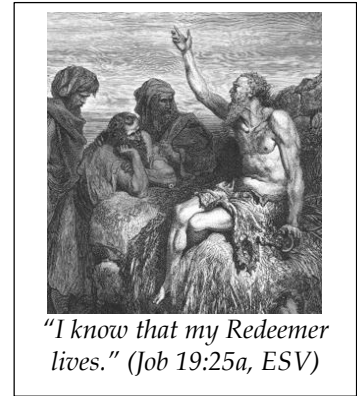


Law vs. Grace?



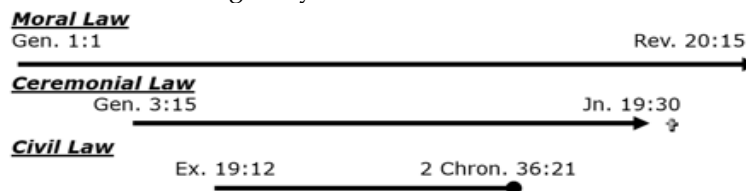
Introduction Question #1

Our study of the law of God began by understanding the three different aspects.

- First, there is the Moral Law - which is a part of creation and, as such, will never pass away.
- Second, came the Ceremonial Law - this was initially given Adam after the fall and later, more fully, to Moses at Mt. Sinai.

The Ceremonial Law pointed to Christ and taught him in several ways:

- ❖ *the true horror of sin* - that sin is against the holiness of God and that death is required for sin;
- ❖ *the covering of shame* - that sin exposes the sinner completely to God, but that God graciously provides a covering for the shame of sin - and that covering, ultimately, is the righteousness of Christ;
- ❖ *the grace of substitutionary atonement* - the lives of mere animals were provided by God and were sacrificed by the worshipping sinner in substitution of the sinner's own life, understanding that he would be forgiven his own sin by God's gracious substitutionary provision - a role that Christ will ultimately pay for all his people.
- Third is the Civil Law - the nation of Israel was organized by God as a *theocracy* - a nation truly and formally under God's direct rule and reign. But God's people proved to be rebellious and unbelieving, wanting a human king and their own, sinful desires - God judged them by enslaving them to other nations and taking away their land.



The Moral Law is Permanent

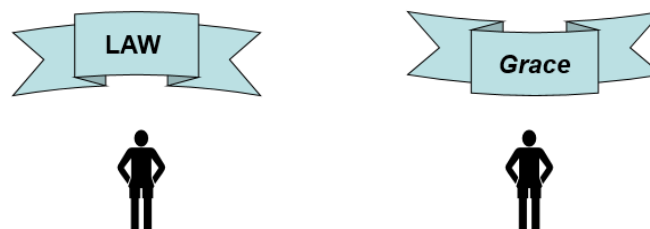
It is the Moral Law that is our focus here - the law which has been in the heart of man since the beginning and which must apply to all men everywhere until this present age is complete. But before we get to the Moral Law, we need to address three common questions and misconceptions about the law that New Testament believers sometimes ask. The first question is this:

"Isn't the law done away with now that we are under grace?"

At first glance, Paul, in Romans 6, seems to be saying exactly that:

"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

Paul seems to be saying the Moral Law no longer applies to the Christian. But this is wrong. The misunderstanding here is this: law and grace are opposite each other as if a man will either stand under one banner or another.



This involves a misunderstanding of both law and grace. Many Christians have been taught to think this way.

1. **Mistake #1** – *The Old Testament believers were saved by obedience to the law.* Thinking of law and grace as polar opposites makes one think that the Old Testament saints had to earn their salvation because, after all, they were under law. Doesn't John 1:17 say "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."? But law and grace run through the entire history of God's people and are not relegated to certain eras or dispensations. Even before the giving of the law formally, we read of the gift of faith in the Old Testament saints and that they really lived by the gracious gift of that faith. We read in Genesis that the faith of Abraham and others was clearly held out as honored in God's sight and that Abraham was credited as

righteous not by his works but by his faith. Faith is always a gift of God and God treated Abraham with grace. More importantly than that, we understand by our reading of the New Testament that other Old Testament saints were not saved by their obedience either but rather by their hope in the same Savior to come. Even Job, a very ancient character in Old Testament Scriptures said:

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth." (Job 19:25, ESV)

The Old Testament saints were not saved by obedience to the law but they were saved by grace through faith just as we are today. Still, the Moral Law had a purpose in the way they lived their lives, just as it does for us today.

