

# The Role and Limits of the Law in the Christian's Life

(Regarding Old Testament promises and the Christian life see the companion paper,  
"The Unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles")

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## The Role and Limits of the Law in the Christian's Life

### Introduction

Why is this subject in a chapter dealing with "Motivation for Following Christ?" Because Christians must interact with God's law as it is expressed throughout Scripture if we take seriously that all Scripture is *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2 Tim. 3:16). Much of the God breathed Scripture given to us is called "law". How we use the law can have a significant positive or negative effect on our motivation to follow Christ. The Scribes, Pharisees and Lawyers prided themselves that they used the law rightly but they had no motivation to follow Christ. Jesus spoke of them, "*Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness* (Matt. 23:28). Jesus certainly did not intend for us to ignore the law for he says, "*Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire*" (Matt. 13:41-42).

Common English uses of "law"

One of the difficulties we face when studying the law is that our English word law is not used with nearly as wide a range of meaning as the Greek and Hebrew terms for law were used by Israel. We can overcome this difficulty by patiently immersing ourselves in the various contexts in Scripture where the terms are used. It is beneficial to think for a moment about the two most common ways we use the term.

1. "The law" is a collection of the commands, or rules, for our behavior issued to us by one in authority over us. We say, "the laws of the state", or "the law of our mother". An individual or body has authority to require us to behave in a certain way and proscribe and enforce consequences if we do not obey. The law informs us of what behavior is expected and the consequences for not behaving accordingly.
2. "The law" being a description of something that is always operative in nature. We say, "the law of gravity" or Newton's "laws of motion". Such "laws" are "natural", they exist and cannot be violated in the physical realm (at least by us). For example, no one has ever generated a force in one direction which has not resulted in an equal force in the opposite direction. This use of "law" is somewhat synonymous with the term "principle".

The term "law" in Scripture is used often in the first sense (Deut. 30:10), and in a few instances in the second. However in Scripture the term law is used in a number of additional ways.

### Uses of the term law in scripture<sup>1</sup>

As a synonym for Scripture itself.

John 10:34, 15:25, 1Cor. 14:21, Rom. 3:19 - Jesus can refer to statements from the book of Psalms as written in the Jew's law. Paul can refer to statements from the prophet Isaiah as written in the law. It is reasonable to assume that there is not something especially "law like" in Isaiah or the Psalms that would cause them to be singularly referred to as law, but that Jesus and Paul could refer to all of the Old Testament as law. Also note the OT quotes preceding Romans 3:19.

Isa. 1:10

In this text the phrases *the Word of the Lord* and *the Law of our God* are synonymous. And the exhortation to *hear the Word of the Lord* is referring to the prophecy Isaiah is about to give in the verses which follow.

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1. Greek *nomos*, Hebrew *tora*.

In what sense then can a Jew refer to any portion of Scripture as “law”? And, how can those portions of Scripture *which are not commands* be called “law”? Likely in the sense that the Word of God (any category; promise, command, curse, doctrine, prophecy, etc.) is an *authoritative* revelation about whatever it addresses. The required act of obedience to this revelation of “law” is faith or belief.

*Referring to the Law of Moses, the Pentateuch.*

Neh. 8:1-8, 18 - A *dominate* use of the term “law” in the Bible is to refer to the “law of Moses”, the first five books of the Old Testament referred to as the Pentateuch.<sup>2</sup> The phrase *law of Moses*, or phrases with the identical meaning, occur 30(?) times in the Bible. There are xx places where the phrase *law of God* is a synonym for *law of Moses* (vs. 8, 18). Finally there are many places where a biblical author simply uses the term *law* by itself, but the intended meaning is the *law of Moses* (vss. 2, 7).

Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to begin rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem in 445 BC, after a remnant of the Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity. These verses give us a glimpse of what they understood the law to refer to. *The book of the Law of Moses* (vs. 1) is *the Law* (vs. 2) is *the Book of the Law* (vs. 3) is *the Law* (vs. 7) and finally is *the law of God* (vss. 8, 18).

*Deut 31:24-26, Jos. 1:1-8*

The terminology used in Nehemiah is very ancient (aprox. 1000 years earlier) in Israel’s history and originated when the Mosaic covenant was established at the Exodus. The Law of Moses, that is, the law given by God through Moses, was preserved in *this book of the Law*.

In Nehemiah 8:1-8 it is obvious that the references to the law, are references to *the Law of Moses*, which we can clearly identify as the Pentateuch. However, in how many other places where the Jews simply use phrases like “the law” or “the law of God” do they mean “the Law of Moses”? In many places. Consider Gal. 3:17-24.

*Gal. 3:1-24*

The phrase *works of the law*. has been the subject of almost endless study and controversy. What “law” is being referred to in this phrase?

Vss. 2, 5, 10a - Paul uses the phrase “works of the law” three times.

Vs. 10b - In verse 10b Paul quotes from Deut. 27:26 and we can see clearly Paul is referring to *all things that are written in the book of the law*. We know this to be the book of the Law of Moses.

Vs. 17 - Verse 17 confirms that “law” in Galatians 3 is referring to the Law of Moses, given by God at Mount Sinai, 430 years after He had established the Abrahamic Covenant. Law here means law of Moses. We consider the law of Moses further but if we miss this meaning in Pauline passages, such as these in Galatians, we could go far astray in understanding.

*Luke 24:44, Acts 28:23*

The Lord’s expression, *Law of Moses and the prophets*, likely indicates that in the phrase, *Law and prophets*, “Law” is abbreviated for “Law of Moses”.

*Luke 2:22-23, 39*

*Law of Moses* (vs. 22) is equivalent to *law of the Lord* (vs. 23, 39).

In view of the above, anytime in the New Testament when we come across the term law and phrases as the law of God, law and prophets, before concluding some other concept of law is in view, we ought to consider if the term or phrase should be understood as *the law of Moses*.

*Law as a custom, rule, or principle, or norm.*

Rom. 7:21-25 - Paul is not referring to the law of Moses at this point, or even a command of God. He is referring to something that operates so consistently and something which he cannot resist, or deny: he says *I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good* (vs. 21). This law he found, that evil always exists within him (vs. 21), he refers to as *the law of*

2. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

*sin* which is in his members (vs. 23). This usage is similar to our English usage when we refer to the law of gravity. One can count on this always occurring. We could say, such a law is always enforced.

Rom. 8:2-3

Paul's use of law here falls into this category of principle or norm.

*The law of God and law of Christ in some sense distinct from the law of Moses.*

1 Cor. 9:20-21, Gal. 6:2 - *ESV - To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law [of Moses] I became as one under the law [of Moses] (though not being myself under the law [of Moses]) that I might win those under the law [of Moses]. 21 To those outside the law [of Moses] I became as one outside the law [of Moses] (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law [of Moses].*

In recent years there has been much discussion regarding the meaning of the phrase, *the law of Christ*. These expressions by Paul are discussed further below.

### **Special Considerations Regarding the use of the term Law in Scripture**

*Law as a collection of God's commandments, curses, blessings and promises.*

Deut. 30:10, Amos 2:4, Matt. 5:17-18 - This is not a separate use of the term law but a central idea in the term, especially when reference is made to the Law of Moses, or the law of God. Sometimes we can use the term law so frequently we begin to forget that what we are talking about is a *collection* of God's commandments, curses, and blessings to regulate our behavior. In this sense the law represents an entire legal system of:

1. Commands which express *the will of a personal God* for our behavior. The law is a collection of God's *commandments* for His people. For the faithful the commandments are not "the law" but "*Thy law*" or "*Your law*", it is a personal matter. God is not an "it".
2. Blessings or rewards promised to us if we obey His commands.
3. Curses, "promises" to us if we disobey His commands.

This "legal system", the law, regulates our relationship to the Lawgiver, who is God.

This law was put into written form for Israel in "the book of the Law". The law of Moses actually contains more than these three which is considered below.

*1 Sam. 15:22, 1 Cor. 7:18-19*

There is an assumption running throughout the Bible, it is always present, but sometimes lost sight of. That assumption is that God's commandments must be obeyed. Every biblical writer, writes with this assumption in place. And there are always grave consequences when God's commandments are disobeyed by men or angels. The entire plan of salvation deals with the fact that men have not obeyed God's commandments.

*Is the term law used as a reference to the decalogue?*

Decalogue is short hand for ten commandments, deca meaning 10, logue referring to words or speech. Thus, the ten words. This is the OT language of Ex. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, 10:4; the ten words (Heb. bara). The term law is seldom used in Scripture to refer explicitly to the decalogue. By saying this there is no intent to diminish the importance of this *portion* of the law of Moses, which is given a *special prominence* within the law itself. However, the Jewish use of the term law is seldom a minimizing use, that is, used in a way to refer to only a portion of the law of Moses.

*Ex. 24:12, Deut 5:22*

The decalogue was written by God Himself and in Ex. 24:12 the *torah* (law) referred to is the ten commandments. The decalogue is also referred to as *the words of the [mosaic] covenant* (Ex. 34:28) and *His covenant which He commanded Israel to perform* (Deut. 4:13).

*Matt 5:17-44*

It may at first appear that Jesus is referring to the decalogue alone in these verses but this conclusion is not supportable when the whole passages is considered. Out of the six portions of the law referred to only two are from the decalogue; you shall not murder (vs. 21) and you

shall not commit adultery (vs. 23). The remaining four regarding divorce, oaths, an eye for an eye, and loving one's neighbor are from other portions of the law.

*Rom. 2:20-21*

Some have appealed to Romans 2:20-22 which refers to four<sup>3</sup> commands in the decalogue to teach that the "law" in verses 14-15, which is written on the consciences of Gentiles, is the decalogue. This interpretation is often presented in a discussion of the Sabbath (fourth commandment) and the concept of "unchanging moral law"<sup>4</sup>. Certainly the "law" as used here *includes* the decalogue but those who have *sinned in the Law* (vs. 12) refers to the Jews, so law here means *more* than the decalogue. The phrase *without law* (vs. 12) refers to Gentiles who *do not have the law*. They are not only without the decalogue, but they are without the entire law of Moses (vs. 14) which Israel possessed. Surely in verse 17, 18 and 20 law refers to the Law of Moses and it should not be forgotten that in Romans 2 Paul is addressing the Jewish mind set (vs. 17).

Thus, the thorny question of exactly which commands of the Mosaic Law are written on the consciences of the Gentiles cannot be answered by reducing the content of "law" in romans 2 to the decalogue and then identifying this with the work of the law written in the heart of the Gentiles (vs. 15). What Paul must mean in vs. 15 is, the Gentiles show the work [of some portions] of the [Mosaic] law written into their hearts.<sup>5</sup> This is discussed further below.

*Rom. 13:8-10*

Some may appeal to this passage for an example of the use of the term law to *explicitly* refer to the decalogue. Though Paul quotes the five commandments of the second table of the decalogue, his statement, *and if there is any other commandment*, indicates that there certainly are other commandments in the law and these five I've quoted, and all the others, are summed up in the command to love one's neighbor as oneself.

It is clear from verse 10 that *the law* being fulfilled by keeping the commandment to love my neighbor is not *limited* to the decalogue, nor can we say it is even summarized by the decalogue since the command to love, which is the summary, is not part of the decalogue. The law referred to in verses 8-10 *includes* the second table of the decalogue *and* all the other commandments in the Mosaic law which have bearing on my relationship to my neighbor, the *if there is any other commandment* [and there is] commands.

*Conclusion*

Other than the historical reference in Deuteronomy to the giving of the decalogue, the term law is not used explicitly to refer to the decalogue. Sometimes English readers have a tendency to read their New Testaments as if law often means the ten commandments. This tendency should be avoided. This being said, it is still evident that the decalogue continues to receive a special emphasis in the NT evidenced by the number of references made to it. Perhaps surprisingly though, the references are almost all to the second table.

*Use of the term "letter" to refer to the law of Moses and the decalogue.*

Rom. 2:27-29 - Paul uses the term "writing" or "letter" as a technical expression<sup>6</sup> to refer to the law of Moses. This use places special emphasis on the fact that the Lord had *put His law in writing* for Israel. The use of the term heightens Israel's accountability to obey God. Knowledge increases responsibility. To have the law of God in writing increases knowledge. *Letter* or *written code* in verses 26-27 has the same meaning as *law* throughout the chapter, this being the law of Moses as explained above.

3. Assuming that the reference to "abhor idols" is referring to the first two commandments.

4. Meaning a command of God which is applicable to all people for all time regardless if they are covenantal members, Jew or Gentile, or living before or after the coming of Christ.

5. Unless we are willing to reduce the term law in romans 2 to mean the decalogue or believe that the entire Mosaic law is written into the hearts of Gentiles, we must deal with the "thorny" question.

*Rom. 7:6* Here *letter* is also used as another term describing the law of Moses.

*2 Cor. 3:6-7* Verse 7 makes it clear that in this context *the letter* has a specific reference to the ten commandments which were written in stone. That the decalogue is here referred to as a ministry of death relates in a special way to curses associated with the Mosaic covenant. In Ex. 34:28 and Deut. 4:13 the decalogue is referred to as the covenant itself. This is discussed further below.

Regarding Paul's use of the term *letter* to describe the law it is significant to note that in all three cases he uses this term when contrasting the ministry of the Spirit with the law; *circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter (Rom. 2:29), so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. (Rom. 7:6), [He] made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2Cor. 3:6)*. This is considered further below.

### **Understanding the Mosaic Law in relation to Gentiles**

*The term law applied to Gentiles*

It is instructive to ask: Is there a non Jewish, non covenantal, use of the term law applied to Gentiles? When it is understood that the "law of Moses" was given to Israel, not to any other nation, it is worthwhile to find those places where Scripture speaks of a law given to *Gentiles*, or where Scripture uses expressions which are synonymous with the idea of law applied to Gentiles. Such a study reveals that there are only a few places where this is done. However, this does not warrant the conclusion that Gentiles do not sin.

*Rom. 4:15-16, 5:13-14* Paul's statements that *where there is no law there is no transgression (4:15) and sin is not imputed when there is no law (5:13)* show that he makes a significant distinction between Gentiles who were not given the written law and Jews who were. Though these types of statements from Paul might lead one to think that God does not hold Gentiles responsible to obey anything, such an understanding would be a grave mistake, because Paul states in 5:13, *for until the law sin was in the world, and nevertheless [i.e. even before the law of Moses] death reigned from Adam to Moses*.

*Rom. 2:15* Paul clearly believes that there is a law of God written on Gentile's consciences.

*Rom. 3:19* If "those under the law" refers to "all the world" in the following phrase then this is a clear reference to Gentiles being under *nomos*. An alternate interpretation holds that those under the law still refers to Israel and the point is: if Israel who had the law so clearly given to them could not keep it and attain righteousness, then it is clear that all the other nations don't have a shred of a chance. If Israel, being under the law, is unrighteous and condemned, then everyone else is *most certainly* unrighteous and condemned.

*Rom. 1:32* This text is significant. Even though the term *nomos* is not used, the idea of law is clearly present.<sup>7</sup> God expects men and women not to behave in certain ways (expressed throughout chapter 1) and when they do they are deserving of death. There is surely a *law of God*, with its prohibitions to refrain from certain behavior, its commands to engage in other behavior, and its insistence upon consequences of judgement when one fails to do so - there is surely such a law over the Gentiles. Verse 32 is parallel with 2:15 in that the Gentiles have (or at least

6. Used not in its ordinary sense meaning letters or writing.

7. The term translated judgement (NKJV), ordinance (NASB), decree (ESV) is Greek, *dikaiwma*, (*dikaioma*) with the following definitions given in the BDAG lexicon; 1) a regulation relating to just or right action, *regulation, requirement, commandment*, 2) an action that meets expectations as to what is right or just, *righteous deed*.



sometime had) knowledge of these expectations of God.

### Conclusion

The conclusion I'm coming to is that the idea of a people having "received the law" is so distinctively Jewish, especially for Jewish writers, that they seldom, if ever, speak of Gentiles as having the law. However, as is clear from Paul in Romans 1 and 2 this does not mean that God is not holding Gentiles accountable for their behavior to a righteous standard that His justice will uphold. Paul writes that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (1:18)*, a statement he is clearly making regarding the Gentiles.

### Unchanging Moral Law

These considerations lead us to the concept called *unchanging moral law*. Meaning a command of God which is applicable to all people for all time regardless if they are living *from Adam to Moses* or after the law was given. Regardless if they are members of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants (Israel) or outside of those covenants (Gentiles) this unchanging moral law still applies to them. This concept is also very close in meaning to the expression *natural law*, meaning that all people everywhere have this law in their consciences as a result of being created in the image of God.

There is much discussion regarding the *content* of this unchanging moral law. Some, especially from the Puritans forward, have advocated that the decalogue has a 1 to 1 correspondence with unchanging moral law. This is not the position taken in this study and this matter will be considered further below in relation to covenantal provisions in the law of Moses. But for now consider:

### Continuing with Rom. 1:32

Regarding Romans chapter 1 it is instructive to ask, how many of the ten commandments do we find in Rom. 1<sup>8</sup> (NF means Not Found)?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>1st</b> - worship God only, vs. 18-25  | <b>2nd</b> - making images of false gods, vs. 23                                 |
| <b>3rd</b> - taking God's name in vain, NF <sup>9</sup>                           | <b>4th</b> - keeping the Sabbath, NF   |
| <b>5th</b> - honor your parents, vs. 30   | <b>6th</b> - shall not murder, vs. 29  |
| <b>7th</b> - adultery, vs. 29, a specific type of sexual immorality <sup>10</sup> |  |
| <b>8th</b> - stealing, NF <sup>11</sup>   | <b>9th</b> - bearing false witness, vs. 29, witness, a specific type of deceit), |
| <b>10th</b> - covetousness, vs. 29.   |  |

So the 3rd, 4th and 8th commandments are not directly referenced. Nor is there a 1 to 1 correspondence in meaning for the 7th and the 9th commandments.

Another instructive question is, are there also things Paul includes in Romans 1 which are not found in the decalogue? It seems so, such as; unthankful, homosexuality, envy, pride, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful, to mention a few.

What is the point of this exercise? In Romans chapter one we are seeing things we can label "unchanging moral law"<sup>12</sup> and all of these things are sins of the Gentiles who have sinned

8. The advocates that the decalogue summarizes unchanging moral law over the Gentiles may say that the missing commands are in the general phrases like, "all unrighteousness" (vs. 29) and "those things which are not fitting" (vs. 28). But, if Paul's "theology of law" was strongly oriented to the idea that the decalogue is the law under which the Gentiles would be judged, then why resort to writing other lists as we have in Romans 1? Or shouldn't these lists at least be a supplement to the decalogue? These matters are discussed further below.

9. note regarding Rom 2:24 that the Gentiles blaspheme God's name because of Israel. Is this equivalent to what the 3rd command has in mind?

10. The NU text (and thus the NASB, NIV, and ESV) does not contain sexual immorality.

11. Note regarding Rom 2:21-22 regarding stealing addressed to the Jews. It is interesting that when addressing Jews Paul quotes direct examples from the law but he doesn't seem to do this anywhere when pointing out Gentile sinfulness (chapter 1) - this needs to be researched further.

“without [having] the [written] law [of Moses]” (Rom. 2:12). But we cannot simply equate this with the decalogue. Nor can we say that if the decalogue does not condemn something, then it is not sin. Thus, the decalogue does not reveal *all* of the unchanging moral law. The decalogue served a different purpose within the Mosaic covenant. A different approach is needed to determine what law applies to the Gentiles and what applies to Israel in the Mosaic Covenant.

*Rom. 2:12*

Given the above understandings Romans 2:12 should be understood down the following lines: *For as many as have sinned [by violating unchanging moral law] without [the] law [of Moses] will also perish without [the] law [of Moses], and as many as have sinned in the law [of Moses] will be judged by the law [of Moses].*

*Regarding Adam*

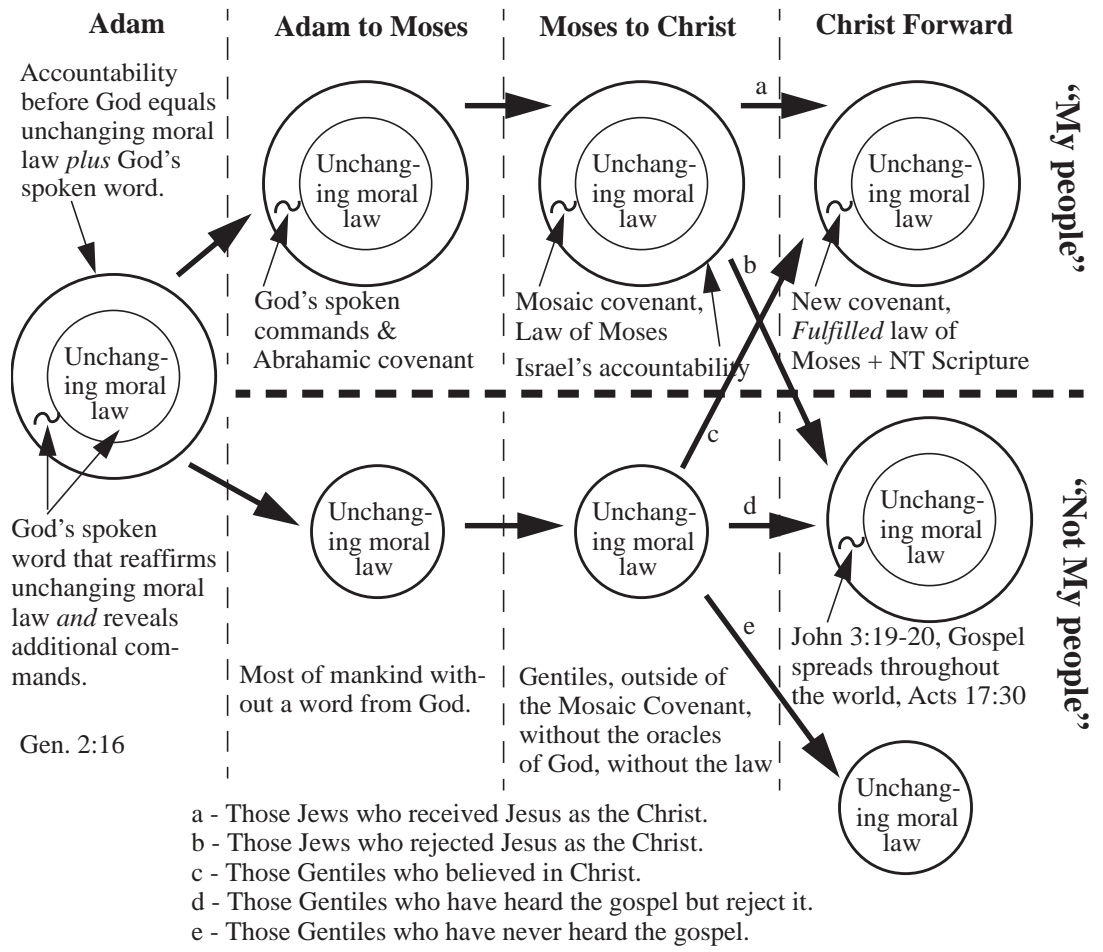
It is also instructive to think about Adam and Eve when first created. Was the command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil unchanging moral law, written on Adam and Eve’s consciences as a result of them being made in God’s image? Of course not. However, what more fundamental “law” was written on their consciences, such that they *immediately* felt guilty when Adam disobeyed? Answer: That *whatever* God commands *ought* to be obeyed, regardless if such knowledge of His command was found written within them *or* communicated to them by a spoken word from God. They were responsible to obey *both*; that which was written within them and that which was communicated to them by a spoken word from God.

