94</sup> Brice L. Martin, "Paul on Christ and The Law." *JETS* 26/3 (September 1983) 277-279. T. Schreiner for Martin's interpretation says that is similar to his (see the article from previous footnote, p. 121, footnote 36).

Law. The Law was never given for justification but was pointing to Christ. Christ is the goal (or the purpose) of the Law for justification, and not the Law itself.

It should be noted that verse five is often interpreted incorrectly, as if it refers to salvation by works (whether in reality or hypothetically). The Bible speaks of two kinds of righteousness, one by the Law and one by faith. But they are not in opposition. Righteousness by faith is the basis for righteousness by the Law. That means that we are not doing good works to be saved, but we do them because we are saved.<sup>95</sup> Faith without works is dead.

## **Conclusion**

It should be clear that the verses in Romans 7:1-6 and 10:4 cannot be interpreted in the way they are interpreted by those who speak against the Law. Far from it that these verses teach that we are free from keeping the Law. The apostle Paul felt compelled to explain the right role of the Law to believers. The Law was not given so that we should boast in it or to be content with the fact that we possess the Law; the Law was given to be kept. On the other hand, the Law is not and cannot be the means of justification. Justification is only through grace by faith in Christ, and it is never by the Law. The purpose of the Law regarding justification is to point to Christ, and justification is not through the Law itself. However, grace is not an excuse for sin or for breaking the Law. Grace gives us power to keep the Law. The Law was intended to be kept by believers, not unbelievers. One must embrace faith in Christ in order to be justified. The Law then becomes a joy and comfort. In the Law we find wisdom and instruction which we must interpret correctly and apply in our lives. This is true for both Testaments of Scripture.

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<sup>95</sup> See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do this and You Shall Live (Eternally?)" *JETS*, XIV (1971).





## THE LAW AND GRACE IN THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS (1)

I have used the term *legalism* several times. Since it is often mentioned in the church it is important to find out and determine its precise and biblical meaning. Legalism is one of the most dangerous heresies mentioned in the New Testament and it is very present in our day. One of the problems with the term *legalism* is that it is often used in the wrong way. It is applied to teaching and practices that are not legalism or, in the case of New perspective, it is not applied to teachings that should be applied. The word *legalism* is often used to accuse and defame theological opponents and to attack the basic truths of the Gospel. Thus, it is necessary to understand what legalism is and what it isn't.

### 1. A Definition of Legalism

What is legalism? For some people legalism means the strict keeping of the Law.<sup>96</sup> If this is legalism in the biblical sense, then legalism is not a negative but a positive thing. When God gave the Law to his people, He wanted them to carefully observe all that He has commanded (Joshua 1:8). Jesus was just as strict when he said that our righteousness must be greater than the righteousness of the Pharisees and the scribes, and that we must teach his disciples to observe all that he has commanded.

If keeping the Law strictly is negative, or if that is legalism, then it follows that we must not keep the Law strictly. If the Law says *don't kill*, then we must not keep it strictly so that we are not heretical legalists. If the Law says *do not commit adultery*, we must not keep that strictly to avoid being legalistic. Should I continue or is this definition obviously absurd? To keep the Law strictly is good, not bad (taken that it is understood rightly).

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<sup>96</sup> This is a classic definition, but it can't be applied to the legalism in the Bible.

Some say that legalism is when we teach believers any commands. Others claim that legalism is when we teach believers to keep the Old Testament commands, even if they were just moral commands, but they allow teaching of the New Testament commands.<sup>97</sup> Others are quite unclear, so it is hard to put them into either category. However, nothing from the above is legalism (or, at least, legalism in a negative sense).

Edward Fisher began using the term legalism in the 17th century in the theological sense. He labelled as a legalist the one who uses the Law as a means of justification.<sup>98</sup> That is the correct and basic definition of legalism. That is the heresy which Paul is fighting against in the letters to the Romans and the Galatians. Therefore, a legalist misunderstands the role of the Law, and his motive for keeping the Law is wrong. There are other wrong motives for keeping the Law besides the motive for justification, such as boasting and the praise of men. The Pharisees did everything so they would be seen by others, they were proud before God and the people while they despised others. However, we will focus on the most important form of legalism and that is the attempt to receive salvation by works of the Law.<sup>99</sup>

## **2. Legalism in the Letter to the Galatians**

The apostle Paul has written the letter to the Galatians because of the problems with legalism. As we study this letter, we can gain a clear picture of what legalism is. Our aim is to see what kind of teaching the Apostle Paul is fighting against in it. The apostle is calling this teaching a different gospel (Gal 1:6). He says that those who bring this teaching should be accursed (Gal 1:8,9). The

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<sup>97</sup> Zane C. Hodges, "Legalism: The Real Thing", *JOTGES*, Fall 1996, vol 9:17.

<sup>98</sup> A. R. G. Deasley, "Legalism", in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Walter A. Elwell (ed.), el. ed.

<sup>99</sup> See all that Thomas Schirrmacher classifies as legalism (*Law or Spirit? Galatians Between Legalism and Antinomianism*, str. 67., <<http://www.contra-mundum.org/schirrmacher/Galatians.pdf>>).

one who accepts this teaching has fallen away from grace. (Gal 5:4). It is clear that legalism is a great evil and danger to the church. Therefore, it is important to understand what this teaching is so that we won't be cursed and fall away from grace.

## **The Heart of the Problem**

I'll quote several texts which show that the problem in the churches in Galatia was Jewish teaching about justification, i.e. salvation by the works of the Law:

*Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.* (Gal 2:16)

*You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.* (Gal 5:4,5)

Jewish false teachers had begun to preach legalism. Some were deceived or bewitched by that teaching. Paul speaks about that in chapter 3:

*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who*

*supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?* (Gal 3:1-5)<sup>100</sup>

Receiving the Spirit and justification comes by hearing with faith, not by the works of the Law as heretics taught.

## **Manifestation of the Problem**

We must dig deeper to see how this heresy is manifested. What did false teachers require from the believers in Galatia?

**Firstly**, they had to accept the teaching that justification comes by works of the Law and not only by faith. **Secondly**, in order to attain this justification, they had to subject themselves to the ceremonial aspects of the Law.<sup>101</sup> In the letter Paul mentions circumcision, food regulations and observing of days and seasons. In chapter 5:2-4 we read:

*Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.* (Gal 5:2-4)

Then in 4:9-11 observing of days and months and seasons:

*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be*

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<sup>100</sup> This text exclusively refers to justification, not to sanctification. This is clear if the context is looked at carefully.

<sup>101</sup> Observing the Law's ceremonies (outward religiosity) was very important to false teachers because their concern was to avoid persecution because of the cross of Christ (Gal 6:12).

*once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain. (Gal 4:9-11)<sup>102</sup>*

In 2:11-14 we see regulations about food:

*But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Gal 2:11-14)*

The legalists didn't deny that Christ is the Messiah and that one must believe in Him, but they denied that justification comes by faith alone. They promoted this heresy by teaching Christians that they need to receive circumcision, observe days and seasons and apply certain food regulations. In other words, the Gentiles had to become Jews and keep the Law in order to be saved. (Gal 2:14)

Justification is not by the Law, whether ceremonial or moral, because no Law exists (nor good deeds) that can justify men. However, it is important to notice that legalists did not teach the believers to keep the moral stipulations of the Law.<sup>103</sup> Paul states that not even those who are circumcised keep the Law (Gal 6:13).

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<sup>102</sup> It is not superfluous to mention that this verse is not about sanctification, but justification. This is clear if we look at verses 4:21 and 5:4.

<sup>103</sup> There is a lot of debate among theologians about the phrase *works of the Law*. It is true that this phrase does not only refer to the ceremonial observance of the Law, but also to the moral. However, it seems that it is also true that false teachers have emphasized ceremonial and not moral Law. See Thomas R. Schreiner, "*Works of Law*" in *Paul*, *Novum Testamentum XXXIII*, 3 (1991), 217-244.

