

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 64 – LAW AND GOD'S HOLY PEOPLE]

The last couple of times we have spent quite a bit of time looking at the subject of the law, both in a general sense and then in a specific sense with the Law of Moses.

- ◆ 1) We have seen that the law is holy, just and good as it is a reflection of God's very nature and character (Romans 7:12).
- ◆ 2) We saw how God was required to introduce the law as a new way of relating to sinful mankind after Adam and Eve's sin if they were not to be consumed by His divine holiness.
- ◆ 3) We also saw ***"The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase" (Romans 5:20)*** and reveal the vast gulf between a holy God and sinful mankind.
- ◆ 4) And finally it provided the means by which the two parties would eventually be reconciled (Romans 8:3-4).
- ◆ When we look at each one of these four points regarding the law, we see each one is positive from humanity's point of view.
- ◆ So it's important to recognise the crucial role the law has played in God's plan of salvation.
- ◆ And even though the age of the law has come to an end, as it has been replaced by the age of faith and grace as a result of Christ's saving work, the question is, is there a role for the law to play in the development of maturity in God's holy people? (Luke 16:16; Romans 3:20-22).

This is the subject we are going to begin to look at in more detail today.

- ◆ Controversy surrounding the role of the law in the age of the New Covenant is nothing new.
- ◆ Change always brings controversy and after living with the Mosaic Law for over 1200 years, this was bound to happen, as most of the early converts to Christianity were law-abiding Jews (Acts 2:41).
- ◆ But as Gentile converts were added who had no experience with the Mosaic Law and were correctly instructed that salvation was only possible through faith in Jesus Christ, the potential for controversy over the role of the law grew.
- ◆ This is the underlying dynamic with which we should view the books of the New Testament canon that addresses the development of the early church, especially the writings of Paul.
- ◆ More than any of the other apostles, he, as the apostle to the Gentiles, was the one who had to juggle this dynamic as most of his churches had both Jew and Gentile converts.
- ◆ Not only that, but he faced a determined faction of Jews who insisted new Gentile converts adopt the teaching of the Law of Moses into their new Christian practice (Galatians 2; Galatians 5:7-12; Titus 3:9).

To further confuse the issue, there are times when Paul himself speaks positively about the law and times when he speaks negatively about it.

- ◆ On the negative side, to be under the law was, to be in slavery (Romans 7:22-23; Galatians 4:21-31), bought death and condemnation (2 Corinthians 3:7-9), is powerless to save us (Romans 8:3), those that promote the law are the enemies of Christ (Galatians 5:12), it came to an end with the introduction of the New Covenant (Romans 10:4; Galatians 5:18), and it produced self-righteousness rather than godly righteousness (Romans 10:3).
- ◆ On the positive side, Paul calls the law "holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12), faith does not nullify the law but upholds it (Romans 3:31) and although circumcision is out, keeping the commandments of God is not (1 Corinthians 7:19).

How are we then to reconcile these two points of view?

- ◆ The answer lies in Romans 8:1-2.
- ◆ ***Romans 8:1-2 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.***
- ◆ Notice two laws are mentioned; one that leads to life, and one that leads to death.
- ◆ As we saw last time, the reason there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus is because, 1) Jesus through His righteous life has produced on our behalf the righteous requirements demanded by the law.
- ◆ In other words, we are accepted in faith, based on His righteous "works" not ours (Romans 8:4).
- ◆ And, 2) Jesus has paid the death penalty demanded by the law for mankind's sins.
- ◆ So the law has lost its deadly power over us. It can no longer condemn us or punish us as it says here in Romans 8:2. We have been set ***"free from the law of sin and death."***

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- ◆ What this section is saying is, the law that God instituted as a way to govern the relationship between a holy God and His rebellious children (one that led to sin and death) has now been replaced by a new law, ***“the law of the Spirit”*** to govern the relationship between a holy God and His holy people (one that leads to holiness and eternal life).
- ◆ This is simply the fulfilment of the promise recorded by the prophet Jeremiah added to God's original statement in Leviticus 26:12.
- ◆ ***Jeremiah 31:33 “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.***
- ◆ As we saw, the Old Covenant failed in that it did not produce the spiritual maturity required for the Israelites to be God's holy people.
- ◆ Besides the other positive benefits just mentioned, the New Covenant included the means to address this failure.
- ◆ And this is the remarkable aspect of the New Covenant.
- ◆ The responsibility of living up to God's righteous requirements in order for them to be His holy people is transferred from the people to God Himself, Jesus.
- ◆ Through His righteous life, His death and resurrection, Christ has fulfilled this aspect of God's plan to redeem humanity so they can become His holy people.

But this is only the first step. In order for what Christ has achieved on our behalf to become a reality in our lives, the Holy Spirit by taking up residence in our hearts and mind is the means by which God now produces His holy nature and character in our lives.

