

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (12) Following Jesus Christ Rightly –
#6c: Understanding Law and Grace (part 3)**

Today we continue our consideration of the Bible’s teaching about God’s law. More specifically, we will attempt to show how Christians are to live under God’s law toward Christ, which is also sometimes referred to as the third use of the law. The law of God is an important subject of God’s Word. The reasons for its importance include the following:

- (1) The law of God is an important subject because apart from a proper understanding of God’s law, you will not be able to read and interpret the Scriptures rightly, for the subject of the law of God permeates the entire Bible. If we are wrong here, we may be in error in many and significant ways.
- (2) The law of God is an important subject because apart from a proper understanding of God’s law, one cannot understand the Bible’s teaching about God’s grace, righteousness, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and many other vital and essential biblical subjects.
- (3) Studying what the Bible says about the law of God is important because there are strange but prevalent teachings among “Bible-believing” Christians that ignore, diminish, or even deny the role of God’s law for Christians.
- (4) Knowledge of the law of God is important for us because we live in days characterized by lawlessness, both inside and outside of the church. There is a refusal of even professing Christians to recognize and yield to biblical authority. Some, because of a faulty understanding of God’s law, deny the authority of large portions of the Holy Scriptures. While they say that they are Bible believers, at the same time they will say that the Old Testament is no longer authoritative for the Christian; “after all”, they say, “we are not under law, but grace.” Others will go so far as to say that even portions of the New Testament are not to be regarded as authoritative for Christians in this church age. “Because the Jews were under the law until the cross”, they say, “Much of the teaching of Jesus is not for the church.” Still, others say that because we are under grace, we are free from any and all laws of any kind. They are lawless in their belief and soon they become careless and lawless in their practice.
- (5) An understanding of God’s law will bring clarity to one’s thinking about issues of morality and decision-making. This may not appear to be a practical matter, but it is very much so. An understanding of God’s law provides us a clear understanding into the nature and will of God, and will help us to know where and how we can determine what kind of behavior pleases Him.

And so, for these reasons, among others, we have sought to present what the Bible teaches about this very important matter, the law of God. In order to follow Jesus Christ rightly, we must understand this subject rightly.

Now, as we have said before, we are presently not speaking about matters that are essential to believe in order to have salvation from sin that God gives us through Jesus Christ. Rather, we are addressing how Christians may follow Jesus in a right manner so as to please our Lord and in order that we might receive from Him the greatest measure of blessing possible for Christians. For the last two Sundays we have dealt with the very important matter of understanding rightly the nature of God’s law and God’s grace. We need to spend today also addressing this in order to assure that we have understood the essentials of this issue. Today, we want to explain and address what has come to be known in reformed theology as **the third use of the law**.

As reformed Christians, that is, as ones who believe in the historic, Calvinistic understanding of the Holy Scriptures, we advocate that the Lord has three purposes for His law for Christians. In order to understand what this means, perhaps a good place to begin our study would be to rehearse the theological note in **The Reformation Study Bible**, which is entitled, “*The Threefold Use of the Law.*”¹

Every Christian wrestles with the question, how does the Old Testament law relate to my life? Is the Old Testament law irrelevant to Christians or is there some sense in which we are still bound by portions of it? As the heresy of antinomianism (i.e. lawlessness) becomes ever more pervasive in our culture the need to answer these questions grows increasingly urgent.

The Reformation was founded on grace and not upon law. Yet the law of God was not repudiated by the Reformers. John Calvin, for example, wrote what has become known as the “threefold Use of the Law” in order to show the importance of the law for the Christian life (*Institutes* 2.1.304-10).

The first purpose of the law is to be a mirror. On the one hand, the law of God reflects and mirrors the perfect righteousness of God. The law tells us much about who God is. Perhaps more important, the law illumines human sinfulness. Augustine wrote, “The law orders, that we, after attempting to do what is ordered, and so feeling our weakness under the law, may learn to implore the help of grace” (*Institutes* 2.1.306). The law highlights our weakness so that we might seek the strength found in Christ. Here the law acts as a severe schoolmaster who drives us to Christ.

A second purpose for the law is the restraint of evil. The law, in and of itself, cannot change human hearts. It can, however, serve to protect the righteous from the unjust. Calvin says this purpose is “by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice” (*institutes* 2.1.307). The law allows for a limited measure of justice on this earth, until the last judgment is realized.

