

THE BELIEVER AND THE MOSAIC LAW:

How Do They Relate? (Pt. 1)

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Believers who actively witness, read widely, and aggressively communicate Biblical truths have no doubt been confronted with conflicting views on the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic Law. Those who saddle believers with the Law, mostly Reformed/Covenant theologians, label their antagonists "*antinomian*." Those who advocate freedom from the Law, mostly evangelicals, dispensationalists, and some Pentecostals, label Reformed brethren "*legalists*."

To add fuel to this fire, the decline of Christian values in Western civilization during the past fifty years has stimulated a reactionary and contrasting rise in what I choose to call a *rigid Christianity*. It is rigid in the sense that those involved seek to impose God's mediatorial Kingdom laws upon nation states. I am referring, of course, to the Christian Reconstruction movement with its emphasis on theonomy ("*the rule of God*") and Dominion theology.

Reformed/Calvinist theologians of the past are notorious for carrying the Law (of Moses) right past the Cross and laying it on the backs of believers. But now a few, having adopted the Dominionist persuasion, are taking it a step further and laying it upon *all* humankind. Their ultimate goal is the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Having successfully brought the kingdoms of this world under God's law-rule, the "*Church*" can turn it over to Jesus Christ at His second advent.¹ The Church will be victorious, the Kingdom will be established now, and the Law of God will be supreme everywhere and over all,

including unbelievers! Dominion theology is a rebirth of the postmillennialism of the nineteenth century. However, during the nineteenth century, postmillennialists optimistically and naively expected to convert the entire world to and through the Gospel with no thought of imposing Mosaic Law on nation states.

Though confined to a small number of Presbyterian and Reformed leaders, the movement has enjoyed more recent success among the Pentecostals.² Reconstruction ideas also are manifest in some religious/political postures of pastors and leaders of the religious right who are not necessarily involved in the movement.

But the purpose of this paper is to focus on New Testament passages that deal with the believer's relationship to the Mosaic Law. Do the Dominionists really have a sound exegetical basis upon which their promotion of the Law is based? Are Christians under the Law? If so, in what sense are they under it? What place has Mosaic Law in the sanctifying process of a true believer, if any? Or, stated another way, do you as a believer grow by seeking to obey the Mosaic Law (the Ten Commandments in particular)? Moreover: are we as believers to establish theocratic states that seek to function under Mosaic Law? Sound doctrine is the result of solid exegesis, not religious or philosophical speculation. Let's look at the New Testament teachings.

Five Purposes of the Mosaic Law Stated in the New Testament

As background, it is important that we examine God's purposes in the Mosaic Law³ as clearly stated in the New Testament. I list five purposes below. These are not speculative; they constitute the Holy Spirit's viewpoint of the true intent of the Law.

1. **First, the Law was given "to stop every mouth"– that is, to muzzle every voice that would flaunt self-righteousness before God.**

*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...***⁴ (Rom. 3:19)

Paul definitely has the Old Testament Law in mind because he uses the Greek definite article with the word *law* in both places in this verse. He is not talking about any law per se, but specifically the Old Testament Mosaic Law to which he referred in Romans 2:11-29.

Saith to them who are under the Law... primarily refers to Jewish people, those to whom the Law Covenant was given in Exodus 19-30.

That every mouth may be stopped... refers to Jews and Gentiles alike, with special emphasis on the Jew who self-righteously regarded Gentiles as reprobate sinners. The Law was given, says the Holy Spirit, that *every* mouth, religious and non-religious, might be muzzled, shut-up, and quieted when confronted with the holiness that God's righteous Law demands. When individuals rightly perceive the righteousness that the Law requires, they are left hopelessly speechless.

This is a clear statement of one of God's major purposes in giving His holy Law. It was designed to create a sense of personal embarrassment to members of the human race regarding their unrighteousness, an embarrassment that would cause them to muzzle themselves before the holy, righteous, almighty God. His purpose in giving the Law was not to produce righteousness, but speechless GUILT!

2. God's second purpose of the Law is to produce in every human being a sense of personal guilt, accountability, and hence a need for God's forgiveness.

