

## THE LAW AND CHRISTIANS

- A. Introduction: Several days before Jesus was crucified He warned His apostles that, just prior to His second coming, religious deception will abound. Jesus exhorted His followers to be on guard so that they won't be deceived by false christs and false prophets. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24
1. We're taking time to look at what the Bible shows and tells us about Jesus so that we become familiar with the genuine Christ and can easily recognize counterfeits. John 5:39
    - a. For the past several weeks we've been discussing the fact that teaching on grace has become very popular in many Christians circles. And, while some of it is good, much of it is inaccurate and has led to wrong conclusions being drawn by those unfamiliar with sound Bible doctrine.
      1. Grace has become an excuse for lax and even sinful living among people who profess to be Christians.
      2. Some say that if you tell a Christian that they must do certain things (such as live according to a standard), you're into works, and that's wrong because we are now under grace.
    - b. We pointed out in previous lessons that the word works refers to deeds or actions. Works is used in two ways in the Bible in connection with our behavior before God—as actions that earn or merit something from God and as actions that express what God has done for us.
      1. All human beings are guilty of sin before a holy God. There are no works we can do (no actions we can take), that will earn or merit release from this condition. We're saved from sin by God's grace and not by our works or efforts. Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; II Tim 1:9
      2. However, once we are saved from sin, our works (actions) are a very important part of Christian life—not as a means of earning and deserving God's help and blessing—but, among other things, as expressions of our commitment to Christ. Titus 2:14; Eph 2:10
    - c. Those who have misunderstood grace and works also mistakenly say that if anyone tells a Christian that there are things we must do, not only are they into works, they're trying to put us under law. In this lesson we're going to revisit and then add to some things we've already said about God's law.
  2. Matt 24:12—Note that in the same place where Jesus warned His followers about religious deception, He also said that iniquity or lawlessness (in the original Greek) will abound just before He returns.
    - a. Clearly, lawlessness (lack of respect for authority) is increasing in society. But lawlessness has also infiltrated the Church. The term law has become a bad word in certain Christian circles.
      1. The word law means a rule of conduct or action laid down and enforced by the supreme governing authority (*Webster's Dictionary*). God is the supreme governing authority in the universe. Therefore, lawlessness is actually a rejection of Him. He is the ultimate Law Giver and He works according to law.
      2. As our Creator, He has the right to set the standards for the creatures He created. As our Savior and Lord, He has the right to set the standard for our behavior.
      3. Almighty God has the right to set the standard because, as perfect Righteousness and Justice, He is the standard. He is and always does what is right and just. Eccl 12:13
    - b. In some Christian circles, law has become synonymous with the rules and (they say) Christianity isn't about rules—it's about relationship. This statement has become a meaningless cliché.
      1. While it is certainly true that Christianity is about relationship with God through Jesus Christ, "rules" or standards of conduct are part of relationship. There are standards of conduct we follow and expect in our relationships with each other—respect, courtesy, kindness, etc.
      2. I John 2:6—Here is the test by which we can make sure that we are in him; whoever claims to be dwelling in him binds himself to live as Christ lived (NEB). That's a standard of conduct.
- B. When the term law is mentioned, the Law of Moses is usually what first comes to mind for many. The Law

of Moses (which includes the Ten Commandments) was given at a specific time in the history of man to a specific group of people for specific purposes. We'll get to the Law of Moses in a moment.

