

The Lord, His Law, and Those Who Love Him

(The Place of the Law in the Life of the New Testament Believer)

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These are crucial questions that deserve clear answers. I hope to show that the relationship of the Old and New Testaments is not from *less true* to *more true*, but from *promise* to *fulfillment*. Compare the caterpillar and the butterfly. The latter is not something *different* from the former, but is the former in its advanced or fulfilled form. It's an old saying, "The New Testament is in the Old contained, the Old is in the New explained."

There are a number of passages that seem to be mutually contradictory – like these for instance:

You are not under the law but under grace. **Romans 6:14**

Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ. **1 Corinthians 9:21**

Are we under the law or not?

Having abolished the law of commands contained in ordinances... **Ephesians 2:15**

Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. **Romans 3:31**

How can God *abolish* the Law and *uphold* it at the same time?

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Do not think that I have come to destroy the law... but to fulfill it... **Matthew 5:17**

In order to get to the bottom of this, first we'll have to see if we can't separate out a few different aspects of the Old Testament Law, and then try to figure out which apply to us today and how.

IS ALL THE LAW STILL ALL THE LAW?

It seems to me that in the Old Testament there are at least three distinct categories of what we call, "The Law." Admittedly, there is no particular biblical statement which spells out their difference, nor is there a distinct linear separation of them in the Old Testament, but it does appear that the Law has three definite aspects: *Civil*, *Ceremonial*, and *Moral Law*.

The Ceremonial Law

By "Ceremonial Law" I'm referring to Israel's sacrificial system, Temple observance, feast days, and so on. Found mostly in Exodus 25-31 and Leviticus 1-17, these ceremonies prefigured and symbolized the person and work of the coming Christ. I like to think of them as "snapshots," of the Messiah, Who was to come. When Jesus came, He fulfilled the meaning of these ceremonies, which were "*shadows of things to come*" (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1; Colossians 2:17). It's as if Jesus stood just around the corner, out of the view

of the Jews in the Old Testament, casting a shadow within their view. Then, “*when the fullness of time came,*” He stepped around the corner so they (we) could see Him as He really is. Since the One Who Himself cast the shadow has come, we would be foolish to prefer the shadow over the real thing! The “snap shots” of Him don’t even compare to the actual Jesus! “It was only the use of the Old Testament ceremony that was abolished, their meaning was more fully confirmed.” (John Calvin)

The Ceremonial aspect of the Law is distinguished from the Moral aspect in 1 Corinthians 7:19, “*Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts.*” Circumcision was one of God’s commands in the Old Testament; it was part of the Law – the Ceremonial aspect of the Law. As such, it is no longer required of His followers, as it is to “*keep God’s commands*” (His moral commands). The Ceremonial Law was always meant to be temporary and the Moral Law permanent.

The most prominent example of the Ceremonial Law, of course, is the sacrificial system instituted in the books of Moses. This entire system from lamb to tabernacle powerfully represented the sinless sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

The book of Hebrews is emphatic about Jesus being the fulfiller of the prophetic pictures given us in the sacrifices of the Old Testament. When referring to the Holy of Holies (the place of sacrifice and offering in the times before Jesus), the writer says, “*The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed... This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered... (applied) until the time of the new order*” (Hebrews 9:8-9). That new order came when Jesus fulfilled all those ceremonies designed to give the Jews an entire photo album of the One Who was to come.

The Civil Law

God gave the Civil or judicial aspect of the Old Testament Law to the nation of Israel in order to regulate them as a national unit. Not only was their worship governed by God, but also their social and political order. Most of these laws were associated with the theocratic Jewish state, and its legal system. For a good dose of Civil Law, scan Deuteronomy 19-25.

“The law was given to protect the people of the promise, to aid them in the pursuit of their destiny, and to provide the legal standards so necessary to an orderly society... It prescribes the general outline of obedience by which the nation would be preserved from social decay and would fulfill the will of God.” (Thomas McComiskey)

So, just how relevant are those Civil Laws to us today? Should we be putting blasphemers, false prophets, deceivers, rebellious children, Sabbath breakers, and adulterers to death (Leviticus 20 and 24; Deuteronomy 18; Exodus 35)? While we certainly may learn from such standards and their punishments about God’s desire to insulate His people from worldly ways, it’s clear that His intent in these laws was to preserve national Israel until Jesus came. Israel was the “apple of His eye,” His special people on the earth, called to demonstrate His character and deliver His Son to a needy world. His Civil Laws protected them as a nation through the ages so they could fulfill their destiny and deliver the Messiah to the world. Now that He’s come, and since we don’t live in a theocratic state (a government under God), it is not incumbent upon us to impose these Civil Laws on ourselves or upon our pluralistic society.