What passages like Rom. 6 and John 1 speak of is that the Moral Law pointed to all of our sinfulness before God and that mere obedience to the law cannot save. Instead, all must look to Christ who is the gift of God for any who put their faith and trust in him.

2. **Mistake #2:** *Old Testament law does not apply to New Testament Christians.* Christians can also be mistakenly taught that anything in the Old Testament, being before the coming of Christ, does not apply with force to the New Testament Christian. The New Testament Christian must only attend to the teachings of Jesus and Paul for his duty before God. Christians have been told that they simply have more liberty, more freedom today than Old Testament believers did. But if that is true, that we are under grace instead of law, even the very meaning of sin is called into question. What is sin? How do we define it? Sin is no longer seen as the actual breaking of a commandment of God. Instead, it is reduced to just not being as good as we know we should, falling under the disapproval of men, or that we are "not living for the Lord". These are nebulous and even subjective terms that only result in our excusing ourselves for not being obedient to the Lord as we should.

And that brings up an interesting dilemma – if Christians are not under law and do not really sin, how is behavior measured or disciplined? The law of God is replaced with man-made laws and guidelines for what a Christian "is supposed to be like". For example, "real Christians", we might hear, do not drink, smoke, dance, etc., are sure to dress in a certain way, and that they "keep up appearances". But this is no more than modern-day Pharisaism – a cultural Christianity - the attempt to measure inward spirituality by some outward compliance or an act done before the eyes of others.

This cannot be right because Jesus teaches the continuing role of the law of God in the lives of believers. He probes deeply into the motives of the heart, and not the mere outward behavior. "I did not come to abolish the law," he says, "but to fulfill it." and to show us what it really means to live as Christians.

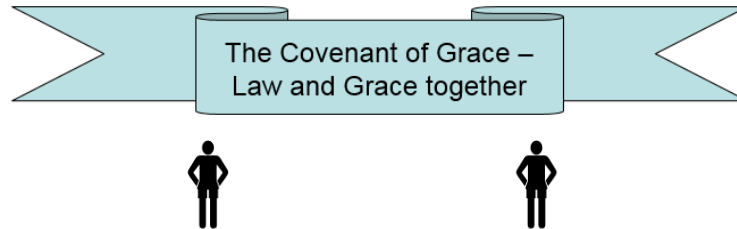
In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us key illustrations as to how we are to understand what it means to live by the Moral Law as believers: he says

"you have heard it said 'You shall not murder ... But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment;' 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

If Jesus fulfills the law but does not abolish it, if not one stroke or dot will pass away until all is accomplished then the Moral Law still stands today as our guide to lead us in paths of righteousness and Christlikeness.

Law and Grace Together

So where did this kind of thinking about the law of God go wrong? It went wrong in thinking that the opposite of law is grace and that you can only be under one banner or the other. But in truth, the opposite of law is not grace, the opposite of law is lawlessness - just as the opposite of grace is justice.



When Paul speaks to Roman Christians about being under grace he anticipates these very kind of mistaken notions in their thinking. He responds to them by asking a question: *Are we to be free to sin because we are not under law but rather under grace?* His answer: *"by no means!"* But why is that? Because even for the one saved by grace through faith there is still the path of righteousness upon which that believer is to walk. That path is the Moral Law of God. But what if the believer fails at any point? Here is where the right understanding of Romans 6 is found. The believer is forgiven in Christ through grace and will not be judged and condemned by the law. Now the law is his guide into Christlikeness.