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12. There is no attempt here to say that all unchanging moral law is revealed in Romans 1, rather that what *is* contained in romans 1 is in the category of unchanging moral law.

*Summary of Concepts*

The following figure summarizes the ideas developed thus far regarding law from God to mankind (Jew and Gentile) *throughout* mankind's history. The heavy arrows represent the flow of humanity through history.



*Summary*

What people are accountable to God to obey is the combination of the law written in their consciences as they are made in the image of God *and* any additional expressions of God's will for them, i.e. expressed in His spoken word, as to Adam and Adam's early descendants, then to Abraham and the Patriarchs.

What people are accountable to God to obey *varies on the basis of the relationship they sustain to Him*. The *covenants* God initiated establish the relationship between Him and His people and a corresponding expectation of obedience expressed in His word to them. Each covenant comes with *a word from God*. With Adam<sup>13</sup>, with Abraham, with Israel under Moses and the Mosaic covenant, and the NT church with Christ and the New covenant He mediates. Thus the content of the outer portions of the circles in the figure change with the progress of redemptive history. It is very important that people do not attempt to deal with God as if they are living in a period of redemptive history in which they are not.

The law God revealed in His word expresses *both* the unchanging moral law, which is repeat-

13. Though the term Covenant is not used in regard to Adam's initial relationship with God, many understand the initial arrangement established between God and Adam as a covenant, and have labeled it the Covenant of works. Hos. 6:7 may be translated, *But like Adam they transgressed the covenant* (ESV), indicating that adam violated a covenant previously established by God with him.

edly suppressed and ignored by sinful man (Romans 1), *and* the specific covenantal obligations for the period of redemptive history in which one is living. Adam was obligated to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16). Abraham was obligated to leave his country and circumcise his household (Gen. 26:5, Heb. 11:8). Israel, after being delivered from bondage in Egypt was obligated to obey the law of Moses.

Returning to the question, “Is there a non Jewish, non covenantal, use of the term law applied to Gentiles?”

*Gentiles receiving the law*

When considering this question the clearest references of Gentiles being given the law are those which refer to the Messiah saving and blessing the Gentiles. When He does they receive the law! This will be considered below but for now briefly consider the following passages.

*Isa. 42:1-4*

The result of the Messiah establishing justice in the earth is that the coastlands (those places where Gentiles dwelt) shall wait for His law.

*Isa. 2:2-3, Micah 4:2*

There are widely differing views as to how and when these prophecies will be fulfilled but it should be noted that the scripture represents it as a great blessing when Gentile nations begin to seek and obey the law of God.

### ***Understanding the Mosaic Law in relation to Israel***

*Deut. 4:6-8, Rom. 3:1-2, 9:4*

At the time of the Exodus God’s Law was given to Israel as it had never before been given to any people group. And at this time it was only given to Israel.

*The law contains unchanging moral law and covenantal provisions.*

The law given to Israel contains *both* what we’ve called unchanging moral law and *specific* commands and promises based on the Mosaic Covenant with Israel for this period of redemptive history.

The unchanging moral law, previously existing only in the consciences of men, was now written and given to Israel. That Paul teaches that Gentiles can, in some measure, do the things that are *written* in the law of Moses, even without having the law, confirms that we should view the law of Moses as *containing* God’s unchanging moral law for all mankind.

We should also recognize that in the law of Moses as given to Israel there is no attempt to strongly distinguish between unchanging moral law and covenantal provisions. There appear even to be single laws that contain both aspects within them<sup>14</sup>. It is later revelation given in the New Covenant (NT Scripture) that guides us in distinguishing between the two.

*Examples of covenantal provisions*

And few examples of commands in the law based on the covenantal relationship God had with Israel unique from Gentiles.

Gen. 17:10, Lev. 12:3 - Sign of circumcision.

Exodus 31:13 - Sabbath - sign that Israel has been set apart for God, i.e. sanctified.

Deut 16:1 - Passover - a remembrance that Israel was delivered by God from His judgement *and* a looking forward to the true passover lamb, Jesus Christ.

*Historical provisions relating to idolatry*

A number of the commands and practices required by the Mosaic law of Israel were designed to protect them from returning to various forms of idolatry. Such laws cannot be simply turned into unchanging moral law. A few examples are:

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14. Examples are considered below.

Deut. 7:2-4 - laws forbidding intermarrying.

Lev. 19:27-28, Deut. 14:1, 1 Kings 18:28 - laws dealing with how one's beard was kept or trimmed, forbidding cutting oneself, and tattooing - these practices were directly associated with forms of idolatry of the surrounding nations.

Deut. 12:30-31 - the general principle - you shall not worship the Lord in that way. The law of Moses is definitely influenced by the historical situation into which Israel was to settle when surrounded by various forms of idolatry. Such laws cannot be simply turned into unchanging moral law.

*Those laws designed to be typological.*

Numerous practices commanded in the Mosaic law were designed to represent the work and offices that Christ would do and fulfill when He came to save God's people.

Col. 2:16, Heb. 8:5, 10:1 speak to this aspect of the law.

Priests & Offerings, aspects of Israel's prophetic and kingly offices.

*Those laws associated with theocracy*

Deut. 16:18-19 made provisions for judges throughout the land who would apply God's law to the cases that arose amongst the people.

(research the idea that all (most) people in this society were members of the MC and all covenant members were required to keep the whole law. But, what about the "strangers" in the land? They certainly were not required to obey certain aspects of the law, i.e. passover?, feasts, etc. unless they joined themselves to Israel and entered the covenant)

*Israel's inheriting the land*

Israel's inheritance of the land was entirely gracious, based upon faith alone and God's promise He made to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant. Their *inheriting* the land was not based upon their righteousness in relation to the law given at Sinai.

*Heb. 3:12, 3:16-4:2*

As amazing as it may seem the rebellion referred to here does not focus on the idolatry incident of the people at Sinai but on their *unbelief* regarding the fact that God had promised to bring them into a land far superior to anything they had experienced in Egypt. Verse 19 states the conclusion of the matter: *So we see that they* [the generation who came out of Egypt (vs. 16)] *could not enter in because of unbelief.* The *having heard* of verse 16 refers especially to having heard God's *promise* to bring them into the land (see 4:1-2). They heard repeatedly that God had sworn an oath to Abraham to settle his descendants in the land. That generation's rebellion (vs. 16) most likely refers to the incident when they arrived at the land of Canaan, had spied out the land, and refused to enter (Nu. 14, Deut. 9:22-24, Psa. 106:24-25). They did not believe that God would give them this land and drive out the other nations before them. This is the point when God swore that they [that generation] would not enter His rest.

*Deut 7:6-7*

When the second generation from the exodus does enter the land, God makes sure they understand that it is for only two reasons: God's original choice of them which involved his setting his love upon them and that He would keep His oath which He swore to their fathers.

*Deut 9:1-6*

The Lord ensures that they understand they will possess the land not because of their righteousness (i.e. keeping the law given at Sinai), for they are a stiff-necked people. But, because of the wickedness of those being driven out of the land and because He will fulfill the word which He swore to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He will keep the Abrahamic covenant.

*Israel's continuance in the land*

Many promises for Israel's *continuance* in the land and receipt of blessing in the land were conditioned on their faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant, especially the law set down in the decalogue, and especially the first two commandments forbidding idolatry. It also seems clear that many other commands in the law were "helps" to prevent idolatry; such as being forbid-

den to intermarry with the other nations, being forbidden practices which were inseparably associated with the worship of false gods by the nations (see “historical provisions relating to idolatry above”).

*Ex. 34:28,  
Deut. 4:13  
Deut. 17:2-5*

The ten commandments are called *the words of the covenant*. Israel’s continuance in the land was conditioned not on a perfect faithfulness to the entire law, but especially conditioned on faithfulness to the decalogue, and especially the first two commandments.

*Deut. 11:13-17*

If they would love the Lord their God (vs. 13) their hearts would not become deceived and they turn away to other gods (vs. 17). If they turned away to other gods they would perish quickly from the good land which the Lord gave them (vs. 17).

*Deut. 28:1-3, 13-14*

Great blessing in the land was conditioned on their *observing carefully all His commandments* (vs. 1). But notice that verse 14 returns to the particular emphasis of not turning to *the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them*.

*Deut. 30:15-20*

Verses 15-20 summarize the blessings for obedience (28:1-14) and the curses for disobedience (28:15-30:14). Their being blessed in the land was conditioned on their faithfulness (obedience) to the Mosaic Covenant law (vs. 16) but if their hearts turned away and they were drawn away to worship other gods and serve them they would not prolong their days in the land (vss. 17-18).

*Provision for Israel’s sinfulness*

It should also be understood that the law of Moses also made provision for Israel’s sinfulness. From the beginning of the Mosaic Covenant provision for Israel’s sinfulness was made by God establishing the priesthood and sacrificial system. Long term provision was made in the promises contained in the law.

*Lev. 1:1-4, 4:27-35*

Though Israel’s continuance in the land was based upon their faithfulness to the MC, it was not based upon anything remotely like a perfect obedience to what the law required. The law made continual provision for sin and disobedience. An Israelite was to approach God *in the way God had prescribed* to obtain forgiveness and blessing, in spite of his breaking of the law. They would be forgiven (in the truest sense) if they, with repentance and faith (Psalm 32, 51, 103:3), *approached God in the way He had appointed*.

*Deut. 30:1-6*

Regarding the people as a whole the law promised that even after Israel broke the MC, provision would be made to remove the sinfulness of future generations and for them to be blessed by the Lord.

As much of the law set forth types of Christ and His work, think of the passover as one example, the law pointed to the long term provision for the people’s sinfulness. Mosaic Covenant laws which constructed types of Christ were *promises* of an effectual Saviour and salvation to come.

*The eternal inheritance*

A few words should be said regarding the question we often have when looking back upon Israel during the MC period of time and Israel “under the law”: Were any of them “Christians”, were any of them “saved”? What we seem to mean by these questions is, did any of them enter glory when they died and will any of them be eternally in the “new heavens and the new earth”? To ask the question another way, will any of them be citizens of the Lord’s *eternal kingdom*?

*Heb. 11:13-16*

Yes, some (many?) will participate in the eternal kingdom established by the Messiah. Those who had true faith in God, as the patriarchs did, will inherit *what the land of Canaan typified*, a new heavens and earth and God dwelling forever with His people, a resurrected new humanity in the second Adam, Christ. This is the heavenly country and the city that God has

prepared for them.

*Heb. 9:15*

All the ethnic descendants of Jacob, except for the unbelieving wilderness generation, inherited the physical land of Canaan that the Lord had promised to give to Abraham's descendants. Those amongst them, who had true faith in God, will also inherit what all the types and shadows pointed forward to. This is referred to as the *eternal inheritance* secured for those who are called by Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant.

*The New Testament must be our final guide.*

In seeking to understand the Mosaic Law in relation to Gentiles and Israel it must be kept in mind that *all* of what was occurring with God's relationship to Israel cannot be fully understood without the New Testament explanation of the *multifaceted* nature of what God was doing with Israel. To clearly understand God's law in relation to Israel (and the Jew and Gentile church today) the New Testament *must* be our guide. We cannot properly understand God's work with Israel until *God interprets His own work*, and this He does *in the New Testament*. The memorable rhyme, "The New is in the Old concealed and the Old is in the New revealed"<sup>15</sup> is true. Thus, when dealing with the many vexing questions that have been in the minds of believers regarding the law, a *priority* of interpretation should be given to the explanations we find regarding the law in the NT, not vice versa.<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Hierarchy of Significance Within the Law of Moses***

Before turning to NT passages it is helpful to consider the hierarchy of significance within the law of Moses. Though the Lord did not organize the law into the various categories that we do to aid our understanding, He did clearly indicate that some things were of greater importance or, we could say, of basic importance that should influence our understanding and application of all other things.

*Monotheism*

It is difficult for us to realize the extensive polytheism of all cultures prior to God calling Abraham. Passages like Gen. 35:1-4 and Ex. 32:1, 23 give us some idea of how far away from monotheism even most Israelites were at the time of the exodus. It is not an over statement to say, a different god for every nation *and multiple* gods within every nation, i.e. *all the gods of Egypt*. (Ex. 12:12). Even though the Jews at the time of the Exodus would have had a sense that Yahweh delivered them, it is likely that they still considered that many other gods really did exist. As late as NT times Paul can speak of Christians who still may think that idols do actually exist (1 Cor. 8:4-7).

*Deut 4:32-36*

Verse 35 - "*To you it was shown [demonstrated], that you might know that the LORD [Yahweh] Himself is God [Elohim]; there is none other [god] besides Him.*" This "demonstration" that Yahweh is God, and there really are no other gods, was the point of the exodus.

*Deut 6:4-5*

Thus at the "top" of the hierarchy of the law is an insistence that Israel worship *one* God, and that one God is He who was the God of the patriarchs, the God who brought them out of Egypt, and the God who spoke to them at Sinai.

Knowing and worshipping the one God and being devoted to Him, i.e. *you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*, is the great emphasis in the law as expressed in Deut. 6:4-5.

*Love to God and man*

Monotheism and love to God and man are closely related. Yahweh is the one true God who creates and redeems us and we ought to love Him supremely. Also, we have been created in

15. Source unknown.

16. Many cults are examples of ignoring this maxim. The Old Testament is interpreted and applied to people today with disregard of the NT interpretation and application of the law.

His image and thus we ought to love mankind.

*Mk. 12:28-34, Deut. 6:4-5, Lev. 19:18*

Monotheism, loving Yahweh the true God and loving our neighbors as ourselves, these are the great commandments in the law. These matters are *more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices* (vs. 34). Jesus commended the Scribe saying, *You are not far from the kingdom of God.*

*Matt. 22:36-40*

Matthew records Jesus' statement that *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*. This statement tells us that all the "lesser" commandments in some way point us to the fulfilling of these great commands. Thus we ought not understand the "lesser" commands in a way that divorces them from the goal or ideal expressed in these great commandments (see below on understanding prohibitions). There is a hierarchy of significance in the law and in many cases the "lower levels" contribute to fulfilling the "upper levels". And, as will be seen in what follows, no amount of doing the "lower levels" will ever please God if the upper levels are absent.

*Justice, mercy and faithfulness*

The OT prophets from Amos forward contribute significantly to our understanding the law given to Israel many centuries earlier. As the prophets reprove Israel for their failing to keep the law we are given insight into what matters in the law were of special significance and how various aspects of the law should have been related to each other in the minds of the people. Seeing this perspective in the OT helps us when we reach the NT, for the NT does not regress this emphasis, but heightens it. The Lord Jesus made it plain that a key part of Israel's repentance would be an acknowledgement of their misuse and misunderstanding of the law. This Jesus expressed when he said, *"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'" (Matt. 9:13, 12:7).*

These prophets speaking in the Lord's behalf, repeatedly emphasize justice, mercy and faithfulness. Faithfulness is a virtue exercised toward God and man. Justice and mercy are virtues exercised especially toward men. In all three of these virtues we "hear" the second great commandment of love your neighbor as yourself. The Lord's insistence upon justice faithfulness and mercy has special bearing upon those in authority over others. Heads of households and leaders in Israel (priests, kings).

*Amos 5:21-27*

The performance of the external worship commanded in the law was displeasing to God, rather than pleasing, since there was a pervasive ignoring of justice throughout Israel (vs. 24). Also the widespread problem of idolatry was still present and the Lord points out that even their forefather's offerings in the wilderness were often offered to other gods. Verses 25-26 indicate the significant problem of polytheism among Israel as discussed above. Idolatry breaks the mosaic covenant and thus Amos announces the Lord's coming judgement of removing them from the land.

*Micah 6:6-8*

Verses 6-7 represent a complaining attitude of the people which accused the Lord of being unreasonable and unsatisfiable. "Why won't He accept our offerings?? We are willing to give more but it seems He won't accept them! His demands are simply unreasonable." The Lord answers this attitude in vs. 8, *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"* Here we have a summary of the entire law. And it is focused on the heart relations between God and men. Do justly relating to God's command that we treat one another justly and uphold his standards of justice. To love mercy. Quite an expression, *to love mercy*. Again, God commands us to treat one another with mercy, to love mercy. To walk humbly with your God. This speaks of our relationship with the Lord. To walk humbly emphasizes what our attitude should be toward are lowly position before Him, a childlike dependence upon Him, and a living, i.e. walking, in His presence.



- Isa. 58:3-9* Although the terms justice and mercy are not used in this passage it is parallel to Micah 6:6-8<sup>17</sup>. Note the *Why have we fasted, they say, and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?* The law did require certain fasts. But the goal was love, justice, humility and mercy toward God and man. The Lord defines the type of “fast” he chooses as a forceful way of saying there is no use fasting if you are not pursuing these matters of first importance.
- Hosea 12:6* Hosea 12:1 represents Israel’s unbelief as they were trusting in foreign powers with hopes of safety but their real safety lied in repenting of their evil before the Lord and turning back to Him and trusting in Him to save them. Verse 6 summarizes what is the center of being faithful to the law of Moses, *So you, by the help of your God, return; Observe mercy and justice, And wait on your God continually.* Waiting on your God continually means; live by faith in Him and what He has promised to do for His people. And in the context of Hosea 12 it means do not turn to other trusts, other nations, other gods.
- Zech. 7:7-12* Justice, mercy and compassion. Oppression is the obvious opposite of these.
- Matt. 23:23* Jesus’ teaching follows in the tradition of the prophets before Him. The weightier matters of the law are: justice, mercy and faith. The “lighter” matters are not to be ignored, but it seems the problem has been that since the weightier matters are more subjective, i.e. mercy, faithfulness, love to the alien, love to your brother, love to God, it is easier to kid ourselves that we have kept these. The “lighter” matters, tithing given by Jesus as an example, are very objective, i.e. one can use a scale and weigh out one tenth of his anise and cummin and be sure he has kept this law.
- Obedience* Obedience is one of the weightier matters. This was mentioned by Samuel to Saul much earlier in Israel’s history than the passages considered above.
- 1 Sam. 15:22* Samuel’s reproof of Saul reflects the right attitude regarding the law. God has greater delight in obedience than burnt offerings and sacrifice.
- Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.* In this statement obedience is represented as something difference from sacrifice. In the context Samuel is referring to the fact that Saul had an explicit word from God to obey; destroy all the people and animals. But Saul tried to justify his disobedience by saying he had kept the sheep for sacrifice, knowing that God had commanded sacrifices.
- No amount of giving a priority to do some “lessor” command in the law to justify not performing a greater would ever be considered obedience.
- This principle is clearly why Jesus healed, i.e. worked, on the Sabbath. There were the more weighty commands to show mercy and love your neighbor as yourself. Thus to work on the Sabbath to relieve the immediate suffering of your neighbor was not a violation of God’s law. It was simply to recognize that the law itself does contain a hierarchy of importance which the Lords expects us to recognize and act accordingly.
- Ritual not intended to be alone* Certain commands of the law, especially those prescribing the performance of rituals, could not be obeyed “alone”, that is, without obeying the weightier matters of loving to God, living by faith Him and showing mercy to others. The ritual laws were very “objective” (to use the earlier distinction regarding Matt. 23:23) but there performance was expected to be joined with the performance of the “subjective” commands. i.e. sacrifices must be offered with faith in the God who appointed them as a means of drawing near to Him to receive forgiveness or

17. Micah and Isaiah were roughly contemporaries in Israel.

express thankfulness. The separating the doing of the “objective” external commands from doing the “subjective” internal commands became a major stumbling block to Israel.

*Psa. 40:6-8* These verses are of course Messianic (see Heb. 10:5-9). But the OT can speak so strongly regarding this matter that it says: *Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; ..... Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.* We know that the Lord did require and desire them in some sense. But never to be at the top of what is finally important, but as various means to greater ends. Those greater ends were 1) to encourage the people to exercise faith in God who appointed ways to approach Him for forgiveness and worship 2) to point to the coming Christ who is really the only sacrifice that God has desired and required - in the ultimate sense.

*Psa. 51:16-17* David understood that the “objective” rituals, pointing the way to forgiveness and restoration of relationship with God, were useless without the “subjective” broken and a contrite heart. Remember Micah 6:6-9, what does the Lord require? *to walk humbly with your God.*

*Isa. 1:10-17* Obeying ritual commands cannot be considered “partially right” when such things are divorced from pursuing the weightier matters of the law as mentioned in verse 17.

*Mk 12:33-34* Here was on scribe who was understanding the law correctly!

*Matt. 12:7* Even with commands as significant as the Sabbath and the “sanctification” of the showbread, the weightier commands of loving our neighbor and having mercy on others were to regulate how these commands were applied.

*Understanding prohibitions* Many *prohibitions* given in the law should be understood as preventing violations of the weightier matters of the law.

*Rom. 13:8-10* All that is in the law that relates to “one another” is fulfilled by loving one another. Paul can state that *he who loves another has fulfilled the law.* The prohibitions (vs. 9) “promote” fulfilling the greater commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. However, we should never think that simply obeying the prohibitions is equivalent to fulfilling the greater commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. We have already seen that justice, mercy and faithfulness are of first importance in how we treat our neighbor and one does not show mercy to one’s neighbor by simply refraining from doing him harm, i.e. obeying the prohibitions. The NT strongly reinforces this, see 1 John 3:17-18

*Summary*

The Hierarchy of Significance in the Mosaic Law

<b>Positive Commands, Do.....</b>		<b>Prohibition Commands, Do not....</b>
believe in one God, Yahweh is the true God		have any other gods before Yahweh.
Love Yahweh, fear Him only.		make images, or bow down to them.
Obey Yahweh, have humility before Him.		break Sabbath, remember Yahweh gave you rest, not other gods.
Be faithful to Yahweh & trust Him.		adorn your body with symbols that represent idols known around you.
Love man made in Yahweh’s image.		“You shall not commit adultery,”
Justice, Mercy, Faithfulness		“You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,”
		Don’t avenge.
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Burnt offerings and sacrifice, dietary laws, tithing regulations		

*Fallen humanity*

As we read the Old and New testaments and look at ourselves prior to experiencing a real work of the Holy Spirit our religion always becomes, “I haven’t done certain things and I’ve observed certain rituals.” We tend to invert what is of first importance to the Lord, the upper left section of the figure.

