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Shall We, Then, Live by Grace?

by James A. Freerksen

“Young man, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, playing ball on the Lord’s day!”

“But Pastor Green preached Sunday that we are under grace, not under the law, so I don’t have to follow those Old Testament rules.”

This common scenario illustrates only one of the many similar questions occurring frequently among godly Christians today. Has God done away with the Law of Moses? If so, can we work on Sunday? And if we are not under the law, are we then under the Ten Commandments? If we are under the Ten Commandments, shouldn’t we be keeping all 613 commandments of the Old Testament?

Problems confront believers on every hand as we seek to discern our relation to the Old Testament law and to grace. Whole denominations and cults have been developed around errant views concerning the law. Systems that follow the priestly order of the Old Testament have certainly placed themselves under its law. Others plainly teach that the keeping of the Sabbath and other legal matters are necessary for salvation or godly living.

We are enslaved not only by religious leaders, but by our own impulses as well. We push ourselves into an outward, legalistic system. Living under external regulations is easier than surrendering our lives to the Holy Spirit. Our church’s brief ethical code is less demanding than the dictates of the Spirit.

For example, students at Liberty University do not always appreciate the written code of the student handbook, *The Liberty Way*. But later many find that



Photo by Melinda Tennis

abiding by the handbook is easier than responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. *The Liberty Way* controls only the student’s overt actions in certain situations and at certain times. The Holy Spirit, by contrast, directs concerning every situation at all times—every thought, attitude, and action. The Spirit does not tell students to turn off their room lights at 11 p.m., but He does instruct them to be considerate of their roommates at all times. Thus, the regulation becomes greater under the Spirit. It is, however, a voluntary submission of love rather than a legal bondage.

Following rules is easier than following the Spirit, for this allows us to pick which rules we will follow. We naturally prefer to establish our own list of do’s and don’ts, thereby stressing our own strong points, and judging others by the same. Most of us have seen someone despise one sin yet coddle a “greater” sin. I have known men who religiously tithed their substantial incomes while practicing lives of immorality. Christ repeatedly confronted the Pharisees regarding such inconsistencies (Matt. 23:23).

How, then, do we live by grace? Before we can understand our situation under grace, we must understand our relation to the Mosaic Law.

The Removal of the Mosaic Law

The scriptural proof of God’s removal of the law is abundant. In Galatians and Romans Paul specifically deals with the law and speaks clearly of its removal. “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14; cf. Rom. 7:1-6; 1 Cor. 9:20-21). “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; . . . But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which would afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:19; 23-25).

But why and in what way has the law been removed?

Reasons for its Removal. God has removed the Mosaic Law from the life of His people because it cannot accomplish a positive work. It cannot save; it cannot sanctify. It reveals man’s sin, but it cannot release him from it. Though the law is holy, it cannot make us holy (Rom. 7:12-24).

God has provided a better program. He has written His law upon the tablets

of our hearts, prompting and aiding us by the Spirit, who indwells us (Rom. 8:3). The law written on stony tablets has given place to the law written upon our hearts. The external conviction of the law has given place to the inner conviction of the Spirit.

Extent of its Removal. In speaking of God's removal of the law, we must not suggest that God has annihilated it. That is far from the truth. Jesus expressly states that He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17-18). Paul is clear that his preaching of faith in no way annuls the law; indeed, it establishes the law (Rom. 3:31). He preached that Christ was the end (Greek, *telos*) of the law, not that it was terminated, but that it was terminated "to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10:4). While the law was not annihilated, its removal was *complete*. The Mosaic Law is often compartmentalized into three units: civil, ceremonial, and moral. Though most people can easily accept the removal of the civil aspect involving Old Testament social regulations and the removal of the ceremonial aspect involving the sacrificial practices, few will readily accept the removal of the moral aspect—the Ten Commandments. But to compartmentalize the law is contrary to Scripture. The law is a unit (James 2:10; Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10). To violate one point is to violate all. To step outside the circle of the law at one point is to become a transgressor of all. The law is a single whole, much like a seamless garment. One tear makes it a torn garment.

No Christian seeks to keep the civil "part" of the law today (e.g., death to the owner of a reportedly vicious animal that kills), yet the removal of this aspect of the law is the very one on which the Scriptures are silent. By contrast, the New Testament, in the Book of Hebrews, extensively teaches the replacement of the ceremonial part of the Old Covenant by the New. Chapters 3 through 10 of Hebrews show how Christ is better than (even the fulfillment of) the Mosaic system with its temple and sacrifices.

