



THE 10 COMMANDMENTS & NEW TESTAMENT LAW

How does God's law apply to us in the New Testament? Are we still under the 10 Commandments, are we under a new law, or are we under no law at all?

INTRODUCTION

There are two beliefs about the law we commonly come across:

The first is that because God does not change, neither can His law. The argument goes that the 10 Commandments are God's basic moral code for all time, and therefore it must carry through from the Old to the New Testament. These often conclude that keeping the Sabbath is a sign that a person is in right standing with God.

The second belief system says that Jesus did everything for us on the cross, therefore we are under grace and free from any commands on us. These argue that to suggest a set of commands is to be "legalistic".

The purpose of this piece is to show **what the Bible teaches** about the New Testament law.

THE STRUCTURE OF OUR DISCUSSION

Our discussion will show how the purpose of the law is to reveal the way to become righteous in God's eyes. Perfect obedience to God's law would then qualify us for acceptance before God. But in all the Old Testament, no one was able to achieve perfect obedience, therefore no one could earn their righteousness. To solve this problem in the New Testament, God sent His Son to earn righteousness on our behalf, thereby removing our need to fulfil the law to become righteous. The purpose of the law therefore falls away. In place of the Old Testament law, Jesus then lays down a new set of even more demanding commands for us to walk in – not to earn our righteousness – but because this is the good and acceptable behaviour of children of a holy God, who already are righteous. The result is that under these new commands, the moral obligations of the old law are fulfilled. We close by discussing the place of the Sabbath in the New Testament.

Section One:

THE PURPOSE OF A LAW

The purpose of the law is to show the way to become righteous in God's eyes. Here is the definition of the word as found in the Strong's Concordance (which is a dictionary giving the meaning of the word as found in the original Greek text):

Righteousness (Strong's G1343)

in a broad sense: state of him who is as he ought to be, righteousness, the condition acceptable to God.

the doctrine concerning the way in which man may attain a state approved of God.

integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking feeling, and acting.

When we speak about the law then, we are actually speaking about the way we achieve acceptance by God. It is the set of rules He has laid down in order to tell us **what He demands from us** in order to accept us. So what law did God give us?

The law of the 10 Commandments

God delivered the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. It begins with the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), and then goes on in the next chapter to say:

“Now these are the laws which you shall set before them.” – Exodus 21:1

These laws cover another 3 chapters, which we won't quote here. But what we will point out is that all these commands together make up the law of Moses. This includes regulations on slavery, the punishment of 'an eye for an eye and a life for a life', the feasts and more. This was all written down by Moses in "the Book of the Covenant".

*“So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the Laws... And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD... Then he took **the Book of the Covenant** and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.' And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'This is the blood of **the covenant** which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.'” – Exodus 24:3a, 4a, 7-8*

As you can see in the text above, these laws became the basis of the covenant God made with Israel, what we now call the Old Covenant. These were the rules laid down as the structure of the relationship between God and Israel. On the one side there was God's promises to them, and on the other side, His demands upon them. Together these established the covenant relationship.

*“**The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.**” – Deuteronomy 28:9*

After the covenant was sealed with Israel, the Lord gave Moses two stone tablets – a summary of the heart of the law – and the Bible says:

*“And He wrote on the tablets **the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.**” – Exodus 34:28*

So it becomes clear then that the 10 Commandments are the words of the Old Covenant. The 'Book of the Covenant' contained the whole law, while the two stone 'tablets of the Covenant' contained just the essence of the law, captured in the 10 Commandments.

*“So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, **the Ten Commandments**; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.” – Deuteronomy 4:13*

*“When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, **the tablets of the covenant** which the LORD made with you.” – Deuteronomy 9:9a*

The point we would like to make here is this: **The law of Moses** (whether you refer to the whole law or just the 10 Commandments) was established as **the foundation of the Old Covenant**. It is thus intrinsically connected with the Old Covenant.