*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.*** (Rom. 3:19)

The New American Standard Version (hereafter, NASV) translates *guilty*⁵ as "accountable"— i.e., "*that the entire world might become accountable to God.*" The word means *subject to judgment* or *liable to punishment*, in this case, by God.

God's holy Law not only muzzles human self-righteous boasts, it stimulates a sense of personal guilt and accountability to Him with an accompanying expectation of judgment or punishment. The Law of God reveals sins and shortcomings, but it does not and cannot correct them. It simply leaves those who really hear the Law with a sense of guilt and liability before the righteous, personal God of the universe.

3. The third purpose of the Law as stated in the Scriptures is to provide an objective knowledge of sin for the human race.

*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 knowledge⁶ of sin.*** (Romans 3:19,20)

We are not left to our own machinations on the issue of sin. It is not a matter of subjective speculation or comparative human values from God's point of view. God Himself in the Moral Law (the Ten Commandments) has given an incisive and objective revelation of sin, a moral code against which all members of the human race can measure themselves.

By the Law is the knowledge of sin... God's Law objectively defines sin for the human race. This is precisely what Paul means in Rom. 7:7 when he states "... *I had not known sin, but by the Law: for I had not known lust, except the Law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet.'* "

Romans 5:20 intensifies this purpose: "*Moreover, the Law entered, that the offence might abound...*" The NASV translates, "*And the Law came in that the transgression might increase...*" The point is this: God introduced His holy Law in the course of human history to make apparent the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The offence is more reprehensible when one realizes that sin directs itself not just against mankind, but against the personal, almighty God, our Creator-Sustainer, and, above all, our Redeemer.

BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN, BUT NOT ITS CORRECTION! The Law is like a plumb bob: it shows clearly how far out of line we are, how untrue, but in no way can it correct our crooked posture. It is like a mirror reflecting our flaws, blemishes, and defects with absolutely no power to correct any of them. The Law tells us how wrong we are, but it cannot "*right*" us!

Someone aptly stated this dilemma as follows:

This do and live, the Law commands, but neither gives me feet nor hands: A better word the Gospel brings, it bids me fly and gives me wings! –Author Unknown

This brings us to God's next stated purpose of the law.

4. The fourth purpose of God's Law is that it serves as a stern child disciplinarian to bring its hearers to Christ, that they might be declared righteous by God through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross.

Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster⁸ to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.
(Galatians 3:24)

My expanded translation of v. 23 demonstrates the significance of this verse in its context: "*But before the faith came of which I have been speaking, i.e., the faith in Christ Jesus that justifies, we, the hearers of the Law, were constantly guarded, kept in ward⁹ under the Law (where there was no room for subjectivity or compromise relative to sin), shut up¹⁰ or locked in unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*" To genuine hearers of the Law in any age, the Law serves as a stern, authoritarian guardian that, like a guided missile, leads directly to faith in Christ! The Law cannot justify. However, it did and does make one conscious of the need to be right before God.

The glorious and directive purpose of the Law: to lead to Christ any and all who hear its condemnatory message and by faith in Him find not only forgiveness, but also absolute righteousness before God! In this way "*Christ is the end¹¹ of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believeth*" (Rom. 10:4). The NASV translation is even more clear: "*Christ is the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*" The meaning and contextual connection is "*Because the Jews seek justification by the Law (good works), they miss God's true method to be just or righteous, that is, by*

simple faith in Christ's redeeming work. Christ has abolished the Law in order that all who believe may be justified." Christ has abolished the Law, not by destroying it, but by fulfilling it. Because He fulfilled it, He is the end of it. ONE COULD WELL SAY THAT CHRIST IS NOT ONLY THE TERMINATION OR END OF THE LAW, HE IS ITS TERMINATOR.

The Scriptures clearly teach that for believers, the Law of Moses IN ALL OF ITS ASPECTS has been abrogated or abolished by Christ in His cross.¹² Have the Dominionists, Reformed theologians, or any of the Law-pushers given serious consideration to Paul's teaching in this regard? Would they—could they – even consider Paul an "*antinomian*?" I will address this later. For now, let's examine God's last stated purpose of the Old Testament Law.

