

## FOUNDATIONS FOR RECONSTRUCTION - Part one

Looking Again at the Ten Commandments - Pastor Don Horban

Sunday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1643

### THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LAW - SOME BACKGROUND

**Deuteronomy 6:16-24** - "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. [17] You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. [18] And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers [19] by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has promised. [20] When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?' [21] then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. [22] And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. [23] And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. [24] And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day."

People have varied opinions about the meaning and role of the word "**law**" in the Scriptures. And that's not totally without reason. The word is used in several different ways, and its meaning must be determined from the situation and context.

Sometimes the word "law" is used to describe **the whole of the Scriptures**. This is the **revelation we have from God** and is spoken of in terms of love and devotion. We study it to see the mind of our Heavenly Father. Sometimes the word is used to describe the **ceremonial practices described in the Old Testament**. Included here are the many **ordinances and sacrifices** that **distinguished God's people from the surrounding nations** and, when practiced in faith, **anticipated the coming of Jesus and His death on the cross as the Lamb of God**.

The Bible clearly teaches that these ceremonies are now **obsolete**. They have served their purpose. They were only temporary shadows of what was to be permanently accomplished through Jesus Christ. No one is under obligation to keep these "**laws**" anymore:

**Hebrews 10:1-4** - "For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. [2] Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? [3] But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year. [4] For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

**Hebrews 8:13** - "In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one **obsolete**. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."

Now, those are very clear statements if you accept the final revelation of the New Testament. It's not just a matter of personal opinion or religious preference. You can't continue to participate in those ceremonies without somehow **denying** the end to which those ceremonies pointed. Jesus Christ, God's Son makes those laws "**obsolete**." That's the very word used in the text.

The word "**law**" is also used to describe the **moral law of God**. The most common and condensed expression of this law is found in the **ten commandments**. While possessing no power to redeem, these commandments outline principles of behavior that are permanent descriptions of God's character. They're binding because they **reflect something of what God Himself is like - His character and desire for His people**. While some of those commands get **expressed** in different ways - refined and actually deepened as the revelation of Scripture unfolds - the principles are unchanged.

Even when you talk about God's **moral law**, there is still much confusion as to its applicability to the church today. There are people who think the word "**law**" is a useless term for the New Testament Christian - "**I'm not under the law, Pastor Don, I'm under grace.**"

And that is a perfectly true statement, as long as you mean what the Bible means when it says it. Some Christians think it means they can live however they like and don't have to worry about being judged for willful, persistent disobedience. If that's what you think those words mean, you're in for a rude awakening one day. Hear this today. There is no Christian who is free from the law in that sense.

The other extreme is people sometimes think that they can somehow measure up spiritually because of the acts of righteousness they perform. You know the ones I mean: "Of course I'm a Christian. I mean, after all, this is a Christian nation. I give to the poor. I don't swear or drink or go to dirty movies. I love my wife and am faithful to her. Of course I'm a Christian."

So if some people think they can live however they please because they're not under the law, but under grace, there are others who think they actually **earn their standing before God by their efforts to keep His law as best they can**.

And both views are totally unscriptural and incorrect. The Bible teaches two important truths about the role of God's **moral law** for my life today:

1) **FIRST, I WILL NEVER BE SAVED THROUGH MY OWN EFFORTS AT LAW KEEPING**

Paul is clear that I am saved **by grace, through faith, and not by works** - Ephesians 2:8-9 - "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

In Galatians, Paul makes it clear that God intended, right from the beginning, to make clear distinction between faith and works as the means to eternal life, **and that God has so ordained things that I must choose one way or the other.** I cannot have **both**: Galatians 2:20-21 - "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who 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. [21] I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."

If salvation came through the law, there was no reason for Jesus ever to come or to die. Paul means Jesus did something **essential** on the cross. Man could never be right with God in any other way.

## 2) SECOND, THE LAW STILL PLAYS A MORE INWARD ROLE IN EVERY CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

Let me explain what I mean. While not **saved** by the keeping of the law, the law is not unimportant for the believer. And it's interesting that **Paul makes this point in the very same letter in which he denounces the mistaken idea that the law is an instrument of salvation.** It's **not** an instrument of salvation. But it **is** an instrument of instruction.

Galatians 3:24-26 - "So then, the law **was our guardian** until Christ came, in order that we might be **justified by faith**. [25] But now that faith has come, **we are no longer under a guardian**, [26] for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."

It's so important to read theological verses in the Scriptures with care. Some people read those words and are right now thinking, "**See, Pastor Don, before we were saved the law was our guardian/tutor to point out our sin and lead us to Christ. But now that we're saved, Paul says we're no longer in need of that guardian anymore. What could be clearer?**"

But notice what Paul says is now **different** about the law and its relationship to the Christian. He's not talking here about the **existence** of the law, like it used to exist and now it doesn't. He says the Christian is no longer "**under**" the law as a guardian/tutor (26). Faith in Jesus Christ has **changed** my relationship to the law in that **I am no longer under it as I used to be.**

Now, stay with me for just a few more minutes on this subject. This is not the only place where Paul talks about being "**under the law.**" It's a very important concept in his mind and we should take some time to study it together:

Galatians 4:4-7 - "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those who were **under the law**, so that we might receive adoption as sons. [6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

Jesus came because we were "**under the law**"(5). So we know that we were in trouble, or Jesus wouldn't have come and died. Under the law means we were **guilty of specific sins.** And because the law was there to do its work, we knew our sins were more than just **mistakes** or **weaknesses**. The voice of the law proclaimed our actual **guilt before God**. The law makes sin **officially wicked**. And we **knew** about our guilt because the law cataloged what we had done wrong. So we were under the law in the sense that it **posted our sins.** But it provided no **forgiveness** for those sins.