Section Two:

RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH THE LAW

The Old Testament will show that Israel was not very successful at keeping God's law. This is a problem because to attain **righteousness by the law**, a person would have fulfilled the law **perfectly**. This means following every one of God's commands, from the moment we are born until the day we die. Even one tiny failure on the least important law is enough to disqualify us from this form of righteousness. Only a sinless life will earn righteousness.

*“For whosoever shall keep **the whole law**, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” – James 2:10*

But no one in all the world (with the exception of Jesus Christ), has ever been able to keep the whole law. Everyone has broken it and thus we are all guilty sinners, forever unfit to be called God's children.

*“There is **none righteous**, no, not one... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” – Romans 3:10, 23*

So the result is that it is impossible for us to become righteous by our own efforts of keeping the law. Therefore Paul says that there is no law that can make men righteous:

“...if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin...” – Galatians 3:21b-22a

“For the law made nothing perfect...” – Hebrews 7:19a

The trouble with the law

The fault does not lie with the law itself, but with the heart of the person trying to fulfil it. Man's nature is evil, it is drawn to sin. The law cannot fix that nature, it can only expose it. This is what Paul tells us in the next passage:

“I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law... For apart from the law, sin was dead... the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death... So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good... Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.” – Extracts from Romans 7:7-13

In simpler terms, the text is saying roughly this, *“had it not been for the law, I would not have recognised my sin. And though the law is good, it did me no good, but instead produced death in me by exposing my sinfulness.”*

A quick analogy will explain why this is: Let us say that a country declares fornication (sex outside of marriage) illegal. There is now a law which teaches righteousness. But those who slept around before there was a law, will still want to continue after the law is brought in. The law does not change their desires. Instead, the presence of the law only makes people more conscious of their desires being wrong. The law does not cure them, rather it exposes the unrighteousness of who they are. As perfect as the law may be, it does not have the power to change the heart. The law therefore makes nobody righteous.

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law” – Romans 3:20a

So despite the perfection and holiness of the law, it failed to make anyone righteous, and therefore failed in its purpose. This is why something different was needed if men were to have any hope at all of approaching God.

Section Three:

TIME FOR A CHANGE

So if the law could not make men righteous, then something else would have to. Some change would have to take place or else all men would be lost. But before we can discuss what changed, we must address the stumbling block which trips many people up at this point.

There is an argument which says that because God is unchanging, therefore His law cannot change. In fact the idea is often extended to say that nothing God does can change. Now we agree that the Bible teaches that God cannot change.

“For I am the LORD, I change not” – Malachi 3:6a

But the Bible does not teach that God's law cannot change, that is simply an assumption made from logic but not based on the text. We must be very careful when establishing doctrine based only on what seems logical to us but isn't written in the Word. Many a skewed doctrine has been the result of logical, yet inaccurate, deductions.

In fact, what the Bible does teach is that *“of necessity the law had to change”* (Hebrews 7:12). We will get back to this point in a moment, but first a quick analogy will help here:

A father can have a rigid moral code, but that does not mean the law he applies to his children never changes. You see, he can deny his 7 year old social activities after 18:00 and give his teenager a curfew of 23:00, and still remain consistent to his code. When a child turns 21, he can remove all curfews and still he has not changed his standards or his code. His rules have changed – **not because he changed, but because his children changed.**

In the New Testament, the fabric of God's children is utterly different to the Old Testament. God has never changed. His moral code has never changed. But Jesus coming to earth on behalf of mankind has fundamentally **changed us, and how we approach our unchanging God**. Let's take a look at what we mean by this.

A New Covenant

We opened this discussion by showing how God established a covenant with Israel and at the same time set down a law to govern that covenant. But the covenant failed because Israel could not keep the law. So God would establish a new and very different covenant the next time around.

“If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, there would be no reason to establish another one. But God found fault with the people who could not keep the law and said: ‘I will make a new covenant which is not like the old one. In the new one, I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.’ Now by calling this covenant ‘new,’ He has made the first one outdated, and what is outdated will soon disappear.” – Shortphrase from Hebrews 8

The Old Covenant failed because it had an internal flaw – the sinful nature of man. So at the end of the Old Testament, God declares the covenant corrupted.

