

Chapter Eleven

The Law as a Judge

The last word of the Old Testament is “*curse*.” This closes the book of the old covenant of the law to Israel. In this one word, “*curse*,” the Holy Spirit sums up the ministry of the Law – to condemn the sinner and teach him that he cannot be saved by the works of the Law. But see the contrast in the way the New Testament closes. The dispensation of Law ends in a curse – the dispensation of the grace of God through Jesus Christ ends as follows:

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen”
(Revelation 22:21).

How difficult it is for man to learn that the ministry of the law was to curse the transgressor, and could only bless those who kept its precepts perfectly and continuously. Since there has never been any one of Adam’s race who was able to keep God’s Law perfectly, so the law could not bless anyone but only curse all alike.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”
(Romans 3:23).

Some of the difficulty arises from the fact that so many believe that every time the word “*law*” appears in the Bible it refers to the Ten Commandments. In the great majority of cases it refers to the Word of God, or parts of that Word. I give as an example, Psalm 19 that is an exaltation of the Word of God. David uses many different terms to describe this Word, including the word “*law*.” Notice verses 7 to 9.

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether “ (Psalms 19:7-9).

In these verses as in the whole Psalm, David is extolling the **Word** of God, and not only the Ten Commandments. Notice he calls the Word of God:

1. The *law* of the Lord,
2. The *testimony* of the Lord,
3. The *statutes* of the Lord,
4. The *commandment* of the Lord,
5. The *fear* of the Lord,
6. The *judgments* of the Lord

All these are different names for the Word of God and have no specific reference to the Ten Commandments. In the vast majority of cases where the word “*law*” is used, it refers to the Scriptures. Jesus Himself spoke of the books of Moses as “*the law*” as distinguished from the prophets (Matthew 7:12). The word “*law*” is used in the Bible

more than 500 times (about 300 times in the Old Testament, and over 200 in the New Testament). In most of these cases it has no specific reference to the tables of the Law. I mention this to emphasize the absolute necessity of determining what is meant by “*the law*,” when we read it in Scripture. We must determine whether it refers (1) to the Scriptures as a whole; or (2) to the five books of Moses, or (3) the whole body of ceremonial and civil and moral laws as given in Exodus and Leviticus; or (4) the tables of the Law written by the finger of God. In every case a study of the context will determine which meaning is in view.

A Christian of Separation

As an illustration I refer to a little-known passage of Scripture. It is found in 2 Corinthians 3:2-4, and reads,

“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward”

After this introduction, Paul proceeds to give an amazing contrast between the perfect Law of God, and His perfect grace. He says,

“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, [that is, the Ten Commandments] was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away”

(2 Corinthians 3:6-7).

Before reading any further, notice that Paul is now speaking about the Law in its narrowest sense, as referring to the Ten Commandments. Notice that Paul identifies what he means by “*the law*.” He is talking about the ministration of death, “*written and engraven in stones*.” The reference is unmistakable. He is speaking of the two tables of the law. He is contrasting this *Law* with grace. Remember, he is now talking about the Ten Commandments – the two tables of the *Law*, and calls it:

1. The letter of the Law, and then adds that,
2. The letter of the Law killeth,
3. The Law is a ministration of death, and
4. It was accompanied by glory, but this glory was to be done away.

Again I remind you, Paul is talking about the Law, the ministration of death, “*written and engraven in stones*,” i.e. the two tables of the Law. But there is more Read the following verses (2 Corinthians 3:9, 11-16).

“For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory...For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is

glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away."

Here Paul adds to his description of the Law. We have already seen that the Law gave,

1. The letter – not the Spirit.
2. This letter killeth.
3. The Law was a ministration of death.
4. It was accompanied by a temporary glory.