The third purpose of the law is to reveal what is pleasing to God. As born again children of God, the law enlightens us as to what is pleasing to our Father, whom we seek to serve. The Christian delights in the law as God Himself delights in it. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). This is the highest function of the law, to serve as an instrument for the people of God to give Him honor and glory.

By studying or meditating on the law of God, we attend the school of righteousness. We learn what pleases God and what offends Him. The moral law that God reveals in Scripture is always binding upon us. Our redemption is from the curse of God’s law, not from our duty to obey it. We are justified, not because of our obedience to the law, but in order that we may become obedient to God’s law. To love Christ is to keep His commandments. To love God is to obey His law.

I had us read that note in its entirety because it is an excellent summary of the truth of Holy Scriptures regarding God’s law and our relationship to His law as Christians. But it is a sad reality that among professing Christians, relatively few would affirm this third use of the law to be biblical. Very few Christians understand and affirm the third use of the law. Rather, it is commonly believed that Christians are not responsible before God to live according to His law. They argue, “We are under grace not law, therefore Christians are free from having to obey the law of God.” We will speak more of this view a little later. But first, I would like us to consider the teaching of one passage of Scripture which is erroneously said to teach that Christians are not under the authority of, or obligation to, the law of God. Let us turn to Galatians 3, in which we will consider Paul’s instruction of the entire chapter. We will read a paragraph and then comment on it before reading the following paragraph. But first let me provide some background to our passage.

Two weeks ago we addressed the teaching of chapters 4 and 5 of this epistle. At that time we gave the setting of this epistle. Paul’s wrote this epistle to churches that he had founded in the region of Galatia. But after Paul had left the region, false teachers came into those churches and promoted errant teaching respecting the nature of salvation and the Christian life. Paul had proclaimed to them the gospel of God’s grace, that sinners are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from the merit of any works that fallen man might do. But these false teachers claimed that Paul had taught them error, that God actually

¹ Sproul, R. C., gen. ed., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 273.

bestows His salvation upon those, who, yes, believe on Jesus Christ, but that these believers must also keep God's law in order to merit and obtain God's forgiveness of sins and to become righteous before Him. And so whereas Paul had taught them that a saving relationship with God was through *a covenant of grace*, based on *what Jesus Christ did*, the false teachers, or Judaizers, taught that a saving relationship with God was attained through *what they did*, that is, according to *a covenant of works*. Paul taught salvation by grace; the false teachers taught salvation by the merit of keeping God's law.

Let us turn to Galatians 3, in which we read of...

I. Paul's teaching on God's law as a covenant with Israel. (Gal. 3:1-29)

In Galatians 3 Paul explained God's purpose for having given His law through Moses to Israel as the basis of their covenant relationship with God. But the Israelites had failed to understand the role and purpose of God's law as a temporary covenant. Here, in chapter 3, Paul speaks to this matter. In the first two paragraphs, verses 1 through 9, we read of Paul asserting...

A. Justification through faith alone (3:1-9)

¹O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ²This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ⁴Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

⁵Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—⁶just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” ⁷Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” ⁹So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

The apostle reasoned with these Christians that they had formerly embraced the gospel that he had proclaimed to them and that through faith alone God had transformed them by the work of the Holy Spirit. He had preached to them Jesus Christ crucified as the only way of salvation and they had embraced that gospel. But they had departed from the doctrine they had formerly embraced. They were now trusting in their performance of good works of God's law in order to be saved from their sins. Paul accused them of being ignorant and foolish. He even suggested that someone had “bewitched” them to believe such error after having formerly heard, known, and embraced the truth. He reasoned with them. “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” In other words, “Did God transform your lives through faith or had He done so due to works that you had performed?” Obviously, it was when they had believed the gospel that they then experienced the grace of God that had transformed their lives.

Paul then reasoned with them that it was through faith that God had justified them in order that God's promise to Abraham would be realized that he would become the father of many nations (i.e. Gentiles). Those who have faith, as Abraham had faith, are Abraham's spiritual children, the heirs of God's promises to Abraham. In other words, Paul was declaring that people of faith, whether Jew or Gentile, comprise the “Israel of God” to whom God promised salvation.

If God justifies sinners through faith and not through doing the works of His law, the question then may be asked, “What is the outcome of those who believe that they may be saved by keeping God's law?” The answer is that...