False teachers didn't come to churches shouting *Love God with all your heart! Or don't commit adultery!* They didn't care about that because they themselves didn't keep it. They were only interested in outward behaviour. They wanted to boast in the flesh and escape persecution because of faith in Christ. (Gal 6:12, 13)

### 3. Keeping of the Law and Legalism

Is keeping the Law legalism? Many theologians use the letter to the Galatians to reinforce their interpretation about the abolition of the Law. They say that to keep the Law (or Moses' law) is legalism even if they are just referring to the moral commands. We should ask ourselves if legalism is when a person is justified by faith and then starts to keep the Law, whether ceremonial or moral?<sup>104</sup> Isn't that what Paul is fighting against in Galatians? Contrary to many opinions, I must say that this is not legalism. Paul is not writing against that. If that is legalism, then the Lord has established it, because He has commanded Israel to receive salvation by faith and He gave them the Law to observe. (see Ps 119:4)

The heresy in Galatia was not a heresy because the false teacher had taught the believers to keep the Law, but because they taught that justification comes by the Law and not by faith.<sup>105</sup> We must understand that the problem is not in the keeping of the Law. The

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<sup>104</sup> C. S. Scofield calls the heresy in Galatia *galatianism*. To him this teaching holds that salvation is partly by grace and partly by the Law, or that grace is given so we are able to keep the Law. (*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, chapter 6. <[http://www.biblebelievers.com/scofield/scofield\\_rightly06.html](http://www.biblebelievers.com/scofield/scofield_rightly06.html)>).

<sup>105</sup> It seems that T. Schreiner has needlessly complicated things in trying to present the keeping of the Law as something positive and to judge the attempt to receive justification by the Law, *except in the case where someone is able to keep the Law perfectly*. Keeping the Law is positive but any attempt to receive justification by the Law is always negative, even if someone (theoretically) is able to keep the whole Law and never commit wrong. His very motive must be wrong and sinful (see Schreiner, *"Works of Law" in Paul*, 238-241. o. c.).

fundamental problem in the Bible is breaking the Law, not keeping it. The major problem also lies in the wrong use of the Law and that is legalism.

### **Proof from the Acts and the Letter to the Romans**

There are several texts in Acts where we can see that the problem is not in the keeping of the Law, whether ceremonial or moral. According to the words of James, there were thousands of converts in the church of Jerusalem who were faithful observers of the Law (Act 21:20). The apostles didn't think that they did something wrong and that they have fallen away from grace. Even Paul subjected himself to some ceremonies of the Law to show that he is not against the Law, but that he himself keeps the Law, even though he was not obligated to keep the ceremonial Law (Act 21:20-25; 1 Co 9:20-21).

In Romans 14 Paul encourages believers not to condemn each other because of their different opinions. Among other things he mentions the keeping of certain days. The apostle doesn't condemn those who were observing certain days thinking that they are pleasing God by doing so. Paul doesn't say that they have fallen away from grace. Here, too, we see that the problem is not in the keeping of the Law or its ceremonial aspects.

Even though the problem is not in keeping the Law, Paul was however forbidding that Gentile converts should be taught to keep the ceremonial Law. That was also the conclusion of the Council of Jerusalem. Most likely the basic problem was that the heresy of legalism was widely spread. It is a well-known fact that it is hard to teach people good things while they easily accept the wrong ones. To allow the Gentiles to learn the ceremonial Law was the same as doing a favour to the false teachers, that is, opening the door for them to enter churches. It was the same with the problem of consuming meat sacrificed to idols. Even though the idol was

nothing and the meat was not contaminated, none the less its consummation would give an open door to heresies and problems.

### **Faith Plus the Law?**

We see in the epistle that some in Galatia tried to be justified by the Law. That means that the false teachers have convinced them that they are not justified by faith alone. This is also confirmed by the text in Acts 15:1.

*But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*

This was also happening during the crisis in Galatia. Some were teaching the brothers (believers) that they cannot be saved unless they were circumcised. This shows that salvation to them was not by faith alone, but by the law of Moses.<sup>106</sup> This doesn't mean that the false teachers didn't believe that Christ is the Messiah, or that they didn't believe in God or His Word, or that they were not zealous for God. What they didn't have is a correct understanding (Rom 9:30-10:4) and a right motive. They didn't understand that God has appointed that justification only comes by faith in Christ. They thought that works must be added to faith too. The Bible teaches that works are necessary, but only as a proof and not the means of salvation.

It's not unusual to meet people who are very zealous for God doing many religious deeds, but they are not saved because they don't have a correct understanding or motive. They believe in

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<sup>106</sup> One should know that those who teach salvation by works (according to our understanding) say that they actually teach salvation by grace. But when we compare their teaching with the Bible it is obvious that that salvation is by works and not by grace, even though the grace is included in their teaching. See Schreiner, *"Works of Law" in Paul*, 241, 242. o. c.



Christ, his divinity, virgin birth, resurrection and so on, but they don't believe that justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and not through religion.

## **Conclusion**

Is it sin to keep the Law? Is it legalism? No! Legalism is not when one keeps the Law (not even in keeping it strictly), but when one tries to be justified by the works of the Law. Justification comes only through grace by faith in Christ, not by the works of the Law, or by grace plus the Law.

Should a believer keep the Law? So far we have seen that God requires of us to keep the Law, but not as a condition for salvation. The Law reveals God and his will, and teaches us what is pleasing or not pleasing to Him. The Law is like a mirror to us (Jas 1:23-25) and by it we are taught, reprov'd, corrected and trained in righteousness (2 Ti 3:16). This is certainly not legalism, but the correct use of the Law.<sup>107</sup>

Many are afraid to preach the Law today because they think that they will make people legalistic. Moses didn't preach legalism but Christ (Joh 5:46, 47), nevertheless many became legalists, and not only legalists but downright ungodly. Sadly, we can't avoid the possibility of being wrongly understood, but people wrongly interpret the Scripture too to their own destruction.

In addition, the New Testament mentions several other forms of legalism, mainly that along with the Law many other human commands are added as a means of justification. All religions are actually legalistic because they teach that a man must earn salvation through religious ceremonies and other works (even though they talk about God's grace). Only the Bible teaches that

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<sup>107</sup> See John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Purpose of the Law*,  
<<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/jm-231570.htm>>

God calls us to come to Him just as we are and believe in His work on the cross on our behalf.

## THE LAW AND GRACE IN THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS (2)

(Gal 3:19-29)

*Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:19-29)*

The apostle Paul's main goal in the letter to the Galatians was to protect the church from the false teaching which we called legalism. The apostle strongly opposed that teaching. In the text which we are studying he wants to clarify the correct role of the Law. God didn't give the Law so that a person can receive justification or salvation through it, but that does not mean that the Law doesn't have a purpose.

This chapter in Galatians is very complicated. It is hard to discover its meaning no matter what angle we look at it from (that is, from which theological position). It is just as difficult to translate some of the verses in this chapter as it is to correctly

interpret them. Both, translation and interpretation are closely connected. Great scholars agree that the key is not in the grammar but in the context.<sup>108</sup>

What is Paul saying in Galatians 3:19-29? Is he saying that the Law has been abolished and it doesn't need to be kept? Or that the ceremonial Law has ceased? Or that the Old Covenant has passed away and the New Covenant has come? Or is he explaining the role of the Law in justification?

What does Paul refer to when he uses the phrase *under law*? Is he using it in the same way as in Romans 6:14 or in 1 Corinthians 9:20:21?<sup>109</sup> Or is he referring to the historical period from Moses until Christ? Or to legalism? Or to something else? What does he refer to when he compares the Law with a guardian?

Since the context is the only key, it is very important to understand why the apostle is writing the letter to the Galatians, and what he is trying to reveal and prove with the letter. Paul's main goal is to refute the false teaching about justification by the Law. He also speaks against the ceremonial aspects of the Law but only in connection with justification by faith. The main purpose is not to forbid the practice of the ceremonial Law, but its use for justification.<sup>110</sup> The same applies to the moral Law. Paul is certainly not forbidding keeping of the moral Law (sadly, some believe and teach that he does), but its wrong usage.

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<sup>108</sup> Others see as key the discovery of the right interpretation of the word *guardian* in Gal 3:24.

<sup>109</sup> For the interpretation of the phrase "under law" in 1 Co 9:20, 21 see John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978. 186-188. For the interpretation of the phrase in Galatians and Corinthians see *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Edinburgh, Banner, 2005, vol. 4, 134.

<sup>110</sup> This is also true for Gal 4:1-11. Paul is not speaking about the ceremonial Law being fulfilled in Christ (even though this is true), but that those who seek justification in ceremonial keeping are unconverted slaves to sin, whether they were Jews or gentiles.