5. The fifth purpose of God's Law according to the Scriptures is to serve as a restrainer of evil and a perpetual reminder to unbelievers of their moral responsibility to God. The Law is categorically not made for the believer.

But we know the Law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this, that the Law is not made for a righteous¹³ 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.¹⁴ (1 Timothy 1: 8-10)

Could anything be clearer? The Law of God is not laid

down for a justified person. Is this consistent with the rest of Scripture? Without a doubt it is, for *justified* in the New Testament is never used in a comparative sense: one is not a little bit justified nor justified by degrees.

Justification is absolute. God sees the believer clothed in the absolute righteousness of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states it this way:

For He (God) hath made Him (Christ) to be sin for us (believers), that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Justification is unchangeable righteousness! Therefore Paul says, *Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth* (Rom. 8:33). Justified individuals are secure in the righteousness that God imputes unto them in Christ. **Who** can bring law charges against them? The Law is not appointed for believers in Christ.

But it is made for the unbeliever as this verse clearly states.

Summary Thus Far

So far, we have looked at five clear statements in the New Testament that delineate God's stated purposes in His giving of the Law. These constitute the Holy Spirit's viewpoint of the true intent of the Law. As we have seen, the Law condemns; it highlights one's sins, but does not help one overcome sin. The Law creates a sense of both moral responsibility and inescapable moral failure before God. Additionally, the Law muzzles any sense of self-righteousness and leaves one speechlessly guilty before God. But finally, the Law becomes an authoritarian guide that leads to faith in Christ where one is justified, forgiven, and accepted by the Father. Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness/justification.

Be assured that once in Christ, the Law for the believer is abrogated, for as Paul clearly states, *The Law is not made or enacted for the justified man*. Theonomists, Dominionists, and law-oriented believers need to seriously study these clearly stated purposes of God in the giving of His Law. Only by properly orienting to God's purposes for the Law can the believer properly make application of the Law.

Footnotes:

¹ Leading spokesmen and prolific writers for the Christian Reconstruction movement are its founder, Rousas J. Rushdoony, and his son-in-law, Gary North. Others include Greg Bahnsen, who coined the term "theonomy," David Chilton, James Jordan, and Ray Sutton. Rushdooney's voluminous publications emanate from the Chalcedon Foundation in Vallecito, California: they are philosophical and theological in nature with a noticeable lack of Bible exegesis. Gary North established the Institute for Christian Economics in Tyler, Texas, in the early 1980's after a falling out with Rushdoony. He holds a Ph.D. in economics and promotes reconstruction doctrine through his publishing companies in Ft. Worth (Dominion Press) and Tyler (Reconstruction Press). North's writings are flamboyant, hyperbolic, and philosophical: like those of his father-in-law, they evidence a great deficiency of good, Bible exegesis.

² Some Pentecostal leaders have warmed up to the Dominion concept of "*the Kingdom Now*." Marylyn Hickey, Bob Mumford, Robert Tilton, Earl Paulk, Don Paulk, John Mears, and James Roberson are reported to be promoting these errors (among others). God's Law (theonomy) is to reign and Christians are to see to it that it does! The prophecies in both the Old Testament and the New Testament regarding Israel are misapplied to the Church. As a result, the Church is seen as world dominant, the source of all social, economic, political, and spiritual blessing! Shades of medieval Europe under the Popes!

³ The Mosaic Law is commonly divided into three areas: 1) the Ceremonial Law, which delineates the priesthood and sacrifices of the Old Testament; 2) the Civil Law, which covers civil relationships within the Israelite nation; and 3) the Moral Law, which is universally known as the Ten Commandments.

⁴ All Scripture quotes in this paper are from the King James

Version (unless otherwise noted).

⁵ *guilty* = υποδικο V ; used only in this passage in the New Testament.