B. The law brings a curse (3:10-14)

¹⁰For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” ¹¹But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” ¹²Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.”

¹³Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), ¹⁴that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Anyone who attempts to be saved by keeping the works of the law are under the curse of the law. That supposed law keeper is actually under God’s wrath, for the law can only condemn sinners. We spoke about the reason for this last week. Although God had established a covenant of works with the human race through Adam, who was mankind’s federal head, since he broke the law, and since the covenant of works required perfect conformity to God’s law, upon Adam’s transgression fallen man could no longer be saved by the covenant of works.² But when sinners believe the gospel, as Abraham had believed, then God thereafter regards and treats the believing sinner as righteous. This qualifies the believer to be the beneficiary of God’s promise to Abraham, the gift of the Holy Spirit, who enables them to live before God.

We next read of...

C. God’s changeless promise to Abraham (3:15-18)

¹⁵Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. ¹⁶Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. ¹⁷And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. ¹⁸For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Paul drew an analogy of the covenants that men make with one another. People do not change their covenantal arrangements once they are agreed upon. Similarly God did not change his covenantal commitment that he made to Abraham. But Paul takes great care to say that God had originally made His covenant with Abraham and his “seed” (singular), not “seeds.” What Paul was saying is that when God originally promised the blessing of life to Abraham, He did so specifically to Abraham and Jesus Christ, his seed.³ Therefore, when God covenanted with Israel through Moses 400 years later, a relationship with Israel based upon keeping His law, that covenant could not and did not annul His covenantal commitment to Abraham. Paul reasons that if God’s promise (of salvation) was due to keeping the law, then it could not be based on God’s promise (rather it would be a debt that God owed).

This leads to the question, “What, then, was God’s purpose for establishing His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, a covenant based on Israel keeping His law?” And so, we read of...

D. God’s purpose for his law (3:19-25)

¹⁹What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. ²⁰Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.

² Except, of course, Jesus Christ as our sinless federal head, the representative of His people, kept the covenant of works on our behalf. He merited our salvation through His absolute obedience to God’s law.

³ If this is followed to its reasonable conclusion, it means that when God made His covenant with Abraham, He made two covenants, one with Abraham’s physical seed(s), which was a covenant of works, and one with his spiritual seed, which is Christ. This is how historic 17th century reformed Baptists understood God’s dealings with Abraham, but it is a position that seems to have been unique with them, not with non-reformed Baptists.

²¹Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. ²²But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. ²⁴Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Paul declared that God's covenant with Israel through Moses was intended to be a temporary covenant, which would serve only until Jesus Christ came, to whom the promise of Abraham was given. One might conclude, but would be wrong to do so, that the Mosaic covenant based upon God's law would, therefore, be in conflict with God's promises. But this would be wrong to think so, for the Mosaic Law never promised life. Rather, God gave His law through Moses in order for sin to be recognized and seen in all its hideousness. The law as a covenant served as a "tutor", an instructor which would prepare them and lead them to faith in Jesus Christ.

Now look at verse 25 closely, which reads, "But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." Paul declared that after faith came, that is, faith in Jesus Christ was proclaimed and required in the gospel, there was no longer need for the law as a tutor. Earlier we spoke of those who deny the third use of the law, that the law of God continues as a rule of life for the believer. They wrongly take this verse to argue their position. They say, "Since the law was God's tutor to lead us to Christ, and that after faith in Christ was announced through the gospel, we no longer need to obey God's law. We just need to believe." But it is clear that what Paul was addressing in this passage was God's law as a covenant, not His law as an unchangeable and abiding standard and expression of God's holy nature. Yes, the law as a covenant, as a basis on which the nation of Israel maintained its relationship with God, had come to an end "after faith has come." But God's law as a rule of life continues for believers in this age of grace.

Let us consider lastly in our passage, that...

E. True believers are sons of God and heirs of God's promises to Abraham (3:26-29)

²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

All former distinctions between Jews and Gentiles have come to an end when faith is placed in Jesus Christ. We who believe are in union with Jesus Christ, to whom God made His promise of life. Because every believer is Christ, all believers are alike in Him. There are no distinctions between believers for we all stand in Christ.

