NEW FOCUS

Believer's & God's Holy Law

Don Fortner | Added: Feb 18, 2006 | Category: Theology

> Those who tell us that believers are under law as a rule of life have a hard time proving their position from the New Testament. This is because every statement about the believer and the law in the entire New Testament asserts exactly what Paul says in Romans 6:14 — 'ye are not under the law'!

If you are a believer, if you trust Christ, you are not under the law for justification, for sanctification, for holiness or for any other reason. This is the teaching of the New Testament. It is simply wrong for Christian ministers and teachers to bind believers to the law as a rule of life and conduct. Such doctrine might help church leaders control their wayward members in much the same way as a goatherd tries to fence in his goats. However, it is not the liberating message of the gospel and we need to get the law-gospel distinction clear in our minds.

Those who treasure the liberty of grace do not for one moment say that the law of God is evil. The Word of God does not teach that, nor does any child of God believe it (1 Timothy 1:8-9). On the contrary, the law of God is holy, just and good. It would be well if all men lived in conformity to the law's commands, in both outward practice and inward principle. The law was ordained of God and is in some measure used by all civil governments to protect society from those who would otherwise have no respect for the rights, property, and lives of others.

The Word of God does not teach that we are free to break the law. A believer is not free to break the law, nor does he desire to be. God's commandments are not grievous to those who believe (1 John 5:1-3). They are not like a dead weight we drag around or like a piece of elastic we struggle against, always straining to stretch it as far as we can without actually breaking it. In fact, if we could, we would love God with all out hearts. If we could, we would love our neighbour as ourselves. But we do not have the ability to do so.

Christ, the end of the law

The Word of God does, most emphatically, teach that in Christ the believer is entirely free from the law, and for this simple reason 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth' (Romans 10:4). We have been crucified with Christ, we are 'become dead to the law by the body of Christ' (Romans 7:4). Consequently there is no sense whatsoever

in which it may be said that the believer is ‘under the law’ as a rule of life.

The believer’s ‘rule of life’, is not one section of scripture, but the whole revealed will of God in Holy Scripture. Because we are ‘in Christ’ we are a new creation, we are motivated by new principles, predestinated to be conformed to His image. We follow the pattern of Christ’s life. He is our Captain whom we endeavour to emulate, our Example. Therefore, we take the Word of God in its entirety as our only rule of faith and practice. We rejoice in the fact that we are no longer ruled, motivated, or governed by law nor live before God upon legal principles.

This is not to say that we are faultless, sinless and perfect in all our ways. Even as Christians we most certainly sin. Indeed, in many ways we are more acutely aware of our faults and failures than ever we were in our natural state. We may be condemned by the devil, criticised by the world, convicted by our own conscience but we are most certainly free from condemnation by the law.

When the Word of God declares, as it universally does, that all who look to Christ as their Lord, Saviour and King, are totally free from the law, this is what that freedom means:

1. We have no covenant with the law. The law has examined Christ and found Him perfect and holy. It has nothing more to say against Christ and, as we are in Him, no more to say against us. We now live under a covenant of grace.

2. We have no commitment to the law. Our commitment is to Christ, who obeyed the law for us.

3. We do nothing by constraint of the law. ‘The love of Christ constraineth us.’

4. We fear no curse from the law. ‘Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. For it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.’ ‘There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.’

Free from the whole law

Despite the strength of Paul’s arguments—could his language have been more emphatic?—some try to mitigate the force of his teachings by finding different parts to the law, separating them out and applying different criteria to them.

There are certainly different definitions applied to the law in scriptural usage. For example, frequently the word ‘law’ is used in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms, to refer to the whole Word of God, the whole revelation of God and His will in Holy Scripture. Sometimes the

word ‘law’ is used to refer to the ceremonial and dietary law, and sometimes to the civil law given to the nation of Israel. Also, the word ‘law’ is often used to refer specifically to the ten commandments as recorded in Exodus 20. It is this last definition that preachers and theologians usually have in mind when they use the word ‘law’ with reference to the law of God.

In an attempt to distinguish between these three ‘parts’ of the law, the descriptions ‘ceremonial law’, ‘judicial law’ and ‘moral law’ are usually employed. The ten commandments are commonly referred to as ‘the moral law’. However, you will search the Word of God in vain to find a separation between the ten commandments and the ‘other’ laws given by God, in the hand of Moses, to the children of Israel. When the scriptures declare that believers in Christ are free from the law and that Christ is the end of the law, the declaration is that we are free from all the Mosaic law (ceremonial, judicial, civil, dietary, economic, and moral) by which the nation of Israel was governed in the Old Testament.

Those who try to separate the moral law, that is, the ten commandments, from the rest of the law of God given to Israel tell us that the believer is free from the dietary laws, circumcision laws, sacrificial laws, etc., but he is still under the moral law. However, when Paul told the Galatians that such doctrine is no better than witchcraft (Galatians 3:1), and affirmed our total freedom from the law, he quoted a passage from Deuteronomy which specifically refers to the ten commandments (Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:14-26).

The cost of Christian liberty

Those of us who do not regard the ‘law’ as our ‘rule of life’ will likely be charged with all manner of things; much as the Pharisees denounced Christ. Men may accuse us of being antinomians or promoters of licentiousness. They may censor us, and warn others to avoid contact with us, as though our liberty in Christ were some kind of spiritual leprosy. But we are free and we will not again be entangled with the yoke of bondage. We will not attempt to reach the throne of God by climbing Mount Sinai. We will simply trust the grace of God streaming to us from the wounds of our crucified Saviour, finding all our righteousness and all our redemption in that One who died for our sins at Mount Calvary.

As for those who seek God’s favour by their works and obedience to the law, let them be warned—‘Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.’ Show me a man who trusts his own righteousness, obedience, devotion, feelings, or anything else of his own, and I will show you a man to whom the blood and righteousness of Christ is worthless.

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