⁶ *knowledge* = επιγνωσι V (epignosis), a favorite word of Paul. He used it 15 times in the noun form in his epistles and 13 times in the verbal form. Peter used it 4 times in his second letter. Thayer (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*) defines it inadequately as "*precise and correct knowledge*;" Arndt-Gingrich's (*A Greek English Lexicon, etc.*) definition, "*knowledge*," "*recognition*," is even less adequate. Vine (*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*) is much better (since επιγνωσι V must mean more than γνωσι V). Vine aptly states that this word denotes "*to observe, fully perceive, notice attentively*," and "*a knowledge which perfectly unites the subject with the object*." Whereas γνωσι V can mean knowledge in the abstract, επιγνωσι V always discerns, perceives, comprehends. Επιγνωσι V , as used by Paul and Peter in the New Testament, is γνωσι V (Bible doctrine) that has found its mark! By the Law is perceptive, discerning knowledge of sin! It is objective fact fully perceived; it is not abstract or subjective.

⁷ Note Paul's play on words: in Rom. 5:12 "...by one man sin entered (εισηλθεν) into the world" and 5:20 "*moreover the Law entered (παραισηλθεν) that the offence might abound*." Sin, disobedience to God's express will, entered human history by one man, Adam. However, the Law direct from the hand of God also entered "*that the offence might abound*"-- that is, that the offensiveness of sin from God's point of view might be clearly demonstrated to the human race.

⁸ *schoolmaster* = παιδαγωγο V , from which the English word *pedagogue* derives. It is better translated as an "*authoritarian guardian*" or a "*discipline enforcer*." In Paul's day, the schoolmaster usually was a slave assigned to monitor and guard the behavior of a child. This guardian was NOT A TEACHER. Instead, the role functioned as more of a guardian-overseer to keep a child in check.

⁹ *kept* = θρουρευω in the present, passive, indicative.

¹⁰ *shut up* = συγκλειω in present, passive, participial form. This same verb is used in Gal. 3:22 where it is translated "hath concluded": "*the scripture hath concluded, shut up all under sin, that the promise by faith of Christ Jesus might be given to them that believe*."

11 *end* = τέλοϛ , *end* in the sense of *termination* , the ordinary use of τέλοϛ in the New Testament.

12 Supporting passages include Col.2:14, "*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us which was contrary to us...*"; Gal.3:13, "*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law...*"; Eph.2:15, "*Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of the commandments...* "; Rom.7:6, "*But now we are delivered from the Law, that being dead wherein we were held...* "; Rom. 6:14, "*Ye are not under the Law, but under grace;*" Gal. 3:25, "*...after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.*" The comments of Charles Hodge, who (though deceased) remains one of the most able of Reformed expositors, are interesting. In his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1955, p.336, he appears to agree totally with what I am stating, but later follows the standard Reformed logic (sic) when he states, "*The Law is abolished by Christ, not as a rule of life, but as a covenant prescribing the condition of life,*" p. 336. In other words, the Law is still the rule of life for a believer: Hodge puts the believer under the Law for sanctification, but not for justification. This is typical of Reformed theology.

13 *righteous* = δικαιοϛ , righteous, justified, in the theological sense.

14 *Law* in 1 Timothy 1: 8 has the definite article: without question, Paul has in view the Mosaic Law, for in verse 7 he refers to would-be Law teachers in the Church. Moreover, vs. 9-10 list sins commensurate with the Ten Commandments, sins that are contrary to sound doctrine. He is speaking of *Law* in the theological sense. Though *Law* in verse 9 has no definite article, the context demands that the Mosaic Law is in view. Interestingly, William Hendriksen (Reformed) agrees. See his *New Testament Commentary: I-II Timothy and Titus*, Baker Book House, 1955, p.66. However, he disagrees with the idea that the *righteous* man here is a justified man. Instead, he sees him as a moral person. In his view, the passage means that "*The Law was not made for the moral person.*" This interpretation contradicts God's stated purpose in Rom.3:19, where we are told that the Law was given to stop every mouth, moral and immoral. Either the Apostle Paul or Hendriksen is wrong! ¢

This article will continue in the March/April issue. Ron will cover "*What the Law Could Not Do*" and "*We Are Not UNDER THE LAW, but UNDER GRACE... MEANING—?*"

