

—Understanding the Christian’s Freedom in Christ—
Lesson 9–Question 1 Continued
Are Christians freed from the moral law as a rule of obedience?

Proposition 1: The law remains as a rule of obedience for believers.

Proposition 2: The law, as a rule of obedience *for a life of good works*, is consistent with the grace by which believers are saved *without respect to their works*. “This is more difficult to prove than the first proposition, but, once proven, will at once vindicate the moral law and overthrow falsehood. It can be shown how the gospel is in the law and how the law is not opposite to the gospel or to grace. It can be shown that the law, as a rule of obedience, may run along with grace and be serviceable to the advancement of grace.”

I. Seven purposes for which the law was given.

- A. To restrain sin. To set bounds and banks to the cursed nature of fallen man, by revealing not only his sin but also the wrath of God against sin, Rom 2.8-9; 3.19-20. The law can restrain sinners but it can’t renew sinners; it can hold in and bridle sin, but it can’t heal or cure sin. Before the law was given, sin had a more perfect reign and dominion, Rom 5.13-14; but now the law serves to restrain men in the ways of sin because it puts in them the fear of punishment. It acts as a chain on the lusts of their heart, 1Tim 1.8-9.
 - 1. “Bless God for this work of the law. Otherwise, every man would be a Cain to his brother, an Amnon to his sister, an Absalom to his father, a Saul to himself, and a Judas to his master. There would be no stay, no bank, no bounds to sin, without the law. Though men will not be as good as they should, thanks to the law and to the fear God puts in their hearts, they don’t become so bad as they would,” Rom 7.8.
- B. To uncover and reveal sin, Gal 3.19; Rom 4.15; 7.7, 12-13; 5.20. This is why the law was given after the promise of grace of mercy in the gospel, so that men might see their need for the promise, Gal 3.21-22. The law awakens men to their sin and convinces them of their need for the grace offered by God. In other words, God gave the law to pursue the purpose of mercy he had in giving the promise. The law was given to drive us out of ourselves so that we might look for mercy in the gospel.
- C. To humble men for their sins, Rom 3.19-20. Where the law is not known, sin reigns and men are careless and secure in sin because there’s no rule to charge their consciences with guilt. So God renewed the law at Sinai, to reveal and impute sin to men, so they might become sensible of their guilt before God and be humbled, Gal 3.22.
- D. For a rule of obedience for believers, a director of their duties, Jn 14.21; 1Jn 2.4-6.
- E. As a mirror to reveal the imperfections in all our duties, so that we might be humble and vile in our own eyes and live more out of ourselves and more on Christ. “It was given so that we might fly to Christ upon all occasions, as a defiled man flees to the fountain to be washed and cleansed, for in Christ there is mercy to cover and grace to cure all our infirmities,” Phil 3.7-9.
- F. To discipline and reprove believers for sin, 2Tim 3.16. Calvin, “By teaching, warning, admonishing, and correcting, the law prepares us for every good work.”
- G. To be a spur to quicken us to duties. The flesh is sluggish and backward, Rom 7.18, 21-24, and the law is as a spur or goad to quicken us in the way of obedience, Rom 7.7.

II. Five reasons why these purposes are consistent with grace and serviceable to the advancement of the covenant of grace, and therefore must continue under grace.

- A. The law was given to restrain sin and it’s of the same use now under the gospel. This is one of the perpetual uses of the law of God. It cannot heal or cure wicked men, but it does restrain them. It sets bounds and banks to the rage of their sinful hearts. It chains up the wolf, stops the streams, and restrains the evil practices of men in this world so that the church can abide within it.
- B. The law was given to uncover and reveal sin, and this is not inconsistent with grace. In fact, it serves to advance grace. For when it reveals sin in believers and makes sin to appear exceedingly sinful, it awakens their consciences and drives them to Christ, not only for forgiveness but for grace to walk

in holiness. The point is, the law does this not only before grace in unbelievers, but also after grace in believers, since that which was sinful for them before is still sinful for them now. Grace doesn't alter the nature of sin, though it frees them from the wages and condemnation of it, so that the law is still necessary to the Christian life.

- C. The law was added to humble us for sin, and this also agrees with grace. Thus the law is not against the gospel, because it's subservient to it, Gal 3.21-24; Rom 3.19-20. Chamier, "The law serves the cause of the gospel because, convincing men of their works of condemnation, it prepares them to seek the grace which is found in the gospel." Thus the law remains in the hand of the Spirit as an instrument to reveal our sins to us and to humble us for it, so that we'll go to Christ. "If the avenger of blood had not pursued the murderer, he'd never have fled to the City of Refuge, and if God does not humble us by the law, we'll never go to Christ. An offer of Christ and of pardon before men are humbled by sin is unavailing." But after men taste the bitterness of sin, then they're prepared to taste the sweetness of Christ.
- D. The law was given for direction in life, and so it continues under the gospel. Though we're sons and guided by the Spirit, yet we need the Word of God to be a light for our feet. Our obedience is not the ground and cause of our adoption, but the expression of our thankfulness and of the duty we owe to God who adopted us. That's why God gave the promise first, and then the law, Gal 3.17-18. "Obedience begins from Christ. Not that we work for an interest in Christ, but we get such an interest by faith in order that we may work." The law shows us what is holy, as a spiritual law, Rom 7.14, but only the law of the Spirit can make us holy and give us a nature to walk according to the law, Rom 8.1-4. The new principle of the Spirit of holiness within us sends us to the law for the pattern of that holiness. The Spirit gives the life within to walk according to the rule without.
- E. The law was given as a mirror to reveal the imperfections in all our duties, and it continues so under the gospel. The law takes us away from reliance on our own works and casts us on Christ and the promises. Thus the moral law is not inconsistent with grace but subservient to it. It was given to Israel on Sinai, not as a covenant of works, but in service to the covenant of grace, which could not be annulled, Gal 3.1-24.