The Moral Law

While the Ceremonial and Civil aspects of Old Testament Law were enforced for a specific people for a limited season of time, the Moral aspect of God’s Law is relevant for all people at all times. The Moral aspect of the Law represents God’s unchangeable character and outlines standards of behavior which He considers normative for all mankind in every time. The Moral Law expresses both God’s good character

and His great love, which are as timeless as He is. That which is right is rooted in the One Who is the standard of right. Since He doesn't change, nor does His Law change.

As an expression of His love, God's Moral Law is designed to protect us from the sin that threatens to destroy us. His moral laws, like traffic laws, are really the best way to travel and to stay out of dangerous, and potentially fatal, trouble. It was this understanding of the Law that inspired David – the most New Testament of all the Old Testament believers – to say, “Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold.” (Psalm 119:127)

It is important to see these three aspects of law and their dissimilarity. Admittedly, it is a bit tricky to attempt to label laws in the Bible as *Ceremonial*, *Civil* or *Moral*. You won't find tags on particular passages designating them one category of Law or another. But when you read the Bible as a whole, you'll be able to tell the difference. All three categories are woven tightly into a unified Old Covenant administration. But that there are general distinctions between these categories of laws, and that our relationship with each is distinct, seems clearly to be God's design and intent.

How did Jesus fulfill the Law?

In regard to the Moral Law Jesus said, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*” (Matthew 5:17) There are at least four ways in which Jesus “fulfilled” the Moral Law of God, and the bulk of the remainder of our study will focus on our relationship to this Moral Law in light of what He did.

- *He fulfilled it by obeying it completely. As a Man on earth, Jesus obeyed all of God's laws (Hebrews 7:26).*
- *He fulfilled it by, as a sinless substitute, receiving its punishment for our disobedience (Galatians 3:13).*
- *He fulfilled it by transferring the legal and relational benefits of His obedience to those who trust Him for salvation (2 Corinthians 5:21).*
- *He fulfills it daily from within believers' lives by empowering us to obey God's Law (Romans 8:4).*

In the next section, I'll unpack how we related to God's Moral Law in relation to our Justification. Then we'll look at our relationship to the Law in connection to our Sanctification. In our Justification we'll see the Law *outside of us* driving us to Christ for forgiveness. In our Sanctification we'll discover that the Law is *inside us* - the Holy Spirit within us empowering us to follow its dictates.

WE'VE BEEN “JUSTIFIED” – WHERE DOES THE LAW FIT IN?

What the Law couldn't do

There have always been people who thought they could earn their salvation by obeying God's laws. Adam attempted to cover his own sin with fig leaves. Cain, instead of offering the required blood sacrifice, made a feeble effort to please God with the fruit of his garden. The Pharisees attempted to win God's favor with their meticulous regulations. The Judaizers argued that Gentile believers could only be saved if they were circumcised (ceremonial law). By contrast the New Testament's message is clear...

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. (Romans 3:28)

Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ... by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse... (Galatians 3:10)

Rather than justify us, the Moral Law shows us how un-justified we are and then points us to the Justifier. Going to the Law for salvation is as ridiculous as eating salt to quench your thirst, or pouring gas on a fire to put it out! The Law can't save the sinful, it can only point to the Savior.

The Law puts us on the defensive by requiring *our effort* to be saved. The problem is that we have no ability – no power – to achieve it. (It will help you to read Romans 4 and Galatians 3 in their entirety for a larger view of what I'm saying.) In a nutshell, those chapters teach that while the Law requires *doing*, the Good News only requires *believing*. The law *demand*s and grace *gives*! The Law begins with a big, "Do!" The Gospel, on the other hand starts with a huge, "Done!" (Remember Jesus' cry from the cross, "It is finished!" John 19:30) When we rely on the Law for salvation, we're left to our own ability and are therefore rejecting God's ability to save us apart from our own efforts.

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. (Galatians 5:4)

When we're *trying* in our strength instead of *trusting* His saving strength, we're saying we need no help from grace.