***Uses of the Law in relation to redemptive history***

The Lord did not reveal the entire plan of salvation in a day! After sin entered the human race, and Adam and Eve were driven out of God’s presence, the Lord began to slowly (perhaps by our standards) re-approach mankind. During various stages in history He has made known the means of salvation and His ultimate intention to create a new humanity and again dwell with mankind. During God’s implementation of His plan the law has served a number of purposes at different times. It is important that we understand these times and purposes in order to benefit from and use God’s law rightly. No one addressed these matters more than the apostle Paul and to these passages we now turn. In Paul’s passages we will understand the term law to be referring to the whole law of Moses (the Pentateuch) unless there is an immediate contextual reason for understanding it otherwise.

*Gal. 3:6-20*

In verses 6-14 Paul presents one of his major proofs that no one, Jew or Gentile, is justified by the law in God’s sight (vs. 11) but through faith, even as Abraham was (6-9, 11, 14, 22). In verses 15-18 Paul explains that the giving of the law and establishing of the Mosaic covenant did not replace or annul (vs. 15, 17) the Abrahamic Covenant which promised salvation to both believing Jews and Gentiles (vs. 14). These assertions that no one is justified by the law, and that the inheritance promised to Abraham is not based on the law (vs. 18) raise the major question in the minds of most Jews, *What purpose then does the law serve?* (vs. 19). There should be no doubt that when Paul says that the law was added (vs. 19) he is referring to the book of the law of Moses, given at the establishment of the Mosaic covenant with Israel.

*The temporary nature of the law*

There has been extensive discussion regarding Paul’s statement that the law *was added because of transgressions [un]til the Seed should come to whom the promise was made.*

*Gal. 3:19*

In this paragraph Paul asserts one purpose of the law and the law’s temporary nature. *It was added* (vs. 19), i.e. the law was given 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant (vs. 17) and appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator (vs. 19) - the law had a beginning. This law was “added” *until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made.* That is, until the coming of Christ, Abraham’s singular Seed (vs. 16). The law had an ending; *after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor* (vs. 25). It should be noted that this beginning and ending corresponds with the beginning and ending of the Mosaic covenant. A more precise definition of the temporary nature of the law will be discussed below.

*The law added because of transgressions*

During this period of Israel’s history the law was added *because of transgressions.* If we could speak to Paul we’d say, “Paul, what do you mean, *because of transgressions!*” Sin in general? Certain sins in particular? It is difficult to know precisely what Paul has in mind with this statement in the context of Galatians. Some think Paul meant that it was given to restrain sin. This is unlikely because Paul does attribute to the law *an ability* to restrain sin in general. In Romans he actually indicates that due to the evil nature of sin the law actually results in stirring up more sin (Rom. 5:20, 7:5, 8). Furthermore it is unlikely in the context of Galatians that Paul is going to say to the Judiaziers that the law is of value in restraining sin, this would only confirm their argument that they ought to receive circumcision and remain “under the law”. There are at least two possibilities each of which we know from Scripture are purposes for the Mosaic law.

*Preservation from idolatry*

Verse 23 also sheds light on the purpose of the law. Israel was *kept under guard by the law*. Understanding that the law built a wall of separation between Israel and the Gentiles (see Eph. 2:14-15) to preserve Israel (at least a remnant) from idolatry, we could consider the law added *because of transgressions* [especially having to do with idolatry]. The law *guards*<sup>18</sup> Israel until Christ comes. Once the promise comes, which in Paul has special emphasis on the giving of the Holy Spirit and the putting the law in the heart, the wall of separation built by the law is to be taken down and believing Israel is no longer to be isolated from the nations. Instead, now given the promise of the Spirit, they are to go into all nations and extend the kingdom to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This redemptive historical process is certainly that which the NT teaches and that the building of the wall of separation was a means to preserve Israel from idolatry is clear. That Paul specifically has preservation from idolatry in mind in verses 19 and 23 may or may not be the case.

*Defining and manifesting sin.*

We know from Paul's writings outside of Galatians that a key purpose for the law was to clearly bring the knowledge of sin to Israel and mankind.

*Rom. 3:19-20*

People are naturally self righteous but every mouth needs to be shut<sup>19</sup>. The law clarifies our actions in God's sight, as in a court of law, so that those who are guilty end up *knowing* that they are guilty. As Paul states, *for by the law is the knowledge of sin*. With mankind there is this huge disconnect between man being sinful and guilty and his actually knowing that he is. This was surely a problem for Israel.

*Rom. 4:15*

Paul did not say that where there is no law there is no sin (see Rom. 5:13-14). Transgression means to *deviate from an established boundary or norm, to over step that norm*. With the law published the boundaries became clear and thus the overstepping of them was plain to see. Men are not simply sinners, they are transgressors.

In Rom. 5:12-19 Adam is referred to as having transgressed (vs. 14)<sup>20</sup>, trespassed (vss. 15, 16, 17)<sup>21</sup>, sinned (vs. 16)<sup>22</sup>, and in 1 Tim. 2:14 Paul states that *Adam fell into transgression*. Though before the law there is no transgression (4:15), in Adam's case he had more than natural conscience. He had a clearly spoken word from God, thus he *transgressed*. This seems parallel with Israel's condition under the law, they had a clearly spoken word from God and their sin is clearly seen as transgression.

*Rom. 5:20*

The law entered that the trespass<sup>23</sup> might abound. The "law entering" refers to the initiation of the Mosaic covenant with its giving of the law. The law was not given to restrain sin, and as will be discussed below, it has no power to do so.

The idea that the law entered that the trespass might abound shocks the religious sensibilities of the natural man and has always been one of the most controversial of Paul's statements. Two common interpretations of this statement are: 1) by abounding Paul means that sin may be seen as truly sinful, but he does not mean the law's purpose was to actually stir up more

18. I understand the "guarding" role of the law as a positive matter, that is, not captive or imprisoned in a negative sense. But as a minor kept in custody for his benefit and preservation. Israel is preserved until Christ comes. Thus both the law as guard (vs. 23) and guardian (vs. 24) were blessings to Israel during her infancy (vs. 25).

19. See the section "the experience of conviction" in chapter 15.

20. Greek *parabasis* - transgression

21. Greek *paraptoma* - a false step, trespass

22. Greek *harmatano* - to sin

23. Greek *paraptoma*, trespass.

acts of sin. 2) Others understand Paul to mean that the law's purpose was to actually stir up more acts of sin. However, as Paul explains elsewhere, this result is not the law's fault. A third possibility is that with the adding of the law many more requirements were added which occasioned many more trespasses. The law was a yoke which they could not bear (Acts 15:10, Gal. 5:1).

*Rom. 7:5-13*, Since Paul can say some things which may seem startlingly negative about the law, but in reality he is being negative about people's misunderstanding and misuse of the law, he anticipates questions such as, *is the law sin (vs. 7)?* He answers his own question, *On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law.* He then gives a concrete example of how through the law he learned that coveting was sinful. It is clear from verse 8 that this "knowing sin" goes further than intellectually knowing that coveting is wrong, *but knowing the power of sin to rule one's life.* Sin being dead seems to mean not exercising such a grip over oneself. But when the law comes sin awakens, i.e. *sin revived when the commandment came and produced in him all manner of evil desire (vs. 8).* Verse 13 summarizes that through the commandment (law) sin appears as sin and through the commandment sin becomes *exceedingly sinful.* In this passage sin is personified as one with mighty, evil, ruling power over us, who picks upon something very good, i.e. the law, and uses it to effect our death (vs. 11).

*Gal. 3:24* Having considered ways of understanding that the law *was added because of transgression (Gal. 3:19)* we need to return to Galatians 3:23-24 and consider more precisely the meaning of verses 23-24.

*"Guardian" or "tutor"?* The translation of the Greek noun *paidagogos* as schoolmaster (KJV) and tutor (NASB, NKJV) is unfortunate and the ESV rendering guardian is to be much preferred. The problem with the "schoolmaster" or "tutor" translation is that it focuses us on the idea of a *teacher* which is not the basic meaning of the Greek term<sup>24</sup>. The *paidagogos* may or may not have performed "teaching" as one of his duties. Guardian is a better translation and what is in view is a person who, *for a season of time*, protects a child until he comes of age. Once the child is grown he is no longer under the care of the guardian.

*"To" or "until"?* In verse 24 the Greek preposition *eis* can be translated as either "to" or "until", i.e. either as a "direction" reference (to, into) or a "temporal", time reference (until). The context favors the ESV's rendering, "until".

Paul's main point regarding the law in 3:19 - 4:5 is *the temporary status* of Israel being under the law. Verse 19, *the law was added until the Seed should come*, vs. 25 *but now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.* In 4:1-3 we see that Paul does have in mind the idea of a child who is under the care of guardians. Vs. 1, *I say that the heir, as long as he is a child*, Vs. 2 *but [the heir] is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed.* Vs. 3 *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage.* Vs. 4-5 *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His son ... to redeem those who were under the law.* Israel, being under the law was never intended to be a permanent arrangement, just as parents placing a child under a *paidagogos* (guardian) (3:24) or a guardian (4:2) or steward (4:2) was not intended to be a permanent arrangement. Further confirming this interpretation is the fact that the controversy with the Judaizers was over this very issue, they were insisting that Israel *remain* under the law. Paul is saying "no!" That arrangement was designed to be temporary, it had a beginning, it has an end. Now that faith has come Israel is no longer under a guardian (*paidagogos*).

24. *paidagwgoj* (*paidagogos*) - Originally a 'boy-leader', the man, usually a slave (Plut., Mor. 4ab), whose duty it was to conduct a boy or youth (Plut., Mor. 439f) to and from school and to superintend his conduct generally; he was not a 'teacher' (despite the present meaning of the derivative 'pedagogue'). In our lit. one who has responsibility for someone who needs guidance, guardian, leader, guide. TGordon, NTS 35, '89, 150-54 role of guardian; BDAG lexicon.

*Preferred reading of Gal. 3:23-24*

Given the above understanding we are in the less than perfect situation of preferring the NKJV and NASB renderings of verse 23, which represent being under the law as a good thing<sup>25</sup>, opposed to the overly negative rendering of the ESV<sup>26</sup>, but we must prefer the ESV rendering of verse 24. It should be noted that the added words, *to bring us* (NKJV) and *to lead us* (NASB) are not required when *eis* is rendered “until” as in the ESV.

<b>Preferred reading</b>	<b>NKJV</b>	<b>NASB</b>	<b>ESV</b>
<b>Gal. 3:23</b> But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.	<b>Gal. 3:23</b> But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor <i>to bring us</i> to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.	<b>Gal. 3:23</b> But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor <i>to lead us</i> to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.	<b>Gal. 3:23</b> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

*What then of using the law to bring people to Christ?*

The above understanding of verses 23-24 of placing the emphasis on the law’s role as a “guardian” of those under it, especially Israel, and preserving them until Christ came may be difficult for some who have long (from these verses) placed an emphasis on the law “tutoring” Israel and Gentiles to Christ by producing conviction of sin and by the law’s typology pointing us to Christ. The position set for here is that the law certainly was and is intended to serve these purposes (conviction, typology) *but* that this is not the point of Paul in verses 23-24. As was shown above, the main point in 3:19-4:5 is the *temporary* nature of being “under the law” and the Mosaic covenant, represented by receiving circumcision (this will be discussed below).

Lest we take something good away and not give it back in a better form, the following texts do show us that the law does direct us to Christ by producing conviction, even despair (Rom. 7 see above), regarding sin and by its types the law encourages us to place our faith in Christ, not in our performing works of the law (forgiveness was obtained through the sacrifices of the law, mediated by the priesthood the law established).

*Gal. 3:21-22*

The law is not against the promises of God (vs. 21). Instead the law (part of the Scripture of vs. 22) *has confined all under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe*. The law confines all under sin so that the promise, that is, the attaining of righteousness (vs. 21), might be given to those who believe - in the promise, in Jesus Christ. So then a right understanding of the law, leads to an “imprisonment” (ESV) under sin, that people may receive the promise, righteousness by faith, and not by works of the law (vs. 21b, righteousness does not come by the law).

So for those who have been accustomed to using verse 24 in accordance with the “tutor” and “schoolmaster” translations, verse 22 closely follows this use.

*Rom 3:18-20*

As was seen above righteousness, being justified in God’s sight, does not come by the deeds of the law, *for by the law is the knowledge of sin*.

25. See footnote 18.

26. We don’t normally speak of our children being *imprisoned* when we place them under the care of a nanny or other guardian.

2 Tim 3:14-4:2

Paul wrote these words near the end of his life. And even after all that he had received by revelation (see. Gal. 1) and written and experienced, he still directs Timothy to continue in the things which he had learned, and been assured of. And what he is referring to is a proper understanding of the Old Testament, which he refers as the Holy Scriptures. Further he states that the Holy Scriptures are able to make one wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. He certainly was referring to more than the law, but he certainly was including the law as a major part of the Holy Scripture that makes people wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. This statement is similar to Galatians 3:22, *But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.* The Scriptures, including the law, work to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ.

Jewish Christians of the first century did not suddenly forsake the “Bibles” they had used for 1.5 millennia, that is what we call the Old Testament. However, they realized that these Scriptures (the OT) were not complete, that is, they were not the *final* revelation of God’s plan and works of saving His people. The unbelieving Jews thought that revelation that came through Moses was the apex of God’s word to His people and there would never be anything greater. But the apostle John said, *for the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.* Even though they were not complete, they were still very essential and when Paul knew his time of departure was near (vs. 6) and knowing false teachers and perilous time are coming (3:1-9,13) he charged Timothy to preach the Word (vs. 2), and this can mean only two things; the Holy Scriptures mentioned in 3:14-16 that make one wise unto salvation by faith in Christ, and Paul’s teaching and understanding of those Scriptures (3:10), which Timothy heard in person and had in Paul’s letters.

Thus, it is correct to attribute to the law, a major portion of the OT, the ability to make one wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Can you imagine trying to explain the doctrine of sin or the atonement without the Mosaic Covenant law? It cannot be done.

Typology,  
Heb. 10:1

The law was a shadow of the good things to come. It served the purpose of giving some knowledge of a coming fuller and more complete and *permanent* salvation. That the law served this purpose *for a season* is also make clear in the book of Hebrews, though in a different way than Paul did in Galatians. In Hebrews the *temporary* nature of being under the law is conveyed in three ideas:

1. When the substance comes one should not continue to live on the basis of the shadow (10:1). The shadows were imposed until the time of reformation (9:9-10).
2. There has been a change in priesthood which necessitates a change of the law (7:12), the former commandment is annulled because of its weakness (7:18), the law appointed men who have weakness (7:28), but the word of the oath appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.
3. The covenant, to which the law was inseparably bound, is coming to an end (Heb. 8:13).

The above is not to say that the NT church, or the New Covenant people of God, will not still use the law, and benefit from the law, but they will not function *under the law* as Israel did. This will be addressed in a later section. But suffice it to say at this point that we still study the law to know Christ. The book of Hebrews is an extended example of using the law to make people wise unto salvation which is by faith in Jesus Christ! But we no longer actually *practice* those portions of the law which the writer directs our attention to. Yet we need those portions of the law in order to know Christ and His work.

Summary

Paul and the author to Hebrews understand that the Old Covenant people of God were to be

under the Mosaic law *for a season*. This arrangement had a beginning (the MC) and an end (the NC). During this season the law's purposes were *multifaceted*. The law was designed to preserve Israel from idolatry and contained specific commands relating to the historical situation Israel was in when they settled in the land of Canaan. The law was *added because of transgression* and Paul's somewhat surprising exposition of this purpose indicates that by this phrase he does not mean to restrain sin. Rather, he means to define and manifest sin, and even to increase sin. The concept of the law of Moses actually increasing sin may contain both ideas that our corrupted nature's rebel even more when they are placed under authority and that with the coming of the Mosaic law many more requirements were placed upon Israel which became the occasion for many more transgressions. The law was also added to give a clearer shadow of the good things to come. And finally there were certain provisions in the law that dealt with the fact that Israel at this time was a theocracy.

There is a tension in the writings of the NT, and especially in the writings of Paul, to view the law either in an entirely negative manner or attribute too great of an ability and role to the law<sup>27</sup>. It is a tension that we simply need to live with and we must realize that the role of the law is *complex, multifaceted, and its role has changed with the progression of redemptive history* (discussed below). Paul's use of the metaphor of a guardian caring for a child during the child's youthful years (Gal. 3-4) is somewhat of a watershed regulating our understanding. God placing Israel under the law was not by any means an entirely negative arrangement, as if the Lord did something evil by initiating the Mosaic covenant, with its law, with Israel. But neither is this "childhood" arrangement the best that God intended for Israel, nor should it ever have been considered permanent. However Paul confronted many who did think that the arrangement under the Mosaic Covenant, under the law, was the best and permanent.<sup>28</sup> To such thinking Paul carefully and strenuously articulated the *limitations* of the law. A subject to which we now turn.

### ***Limitations of the Law***

In the above sections the reader may at times think I have erred on the side of giving an overly positive representation of the purposes and ability of the law. In the present section one may begin to think that an overly negative representation is being given.

*The law is not a full revelation, John 1:16-17*

The law gave to Israel a very significant revelation of the true God and His promises of mercy to Israel; promises ultimately extending to all nations. But it cannot be said of the law that it was *full of grace and truth* (John 1:14) as it is said of the Son and the revelation associated with Him. In verse 17 John makes this contrast clear when he writes, *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (ESV).<sup>29</sup> He does not mean that there was no grace or truth revealed in the law, but those now living who have beheld the Glory of the

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27. Liberal scholars routinely conclude that Paul was inconsistent and confused and that His writings, produced over a period of time, reflect a man whose theology of law is developing and changing, changing to the point of actually contradicting positions held earlier.

28. It is hard for us to appreciate the difficulty, for even a faithful Jew, to grasp the changes that took place with the coming of Christ. It has been pointed out (Pastor John Tock) that Israel's prophets constantly called the people back to being faithful to the law (Mal. 4:4-6). How then could it be right to now introduce such sweeping changes and the setting aside of so many "commandments"? Only by understanding that the law itself, when properly understood, pointed to the future *fulfillment* (not simply setting aside) of itself in the work of Christ and the provision of the Holy Spirit (discussed below).

29. The NKJV translation adds "*but* grace and truth came". The *but* need not be included as indicated by the italics in the translation. Its inclusion likely heightens the contrast more than John intended. Accordingly newer english translations (NASB, ESV) have not included it.



Word, and the revelation that has come from the unique Son (vs. 14), as opposed to only Moses, have received a *fullness* (vs. 16) of grace and truth that was not possible with having only the law. The law was not the *climax* of revelation from God to His people.

*Heb. 10:1,  
Col. 2:16-17*

That the law has only the *shadow* of the good things to come is a figure indicating that the revelation given by the law is not complete. However, we should not understand the expression “not complete” to mean lacking any major truth, but as lacking detail. The shadow reveals the *whole* object, yet many details about the object cannot be known from the shadow.

The illustration of a bud and resulting flower is often used to describe the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. It’s all in the bud, but only fully seen when the flower blooms. Another illustration, not as picturesque as the bud and the flower, is to think of a camera taking a picture. In our Bibles, from Genesis 3 forward, the “field of view” has not really changed but the *resolution* of the picture keeps increasing as we go forward in history. By Genesis 3 all major revealed truths are present but with very little detail.

At the risk of giving too many illustrations, having the law is like having the earlier chapters of a great book.<sup>30</sup> They are great chapters, but they do not complete the book! Two responses to the earlier chapters would be foolish: Considering the earlier chapters as the completed book or discarding the earlier chapters and only using the later chapters of the book and offering the later chapters by themselves, as if they can tell the whole story.<sup>31</sup>

*2 Cor. 3:5-11*

It is difficult to determine which subsection of an *uninspired* outline to discuss this passage. That the law did not bring a full revelation of God’s intended work for his people is clear from Paul’s statements. It is also clear that God’s people were not intended to *forever* live under all of the norms established by the law. Paul acknowledges in four phrases that the Mosaic Covenant and the giving of the law brought a glorious revelation to Israel; *But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, (vs. 7a), For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, (vs. 9a), For even what was made glorious (vs. 10a), For if what is passing away was glorious, (vs. 11a).* But it was not intended to be the final, complete, revelation. *For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. (vss. 10-11).* Thus the Jews, and Gentiles who may join them, should not consider the perfect situation the achieving of a politically united Israel perfectly keeping the laws of Moses and worshipping according to its dictates. Again Paul speaks of this arrangement, which was never achieved, as passing away (vs. 11). The MC and the law do not bring into full view the Glory of God and His people.

*The law cannot be the means of attaining righteousness.*

Paul, more than any other inspired writer, refers to the state of being blessed by God (Rom. 4:6) as being right or justified in God’s sight. Attaining the state of righteousness is the opposite of remaining in a state of condemnation.<sup>32</sup> He strenuously insists that this state of righteousness cannot be obtained by means of the law. By either the law giving it or by one performing the deeds of the law to obtain it.

Paul asserts in four complementary ways that one cannot obtain righteousness by the law. These four ideas mutually reinforce the conclusion that one cannot obtain righteousness by

30. The view being expressed is that the law of Moses does contain the promises of the Gospel, but not does not give a full revelation and understanding of the promises.

31. For example, liberal views of the atonement which deny the idea of judicial substitution and the vindicatory justice of God must either ignore the Mosaic law or relegate it to a primitive and unenlightened religious expression which we should not believe accurately reflects the nature and mind of God.

32. These concepts are discussed in detail in chapter 16, “God Saves Those who Believe in Christ”, “The Father Justifies”.

the law. In this discussion “being justified” is synonymous with “attaining righteousness”. “Being justified” views the *completed action* that results in one being in the state or status of righteousness.