“But you have departed from the way; You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,’ says the LORD of hosts.” – Malachi 2:8

The next chapter goes on to say the Lord will send the messenger of a New Covenant. This covenant would not need to rely on the good works of sinful men, but on the perfect works of a righteous One. So the Son of God came down from heaven to establish that covenant for us.

We do not have the time here to go very much deeper into the covenants themselves. But the topic will enrich your understanding of the difference between the Old and New Testaments and add insights on the law itself which we will not repeat here. Therefore we strongly encourage you to read that piece as a supplement to this one:

For more on the covenants, please go to:
<https://www.godsessions.com/covenants>

Section Four:

A NEW HOPE IN CHRIST

So how does this New Covenant help us? Well, you will recall that we said the reason God's law can change (even though He does not), is because the nature of His children in the New Testament has fundamentally changed. Let us explain:

In Adam

The Bible tells us that all men became sinners because of the act of one man. We were ‘**in Adam**’ – in his loins so to speak – when he sinned. God warned him not to eat of the forbidden tree or he would die. So when he rejected God's command and ate, he did die – he died to his righteous nature (a spiritual death). Thus he became a sinner, and the price of his sin would eventually be his physical death as well.

“For the wages of sin is death” – Romans 6:23a

We say ‘he fell’, meaning he lost his position of acceptance before God. He now had a fallen-nature which loved to sin, loved independence, self-rule and rebellion. Then when he had children, he had them ‘in his own image’ thus passing his fallen nature down them, and they passed it on to theirs. And so all mankind fell **in Adam**.

“in Adam all die” – 1 Corinthians 15:22a

“through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” – Romans 5:12

Now until the time of Jesus Christ (in other words all through the period of the Old Covenant), this sinful Adam-ness was the state of all men. It was only when our Lord came to earth that the possibility of something better was established.

A New Man

What God needed in the New Covenant, was a new man to place men in. Salvation would require a man that had walked this corrupted earth, without being corrupted by it. But we know there was no such man, so God came down from heaven and took on a human form, to become that one, new, righteous man for us. He walked the earth in absolute obedience to His Father.

“For I [Jesus] have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” – John 6:38

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son... born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” – Galatians 4:4-5

Jesus was born as a Jew under the rule of the law, so that He could fulfil the law perfectly. Therefore He says:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law... I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.” – Matthew 5:17

“I [Jesus] seek not My own will but the will of Him who sent Me.” – John 5:30

Though Jesus was born as a man, He did not have a fallen nature. You see, Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit through the miracle of a virgin birth. He therefore had a different Father to the rest of mankind, (we are referring here to His human nature, since His divine nature was neither born nor created). So Jesus was not ‘of Adam’ and therefore He was not born into sin. He was the only righteous man in all of history. So the Bible refers to Him as the second Adam, meaning the second original man. There are now two kinds of men, those who are ‘of Adam’ and this other One.

“The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving spirit... The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.” – 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47-49

In Christ

So here lies our new hope – in this one heavenly man. God could now take us ‘out of Adam’ and place us ‘in Christ’, as if we had been born of His lineage and taken on His nature. In the process we lose our fallen, sinful, Adam-ness and take on a new, righteous Christ-like-ness.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” – 1 Corinthians 15:22

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” – 2 Corinthians 5:17

Without fulfilling one single law, we are accepted by God on the grounds of being “in Christ”. In the same way that Adam represented us all when he sinned, and so we all became sinners through Adam. So Christ represented us in His obedience, so we can all now become righteous in Christ.

“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” – Romans 5:19

Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law, and when He lived that perfect life, it was on our behalf. The result is that God now sees those who are “in Christ” as those who have already fulfilled the law perfectly. He has earned our righteousness for us.

“For He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” – 2 Corinthians 5:21

So the critical question then becomes – How do we get placed “in Christ”?