II. Several Verses that declare the abiding rule of God's law for the Christian

Let us look at several verses in which the law of God is affirmed and reinforced as the rule of life for believers. We read the following:

1 Corinthians 7:19. *"Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters."*

Romans 7:25. "I thank God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind *I myself serve the law of God*, but with the flesh the law of sin."

Romans 13:8-10. “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

1 John 2:4. “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

1 John 3:24. “Now *he who keeps His commandments abides in Him*, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”

1 John 5:3. “For this is the love of God, *that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*”

Revelation 22:14. “Blessed are those *who do His commandments*, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”

The law of God abides as a rule of life for the believer. True believers order their lives according to God’s commandments.

III. The law of God under the rule of Christ

God’s covenant with Israel mediated through Moses, which was based on law-keeping, came to an end when Jesus Christ died on the cross. With the death of Jesus, God established a new covenant with His people, with Jesus Christ Himself as the basis of the relationship between God and believers in Jesus Christ. God’s testimony to the end of the Mosaic covenant may be seen in the event upon the death of Jesus. We read in Matthew 27:51, “Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.” A relationship with God, thereafter, was available only to those who believed on the crucified, risen, and enthroned King, Jesus Christ.

But the Lord Jesus now reigns over His people according to the standard of God’s law. He gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to His people who enables them to keep the righteousness of God’s law. Paul declared that this was the purpose of God in sending His Son into the world. We read in Romans 8:

³For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴*that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God*, nor indeed can be. ⁸So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹*But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit*, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. (Rom. 8:3-8)

As Christians, we remain under God’s law, but as directed so through Christ, rather than Moses. Although we are not under the law as a covenant, we are under the law to Christ. Paul wrote of this in **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**.

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; ²⁰and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law (*not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ*), that I might win those who are without

law; ²²to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. ²³Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

Let us consider what it is to be under the law toward Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself taught that the law of God was the rule of life for His people. We read of our Lord teaching God's law to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. We read His words in **Matthew 5:17-20**.

¹⁷“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. ¹⁹Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the passage of Scripture in which the above reading is taken, the Lord Jesus was teaching the gathered crowd the way to live before God. They were to live a life of good works. He had said to them, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13), “you are the light of the world” (5:14), and “let your light so shine among men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). In this immediate context the Lord tells these people what determines right conduct. He first tells them that *He came to fulfil God's abiding rule for life, His law*. Again, He declared,

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. (Matt. 5:17-18)

This speaks of His fulfilling of the law in His life even unto death and, I believe, it speaks of His work of salvation in rendering His people righteous according to the standards of God's law and enabling them by the power of the Holy Spirit to live lives patterned by the law of God. He then speaks of *the abiding rule of God's law for people*:

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that unless your righteousness [This is by definition, (1) a life in accord to God's law and (2) a gift of Christ's righteousness credited to the believer through faith alone.] exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will be by no means enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19-20)

The Lord Jesus taught His disciples that they were to order their lives as His disciples according to God's law. Those who fail to teach this to His people, will be called least in the kingdom of God when He returns.

The Lord then began to teach and apply the Ten Commandments to His disciples. This begins with Matthew 5:21f these words:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ ²²But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.”

Jesus addressed the **6th commandment**, “You shall not murder” (5:21). He first referred to the way that the commandment was commonly understood and taught by the scribes and Pharisees, that it was only addressing the unjust taking of physical life. “No” He was saying in essence, “the law of God is spiritual in nature and speaks even to the thoughts and intents of a man's heart.” “But I say unto you that whoever is

angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” In other words, the angry man has broken the spirit of the 6th commandment.

The Lord went on to address other of the 10 commandments in His Sermon on the Mount, first correcting errant belief and practice that was common to the people of that day, and then He proceeded to apply the rule of God’s law in a spiritual manner to the people. He addressed the **7th commandment** in verse 27. In his explanation and application of that law, He spoke of inward lust as well as the sanctity and permanence of marriage.

Our Lord alluded to the **9th commandment** prohibiting bearing false witness against your neighbor in Matthew 5:33ff. We are to be honest in all of our statements, not just when we are swearing that we are telling the truth.

He also spoke to issues reflecting the **10th commandment**, “You shall not covet”, when He warned them not “to lay up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in to steal”, but you are rather “to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Elsewhere Jesus spoke about the matter of being content with clothing and food, being free from worry. Some people are consumed with worry and strive in life, not for the kingdom of God first, but because of covetousness, thinking that security and wellbeing, and happiness are tied to possessions and power, covet the things of the world.