Paul uses a number of phrases of varying length with near identical meaning. The “full” or “long” expression is, *apart from the works of the law* (Rom. 3:28). His shorter phrases are a form of “shorthand” for this longer expression. Thus:

*apart from the law* means *apart from the [works of the] law* (Rom. 3:21, compare to vs. 28),  
*for if Abraham was justified by works* means *for if Abraham was justified by works of the law* (Rom. 4:2),

*apart from works* means *apart from works [of the law]* (Rom. 4:6),  
*through the law* means *through [the works of] the law* (Rom. 4:13),<sup>33</sup>

*those who are of the law* means *those who are of [the works of] the law* (Rom. 4:14).

Rom. 3:20-22, 28

**First: That the law is not the means of attaining righteousness is evident because righteousness is revealed *apart from the law*.**

After stating in verse 20 that *by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight*, Paul announces the good news of the gospel (see 1:17) that *now the righteousness of God **apart from the law** is revealed*. There is a way of being justified in God’s sight, and that way is apart from the law. The way to attain to this righteous state in God’s sight is stated in verse 22, *even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ*. It is significant to notice that though Paul speaks of the righteousness of God being revealed *apart from the law*, he is quick to add, *being witnessed by the law and the prophets*. He is not teaching that the law was opposed to this revelation of righteousness, or that it retains no purpose now that Christ has come. He is careful to say that the law witnessed to this very means of making the believer righteous in God’s sight (more below on the right uses of the law).

In verse 23-26 Paul explains how it is that the believer can attain righteousness apart from the law and then states his conclusion in verse 28, *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith **apart from the deeds of the law***. Performing the deeds of the law *is not* the means of attaining righteousness.

Rom. 4:6, 13

God imputes righteousness *apart from works [of the law]* (vs. 6). These *apart from* expressions clearly inform us that righteousness does not come from the law.

**Second: That the law is not the means of attaining righteousness is evident because Scripture explicitly states that one cannot attain righteousness by the law.**

Rom. 3:20

Paul concludes his discussion of both Jews and Gentiles in relation to sin and the law (1:18-3:19) with the emphatic statement, *Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight*.

As was demonstrated above we ought to understand most NT references to law, especially Paul’s, as referring to the law of Moses in a comprehensive sense. Thus when Paul refers to the deeds of the law he has in mind all deeds, or commands, that the law calls on Jew or Gen-

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33. This nuanced understanding of Rom. 4:13 is significant because the law at times is misrepresented as containing no element of promise, or as opposed to the promise and the gospel. The statement, *for the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or his seed through the law*, could be misunderstood to mean that the law has no part in communicating the promise to the people of God, Abraham’s seed. But the meaning is the promise was not *through [the works of] the law*, but through the righteousness of faith. The contrast is between “the righteousness of faith” versus a righteousness which comes by doing the deeds of the law (vs. 13 is parallel with vs. 5).

tile to do. He is emphatically stating that no flesh, i.e. no Jew or Gentile, will be justified by doing the deeds of the law. Whether those deeds be refraining from those activities the law prohibits, doing those activities the law commands. This includes all of what has been commonly referred to as the “ceremonial law”. Doing the deeds of sacrifice, attending feasts, observing days and purity laws. No one will be justified by doing the deeds of the law of Moses.<sup>34</sup>

Rom. 9:30-32

Israel did not attain to righteousness (vs.31) because they pursued attaining it *by the works of the law* (vs. 32).

Gal. 2:21

No Christian could ever say that Christ died for no purpose. However, if one maintains that righteousness comes *through the [works of the] law*, in effect one is saying that Christ’s death is unnecessary for attaining righteousness. It is obvious that for Paul attaining righteousness is the big thing, if one has this, one has it all. *Take away from Christ’s death the purpose of providing a means for people to attain righteousness, and there is virtually no other reason for Him to have died.*<sup>35</sup> Well, Christ did not die in vain, thus righteousness does not come through works of the law.

Gal. 3:10-11

Keeping in mind that being justified is the opposite of being condemned Paul’s statement that *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; (vs. 10b)* is a simple declaration that no one who performs deeds of the law *as a means of being justified* will succeed, for all who attempt to do so remain under the law’s curse or condemnation. The reason is given in verse 10b. The law brings a curse on everyone who does not render a perfect and perpetual obedience to all that is required. Paul assumes that no one under the law has ever done this, thus all who are of the works of the law are under the curse which he quotes from the law.

Verse 11 plainly states that no one is justified by the law. *By the law* in verse 11 is shorthand for by the works of the law as explicitly expressed in verse 10b.

In verses 10-11 Paul has stated the matter both ways. All who are of the works of the law are cursed (vs. 10) and no one can be justified by the works of the law (vs. 11). You are cursed if you are of the works of the law and *the curse cannot be removed*, you cannot be justified, by doing works of the law.

Gal. 3:21b

The language of 21b is a clear statement that one does not obtain righteousness by the [works of] the law. There was no such law given that could have given life.

Phi. 3:9

A righteousness which men produce by observing the law Paul calls *my own righteousness, which is from [doing the works of] the law*. But the righteousness that leads to salvation is not from the law, *but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith*. Paul is discussing two sources of righteousness. One from the law - this source of righteousness is inadequate to lead to salvation. The second source of righteousness is *from God by faith*. Obviously then the law cannot be used as a means of obtaining the righteousness from this second source, for it is *by faith*.

**Third: That the law is not the means of attaining righteousness is evident because Scripture states that the state of righteousness is a gift freely given to those who believe.**

34. Mention the NPP attempt to reduce the scope of the expression “deeds of the law”.

35. This may be a case of overstatement in Paul to make a point with the Galatians because it is true that there are other purposes for Christ’s death beyond justification. However, none of those other purposes relating to the people God could have, would have, taken effect without them *first* being justified. Righteousness is attained *at the beginning* of the Christian life and this restores one’s relationship with God.

Rom. 3:24,  
4:4-5, 5:17-  
19

Consistent with the fact that righteousness is revealed apart from the law, and that righteousness cannot be obtained by the law, are Paul's statements that those who have been justified, have been *justified freely by His grace* (3:24) and have received *the gift of righteousness*. They have not obtained righteousness as a payment of wages for services performed (4:4-5). No, instead the many *are made righteous by the one Man's [Jesus Christ's] obedience*. Note, *the one Man's obedience*, note not *their* obedience (5:17-19).<sup>36</sup>

**Fourth: That the law is not the means of attaining righteousness is evident because the actual purpose of the law is to show men they are sinful and condemned, urging them to faith in Christ as the only means of attaining righteousness.**

Rom. 3:20,  
Gal 3:22

Since the law speaks to men to take away all self justifications and make them guilty before God (vs. 19), therefore by the deeds of the law no one will be justified in God's sight. For *by the law* comes, not the righteousness of God that justifies men, but the knowledge of sin, convincing them of their need to be made righteous.

Summary

Has the law failed since Israel (and everyone else) could not attain righteousness by it? No. Is the law limited? Yes, in the sense that it cannot justify. However, this like saying you cannot use a screwdriver to remove the lug nuts from the wheels of your car! There is nothing wrong with the screwdriver and it works perfectly when used for what it was designed to do. Given this illustration then, is it correct to speak of "the limitations" of the screwdriver? Only if we understand that the screwdriver has not failed, but that it simply cannot do everything *and* was never intended to do so. It is in this sense that we speak of the limitations of the law.

Why can't  
men attain  
righteous-  
ness by the  
law?

It is important to not only assert that righteousness cannot be obtained by doing the works of the law but to be clear as to why not. Thomas Schreiner carefully summarizes the gist of Paul's reasoning.<sup>37</sup> "Paul rejected the law as a way of salvation because of human inability to obey it. No one can be justified by the works of the law because no one can obey the law perfectly. If one could do all that the law requires, then one would be counted as righteous in God's sight. But since everyone falls short of obeying the law, therefore, righteousness cannot be obtained through the law. .... Galatians 3:10 is a clear statement as to why righteousness is not through works of the law: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written, 'cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law to do them.'" What Paul is saying can be expressed in a syllogism:

Those who do not keep everything written in the law are cursed (3:10b),

No one keeps everything written in the law (implicit premise),

therefore, those who rely on the works of the law for salvation are cursed (3:10a).

The explicit reason given for the curse is failure to do everything that the law commands. The word "all" is not found in the Hebrew Masoretic text of Deuteronomy 27:26 but is taken from the Septuagint. Its inclusion indicates that perfect obedience is necessary to escape the curse. In the concluding words of the verse Paul identifies the problem as a failure "to do" what the

36. In Paul's writings dealing with the subject of attaining righteousness, faith and works of the law are set forth as two entirely different, and exclusive, means of seeking righteousness. Rom. 3:21-22 and 4:4-6 are definitional regarding the "either or" antithesis regarding faith or works as a means of attaining righteousness. In the following texts faith is the means of attaining righteousness, and saying this excludes works of the law as a means. Men are not justified by works, they are justified by faith. Rom. 3:21-22, 3:30, 4:5, 5:1, 10:4-6, 10:10, Gal. 3:8, 24.

37. Thomas Schreiner, "The Law and Its Fulfillment", Baker, 1993, pgs. 44-45. The conclusions stated have been challenged by various forms of liberal theology. Chapter 2 deals with the errant views of Bultmann, Hubner, Sanders, Dunn, Wright.

law commands. In context it is evident that Paul maintains, as he assumes his readers do, that no one can “do” the whole law.” This summary leads naturally to the third limitation of the law.

*The law cannot provide deliverance from the power of sin.*

Our human condition in sin is not simply that we are guilty and exposed to God’s condemnation but that we practice sin. We repeatedly disobey God. And not only do we repeatedly disobey God, we cannot stop doing so. We are, apart from God’s grace, the slaves, or addicts, to sin. To use Paul’s expression, we are *carnal, sold under sin* (Rom. 7:14).<sup>38</sup> The law cannot give us any strength to defeat the power of our own corruptions that often lead us to sin. Indeed, as was seen above, the law, apart from the works of the Holy Spirit, actually stirs us more acts of sin within us (Rom. 7:5).

*Rom. 8:1-4, Rom. 7:5*

The law could not make us *free from the law of sin and death* (vs. 3). This could only be done *by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* (vs. 2). The law could not set us free from the dominion of sin *because it was weak through the flesh*, that is our sinful, corrupted, human nature. The law can tell us what to do but it cannot give us any life to be able to do the commands it urges. *Through the flesh* of verse 3 should be understood in the sense of 7:5, *For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death*. Being under the law but without receiving the promise of the Holy Spirit in Christ (vs. 2). As will be considered in the following section, those who try to pursue eliminating the sins of the flesh by use of the law without the Spirit of life in Christ are doomed to failure.

*2 Cor. 3:6-7*

The law’s inability to give life is strongly indicated by that truth that *the letter kills* and being under the law can be called being under a *ministry of death*. True, in this passage the death in view is a judgment resulting from condemnation (vs. 9) for having not obeyed the law, and not a human inability to obey the law. But the language is striking, the law cannot give life.

We can say from the above that the law can give no righteousness to justify us in the sight of God nor can it give any life, or power, to live a life of obedience to God’s commands.

*The law cannot bring those being redeemed to perfection.*

The author of Hebrews does not emphasize the Pauline concept of attaining righteousness but the concept of attaining *perfection or completeness*.<sup>39</sup> Paul makes it clear that righteousness cannot be obtained by the law, the author of Hebrews makes it clear that *perfection* cannot be obtained *by the priesthood established by the law*. In other words, the law did not establish the priesthood which would actually bring a complete salvation to the people of God.

*Heb. 7:28*

The law appoints priests who have weaknesses *but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever*. The word of the oath refers to God’s promise found in Psalm 110, *The LORD has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek'*

The law was limited in that it could not usher in the final state of perfection for the people of God. And it was not intended to function indefinitely, but until the time of reformation (9:11).

38. This subject is dealt with in detail in Chapter 12, The Doctrine of Sin and Evil.

39. *teleiōsij*, teleiosis, (noun), perfection (Heb. 7:11), *teleiōw*, teleioo (verb), to make perfect, to complete (Heb. 2:10, 5:9, 7:19, 7:28, 9:9, 10:1, 14, 11:40, 12:23).

It is impressive to read in order the author's use of the idea of perfection and completeness, or lack of it, from beginning to end in his letter (emphasis added).

**Hebrews 2:10** For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, **to make** the captain of their salvation **perfect** through sufferings.

It was appropriate for God to make the leader of the salvation of His people perfect through sufferings. I.E. to provide a perfect saviour.

**Hebrews 5:9** And **having been perfected**, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

The Son was perfected and He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

**Hebrews 7:11** Therefore, if **perfection** were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need *was there* that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?

Perfection did not come through the levitical priesthood. The levitical priests were those who instructed the people in the law. But both priest and law could not bring perfection, otherwise there would have been no need for a priest according to another order, outside the law.

**Hebrews 7:19** for the law **made nothing perfect**; on the other hand, *there is the* bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

The law made nothing perfect in relation to drawing near to God.

**Hebrews 7:28** For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who **has been perfected forever**.

The perfected forever High priest did not come through the law, but by an oath from God which came after the law. The sustained argument in Hebrews 5-10 is that *more than the law* is required if we are to truly draw near to God.

**Hebrews 9:9** It *was* symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which **cannot make** him who performed the service **perfect** in regard to the conscience --

The present time refers to the season of time prior to Christ's coming. Practicing the requirements of the law could not make those who performed the required service, or worship, perfect in regard to the conscience.

**Hebrews 10:1** For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, **make** those who approach **perfect**.

This is an explicit statement regarding the limitations of the law. Only the greater things which the law pointed to are able to make those who approach God perfect.

**Hebrews 10:14** For by one offering **He has perfected forever** those who are being sanctified.

The perfection *which lasts forever* is obtained by *one offering*! He is referring to the one offering of Jesus Christ who offered himself to God.

**Hebrews 11:40** God having provided something better for us, that they should not **be made perfect** apart from us.

Due to the limitations of the law it was not possible that the OT people of God could attain perfection.

**Hebrews 12:23** But you have come to..... the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men **made perfect**,

Those redeemed, not by the law, but by what the limited shadow pointed to, are now *spirits of just men made perfect*.

*A perfect priesthood secures a perfect salvation.*

Hebrews 2:10 begins with the Son being made the perfect redeemer. His perfect priesthood and redemption is then compared with the limitations of the law to provide a perfect redemption. But the perfected Redeemer provides the perfect redemption thus Hebrews 12:23 ends with *the spirits of just men made perfect*.

*What is meant by perfection?*

It is beyond the scope of this section to consider this in detail but the idea of perfection in the book of Hebrews has both an objective and subjective element. Objectively; that sins are *actually* forgiven and the wrath of God is *really* removed (9:15, Rom. 3:25-26). This objective state was never actually achieved under the law (10:4,11), not in heaven (9:8), the true tabernacle (9:23). Based upon this objective achievement (9:12b, 10:14), a subjective perfection is attainable for the people of God. They can be made perfect in conscience (9:9,14, 10:22) and have confidence to enter the most holy place (4:15-16, 10:19-22) instead of being reminded of sins year by year by a repeated string of sacrifices which can never take away sin (10:2-3).<sup>40</sup>

*Summary*

The writings of the NT clearly point out the limitations of the law as they call us to faith in the fuller and more complete work done in Jesus Christ and the results of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

### **Misuses of the Law**

*Introduction*

Having considered the limitations of the law the foundation is established to consider the misuses of the law. Those who do not understand and appreciate the limitations of the law are forever prone to misuse it. However, the problem is even more basic. The natural mind, unless it is enlightened by the word of God and the Holy Spirit, will most certainly misuse the law. Misuse of the law, whether it be the written law as given to Israel or the law of conscience put within the Gentiles, is the propensity of every human heart and this is the explanation of a never ending occurrence of false religious beliefs and practices that deny and compromise salvation by grace alone. There is a doctrinal *and experiential* side to this matter and both are very important.

***To establish one's righteousness***

The most universal misuse of the law is to use it to gain confidence that one is righteous in God's sight. To express it in a more experiential way, people misuse the law to gain peace, or hope, that God will not condemn and punish them in judgement.

*Rom. 9:31-32, 10:1-4*

Israel did not attain to the law of righteousness because they pursued it *as though it were by works [of the law]* (9:32). They misused the law (any and all aspects of it) as a means *to establish their own righteousness*. (10:3).

*Gal. 5:4*

All who *attempt to be justified by [the works of] law* are misusing the law. They are misusing the law as a means to obtain a "not guilty, not condemned to punishment" sentence from God.

*Luke 18:9-14*

Jesus' parable addressed to those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous shows us the experiential side of how men misuse the law in an effort to be justified in God's sight. The Pharisee considers himself as having obeyed the prohibitions of the law, at least some of those which he knows other men have broken. He also begins to rattle off a list of positive commands in the law, fasting, tithing, which he believes he has kept. He misuses the law and thinks it gives him reasons, reasons found within himself, that God would pronounce a sentence of righteous, not guilty upon him. He does not go down to his house justified, but remaining in a state of condemnation, though he is entirely blind to this fact and enjoys a delusion of false peace and comfort.

Misusing the law to establish one's own righteousness is common to all people, and for the most part done *unconsciously*. Which is why such a misuse is so dangerous. Those who

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40. This is one reason why the Lord's supper, instituted by Jesus, is not a *repetition of a sacrifice* but a *reminder* of the one offering (Heb. 10:14) offered *once for all time* (10:10). Hebrews 10:18 states, *Now where there is remission of these [sins], there is no longer an offering for sin*. There are no longer sacrifices made for sin. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass is an extremely serious error, that actually denies the efficacy of Christ's once for all time offering of Himself.

preach the gospel must help people see that they are trusting in themselves that God will accept them and their trust is based upon mis use of the law, whether the written law or the law reflected in their consciences.<sup>41</sup>

*Why the universal tendency to misuse the law?*

I am not sure if we could find a text of Scripture that would state that all people, from birth up, begin to misuse the law as described above. They all think that salvation by works of the law is right and expected. Where does this universal, wrong minded, tendency come from? I offer only two possibilities at this time.

Adam and Eve, originally created without sin, were placed on a conditional footing, under the authority of the law of their conscience and the spoken word of God to them at the time of their creation. Their reward and continuance in that state was based upon obedience to the law they were accountable to at that time (this has been termed the covenant of works). Perhaps, now, even after sin, that idea still remains deeply imprinted in ever human heart. And because of our blinded, corrupted nature, we do not figure it out on our own, that now the law is never intended to be a means for us to become righteous in God's sight.

Or simply due to the blindness of our minds due to sin and our pride, we will not admit our *inability* to be righteous, both judicially and in the practice of obedience.

*To maintain one's righteousness*

It needs to be pointed out that if it is a misuse of the law to use it to *initially* establish one's righteous standing in God's sight, then it is a misuse of the law to use it to *maintain* one's righteous standing in God's sight. Much of Paul's teaching centers around the initial attainment of righteousness, i.e. the justification of Jew and Gentile. However, much of the confusion of latter centuries, both in our personal experience and church teachings, is bound up in the matter of how we *maintain* our righteous standing in God's sight, and experience the peace and assurance of this. It is not through works of the law, but by continuing to believe in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. The just don't only begin by faith, the just, or justified person, lives by faith [in Jesus Christ]. Rom. 1:17.

*Rom. 5:1-2, 9-10*

*This grace in which we stand (vs. 2) - these words summarize the experience of personal assurance. To stand in this grace is to be secure and to rejoice [now] in hope [expectation] of the glory of God is to have personal assurance now of experiencing future glory when the Lord returns.*

In verses 9-10 notice again the *"having now [presently] been justified by His blood, we shall be [in the future] saved from wrath through Him.* The true gospel gives assurance to the believer when he *first* believes that he will be saved in the end, when Christ comes in glory.

This personal assurance in the Christian's life cannot be based upon, or maintained by, the works of the law. To use the law to attain or maintain assurance of a righteous standing in God's sight is a misuse the law. We do easily, and unconsciously, fall into this snare.<sup>42</sup> As will be considered below, it is good and necessary to pursue obedience to those aspects of God's law that apply to the believer today. The law does inform us as to what pleases God. But, none of the works of the law we do are ever to be looked to as a means of maintaining our righteous, un-condemned, justified, adopted, accepted, loved, status before God.

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41. See the subsection on *believing in Christ* in Chapter 15, Christ Exercises His Saving Reign for a detailed discussion of helping people see they are trusting in their own righteousness and misusing the law.

42. See the section on Assurance of Salvation earlier in this chapter.



***To receive  
the promises Gal 3:1-2, 13-14***

Paul's question could only be answered one way, "We received the Holy Spirit not in any way associated with doing any works of the law. We listened to the gospel that explained to us Christ crucified as the only way of salvation and blessing. As we heard these things about Him we believed in Him and were blessed with the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit"

Paul's reasoning regarding the promise of the Spirit can be applied to *all* of the promises we find in the gospel. None of them are to be received *by the works of the law*. It is a misuse of the law to keep its precepts or perform its rituals with the expectation that on this basis we will be blessed with gospel promises being fulfilled in our lives. No! How are they received? *Ask in my name* Jesus says.

***To obtain  
perfection Gal. 3:3,  
4:9-10***

Though Paul does not use the term law in this verse, attempting to be made perfect in the flesh can only refer to their performing works of law as a means of attaining perfection. Exactly what perfection they were seeking is hard to define but they were misusing the law to achieve it. Galatians 4:9-10 refers to some of works of the law they were turning to as a means of achieving perfection.

***NT history of  
misuse***

It is helpful to understand how those living in some NT churches were misusing the law. A study of these passages can help us understand the controversies dealt with in Paul's letters.

***Acts 6:13-14***

The *customs which Moses delivered to us* (vs. 14) is practically synonymous with "the law of Moses". The statement they made vividly shows that among many Jews the temporary nature of the "law of Moses" and the Mosaic Covenant was not understood, nor the idea that it was an incomplete revelation, it was not the final Word of God to His people. They expected Messiah to come but they expected He would make no changes to the law. This passage reflects the thinking of many Jews outside the church.

***Acts 15:1-25,***

This passage reveals to us the thinking going on with Jews and Gentiles within NT churches.

Vs. 1 - there were many Gentile believers in the church at Antioch. These men came down from Judea, likely Jerusalem. Again note custom of Moses is nearly synonyms with law of Moses. The false teachers insisted that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were circumcised. They were likely viewing Gentile conversion identical with the Gentile proselytism under the Mosaic Covenant.

Vs. 5 - Can you imagine trying to keep the law of Moses outside the land of palestine? How much of it, which centered around Jerusalem and the temple, would simply not be able to be performed? It would be like living in exile.

Vs. 10 - the yoke means the whole law of Moses. Peter sounds a little here like Paul, as Paul taught that by the addition of the law of Moses sin actually increased.