## 1. The Role of the Law in Justification

After explaining that salvation is always by faith and never by the works of the Law, giving the example of Abraham, Paul now explains the right role of the Law. The Law was not given to replace the promise or to offer a new way of salvation. Why was it given then? The text says that the Law was added. It was not added for justification but because of transgressions.<sup>111</sup> The Gospel is given for justification, not the Law.<sup>112</sup> What is the relationship then between the Law and justification, or what is the role of the Law in justification (or salvation)? Why is the Law given when it was revealed long ago that justification comes by faith?

We know that the Gospel is given so that a man can be justified before God. The Bible reveals that all have sinned, and that God's wrath is poured out on sinful humanity. We need salvation from God's wrath. We need our sins to be removed so that God's wrath over us can stop. When we believe in Jesus Christ who died for our sins, we receive forgiveness. But how can we seek forgiveness if we don't believe that we are sinful and that we need it? That's why the Law was added to define sin (Rom 3:20) and that transgression would increase (Rom 5:20), i.e. that people would better understand their sinfulness and the poor condition that they are in. The Law helps us understand how sinful the world is (Rom 7:13), how sinful we are and that we are under the curse. Only when we understand the seriousness of our situation, will we understand the value of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and seek forgiveness from God.

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<sup>111</sup> Transgression is a deliberate disobedience to a certain command (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, NIGTC, 175.).

<sup>112</sup> The Gospel, therefore, is not something that appeared in the first century but was present from the very beginning.

That is the true role of the Law that Paul emphasizes here.<sup>113</sup> The role of the Law is the role of condemnation (2 Co 3:9), not the role of salvation. The Law is not the way of salvation, but it points us to the way of salvation. Salvation is only in Christ. That is clearly spoken in verse 22:

*But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*<sup>114</sup>

Verse 24 says the same:

*So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.*<sup>115</sup>

That is the purpose of the Law that Paul has in mind. That is, the role of the Law in justification. The Law humbles us but Christ lifts us up. The Law kills us but Christ makes us alive.<sup>116</sup>

The written Law is not necessary for someone to come to Christ. The people came to Christ even without the Law, that is, before the written Law was given.<sup>117</sup> An obvious example is Abraham. The Law, however, is an additional means or an additional grace

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<sup>113</sup> Paul here is not presenting detailed teaching about the role of the Law but wants to explain its relation to the promise, that is to salvation by faith. V Daniel B. Wallace, "Galatians 3:19-20: A Crux Interpretum for Paul's View of the Law." *WTJ* 52 (1990) 232.

<sup>114</sup> Compare Rom 11:32.

<sup>115</sup> Some think that this text says that the Law was our guardian who led us *until Christ came*, but it does not lead us *into Christ*. They believe that the context demands such translation. That can only be true if Paul in the chapter doesn't talk about justification that is about the role of the Law in justification.

<sup>116</sup> While explaining this Paul has in mind the Law itself, that is, the Law which is separate from the promise. Paul presents the Law in this way because he is dealing with the problem of legalism. We know that in practice the Law is not separate from the promise. The Law is a step in the fulfilment of the promise, and in the Law we have parts that refer to the promise and to grace.

through which God wants to show us our need for salvation. We don't need a mirror to know that we have not washed our face or combed our hair, but a look in the mirror gives us a clearer picture.

What do you see when you read God's law? Do you see your goodness or how sinful you are? If you think that you are good, righteous and wise, then you are far from the truth and you plan to enter heaven by your good deeds. In that case Christ doesn't have any value and without Christ each man, even the most righteous, will perish. If you realize that you have sinned and come to Christ, He will not send you away. He will forgive your sins and give you eternal life. If you don't see your sin, then read God's law. The Law was intended to show you your sinfulness and to convince you about the need of salvation through Jesus Christ.

## **2. Under the Law**

We have seen what happens when a man is under Law. The Law declares him a sinner and condemns him to death. The man cannot free himself but is forced to seek help in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul describes this condition with several strong words.

### **The State of Unbelievers**

It is essential to understand that for the apostle Paul the state under Law is actually the state of unsaved man who is under the condemnation of the Law, and not only some era in human history. In Galatians 3:23 the apostle says:

*Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.*

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<sup>117</sup> The Law always existed and people were obligated to keep it but the Law was not written before the time of Moses.

Many people interpret this in some kind of a positive sense, as if Jews were held or protected under the Law.<sup>118</sup> However, it seems that this is a wrong understanding of the text. Actually, the thought from verse 22 is repeated here and this is what it says:

*But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

The use of the word Law in verse 23 is the same as the word translated as Scripture in verse 22.<sup>119</sup> The Scripture imprisoned everything under sin and condemnation, but we are also imprisoned under the Law.<sup>120</sup> So, *imprisoned under the Law, guarded for faith...* it means that the Law declared us as sinners and perpetrators without any possibility for salvation apart by faith in Christ. This is the Law's definition of man's condition. Those who are under Law are not saved believers protected by the Law, but unsaved sinners. Verse 24 also shows this truth:

*So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.*

Those under the Law are without faith and are unjustified because it says that *we are justified by faith*. Galatians 4:4,5 confirm this by saying that Christ came to redeem those who were under the Law.<sup>121</sup> If those under the Law were saved, they would not need redemption. The fact that they need it shows that they are in serious trouble. This can be true only for those who are not converted. If the words *under Law* refer only to one era in history

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<sup>118</sup> See R. A. Cole, *Poslanica Galaćanima* (The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians), Daruvar, Logos, 1997, 105.

<sup>119</sup> See Bruce, *Galatians*, 181. *o. c.* To be *under Law* in verse 23 is parallel with to be *under sin* in verse 22.

<sup>120</sup> Compare H. H. Esser, *Law, Custom, Elements*, NIDNTT, vol.2, 445.

<sup>121</sup> It is not a problem for Christ to be *under Law* because the Law cannot condemn Him as a sinner, He is without sin (see Bruce, *Galatians*, 196. *o. c.*).



(the time from Moses until Christ) then it follows that all people during that period were not saved, and therefore all those from Christ until today are saved. We know that this is not true.<sup>122</sup> Besides, in Galatians 3:26 Paul calls those who are in Christ the sons of God. Those under Law are not in Christ and therefore are not the sons of God.

Therefore, when Paul speaks of those who are under Law, he doesn't have in mind only the Israelites who lived during the time from Moses until Christ (and who were not converted), but he has in mind all people, at any period of time, who are not converted and are under the condemnation of the Law (because the Scripture imprisoned *everything* under sin).<sup>123</sup>

## Time-Limited State

According to Paul, the state under Law is a dangerous state. Those who are under Law are in slavery to sin and under the condemnation of the Law. God is merciful and He offers the way of salvation to people by faith in Jesus Christ. Once a person believes in Christ, he receives forgiveness of sins and is free from the Law's condemnation. He moves from the state *under Law* into

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<sup>122</sup> Paul in Gal 4:24 marks the Covenant at Sinai as a Covenant of slavery. Those who are under the Old Covenant are slaves (4:24,25) and they live *according to the flesh* (4:29). The Old Covenant is made on the basis of the Law. Thus, all that was said about the Law is also valid for the Old Covenant. The apostle compares the Old Covenant with man's state under Law, and the New Covenant with man's state in grace. However, even in the Old Covenant there were those who were not under Law, in the flesh and in slavery, but in the Spirit (4:29). Just like in the time of the New Covenant there are those who are under Law, in the flesh and in slavery (4:25, 29). Thus, it doesn't really matter what time of history we live in but rather what is our spiritual condition.

<sup>123</sup> Those *under Law* in its narrow sense are Jews and in its wider sense all people. Paul claims that Christ came to redeem those under the Law. We know that Christ did not only redeem Jews but that he died for all people, without distinction, not without exception (compare Rom 3:19).

the state that Paul in Romans 6:14 calls the state *under grace*. Paul also calls this state the state *in Christ* or *in the Spirit*.<sup>124</sup>

In Galatians 3:24,25 the apostle compares the Law with a guardian or a supervisor, that is, he compares the state under Law as a state under a guardian. The word guardian in the Greek language is *paidagogos*. From that word we get the word *pedagogue*. In Paul's time a pedagogue was a slave who was responsible for the education of a child. He watched over a child, supervised his behaviour and took him to school. That lasted until the child reached a certain age. The child was then free from the pedagogue.