The bad thing about the good Law

It almost sounds like we're saying that the law is a bad thing. Not so.

- *"... the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12).*
- *The Law is good if a man use it lawfully. (1 Timothy 1:8)*
- *Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. (Romans 3:31)*

There are at least two purposes of the Law in relation to our Justification:

1st – the Law reveals sin.

"... by the Law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20)

It should be clear that you can't be saved by something that God never meant to save. The Law's purpose is to show you your need to be saved. God never intended the Law to be *a ladder* to raise us up to Himself. It's more of *a mirror* whose job is to show you how dirty you are, not to wash your dirtiness! It's like a level or a plumb line that reveals even the slightest flaw in a structure. The Law shows us how crooked we are but won't straighten us out! "The Law by itself does not give bread; it only gives a recipe for making bread, a work which is totally beyond the ability of sinners." (Alva McClain)

2nd – the Law drives us to Christ.

"What then was the purpose of the law? It was added because of the transgressions until the Seed (Jesus) to whom the promise referred had come... Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law." (Galatians 3:17-25)

The Jews, through whom God's promise of salvation was to be fulfilled, were prone (as are we all) to wander away from God. God's revelation of Himself was at stake, and so a system of law was given, "...a fence was erected to impede the decline of Israel from their Lord" (Walter Chantry). The Law served a

supervisor, even a jailor, to hold people in custody, to keep them from escaping their awareness of sin. The Law was meant to restrict the Jews to only one avenue of escape. That avenue was the God's saving Messiah. The Law brings people to despair of their sin, and then closes every road of relief but one! The Old Testament system was a goad and guide to Christ. When Jesus came, the need for the Law as a restrictive force was abolished. "*Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*"

It's important to know that Old Testament believers were justified in the same way as we are. While we look *backward* in faith to the fulfillment of God's promise, they looked *forward*. Their revelation of the coming Messiah might have been dim at best (1 Peter 1:10-12), but through God's promises to Adam (Genesis 3:15), to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), through the prophets and poets (Isaiah 53; Psalm 22; etc.) Old Testament Jews looked hopefully ahead to Christ's coming.

God gave the Law as a kind of "Protective Precepts for the People of Promise." As we've seen, God was concerned to preserve Israel from spiritual and social decay in order to fulfill His promise to and through them regarding the coming Christ. All three aspects of the Law (Civil, Ceremonial, and Moral) served as a sturdy wall confining them until Christ came. The purpose of the Law was to keep God's people under strict surveillance until their Savior arrived.

As New Testament believers, we are no longer "under the law" as a restrictive force from the outside. When Jesus came and died and rose again, the Law, instead of looming outside of us, was put inside us. Now it's written on our hearts ("*I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts*" Hebrews 8:10).

Jesus, the keeper of the law

"(Jesus) is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners... He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth..." (Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22)

We're all lawbreakers, He's the consummate Law-keeper. "*He knew no sin*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was born under the Law (Galatians 4:4) and fulfilled it (Matthew 5:17). He was tempted in all the ways we are, *yet without sin* (Hebrews 4:15).

The question is, since we're guilty and God is holy, how can He deliver us from our guilt without compromising His holiness? How can *a just God* save sinners from sin without violating His justice? How can a righteous God give righteousness to the unrighteous righteously?! I call it the "Divine Dilemma." But it didn't stay a dilemma long. Jesus volunteered for duty.

Jesus, the victim of the law

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" (Galatians 3:13)

Jesus' sinless sacrifice was the solution to the "Divine Dilemma." On the cross He became the Law's "*Victim*," so to speak. He volunteered to take something *He didn't deserve* and gave us something *we didn't deserve*. In our place He stepped under the cloudburst of the curse of the broken Law. He received its curse for us. He traded legal places with us. We were guilty, awaiting our sentence, when He stepped in and exhausted the just penalty that the Law required. He didn't *change the Law* for us to escape its sanctions, He *satisfied its cry* for punishment in His own substitutionary death. He was no lawyer who schemed our release but *the willing Victim* of the sentence we deserved.