Vs. 19-20, 28-29 - Comparing these verses with verses 1 and 5 a significant matter should be noted. For the Apostles, there was a world of difference between being circumcised and under the law of Moses versus obeying *some* of its commands. This NT pattern will be considered in the last section.

***Acts 21:17-25***

Briefly discuss.

***Definition of  
legalism***

The term legalism is often used and its meaning is primarily what has been described as the most basic misuse of the law; attempting to attain or maintain one's righteous standing in the sight of God by doing works of the law. All non believers engage in legalism and often believers unconsciously begin to do so also.

Legalism is also used in the different sense, that of adding the commandments and traditions *of men* to the law and insisting that people are unrighteous for not obeying these man-made additions. This form of legalism is also a denial of the important doctrine of Scripture, *Sola Scriptura* or *The Scriptures Alone*. We have no authority to add to any portion of God's Word. And when we add to His law we are arrogating ourselves to be lawmakers. There are endless examples of this form of legalism among non believers and believers.

***Is the law in some way opposed to the gospel?, grace?, the Promises?  
the Spirit?***

In some Lutheran theology, and even in reformed theology, and especially in early dispensational theology, the law and gospel are represented as opposed to each other. But this is a superficial understanding of the Mosaic Covenant and the apostle Paul. It is more accurate to say the *misuse* of the law, by Jews or Gentiles, is opposed to the gospel. Paul makes statements that should caution us away from making statements that pit the law and gospel, both as given by God, against each other.

*Rom. 3:21* The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:17) because in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. Yet this very way of salvation is *witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*. Rightly understand the law testifies to, and directs us toward, the gospel way of salvation of God freely providing a righteousness for all who believe in Jesus Christ.

*Rom. 3:31* Paul anticipates someone objecting that if God justifies Jews and Gentiles by and through faith then the law has been voided, or nullified. Paul completely rejects this way of thinking, *Certainly not!* he retorts. In spite of the fact that there has been much discussion as to how sinners being justified through faith establishes the law, it is clear that Paul does not allow an attitude that the way of salvation he has taught and the law are some how opposed to each other. What then does he mean by establishing the law? He cannot mean we establish every practice in the law *as* they were intended to be practiced when Moses first received the law. That would necessitate the practice of physical circumcision which Paul has eliminated in the previous verse.

The simplest answer as to how the law is established *through faith* is likely the ideas presented in 3:25-26. Christ being set forth as a propitiation by His blood, *through faith* demonstrates God's righteousness. Anything which demonstrates God's righteousness establishes the law. Every curse pronounced upon Jew or Gentile by the law is honored by Christ being set forth as the propitiatory sacrifice *through faith*. Faith in *this* way of salvation acknowledges that the law must be fulfilled. Ultimately the cross is the grand demonstration of the righteousness of God.

But when we understand law in a comprehensive sense, including not only what has often been called moral law, but all the sacrificial, priestly and ceremonial components, and all of it's topology, we can discern in a fuller sense that the gospel establishes the law. Establishing the law through faith means, establishing the law through *faith in Jesus Christ*. If we accept the idea that *the law being established* and *the law being fulfilled* are similar concepts, then Jesus' words in Luke 24:44 shed light on Romans 3:31. *I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.*" Without Christ and His work, as explained by Paul, the law remains unfulfilled, unestablished in its fullest sense. *What the law is seeking to achieve is not achieved without the people of God believing in Christ!*

Consider one example. Regarding the matter of physical circumcision, did Paul really make void circumcision? Of course not, see 2:28-29. The gospel fulfills the ultimate reality to

which circumcision pointed.

And in regard to all the judicial curses contained in the law? Did Paul's explaining that God's set forth Christ as a propitiation in His blood void all those curses? No, it honored all those curses and the cross becomes the demonstration of the righteousness of God so strenuously insisted upon in the law (see above).

More examples could be given.

*Gal. 3:21-22* Paul asserted in the previous verses that the inheritance, that is the blessing of salvation promised to Abraham and his descendants, was given to Abraham on the basis of promise, not on the basis of the law which came 430 years after the promise was given. In verse 21 he anticipates someone wrongly reasoning from this that the law was *against the promises of God*. He completely rejects this way of thinking with his, *certainly not!* the law is not against the promises of God. Verse 22 shows how the law, referred to here as the scripture, works together with the promises. The law has *confined all under sin so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe*.

The objectors misunderstand and misuse the law as if it were given by God as a means for them to attain righteousness, or inherit the promises. But God never gave it for such purposes.

*Paul's "anti-theological" statements* The above texts rightfully caution us not to adopt an understanding of the law which pits it against the gospel, grace, and the promises or the Spirit. However, Paul does make statements that do speak antithetically and we need to understand these statements in a way which is consistent with the above statements and all of Scripture. This has always been a challenge in understanding Paul.

*Rom. 6:14-15* The conclusion stated in 6:14 is concluding the discussion which began in 5:20 (not 6:1) which introduced the subject of the relationship between *law and grace*. Those opposing Paul's gospel of being justified apart from works of the law, and salvation being freely given by God's grace to the one who believes in Christ, misrepresented Paul was advocating, or at least allowing, a continuance in sin that grace may abound. Paul explains in verses 2-13 that such a continuance in sin is simply not possible. The concluding statement in verse 14 gives assurance to the believer, and answers the objector represented in verse 1, that sin will not maintain a mastery over the believer's life. The reason sin will not maintain this mastery is because the believer is *not under law but under grace*.

Whatever this phrase means, it cannot mean that there is no law, or collection of God's commandments<sup>43</sup>, which the believer remains obligated to obey as described in verses 12-13. The believer is not to allow sin to reign in his mortal body, instead he is to present himself to God as one alive from the dead, and the members of his body, think of mind, eyes, mouth, ears, hands, etc., as instruments of righteousness. He is to use all of himself to perform acts of righteousness as opposed to his former use of himself in performing acts of sin. This is all reinforced and expanded in verses 16 - 23. Furthermore, in chapters 12-16 Paul gives significant lists of commands, many of them actually drawn from the Mosaic law which believers are to obey.

Nor should we think that Paul is referring specifically to justification apart from the works of the law which would emphasize that being "under law" is focusing on being condemned or accountable to establish one's righteousness by deeds of the law. The discussion from 5:20-6:23 is not *primarily* about justification but about the mastery of sin in the unbelievers life,

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43. See the section above, "Special Considerations Regarding the use of the term Law in Scripture".

versus the deliverance from sin's mastery for all who are in Christ.

*Meaning of being under law and grace*

The meaning of being "under" something is that of being in a position of *being controlled, ruled, or obligated* to the thing which one is under. In the context of Romans 6 being "under law" leaves one under the mastery of sin, but being under grace assures a person of freedom from sin's dominion.

So how is it that remaining under law leaves one under sin's mastery? Most likely the answer is in Paul's expressions of 5:20 and 7:6. Without faith in the promise and the reception of the promised Spirit the law actually increases sin in one's life. The law *entered that the offense might increase* (5:20) and when we were in the flesh, *the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death* (7:5). But grace is a far more powerful agent and when one is under grace, a recipient of God's favor by faith alone in a freely given justification and union with Christ's death and resurrection, sin's dominion is decisively ended. The law shuts all men up to both the dominion and condemnation of sin that they might receive the promise by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:22).

Both the law and grace are powerful agents that have major effects on a person's life. Controlling them and keeping them in a certain course. If one remains under the law one remains under the dominion of sin. But if one is "under grace" one's life will no longer be mastered by sin. This freedom has been achieved through union with Christ as Paul explained in verses 3-10.

"Under law" in this discussion does not mean "what group of commands I am accountable to obey"<sup>44</sup>, that is not the focus. "Under law" means "under [the influence or control of] the law" and that influence, *because of our flesh*, stirs up sin and leads to further slavery to sin. One must not stop with the law! one must go on to faith in Christ and reception of the promise of the Spirit in Christ. Paul's opponents either want to stop with the law, or give it a place of prominence which it is incorrect.

*A redemptive history shift*

We have a tendency to think far too individualistically when we try to understand passages of Scripture. The NT authors often refer to the entirety of the people of God at various times. The phrases "under law" and "under grace" most likely carry a redemptive historical sense. "under law" is referring to the era that Paul describes in Galatians 3 from Moses to Christ. Notice also in Romans 5:20 Paul refers to the law *entering*. If this is correct then Paul is also saying in 6:14 if you were still living under the era of the law of Moses or insisting on doing so now, you will remain under the power of sin. Israel, in the main, never achieved a victory over sin while under the law, but now that Christ has come, and the new era, called the reign of grace (5:21) has come, and during this era sin will not have dominion over the people of God as it did during the era of the Mosaic Covenant. If you insist on remaining under the Mosaic Covenant you will not achieve freedom from sin's dominion.

*Not under law in reference to sanctification*

We should go as far as to say that not only in regard to our Justification are we not "under law", but also in regard to our sanctification we are not under law, and if we seek to be we will be defeated by the power of sin.

This does not make law opposed to grace. Nor does it mean there is not a set of commands for us to obey. But it makes it clear that salvation comes by being *under the influence* and reign of God's grace (5:20-21). This is another way of saying that the law can give no power to justify or sanctify.

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44. But I do believe Paul still has the Mosaic law, which "entered" (5:20) in view.

*Rom. 7:1-6*

Three expressions of Romans 7:4-6 need to be understood. What does it mean that the believer has become *dead to the law through the body of Christ* (vs. 4)? What does it mean that the believer has been *delivered from the law* (vs. 5)? and what does it mean that prior to being in Christ we were *held by the law* (7:6)? As we attempt to answer these questions we should keep in mind that even in Rome, there was a significant Jewish presence, either in numbers or influence. Thus questions about the law were undoubtedly arising and in Romans 7:1 Paul specifically says, *for I speak to those who know the law*. A reference to the Mosaic law (5:20) and Jews or Gentiles familiar with, and likely having a high regard for Judaism.

In Romans 6 Paul has already rejected the notion, brought up by his Jewish opponents, that believers are permitted to sin since they are no longer under the law (6:1, 14,15). “In 7:1-6 he carries the argument one step further, for he contends that sin rules over those who are under the law [vss. 4-6]. Jewish opponents of Paul’s gospel contended that freedom from the law opened the door for sin. Paul turns the tables on them by insisting that it is those who are under the law who are in bondage to sin.”<sup>45</sup>

There has been a tendency to answer these questions, especially what it means to have been delivered from the law, as if they were asked in the context of a discussion centered on justification and deliverance from the *condemnation* of the law, i.e. the context of Romans chapters 3-5. But the context in which we find these questions has to do with the dominion of sin over a person’s life and how that dominion is broken, and does the law free from sin’s dominion or increase sin’s dominion? This context is indicated by; *Shall we continue in sin that grace might about?* (vs. 6:1), and *sin shall not have dominion over you* (6:14), and *shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?* (6:15), and that the believer has become dead to the law and married to Christ *that we should bear fruit to God* (7:4). This is not a discussion about justification.

Verses 5-6 explain verse 4 and help us properly answer the question, what does it mean that those in Christ have become dead to the law (vs. 4). Both having died to the law (vs. 4) and deliverance from the law (vs. 6) have to do with dieing to and being delivered from the law’s *influence* over us. The same idea as the “under” phrases of 6:14 (see above). And the influence that Paul has in mind is that described in verse 5, that *while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death*. Once we die to the law by union with Christ’s death we *are delivered from [this influence of] the law* (6a) and have *died to what [the law] we were held by [in bondage to sin’s power], so that we now serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter*.

The death to the law through the body of Christ referred to in verse 7:4 is one aspect of having died to [the dominion of] sin of which Paul refers in 6:2-6 which was for the purpose that we should not longer be slaves of sin (vs. 6:6). “Romans 6 stressed that the power of sin was broken when believers died with Christ, and now in Romans 7 the power of the law [to arouse sin and lead to more bondage] is also shattered through His death.”<sup>46</sup>

To express it another way, being delivered from the law means we are delivered from this “syndrome” of the influence of the law working with our flesh to produce even more sin and lead to death. Paul describes this “syndrome” in some detail in 7:8-10.

The question raised in 7:7, *What shall we say then? Is the law sin?* confirms that the above understanding is correct. If Paul was only saying we were made to die to the law’s curse, i.e. condemnation (vs. 4), and we had been delivered from the law’s condemnation (vs. 6a), and thus

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45. Thomas Schreiner, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT, Romans, 1998, pg. 345

46. Schreiner, pg. 352

were no longer held under a curse (vs. 6b), it would be hard to see how such statements would provoke the question in verse 7. But since Paul asserted that to remain under the law is to remain under this “syndrome” which creates more sin and death, and the law is an integral part of the machinery of this syndrome, then the question arises, *Is the law sin* (vs. 7)?

*Antinomian  
misuse of  
7:4, 6*

It should now be clear that *having become dead to the law* (vs. 4) and *having been delivered from the law* (vs. 6) does not mean that we are not required to obey the commands of the law or be under God’s authority *as expressed in His law*. That simply is not the point of discussion in this passage. These phrases (vs. 4 and 6) have often been taken out of context and understood to mean that there is no law or set of commands that the believer is responsible to obey, “you are delivered from the law”, “you are dead to the law” therefore there are no commands for you to obey.

However when we understand Romans 6 and 7:1-6 together the picture emerges that in Christ the believer dies to *both* sin and the law. Dying to the law means (see above) that the bondage of sin and the law *working together* in our flesh to produce more sin and death has been broken. Union with Christ’s death, resurrection and the reception of the Holy Spirit bring about a whole new way of life (see 6:4b, 6:5, 6:6b, 6:7, 6:14, 6:18, 6:22, 7:4, 7:6). We no longer serve in the oldness of the letter but in the newness of the Spirit.

*Serving in  
newness of  
the Spirit,  
Rom. 7:6*

Serve in this context means to bear fruit to God (7:4) and fruit to holiness (6:22). The best explanation of what it means to serve in newness of the Spirit is given in 8:1-4. And amazingly, the person serving in the newness of the Spirit begins to fulfill, i.e. obey, the righteous requirements of the law (8:4).

In Romans 7:6, and in other passages, Paul appears to be contrasting *two sets* of two different time frames and it causes us some difficulty (at least the author) in feeling confident that we’ve really grasped what He is saying<sup>47</sup>. In 7:1-6 we have a time of serving in *oldness of the letter* versus a time of serving *in the newness of the Spirit*. One set of “old and new” refers to the *individual*. When he was in the flesh (7:5) and married or bound to the law (vs.7:2) and serving in oldness of the letter versus having become dead to the law (vs. 7:4), married to Christ (vs. 7:4), delivered from the law (7:5) and serving in newness of the Spirit.

However a second set of “old and new” refers to the history of redemption. When Paul uses the expression *oldness of the letter* contrasted with *newness of the Spirit*, there is a “heavy” overtone of the old, immature, kept under custody of the law age contrasted with the new age of the Spirit. The old age is the era prior to the giving of the Spirit and the promises of the Spirit becoming a reality. Now that Christ has come the new age, the Messianic age, has come and these promises of the Spirit are being fulfilled *for all the people of God*, and they now serve in the newness of the Spirit. Paul will argue in Romans 8 that all the children of God have the Spirit and are led to cry out Abba Father. We will return to this discussion in the following section on the right uses of the law for the believer today.

*Rom. 2:29*

“in the Spirit not in the letter” is the antithetical expression.

From the context it’s clear we shouldn’t understand this meaning opposition but rather the insufficiency of an “external” law, written on tablets of stone, or paper, etc.

What good is an outward law - i.e. written on paper that you hold in your hands only? Like, what good is an outward circumcision in the flesh only? And ultimately, what good is it being

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47. It is even more pronounced in Gal. 3 when he says “before faith came”, not directly referring to our individual faith, but prior to the coming of Christ when Israel was under the law.

an outward Jew only? It was circumcision (and the covenant this represented) and being given the law that made the Jews distinct from Gentiles

“In the letter” is associated with that which is outward. “In the Spirit” is associated with that which is inward. The law will do no good without the Spirit. Again think of the New covenant promises of the Spirit - the only means whereby Israel will become faithful to follow God’s commandments. Jer. Eze.

2 Cor. 3:6

“the letter kills but the Spirit but the spirit gives life” is the antithetical statement.

One major feature and *newness* of the new covenant is the provision of the Spirit.

The Mosaic covenant primarily gave the law but did not provide the Spirit.

Understanding Paul further from Romans and Galatians we can see that the law kills in two ways: Its curses bring down God’s judgements on our violations of the law. But it also kills in the sense of Rom. 7:9-10. Without the Spirit the law works with sin to produce more bondage to sin.

Gal. 5:18

Special attention needs to be paid to the preceding context of chapters 4 and 5 to understand Paul’s statement in 5:18. The *liberty* to which Christians are called, referred to in 5:13, should be understood in light of the bondages mentioned earlier:

1. 4:9 - bondage under the law - because it is weak (due to our flesh, it cannot impart an ability to obey its commands, it cannot give life).
2. The allegory given in 4:21-31 - Vs. 25, those living “under the law”, the old era of salvation history, remain in bondage. Israel never prospered during this era.
3. 5:1 - the yoke of bondage refers to Israel’s inability to live and prosper “under the law”, during the era of the MC. Compare 5:1 with Peter’s statement in Acts 15:10.

The liberty we have been called to (5:13) is to be free from these bondages he has just been referring to.

In 5:13b Paul cautions against a false representation of what he means by this call to liberty or freedom. He is referring to a liberty *not to practice sin*, but a liberty which enables them to fulfill the law of love which is actually a fulfilling of all the law! (v.14)

And how will we fulfill the law of love? by returning to being under the law and observing days, months and seasons and being circumcised? No! We will fulfill the law of love by walking in the Spirit (vs. 5:16, 22). And how did and do we receive the Spirit? by the works of the law (3:2)? No! We received the Spirit by the hearing of faith (3:2, 14).

Vs. 5:16 - you will have a freedom from the power of sin by Walking in the Spirit. You will be enabled to fulfill the law of love, and all the law! by walking in the Spirit.

Vs. 5:18 - It is a certainty, if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.

The first meaning here is likely a redemptive historical point - If you are led by the Spirit you are no longer living under the “before the fullness of time” era of salvation history. To live under the law is to live under the power of sin, which is aroused by the law and to live under the law’s curse upon sin. If you are led by the Spirit you are freed from the “syndrome” (described in Romans 7:1-14). The outpouring of the Spirit announces the beginning of a new era in redemptive history and now all the people of God, having faith in Christ, receive the Spirit and are given the ability to practice the law of love. Walking in the freedom of the Spirit does not grant freedom to sin, it actually gives victory over sin, those who walk in the Spirit,

“shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”.

Also not to be “under the law” certainly ought to be understood down the lines of 3:21-25, 4:17.

*Parallel with Rom. 6:14*

Gal. 5:16 and 18 are parallel with Romans 6:14, *sin shall not have dominion over you for you are not under law but under grace.*

*Summary*

By faith in Christ we attain a righteous standing before God entirely apart from works the law (being justified), and believing in the promise made to us in Christ we receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit - also apart from works of the law (3:2). We now live during the age of the Spirit as the sons of God and are enabled to bear fruit of the Spirit, fulfilling the law of love.

### ***Right uses of the law for the believer today***

*1st - A revelation of profitable doctrine or teaching*

The NT authors likely never dreamed that they would have to convince people that the Jewish Scriptures were essential to the faith of NT churches. It was simply assumed. This attitude comes out strongly in Paul’s final instructions to Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:13-4:3.

Note the context: 3:13 with 4:3 - deceived and being deceived, not enduring sound doctrine.

The first right use of the law for the believer today is to become grounded in right thinking about God and His relationship to the world. The OT law builds that foundation as the one true God reveals Himself to Israel through the law.

*Sound, profitable doctrine* - One God, monotheism. That one God is Yahweh, the God of Israel. And he is the Creator of the whole world. When we study the law we see how the true God chose to reveal Himself to Israel, we discover what God is like.

He is the Creator, He is a jealous God, He is full of goodness, He is invisible and cannot be compared to anything on earth or in heaven. Therefore we must not make images of him like anything on the earth. He is holy. Many of the commands and prohibitions in the law show His holiness contrasted with our sinfulness.

Some say that they do not believe the God of the OT to be an accurate representation of the true God. A more accurate way of expressing this, which highlights the serious error of such an attitude, would be to say, “the God of Israel is not an accurate representation the true God”. But the true God had preeminently revealed Himself as Yahweh when giving the law of Moses to Israel when He established the Mosaic Covenant with Israel.

*Sound, profitable doctrine* - God’s hatred of sin, is the basis for understanding the death of Christ as a propitiation, substitutionary atonement, justification, redemption - the proper understanding of all these aspects of salvation is established in the law.

Every believer today should make a careful study of the law to become grounded in profitable and sound doctrine, teaching, information to become acquainted with the true God.

Think of the relation of the law to our understanding of God like the structural skeleton of a large building (illustrate). The structural skeleton is not the complete building, but the building is built on and around and attached to the structural system, top to bottom, side to side. *Every room in the building has a dependent attachment to that structure.* So it is with the law and everything that comes after the law in the history of man’s relation to God and His fuller revelation in the NT.

The Christian ought to be a careful and patient student of the law and deeply imbibe its sound and profitable doctrine.



*2nd - Moral and ethical norms (non typological)*

Many moral and ethical norms of the law are referred to and applied to NT believers. Paul, who proclaims so strongly that believers who have the Spirit of God are not under the law, without any hesitation often refers to portions of the law to regulate our behavior. Not being under the law, for Paul, means we are no longer living under the Mosaic Covenant *as a whole*, and responsible before God to live under that covenant and the totality of its provisions (see above sections) and not being under the mastery of sin created by syndrome of the law and sin and our flesh. Nor are we sinning when we cease to practice those commands of the law which are now fulfilled in Christ (see following section).

However, for Paul, and all of the NT, there is never a flinch of doubt that an obedience is still to be rendered to God and if the basic orientation toward obedience is not present then one can expect judgement in the end and one will not participate in the final end-time manifestation of the kingdom of God. The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God (Eph. 5:2-7, 1 Cor. 6:9-11, Gal. 5:19-21).

A survey of the “practical” sections of Paul’s letters demonstrates that he has no hesitation in finding moral norms in the law that Christians ought to obey and Paul does not consider applying such norms from the law as in any way compromising His gospel of Grace and life in the Spirit. Consider the following examples.