The Lord went on to apply **other Old Testament laws** to the people, still, correcting false understanding and practice and then teaching and reinforcing the rule of law. Consider Matthew 5:38 in which He said,

You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Many wrongly believe that He was changing *the content* of Old Testament law. No, again, He was correcting the wrong understanding and wrong application of the law. When Moses taught “an eye for an eye”, he was speaking about the civil authorities administering appropriate punishment for crime. This law speaks of the principle of justice. When a man commits a crime, the punishment rendered by the civil authorities is to be in proportion to the gravity of the crime he committed, moreover, the law taught that the offender was to make just and equitable restitution--“an eye for an eye.” ***This principle of justice is steadfast and unchanging in the mind of God and should be evident in all nations at all time in history.*** But what had happened was that the people of Israel took God’s law and twisted its understanding in order to justify personal vengeance. “You harm me I have a right to get even, an eye for an eye.” “No” said the Lord Jesus, “you do not seek personal vengeance. When someone harms you, you are not to retaliate. That may be the civil authorities’ responsibility, but you are not to seek vengeance. Turn the other cheek.” And so, we see again, the Lord Jesus showing the spiritual nature of the law and reinforcing its abiding authority upon His hearers.

Let us skip over to the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. Beginning in Matthew 7:21 the Lord Jesus asserted that the rule and standard of God’s law would be the basis of God’s future judgment. Jesus said,

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

Only those who live according to the will of God will be granted everlasting life. Here the Lord setting forth how a person obtains everlasting life; here, He is simply describing the character of the people who will inherit eternal life. This is similar to the idea of Hebrews 10:36, “You have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise (salvation).” And also 1 John 2:17, “The world passes away, and the lust thereof, but He that does the will of God abides for ever.” The narrow way that leads to life is a life ordered by the will of God.

“But what is the will of God?” One might ask. Let us look on in **Matthew 7:21-23**.

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare unto them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice *lawlessness!*’

Here the Lord tells us what the substance of the will of God is by expressing a negative. “Depart from Me, you who practice *lawlessness!*” The King James Version uses the word “iniquity.” The NIV uses the word “evildoers.” The Greek word is *anomia*. *Nomia* is the Greek Word for “law.” The “a” at the beginning of the word makes it a negative. “A” “*nomia*” carries the same idea as another word we have used, *antinomia*. This describes a *lawless* person. What is it to live according to the will of God? It is a life ordered according to the rule of the abiding “law of God.” As our Lord Jesus did, so are we to do.

The major point we wanted to stress is this: the Lord Jesus did not set aside the law of God as a rule of life. He reinforced the law as a rule over all aspects of thought and life. The law of God is what God uses to instruct us in the way of righteousness. It shows us wherein we fail. It will be the basis of God’s judgment on the last day. It shows us our need for God’s mercy in our failure in that we need forgiveness of sins. God’s law shows us we are in need of the empowering of the Holy Spirit and the grace of Christ, for apart from Him, we can do nothing. Jesus Christ, as our Prophet and King, teaches and rules according to God’s will, His abiding, unchanging moral law. But thankfully, Christ also serves as our High Priest, having applied the merits of His own life and death to true believers, so that they cannot be and will not be condemned by the law on that great day. When we placed our faith in the Lord Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we petitioned the Father to accept us for Christ’s sake. We did not ask God to receive us based upon our own attainment to the law of God, but based upon the life of the Lord Jesus, who kept the Law of God perfectly. And then in trusting God to receive us for Christ’s sake, we believed that the death of the Lord Jesus made atonement for our sins.

IV. Popular, but errant belief regarding the law of God under the rule of Christ

Great error exists in the belief of many Christians that biblical law in any and all forms has no place in the life of the Christian. This is unfortunately the position of many, even the majority of evangelical Christians and church attendees. “The law”, they would say, “with any and all of its rules are not to be imposed upon Christians, for the Christian is under grace not law.” The result of this errant teaching is that we have “lawlessness” among Christians with respect to how they live before God, and few are challenging their belief or practice. These people claim to believe the gospel, but they live with no sense of an objective standard of behavior as Christians. They are a law unto themselves. Many times this results in the errant thought that a license to sin is given to the Christian. “Although it is not right to sin”, they would say, if pressed they would say that it actually doesn’t really matter with respect to salvation, “after all, we are saved by grace and not by works.”

