

Saved By Grace Through Faith But Not Without Law

It is clear that Jesus freed us from the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:10,13). It is also clear that it was impossible for anyone to obtain salvation by keeping the Law (Gal. 3:11). It is further true that the failure of the law was not an inherent flaw in the Law itself. There is no doubt that if salvation could have been obtained through keeping a law, the Law of Moses would have been adequate. Paul gives personal testimony to the fact that the flaw was in the weakness of mankind, the inability of mankind to avoid breaking the Law (Rom. 7:7-12, 14-18). This statement applies to any law, including the law of ones own conscience (Rom. 2:12-16, 3:9, 23). When we are told that Christ is "the end of the Law for righteousness" for one who believes in Him, it is saying that the impossible requirement of obtaining righteousness by Law has been taken away. It has been abolished by Christ, who after living perfectly according to the Law, took it away in His death (Col. 2:14, Gal. 3:13, 2 Cor. 5:21). His perfect keeping of the Law is then by grace through faith credited to those who believe in Him (Rom. 8:1-4). This was the way God was able to be both just and justifying (Rom. 3:26). Since the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22,23), when we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27), we enter into His body. In this manner, now covered by Him, we receive credit for His righteousness as though it were our own (2 Cor. 5:21). For this reason we share in His victory over sin (Eph. 5:25-27). This was also prophesied by Isaiah 750 years before it came to pass..."He will divide the booty (of his victory) with the strong"(Isa. 53:12).

What then was the purpose of the Law? First, it was to show that all mankind is guilty of sin and therefore could never achieve salvation on the basis of law (Rom. 7:7). Second, it was to prepare mankind for the wonderful news that salvation could be obtained as a gift of God's magnificent grace (Eph. 2:8,9). This grace was made possible through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17-21). Third, it was to convince mankind that grace is available through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:27,28). This is, of course, a faith which leads us to be obedient to the teaching of Christ (Acts 6:7). This obedience of faith is clearly set forth by James (2:26). In this light, even faith itself can be referred to as a work (John 6:28,29).

It is sometimes claimed that if we are saved by grace rather than by keeping a law, we are no longer subject to any law. Such is not the case. While we are not under the Mosaic Law as such, we are to be

subject to the law of Christ. Keep in mind that all laws are composed of commandments, as was true of the old Law (Matt. 15:3,4, 19:16-20). It is enough to just ask if Christ gave any commandments to be followed. What did He mean when He told the Apostles to teach others to obey all the commandments he had given them? (Matt. 28:20). When Paul writes of the difference between a fleshly life and life led by the Spirit and speaks of things that will prohibit one entering the Kingdom of God, is that list of fleshly works to be considered suggestions, or prohibitions? (Gal. 5:16-25). While loving God and one's neighbor are the chief commandments, each is further illustrated by many sub-commandments. Notice how Paul refers to the content he is writing to the Corinthians as the "Lord's commandments" (1 Cor. 14:37). Sin is a violation of law (1 John 3:4, 5:17)...so, no law means no imput-able sin. This is why Paul says that sin is not imputed where there is no law (Rom. 4:15, 5:13).

When the Bible tells us we are no longer under the Law (Gal. 5:18), it does not intend to say that we are not required to obey the Lord's commandments (His law). Nor does it mean that when we willfully and unrepentantly disobey Christ's words, we do so with impunity and will not be held accountable for the guilt of our sin (Heb. 10:26-30). The idea that we can do as we please, once we have accepted Christ and have come under the umbrella of His grace, is not biblical. This was the idea of some Romans who thought by sinning more one could obtain more grace (Rom. 6:1-2). Paul tells them that if they choose to sin, they go out from under grace, and go back under law (Rom. 6:12-17, Gal. 5:1-4). If we leave grace to again go back under law, we EARN condemnation (Rom. 6:23). This is also stated in Hebrews 10:26-31. Salvation can only be received as a gift of God's grace (unmerited favor). While we cannot earn grace, grace is not unconditional. The condition of grace is obedient faith (Heb. 5:9, Rom. 6:17). Obedient faith is not only a manifestation of the sincerity of our faith, but also of our love (John 14:21,23, 24). As noted in the passage just indicated, a failure to obey the words of Christ, in the Lord's view, proves that we do not love Him. Also, if the New Testament were not the law for Christians, 1 John 1:8,10 would not be true. If we claim that we do not sin, the Holy Spirit through John says we are liars. If we say we have never sinned, He says we make God a liar. These verses are true because there is a law to transgress (1 John 3:4, 5:17).

It is sometimes thought that the word "law" in the New Testament always means the law of Moses. This is not the case. The New Testament speaks of the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2). When Paul speaks of identifying with Gentiles who were not under the Old Law, he says he became as one not under law, although in reality, he was under the "law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21). I believe there is

a generic use of the word "law" in Rom. 8:7,8 where we are told that fleshly minds cannot be subjected to the law of God. I would paraphrase that, "cannot come under the rule of God". It is generally accepted that Isaiah 31:33, quoted in Heb. 8:10, and 10:16, speaks of the Messianic age when it promises God's law would be written on human hearts. If it is referring to the church age, then it must be talking about the commandments of Jesus and not those of Moses (although all of the Ten Commandments are included in some form in the New Testament except the one concerning keeping the Sabbath). James tells us that we are not only to hear, but also to obey the "perfect law of liberty" (1:25). Paul refers to this "law of liberty" in Romans 6:17 for which he expresses his thanksgiving that they had "obeyed it from the heart.". Later, James claims that we are to be judged by this law of liberty (2:12). Since the law of liberty showcases love (2:8), those whose deeds do not demonstrate love, will be harshly dealt with in judgment. Note this comment by Ralph Martin: "The law of freedom can liberate those who fulfill it, but it also serves as a solemn threat of eschatological wrath to those who transgress it (James 2:13)." (James, World Bible Commentary, Word Pub., Waco. TX, 1988, p. 71).

I conclude calling attention to the title of this study. First, we are not under law in the sense that we are to be saved by keeping God's law perfectly. The Old Law, in part, was given to show mankind that salvation by law is impossible. Christ fulfilled the Law by keeping it perfectly, and then went to the cross where by His death He took those who accept Him out from under law as a means of salvation (Rom. 8:1-4). Edward Mote's hymn, "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less," states it well: "When He shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found, Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne." Second, although we are saved by grace through faith, we are to live by the teachings of Christ. While He rescued us from a failed attempt to be saved by law, He still gave us commandments (laws) which are to be obeyed (1 John 2:3-5, Gal. 2:10). In addition, he gave a way of perpetual cleansing by which daily sins of the faithful are taken away, and will not be counted against us so long as we continue to serve Him as Lord (1 John 1:7, 2:1-2, 3:4-10). We are further aided by the Holy Spirit who adds to our prayers so that as they come before the Lord they represent all our needs (Rom. 8:26-27). Saving faith is to be demonstrated by living in the light of God's word (1 John 1:6-7,9). We are to teach others to do the same (Matt. 28:19-20, 2 Tim. 2:2). Authentic Christianity is shown in this manner, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness" (2 Tim. 2:19, Jas. 4:17). The oracles of God tell us how to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

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