Rom. 12:19 - Deut. 32:35  
 Rom. 13:8-9 - Ex. and Lev.  
 1 Cor. 5:13 - Deut. 17:7; 19:19, 22:21,24, 24:7  
 1 Cor. 9:9 - Deut. 25:4  
 1 Cor. 10:7 - Ex. 32:6  
 2 Cor. 6:16 - Lev. 26:12  
 2 Cor. 8:15 - Ex. 16:18  
 2 Cor. 13:1 - Deut. 19:15  
 Gal. 5:14 - Lev. 19:18  
 Eph. 5:31 - Gen. 2:24  
 Eph. 6:2-3 - Deut. 5:16  
 1 Tim. 5:18 - Deut. 25:4  
 1 Tim. 5:19 - Deut. 17:6, 19:15  
 1 Tim. 5:21 - Deut. 1:17  
 James 2:8-9 - Lev. 19:18, Deut. 1:17  
 1 Pet. 1:15 - Lev. 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7

All of these exhortations are “enriched” if they are studied in their OT contexts. Consider the exhortation in 1 Timothy 5:21 to church leaders to not engage in partiality. A reading of Deuteronomy 1:17 surely reinforces this exhortation.

The question arises, “are these *explicitly referenced commands* the only moral norms we ought to concern ourselves with from the law?” Some have taught that only those aspects of the law which are explicitly re-iterated in the NT have authority over believers today. This approach can easily be seen to be incorrect because:

1. It ignores the “all Scripture” principles of 2 Tim. 3:14-16.
2. It is clear in the above examples that the various references to the law *are occasioned by the specific situations the author is addressing*. We can rightly expect if the situations were different, other portions of the law that have bearing on the different situations would be applied. For example, Jesus quotes Genesis 2 when the subject of divorce is

being discussed because that portion of the law is directly applicable to the matter of marriage and divorce.

Principles of how to determine what portions of the law, and how each portion of the law, applies to believers today are discussed in the following section. But it is clear that the law continues to give humankind, believers and unbelievers, many moral, ethical norms to which they are held accountable by God (see above section of the law in relation to the Gentiles and the discussion on “unchanging moral law”).

*3rd - The believer's use of the “typological commands”*

By “typological commands” is meant the many commands in the law which were a *shadow of things to come* (Col. 2:16-17), and were related to what Christ would do when he came as *High priest of the good things to come* (Heb. 9:11-13, 10:1). The believer today ought to use these commands in two ways: 1) The Mosaic Covenant practice ought to be studied to gain a proper understanding of the person and work of Christ, 2) The believer now “obeys” these commands by doing what the type represented and pointed forward to.

*Gaining an understanding of Christ*

Jesus' statement to the unbelieving Jews in John 5:45-47 and His words to His disciples in Luke 24:44 teach us that we are to learn much regarding Jesus Christ from the Law of Moses. No one will form a proper understanding of Jesus Christ without attaining to a proper understanding of the law of Moses. This is as true today and it was when Jesus spoke these words to the unbelieving Jews and His disciples. If Christ's death is understood in a way that takes it outside of the structural understanding of atonement, sacrifice and the priesthood established in the law, such an understanding is incorrect. Paul, near the end of His ministry, can without hesitation tell Timothy that the Scriptures are those which can make one wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

When Jesus comes as the Messiah and His work begins to unfold with John the Baptist's announcement, *behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*, the full meaning of so much of the law of Moses becomes plain. Jesus' own statements of laying down His life, giving His body and shedding His blood are to be understood in the light of the law of Moses. Historical incidents for the entire nation with associated commands (consider the manna, the water from the rock, the fiery serpents) are designed by God with the express purpose (discovered later) to teach us of His Son. All of the law's required sacrifices, the priesthood, the altar, the tabernacle/temple with its inner and outer sanctuaries show us how it becomes possible for the Holy God to draw near to and save sinful, worthy of death, people. The fullest explanation of these aspects of the law of Moses is given to us in the book of Hebrews. All of the OT ritual commands to worshipper and priest give us a clear understanding of what actually takes place when God saves us in Jesus Christ. The rituals also continue to teach us today that God is holy, He does not, cannot, ignore sin, and yet He provides and appoints the way He is to be approached and found to be gracious in spite of our sinfulness.

*Obedying the typological commands*

The believer's use of the “typological” commands goes further than receiving instruction from them. In a real sense we still obey these commands, not by practicing the external type, but now that Christ has come, *we do what the external type pointed to and symbolized*. We “do” the Leviticus ritual (Lev. 4:1-6) of taking a bull to the priest, laying our hands on it and confessing our sins, thus transferring our guilt to the bull - we do this today by believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins as we confess them to God, and approach God by Jesus Christ our High priest. We look to the serpent lifted up on the pole, we gather manna daily to sustain our life by living by faith in Jesus Christ, who is the bread of life. Should we burn incense on the altar in the temple? Yes, we should gather in the new covenant temple (the assembled people of God) and pray. We still offer free will and thank offerings in a fulfilled in Christ manner (Eph. 2:21-22, Heb. 13:15-16, 1 Pet. 2:4-5).

Though there is much controversy regarding the Sabbath commandments in the law, Hebrews 4 and Colossians 2:16-17, along with the biblical motif that God gives his people rest, seem to make it clear that the fourth commandment finds its “keeping” now by believing and continuing to believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup> By coming to him to enter God’s rest.

The emphasis and commands in the law teaching that Yahweh would be approached in *only one way*, through only the priesthood which He had established, and only with the rituals He had established - all of this teaching is “obeyed” when we draw near to God *by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh* (Heb. 10:19-20). All those religions which speak of a way to the Father other than Jesus Christ and disregarding the law of Moses, including every unbelieving Jew. Did not Jesus say, “*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.*” The law of Moses teaches very clearly that there is only one way of salvation.

There is a principle which can be summarized as follows: One purpose of the Mosaic Covenant laws to Israel was to enforce *typological behavior*. The Old Covenant people of God were to do *both*, the typological behavior and believe in what it pointed to. When the New Covenant was instituted the people of God are called to obey what the typological behavior represented and *cease* the typological behavior itself. *Physical* circumcision is abolished. To be *under the law* is to be required to practice the whole law.

*Practicing the law while ignoring Christ*

It should be pointed out that the unbelieving Jew, who still tries to practice the law, and the civil moralist<sup>49</sup>, who ignore the fact that Christ is the fulfillment of the law, are misusing the law. They are like the Pharisees Jesus reproved in John 5:46. Unless they respond to God’s fundamental purpose of the law to reveal His Son and direct us to Him, they will remain under the law’s condemnation.

*4th - the law brings the knowledge of sin*

This application relates to both Jews and Gentiles. God publishing his law in writing is intended to bring the knowledge of sin to mankind. Romans 3:19-20 summarizes the purpose of the law, *for through the law is the knowledge of sin*. Paul expressed in Romans 7:7-9 that he *would not have known sin except through the law*. Though John seldom uses the term law when he gives a formal definition of sin he uses the term, *whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness* (1 John 3:4).

*Knowledge of sin in a twofold sense*

As was discussed above the idea of knowing sin by the law, especially in Paul’s experience, contains both the knowing that some act is evil, wrong in God’s sight and also knowing the enslaving power of sin which is aroused by the law. And this twofold knowledge of sin given by the law continues for the believer and unbeliever.

*Knowledge of condemnation*

Closely associated with a knowledge of sin, i.e. knowing what human acts are wrong in God’s sight, is a knowledge of condemnation; knowing that God condemns us. The curses in the law awaken us this vital knowledge. Also, the very important knowledge that we are condemned for any and all violations of the law, *no matter how few*, comes from knowing and understanding the law (Gal. 3:10-11). This knowledge of condemnation, because of any infractions of the law, is absolutely vital if we are to believe that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, apart from works of the law. *But the Scripture [especially the law] imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus*

48. For a thorough discussion of the Sabbath and subjects relating to it refer to the series of messages available from the SGBC media ministry.

49. One who tries to use the law as a moral code for the laws of the state. This is not to say that civil governments may not benefit from a study of the law and the application of its principles within society. But, this was not a central purpose for the law being given to Israel.

*Christ might be given to those who believe* (Gal. 3:22 ESV).

*Self righteousness*

In sharing the gospel and doing the work of evangelism it is vitally important to understand that both the religious (think of the Jew in Paul's day) and the irreligious (think of the Gentile in Paul's day) are naturally self righteous and completely mis understand and mis use whatever law they may have. That law can be nothing more than the deeply suppressed law in their consciences or the law they learned from a religious upbringing. The only way to awaken such people is to carefully teach them from Scripture the true nature of the law and of God's holiness and how these expose their sin and thoroughly condemn them. Learning how to expose self righteousness is key in learning how to bring the gospel to others. Understanding the law and its God intended purposes enables us to expose self righteousness and show how utterly inadequate one's own righteousness is for standing before God in the day of judgment.

*The OT expects the law to continue for the people of God*

Isa. 42:4 - OT references to the Gentiles receiving or waiting for God's law. These need to be researched and our interpretation of law in the NC should be consistent with these texts. Also Isa. 51:4-5, Jer. 31:33, Micah 4:2

### ***What Law applies to believers today?***

*Introduction*

Though it has often been attempted there is no simple formula that can be rigidly applied to determine what portions of the law are applicable in the New Covenant. No such formula is directly given in Scripture. However, the "formulas" which have been proposed are instructive and when not used too rigidly can be helpful. One such "formula" has been centered around a division of the law into the categories of: moral, ceremonial, and civil. In this approach those laws which can be put into the "moral" category remain applicable to the believer today. Those in the ceremonial and civil categories have been done away with now that Christ has come and the church is not a theocracy. There is wisdom in this approach but the categories are lacking in that they are somewhat artificial because they do not sufficiently take into account the two key concepts of, 1) the law is affected by the covenant people are in 2) the law relating to the people of God is affected by the *period* in redemptive history in which they live. What is needed is a set of categories that are more "sensitive" to these two key matters.

In the section above, "Understanding the Mosaic Law in relation to Israel" an altered set of categories of commands and promises was recommended:

Unchanging moral law - Matters which are found written in the consciences of all people.

Covenantal provisions - Matters unique to the administration of the Mosaic covenant.

Historical provisions relating to idolatry - Matters unique to Israel's position in Canaan

Typological provisions - Matters pointing to the coming person and work of Christ

Theocratic provisions - Matters relating to Israel as a nation with borders among nations

*Unchanging moral law*

Prior to the giving of the law to Israel the unchanging moral law existed, in a suppressed and defaced manner, in the consciences of men (Rom. 2:11-15, 1:32). With the giving of the law it was now written and given to Israel. That Gentiles in some measure can do the things that are *written* in the law of Moses, without having the [written] law, confirms that we should view the law of Moses as *containing* God's unchanging moral law for all mankind.<sup>50</sup>

We should also recognize that in the law of Moses as given to Israel there is no attempt to distinguish between unchanging moral law and the other four categories (there is an hierarchy of significance in the law as shown above). There are single laws that contain multiple aspects of

the five categories given above. In recommending these five categories it is not advocated that we put each command or practice explicitly into one category. What is being advocated is that those laws, or aspects of a law, which fall into the last four categories do not apply to the believer today *as if he or she were a member of the Mosaic Covenant and a citizen of Theocratic Israel* living in the land of Canaan. So we will begin by looking at each of the four categories and point out things in the law which no longer apply because they are clearly fulfilled in Christ, or no longer necessary now that the people of God are living in the age of Christ and the provision of the Holy Spirit.

### **Covenantal provisions**

The laws associated with *circumcision* in the flesh are an example of unique covenantal provisions of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. These laws certainly did not, could not apply to Gentiles outside of the covenant.

*Gen. 17:10-14*  
*Lev. 12:3*

Both the descendants of Abraham and any Gentile servants who were bought as slaves were to be circumcised on the eighth day. To fail to do this would result in that individual, even though a physical descendant of Abraham, being cut off from Israel, the people of God.

*Ex. 12:43-48*

Only those inside the covenant were permitted to eat the passover, therefore if any Gentile desired to eat it, he must first enter the covenant (12:48). An neither could the commands to observe the passover be applicable to Gentiles or considered unchanging moral law.

*Deut. 10:16, 30:6, Jer. 4:4, 9:25, Rom. 2:25-29, Col. 2:11*

In understanding the law of Moses it is essential that any later revelation in the prophets and the NT be brought to bear on how we understand it. In the case of circumcision learn that it was more than a “covenantal provision”, i.e. a sign of the Abrahamic covenant. It also contained a typological provision pointing to both the need of a new heart and God’s future provision to give one by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 2:29) and a by circumcision in Christ (Col. 2:11).

*Heb. 7:12, 16, 28*

*The Levitical priesthood.* That the only sanctioned priests whereby the people of God were to draw near to God *must be descendants of Aaron/Levi* was a unique provision of the law given with the Mosaic Covenant. Prior to the giving of the law this provision was not in place, and it was clearly rescinded with the coming of Christ who is the great high priest for the people of God in the New Covenant and is a descendant of Judah. Hebrews 7 is explaining how the people of God still have a high priest, and one far superior to that which the law provided. But, this priest is not appointed according to the law of Moses, but the word of the oath which came after the law (vs. 28). Notice how the author of Hebrews appeals to latter Scripture to show that the *law has changed* for the people of God.

Also, when the Levitical priesthood was ended all the laws associated with the levitical priesthood were ended. It is a mistake to take a piece of the law relating to levitical priests and try to apply such to the office of elder or pastor in the New Testament.

### **Sabbath commands**

There has been extensive discussion and debate regarding the various Sabbath laws, especially the fourth commandment in the Decalogue. It is not possible here to enter fully into this discussion, but, like circumcision, the Sabbath Laws also contain both a *covenantal* and *typological* provision.

*Ex. 31:13, Eze. 20:12, 20*

Exodus 31:13 defines that the Sabbath *is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.* The Sabbath observance was to remind the Israelite that the Lord had set him apart from all others, i.e. sanctifies you. This obviously

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50. The reference to the Gentiles in Leviticus 20:23, *for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them*, makes it clear that portions of the Levitical law proceeding this statement are surely unchanging moral law.

could not have applied to Gentiles, outside of the covenant. This aspect of the Sabbath command was not unchanging moral law applicable to Gentiles outside of the Mosaic Covenant. It was a “covenantal provision” applicable to those inside the covenant.

*Deut. 5:12-15, Heb. 3:5-4:14, Col. 2:16-17, Psalm 95*

Deut. 5:12-15 further explains how an Israelite was to understand the Sabbath. The rest he was experiencing was *to remind him that Yahweh had delivered him from slavery and bondage*, remember he had no rest in Egypt. The term Sabbath means rest, Sabbath day - Rest day. From the explanation given in Deut. and additional scripture, the concept of God giving His people rest and they entering into His rest is a type of our complete Salvation in Jesus Christ at the last day. Sin has resulted in no rest but instead an endless toil because the earth has been cursed. The promise that God will give His people rest is developed throughout the OT beginning with God resting on the seventh day of creation, Noah (who’s name means rest), the Lord settling Israel in the land which gives them rest, Psalm 95 promises a greater rest to come, and then in the New Testament Hebrews 3:5-4:14 explains how the Sabbath ought to be understood as a type of entering God’s rest by believing in Jesus Christ - who gives His people rest. The Sabbath pointed forward to the rest God gives His people in Christ when they first believe, and ultimately on the last day when they are settled in the eternal land of promise.

In Col. 2:16-17 Paul clearly indicates that the various Sabbaths (plural) were a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Paying close attention to both the covenantal provisions of the Sabbath for Israel, and the typological purposes of the Sabbath relating to the biblical theme of God giving His people rest, can significantly help in properly understanding the Sabbath.

That the above examples of covenantal provisions are ended is based upon the temporary nature of the Mosaic Covenant, that covenant being ended now that Christ has come. See the section above, “Uses of the Law in relation to redemptive history”

### **Historical provisions**

A tendency to ignore the fact that there are specific laws given to Israel that relate to specific forms of idolatry they were to avoid has led to misapplications of the law.

*Deut. 7:3-4*

Laws forbidding intermarriage are in this category of historical provisions relating to idolatry. The reason such marriages were forbidden is explicitly stated, *For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods*. It is a serious mis application of Scripture for 20th century Christians to condemn marriages between men and women of different ethnicity on the basis of these commands.

*Lev. 19:27-28, De. 14:1, 1 Ki. 18:28*

Laws dealing with how one’s beard was kept or trimmed, forbidding cutting oneself, and tattooing dealt directly with practices associated with forms of idolatry of the surrounding nations. 1 Corinthians 10:19-21 gives us some guidance in how the principle ought to be applied. The believer should not participate in “whatever” is directly *and* intentionally associated with idols, demons, or Satanic worship or praise. But the question to be asked in these cases is, what Christian would desire to?

*Deut. 12:29-32*

They were not to pick up the practices of how foreign gods were worshipped and then use those practices in the worship of Yahweh, *you shall not worship the Lord in that way*. The law of Moses is influenced by the historical situation into which Israel was to settle, being surrounded by numerous forms of idolatry. Such laws cannot be simply turned into unchanging moral law.

*Eph. 2:14-15, Lev. 20:22-26, Gen. 9:3-4, Acts 10:9-16*

The Mosaic covenant law was designed by God to *temporarily* erect a wall of separation between Israel and the nations. Regardless of the translation of Eph. 2:14; whether the dividing wall is the hostility caused by the law of commandments (NIV, ESV), or the dividing wall is the law of commandments which caused the hostility, *the law of commandments played a major role in separating Israel from the Gentile nations that previously inhabited Canaan.* It is significant that in the summary of the law given to the people of Israel in Leviticus 20:22-26 that the Lord states, *I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean.* There has been much discussion regarding the dietary laws regarding clean and unclean animals. It appears<sup>51</sup> that these dietary laws, either by custom or oral tradition, did not exist prior to the Mosaic Covenant (Gen. 9:3-4).<sup>52</sup> Also the fact that these laws began with settling Israel in the land and are rescinded by the Lord (Acts 10:9-16) makes it clear that they are not unchanging moral law. What then was the purpose of these laws? It is likely that the purpose of these laws was to encourage a “healthy” separation (Lev. 20:22-26) of Israelites from Gentiles in order to minimize temptations to idolatry. Significant social and living integration with Gentiles on their “turf” would simply not be possible without violating these laws. Unless Gentiles were slaves in your house, in which case they were required to be circumcised and to live on your “turf”, one would have little sustained contact with them and opportunities to learn their “customs”, inevitably associated with idolatry, would be greatly minimized. The visions the Lord gave to Peter, declaring all foods clean (Acts 10:9-16), prior to Peter being sent to Cornelius’ house confirm that the dietary laws maintained this separation between Jew and Gentile (Acts 10:28).

Leviticus 20:26 repeats the fact that the Lord had separated Israel from the nations; *And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.* The associating of obeying the clean/unclean animal laws (vs. 25) with the covenantal refrain expressed to them, *I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine,* may indicate that these laws also served as “markers/reminders” to every man, woman, boy, and girl that they belonged to Yahweh and not to the gods of their Gentile neighbors. Whatever their purpose, it is clear from Mark 7:18-19 and Acts 10:9-16, now that the Mosaic Covenant is ended, there is nothing that one can eat that will defile one in the sight of God.

*The reverse of separation in the New covenant*

With the coming of the new covenant in Christ, the blessing of the Holy Spirit given to all the people of God, and the law written into all of their circumcised hearts (Jer. 31:31-34, Heb. 8:8-12), not only is the wall of separation no longer necessary, the people of God are *commanded and empowered* to go into all the nations (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). Believing Jews are no longer to remain separated from the Gentiles as a means of preserving them from idolatry. They are now to go into all idolatrous cultures, and cities, and homes and call them to faith in the name of Christ and the worship of the God of Israel, the one true God (1 Th. 1:9).

**Typological provisions**

The word *type* applied to things in the OT pointing to Christ comes from Paul’s use of the term in Romans 5:14 where he stated that Adam *is a type of Him [Christ] who was to come.* The Greek term<sup>53</sup> translated *type* can refer to the impression or figure made by a die. The term is often translated as “example” in the NT<sup>54</sup>. The type is not the thing itself, but represents the

51. My research is not yet complete.

52. The distinction between clean and unclean animals to be used for sacrifice did exist as an oral tradition passed between generations prior to the Mosaic Covenant.

53. τυπος, *tipos*, type or example.

thing.

The term *shadow* is also used to convey the similar idea as type. The shadow an object casts is not the object itself, but does convey a significant amount of information about the object. In Colossians 2:16-17 Paul states that many commands in the law relating to foods and the observance of days *are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ*.

A third term used by the NT to convey these ideas about the law is *symbol*. Hebrews 9:9 refers to the tabernacle with its rituals as *symbolic*<sup>55</sup> for that time of history. Like a type and a shadow, a symbol conveys significant information about an object, but it is not the object.

The NT teaches us (as shown below) that the law contained *many* types, shadows, and symbols, of the person, offices, work and blessings of Christ. These types, shadows and symbols can come in the form of,

commands; think of the commands for the sin offering, offices; think of the office of the high priest, prophet, and king, individuals; think of Adam, Isaac, Moses, events; the passover, the giving of manna, the fiery serpent ordeal, Jacob's ladder, and objects; the tabernacle and its furnishings, the brazen serpent, the rock which was struck.<sup>56</sup>

In this study types, shadows, and symbols are referred to simply as *typology*. All of the typological provisions in the law were intended to represent the realities of heaven, God's saving work in Jesus Christ, and the blessings which come from Him and His work. As is shown below these typological provisions, established and enforced by the Mosaic Covenant, were intended to be *temporal*, and ended when Jesus Christ came and fulfilled what the types represented.

*Heb. 8:1-13*

Without giving a detailed explanation of this chapter the main points can be clearly seen and guide us as to how we should understand many portions of the law of Moses.

Vss. 1-2 - The true tabernacle, which the Lord erected (vs.2) is in heaven. The true high priest is seated at the right hand of God in heaven (vs. 1). Jesus, the true high priest, ministers there (vs. 2) and what takes place *there* is ultimately what matters for each one of us.

Vss. 3-5 - Israel's priests on earth *who offer the gifts according to the law* (vs. 4) are serving the *copy and shadow of the heavenly things*, the things described in verses 1-2.

Vss. 6 - Things have *now* changed for the better because Jesus has *obtained a more excellent ministry* than the Levitical priests because He is the *Mediator of a better covenant which was established on better promises*.

Vss. 7-12 - The author, addressing a Jewish mind set, must now defend two significant matters he introduced in verses 6. 1) That things have *changed* because of Jesus' priestly ministry, and, 2) that there is a *better* covenant based on *better* promises. He begins by proving that the Mosaic covenant had "faults", *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would*

54. 1 Cor. 10:6, 1 Thes. 1:7, 2 Thes. 3:9

55. Greek παραβολη, *parabole*, often translated parable.

56. When studying the law it is important to recognize what are and are not legitimate types. We must identify the types that are present to properly handle the law *and* we must not find types where none exist. See the section, "Types and Shadows" in chapter 4, "Interpreting Scripture" which lists six characteristics of a true type.