I believe much of today’s understanding is the result of the influence and legacy of *classical dispensationalism*.⁴ This is a system of belief about the Bible that was popularized toward the end of the 19th century by a Plymouth Brethren man named **J. N. Darby**. He had a great influence upon **C. I. Scofield**, of Scofield Bible fame, who in turn had great influence in shaping the belief system of a generation of evangelicals, including **Lewis Sperry Chafer** who founded Dallas Theological Seminary whose legacy was assumed by **John Walvoord** and **Charles Ryrie**. Most conservative evangelical pastors and teachers of the 20th century had their views of law and grace shaped directly or indirectly by the teaching held by these men. Their teaching is still predominant and is taught to the people in the pews, not only by pastors and teachers influenced by them, but through their books and study Bibles that have always sold quite well.

⁴ The term *classical dispensationalism* is used to distinguish these views from the position of others who would regard themselves as dispensationalist but repudiate strongly the views of law and grace these above men held. Noted among these *progressive* dispensationalists would be John MacArthur.

What was their position respecting law and grace? The major point was this, that the two systems of relating to God, law and grace, are so different in nature that the two can never co-exist. The Old Testament dispensation of law from Moses to Calvary was an age of law. But now is the age of grace. Law was law, and now grace is grace.

This system of teaching respecting law and grace appears to be a very logical one and it is believed to be taught in the Scriptures. And the manner in which some of these writers have set forward their teaching has reinforced their teaching to many others. They view law and grace as two principles distinct, even antithetical (opposite) to one another. Often these two principles of law and grace are presented in by-polar terms, compared and mostly contrasted with one another. Here are **Lewis Sperry Chafer's** words:

Since law and grace are opposed to each other at every point, it is impossible for them to co-exist, either as a ground of acceptance before God *or as a rule of life*. Of necessity, therefore, the Scriptures of the New Testament which present the facts and scope of grace, both assume and directly teach *that the law is done away*. Consequently, it is not in force in the present age in any sense whatsoever. This present nullification of the law applies not only to the legal code of the Mosaic system and the law of the kingdom (i.e. the Sermon on the Mount—Lars) but *to every possible application of the principle of the law*.⁵

The result is that a certain view of grace is constructed and a certain view of law, and these become overarching principles by which the Bible is interpreted and taught.⁶

This view of law and grace resulted in some significant interpretive problems. After all, if the age of grace began with Calvary or Pentecost, and everything before was under the dispensation of the law, what application is there for the Christian of Old Testament teaching? For that matter, what teaching of the Lord Jesus is for New Testament Christians since Jesus Himself was under the law and was teaching Jews who themselves were still under law? The conclusion of the dispensationalists, such as Scofield, Chaffer, Walvoord, and Ryrie, was that most of what Jesus taught His disciples is not to be regarded as authoritative for Christians.

These dispensational theologians assume wrongly that whenever God's blessing was contingent on obedience, then it must be due to the works-righteousness principle. Therefore, they conclude that any and all such commands are legalistic and do not apply to the New Testament believer. They believe that any and all works mentioned in the Bible are meritorious. This leads them to think in only two categories, grace and meritorious works of law-keeping. Any and all commands that demand obedience in order to obtain God's blessing are viewed as legalistic and should not be applied to the Christian. Here are the words of **Lewis Sperry Chafer**, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary:

When any work is undertaken for God by which it is hoped thereby to gain favor, that work is wrought of necessity on the basis of pure law. On the other hand, when any work is undertaken for God because it is recognized that divine favor and blessing already have been received, it is wrought in harmony with pure grace. Thus the highest ideal of grace if prostituted by the motive of securing divine favor, takes on the character of law.⁷

Here is a more extended statement of the dispensationalist's hermeneutic as articulated by Chafer:

The second major distinction between the teachings of the law and the teachings of grace is seen in the varying order between divine blessing and the human obligation. This variation is found to exist when the principle of grace is compared with the principle of the law in any form of the law whatsoever. (Note the absoluteness of this statement—Lars) It is equally true of the law of Moses, the law of the kingdom (here is referring to his teaching of a future Jewish millennium—Lars), or, when legally stated, of the larger conception of

⁵ See Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace, The Glorious Theme* (Zondervan House, 1922, renewed 1950) p. 215.