This comparison was an illustration of what Paul had explained in the previous verses. This is a double illustration. Firstly, he compares the Law with the pedagogue (verse 24) and the people who are under Law with the children who are under the pedagogue (verse 25). Just as the pedagogue took the child to school or led him until the child came of age so did the Law lead people to Christ. No further similarities should be looked for between the Law and the pedagogue. The second part of the illustration is a comparison of people under law with the children under the pedagogue. Children are immature and under age. Similarly, people under law are incomplete spiritually because the Law can only do part of the work, i.e. point them to Christ, but not save them. Only when they come to Christ do they experience fullness, they are no longer *under age* but they reach maturity and become sons of God.<sup>125</sup>

With this comparison Paul wants to show that the state under Law is temporary (and incomplete). We are in slavery to sin and under

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<sup>124</sup> To be *under Law* is the same as to be *in the flesh*.

<sup>125</sup> It should be noted that Paul is not saying that those who are under law are the sons of God, nor that they are under age sons. They are not converted and therefore they are not sons. They become sons only when they come to Christ.

the Law's condemnation only until we come to Christ.<sup>126</sup> In Christ we are free from slavery to sin and the Law's condemnation, i.e. we are no longer under age, but are mature children of God. The term *guardian* refers to one task of the Law which is to declare us as sinners, perpetrators and condemned, and to point us to Christ.

This is only one of the three basic roles of the Law. There are two other roles that Paul is not talking about here. They are the role of the Law in restraining sin and the Law as the moral guide for a believer.<sup>127</sup>

No doubt Paul has in mind the change that a man experiences, i.e. his crossing from unbelief to faith. However, in Paul speech this seems to coincide with the historical passing from the Old Covenant into the New Covenant.<sup>128</sup> It seems that this historical passing from the Old Covenant into the New is a picture of what is happening throughout history in the personal experience of every believer.

### **3. Refuting False Interpretations**

The chapter we are studying is the subject of much misuse. Since it contains the theme of the temporal role of the Law, many read into it whatever comes to their mind. Very often they say that these texts teach that the Law has ceased in the sense that we are no longer obligated to keep it. We no longer need the Law or any commands. The period of the Law was valid only until Christ came, and now is the time of grace (which, according to them, renders the Law obsolete).

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<sup>126</sup> To be under law in verse 23 is the same as to be under sin in verse 22.

Therefore, to be under a guardian in verse 25 is the same as to be under sin in verse 22.

<sup>127</sup> Traditionally we speak of the threefold use of the Law (see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996, 614, 615).

<sup>128</sup> See H. H. Esser, *Law, Custom, Elements*, NIDNTT, vol. 2, 445.

If this and similar interpretations are true, then it follows that in the past two thousand years God no longer used the Law to show people their sinfulness. Only primitive Israelites in the Old Testament needed it, not us. They needed moral standards and we don't. It seems that some believe exactly that. This would also mean that in Israel there no longer exists any Law after Christ died. And that all the people after the first century no longer need redemption or conversion, because if there is no Law, then there is no transgression or condemnation or the curse of the Law. There are also other conclusions which can arise from these wrong interpretations.

Due to these facts even those who are trying to abolish the Law admit that the Law is not abolished in every, but only in a certain sense. We fully agree on this point. I say that the Law is abolished only in some aspects. However, we greatly differ when we answer the question: *In what sense is the Law abolished?* It is hard to understand their interpretation but generally they say that the commands are abolished, whether ceremonial or moral (the commanding aspect of the Law is abolished). Some change this a little by adding that some commands are still valid, but only those that are repeated in the New Testament.

I believe that their interpretation is not correct. Besides, they are unclear, illogical and contradictory.<sup>129</sup> This should be clear by now and it will become clearer when we look closely at some texts. We will conclude that ceremonial commands, slavery to sin and the curse of the Law are abolished, and the moral commands are not.

### **What Do the Texts Say?**

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<sup>129</sup> At first glance their interpretations look simple and clear, but the problem appears when we analyse them closely. See answers from Kaiser, Bahnsen and VanGemeren to essays from Moo and Strickland in Stanley N. Gundry, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1999.

Those who teach the abolition of the Law quote Galatians 3:19 and 25. Verse 19 says that the Law *was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made*. This implies a certain time limit because it says: *until the offspring should come*. In verse 25, where the Law is compared with a guardian (pedagogue), it says that we are no longer under a guardian. This also implies a certain time limit.

However, we must not read from these texts more than what they say. A person must be very imaginative to read from these texts that we are no longer obligated to keep God's commands. There is no time to further look into verse 19, but ask yourself does it really say that we don't need to keep the Law? The text contains too little information to make such a conclusion. That is why the final conclusion must be based on the context and the rest of the New Testament.<sup>130</sup>

We have already discussed verse 25 and saw that it speaks of crossing from unbelief to faith, from condemnation into justification, from rejection into sonship. We are no longer under a pedagogue in the sense that we are not in slavery to sin and under condemnation of the Law. The Pedagogue has shown us our wretched state and pointed us to Christ for justification. With that, his role in justification is finished. The apostle here speaks of the role of the Law in justification, not after justification.<sup>131</sup>

## **What Does the Context Say?**

Let's find out what Paul says about the abolition of the Law in the rest of the Epistle. Is the Law abolished? Are commands abolished? Are all commands abolished, or only some? It is clear

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<sup>130</sup> Verse 19 says that the Law came to more clearly define sin, i.e. to declare sin as transgression, and that Christ will come to solve the problem of sin (compare Gal 3:24, Eph 2:1-5, Col 2:13, 14).

<sup>131</sup> Contra Moo, in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 363, 364. o. c.

from the epistle that ceremonial commands are abolished and that the moral ones are still valid. The condemnation of the Law is also abolished.

**Ceremonial commands are abolished.** The letter to the Galatians says that circumcision is abolished (Gal 5:2). Days and seasons are abolished (Gal 4:10).<sup>132</sup> Food regulations as well (Gal 2:11-14). Differences between nations and gender regarding the approach to God are abolished (Gal 3:28, Eph 2:14-18). In Galatians 4:24 we see that the Old Covenant is abolished. In the letter to the Colossians regulations about clean and unclean things are abolished (Col 2:20, 21). In the letter to the Hebrews the Levitical priesthood and the entire Old Testament service and sacrifices are abolished. They were the pictures of reality and the reality is Christ (Heb 9:1-10; 7:11,12). Therefore, the Old Testament symbolism is abolished.

**The curse of the Law and slavery to sin is abolished.**

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal 3:13, 14)*

We are no longer under sin because we are redeemed and justified. If certain parts of the Law were of a temporary nature, then the Bible clearly says what those are. We can't believe that the entire Law is abolished. Only those things that were fulfilled in Christ are abolished.

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<sup>132</sup> Even though this text doesn't speak directly about that, nevertheless it is clearly seen from other texts and the rest of the New Testament. See Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol. 4, 138.

**Moral commands are still valid.** Paul teaches that the moral Law must be fulfilled (Gal 5:13,14). We see that love fulfils the Law, but doesn't abolish it. Paul doesn't want the believers to break any moral commands by their conduct (Gal 5:22,23). Life by the Spirit ensures a life against which the Law has nothing to say. The text in Galatians 6:1 teaches that a Christian must not break the Law. Paul here mentions transgressions and we know that there is no transgression if there is no Law.<sup>133</sup> The one who is caught in transgression must be corrected. These are just some examples from Galatians.

## Conclusion

It is my desire that these facts will free you from a wrong understanding of the Law and from fear of keeping the Law which has been caused by some theologians. They scare us with empty words and the wrong use of the term *legalism*. They say that we shouldn't keep the Law strictly because that is legalism, but they add that we must live righteously and in love. We are confused and don't know what to do, because the Bible says that to live righteously is to live according to God's word that is by God's commands (2 Jn 6).

Keeping the Law is not something that should have ceased in the first century; it is not legalism or falling out of grace. It is exactly the opposite. God's word says that falling away from grace is when a man sins wilfully once he has learned the truth (Heb

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<sup>133</sup> Some believe that this is about transgression of some new Law which they call Christ's law (as it is written in Gal 6:2). According to them Christ is the new lawgiver whose Law has a different nature. However, Christ's law is nothing else but the law of Moses correctly interpreted (compare Matt 5:17-19 and further). It is correctly interpreted if it is interpreted in unity with the promise or with Christ, and not separate from Him. Christ is the goal of the Law (Rom 10:4) and the Law speaks of Him. This Law is kept in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the New Testament period is free of ceremonial commands because they have been fulfilled. A. W. Pink has defined the law of Christ as God's law in Christ's hands (Law and Saint).