Understanding this concept is arguably the most critical truth we need in our Christian walk. It does not happen just because we attend church, or because we consider ourselves Christian. It is a spiritual transaction with profound implications. Because of its importance we would rather not give a half-hearted explanation here. Instead we will point you to a fuller explanation in another piece:

For more please go to:
<https://www.godsessions.com/in-christ>

For the purposes of this piece, what is critical to know is that when God places us “in Christ,” all that His life and death achieved can now be imputed to us. He lived and died as our substitute – our proxy. So when we are “in Him,” His sinlessness becomes our sinlessness, His righteousness becomes our righteousness and so forth.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” – Ephesians 1:3

“you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” – 1 Corinthians 1:30b

It is as if we can simply shed our old selves, like an old skin, and be clothed with His eternal holiness.

“put off... the old man [the Adam-ness] which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts... [and] put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” – Ephesians 4:22, 24

The conclusion then is that **we no longer need to fulfil a law to become righteous before God**. Jesus has already fulfilled the law and purchased that right for us. Therefore the law is no longer our path to righteousness – Jesus is. He offers us that righteousness which the law tried to, but never could (because of our weakness).

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” – Romans 8:3a

“And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” – Hebrews 5:9

Because we now become righteous through Jesus Christ, instead of through the law, Paul says that Christ is the end of needing the law to become righteous:

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” – Romans 10:4

Therefore God has now separated those two things (the law and righteousness), which before Christ could not be separated.

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ.” – Romans 3:21a-22a

The result is that God has effectively removed the requirements of the law on us.

“[Jesus Christ] wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” – Colossians 2:14

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us (for it is written cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree)... that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” – Galatians 3:13a, 14b

When Christ died our old Adam-ness died and went to the grave with Him. And when He was resurrected, we received our new and eternal life in Him.

“our old man [Adam-ness] was crucified with Him... we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead... we also should walk in newness of life.” – Romans 6:6a, 4

Rejecting Grace means rejecting Christ

So after all Christ has endured and purchased on our behalf, any attempt we make to be justified by our own obedience to the law, is nothing short of a rejection of Him. This is why Paul says:

“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” – Galatians 5:4

If we could have found righteousness without Christ’s life and death, then God would never have put His Son through mockery, torture and death. If there was another way to make us righteous, then His sacrifice was for nothing.

“...if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” – Galatians 2:21b

But He did not die in vain and those who are in Him can be recognised by His life and righteousness working through them.

“He [Jesus] is righteous... [and] everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.” – 1 John 2:29

Section Five:

NOT LAW BUT GRACE

So it is evident that in the New Testament, the law is not the way we become righteous. And the Bible therefore says that we are:

“not under law but under grace.” – Romans 6:14b

So let’s have a look at both of these elements –what is it to “not be under law,” and what is it to be “under grace”?

Under Grace

Being under grace means finding ourselves under the loving-kindness of God. It means having His favour rest on us, and His power working on our behalf. It means His strength solving the problems of our weakness. Here is the Strong’s Concordance (a dictionary of the Bible) definition:

Grace (Strong’s G6485)

- 1. that which accomplishes joy, delight, sweetness*
- 2. loving-kindness, favour*

the merciful kindness by which God turns souls to Christ, keeps, strengthens and increases them in Christian faith, knowledge and affection.

God’s favour towards us – even when we absolutely did not deserve His kindness – is what made the whole New Covenant (and therefore our acceptance before God) possible.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” – John 3:16

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” – Romans 5:8

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that... He might show the **immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; **it is the gift of God**” – Ephesians 2:4-8*

Love is the driving force behind grace and the driving force behind the entire New Testament. God loved us and therefore He determined to save us from ourselves, from our weakness and hopelessness. **Grace is based entirely on God’s gift to us** – His favour which we did not earn or deserve. Grace reveals the true and glorious heart of the God we serve. It is by God’s love that our sins have been done away with in Christ.

“love will cover a multitude of sins.” – 1 Peter 4:8b

“the love of God has been poured out in our hearts...” – Romans 5:5a

And it is experiencing this love which makes us want to love God in return. He loved us and gave Himself for us, therefore we love Him and long to give ourselves for Him.