1. The word law is actually used a number of ways in the Bible. But, in general, law means the revealed will of God in regard to human conduct. God's law is expressed through His Word. Therefore, law, in its broadest sense, means the Scriptures or the written record of God.
  - a. Although God's law or will has been expressed in various ways at different times throughout man's history on earth, all the various expressions call men to love God and love their fellow man.
    1. Matt 22:37-40—Jesus said that God's law can be summarized in two statements. Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself.
    2. I John 3:11-12—Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were under the law of love. They were supposed to put God's will above their own and treat each other as they wanted to be treated.
  - b. I John 3:4—Sin is transgression of God's Law (the law of love). Transgression means illegality or violation of the law. It comes from a word that means lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness (ASV). Sin is an offense against God. (An offense is an infraction of the law.)
2. We must understand the law in terms of the big picture or overall plan of God. God created human beings to become His holy, righteous sons and daughters through faith in Christ. Eph 1:4-5
  - a. Sin seemed to thwart God's plan. When the first man (Adam) disobeyed God, he took the entire race resident in him into the pigpen of sin, corruption, and death. Human nature was altered and men and women became sinners by nature. We act out of that nature and become guilty of our own sin before God. Gen 2:17; 3:17-19; Rom 5:19; Eph 1:1-3; etc.
  - b. Salvation is about restoring men and women to their created purpose. Jesus paid for sin at the Cross so that we could be justified. When we believe on Jesus, we are justified (declared righteous, acquitted). Rom 3:24; Rom 4:25; Rom 5:1; etc.
    1. God can then indwell us by His Spirit in what the Bible calls a new birth. We are born of God and become sons and daughters by nature. John 3:3-5; I John 5:1; John 1:12-13; Titus 3:5; etc.
    2. The new birth takes place in our innermost being (our spirit). It is the beginning of a process of transformation that will ultimately restore every part of our being (mind, emotions, and body) to God's original purpose for us—conformity to the image of Christ. Jesus is the pattern for God's family. Rom 8:29-30
      - A. Long before Jesus died for sin, God foretold of a time when He would put His law into the inward parts of His people (Jer 31:33). The writer of Hebrews stated it this way: I will imprint My laws upon their minds, even upon their innermost thoughts and understanding (Heb 8:10, Amp).
      - B. Urging Christians to live as God desires, Paul wrote: For it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you—energizing and creating in you the power and desire—both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight (Phil 2:13, Amp).
  - c. Through the new birth and the change in our nature, God's law has been written in our hearts. But God's law has not yet been written in our minds. Our minds are not yet fully Christlike.
    1. Sons of God still need an outward law. We need to be told what to do and how to act because our minds were darkened as a result of being cut off from the life in God (Eph 4:18). We don't yet think right. There's a way that seems right to a man, but it ends in death (Prov 14:12).
    2. Our minds must be renewed (Rom 12:2). We must learn to see things as they really are, according to God. To do this we need an objective standard, God's law or rule of conduct.
  - d. The law of the Lord (as it is expressed in His Word) is part of the cleansing and transforming process we undergo as we grow in Christlikeness (or conformity to the image of Christ).
    1. Eph 5:26—(Jesus) gave Himself up for (the church) so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word (Amp).

2. Heb 4:12—The Word of God exposes the darkness in our minds because it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents (motives) of our heart.
  3. II Cor 3:18—And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit. (Amp)
- C. Not only must we understand law in terms of the big picture, it is helpful if we understand it in the historical context of the Bible. The Bible is a timeless book in that it is the Word of God and it speaks to all people everywhere in every generation. But, there's more to it.
1. God's Word is communicated to us through the 66 writings (books and epistles) that make up the Bible. All were written by real people to other real people for specific purposes. Those parameters set a context that helps us understand and discern the meaning of specific passages.
    - a. When the term law is mentioned, for most of us, the Law of Moses is usually what first comes to mind. The Law of Moses (which includes the Ten Commandments) was given at a specific time in the history of man to a specific group of people for specific purposes
    - b. God gave this Law to Moses at Mount Sinai shortly after Israel was delivered from slavery in Egypt. It is the most detailed description of law given in the Bible. It includes civil and criminal laws, dietary laws, ceremonial and sacrificial laws.
    - c. The Israelites had lived as slaves in a foreign land for 400 years and the Law was designed to help them set up a functioning society and live in relationship with the Lord once they settled Canaan.
      1. Much of the Law was given to expose and remove the practices associated with idol worship that Israel picked up while living in Egypt. Ex 23:19; Lev 17:7; Lev 18:23; Lev 19:19; etc.
      2. The Law was given to expose sin, and then through the penalties proscribed by the Law, show them that sin brings destruction and death and obedience brings life. Rom 3:19-20; Deut 30:19
        - A. The Law wasn't given to make men right with God. It was intended to reveal man's inability to live above sin without the transforming power of God. Rom 3:21
        - B. It was meant to show men their need for a Savior, and make it clear that deliverance from sin comes only through blood sacrifice offered by a priest or a mediator (foreshadowing Jesus and His sacrifice at the Cross). Gal 3:24
  2. Jesus grew up in a culture that was dominated by the Law of Moses. When Jesus began His public ministry, He knew that the Pharisees (the religious leaders of His day) would eventually accuse Him of violating the Law of Moses because, among other things, He healed on the Sabbath.
    - a. Therefore Jesus made it clear at the outset that He'd come to fulfill the Law. Matt 5:17—Do not for a moment suppose (Weymouth) that I came to do away with the Law or the Prophets (20<sup>th</sup> Cent), but to enforce them (Goodspeed), to bring them to perfection (Knox).
    - b. In His humanity, Jesus was born a Jew, and, as such He would have been under the Law of Moses.
      1. He was circumcised and presented at the Temple as the Law proscribed (Luke 2:21-24; Lev 12:2-6), and He kept the various feasts established by the Law (Luke 22:8; John 7:2; etc.).
      2. Jesus also lived righteously, according to the precepts of the Law. Matt 3:15—It is right for us to meet all the Law's demand (Phillips). Under the Law the High Priest was initiated into his office by washing and anointing before he offered any sacrifices (Lev 8). At His baptism, Jesus fulfilled these requirements, preparing Him to offer atonement for the sins of the world.
      3. The Law of Moses says the soul that sins must die (Ezek 18:4; 20). Fulfilling the Law meant that Jesus bore the righteous penalty of the Law for our sin so we could be saved from sin.
  3. The place of the Law of Moses in the life of Christians was an issue in the early church since many of the first converts were Jews who had lived under that Law their entire lives. Consequently, we see the Law