*have been sought for a second covenant.* But as Jeremiah 31:31-34 states, the Lord has sought for a second covenant.

Vs. 8 - From Scripture (Jer. 31) it is clear that a time would come when the Lord would make *a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.* The Lord said things will change, *days will come* when He will change them. And the Lord will change things *for the better.* And these changes are being made because of *finding fault with them [the people]* (vs. 8),..... *because they did not continue in My [first] covenant, and I disregarded them* (vs. 9b).

Vss. 9-12 describe the new covenant. It has four major characteristics; it will not be like the covenant made at Sinai, God's laws will be put in the people's minds and written on their hearts instead of the external tablets of stone, all the people shall know the Lord, and all will be forgiven.

Vs. 13 - This is a significant summary and conclusions are drawn. For God to have said, *A new covenant,* means, *He has made the first obsolete.* Thus, even many centuries ago the Lord indicated that the first covenant would become obsolete. And when was this obsolescence take effect? When the priesthood of the New Covenant began to function in the true tabernacle which the Lord erected. When the High Priest became seated at the right hand of God and began His ministry *in the true tabernacle* (vs. 1). When Jesus obtained the more excellent ministry and began to mediate the better promises of the new covenant (vs. 6). With the obsolescing and vanishing away of the first covenant the three things previously established by that covenant for drawing near to God vanish away:

1. The earthly tabernacle and all the laws associated with it (it is no longer necessary since the high priest of the new covenant ministers in the true tabernacle.).
2. The priesthood and all the laws associated with the priest ministering in the earthly tabernacle (the priesthood is replaced by Jesus Christ).
3. All the regulations for God's people for approaching Him in the tabernacle, via the high priest. These include all laws relating to becoming ceremonially unclean. One couldn't draw near to the tabernacle if he/she were unclean. All the rites associated with the various sacrifices and offerings *presented to God* who was "in the tabernacle". His presence is no longer there. In the new covenant His presence is in Jesus Christ!

A foundational principle in all of this is, if you take down the tabernacle *in which God's presence dwells* then everything associated with it goes away also. The author actually goes so far as to say that via the first covenant tabernacle the Holy Spirit was indicating *that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing* (vs. 9:8)

*Shadows replaced with that which is better*

All these things vanishing away could make a Jewish worshipper very insecure. Thus in 9:1-10:22 the author explains that what has replaced the *copy and shadow of the heavenly things* (vs. 8:5) is superior, because *Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come* (vs. 9:11) - and note, *with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.* A high priest *in the true, heavenly tabernacle,* surpasses anything that a priest could accomplish in the earthly tabernacle.

*Heb. 8:5, 9:9, 10:1*

Hebrews 8-10 teaches us that we should understand all those portions of the law which were, *by God's design,* the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as typology, pointing toward some aspect of Christ's person, or work or blessing obtained for us. The law, having a shadow of the good things to come, still has value for the Christian today but its use has been transformed.<sup>57</sup> When the NT gives an indication that an OT practice, or entire institution (i.e. temple, priesthood) was typological we can be sure we are not to practice the law as if Christ has

not come and fulfilled the type.

*Col. 2:16-17* Paul, without giving as full an explanation as the author of Hebrews, taught the same truth when he confronted those who insisted on the value of practicing some of the typological provisions of the Law (2:8-15, 20-22)<sup>58</sup>. If the Colossians followed these false teachers they would be cheated or swindled out of what was really theirs in Christ (vss. 8, 18). It would be to have your silver coin taken away and given a wooden one in its place.

*The danger of turning back* Any religion attempting to continue or re-institute the typological provisions of the law is making a serious mistake. In view of the above it is not surprising that in 70 A.D. the Lord had the temple completely destroyed. He is no longer found in the temple but in His Son who is seated at His right hand in *the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man*. (Heb. 8:2).

*Theocratic provisions* When the Lord formed Israel into a nation He gave them *the power of the sword* (Rom. 13:4) and the Divine right to destroy other nations as His judgement upon them and the right to execute their own countrymen for certain offenses against His law. As the Lord pointed out so eloquently in Deuteronomy 9:4-5, it was not because of Israel's righteousness that they were given the ability to destroy these nations, *but because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God drives them out from before you*. Israel was established as a *theocracy*, that is, a nation of people ruled directly by God. God was Israel's King, and God gave direct, special revelation to Israel primarily through Moses and the prophets. Furthermore, God was to  *dwell with them in the land* (Num. 35:34). And all idolatry and false worship was to be purged from the land.<sup>59</sup>

The position of God's New Covenant people today, the Church or assembly of Christ (Matt. 16:17-19), is significantly different from that of Mosaic Covenant Israel dwelling in the land. The King over God's people today is Jesus Christ. When a person, Jew or Gentile, believes in Jesus Christ they are *delivered from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son* (Col. 1:13). They do not need to go to any particular physical place on the earth to be *transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son*. The Son's kingdom is significantly different from what the kingdom of Israel was during the era prior to the Lord's coming. Jesus' statements to Pilate (John 18:33-37) made this abundantly clear. The visible presence of the kingdom in the world today *is not* a nation with physical borders and a ruling governmental body, to which God speaks directly through Moses and His prophets. The presence of Christ's kingdom is manifested by His people who confess Him as Lord throughout the world and bear witness to the truth of the One true God, is revealed in Jesus Christ. In so doing they *affect* the earthly governmental authorities and structures under which they live for righteousness sake (Matt. 5:13-16), *but they are not, and do not become*, those authorities (Rom. 13:1-8, see parable of the tares, Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). This present age will never be "Christianized". The church (assembly) of Christ in the earth *is not given the power of the sword* as Mosaic Covenant Israel was.

The Israeli theocracy, God dwelling in the land with His people and He being the *only* God worshipped there, was *typological* of the final kingdom of God in a new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells. Compare Numbers 35:34 with Rev. 21:1-3. These conditions will only be established by the second coming of Christ. Yahweh will be the only God worshipped throughout the new heavens and earth.

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57. See the section above, "Right Use of the Law Today", "Obeying the typological commands"

58. Whereas the practices mentioned in Hebrews are all distinctively Jewish, the practices Paul was confronting were a mixture of OT ordinances and non-Jewish elements. However, the Jewish element was significant enough that he refutes it by pointing out the correct use of the law (2:16-17).

59. This is the basic manner of thinking of radical Islam today.

A detailed discussion of these matters is not intended here but when dealing with the law of Moses it must be kept in mind that it contains theocratic provisions, laws which express how God expected Israel *to use the power of the sword in the land of Canaan*, and laws dealing with other matters relating to the theocratic arrangement. With the ending of the Mosaic Covenant, the ending of distinctions between Jew and Gentile, and the kingdom's expansion transferred to Christ's kingdom (as described above), these theocratic provisions can no longer be practiced as if the church today is equivalent to Mosaic Covenant Israel in the land of Canaan.<sup>60</sup>

A few examples of Theocratic Provisions in the law are given below.

- Deut. 17:2-7* The laws associated with obtaining a conviction of overt idolatry against a person and how such a person was to be executed. Now we may draw and apply principles regarding a burden of proof being required to obtain a conviction of a capital offense, i.e. two or three witnesses, which the NT does (see Matt. 18:16, 1 Tim. 5:19), but we are not directly following Deut. 17:2-7 when we do so, nor does the church (or state I would say) have the authority to carry out capital punishment for idolatry. God is not dwelling "in the land" as a theocracy. However, God is dwelling in His church and the NT church is to put out, exile, excommunicate, idolators (and others) from her midst (1 Cor. 5:13).
- Deut. 17:14-20* This passage is called "The Law of the King". It is clearly both a Theocratic and Historical Provision for MC Israel.
- Deut. 21:10-14* This passage is an explicit example regulating how Israel used the power of the sword in certain situations. In these laws of how to treat women captives we can certainly see the influence of unchanging moral law - love your neighbor as yourself - honor your father and mother.
- Deut. 21:15-17, 25:5-10* What about the many "inheritance laws"? Are these unchanging moral laws for all mankind? Or is there something else going on? It's not clear if this category fits best under, "Theocratic provisions", or "Historic provisions dealing with idolatry" (if I dropped the "dealing with idolatry" it would likely fit better under the historic provisions). But, there is likely typology in the law of the firstborn regarding Christ. The "inheritance laws" (at least to the author) relate to the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant that the Lord would 1) give Abraham and Sarah a multitude of descendants and 2) their descendants would be given possession of the land. It seems that the Lord intended that every man's name be preserved and his family inherit a portion of the land (see also Josh. 17:3-4). So when a husband died without having a firstborn son, it was the duty of a brother, or nearest kin, to enable the widow to bear a son. The Lord actually killed Onan, one of Judah's sons, for refusing to perform this duty for his brother Er (Gen. 38:1-10).
- Deut. 15:1-18* No simple direct one to one application of the laws concerning the release of debt and slaves, that were to be practiced in Israel where all Israelites were members of one another by virtue of the covenant, can be applied within the church today, or the church living intertwined amongst the world (like the wheat and the tares). The covenant people today are not isolated with their own national borders, labor, economy, judicial system, property rights, etc., etc.

60. This is not to say that modern governments can not, ought not, use the wisdom and righteousness expressed in the law, when constructing a rule of law for their citizenries. (did the concept of "rule of law" originate from Israel? The Israeli kings were to rule in accordance with the law.) But such governments cannot claim the same Divine rights that Israel had *because they are not in covenant relationship with God as Israel was, nor has God promised to speak to them, as He did through Moses and the prophets*. The Israeli theocracy was a unique-one-time-never-to-be-repeated-redemptive-historical-event.

*Summary*

The five general categories reviewed above are intended to impress us with the fact that the law of Moses is complex, historically tied to a period of redemptive history, and bound to the Mosaic Covenant. The reasoning of this section has been that those laws which were:

specific covenantal provisions in establishing the Abrahamic or Mosaic covenants or,  
 were directly related to specific forms of idol worship in Canaan or,  
 were typological of the person, work, and blessings of Christ or,  
 were associated with Israel being a theocracy,

are no longer to be practiced today by Christians who are members of the New Covenant. Neither are such laws “unchanging moral law” to which unbelievers, including Jewish unbelievers<sup>61</sup>, are held accountable. Paying attention to these four areas when asking the question, “what law applies to the believer today?” is helpful but does not answer all questions regarding this matter.

*Key NT passages and examples*

Turning to the NT we discover that, without giving us a set of “hard and fast rules”, there is an unspoken “expectation” that, we ought to be able to figure out what laws are still binding on us as Christians today. We will now consider some key NT passages relating to our question, “what law applies to the believer today?” and “observe” how NT authors apply the law to the church today.

*Matt. 5:17-48*

The Sermon on the Mount was an example of how Jesus went about *preaching the gospel of the kingdom* (Matt. 4:23)<sup>62</sup> and one major section of it reveals Jesus’ attitude and relationship to the law. Even at the early stages of Jesus’ ministry people were misunderstanding His teaching, to the effect that He would abolish the law and the prophets (vs. 17). Various forms of this attitude of abolishing, especially the law, have been seen in religious movements throughout history. However, in Jesus’ situation, those thinking Jesus was abolishing the law *were not* in favor of doing so, but were raising an objection to His teaching, “He seems to be advocating abolishing the law and the prophets”. In response to this false accusation, Jesus made what is perhaps the most significant statement in all of the Bible regarding this matter of how we should understand His relationship to the law and the prophets. That statement: *I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [the law and the prophets]*.

*Matt. 5:18-19*

In verse 18 Jesus assures us that not *one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled*. Jesus does not in this statement refer to the prophets, unless he is using the term law to mean the entire OT. This is possible, but since all the following examples relate to statements

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61. Because the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are ended, now being fulfilled in the New Covenant. A Jew is not sinning, or breaking the Abrahamic or Mosaic covenants (Gen. 17), if he doesn’t have his child circumcised, neither does his child become a member of the New Covenant if he has him circumcised (Gal. 5:6). There is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile, believing or unbelieving. See Acts 6:13-14 and 21:21. We do not know if Paul actually taught Jews to *not* circumcise their children, but we can be sure that he taught that if dad and/or the child did not believe in Jesus as the Christ, such circumcision was of no value, and if they did believe in Christ such circumcision was not necessary (Gal. 5). As far as “customs”, which would include numerous types and shadows (see Col. 2:16) Paul would have surely taught that they were not necessary and should come to an end.

62. A chapter break between 4:22 and 23 would have been more appropriate as it is clear when reading from 4:23 through 5:2 that Matthew’s introduction to the sermon began at 4:23. So Matthew is comfortable referring to Jesus’ preaching, as related in the sermon, as “preaching the gospel of the kingdom”. This does not mean we should pattern our preaching of the gospel strictly along the lines of this example. We shouldn’t, because when Jesus spoke He had not yet given his life and risen from the dead. Which now becomes the central matter in preaching the gospel. However, if someone hears us preach the gospel and reads the teaching of Christ they should be able to quickly detect a significant resemblance.

in Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and Numbers, the reference to law most likely refers to the law of Moses.

It is obvious from verses 18-19, that whatever the church does with the law of Moses, the Founder of the Church does not give us the option to toss it overboard and ignore it. But this statement is too weak. We are not given the option to ignore any of it, not even a jot or tittle. That point is also emphasized in verse 19 regarding how we treat the *least* of the commandments. Fortunately we have been studying this subject for some 48 pages of notes in an attempt to learn how to properly honor and use the law that God has given us.

*Matt. 5:18*

“until all is accomplished” - this phrase ought to be understood in light of Jesus fulfilling the “law and prophets”. “Until all is accomplished” clearly points to the laws function as typological and prophetic. The law points to God’s plan of salvation in Christ and until all the elements of this plan are accomplished the law will not pass away, and still serves a purpose as is clear from the following verse.

“until heaven and earth passes away” - refers to the end of the present age as we know it. This phrase tells us the duration of which the law is to serve its God intended purposes.

Some have said taught that Jesus is referring only to the “unchanging moral law” (as defined earlier) but His reference to not one jot or one tittle passing away clearly points us in the direction that we should understand Him to be referring to *all the law and prophets*. We should be doing something with all of it. And we should look for the *correct ways* of understanding how Christ is fulfilling all of it.

*Matt. 5:19*

Jesus’ emphasis continues in verse 19.

First we should reject the modern idea that Jesus’ reference to “kingdom of heaven” is entirely future and thus these statements are not applicable to His disciples and the church He is establishing. (see parable of the tares 13:24-30, 36-43).

The opposite of abolishing the law and the prophets is that they should be practiced and taught. Those disobeying them and encouraging others to do so, will have the least rank in the kingdom of heaven - those who keep them and teach others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

What is *valued and praised in the kingdom* that Jesus is establishing is practicing and teaching the commandments of the law and the prophets, even the least of them. Those who do so will be called great in the kingdom.

So, Jesus “came out very strong”, we would say, that we ought not to think that “he came to destroy the Law or the prophets.” No. He “did not come to destroy but to fulfill”. And fulfilling has something to do with “every jot and tittle” of the law, practicing the least of these commandments, and teaching others to do the same.

It is obvious from 17-19 that all ignoring of and disrespect for the law is clearly condemned by Jesus.

*Jesus’ fulfilling of the law and prophets*

Properly understanding and applying what Jesus meant by His not abolishing the law but instead fulfilling it is of crucial importance. One thing is clear from Jesus’ teaching in the verses which follow (8-48), that by fulfilling the law He did not mean that Christians need not obey the law, because when we are done reading this passage our breath is taken away regarding the type of obedience to which Jesus calls us.

Our previous study of Paul’s and the author of Hebrew’s letters has given much insight into

how Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets. When Jesus spoke these words, prior to His death, resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it would not have been possible for the full scope of what it means that Jesus fulfill's the law to be made known. But, looking back now based upon the completed revelation He has given through His apostles we can clearly see the following ways in which Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets.

1. He is the one of whom the prophets speak as the One to come and redeem Israel and bless the world. He fulfills these prophecies (1 Peter 1:10-12, Luke 24:44, Mark 14:49).
2. All the types and shadows of the law "prophecy" of His person, work, and blessings resulting from these upon God's people. He fulfill's these types (John 5:46).
3. All the curses of the law upon sin, curses that all those who were to become the people of God deserved, have been fulfilled by Him for them (Gal. 3:13).
4. All the righteous obedience required by the law, he performed, as he was born under the law in our place. This fulfillment of the law (i.e. obeying the law) is imputed or reckoned to the believer as part of Christ's righteousness given to the believer when God justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.<sup>63</sup>
5. The obedience to be rendered to the law by the people of God *is made possible* and brought into practice by Jesus' union with the believer and His pouring out the Holy Spirit on them (Rom. 8:3-4).

*Matthew  
5:20*

These words are both a conclusion to 17-19 and an introduction to the six examples of the law Jesus discusses in what follows (verses 21-48). The Scribes and Pharisees, though believing they understood the law, successfully obeyed it, and correctly taught it to others, were seriously mistaken. They were likely the ones who were questioning if Jesus was, "destroying" the law, or revising it to be more "lenient". In verses 21-48 we have an extended example of Jesus' teaching and application of the law. We ought to consider this example as a proper approach to the law. Verse 20 sounds an alarm that the law keeping that was being done by the Pharisees would never result in them, or anyone else, entering into the kingdom of heaven.

*Summary  
thoughts at  
the begin-  
ning!*

Attempts to classify Jesus' six examples *into a single category*; i.e. correction of wrong ideas, intensification of the law, showing the spiritual nature of the law, abrogating some provisions in the law, expanding the law, all fail.

*The conclusion of the discourse (vs. 48) should be given much weight in understanding the overall direction of Jesus' six examples.* Jesus tells us the main point of the previous six examples. Far from destroying the law or advocating a more lenient view, Jesus' conclusion expresses *that nothing less than perfection is required.* Though the discourse does not establish *how* such righteousness is to be gained, developed, or empowered; it simply lays out the law's demand for a complete and perfect righteousness that conforms to God Himself.

In the kingdom of heaven that Jesus is establishing, nothing short of perfection is to be the goal for the people of God.... and their Saviour has this goal in mind for them as He comes to fulfill the law and save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Isaiah 61:1-3 describes the work and blessings that Messiah will bring to His people (see Luke 4:16-20). The goal of that work for the people of God is given in 61:3b, *that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.*

God *has not* provided a way of salvation that compromises the law's demands for a perfect

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63. See Chapter 16, "The Father Justifies", discussion of Romans 5:12-19.

righteousness. The believing sinner receives a free, “at no cost to him”, salvation, that provides forgiveness, justification, adoption, reconciliation, sanctification, and glorification. In all these things the righteous demands of the law will be met through the believer’s union with Christ, and his ultimate conformity to Christ’s image (Rom. 8:30). The goal of Matthew 5:48 will be achieved for every child of God through the *comprehensive* salvation provided them in Jesus Christ. One of the “markers” of the members of Christ’s kingdom is, *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.* (Matt. 5:6).

In actuality, the Pharisees were not nearly radical enough regarding the demands of the law. For them, an *external righteousness* was more than adequate. But Jesus says that this reading of the law will never do as we discover when we consider Jesus’ six examples of how to rightly understand the law.

*Matt. 5:21-26, You shall not murder*

Verses 21-48 have been called six *antitheses* because they are begin with a general statement like, you have heard it said.... but I say to you... It is beyond the scope of these notes to consider all the teaching in these six antitheses, but only to observe Jesus’ teaching of the law.

Vss. 21-22 - The law had a goal in mind and Jesus is the one who will fulfill the law’s goal. The root of murder is anger, and that root cannot be tolerated to exist in the heart, even if it has not born the outward fruit. One has not conformed to the righteousness of the kingdom, or become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, by simply restraining oneself from committing homicide.

There is little doubt that “the court” referred to in vs. 21 is the earthly court (or courts) established within the Jewish theocratic arrangements. However, the court Jesus has in view in is eschatological, that is pointing forward to God’s judgment of men’s hearts. No earthly court is capable to rendering this kind of judgement because only God knows the heart. The kingdom that Jesus is establishing will ultimately bring just such a judgement - of the heart, and this will fulfil the law’s true intent. The illustrations that follow emphasize how serious this is.

Vss. 23-25 - If you’ve restrained yourself from murder, but are still angry, you are not done. You still have much to do. You cannot worship before God who sees one’s heart. What is striking in this illustration is that Jesus says the people who may have been the cause of another’s anger, and knows it, is the one who should leave his offering and go and seek to be reconciled to his brother who may be angry. So Jesus disciples are called to know that God sees their hearts and expects that the unrighteousness of the heart be confronted. In both examples Jesus emphasizes the urgency with which reconciliation ought to be pursued. Anger, a murderous root, is a serious matter. To view it as such is to fulfill the law.

*Matt. 5:27-30, Adultery*

This example is the clearest that the tendency, of sinful human beings to separate an outward act from desires and intentions for the outward act, will not stand in the day of judgment according to God’s law.

When Jesus states that the person who desires another has already committed adultery, He must expect his hearers to understand that they ought to view themselves as having transgressed the seventh commandment. It would be wrong to say that Jesus’ statements are expanding the law. Jesus is not telling them, “up until now you’ve kept the seventh commandment, but if you enter my kingdom, the standard will change, since I’ve come to expand the law.” No, Jesus has come to insist upon and bring about the righteousness that God’s law has required from the beginning.

Many Jewish sources treated adultery not so much as a matter of purity but of theft, it was to steal another man’s wife. But Jesus corrects all such false notions. However, readers and teachers of the law of Moses could have figured it out if they would have applied the tenth commandment properly. The seventh commandment points to purity that refuses to tolerate

an wrong, i.e. God forbidden, desire in the heart.

*Matt. 5:31-32, Divorce and remarriage*

This next example is more complicated as a number of factors are involved. Jesus is referring to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which was a prohibition that a divorced woman, after being divorced a second time, could not return to her first husband. However, from this prohibition (and Matt. 19:8) we learn that at sometime earlier, of which we have no record, Moses “permitted them”, because of their hardness of hearts, to divorce their wives. Matthew 5:31 is not a direct reference to the *written* law, but to rabbinic teaching, or an application of the law.

Jesus insists that the only legitimate grounds to initiate a divorce is adultery. Was this a reinstatement of the law as originally given by Moses or was it a changing of the law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4? The answer to this question depends on how one understands the phrase, “has found some indecency in her” in Deut. 21:1. If that phrase refers essentially to the same thing as the phrase, “except for sexual immorality” in Matt. 5:32, then Jesus has not changed the law in Deuteronomy. But if Moses permitted divorce for other reasons, then Jesus, in some way, is “changing” the law (at least in Deut. 21) and insisting on a higher standard.

