

Chapter Two

The Definition of Law

Is the believer under the Law, under grace, or under both? This is a question that was settled almost two thousand years ago, and yet millions of Christians are completely confused, and fail to understand the clear, distinction between the ministry of the Law and the ministry of grace. The Bible, however, leaves no question about the matter. The Law was never given to save anyone. Not one single sinner in all the history of the human race has ever been saved by keeping the Law of God. In fact, God knew before He ever gave Israel the Law, and commanded them to obey it, that no one (except the Lord Jesus Himself) would ever keep that Law of God perfectly; yea, more, He never expected anyone to keep it perfectly. We might multiply Scriptures by the score to prove that the Bible teaches the absolute inability of the Law to save a single sinner, or keep a single saint saved. We do not wish to weary the reader with a recitation of an abundance of Scripture passages, but we must quote a few from among the many. In Romans 3:19-20, Paul says:

“ Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

Or hear Paul once again in verse 28:

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

Turning to Galatians we read:

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ . . . by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” Galatians 2:16).

And in verse 21 Paul nails it down with finality and says:

“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:21).

One more passage from the many others:

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith . . . Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:10-13).

If these verses mean anything at all, they teach the utter hopelessness of being saved by human works or keeping the Law of God. To be saved by the Law, the Law must be kept *perfectly* and *continuously* without interruption. And it applies to *everyone*. Remember, the Bible says, “Cursed is every one that continues not in all things.”

There are no exceptions, for it says, “*every one*.” There must be unbroken obedience. One single transgression places man under the Law’s curse. There must be obedience in *all things*, without one single interruption or failure. The Bible is crystal-clear that the Law was never given to save a person, never given to justify the sinner, or sanctify the saint. We repeat, therefore, God never expected a single sinner to keep the Law, for He knew when He gave the Law that this was impossible.

Which brings us to the question: “*If the Law could not save man or make him better or change his heart, why did God give the Law?*” This we will discuss in detail later, but first we must clear up some misunderstanding by the word “*Law*,” itself. What are we to understand by the expression, “*the Law of God*” or “*the Law of Moses?*” There are many people who thin only of the Ten Commandments, whenever they read the word “*Law*” in the Bible. But the Bible uses the word “*Law*” to describe different things. Sometimes the word “*Law*” refers to the whole Word of God. Sometimes the word “*Law*” is used to distinguish the books of Moses – (the first five books of the Old Testament) – from the rest of the Scriptures. Jesus uses the word, “*Law*” in this manner when He spoke of “*the Law and the Prophets,*” in Matthew 7:12.

The Jews of Jesus’ day divided the Old Testament into: (1) the Law; (2) the Psalms; and (3) the Prophets. “*The Law*” referred to, consists of the five books of Moses. In a general sense the fist five book of the Old Testament are referred to as “*the Law,*” as distinguished form the prophetic books of the Old Testament. In a narrower sense, the instructions God gave to Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai are also referred to as “*the Law.*” The Law that God gave to Israel at Mount Sinai after their deliverance from Egypt was a *unit*, yet consisted of different commandments. Most people imagine that the only Law Moses brought down from the mountain was the tables of stone – the Ten Commandments – but this was not all. God gave also to Moses the Laws concerning the feast days, holy days, sacrifices, offerings, dietary laws, civil laws, and the pattern of the Tabernacle. This Law, consisting of all these different commandments are ordinances, which Moses received on the mountain, was given at the same time that he received the Ten Commandments, and is described in detail in the book of Exodus from chapter 20 through 34. All these laws – civil, dietary, sacrificial, and moral – together constitute the book of the Law. And this Law of God is a unit! There are many commandments but they are all a part of the book of the Law.

Not Two Laws

Thee are also those who, because they do not understand the grace of God and the purpose of the Law, make a distinction between the Laws of Moses and the Law of the Lord, or the Law of God. They tell us the Ten Commandments are the Law of the Lord, while the Laws concerning ordinances, offerings, feast days, and the dietary laws are the Lows of Moses. They tell us Christ fulfilled the Laws of Moses, consisting of

ordinances, but His finished work did not include the Ten Commandments. However, the Law of Moses and the law of God are one, and to state that the Law of Moses was fulfilled and abolished at Calvary, and not the Law of the Lord, is a complete misunderstanding of the Bible. The expressions, “Law of Moses,” and “Law of the Lord,” are used interchangeably.

Three Bodies of Commandments

In this very connection we must recognize the three areas covered by the book of the Law in its broadest sense. The three parts of the Law are:

1. The Commandments of the moral Law (Exodus 20:1-26).
2. The Judgment (civil Laws) (Exodus 21:1-24).
3. The Ordinances (Exodus 24 to 31).