To these four Paul now adds:

5. The Law was a ministration of condemnation (verse 9)
6. This condemnation was to be done away (verse 9)
7. It was to be abolished (verse 13)
8. The Law was a veil that prevented approach to the presence of God (verse 14-16)

This last "*ministry of the law*" as a separating *veil* gathers up the whole purpose and ministry of the Law. It was a "*veil,*" a "*curtain,*" separating sinners from God. Sin and disobedience must be removed before God can accept the sinner. The Law is so perfect that it must condemn the least infraction of its perfect standard. It demands the death of the transgressor and therefore stands as a barrier between the sinner and God. It is a veil, and that veil of blindness is upon everyone who seeks by his won works or by his own obedience to the law, to make himself acceptable to God. That veil must be taken away. This, of course, sinful man cannot do; it can only be done by One who is **(1)** sinless himself; and **(2)** able to pay for the sin of another. Jesus accomplished this when he bore our sins in His own *body* on the tree. Here Jesus Christ met the perfect demands of God's holy Law paid its penalty and removed the barrier and the veil for all who will receive Him. To all others the veil remains, and the Law continues to be for them – "*the ministration of death and condemnation.*"

The Rent Veil

This is the significance of the rent veil at Jesus' death, when "*the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom*" (Matthew 27:51). The barrier that prohibited man from entering into the holy presence of God is removed, and to those who now believe, free access is granted into the very presence of God, and we are invited to

"come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

The law then can show us our danger, but it cannot lead us out. We need to look once more of the words of Paul in 1 Timothy:

“Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient” (1 Timothy 1:9).

The vital question is, “*Are you a righteous or an unrighteous person?*” If you are righteous, the Law has no dread for you. Since you have no righteousness of your own, you must turn to another even “*Jesus Christ the righteous*” (1 John 2:1).

In closing this lesson, let’s consider carefully the following contrasts between the perfect Law of God, and the perfect grace of God

1. The Law prohibits us from coming to God – Grace invites us to come as we are.
2. The law condemns the sinner – Grace redeems him.
3. The Law says, “*Do this and live*” – Grace says, “*It is done.*”
4. The Law says, “*Try*” – Grace says, “*It is finished.*”
5. The Law curses the sinner – Grace blesses the believer.
6. The law slays the sinner – Grace saves him.
7. The Law shuts every mouth before God – Grace opens the mouth in praise to God.
8. The Law condemns the best man – Grace saves the worst.
9. The Law says, “*Pay up what you owe*” – Grace says, “*It is paid.*”
10. The Law says, “*The wages of sin is death*” – Grace says, “*The gift of God is eternal life.*”
11. The Law says, “*The soul that sins, it shall die*” – Grace says, “*Believe and live.*”
12. The Law reveals man’s sin – Grace atones for his sin.
13. By the law is the knowledge of sin – Grace provides redemption from sin.
14. The Law was given by Moses – Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
15. The law demands obedience – Grace gives power to obey.
16. The Law was written on stone – Grace is written in the heart.
17. The Law was done away in Christ – Grace abides forever.
18. The Law puts us under bondage – Grace sets the soul at liberty
19. The Law genders fear – Grace brings peace and confidence.

One could add many more contrasts, but we would drive home these few, so that any who have imagined they can make themselves acceptable to god by their own works and righteousness, may turn from fleshly works to faith, and from self to Christ. My heart goes out to the many deluded souls who are so blind as not to see the liberty we have in Christ – not the liberty to sin, but the liberty to *serve*.

With all the Scripture has to offer on the subject it is very difficult for me to understand those who seek to attempt to prove that the believer is still under the Law. Why would any believer want to give up their position under the blessing of God’s

grace, and put them self under the curse of the Law? Why would they want to give up their security in Christ, to go back to trying to keep themselves saved by their own works? Why would they for one moment want to turn their back on Calvary, and go back to Sinai? – or give up their salvation “*in Christ*” for a life of miserable struggling to keep saved by their works? That would be denying the finished work of Christ, and taking credit for their salvation, instead of giving Christ Jesus all the glory!

That’s not for me! I will not frustrate the grace of God, because if righteousness came by the Law, Paul says, “*then Christ is dead in vain*” (Galatians 2:21).

I say with Paul,

“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).