⁶ See Chafer, *Grace*, pp. 25f, 86f, 91f, 106, 179f, 182ff. See also this errant hermeneutical principle advocated by Charles Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Word Publishing, 1990) p. 57, 60.)

⁷ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1922, 1950), p. 106.

the law as being the whole revealed will of God. When the human obligation is presented first, and the divine blessings made to depend on the faithful discharge of this obligation it is of and in conformity with law. When the divine blessing is presented first, and the human obligation follows, it is of and in conformity with pure grace. The varying orders under law and grace may be stated in the words “do and live”: or “live and do.” In the case of the law, it is *do* something with a view of being something; in the case of grace, it is be *made* something with a view to doing something. Is the Christian under grace saved and kept *by* good works? The law said, “If you do good, I will bless you”; grace says, “I have blessed you, now do good.” Under the law, man lives well to *become* accepted of God; under grace man lives well since it *becomes* one to live well who is already accepted. The law presents first a human work to be *done*: grace always presents first a divine work to be *believed*. Law begins with the question as to what man ought to *do*; grace always presents first a divine work to be *believed*. Law begins with the question as to what man ought to *do*; grace begins with the question as to what God has already *done*. Every word of the law revelation is thus made to be a conditional covenant of *human* works: while every word of the grace revelation is made to be an unconditional covenant of *divine* works.⁸

The result of this hermeneutical principle is that all works demanded of God in order to receive His blessing were to be seen as meritorious works, in other words, which is by definition legalistic. This results in the classical dispensationalists picking and choosing what portions of Scripture apply to New Testament Christians. The outcome of this thinking is that whole portions of the Word of God are practically excluded from the Christian canon. Chafer wrote:

The teachings of grace, it will be found, comprise all of the teachings of the Epistles, the Acts, and also certain portions of the Gospels apart from their mere historical features...

In discovering the fact and scope of the teachings of grace, it will be noted that, (1) The Christian’s daily life is to be directed only by teachings of grace, (2) The law is excluded from the grace teachings of Christ, (3) The law is excluded from the teachings of the Apostles, and (4) the life and service of the Apostle Paul is an illustration of a life which is lived under grace.⁹

Here we see how classical dispensationalists advocated only some of Scripture to be the authoritative Word of God to New Testament Christians. This hermeneutical principle is extended to the teachings of Jesus Christ in the gospels also. Only “grace” teachings of Jesus are to be understood as having authority for the Christian. The “legalistic” teachings of Jesus were to the Jews that He was addressing who were still under the law of Moses. And so, dispensationalists cautioned Christians not to regard all of Jesus’ teachings as authoritative instruction to them. Chafer wrote,

There is a dangerous and entirely baseless sentiment abroad which assumes that every teaching of Christ must be binding during this age simply because Christ said it. The fact is forgotten that Christ, while living under, keeping, and applying the law of Moses, also taught the principles of His future kingdom, and, at the end of His ministry and in relation to His cross, He also anticipated the teachings of grace. If this three-fold division of the teachings of Christ is not recognized, there can be nothing but confusion of mind and consequent contradiction of truth.¹⁰

The informed (and reformed) Christian almost reels under the absurdity of these words. Again, the point that we are making is that they fail to understand that ***the Bible does speak of God’s blessing upon ones who are obedient to His law, but that God does not bless the Christian because He regards obedience as meritorious.*** It is simply a just thing for God to bless those who are obedient and conform to righteousness. Obedience need not be viewed as always meritorious.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 183f.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 86f.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 179f.

Now, why am I saying this? To put down a certain group of teachers? No, by no means. In fact, there was a time when I believed and taught these very things. The reason that I bring this up is that most evangelical teachers and pastors have had their views of the law's relationship to the Christian shaped by the influence of the position set forth.

There are some basic problems with the position that have just been described. Let me identify a few major ones:

1) They assume that any (legal) demand upon a Christian is to be viewed as "legalism", which is condemned in Scripture. Grace to them is viewed as *freedom* from obligation and the consequences of sin. Grace to them is viewed as freedom from obligation and the consequences of anything that may be seen as a law. But they misunderstand what legalism is. They would say legalism exists whenever a law is set before a Christian with a responsibility to do it or else consequences will result. Because they view grace as releasing an individual of moral consequences, any demand placed upon the Christian is viewed as legalistic, unbiblical, and contrary to grace.