“For the love of Christ compels us because we judge thus:... He died for all, [so] that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” – 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

This is why the normal condition of the Christian is to be obedient to God.

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word... He who does not love Me does not keep My words.” – John 14:23a, 24a

“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him’, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” – 1 John 2:3-4

God’s whole moral code is collected in this one thing – love. Love, expresses the essence of His character and the beauty of His heart.

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” – 1 John 4:8

So being “under grace” then means living in the special kindness and favour of the God who loves us. He has made a way (in Christ), to deal with sin which kept us separated from Him. We are now welcomed into a living relationship, established by God’s devotion to us – and all this goodness compels us to live in complete devotion to God in return.

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**” – Romans 12:1*

This is living “under grace”, it means offering our all back to the God who offered His all to us. It means living in the love of God, and loving God back – with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. In practical terms what does that mean, what does it feel like and how do we do it? An entire section of our website called ‘Clear Christianity’ will delve into answering those questions.

A New Commandment

In this New Covenant of grace, Jesus gives us a new commandment:

*“A new commandment I give you, **That you love one another; as I have loved you**” – John 13:34a*

What extraordinary words. Jesus asks us to love one another as **He loved us!** He gave up His heavenly seat to humble

Himself as a servant. He was mocked, spat on, beaten and killed for us, He live and died all because of His endless love for us!

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” – 1 John 4:11

This extraordinary love we experience “in Christ” is the heart of our Christian walk. If we will let His love take hold of us, we soon discover that we love all those souls that God also loves. His love lives in and through us and we find ourselves loving those we could not love before, loving those we do not even know, we just have this unusual love pouring out of our hearts.

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” – John 13:35

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.” – 1 John 3:14

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” – 1 John 4:20

And when love has found its proper place in our hearts, we discover that we cannot help but to fulfil those old commands:

“...he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ Love does no harm... therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.” – Romans 13:9b-10

Because following the command of Christ also fulfils the law, Paul can say:

“Do we then make void the law through faith [in Christ]? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” – Romans 3:31

This is that love which establishes the law:

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” – 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Only this kind of self-sacrificing love (which is poured into our hearts from heaven), echoes the goodness of the God who saved us from our sinful state. When we live out this extraordinary command, we shine forth on the earth as children of our Father.

“love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” – Matthew 5:45-46

This is how we bring Him glory and pleasure – when He sees the image of His Son living out through us.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse... Repay no one evil for evil... If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” – Extracts from Romans 12:14-21.

If we allow the Lord to manifest this kind of love through us, then we can say with Paul:

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” – Galatians 2:20a

It is love then, that fulfils the moral code of God.

Not Under Law

So finally we must answer what it is to, “not be under law.”

The word “under” here, literally means to be placed underneath, under the influence or control of. In a sense, the law was a burden on the shoulders of mankind which Jesus came to free us from – to take us out from underneath its weight. We have a helpful account in the book of Acts, where some believers wanted the Gentiles to be placed under the yoke (or burden), of the law. Look at what Peter says in reply:

“But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary... to command them to keep the law of Moses’... [but] Peter rose up and said to them:... ‘why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?’ ” – Acts 15:5,10

Christ came to purchase our freedom from that heavy yoke.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” – Galatians 5:1

So in Christ, we have been set free from both the burden of the law and the power of sin. For even though the law is holy, as we have shown, the law ended up producing sin instead of righteousness.

“But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.” – Romans 7:8

“The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” – 1 Corinthians 15:56-57

Are we under the law of the 10 Commandments anymore? The simple answer is – no. The 10 Commandments is the foundational law of a covenant we have no part in. Christ bore the burden of that covenant, and the burden of our sins, so that He could offer us a lighter yoke and a better covenant.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” – Matthew 11:28-30

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” – Romans 8:2

And the scriptures repeatedly confirm that we have been released from the old law.