Had Law been set aside while the guilty went free, the justice, God's consistency would have been defeated. Only through the cross was it possible for God to stand behind His Law while releasing law-

breakers. What justice demanded, love provided. *“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.”* (Romans 3:31)

THE LAW IN RELATION TO OUR SANCTIFICATION

So, it's clear that the Law can't justify – save us from sin's penalty. It's only a “goad” to salvation, but absolutely not the “ground” of it. Now let's look at what the Bible says about the relationship that the Law has to our sanctification – our growth in Christ-likeness. Just as the Law couldn't set us right with God, it is equally incapable of helping us live right, at least not from the outside of us. In our ongoing journey to be more like Jesus the Law does have a place.

Consider the following five thoughts about the Law in our lives today:

1) Liberty is not lawlessness

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13)

(There) are certain godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. (Jude 4)

Someone wrote, “Liberty is the power to do what we should, rather than the license to do as we please.”

2) The Lord still has His laws

If you love me, you will obey what I command. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. (John 14:15, 21)

You are my friends if you do what I command. (John 15:14)

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom... (James 1:25)

If you keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right... Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. (James 2:8, 12)

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. (1 Corinthians 9:20-21)

Obedience to God today is no less important as it was in Old Testament times. He's still got the best idea about how people ought to live. His laws show us that idea.

3) The Law is fulfilled by love

The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Galatians 5:14)

Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:10)

Love the Lord your God with all your heart... This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Remember that the Ten Commandments originally came from God on two tables of stone, five laws on each table. The first five rules tabulate *our responsibility to love God*; the second five have to do with *our responsibility to love other people*. If you love God, you won't worship an idol or take His great Name in vain, etc. If you truly love others you won't commit adultery or lie to them or steal from them or covet what's theirs.

Augustine said it well, "*He who loves completely does what he pleases and pleases to do the will of God.*" Another wrote, "*Love for God makes Law enjoyable and Law makes love for God practical. Love for God is the heart of the Law. Law is the hands and feet of a heart of love. Moral Law is the rule book of love.*"

4) There is a New Testament location for the Law

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16)

... in order that the requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:4)

Instead of acting as an extrinsic code, the Law is written on our hearts. It doesn't demand compliance from the outside, but now creates *intrinsic* desire for the love response of obedience inside the sincere follower of Jesus. When the Law was written on stone it couldn't empower or inspire us. But it's no longer an *external transcript* looming over us with demands and threats. It's a powerful *internal principle* that makes performance possible. It transforms *duty into delight!*

5) Those who love the Lord love His laws

His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. **Psalm 1:2**

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes... They are more precious than gold, than honey from the comb. **Psalm 19:7-10**

I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. **Psalm 40:8**

For in my inner being I delight in God's law. **Romans 7:22**

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And His commands are not burdensome. **1 John 5:3**

Psalm 119 is the Bible's longest chapter. David wrote this incredible poem to exalt and glorify God's impeccable Law. All but three verses of the one hundred seventy-six make some reference to God's Law. Take note especially of these verses in which David repeatedly expressed his passionate love for God's laws: **Psalm 119:32, 35, 47, 70, 72, 77, 92, 111, 119, 127, 143, 167, and 174**

- *Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.*
- *I delight in your commands because I love them.*
- *The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.*
- *Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.*
- *Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.*
- *Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold,*

- *I obey your statutes, for I love them greatly.*
- *I long for your salvation, Lord, and your law gives me delight.*

Our obedience to God is a response of love to love. We love the way he loves us so much that we want to show him our love by doing what he says. *“It pleased the Lord for the sake of His righteousness to make His Law great and glorious”* (Isaiah 42:21). We don’t go to the Law for *dynamic*, but for *direction* in the perfect ways of God. Dynamic comes from Jesus Who lives inside us. The Law is our road map for directing that dynamic.

On the other end of the spectrum, when we look to the Law as code of regulations under which we should live, as a taskmaster under which we should labor, our efforts to be like Jesus will be not only frustrated but frustrating. Paul admitted his frustration in Romans 7:4-7.

So you my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

We’ve been freed from the binding jurisdiction of the Law by having died with Christ and being raised to fulfill its commands in the power of the life-giving Spirit of God. Obedience is no longer *required from a compelling force from without*. It is *inspired from an impelling force from within!* It is much easier to obey when the desire comes from *inside* us, than when we are forced from the *outside*. The old poem says it well –

*Do this and live the Law commands
But neither gives me feet nor hands
A better word the Gospel brings
It bids me fly and gives me wings!*
(Author Unknown)

Sin shall not be your master for you are no longer under the law but under grace. **Romans 6:14**

Compare the disparity of being under law and under grace.