Similarly, the New Testament addresses the removal of the Ten Commandments. In 2 Corinthians Paul describes the removal of the law as a passing away, which parallels the fading away of the glory of Moses' countenance after he had been in God's presence (3:7-11). Significantly, in speaking of the passing of the law Paul refers to this law as "written and engraven in stones" (v. 7). Now, the only portion of the Mosaic Law to be written on stone was

that which God Himself wrote—the Ten Commandments (Exod. 34:1, 28). Likewise, Romans 7 implicitly teaches the removal of the Ten Commandments. This is seen in that immediately after Paul teaches the removal of the law (vv. 4-6), he describes that law as the 10th commandment, "thou shalt not covet" (v. 7). If Scripture speaks concerning the removal of any single part of the law, it certainly speaks of the removal of the Ten Commandments. Thus, the proper point to stress is that the law is a unit. And it has been removed as a unit. Nevertheless, to speak of the passing of the Ten

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Commandments (with all of the 613 commandments) must not suggest that all moral restraint has been removed. Indeed, as we shall see, Christ has given us a greater standard, eclipsing by far the Ten Commandments.

The removal of the Mosaic Law by Christ must also not suggest that the law has no function during this present age. True, for the believer today that relation has been severed; he is free from the law. The condition for the unsaved man, however, is different. No man is released from the law or its requirements until he comes to Christ. Paul thus describes the law as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24) and as a husband to whom we are married until we are reckoned dead to it through Christ (Rom. 7:1-4). Consequently, Paul says to Timothy that "the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane" (1 Tim. 1:9).

For believers, Christ is the termination of the Mosaic Law in every sense, for He brings us unto its goal of righteousness (Rom. 10:4). For the unsaved, the law continues in all its strength to reveal the righteousness of God and, hence, the condemnation of man (Rom. 2:11-16).

Life Under Grace

Understanding better our relation to the Ten Commandments, we might ask, "What principles should guide my life?" We know that God has freed us from the Mosaic Law, and we realize that arbitrary guidelines are just another form of law. We must appropriate new principles. These principles involve the life of grace. Three topics concerning the Christian's life under grace are important.

Our life in Christ involves two paradoxical realities: *liberty* in Christ, and a position under the *law* of Christ. In his letter to the Galatians, where he focuses upon the Christian's relation to the law, Paul writes: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (5:1). And again, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh" (5:13).

Through Christ we have learned obedience and so have acquired liberty. Paul's difficult statement in Romans 6:14 supports this truth: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law but under grace." Sin did have dominion over man under the law, but such is not the case under grace. Grace provides man with a new life, with an ability to obey.

Our liberty is further seen in that we have been removed from a position of a minor (or dependent) to that of a son of full age. Under the law man is regarded as a child who needs a pedagogue (Greek, *paidagogos*) to govern his life (Gal. 3:23-26). Though this word is translated "schoolmaster," no English word fully expresses the concept. In Greek culture the pedagogue had charge of a child from the age of 7 to 18. He took almost complete charge of the child, making sure his dress and behavior were suitable and that his schooling was in no way neglected. Often the pedagogue was an old but faithful slave. Today, such a one might be called a tutor, truant officer, nanny, chaperon, or guardian. Though no one word will suffice, they all aid in expressing this ministry of bringing a minor to proper maturity.

Before we were saved we needed a pedagogue to dictate our lives. Because of Christ's regenerating work, God can now trust us as sons and does treat us so. The goal of our position as a son is God-likeness, which the law could not impart (cf. 1 Peter 1:13-16).

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The second reality concerning our life of grace involves the *law of Christ*. Though we have liberty, we also have responsibility. When a child passes into adolescence, he gains not only independence but also responsibility. The two must develop at the same rate. Such is also true of God's children. This responsibility can be called the law of Christ. The New Testament speaks several times of such a law (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:19-21; James 2:8, 12).

For a Christian to imagine that God has set him free to run on his own (to do his own thing) misses the mark of biblical revelation by a long way. Our freedom from the Mosaic Law is not an occasion for self-gratification, nor is it removal of all law from our spiritual life. Paul writes, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:4).

Two points should become clear from this text. First, though my marriage to the law has ended because of death (a reckoned death), yet now I am neither single nor free. I have become married to Christ. I am not in some lawless state; I am under the law of Christ. Secondly, the purpose for my new marriage is a new fruitfulness toward God. God's goal has always been that man might be holy, even as God is holy. Now progress can be made toward that goal.