“you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ.” – Romans 7:4a

“And if you are led of the Spirit, you are not under the law.” – Galatians 5:18

“we have been delivered from the law” – Romans 7:6a

The Law is for sinners

Let’s look at this issue from one more angle. You will recall our earlier analogy of the country with a law against fornication. We pointed out that the unrighteous man will still desire to do evil, even when a law is put in place. This is because he does not personally agree with the law in his heart, so he will go right up to the line and do absolutely as much as the law will allow him to get away with.

Now a righteous man will act very differently. Because he judges fornication to be deadly to the purity of his soul, he will put as much distance between himself and any temptation as possible. He will flee any situation which even hints in that direction. He will not go to places or look at things which may be dangerous to him. He wants to do good and

he knows he is vulnerable to evil, so he flees from it.

This is why Pauls says, *“flee sexual immorality”* (1 Corinthians 6:18), *“flee from idolatry”* (1 Corinthians 10:18), *“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.”* (1 Timothy 6:11).

A righteous person does not need a law to hold him back. It is the unrighteous one who must be told **exactly where the line is drawn**, because he constantly wants to cross the line. This is why the Bible says that the law is not for the righteous but for the unrighteous.

“the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane” – 1 Timothy 1:9a

In the Old Testament God’s people had an unrighteous nature and so they needed a law. In the New Testament we are made righteous, therefore the law serves no more purpose. Notice how interesting Christ’s commands are:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment... You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart... You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” – Matthew 5:21-22a, 27-28, 38-39

Even though He is changing God’s commands, He is not bringing in a different moral code. Murder is evil in both the old and the new commands, but the new one takes purity to an even higher level. Now think back on how the righteous man (in our analogy), stays very far away from evil, putting as much distance between himself and evil as he can. This is exactly what Jesus is teaching here. “You heard the 10 Commandments tell you not to murder”, He says, “but I tell you not even to let anger find a place in your heart.” Again, “You heard the 10 Commandments tell you not to commit adultery, but I say don’t even allow lust a tiny foothold.” He is teaching us to stay so far away from evil that it will not find any place in us. He made us righteous – now we must preserve that righteousness at all cost.

The Consequences of Sin

Another reason we can say that we are not under law but grace is because of how our sins are dealt with in the New Covenant. You see, because we did not establish this covenant by our good deeds, our failures do not break the covenant either. Jesus, in His finished work on the cross, paid for all our sins (past, present and future). So the problem of sin has already been dealt with. That means that our sin becomes a relationship issue, not a legal issue (and the law is a legal structure).

This is why the New Testament usually talks about God’s *“commands”* and the Old Testament talks about God’s *“law”*. The commands are still required behaviour (they are not simply suggestions), but they preserve a relationship not a legal contract. Where the laws are required behaviour to preserve the structure of the contract (or Old Covenant).

So when we sin in the Old Testament, we have broken the covenant. When we sin in the New Testament, we have disappointed God, we have failed Him, or as the Bible puts it, we have grieved Him.

“do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,” – Ephesians 4:30

This is why the Lord says that if we keep His commandments, we will remain in His love. In other words we will feel the sense of His nearness. God does not abandon or leave us (because the structure of the bond is still in place), but He removes the sense of intimacy we have with Him.

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” – John 15:10

But if we fail to keep His commands then we lose that sense of God’s nearness. That loss is so painful that it drives us to our knees, to ask His forgiveness, and to beg Him to return that precious presence we have lost. God is still there, but

the awareness of His presence is less.

So it is God's love which draws us back to obedience. We do not want to sin anymore. This is why Jesus says:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” – Matthew 7:21

Those who truly love God will end up hating sin. God will represent all that they love and cherish and sin will be the enemy. Therefore obedience is the mark of those who belong to Him. The lawless are not His, even if they call on the name of the Lord, they have not let Him write His laws on their hearts. You will know them by their fruit – their hearts will tell you which kingdom they belong to – either light or darkness.

Section Six:

WHAT ABOUT THE SABBATH?

So that brings us to one final question. Where does the Sabbath fit in to the New Testament?