The Law of commandments dealt with Israel’s moral conduct, and is set forth in the Ten Commandments. The second area (the judgments) dealt with the social conduct of the people, and civil laws for the nation, and the third are (the ordinances) dealt with the ceremonial and religious obligations of the nation of Israel. These included the holy days, the offerings, and sacrifices. But all of these are part of **THE ONE LAW** given by the one same God, at one and the same place, at one and the same time, to one and the same nation by one and the same Moses, and for one and the same purpose.

To show the error of making a difference between the Laws of Moses and the Law of the Lord contained in the Ten Commandments, we would point out a most convincing fact. The Bible makes no distinction but uses the terms “Law of Moses” and “Law of God” interchangeably. As an example, I quote from Luke 2:22. It records the observance of the Law by Mary, the mother of Jesus”

“And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons” (Luke 2:22-24).

Notice in this passage that Mary is said to have taken the baby Jesus to the Temple to present Him to the Lord, in obedience to “*the Law of the Lord*” and to offer a sacrifice according to “*the Law of the Lord.*” Where, I ask, *where* does it say in the Ten Commandments that she was to bring a sacrifice? This command is found in the ceremonial Law of Moses, but it is called “*the Law of the Lord.*” Again in Luke 2:39 we read:

“And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth” (Luke 2:39)

To make a distinction between the Laws of Moses and the law of God or the Lord, for our own convenience, to prove our own point, is man-made and artificial, and

is a violation of the Scriptures. If Christ fulfilled part of the Law, then He fulfilled all of the Law, and now the believer is not under the Law but under grace (Romans 6:14). We are delivered from the Law (Romans 7:6), free from the Law (Romans 8:2), and dead to the Law (Galatians 2:19).

Why Then The Law?

Now an important question arises that I am sure has been suggested by the statement that the Law cannot justify, sanctify, or satisfy. The question is, “*Why did God give a Law that no man could keep, but instead only condemned him as a sinner?*” Now Paul, the great exponent of grace, anticipated that question, and says in Galatians 3:19,

“Wherefore then serveth the law?...”

It was an inevitable question, for Paul had proved in the previous chapters (chapters 1 & 2 of Galatians) that the Law was helpless to save or to change anyone. So we ask the questions, “*Why did God give the Law? What good is the Law? What purpose does the Law serve?*”

Paul immediately gives the answer in one of the most condensed, concise, yet comprehensive statements in the Word of God. What was the reason God gave the Law if it cannot save, justify, sanctify, or satisfy? Continue reading carefully the inspired answer in Galatians 3:19:

“...It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made, and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Galatians 3:19).

Three Things Stated

Notice three things that are clearly stated in this answer of Paul, “*It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come.*” Notice these three parts of the answer:

1. The beginning of the Law – it was *added* – added, of course to something that must have existed before.
2. The end of the Law – it was added *till* the seed should come.

The Law had not only a beginning but its ministry was *until* the seed should come. It was for a period of time beginning when it was *added*, and lasting *till* the seed should come. Now Paul tells us what he means by the seed. In verse 16 of this 3rd chapter of Galatians he says:

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16)

The “*seed*” in this verse is Christ! So we may substitute the word “*Christ*” for “*the seed*” and read – “*the Law was added...till Christ should come to whom the promise was made.*”

The ministry of the Law was “*dispensational*,” - [a period of time in which God deals with man in a certain manner] – John the Baptist clears up the question as to the length of the dispensation of Law. He says in introducing Jesus:

“For the Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

We will return to this important passage later in this study, but we must add a word about the third thing Paul mentions in his answer to “*why then the Law?*” The first was the beginning of the Law, the second, the end of the Law: and now number 3:

3. The purpose of the Law. It was **added** because of transgressions. Literally this passage could be read, “*In order to reveal sin as a transgression.*” Before the Law was given, there was no transgression of the Law. There was sin and there was rebellion, but it was not a “*transgression of the Law,*” because the Law had not yet been given. Clearly and plainly Paul asserts this when he said in Romans 4:15:

“Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.”

The Scripture makes it clear, “*before the Law came, there was no transgression.*” The question is, “*Was there sin before the Law came?*” Some teach that all sin is a transgression of the Law. “*Transgression of the Law,*” of course, is sin, but even **before** the Law came there was sin even though it was not “*a transgression of the Law,*” simply because the Law did not as yet exist. Of course, there was sin before the law was given, and sin was just as wicked and wrong then as now – just as horrible and terrible before the Law as it was after it came. Paul says clearly,

“For until the Law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no Law” (Romans 5:13).

“Before the Law was given there was sin in the world, but sin cannot be charged against a man when there was no Law to define it” (From 26 Translations)

When the Law came, it gave to sin a new meaning – (sin became “*a transgression of the Law*”). The purpose of the Law was to reveal sin as rebellion against God, as a *transgression* against better light, for by the Law is the knowledge of sin. There is not one verse in the entire Bible that says that the Law obtains salvation from sin. The first thing we must learn is that no man can be saved by trying to keep the Law! The only remedy is to plead guilty before the Law, and flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation by the grace of God.

*Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy Law's demands;
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone!*