- ◆ We have been justified and reconciled through Christ's saving work, now the task is to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ so that we think and act as He would (Romans 8:29).
- ◆ This is how the New Covenant produces the genuine righteousness the old law failed to do in God's holy people.
- ◆ Think of it this way. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the law of sin and death had to be introduced to govern the relationship between God and sinful mankind.
- ◆ But once we are brought to repentance by that law (our tutor, Galatians 3:24-25) to recognise our sinfulness and rebellion against our Creator, that legal relationship came to an end and a new relationship based on grace is instituted.
- ◆ This in effect takes us back to the situation in the garden prior to sin where mankind enjoyed a personal face-to-face relationship with their God with one major exception.
- ◆ We are now given access to the very Spirit of God represented by the tree of life.
- ◆ This is why Paul calls this new way of God relating to mankind based on grace the ***“law of the Spirit who gives life” (Romans 8:2).***
- ◆ Again it helps if we go back to Romans 8:1-2 and substitute the word “covenant” in place of the word, “law” so we understand we are talking about two ways of God relating to mankind.
- ◆ ***Romans 8:1-2 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.***
- ◆ The sad truth is, Adam and Eve were never forbidden access to the tree of life.
- ◆ They chose instead to exercise their freewill that led to the introduction of ***“the law of sin and death.”***
- ◆ But as it says here in Romans 8:2, the New Covenant of “life” is introduced by Jesus Christ to set us ***“free from the law of sin and death.”***
- ◆ Under the New Covenant, we are welcomed back into God's “presence” (remember that word) in a personal relationship where the main influence for change in our lives is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.
- ◆ As mentioned, the Spirit brings with Him the very nature and character of God as He is God Himself.
- ◆ So the New Covenant has instituted and set in motion all of the ingredients needed to fulfil God's plan to create a genuine holy people for His name “in his image.”

So with that background, let's now summarise how the New Covenant of grace is so much better at producing a holy people for God than the Old Covenant of law.

- ◆ 1) With our conversion we are given a new nature that wants to please God.

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- ◆ For believers, the fallen nature of Adam that we are born with has been wrestled to the ground and destroyed by Jesus Christ.
- ◆ The old nature governed by the “flesh” died along with the “old man.”
- ◆ Baptism is the sacrament used to symbolise the death of the old man and the birth of the new man (Romans 6:1-7).
- ◆ With the birth of the new man comes a brand new nature, a nature no longer a slave to sin, but a slave to righteousness.
- ◆ **Romans 6:6-7** *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.*
- ◆ **Romans 6:18** *You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*
- ◆ This new nature is the fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:33 where God says, *“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.”*
- ◆ This new nature is none other than the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our lives imparting to us the very nature and character of God Himself.
- ◆ Notice the dramatic change in orientation that comes about as a result of this new nature.
- ◆ **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*
- ◆ We are no longer slaves to the selfish orientation that drove us while we were ruled by the old nature.
- ◆ The new nature is oriented outwardly to serve others following the example of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ This change of heart is a massive transformation from the past and should not be underestimated.
- ◆ **2) We have been set free from the condemnation of the law as the demanding righteous requirements of the law have been fulfilled in us by Christ (Romans 8:3-4).**
- ◆ This simply allows grace to be grace.
- ◆ **Romans 6:14** *For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*
- ◆ It's unfortunate that the word “law” has so much negative baggage associated with it as people misunderstand its role in the redemption process and mistakenly apply the “works” mentality of the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.
- ◆ Under the Old Covenant, people were judged on how well they performed in regard to the law.
- ◆ Acceptance was conditional on their “works.”
- ◆ But amazingly, under the New Covenant we are accepted on the grace made possible by Christ's “works.”
- ◆ **Romans 4:5** *However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.*
- ◆ The beauty of grace is we are accepted and continue to be accepted regardless of how far we fall short of the perfection demanded of the law.
- ◆ **Ephesians 2:8-9** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.*
- ◆ This is the Father's gift to us – acceptance based on Christ's “works” rather than our “works.”
- ◆ This ought to be very liberating for us.
- ◆ We no longer need to win God's favour; we have God's favour. We are accepted, we are His sons and daughters, nothing shall separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39).
- ◆ This new status is something to celebrate. We can enjoy our new status and the reassuring grace of God in which we reside.
- ◆ The pressure to be perfect is gone. It was impossible to begin with and even in our new status with God's help we will never achieve perfection this side of the resurrection.
- ◆ God knows this and this is why He does not put unrealistic expectations on us now that we live under His grace (Matthew 11:28-30).
- ◆ Christians, far too often, continue to place themselves under the uncompromising demands of the law when there is no need to.

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- ◆ Instead we should revel in our new status. Our eternal destiny is no longer in our hands, but in our Saviour's very capable hands.
- ◆ We need to be humble as this scripture implies and accept God's remedy for sin.
- ◆ It has been achieved by Christ's finished work on the cross and nothing needs to be added to it.
- ◆ All the honour and glory needs to go to the one who has made it all possible, Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Next time we will continue this subject to explore if there is a role for the law in the development of maturity in God's holy people.