This is an interesting question, because the one command which Jesus was repeatedly accused of breaking was the Sabbath day. Yet we know that Jesus Christ was, *“a lamb without blemish and without spot.”* (1 Peter 1:19b), and He was completely *“without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15). But the Pharisees (who knew the law), judged Him to have repeatedly broken the Sabbath law.

“some of the Pharisees said, ‘This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.’” – John 9:16a

Every time Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath (with one exception), it was because He had healed someone. And more than once His reply was, *“it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath”* (Matthew 12:12). Jesus was healing people out of His love and compassion for them. He was acting out the moral heart of the law, even though He was technically breaking the letter of the law. He was performing God's will, since He said:

“The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.” – John 5:19

So Jesus's actions were acceptable to God and therefore righteous. Think about that for a moment. Could Jesus have said the same if *“do not murder”* was the law He had broken? Could that be called an act of love? Of course not. There would be no moral defence for breaking any other commandment – except for the Sabbath. That is because the Sabbath is different to the other laws – it is not a moral law.

Originally, the Sabbath served as a sign of Israel's bond with God:

“Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.” – Ezekiel 20:12

It served as a symbol of the Old Covenant.

“Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.” – Exodus 31:16

It also served as a reminder to Israel that they were the chosen ones of the mighty God who had saved them.

“And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” – Deuteronomy 5:15

So it served a very particular purpose in Israel's covenant relationship with God.

But then we get to the New Testament, where Jesus's disciples were caught plucking grain from the land on the Sabbath

(because they were hungry), which it was not lawful to do. Jesus defended them by pointing out that David and his men had also once broken the Sabbath (when they were hungry), and yet been blameless because:

“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” – Mark 2:27

So the Sabbath is for the benefit of man. What does this mean? Well, clearly the Sabbath offered the Israelites a time to place their focus on God and to rest, but in the New Testament that rest takes on an even deeper meaning.

If you have read our piece on the Covenants you will already know that everything physical in the Old Covenant, has a higher, spiritual mirror in the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was the physical symbol, the New Covenant is the heavenly reality. For example Israel offered a lamb at the Passover, but that was just a symbol for Christ in the New Testament.

And when we talk about the Sabbath, the New Testament reality relates back to us being “in Christ”. You see, Christ not only secured our relationship with God (as we have already discussed), but He also sustains that relationship. This means that the entire Christian walk is acted out by His power living out through us.

“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” – 1 John 4:9

“in Him we live and move and have our being,” – Act 17:28a

The result of being “in Christ” then, is that we come to rest – we cease from our own works and allow Christ to work His power out through us. And this is what is meant by the next verse from Hebrews, which is explaining the New Covenant meaning of the Sabbath rest:

“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.” – Hebrews 4:9-10

This is why Jesus says, “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:28) because the Sabbath finds its true fulfilment in Him. Paul also says that “the substance” (or true spiritual meaning) of the Sabbath is found in Christ. Therefore do not let anyone judge you if you do not consider the seventh day to be special – because it’s true meaning is to point us to Christ.

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” – Colossians 2:16-17

So the New Testament allows us to either observe a high day or not. Those who are convinced that all days are alike because the true substance is in Christ, they may live out their conviction. And to those who still believe that one day is higher than another, let him do so with full devotion to the Lord.

“One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.” – Romans 14:5-6

Obedying the Sabbath is therefore **not a sign of our righteousness**. It is not a New Testament command, nor is it a moral law. And it certainly should not be a cause for division amongst God’s people. We must live our lives in complete devotion to God – with or without our high days – so long as the heart and substance of our walk is Christ.

CONCLUSION

We conclude then that the law of the Old Covenant was fulfilled in Christ, and is therefore considered fulfilled in all those who are “in Christ”. In doing so, God has taken it out of the way, so that we are no longer under the law. We have instead become part of a new and better covenant, where love is the command we live by. God has purchased our righteousness, redeemed us from our sins and drawn us close to His heart. He now expects us to live in His love, and to live out His love to others – this is the whole of our New Testament “law”.