Another thing stated in those verses is that only through faith in Jesus Christ does the **Holy Spirit come to indwell and empower** - Galatians 4:6 - "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" This changed the **atmosphere** in which I live to please God. Rather than trying to **follow a list**, I now long to **please my Father**.

And this is a **huge** transition. All the law could do was **instruct and hold out the standard.** Through Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes and turns our hearts to **want to obey the law.** And in this way He actually **deepens our power to keep it.**

So to be **under the law** is to have nothing but that **bare moral standard** of God's will constantly telling me I'm wrong, but having **no hope for forgiveness**, and **no desire or power to keep those instructions in the future.** That's what it means to be "**under the law.**" And thank the Lord, we're not under the law in that sense anymore!

So the question now is, does the law have **any** useful purpose in my life as a follower of Christ indwelt by the Spirit of God?

## 3) THE LAW STILL SERVES THE CAUSE OF CHRIST AS THE HOLY SPIRIT WRITES IT ON THE CHRISTIAN'S HEART TO TEACH AND INSTRUCT IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

This happens in several very important ways:

- a) The law of God makes me **appreciate Christ and cling to the cross.** It keeps my **reliance on the Lord current and passionate.** I wasn't just **saved** by grace. I **stand** in grace day by day.
- b) My perception of the law is changed and held with confidence in Christ Jesus and His finished work on the cross. I repeat, my

*perception* of the law is changed. The law of God isn't just **adhered to out of duty**. It's **embraced as the character of my Heavenly Father**. I'm not striving to **earn my status** in God's eyes. But as a Christian I'm constantly striving to **please my Father in heaven**. And I see **beauty** rather than **threat** in the character of Father God.

And it's right at this point that I sense the big difference that the Holy Spirit has made in my life. **I long to keep the law of God and I delight to keep the law of God**. That's what John meant when he said, **"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."** (1 John 5:3).

- c) The law of God helps me as I am still growing in Jesus, **not to turn grace into licence**. I know it seems we shouldn't need this. And I won't need this help in heaven. But here, as I'm growing daily in Christ, I have to be reminded not to **abuse grace while I receive it**.

**Jude 1:3-4** - **"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. [4] For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."**

There is something very important in those verses. These ungodly people were **"denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ"** (4b). But it's **how** they were denying Jesus that's the important point. They weren't running around telling people that Jesus wasn't the Son of God, or that He wasn't Divine, or that He didn't die on the cross, or telling people that salvation was found in something other than God's free grace.

In fact, quite the opposite was the case. They were denying Jesus by telling people that because Jesus had died for their sins, because they weren't under the law, because they were under grace, they had **licence** (that's where we get that old KJV word, **"licentiousness"**) - they had licence to do whatever they wanted and they were still automatically covered by grace.

And Paul says very plainly, **if you believe that, then you deny the Lord Jesus Christ flat out**. The law, while not an instrument of salvation, helps me not to **distort God's precious grace in Jesus Christ**.

#### 4) **WHILE NOT UNDER THE LAW OF GOD, BELIEVERS ARE STILL DESCRIBED AS UNDER THE LAW OF CHRIST**

Paul uses that phrase in the New Testament. And it's very important to understanding the Christian's relationship to the law of God: **1 Corinthians 9:20-21** - **"To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. [21] To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law."**

The Jews are those described as **"under the law"**(20). The Gentiles are those whom Paul describes as **"outside the law"**(21). By that he means the same thing he teaches in Romans chapter 2. The Jews are the ones to whom God gave the Ten Commandments- the law of God.

Those laws weren't given to the Gentile or pagan nations. "But," Paul says, "when I went to the gentiles, I went **on their own terms**. They are people without the law, so I went to them without the law. **But, of course, I wasn't really outside the law of God, because I am under the law of Christ."**

That's exactly what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 9:21** - **"To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law."**

And his point is this. Because he is **under the law of Christ, God's law is on his heart wherever he goes**. He lives it - breathes it - delights in it - wherever he is, at all times.

"Well, is there a difference between being **under the law** and being **under the law of Christ**?" Yes, there are two huge differences.

- a) **The law of Christ fulfills the intent of the law of God**. The law of God is **heightened** in the Christian's heart. He doesn't just keep the **bare minimum letter of demand**. He keeps the **heart of what God was desiring all along**.

Most of us know how Jesus taught this very thing. **Matthew 5:20-46** is the place to study this. The law of God says, **"Try not to kill each other!"** The law of Christ not only holds that hatred in my heart in check, but says, **"If your enemy wants your shirt, give him your coat too. And don't allow hatred to grow in your heart. That will really witness to him of my grace in your heart!"**

The law of God says, **"I want you to refrain from cheating on your wife!"** The law of Christ says, **"You don't even look at another woman in a way that will lead your heart from loving your wife. You constantly give up your life for her just like I did for my church."**

These are just two familiar examples. And the obvious point is, if you are ruled by the law of Christ, you will find yourself

keeping the law of God automatically.

- b) The second difference between being *under the law* and being *under the law of Christ* is that *the law of Christ is inward and spiritually empowered*.

**Romans 8:2-4** - "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. [3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

It could never be said more clearly. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus enables me to keep God's law in my heart. God supplies a divine enabling to fulfill the intent and purpose of His law. It becomes a road to life and joy rather than a sentence of bondage and doom. James says it's actually the "***law that gives freedom.***"

So the beautiful truth we've studied from many different angles in this message is this. God is still vitally interested in holiness and obedience in the lives of all who profess to follow Him. And secondly, through Jesus Christ and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, ***what God requires, He also enables.*** So stay close to Jesus, read His Word with understanding, listen to the voice of His Spirit instantly, and grow in grace until Jesus comes.