It is possible we are dealing with a case of “accommodation” in Deut. 24:1-4 and Jesus is re-asserting the true intent of the law, going back to Gen. 2, see Matt. 19:4-6, 8. Explain.<sup>64</sup>

*Matt. 5:33-37, oaths.*

This prohibition is an application of the third commandment of the decalogue, not to take the Lord’s name in vain (Ex. 20:7, 19:12). Once Yahweh’s name was invoked, in making a promise, fulfilling it was now a matter of debt to *both* Yahweh and the person to whom the oath was made. The law forbid the flippant use of the Lord’s name and the breaking of vows. In Jewish, rabbinic tradition a very complicated system of rules developed to judge how binding an oath was by examining how closely it was related to Yahweh’s name. Matthew 23:16-22 shows the amazing distinctions that the scribes and pharisees were making as to whether or not one was obligated to keep his word.

Vss. 34-35 - Verse 34 could be superficially understood as Jesus changing the law by forbidding the taking of all oaths, since the law did expect people to take oaths, and regulated such (Deut. 6:13, 10:20, Num. 30:2). Yet Jesus appears to be reproofing the practice of people trying to sound as though they are making an oath, and yet leaving some space for a way out, i.e. “I didn’t swear by Yahweh’s name, but only by heaven, etc.” (see Matt. 23:16-22). Jesus seems to be saying that everything relates to Yahweh, so no matter what you swear by, you are still making an oath in His name, and if you are swearing by these other things, i.e. earth, heaven, Jerusalem, thinking you are lessening your guilt or responsibility - stop, don’t do it - *do not swear at all*. Stop all the complicated, man made subtleties which only cloud the real goal of the law, which has always been truthfulness, plain and simple. Thus verse 37, *But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one*. So Jesus is clarifying and enforcing the true intent of the law.<sup>65</sup>

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64. The three most common areas where “accommodation” has been suggested regarding Israel’s practices have been divorce, slavery, and polygamy. These practices were integral to all ancient cultures and the OT law begins to modify them in the direction of elimination. Within the “covenant community”, i.e. Israel in the OT and the church in the new, all three practices are eliminated for the covenant community (divorce, slavery, polygamy). Furthermore, on those cultures where Christianity has had the strongest influence, the practices have been eliminated even outside of the covenant community.

65. It is beyond the scope of these notes to discuss the translation and precise meaning of the phrase “let your yes be yes and your no be no”.



*Matt. 5:38-42, just retribution*

In these last two examples we begin to see the perfection to which the law points and that perfection which Jesus intends to fulfill in His people and kingdom.

This OT law has been called the *lex talionis*, the principle of retribution and has been subject to widely varying interpretations which will not be reviewed here. However, it serves as an illustration of the section above on the importance that the theocratic provisions of the law be dealt with properly. In contemporary culture we hear and use such phrases (vs. 43) to speak of obtaining *personal* vengeance, i.e. getting even. The OT law, to which Jesus refers, was not given to foster or legitimize the taking of *personal* vengeance. The OT law (Ex. 21:24, Lev. 24:19-20, Deut. 19:16-21) was given to provide the nation's judicial system with a ready formula of punishment which could be applied to many situations to determine a *just* punishment to be inflicted. The proper application of such, by those in authority, would greatly reduce personal vendettas and over retaliation.

Now such a law, could be, indeed was likely being, misused to justify personal retaliation and revenge, and Jesus' response certainly puts an end to such. However, Jesus is saying much more than this. In regard to the misuses He could have said, "but I say to you, don't exact your own justice, but let the judiciary administer a just retribution." This, or something like it, would restrain the misuse of the *lex talionis*. But Jesus goes way beyond such in verses 39-42 and it should also be noted that the final example from the law in verses 43-47 appears to have parallels to this one.

The things that Jesus calls his disciples to do take our breath away. We are seeking comfort from a just judiciary action but Jesus says. *But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also!* We are being sued in court for our tunics and Jesus tells us let him have our cloaks also! Now the next two examples in verses 41-42 don't have anything to do with judiciary action, they can not be made right or dealt with in court.

What is going on here? Is this an ending of the *lex talionis* and its proper use? Is this an expansion of the law as a whole? No and no. It is an unfolding of the *law as a whole*, or a showing of its goal which is found in the two greatest commandments to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself. The law is also summarized in Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7 in the expression, *"Be holy, for I am holy"* which Peter applies to all our conduct (1 Peter 1:14-16). As the Son reveals the Father, the one true God, we will begin to see just how "holy", and different from fallen humanity, God really is! This began to occur with the coming of Christ, into our world. Be holy as the Father is holy, well, just how holy is He? Jesus brings this to light. The law has always required it, Jesus gives of a clearer view of its meaning.

Some may live by the *lex talionis* but Jesus is saying that in order to fulfill the full intent of the law one must begin to love and show mercy, and that starts with *not insisting on personal rights*, then grows to *generosity* (vss. 41-42) and finally reaches to *loving those who are ungrateful and even one's enemies* (vss. 45-48). This is being holy as God is holy. This is the "better righteousness" than that of the scribes and Pharisees. It's almost like He's saying, "what portions of the law are your favorite verses?" If you've picked the *lex talionis* texts you've got a long way to go to fulfill the law and be holy as God is holy.

*Matt. 5:43-47, love your neighbor*

Probably in no area did the rabbinic and pharisaic treatment of the law shrink its true demands more than in its commands to love others and show mercy. Nowhere in the law can the expression, which Jesus says they have heard, be found. He was summarizing what must have become a popular sentiment, if not a direct teaching, amongst many Jews. This approach would never fulfill the original intent of the law. In Jesus' quote of what they have heard they conveniently drop "as yourself", which removes the objective standard by which we may

examine ourselves regarding our love of our neighbors.

Though the expression “love your enemies” is not found in the OT it often mandates love for others including aliens (Ex. 23:4-5, Lev. 19:18, 33-34, 1 Sam. 24:5, Job 31:29, Psa. 7:4, Prov. 24:17, 29; 25:21-22). And from the parable of the good Samaritan we learn the proper definition of “neighbor” in the law’s command, not simply any fellow Israelite, but any human being. In verses 45-47 we are shown that the law’s goal is to point us to being like God Himself, and he loves in an unconditional sense and so must we.

“The point of the passage is not to state the means of becoming sons but the necessity of pursuing a certain kind of sonship patterned after the Father’s character”<sup>66</sup>. Jesus is the one who has come to bring us into just this type of sonship. Throughout this discourse, speaking with His disciples in mind, Jesus addresses them repeatedly *as* the children of God; *your Father* in heaven is perfect (vs. 48), otherwise you have no reward from *your Father* in heaven (6:1), *your heavenly Father* knows you need all these things (7:32). He is not telling the how to become the children of God, He is addressing them as though they are and thus their behavior is to be patterned after that of *their* heavenly Father. This is to encourage them in that pursuit.

*Matt. 5:48,  
the summary*

As expressed above, Jesus states the goal of the law which He has come to fulfill as the Saviour of God’s people. God is our heavenly Father, but this only becomes a living reality in and through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

*Mark 7:15-  
19*

It is instructive to discuss the Lord’s statement that *one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled* (Matt. 5:18) in the light of Mark 7:15-19. Mark 7:15 stands in sharp contrast to Leviticus 11:41-47 which defines a list of foods which, if eaten, defile a man. God’s vision to Peter, recorded in Acts 10:9-16, demonstrates that God has ended all the dietary laws established for Israel during the OT period. Jesus, prior to His death and resurrection, proclaims this end, as interpreted by Mark in the expression, *Thus He declared all foods clean* (Mk. 7:19, ESV, NASB). Some questions, which don’t necessarily need to be answered, are raised by Jesus’ statements, in view of the time at which he made them (prior to His death)<sup>67</sup>.

I see some parallels in Jesus response here with the manner in which He treated the Jew’s use of the *lex talionis* in Matthew 5:38-42. In both cases the Jews are mis interpreting the law and here (Mark 7:1-13), they have wrongly condemned Jesus’ disciples. Jesus could simply have said that the law does not require the additional washings you insist on, thus these men have not been defiled for *eating with unwashed hands*. But in His response He goes way beyond this (as He did when dealing with the *lex talionis*) to what we would see as the ultimate fulfillment of the law, which removes all dietary means of becoming “defiled”, since the purposes for the dietary laws are no longer required since Jesus has come (see above). In view of Matt. 5:18 and Acts 10:9-16, fulfillment of the law by Jesus is a complex, multifaceted, matter. Fulfillment will be accomplished in many ways (see the list above). Not one jot or tittle will pass away, and those who teach all of the commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven, *and the right teaching of the dietary commands* is that observance of them as under the OT is no longer required.

We must admit that at times Jesus’ statements could seem very radical and difficult for his hearers to understand. Notice that Mark 7 begins with Jesus reproving the Pharisees for setting aside God’s commandments (Mark 7:8.9) and then ends with Him doing the same with

66. D.A. Carson, Matthew

67. My understanding is that when Jesus interacted with the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath He was only declaring the original intent of the Sabbath as instituted in the MC, not changing it. However, in regard to the dietary laws, He is clearly declaring a NC perspective on these laws.

different commands! This passage is instructive: “The command to honor one’s father and mother is a moral absolute and continues in force despite the change in redemptive history. The fulfillment of the old covenant leads to the keeping of this commandment. It is not a moral norm because it is included in the Mosaic covenant; it is in the Mosaic covenant because it is a moral norm. The prohibitions against certain foods, however, are not universal moral norms. They were intended to be in force for only a certain period of salvation history. With the fulfillment of God’s promises, purity laws are no longer binding. They instead point to the truth that true uncleanness is internal.”<sup>68</sup> See the discussion above on the relation of the law to the Gentiles and unchanging moral law.

Acts 14:26-  
15:29

This passage is often discussed in relation to debates over Church government. However, it is a “case history” of the apostles dealing with the question, “what law applies to the believer today”. The difficulty for the NT churches regarding the role of the law now that Christ had come, especially for the church in Jerusalem, and the continued hostility of unbelieving Jews occasioned by the church “changing” the law, was great. We lose sight of how blessed we are to be able to hold in our hands an entire copy of the Old and New Testaments. Having before us, all at once, the teaching of Jesus, His apostles, and all of the OT. Reading the following passages in Acts can give us an appreciation of the difficulties faced by the first churches regarding how the law ought to be used now that Christ has come: Acts 6:13-14, 10:13-14, 11:2-3, 18, 11:19, 14:26-15:1, 21:21, 28, 22:21-22.

It is not entirely clear that those referred to in verse 1, who insisted that the Gentiles must be circumcised or they could not be saved, and those referred to in verse 5, who insisted that they must be circumcised and commanded *to keep the [whole] law of Moses* were the same individuals. However, the idea expressed in verse 5, that being circumcised brought with it the obligation to keep the *whole* law was the right way to think *for those living under the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants* (see Gal. 5:3). The decision the council reaches is *radically* different from that advocated by the believing Pharisee faction of verse 5. That difference can be seen by comparing verses 1 (circumcision) and 5 (whole law of Moses) with 15:20, 28 - 29. Circumcision and the whole law compared to *no greater burden than these [three] necessary things*.

The three necessary things that they were to abstain from were: 1) eating foods, most likely meat, that had been offered to idols, 2) eating animals from which the blood had not been drained, i.e. animals killed by strangling instead of having their throats slit and their blood drained, 3) from sexual immorality. The Gentiles had a reputation for being notoriously sexually immoral (1 Cor. 5:10). How should we understand this apostolic response, for it does not fit into a classification of unchanging moral law versus ceremonial and civic laws which are no longer required? A few things may be said with confidence.

1. Those advocating the keeping of the whole law (vs. 1, 5), or even most of it, are clearly in the wrong. The apostolic response was clear that the Gentiles were not required to observe the *many* Jewish customs and practices which had been established in the law.
2. They are clearly not afraid that they would encourage antinomianism by stating that *it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things*. They must believe that the Gentile churches, given the blessing of the Holy Spirit, have a “common sense” to know what other laws they ought to obey. They are not giving them permission to murder, steal, worship idols, ignore loving God and their neighbors. But it seems safe to say they don’t expect them to obey all the commands which had historically built a wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles. That would include circum-

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68. Thomas Schreiner, “The Law and Its Fulfillment”

cision, the purity laws, the Sabbath laws. Nor can they be expecting them to integrate into their monthly and annual calendars the Jewish feasts which had been required by the Mosaic Covenant. With the ending of the MC priesthood, and the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem and temple, they are not requiring the Gentiles to observe the pilgrim feasts such as passover. And Jerusalem, and worship centered there because ... is ending.

3. They believed that Gentiles were responsible to accommodate and respect their Jewish brothers and sisters who found certain non sinful practices abhorrent, i.e. eating animals from which the blood had not been properly removed, or in their consciences would be made to stumble by practicing them, i.e. eating meat sacrificed to idols, but afterwards feeling guilty for doing so (See 1 Cor. 8:1-13, Rom. 14:1-2, 14-15).
4. Neither did they intend to promote antinomianism. There are more things in the law of Moses that they are required to do, both prohibitions to be obeyed, and commands to be practiced. They are assuming that they will be able to figure these matters out.
5. They certainly do not require them to be circumcised and they do not tell those zealous to impose circumcision (at least we have no record of such) that circumcision is ended because they have now been baptized in Christ's name. If baptism was to replace circumcision for the people of God this seems to have been the place to make that clear.<sup>69</sup>

*Mat. 7:12*

Many people can recite some version of “the golden rule”, but few are able to identify the source of such morality.<sup>70</sup> Jesus tells us *why* we ought to obey the Golden rule, *for this is the Law and the Prophets*. The “golden rule” is a *concrete* way of stating we ought to love our neighbor *as ourselves*, thus it too summarizes the goal of the Law and the Prophets.

It is like the *lex talionis* in that it is a principle we may apply to myriads of different situations to determine how God would have us behave. Those who have practiced this command will testify to how often, in situations where the right course of action seems unclear, once this rule is applied, the right way to proceed becomes evident.

Matthew 7:12 is significant for our study of the law because it makes it clear that Jesus *is not introducing a new ethic or morality*, as is sometimes represented by those who refer to the OT as setting forth a cruel God and a harsh, unloving ethic for mankind. If we properly do the law and the prophets we will be doing the “golden rule”! In the kingdom that Jesus is establishing the law and the prophets will be fulfilled (Matt. 5:17) as the goal of the “golden rule” is achieved through Christ's work for and in His people.

*1 Tim. 1:7-10*

In view of all the other Pauline passages we've studied, this passage may be the most difficult to understand. It has been misused to teach that as far as Christians (i.e. the righteous person) are concerned the law has no role for them, they do not need it's righteous, objective, commands. This interpretation cannot be followed because of the teaching of Jesus and Paul we have already considered<sup>71</sup>. They clearly expect Christians to obey the law and Jesus intends to fulfill the law in His people as has been explained above. Interpretations by scholars of this

69. Of course our paedobaptist brothers and sisters would disagree with this “argument from silence”.

70. “The golden rule is found in many forms in other settings outside of Scripture. Rabbi Hillel, challenged by a Gentile to summarize the law in the short time the Gentile could stand on one leg, reportedly responded, ‘what is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.’ Apparently only Jesus phrased the rule positively. Thus stated it is certainly more telling than its negative counterpart, for it speaks against sins of omission well as sins of commission. The goats in 25:31-46 would be acquitted under the negative form of the rule, but not under the form attributed to Jesus” (D.A. Carson, Matthew).

71. We believe that Paul did not contradict himself, nor do Paul's and Jesus' teaching contradict.

passage vary widely.

The interpretation recommended here is based on assumptions regarding the false teachers whom Paul was opposing. These false teachers *want to be teachers of the law* (vs. 7). It is likely that they were setting forth the Law as that which holds the key for Christian living. They don't want to be teachers of Christ crucified but of the law. Even Paul can say, I desired to know nothing among you except Christ crucified. A statement which could be misrepresented that Paul taught the Corinthians nothing but the death of Christ. But Paul was making a statement about what must be preeminent. These false teachers gave such preeminence to the law. To do so is an unlawful use of it. So Paul's response to their giving such *preeminence* to the law *for Christians* is, *the law is not made for a righteous person*, an equally strong counter response. And if they want to give such preeminence to the law, then they ought to teach it to unbelievers as the means of restraining sin.<sup>72</sup> This is a valid use of the law for the unrighteous, *knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate*. He then lists what he has in mind, including quite a number of offenses which bore the penalty of capital punishment under the Mosaic Covenant. "Paul emphasizes in this text that the law should not be overestimated. It does not actually produce righteousness; it only restrains sin."<sup>73</sup> Romans 13:1-4 may be applicable to this discussion.

### **Miscellaneous Subjects**

*The primacy of love in fulfilling the law*

There can be no doubt that in Paul's teaching, love of God and others, produced by the Holy Spirit, is of first importance as to how Christians are to behave toward God, believer and unbeliever. However, some have taken the preeminence of love to promote the idea that believers do not need to be instructed in, or concerned with, the commands of the law or even the New Testament. It is said that love, prompted by the Spirit, will guide them in all their behavior into a life which is pleasing in God's sight. This approach often leads to ignoring many of God's commandments in both the Old and New Testaments. When we consider all Scripture relating to the subject of obedience to God we discover, that on the one hand, we have no real love if we don't pursue keeping God's commands, and on the other hand, we have no real keeping of God's law without real love.

*Rom. 13:8-10*

In Romans 13:8-10 it is clear that loving another is equivalent to *obeying those commands that tell us how we ought to treat one another*. And, we ought to do these commands, motivated by love for one another.

*Gal. 5:13-14*

The whole law is fulfilled in loving our neighbor as ourselves. This does not mean we do not need the law. It means that if we pursue loving our neighbor, enabled by the saving power of Christ given to us by the Holy Spirit (5:16, 23), we will obey the law and love our neighbor in the concrete ways expressed in the law, and not use our liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, which would be to violate the law (5:19).<sup>74</sup>

*John 14:15, 21, 31, 1  
John 5:3,  
Matt. 22:40*

Jesus inseparably joined together loving Him and obeying His commandments. And, in light of Matthew 5:17-48 and 22:40 it seems wrong to divorce the idea of obeying His commandments from obeying the law and the prophets. When we are brought to love Him through experiencing His love for us (1 John 4:19, Luke 7:47), we will begin to obey the law and the prophets.

72. An objection to this understanding is that in other places Paul teaches that the law, when applied to the unbelieving heart, which does not have the Spirit, does not restrain sin, instead encourages it. But it seems that Paul is here referring to a mere *external* restraint due to fear of retribution and punishment. And in the other contexts he is referring to the inward desires and affections of the heart.

73. Thomas Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*

74. For the definition of the liberty referred to in 5:13 see the discussion above on Gal. 5:18, 13.

*Cultural Particularity and universal norms*

Certain commands in Scripture were addressed to specific cultural situations in the context of the OT or NT when they were given. The gleaning laws are an example from the OT. Of the five categories expressed above (unchanging moral, covenantal provision, unique historical provision, typological, theocratic), to which category do the gleaning laws belong? Are they *applicable* to believers today? They embody an unchanging moral law *principle* that we should manage our finances such that we have something left over to help those in need. Gleaning is irrelevant to our culture, but the principle that one should care for the poor, and make provision to do so, is not. The NT does command this, see Eph. 4:28, Titus 3:14. It would be difficult to classify the gleaning laws into any of the four non permanent categories. The gleaning laws, though culturally particular when first given, embody a universal norm.

See also Deut. 22:8 and 25:4. These commands fall into the category of universal norms, though they will have a different cultural application. They are not typological, theocratic, etc. Finding cultural particularity in a law does not mean that law does not contain a universal norm. The same principle applies to NT exhortations. The exhortation to greet one another with a holy kiss, found four times in the NT is not irrelevant in the United States and something we may ignore. We are to express a sincere affection for one another, whatever appropriate form that should take in our culture.

*New commands associated with New Covenant?*

Are there New commands associated with the New Covenant? Can we draw the same circle for the NC as we have with the MC and AC? Yes. (see earlier graphic diagram).

Those specific commands to members within the new covenant and new, the most evident are:

Baptism.

The Lord's supper.

The great commission and John 3:17. Compare this to Israel's mandate to go into the land of Canaan and utterly destroy all who dwelt there. The MC built a wall of separation between Israel and the nations. The believing Jew is now to cross the street, enter into his Gentile neighbor's house, have a meal with him and share the gospel with him!

Some commands may not be new *in a strict sense*, but since our understanding of the command *is directly associated with God's revelation of Himself in Christ*, it is as if the commandment is new, because the revelation is so much greater. Examples:

Forgive *as* you have been forgiven. The *as* was not seen prior to the NC.

Love one another *as* I have loved you. The *as* was not seen prior to the NC.

Be holy for I am holy.

Husbands love your wives *as* Christ loved the church. The *as* was not see prior to the NC.

So, in a sense, there has been a progressive unfolding, revealing, of the law, as well as the gospel.

*Transformation examples*

Eph. 6:4 - the promise of dwelling long in the land.

OT capital punishment transformed into excommunication from the covenant people. See Paul's OT quotes regarding the discipline case at Corinth.

Others? See Scriener, Paul, pg. 323.

*Law of Christ*

Is the “law of Christ” intended to be a theological category intended to replace the “law of Moses”? as the New Covenant replaces the Mosaic Covenant? I don't think that was Paul's thinking - why - the text equates “bearing one another's burdens” as that which fulfills the “law of Christ” - which must relate to loving one another - see John 13-14.

Does Gal. 6:2 use of law fit in to definition 3? or is it a NC replacement for the Law of Moses? See BDAG. See Scriener pg. 325

*Interpretive error often done by many people*

51:1-2 - I've said in regard to passages, like the sermon on the mount, that it is wrong to interpret them as answering the question, “what is the *minimum* one must do to be saved, or to go to heaven” - many passages are not answering *that* question. It is likely that Acts 2:38 actually fits into this category - Peter is simply repeating Christ's orders in the great commission - he is not answering “what is the minimum for someone to be justified”. And many people are reading and teaching the Bible as if it is always answering *that* question. Many times such passages are misused to teach some form of salvation on the basis of works.

But, there are certain passages that do interact with the specific question, what is the *minimum* one must do to be saved, sections of Romans, Galatians, and acts 15:1-2. When the context is dealing the “minimum” question we see clearly the answer is by grace alone through faith alone. (if this is not in notes add it somewhere, maybe as a footnote).



















