

Chapter Ten

The Righteousness of the Law

If the believer is:

“delivered from the law” – Romans 7:6

“dead to the Law” – Galatians 2:19;

“free from the Law” – Romans 8:2;

“redeemed from the Law” – Galatians 3:13; 4:5 and 5:18;

and *“Christ is the end of the law”* – Romans 10:4;

does this mean the believer can do as he pleases, break the Law and live like the Devil, and still go to Heaven unpunished? This is a persistent question that is repeatedly raised by those who do not understand either the nature, purpose or the ministry of the Law. There are those who feel that it is preaching license to sin whenever anyone attempts to put God’s Law into proper perspective in Scripture. The Apostle Paul was accused of this same thing nineteen hundred years ago. Paul preached that the believer is not under the law, and he was persecuted for it. Listen to what Paul’s enemies had to say. They said that Paul taught that since we were not under the law, sin was permitted and even encouraged in order that grace might the more abound. Listen to Paul’s answer:

“For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just” (Romans 3:7-8).

Note this accusation against Paul. These teachers were accusing Paul of teaching to do evil, that God would overlook it; it would demonstrate God’s goodness by winking at their wrong doing and give license to sin. Paul does not hesitate to call his critics, *“slanderers.”* He said, *“That is slander!”* Paul’s words need to be echoed and those who affirm that by teaching living our Christian life in God’s grace – secure and free for the Law – that this gives *“license to sin,”* is a slanderer! Paul adds, *“whose damnation is just.”* No one who understands the claims of grace ever teachers that grace permits sin. Paul emphatically denies the charge. See what he says once again:

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Romans 6:1-2).

In this connection notice a clinching passage by Paul. In writing to Timothy he mentions the legalists who had slanderously accused him of teaching freedom from the Law as an excuse for sin. Read what Paul says about them:

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (I Timothy 1:5-7).

Paul's Appraisal of Legalism

Notice Paul's appraisal of the legalists who do not understand that love is the fulfilling of the Law, springing from a purified heart and unfeigned faith. This, Paul says, my critics who slander me don't understand. It is well to repeat Paul's appraisal of them. He accuses them of vain, jangling about the Law.

"Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm" (1 Timothy 5:7).

Then follows Paul answer. Paul does not downgrade the Law, or deny its perfection and holiness and justice. He says in 1 Timothy 1:8,

"But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully"

There is nothing wrong with the Law - the problem is with those who try to keep it! Now follow closely Paul's argument. Before you read this next verse, remember that the *believer is not under the Law*. Read carefully 1 Timothy 1:9-11,

"Knowing this, 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, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust."

Not For The Righteous

Take note of the opening words of this passage, "*knowing that the law is not made for a righteous man.*" A righteous man who has never broken the Law in any manner at any time has nothing to fear from the Law. It has not claim upon him if he is not guilty. The Law does not punish the innocent or the righteous! It only punishes transgressors. If there had ever lived a man who kept God's Law perfectly, he would be totally free from any obligation or fear of punishment. But such a man never lived, because David, the Psalmist, said,

"The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God" (Psalms 14:2).

And what did God find? Did He find any "*righteous man?*" He says it is a proven fact that ***all*** men are under sin.

"They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psalms 14:3).

Notice that Paul, under divine inspiration, declares the same verdict in Romans. He says it is a proven fact that ***all*** men are under sin,

“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3:10-12).

The condemnation of the Law is universal, without a single exception. Now look again at what Paul says in Timothy 1:9,

“Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man”

But Scripture tells us that, *“there is none righteous,”* so who is the Law then for? The answer is devastating. It is for sinners, profane, murderers, whoremongers, thieves, liars, and the like. If you are guilty of any of these, you have reason to fear the Law, because it condemns you. Those who say they are under the Law, therefore admit (although they probably do not realize it) that they are in the category of the sinners enumerated by Paul – lawless, disobedient, profane, filthy, murderers, whoremongers, and liars. The only way to escape the curse of the Law upon these sins is to be *“a righteous man”* – *“holy and sinless!”*

Who Is Righteous?

We have seen that there is not a single person of Adam’s seed who is righteous. What a hopeless situation! But wait! While man does not possess a righteousness of his own, there is another who has provided a righteousness that can be imputed to the guilty sinner. This One who can provide the righteousness of the Law is the Lord Jesus Christ, the only One who ever kept God’s Law perfectly, and then, in addition, paid the penalty of the broken Law for unrighteous, guilty sinners. By His death on Calvary He atoned for the broken Law; by His resurrection He provided His righteousness to all who believe. And now see the result in those who believe. God accepts the payment of the penalty for sin that Jesus made when He died on the cross, and reckons it to the account of those who receive His offer of salvation by faith. The penalty for sin is paid, and there is no condemnation. And then that pardoned sinner is clothed in the sinless righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and stands in God’s sight, as though he had never sinned, but is as holy in Christ as the Law demanded. The sinner has by imputation of Jesus’ righteousness become a justified saint. He still is imperfect in his old nature, he still falls, and fails in his Christian work, but in his *“position”* ***in the sight of God*** he is perfect and complete.

The Righteousness of Christ

Such a justified sinner is called *“righteous”* before God because of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. God will judge him if he sins as a believer and fails to confess, but he is no longer a condemned sinner. Look again at 1 Timothy 1:9:

“Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man”

The man or woman who has been declared *“righteous”* through God’s grace by faith in Christ is free from the condemnation of the Law. But for all others, enumerated

by Paul as sinners (and this includes all who are not saved), the Law continues to be God's requirement, and stands to condemn everyone who is not in Christ. Look again at what Paul, who tells us that he was once just such a sinner,

"Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 1:13-14).

Paul was under the condemnation of the Law once, but then *grace* entered and he was set free. So, we ask once more, *"What is the ministry of the Law today, since Christ fulfilled its demands on Calvary?"* Its ministry is still the same in condemning the sinner who rejects Christ. While the believer is free from the Law, delivered and redeemed, those who refuse the *righteousness* Jesus provided are still under it threatening. But to the believer it holds no threat any more, for he is *in God's sight, righteous*. How glorious the Word of God in Romans 3. After the sad news that *"by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight"* (Romans 3:20), Paul continues with a **BUT!**

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested ... Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" (Romans 3:21-22).

What a glorious Gospel of grace. For all who reject God's righteousness, the Law stands as the minister of judgment and *wrath*. Paul says,

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). "Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15).

In Colossians 3, Paul gives a list of sins that are condemned by the Law, and says,

"For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience" (Colossians 3:6).

But, Scripture declares the believer as counted *"righteous"* in the sight of God. Abraham, (the example of saving faith), *"believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness"* (Romans 4:3). Remember, the Law was not made for a righteous man, and the only way one can be counted righteous in God's sight is by receiving the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. And then we pass under the higher Law, the Law of the Spirit of life that brings forth its fruit of righteousness.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

If you have not received Jesus Christ as your Savior, you may receive His righteousness, not by trying to keep the Law, to make yourself worthy, but by coming empty-handed for mercy and grace.

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5).