UNDER LAW

Rules from the outside

Laboring in your own strength

It gives you no desire nor power

It’s written on stone

It’s a burden

UNDER GRACE

Motivation from the inside

Living in the power of God

It gives you both the desire and power

It’s written on our hearts

It’s a delight

The difference between Law and Grace is like the difference between a map and a personal guide for a journey into the back woods for a backpacking trip. The self-sufficient traveler will opt for the map. When he gets lost, cold, scared, and hungry, he’ll wish he had chosen the guide (along with the map). Our Guide, the Holy Spirit, Who leads us “into all truth,” will use the map (The Law) to lead us along. But He

gives us more than a map for our trek through life. He supplies His personal presence and power to live the life He wants us to live. The map was *given* in the Old Testament; the Guide *came* in the New.

The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17) Through Moses a code was given. But Jesus didn't give us something, He came Himself! We didn't need something from God, we needed Him!

Do this with the law...

The Law is not obsolete, nor is it looming over us waiting to crush us. It's not done away with, nor is it binding as a means of salvation. So, what *does* it do? How do we relate to it in our Christian adventure?

In Romans 7:7-13 Paul shows that though the Law can't, by itself, sanctify us, the problem is not in the Law, but in us. We, who can't seem to obey it, are the problem. So, what does the Law do for us who want to be more like Jesus?

First, it reveals sin.

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said, "Do not covet." Romans 7:7

The Law shows us Who God is, and what we ought to be like in relation to Him and His holiness.

Second, the Law stirs up sin.

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from the law, sin is dead. Romans 7:8

John Phillips illustrated it this way:

As the summer sun shines on a vacant lot and warms the soil, causing the hidden seeds to spring to life, covering the lot with weeds, so the law of God, shining on the human heart, causes the latent seeds of sin to germinate and reveal themselves. The truth of this is evident enough. Does not the sign, "Keep Off Of The Grass," arouse the latent rebellion of our hearts, prompting us to at least put a foot on the forbidden ground?

In other words, God knows we're weak; the problem is that we don't know it. He uses the Law to show us. The Law neither creates sin or removes sin - it *reveals* it. Watchman Nee said it well, "*As long as you leave me alone, I'm not such a bad guy... but as soon as you ask me to do something (law) my sinfulness comes to light. When a clumsy servant just sits, his clumsiness is hidden. If he does nothing he does no damage. But when you tell him to do something he knocks things over, stumbles, smashes, and breaks things. Make no demands and it's not noticed... There's nothing wrong with demands, but the man is wrong.*"

Thirdly, the Law slays the sinner.

For sin seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. (Romans 7:11) The Law brings us to a place of utter dependence on God's grace, having unsuccessfully attempted the Christian life on our own steam!

Again, Watchman Nee –

"The law was given to make us lawbreakers... The Law is that which exposes our true nature. We're so conceited, and think ourselves so strong, that God has to give us something to test us and prove how weak we are... He knows I'm weakness incarnate... The trouble is that I don't know it... God has to bring us all to the place where we see that we are utterly weak and helpless. The whole purpose of the law was to

'kill' you, to show you that you can't do it, to take pride and self-confidence out of you, to take the life out of you, to make you feel weak, helpless and hopeless."

So, where's the good news in that? Thankfully, Romans 7 gives way to Romans 8.

Fourthly, the Law-Abider lives in us.

For what the Law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4)

In relation to our progress in Christlikeness, two things about the Law are *not* true. First of all, it's not true to say that the Law has no bearing or influence on our lives. The Moral Law has not been abolished. To say that we are not "under the law" is not the same as saying we are *outlaws!* Nor is it true that we are bound to the Law as a harsh and meticulous taskmaster. The Law is not binding. The Law shows up, stirs up, and points out sin. But then, God writes His laws on our hearts. What does that mean?

"God sent His Son... in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." **Romans 8:4**

"In us," those two little words carry a world of meaning. How would it be different if Paul had written instead, *"by us"*? It would have meant that *we* supply the power to change ourselves, that *we* can pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and live in obedience to the Law. But that's exactly what *we* cannot do. *We* can't, but *He* can, and He does *IN* us what He requires *of* us! He fulfills His own law in those who trust His life in them! It's not entirely accurate to say that as Christians we are living *changed* lives. It's better than that. We're living *exchanged* ones!