of Moses mentioned in many of the epistles (letters written to Christians about what we believe and how we are act).

- a. The first doctrinal controversy in the early church had to do with whether or not it was necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised in order to be saved. A council was convened in Jerusalem and Peter, Paul, James, and Barnabas delivered major addresses. They decided that circumcision was unnecessary. Acts 15:1-35
- b. Jesus' apostles understood that although the spirit of the Law of Moses (love God and love your neighbor) is for Christians, the specifics (regulations, ceremonies, sacrifices) came to an end in Christ. They all pointed to Christ, the fulfillment, and were no longer necessary.
  1. Col 2:16-17—So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new-moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules were only shadows of the real thing, Christ himself. (NLT)
  2. Heb 10:1—The old system in the law of Moses was only a shadow of the things to come, not the reality of the good things Christ has done for us. (NLT)
- c. The Law of Moses was a schoolmaster to guide men to Christ (Gal 3:24) so they could receive what they could not obtain on their own, righteousness—rightness with God and rightness in themselves.
  1. Christ is the end (completion) of the Law. Rom 10:4—For Christ has put an end to law as a way to right standing for everyone who puts his trust in Him (Williams).
  2. Righteousness comes by God's grace through faith in Christ, not through observing precepts of the Law. Gal 2:16; Gal 3:11
- d. Ex 20:1-17—What about the Ten Commandments? Do they apply to Christians? While not specifically addressed in the New Testament, the spirit behind them is found throughout—love God (1-4) and love your fellow man (6-10).

D. Conclusion: The Law of God shows us the character and will of God. It enlightens our minds to the way things really are. It works in us, cleansing and transforming us, helping us to become more Christlike. Ps 19:7—The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the [whole] person; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple (Amp).

1. Part of the problem in the church today regarding the law comes from Christians misusing terms they don't really understand. When told they must do something or follow a standard, Christians throw around terms such as: That's Law! That's legalism!
  - a. Under the Law of Moses, fear of penalty was the main motivator to holiness and right living. Legalism is not being told you need to read your Bible, pray, and live right. Legalism is obeying God out of fear of penalty.
  - b. When your motive for being good is to get an answer to prayer, that's Law! When you're sure that God won't help you because you're not good enough, that's Law! You're trying to earn God's help and blessing. You cannot earn what comes to us by grace.
2. John 14:15—Under the New Covenant, love is supposed to be the motivation behind our works. We do what we do because we love God and we love people.
  - a. You do what God says to do in His Word (in His law), not to earn or deserve blessing and not to ward off cursing, but because you trust Him and love Him. That's the obedience of faith.
  - b. Too many sincere Christians live out of guilt and fear, trying to earn God's favor, rather than living out of a heart full of love for God because of what He has done for us through salvation.
3. God has provided us with His Law written in our hearts so we can perfectly fulfill His Law of love, not to earn salvation, but as an expression of our salvation—as a demonstration of the power and love of God to the world around us. His Law is good.