2) They assume that legalism exists anytime a teacher or preacher stresses a condition to be met in order for God's blessing to be received, a condition that requires personal effort on the part of a Christian. That position on law and grace assumes that the fulfilling of that obligation must necessarily be *meritorious* in nature. They would say, "*You cannot make a demand on a Christian to do something or that is works-righteousness.*" But this is a logical fallacy. Let me explain. One can be required to meet certain conditions for blessing and yet if those conditions are met, it does not necessarily mean that you merited the favor, earned the blessing. The Lord Jesus Himself makes very great demands upon Christians in the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2& 3.¹¹

3) They separate the Scriptures making some portions applicable to the Christian and some that are not. The basis of determination is whether or not principles of grace or principles of law are found, as they define them. Anything that suggests duty or obligation that carries threat or consequences is viewed as legal and opposed to grace, and is to be regarded as applicable only to Jews before Calvary, or to a period of time in the future after the rapture, as they define it, when once again, they say, God will deal with people based upon law during a seven year tribulation.

Now thankfully their position has been modified somewhat because of justified opposition over the years, but historically this has been the position of dispensationalists respecting law and grace: they claim that most of the teachings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels do not apply to the Christian. Regarding the Sermon on the Mount, Scofield wrote in his study Bible,

For these reasons the Sermon on the Mount in its primary application gives neither the privilege nor the duty for the Church. These are found in the Epistles.¹²

Now one might say to me, "*But pastor, I don't hold to the things that you have described, therefore I do not see the relevance.*" Here is the relevance:

(1) Although you may not understand what I have been saying or maybe you do not embrace the views that I have been describing, the point is this: the books you read or the pastor who teaches you may hold to these views, and they will influence the way in which you and your family are preached to and taught. He may not say it openly. He may not even know that he himself is doing it, but he will tend to only teach and preach from those passages that seem to speak of grace *as he understands it*. Passages or teaching that might confront or make demands will be passed over as being *law* passages. The result is that the ability to confront sin and demand obedience will not be present. Those passages that contain dire warnings of failure will be absent from that teacher's subject matter. When this occurs the very authority of the Word has been stripped away. You will have a people who feel they are forgiven, think they are in grace, as they are being ravaged by sin and are in danger of God's judgment, and yet are unaware of it.

¹¹ Cf. Rev. 2:5; 2:10; 3:2-4; 18-20; 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

¹² C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1909, 1917), p. 1,000.

(2) The message of the gospel in evangelism is frequently stripped of its demand of repentance from sin and a full turning of one's life to God in Christ as a condition for salvation. The Bible teaches that unless a man believes on the Lord Jesus and unless a man repents of sin, turning from sin and submitting to the rule of God over His life through Jesus Christ, that man will die in his sins. But because it is falsely believed by many that salvation by grace means you are not to place any demands of taking action upon the sinner because that would be works-righteousness, the resulting "gospel" is a message is stripped of demands of repentance and contains only pleadings to "believe" only. They redefine what repentance means. They teach that repentance is not the sinner turning from his sin to God, but simply changing his mind as to his belief toward Jesus Christ.

(3) I know this is a problem among evangelicals today by the common reaction to strong teaching and preaching that confronts sin, commands obedience, and places demands upon believers. The first reaction is suspicion and then maybe comes grief. There may be sin present that is held fast and dear, sin that has not been repented of, and when it is perceived that the preacher is saying you cannot have the blessing of God while this is present, disappointment and grief results. One then will commonly do one of two things. (1) *Either* he can go away sorrowful, as say the rich young ruler whom Jesus demanded that he sell all his goods and give to the poor and then follow him. (2) *Or* he can take the easier course, accuse the preacher of being an unloving, self-righteous legalist who robs Christians of their joy by violating principles of grace and by making legalistic demands upon people. In this way he can dismiss the Word of God in its confronting authority.

The skewed view of God's law that we rehearsed basically says of Holy Scripture:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, **but only some of it** is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Only the 'grace' teaching of Scripture applies and is beneficial for the Christian."

But you know what the Word tells us. Paul wrote,

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and **all of Scripture is profitable** for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16)

May the Lord help us to understand rightly the law of God and its abiding moral rule for our lives. Let us be as Paul, who was never in a place or situation but in which he did regard himself as "under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21).

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f.)