10:26-31). Falling from grace is when someone rejects justification by faith and accepts justification by the Law. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, and then we learn how to live and what to believe based on the Bible: the Old and the New Testament (Matt 28:18, 20). This is not mixing the Law and grace, but the true Gospel and we must keep it firmly.



## DIVISION OF THE LAW

In previous chapters we saw that the ceremonial Law has been abolished and that the moral Law is still valid. This becomes very obvious through a study of Galatians. However, many theologians, those who would abolish the Law, claim that this view is wrong because they believe that the Law is a unit which cannot be divided. If one part is abolished, they say, then everything is abolished. It is clear that some commands (ceremonial ones) in the New Testament are abolished, but they claim that this is proof that all commands are abolished since the Law is a unit. This would mean that if we are not obligated to offer sacrifices, then we are also not obligated to keep any other commands from the Law. And if we keep one, then we must keep them all, both ceremonial and moral. Our goal is to look at their basic arguments for such claims and see whether they are valid. We also want to see whether the Bible teaches division of the Law.

### 1. Arguments Against the Division of the Law

There are several arguments used against the division of the Law into moral and ceremonial sections (or moral, ceremonial and civil).<sup>134</sup> One argument is that in the early rabbinical literature such division doesn't exist.<sup>135</sup> Since this argument doesn't come from the Bible, I will not look at it here.

Then there is the claim that the New Testament speaks of the Law as a unit. This claim is supported with texts like Gal 5:3, Jas 2:10,

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<sup>134</sup> See Westminster Confession of Faith. It seems that both ways of division are valid.

<sup>135</sup> David A. Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian: a Compromise", *JETS* 34/3 (September 1991) 329. Dorsey is not against the keeping of the Law, but he writes against its division. I agree with the main idea in his article, but I believe that it is necessary to maintain the division of the Law into ceremonial and moral.

Matt 5:19.<sup>136</sup> These texts teach exactly the opposite, and it is strange how someone can use them to speak against the division of the Law. James says:

*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (Jas 2:8-11)*

James is not speaking against the keeping of the Law. He wants to encourage his readers to keep it because he said: *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.* Not only that, James is trying to teach them that it is necessary to keep all the commands and not just some: *For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.*

James' goal is the opposite from the goal of today's theologians. However, the commands that James is quoting are moral commands from the Law, not the ceremonial ones. Nowhere in the epistle (or in the Acts) can we see that James teaches keeping the moral and ceremonial commands. His attitude in Acts is that it is not necessary to keep the ceremonial Law. James' epistle is a proof that there is a division into moral and ceremonial Law, and not the opposite. We find the same in Matthew 5:19. Jesus said:

*Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called*

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 330.

*least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:19)*

Is Jesus speaking against the keeping of the Law? He seriously warns us here to keep all the commands strictly, to do them and teach others to do the same. Based on the previous verses, this command is valid until heaven and earth pass away:

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matt 5:17,18)*

Was Jesus then teaching that the Law is one inseparable unit and that it is necessary to keep both moral and ceremonial Law? Indeed not, because He said:

*And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) (Mar 7:18, 19)*

Jesus abolishes the Old Testament commands about clean and unclean food. He certainly didn't teach that we must keep commands which he, or the apostles by His command, have abolished, but the ones which are not abolished in the Bible. This example clearly shows that there is division of the Law into moral and ceremonial elements; into the one which was abolished by Christ's coming, death and resurrection, and the one which is valid eternally until *heaven and earth pass away*. Do we need any more proof? Isn't it strange that some use the afore mentioned texts to support their teaching that the Law should not be divided?

The text in Galatians 5:3 is different, but far be it that Paul here teaches that we are not obligated to keep any command of the Law. He opposes false teachers who taught that a person needed circumcision in order to be saved and yet they themselves didn't keep the Law.

The next objection is that it is hard to decide which commands are moral and which ceremonial.<sup>137</sup> The moral and ceremonial are closely connected in some commands. This objection is interesting, the question is good and requires an adequate answer.<sup>138</sup>

The New Testament teaches that many commands (called ceremonial) are abolished. This doesn't mean that they don't have any importance or moral lessons for today. The question is not which command is moral and which ceremonial but what lessons and moral principles are found in those commands whether they were moral or ceremonial. Our duty, as we read the Bible in its historical context, is to discover eternal truths and apply them into our lives in the light of the New Testament revelation. This skill we acquire throughout our life and the Bible gives us solid foundation and secure guidance.

I can't agree with the teaching that only the Ten Commandments are the moral Law and everything else is ceremonial. In one Adventist book the author says that a difference between the moral and the ceremonial Law lies in the fact that the moral Law was spoken and written by God, and the ceremonial Law was spoken and written by Moses. The moral Law was put inside the ark and the ceremonial Law on the side of the ark.<sup>139</sup> There is no

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> The correct answer is the one that gives adequate principles of interpretation and application of each of God's words, and it seems that it doesn't essentially differ from the one given by David A. Dorsey in his article (see footnote 136).

<sup>139</sup> A. Jan Marcussen, *Nedjeljni Zakon* (Sunday Law), s. I., Jagoda i Steva Alimpić, 1996, 85. Therefore it is not strange that they emphasize only the Ten

room to explain the obvious error of such ideas. Whoever reads the Bible needs to see that the Ten Commandments contain the ceremonial Law (Sabbath, which contains both moral and ceremonial elements), and the rest of the Law contains both moral and ceremonial commands.

## **2. Further Proof of the Division of the Law**

Even though we learn about God's ways from moral and ceremonial commands, it is still necessary to see the difference between them. Ceremonial commands had a prophetic character, that is they pointed to Christ and His work. Since Christ has fulfilled them, the need to keep them *in the same form as they were given in the Old Testament* has stopped. This is the clear teaching of the New Testament. We will look at the evidence which shows that the Bible differentiates between moral and ceremonial commands.

### **There is a Difference in the Nature of Commands**

There is an important difference between the command regarding sacrificial offering and the command: *Do not steal*. Sacrifices had symbolic meaning pointing to Christ's sacrifice, but the command: *Do not steal* doesn't have any symbolic meaning. It doesn't prophetically point to some future event. There is no future event which will abolish this command. It is even repeated in the New Testament. How then can someone claim that the Bible doesn't differentiate between the moral and ceremonial commands? This difference in nature between the commands is emphasized in the Old and the New Testament. Text like the following one is not rare in the Old Testament:

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Commandments (especially the fourth) and neglect the others. Actually, they abolish many commands but complain that we don't keep the Sabbath.

*"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. "When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. (Isa 1:11-17)*

This text in some way makes a difference between the sacrifices, days and feasts, and other righteous deeds. If there is no difference between these two kinds of commands, would God speak such words? Imagine if He rebuked them for the opposite, for example: *What to me are your righteous and good deeds? Keep the Sabbath, days and appointed feasts.* There is no such rebuke in the Bible. There are similar texts in the New Testament. In Romans 2:25-27 Paul appeals to Jews with these words:

*For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. (Rom 2:25-27)*

Paul says that uncircumcised man (i.e. a non-Jew) can keep the precepts of the Law even without circumcision (even though we

know that circumcision is part of the Law). Isn't this a clear proof that Paul makes a difference between the ceremonial and moral Law? If it isn't, then I am not sure what proof we need. In 1 Corinthians 7:19 Paul says:

*For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.*

The apostle says that circumcision counts for nothing even though it is God's command. On the other hand, he says that what counts is keeping God's commands.<sup>140</sup> He excluded circumcision from God's commands. Let's see some other strong arguments.

### **God's Moral Law Existed Before Moses<sup>141</sup>**

Not only was the moral Law in existence before Moses but all people were responsible for keeping it. God didn't hold people responsible for not observing the Passover, the Sabbath or the Feast of Booths, but he held them responsible for stealing, laying, adultery and many other moral sins. This was true for people before Moses, during the time of Moses, and today.

Someone may ask: How people knew God's commands when there was no Bible? God's word teaches that He made people in His image. A man has some kind of barometer called conscience that helps him to know what is good and what is evil, what is righteous or unrighteous. We know that a man often ignores his conscience, and over time his conscience becomes dull. God also

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<sup>140</sup> Some claim that these *God's commands* are actually commands which Christ and Paul gave and not the moral part of Moses' law. See Douglas Moo, *Response to Willem A VanGemeren, Five Views on Law and Gospel*, Stanley N. Gundry (ed.), Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1999, 89. For opposite arguments see Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Abolition and fulfilment of the Law in Paul." *JSNT* 35 (1989) 59-65.