The nature of life under grace is that it involves both a liberty and a law, both a release and a responsibility. The New Testament sets forth basic *principles* of Christian living. First, our lives must be directed toward Christ. Our goal is to please our Redeemer. Our love for Christ constrains us to live for Him and not for ourselves (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Jesus said that our devotion to Him will cause us to keep His commands (John 14:23). Living under grace means living unto Christ.

Love is the second principle that must guide our lives under the law of Christ. Christ, following the statements of the Old Testament, demonstrates that love is the essence of even the Mosaic Law (Matt. 22:36-40). Paul then demonstrates this love to be the essence of the new law of Christ (Gal. 5:13-14; Rom. 13:8). James describes this love as the fulfillment of the royal law of Christ (2:8). Love is the first by-product of the indwelling Spirit (Gal. 5:22); love is greater than any spiritual gift and greater even

than faith or hope (1 Cor. 13). Living under grace means living by love.

The third principle of living under grace involves the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit interprets the situations of our daily lives, showing us through the Word of God how to live. We grieve Him when we ignore His leading (Eph. 4:25-32). When we do walk in the Spirit, however, we never carry out the sinful deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:16 ff).

As Christians living under grace, we need to allow these three principles to direct our lives. Christ must be the goal of our thoughts and actions; love, the moti-

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vating factor; the Spirit, our means of success. Now note the *demands* God places upon us. The removal of the Mosaic Law has not resulted in a lowering of God's standard. Indeed, only now can its true heights be comprehended. Jesus discusses the Jewish concept of the Mosaic Law in contrast to God's intended standard in Matthew 5:17-48. His conclusion expresses the demand of God's standard: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Peter demonstrates this standard of holiness coupled with our new life under grace (1 Peter 1:13-16, 22-23). Grace demands a superhuman manner of life encompassing the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Grace demands a spiritual life, not struggle in the flesh, but a reliance upon the Spirit.

Two improper responses commonly arise from the doctrine of the liberty of grace. The first is the reaction of license, that is, unrestrained living. Since we are free from the Mosaic Law, some may feel that we are free to live as we choose. This was William Hendriksen's (*N.T. Commentary: Romans*, p. 3) concern when he wrote: "Today, too, especially in certain fundamentalistic circles, a kind of antinomianism is being propagated. We are being told that the believer is not under the law in any sense whatever.

Therefore, as long as he trusts in Christ as his personal Savior he can more or less do whatever he pleases."

No doubt such individuals exist. If they are born again, they are surely immature. Fundamentalism, however, does not promote such ideas, for the admonitions of Scripture are clear (Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 8:9, 12; Rom. 14:22).

Along with the ungodly reaction of non-restraint is the equally destructive practice of legalism. Though we all have an idea of what legalism is, that idea is difficult to articulate. Though we may easily identify someone else as a legalist or at least as legalistic, probably none of us would consider *himself* a legalist. Nevertheless, we all have that tendency.

A definition of legalism is essential. Charles Ryrie's definition of legalism as *wrongly restricted liberty* focuses directly upon the problem. Certainly, restrictions are necessary in our Christian life. The basis for these restrictions separates the godly person from the legalist. Just as wrongly directed trust separates the legalist from the biblicist in the area of salvation, so wrongly restrained living distinguishes the legalist from the godly believer. A person is a legalist based upon the *reason why* he practices what he does.

Jesus identifies some common legalistic motives in serving God. We could be performing our religious acts to impress people (Matt. 6:1-2) or to win their approval (Matt. 23:1-7). Or we may be zealous (sincere) in our action, but ignorant in our deed (Matt. 7:21-23). We might merely desire to fulfill the law itself (Matt. 23:23, cf. Rom. 10:2-3). These are legalistic motivations and will lead a Christian to emptiness and despair.

Yet, the casting off of legalism must not involve the casting off of moral conduct. Legalism must be understood as wrongly restrained living. Hence, the removal of legalism must be the removal of wrongly motivated restraint, not the removal of restraint (1 Peter 2:11; Rom. 13:14; 1 Thess. 5:22). If we are to live above legalism, we must live by the Spirit.

Living under grace means walking by the Spirit. Walking by the Spirit manifests itself most consciously by the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control (cf. Gal. 5:16-25). Shall we, then, live by grace?

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