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:19-20

My all time favorite definition of the Christian life is: ***"The life He (Jesus) lived then lived now by Him in us."***

We now obey the Law as a consequence of the Law-Giver and only Law-Abider inside us! *"The Law demands strength from one that has none, and curses him if he cannot display it. The Gospel gives strength to the one who has none, and blesses him in the exhibition of it. The Law proposes life as the end of obedience, the Gospel gives life as the only proper ground of obedience."* (C.H. Macintosh)

God doesn't command us to a slavish obedience to an outward standard, but invites us to the Spirit's inner promptings to live out the righteous life of Christ. It is not so much a *work*, but a *"walk in the Spirit."* It's not a *do and live* proposition, but a *live and do* (*living* comes first, and *doing* is the consequence). Someone wrote, "Christ keeps not His subjects in by force, but is King of a willing people."

Paul didn't say that the Law is fulfilled "by us," and neither did he say it is fulfilled *"for us."* That would have implied that we have nothing to do with the outworking of His life – He does it all and we stand by and watch him do all the righteous living. But we are still very much responsible creatures and involved in the process. We carry the role of *responders* to His life and power within us. Our part is to *"work out"* what God has *"worked in"* us. He's given us the desire and power to do His will (Philippians 2:12-13), and it's our job to utilize that power to live our lives more and more like Jesus. He doesn't do it *instead* of us or *for us*, but *in us* as we cooperate with Him.

Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Psalm 119:35

Appendix #1

HOW TO KNOW IF YOU'RE A LEGALIST

“Legalism” as a term is not found in the Bible, but as a concept, it is a concern addressed in almost every book in the New Testament. It’s one of Christendom’s most slippery and ubiquitous errors. Jesus was born into a largely legalistic society. Within a few years of the fledgling Church’s birth, legalism reared its head. Most of the New Testament Epistles were written to correct the tendency. Beyond that, the history of the Christian Church has been plagued with legalistic movements. Much of what we know of the Church in the Middle Ages (1,000 years worth!) was legalism. The Reformation didn’t stamp it out for good. Legalism prevails until today. The Pharisees are the same yesterday and today and forever!

This goes way back to the beginning. Adam and Eve were the first legalists. Their fig leaf clothes were an attempt to cover their sin while hiding from God. Their son Cain followed in their footsteps when he offered the fruit of his own labor to God instead of the prescribed sacrificial lamb.

Let me make stab at a definition based on three components of legalism – *rules*, *reasons*, and *resources*.

**Legalism is an approach to God on the basis of certain *rules*,
for self-glorification *reasons* out of the *resources* of human energy.**

All legalism has certain *rules* (whether right ones or wrong ones) for certain *reasons* (always wrong ones) using certain *resources* (always the wrong ones). Legalism is a perverse answer to the questions: *What* should I do for God? *Why* should I do it? And, *how* can I do it? If you want to detect the legalistic error one has to look at those three factors: The *rules* (*the what*), the *reasons* (*the why*), and the *resources* (*the how*).

The rules...

Rules, regulations, or codes are not in themselves the earmark of legalism. As we’ve seen in the study above, God’s moral standards are not in themselves obsolete or antiquated. They’re not the problem. His Law is still an expression of His will for us. Every healthy Christian has a deep respect for God’s rules, and wants to obey them from his heart. Rules in themselves do not a legalist make.

In relation to *the rules*, what does make a legalist, at least in part, is one of two things. Either he has the *right rules* written in the *wrong place*, or he has *the wrong rules altogether*. The former is when a person honors the right rules, God’s moral laws, but instead of relating to them inscribed on his heart as an intrinsic force from the inside, he relates to them as a demanding code written on stone looming over his head, waiting to crush him. The legalist’s “what” may be right (he has the right rules), but his “where” (where the law is written) is wrong. Instead of being in love with God and His righteous rules He thinks he’s “*under the Law*.” Like the prodigal son’s older brother, he “*slaves*” for God instead of acting like a son.

Other legalists put themselves under *the wrong rules*. They follow the “*traditions of men*” (Mark 7:8), “*human commands*” (Colossians 2:22) instead of God’s expressed will in his good Law. Isaiah spoke of those who worship God, but their teachings are “*rules taught by men*” (29:13). Paul warned Titus to “*pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth*” (Titus 1:14). They have an overactive conscience that requires more of themselves and others more than God does. They see God as a harsh taskmaster and make up rules for themselves to avoid getting anywhere near his bad side.