<sup>141</sup> There were some ceremonial commands before Moses. Their importance was the same as in the time of Moses. They all cease in the New Testament.

speaks through His creation and we can see some of God's attributes in it. Besides, God spoke to people and in a special way revealed his will even though his will was not yet written. Those who knew God's will and His commands have passed them by word of mouth from generation to generation. Therefore, the evidence about God's will, i.e. His moral commands, was always available to people. God always holds people responsible if they break His moral commands. One of the best examples is found in the book of Leviticus 18:1-5.

*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.*

Following this text there is a list of forbidden things.

*You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion. (Lev 18:21-23)*

This list, from which I have mentioned only a couple of commands, ends with the following words:

*"Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall*



*keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God."* (Lev 18:24-30)

It is clear that the commands written in Leviticus 18 were not kept by people who lived in the land that Israel was to take over. God held them responsible for breaking His statutes which were only later written in Leviticus 18. Because of these sins God wiped out many nations. (See Deu 18:8-14.)<sup>142</sup> This means that the moral Law has always existed even before God had it written down. It was written by Moses, and this Law contains both moral and ceremonial commands.

We need to ask ourselves: If God held people responsible for breaking some of the commands from Moses law, even before it was written, and if He held them responsible after it was written, isn't God today holding people responsible for breaking the same commands?

I think this example from Scripture is undeniable proof that God's law is valid today, but that it is also divided into moral and ceremonial Law. It is hard to understand how anyone can claim

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<sup>142</sup> It should be noted that some commands from Leviticus 18 are not even repeated in the New Testament. These texts prove the theory: *Only commands which are repeated in the New Testament are valid* is not correct. It is correct that: *All commands that are not cancelled in the New Testament are valid.*

that the Law is abolished and that it is not divided into moral and ceremonial, or that the Bible doesn't teach that.

## **Conclusion**

We have said that many theologians claim that the Law is one unit which cannot be divided into ceremonial and moral Law. If we abolish one part, we abolish all, or if we keep one part, then we keep it all. We looked at their arguments and saw that they were not convincing, and that the Bible clearly teaches that there is a moral Law which has eternal value, and there is ceremonial Law which is (in some sense) abolished.

It is interesting that the New Testament writers were not the first ones to abolish some commands. There are examples in the Old Testament where the commands are changed and abolished. Salomon abolished the Tent of Meeting and introduced the temple. The temple is not the same as the tent. If abolishing one part of the Law would mean abolishing the whole Law, then it follows that Solomon has long ago abolished the Law. This is absurd in the same way as the claim that by abolishing ceremonial commands we abolish the whole Law.

It remains for us to see what methods of interpretation must be applied to read the eternal moral principles from the Old Testament Law and apply them into our lives. The wise Salomon says:

*The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. (Ecc 12:11)*

We must learn how to use the words of God's wise people for our own benefit and the benefit of the church.

## **INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW (1)**

When we speak of the Law, it is necessary to ask the question of its interpretation. The Law consists of many texts that don't make sense to a modern man or it is impossible to apply them in today's circumstances. These facts seem to support those who speak against the Law. However, this is not true only for the Old Testament Law, but also for the New Testament texts. The New Testament addresses the behaviour of slaves, but there are no slaves in today's churches. It addresses the head covering at the church meetings, but it is only in rare churches that this is required. Is God's word outdated and without authority today? If this is true for the OT then it is also true for the NT.

However, the Bible claims that God's word is alive and effective. It is not outdated nor can it be. Jesus said that heaven and earth will pass away but His words will not.

Becoming a good interpreter of the Bible doesn't happen overnight. On the other hand, that shouldn't be so complicated because God's word is not written to experts but to common people. Each believer is responsible to read and interpret the Bible. There is no special group that holds exclusive right. Preachers and teachers are here to help and direct us. So, while Bible interpretation shouldn't scare us, at the same time we shouldn't approach it lightly. We will look at some basic truths concerning the Bible and its interpretation.

### **1. The Bible is Inspired by God**

In order to correctly interpret the Bible we must correctly approach it. The Bible claims to be God inspired or God breathed which is why we approach it with great carefulness. What is written there is important for our life. Many texts in the Bible speak about the Bible as God's word. We find statements like:

*Thus says the Lord, or: This is the word of the Lord.* This automatically means that this is the true word, the true light that is not subjected to change or obsolescence. People often change their opinion and refute scientific theories that have existed before. The Bible doesn't change. It doesn't need to be adjusted to human advanced thinking or theories. The Bible is perfect because it comes out of the mouth of perfect God.

Since the Bible is God's word, it is the truth, and it is supreme authority for man. God's word requires full trust and obedience. God doesn't speak empty words but wants us to tremble at His word. We don't study the Bible out of mere curiosity but because our lives depend on it.

## **2. The Bible is Inspired in its Entirety**

Some people think that Bible only contains God's words. As we read it we come across God's words (for example, when God speaks in first person). In some Bible editions Jesus' words are marked in red letters. This is wrong and unbiblical approach. The Bible does not only contain God's words, but it is God's word in its entirety, from the beginning to the end. Every letter and every word in the Bible is inspired by God. Jesus said that not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. A classic text that speaks of complete or equal inspiration of each word in the Bible is 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (see also Matt 5:18).

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* (2 Ti 3:16, 17)

The text is clear that all Scripture is breathed out by God, not only part of the Scripture, for instance the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. The Bible is entirely and equally God's

word. The Ten Commandments are no more God's word than Genesis or the letter to the Romans. What God said through Paul is not any less God's word than what He said through Christ. The words that were written by the apostle John are no less God's word than what God wrote with His finger on the tablets of stone.

### **3. The Bible is Complete**

The next truth we need to know is that the Bible is complete. The writing of the Bible was finished with the book of Revelation written by the apostle John. The book of Genesis describes the creation and the beginning and the book of Revelation describes the end of everything. The end of the Bible consists of the well-known words

*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*  
(Rev 22:18, 19)

Regardless of this warning it is very common that words are added and taken away from the Bible. Some religions believe that church tradition is equally important as the Bible and in practical life it becomes even the greater authority. To these religions God's word is not only what is written in the Bible, but God gives new revelations through the church. It seems that they are not bothered that those new revelations are often in confrontation with the Bible. A classic example is prayer before the images and icons, or prayer for dead people. These practices are strictly forbidden by God. Is it possible that images are strictly forbidden in the Bible and that God now allows it? It is impossible. There are many other similar examples.

Adding words to the Bible is a custom in other churches and cults besides the traditional ones. A well-known religious group, Mormons, has a book that for them has the same authority as the Bible. The Adventist church, besides the Bible, believes in the inspired prophecies of Ellen White. They also don't seem to be bothered that they add and take away from the Bible.

This also occurs in some protestant churches. However, no tradition or revelation that comes after the Bible was completed can be equal to the Bible.

#### **4. The Practical Implication of These Truths**

The implications of these truths are multiple.

**We can have a precise knowledge of what sin is and what is not**

The Bible reveals all that is needed to know about God and our relationship with Him. Many things are not revealed and, by God's wisdom, we don't need to know them now. If we live according to what is revealed in the Bible we will live rightly before God. There is no need to add or take away from what is written in the Bible.

Concerning the question of sin we can say it this way: **Sin is only that (behaviour, thinking, action) which is not in line with the written word of God. Or in other words, sin is only that which Bible calls sin whether directly or indirectly (by implication).**<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> For more see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Leicester, IVP, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1994, 132, 133. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Hendrickson, 2003. 3:270, 271.

If we desire to know what kind of conduct is displeasing to God we need to read the Bible. This is a very important truth and is of great help for practical life.

## Specific Examples

Let's look at this by using some specific examples. Some people think that they sin if they eat a little bit more food than usual. They heard that excessiveness in food and drink is a deadly sin. But if we read the Bible we won't find the text which says how much food we are allowed to eat, or how many grams per kilogram of our weight. Nor does it say how many kilograms a person must have according to his height. Since the Bible doesn't prescribe these things then it means that we don't sin if we gratefully take another portion of a cake. When we know these truths they free us from unnecessary guilt and human traditions and allow us to be free to enjoy God's blessings.