When David sinned against Uriah by taking his wife and murdering him, God forgave David! He showed David mercy and grace. But on what grounds? If David lived under law he could expect no mercy from God. He should have received only divine justice and death. But no. The law and the grace of God exist side by side throughout the entire story of redemption. David was forgiven in Christ – the one promised from David's own line and the one in whom David trusted.

Being forgiven of God in Christ means God's people are able to live for him as his forgiven people. To do that we follow Christ: we deny ourselves – that is, to restrain our own choices in life so that we do not sin – and we strive to live the life he lived – obeying the Moral Law as our guide at every turn.

The Moral Law and Worship

Following the Moral Law not only directs our lives, it also prescribes our worship of God. The worship of God is always regulated by His Word. We may only worship God as he instructs. After the fall, Adam and Eve could only worship God if they came with the necessary, substitutionary sacrifice. When Cain brought no sacrifice, his worship was rejected by God. Later, Nadab and Abihu brought a "strange fire", worshipping God according to their own imagination and design. They were consumed in the very fire they thought they were presenting to God. God has never accepted worship he has not given his people to do.

So how are we to worship God today? We worship according to God's instructions. In our worship today, we do three things:

1. *we demonstrate our faith in Christ by rejecting the Old Testament Ceremonial Law.* In our faith in Christ, we no longer offer sacrifices, even though the Ceremonial Law requires it. Instead, we claim that the work of Christ is sufficient and that his offering ended the practice of the Ceremonial Law. This is actually very dangerous for us to do if we are wrong about Christ's being the Messiah! Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God,

because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:12-18)

This tells us that worshipping God is not a matter we may take lightly. Instead, we worship boldly, trusting in Christ's finished work. We march straight through the veil right into the Holy of Holies! We call the Almighty God "our Father"! If we are wrong about these things, worse will come to us than came to Nadab and Abihu! But it is a good thing we are not wrong!

3. *We also recognize that the salvation work of Christ has changed us.* We worship not as sinners who are just trying to impress God or buy his affections somehow. Rather, we worship God as his forgiven, redeemed people. And as such, we approach God in worship with confidence - claiming our very assurance in the name of his only son and knowing full well that he graciously receives us in Christ's name. Not only does he receive us, God wants us.

One implication of this is that worship is not the same as evangelism - worshipping God is not, first and foremost, a seeker-friendly activity. Those who come before him do so either as being already saved by their faith in the blood of the lamb or else they come before him as guilty sinners! If you are in this latter camp, then the fear of God rather than the love of God should be foremost on your mind. If you come before God as an unbeliever, your worship is only to repent and believe the gospel!

4. *We only worship him as he has taught us to do in his Word.* Even as redeemed people, what we do in worship before God must not be just our own idea of what God would like to receive or what he should like to receive. We only give him what he truly wants. We will see this more in depth when we study the first four commandments.

It is the entire race of fallen man that stands under the law of God - both before and after the coming of Christ. If any man denies the gospel, he dies in his sin, he calls God a liar, and he faces God's eternal justice justly. But if a man calls on the name of God and hopes in the Christ of the gospel - whether that be as Abraham who hoped in the Christ to come or ourselves who trust in the Christ who has come - we receive mercy and grace only in that one name. And in the Moral Law, all of God's people are given the path of Christ to follow so that we might know how to please God and grow in grace.

The mistaken perception we have talked of here was this: each man is under the banner of either law or grace. In this way of thinking, the law of God and the grace of God are set as polar opposites to one another and you can only be in one camp or the other - either one or the other defines your relationship with God.

But this cannot be correct because Jesus teaches the continuing role of the law of God in the lives of believers, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. "I did not come to abolish the law," he says, "but to fulfill it." If Jesus fulfills the law but does not abolish it, if not one stroke or dot will pass away until all is accomplished, then the Moral Law still stands today as our guide to lead us in paths of righteousness and Christlikeness.

Pastor David G. Barker, 2015

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