Remember, rules in themselves don't make a person a legalist. As I pointed out above, liberty is not lawlessness (Galatians 5:13). The Lord does give us Laws (John 14:5; 15:10; James 1:25; 2:8...) and these laws are loveable laws (Psalm 1:2; 40:8; 119:32, 35, 47...). But we should make sure though that the laws we're trying to keep are really *God's laws* and not men's. And we should be sure that these laws are written on our hearts, and not on stone tablets (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16; Romans 8:4).

The reasons...

The second factor in diagnosing the legalistic error has to do with our *reasons* for obedience to God. *Why* do we act one way and not another? What's our ultimate motive for adhering to God's rules? This is really the core of this issue: *motive*. Legalism is more an *attitude* than an *act*. For the true legalist, his reasons for obedience to a code of ethics are always wrong.

The right reasons for obedience to God's laws are two-fold. First, we should be inspired to live obediently out of an inward attitude of gratitude to God for His goodness. We serve Him because we love Him and want to please Him. Our second priority and motivator is that we love people and want their best. Living obediently to God always benefits others around us. It therefore boils down to two things: *The glory of God and the good of people*. Any other motives are suspect of having a legalistic core.

Examples of legalistic motives are plentiful. Some, who don't have an understanding of God's free and full acceptance through Christ, might attempt to earn it with good deeds. Others try to impress God with spiritual works, vying for position in the Kingdom as one of God's favorites. I think some people simply miss the love of God and just see *rules*. They figure that they're righteous because they know the rules, and are usually pretty smug about it. They're not trying to impress God or anyone else; this is just how they think this is how the Christian life works. Some legalists simply want the attention and admiration of other people.

"Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen by them... When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets... to be honored by men... the hypocrites love to pray standing on the street corners to be seen by men..." (Matthew 6:1-5)

Why do you avoid lying, or envying, or stealing? Is it because you love the Father and His Laws? Is it because you love people and wouldn't want to hurt them? Or are you afraid that God will strike you dead if you break his rules? Is it so that you'll have something to boast about to God or do you want to please or impress other people with your dutiful actions?

Legalists are inspired by any number of inadequate motives. They may or may not have the right rules, but they always have the wrong reasons.

The resources...

The final factor in detecting the heart of the legalist is looking at the source upon which you rely in order to be able to obey the rules. If you're wondering if you tend toward legalism you'll need to check the *resources* upon which you draw to do the right things. It's important to know *what to do* (*the rules*), and *why you do it* (*the reasons*), but also *how you go about being able to do it* (*the resources*).

It's clear from Romans that the person "*under grace*" draws upon the resurrection life of Jesus for his power to obey God (Romans 6:1-14; 2 Peter 1:3-4; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:19-20). On the contrary, the one "*under law*" is dependent on his own strength to keep God's commands (Galatians 3:3; 5:4; Romans 7:14-20). He's not yet convinced that he's weak or desperate for God's help. He thinks that the

old Benjamin Franklin saying is true, “God helps them that help themselves.” What he doesn’t realize is that God only helps those who know they *can’t* help themselves! He “*resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.*”

Jesus said He didn’t come to call the “*righteous but the unrighteous.*” He wasn’t saying that there really are any truly “righteous” people in the world, but that the self-righteous are definitely not going to hear or heed His call. He also said, “*It is not the healthy that need a doctor.*” It’s not as though there are any “healthy” people that don’t need Him. Everyone is sick. But most people aren’t aware of how sick they are! One of the healthiest things a sick person can do is to admit they’re sick – and then go to Doctor God for help (Proverbs 28:26; Luke 18:9, 1 Corinthians 10:12).

Whose steam are you running on? Do you “*trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding?*” Or are you still finding your own resources apart from God in order to do what He wants? Are you *trying* harder or *trusting* more? Can you honestly say with Paul, “*By the grace of God I am what I am... I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me*” (1 Corinthians 15:10; Galatians 2:20)?

How do you know if you’re a legalist? Legalism has its *rules*, its *reasons*, and its *resources*. Are you following the right rules – God’s rules instead of your own? Why do you follow those rules – for your glory or His? And upon what power source do you rely in order to obey – your strength or his grace?