But far from it that our life should be set on food so that it becomes our god (Php 3:19).<sup>144</sup> The Bible teaches that that is not good. There is only one God that we need to serve and that is Jesus Christ. To be excessively occupied with food is not wise because *for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rugs* (Pro 23:21).<sup>145</sup>

I support healthy living and believe that we should pay attention to eat properly, especially today when many products are of questionable quality. However, I speak against the unbiblical self-condemnation regarding the things that God is not condemning.

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<sup>144</sup> Philippians 3:18-20 speaks of a classic idolatry, that is occupation with this world and not spiritual values. These texts don't prescribe the amount of food someone should eat, they condemn the wrong view of the world and life.

<sup>145</sup> This text also doesn't prescribe the amount of food that a person should eat, but it emphasizes the foolishness of those who are occupied with food and alcohol.

Is excessive drinking a sin? The Bible says that drunkards will not enter heavenly kingdom. Drunkenness is a sin for which a person needs to repent (not just some illness to be cured from).

There are no revelations or prophecies that need to bring new truths which are not already written in the Bible. That what is written is sufficient to show us what sin is and what it isn't. Everything else is men's doctrines and commandments.

### **Things that Bible Doesn't Mention Directly**

Someone may ask whether the Bible forbids the use of heroin or marijuana.<sup>146</sup> The Bible doesn't mention drugs. Are they permitted then? Of course not. We said that sin is that which Bible forbids directly or indirectly (by implication). We have seen that it forbids drunkenness. Therefore, we don't need a list of drinks which we are not allowed to take, nor a list of drugs which we are not permitted to take. It is clear then that the biblical principle is that we should not be in a drunken state and that besides alcohol includes all kinds of drugs.

### **The Importance of the Completeness of the Bible**

Besides the importance that the Bible is completed and that nothing should be added to it, nothing should also be taken away from it. Those who believe that the Law is abolished and has no authority over the New Testament believer nonchalantly undermine its authority and its completeness. They claim that a believer is bound only by that what is written in the New Testament, that is mainly in the epistles. Thus, they arbitrarily cut and customize God's word. They claim that Scripture is their only

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<sup>146</sup> The Bible certainly speaks about drugs, cigarettes, cars, planes, satellites and about any other sphere of our modern life because it contains principles that refer to every part of life. If *principlism* is not the right method of interpretation, then the Bible doesn't have much to say to a modern man.



authority for faith and practice, but when it comes to practice it appears that only one part of the New Testament has authority for their faith and practice. In the end it comes that their authority is not even the New Testament but some undefined feeling of love. The Bible forbids any adding or taking away from God's word. Both are equally wrong. God was generous to reveal all truth to people but some fight to keep only a part of it. Isn't that bad?

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen some basic truths about the Bible and our approach to the Holy Scripture. I have illustrated the implication of these truths by giving some practical examples which show that the Bible is valid today. This applies to the both Testaments.



## INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW (2)

In previous lesson we have looked at some basic truths of how to approach the Bible. Now we can look at the question of interpreting individual texts in the Bible. We are especially interested in how to interpret the Law.

Bible interpretation is not there to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. It is something that is essential for our life. Jesus said that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Since reading, understanding and applying the Bible is necessary for our lives, it follows that it is necessary to **accurately** understand and apply what we read.

The whole Bible is God's true and authoritative word. We have noticed that many texts in the Bible are related to the time, culture and circumstances in which they were written. Thus, it might seem that they have no importance today. That's why we need to learn the important truths regarding interpretation and understanding of the Bible. We will see how to read out and apply the unchangeable and eternal principles from the text which are valid at every place and at any time.

### 1. Reading out Principles

Since the Bible was written in time, culture and circumstances different than ours, we need to understand how the Bible is useful and applicable in our time, that is how can the Bible be authority and rule by which we govern our life. The Bible speaks of many customs unknown to us, about animals and plants that are unfamiliar. People in Bible times had lived differently and they had different jobs. The Old Covenant is in many ways different from the New Covenant. We are right to ask how does what God had spoken to people then relate to us today?

However, regardless of many differences between the people in Biblical times and today, there are also many similarities. Even though people today have different haircuts and different outfits, in the essence they are the same as the people in Bible times. Besides, we have the same unchanging God and the same laws of God. It shouldn't be too difficult to discover God's eternal truths from the Bible that are valid for today just as they were valid for people two or three thousand years ago. The Bible itself gives direction as to how it should be interpreted.

## **Basic Rules**

Taking into account the principles we established in the previous lesson, we come closer to the interpretation of Bible texts. We approach it with prayer, with an open and humble heart, and with an attitude of a disciple. The first task is to see what text meant for people to whom it was first written. Every text must be read in its context. We need to know what is written before and after the verse we are interpreting. It is important to discover what does the entire book say in which this text is. Careful reading provides us with many facts about the people and times in which they live. We are especially interested in their spiritual life and relationship with God. We learn what teaching, reproach and command God gives. From that we learn about God, His character, and His relationship towards those people.

Once we understand the text in its historical and literary context, we can ask how it relates to us. The nature of the Bible text is to reveal eternal truths or principles enrobed in a coat of time in which Bible came into existence. When we understand what the text meant to the original listeners or readers, it won't be difficult to discover eternal principles which we need to apply today in the light of the New Testament revelation. We are particularly interested in the interpretation of the law of Moses.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart have written a book in which they claim that a Christian is not obligated by anything that is written in the law of Moses unless it was repeated in the New Testament.<sup>147</sup> That is one of the teachings I am opposing in this book. However, I won't discard all that they have written, because most of it is very good. It is good that they notice that Moses' law is paradigmatical.<sup>148</sup> This means that God didn't give a command for every possible life situation, but by giving a command for some situations He displays principles that apply in other similar situations.

## Two Examples

The paradigmatical nature of the Law and its interpretation can be illustrated on the following text:

*When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God. (Lev 19:9-10)*

The Law forbids that one should gather all grapes; some must be left for the poor. However, what about those who aren't cultivating grapes but figs, like Amos, or olives? Are they allowed to gather all and leave nothing for the poor?

The purpose of these commands is to help those who are in need. The command mentions some sorts of agricultural products, but not an entire list, not every situation in which one is to act in the same or similar way is listed. The command is therefore an

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<sup>147</sup> *Kako proučavati Bibliju* (How to Read the Bible for all its Worth), Osijek, Izvori, 1999, 162-166.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 166-171.

example or a pattern as to how one should act in every similar situation. A proof to that is the repetition of the command in Deuteronomy 24:19-22 where additional details are added (like olive trees).

This command reveals an important principle, man's obligation to care for the one in need. (Basic principle is actually love which in a specific situation shows itself in giving. Love is the principle on which all the Law and the Prophets hang.)<sup>149</sup> In another place in the Law this principle is given in a general sense:

*For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'* (Deut 15:11)

Here we see a general command: *Give to the poor*. One way to put this into practice is to not gather all the produce during the harvest. God gave an example of wheat or grape harvest and this is also applicable to other situations.<sup>150</sup>

Notice that this is not just an advice or teaching but a command. From these commands we do not only learn something about men and his moral responsibility but we also learn about God and his character. We see that He cares for the needy. We can also gain

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<sup>149</sup> For a more detailed teaching on interpretation, see Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1991. 155-166. The entire Bible is actually the example of interpreting and applying of the Law. When we read the New Testament, we are learning how to interpret the Law, because the NT writers have interpreted the Law and applied it to the new and specific situations. Kaiser notices that the letter to James is an example of how to apply the old Law in the New Testament situation.

<sup>150</sup> Guzik gives an interesting comment to our text: "This was a wonderful way to help the poor. It commanded the farmers to have a generous heart, and the poor to be active and to work for their food. It made a way for the poor to provide for their own needs with dignity." (David Guzik, Commentaries, <[http://blueletterbible.org/Comm/david\\_guzik/sg/Lev\\_19.html](http://blueletterbible.org/Comm/david_guzik/sg/Lev_19.html)>)

wisdom because in these and similar commands we see another principle which is clearly revealed in the New Testament. The aim is not that a man should help another and then be burdened himself (2 Co 8:13,14), because God is not commanding senseless and excessive giving. Giving should be done wisely but also generously. God's revelation gives knowledge, wisdom and assurance and frees us from confusion and needless feelings of guilt.

Therefore, from God's law written in Leviticus 19:9-10 we can learn eternal principles about our moral obligations which God reveals and illustrates by giving a command for a specific situation in a specific time and circumstances.<sup>151</sup>

### **Is the New Testament believer bound by these commands?**

Are they applicable in our time? According to modern theology, we are not obligated to keep them. However, if we give this serious consideration, we must put away such theology.

The first thing we see is that these principles are also given in the New Testament. It is also written that we need to remember the needy (Jas 1:27). However, only a small number of people are doing agriculture or fruit growing, and we cannot literally apply the command about harvesting the wheat and gathering fruit. Does that give us the right to keep all our income for ourselves and neglect helping others?<sup>152</sup>

Secondly, in some situations even the literal application of these commands is possible and necessary. I have heard of a

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<sup>151</sup> Here we don't have time for a detailed analysis of the context.

<sup>152</sup> Many developed states have social programs that are financed by the citizens. Isn't this one step in fulfilling the spirit of this Law? However, one downside of the social program (the state's and the church's) is that in this way people lose the feeling of personal involvement as they give, and those who receive the help don't receive any love from specific people but only from impersonal institution.

businessman in a nearby town who was processing food products from potatoes. He had a field of potatoes, and during potato gathering he only gathered certain number of potatoes (most likely the bigger ones which were needed for processing in his machines). The rest he left in the field so people could come and take it for free. This was of great help to the poor, and there were many poor people after the war. We can ask if it would be right for the businessman to gather all the potatoes and make himself rich while around his field live many people hungry for bread. On the other hand, it would be silly to leave the potatoes in the field if it is far removed from populated area let alone poor people. In that case, another way of helping the poor must be found.

We also must understand that entire world is not like Paris. There are many regions or countries where the lifestyle is not much different from the lifestyle of Israelites in ancient times. Perhaps in their case the literal application of the command regarding the harvest is possible and necessary.

As another example we will look at the interpretation of the Apostle Paul. Let's see how he interprets the Law and applies it to our time. A classic example is found in 1 Corinthians 9:3-11:

*This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in*



*hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? (1 Co 9:3-11)*

In his letter to Corinthians Paul is quoting Moses' law, specifically Deuteronomy 25:4, where it says *You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain*. The Apostle says that this is written for us. His understanding of the Law largely differs from the understanding of today's teachers.

Paul takes out the principle from this text and applies it to the situation in the church. The principle in the command found in Deuteronomy 25:4 is that a worker, whether it was a man or an animal, must receive a reward for his work.<sup>153</sup> Paul applies this principle to the ministry of a preacher, he who preaches the Gospel lives from the Gospel. Paul first gives examples from everyday life (*Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?*), and then concludes by quoting the Law from which he reads out the principle and applies it to modern times.

We see from these examples that the Old Testament law is possible and necessary to apply in our times. Application can at times be literal, but more often we must understand the spirit of the Law in order to apply it to our modern situations.

## **2. Can This Method Be Applied in Practice?**

It is our responsibility to learn eternal principles by reading the Law and apply them in our everyday life. However, important questions arise. A lot of time is needed in order to learn how to

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<sup>153</sup> For a detailed interpretation of this text see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Current Crisis In Exegesis And the Apostolic Use of Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Corinthians 9:8-10." *JETS* 21/1 (March 1978) 11-18.

correctly use and interpret the Bible. Much time is needed to learn many biblical principles and their correct application to our lives. We certainly can't attain that overnight. Assume that we have just become believers. How should we live? How to live in everyday situation, since we don't know much about the Bible? Are we bound to ignorance and many mistakes? Far from it.

Even though a grown-up man needs to work and earn a living, a little child can't do that, God has so ordained things so that a child grows and develops, regardless of the fact that the child is not able to work and earn a living. It is similar with spiritual babies. Even though a man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, those who have just come to faith and don't know the Bible are not condemned to disaster. Several things are important to mention.

Firstly, man is made in God's image and has an inborn conscience which helps him to naturally discern what is good and what is evil in God's eyes. Although our conscience is not perfect, it is still useful.

Secondly, God has given pastors and teachers which help both young and older believers to grow in the knowledge of spiritual truths. Besides that, believers are able to help each other, warn and teach each other.

Thirdly, even though God's law is ample, and much time is needed to learn it, the situation is not hopeless. The entire Law can be summed up in a few words. Love God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself. These are basic principles on which the entire Law and Prophets hang. These principles are also guidelines for the correct Bible interpretation. Therefore, a young believer first learns the basic and general principles (two commands, Ten commands) and over time his understanding grows into more detail. Young believer begins his study in the

New Testament, which is easier to understand and which gives him the basic foundation for further Bible study.

Since the believer has a conscience and since entire Law can be summed up in few words, does that mean that there is no need to grow in the knowledge of the entire Bible? That would be the same as we were to say that a small child can live without work and doesn't need to be trained in any work. Progress in spiritual knowledge is very important in the life of a believer (1 Pe 1:5-11).

## **Conclusion**

The goal of these chapters regarding the interpretation of the Law is not to give us detailed explanation and direction for Bible interpretation, but to give us basic guidelines and help us see that Mosaic Law is useful and needed in the life of each New Testament believer. When we talk about the authority of the Bible, we don't think only of the New Testament books, but of the whole Bible. From entire Bible we learn what God's will is, and we read out principles which we are obligated to apply in our daily life.



## CONCLUSION

We have looked at the concept of Law and grace and have seen that they exist in both the Old and the New Testament. They are not just two periods in the history of mankind, but two constant aspects of God's word and God's work.

Christ's blood had washed the sins of believers at the time of Moses just like it washes sins today. God's law was valid at the time of Moses just like it is valid today. Moses' law is not Moses' but God's. Christ's law is not new and different law, but the same law only rightly interpreted and rightly used. When prophet Jeremiah was speaking of the New Covenant, he prophesied that God will write His law in man's heart. At that time there were not two God's laws (one that is God's and one that is Christ's) like there are no two laws today nor there were two God's then nor today.<sup>154</sup>

God's law was not only given to Israel, for that same law is written in the hearts of the New Testament believers. It seems that all theologians admit that the Law reflects God's character. If God hasn't changed (He hasn't) then neither did His character. From this follows only one correct conclusion which is that God's law hasn't changed either. The prophecies of the Law (typological and direct) are fulfilled or are being fulfilled, but the principles of the Law remain the same.

The Law was not given so that a sinner will be justified by keeping the Law, but to point the sinner to justification which is only in Christ. The Law declares a sinner as a transgressor and

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<sup>154</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr. seems frustrated with the idea of two Laws. He places them in the same category with old dispensationalist ideas of two new Covenants, God's two kingdoms (heavenly and God's), three or four Gospels or two Lord's days, Christ's and Lord's (*Response to Wayne G. Strickland, in Five views on Law and Gospel*, Stanley N. Gundry, ed., Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996, 304).

condemns him to death. Christ justifies the sinner and gives him life. The sinner looks at himself through the Law and sees his poor condition and the need for a Saviour.

For a believer, who was through the Law pointed to Christ and found justification in Him, the Law has a multiple role. For him the Law is not only the letter on the paper, but the reality in his heart. It is no longer a heavy burden, but the perfect law of freedom. It is no longer the letter which kills, but the letter which blesses him with teaching, reproach, comfort and encouragement.

The idea that the OT believer was serving God out of fear of punishment and the NT out of love is hardly biblical even though many view it as true. It would be better to say that the OT unbeliever was trying to serve God out of fear of punishments, but also with a desire to earn justification. Both the OT and the NT believer has received justification by faith in Christ and he serves God not in order to be saved, but because he is saved and freed from the slavery of sin. Love and gratefulness to God are not the NT inventions but the heart of the OT Law, just like it is love for the neighbour. True believer, whether in the OT or the NT, serves God out of love and gratitude, but also out of fear. The fear of God is the important characteristic of a believer at any period of history.

There is no need to be confused and afraid to keep God's word. On the contrary, we should be afraid to break it. It doesn't make sense either to ignore the letter of the OT thinking that it was written to some other people at some other time. That is God's revelation given for us today. It is also not wise to ignore it because God's word is our spiritual food and the man does not live by bread alone, but by **every** word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Finally, it doesn't make sense to be afraid of the Law and precepts thinking that they enslave us, kill grace and so on. Grace is not a ticket for wild living nor is it the killer of joy. Christian freedom is freedom from sin and condemnation. That is also a power for service and obedience to God. True believer finds a true joy in obeying God's word.





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