

The Two Powers: part 1

Peter Ditzel

The two powers I have in mind are at opposite ends of the compass (Psalm 103:12). One is the power of sin and of death and of Satan, and the other the power of God for salvation. These two powers are mutually exclusive, each working against the other. As believers, we have experienced the power of God for salvation, and we remain safe under that power. And yet, Christian teachers abound (some of them even claiming New Covenant Theology) who insist that believers are under both powers and that the power of sin and of death and of Satan is the power we are to use to guide our lives and accomplish our sanctification. I want to show you where the Bible speaks of these powers and how we cannot be under both.

The Power of Sin and of Death and of Satan

The Word of God plainly identifies the power of sin and death in this verse: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56). The law is the power of sin. And sin is the sting of death.

To illustrate this point, let's say that I have a ray gun called sin. The purpose of this gun, naturally, is to kill. But the gun needs a source of power, a sort of battery pack. Without the battery pack, it is completely powerless to kill. What is the battery pack? The battery pack is law. Law powers sin, and sin kills.

It doesn't matter whether the law we use to power sin is the Law of Moses or some other law. In Romans 2:9-16, Paul explains that there is no partiality with God, whether towards Jews under revealed law or non-Jews (whom he calls Greeks) who are without revealed law (verse 12). Even the Gentiles have law, and their consciences tell them whether they are obeying it or not. God will judge them by this. And, since "all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), they will be judged worthy of death: "Because by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. For through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (verse 20); and, "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a).

Those who are trying to use the law for any other purpose than to bring out sin and death are not using it, as Paul says, "lawfully" (1

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Timothy 1:8). This results in them teaching a "different doctrine" and a "different good news" (1 Timothy 1:3; Galatians 1:6-8). Instead of "love, out of a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5), they have "missed the mark, have turned aside to vain talking; desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither what they say, nor about what they strongly affirm" (verses 6-7).

The law is good only when used for its lawful purpose:

...as knowing this, that law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for the sexually immoral, for homosexuals, for slave-traders, for liars, for perjurers, and for any other thing contrary to the sound doctrine; according to the Good News of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

1 Timothy 1:9-11

Why is the law for these people? It is the power that defines their sin and condemns them. But, since Jesus has died for the sins of all who trust in Him and His righteousness is imputed to them, does God see believers as sinners? No. He does not see believers as sinners. He sees them as righteous because of Christ.

As Paul says of himself:

And I thank him who enabled me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he counted me faithful, appointing me to service; although I was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and insolent. However, I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. The grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. The saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

1 Timothy 1:12-15

So, law is the power of sin, and it can only condemn. And yet, many preachers teach law-keeping in their so-called gospel message. Some speak of the law as the means to sanctification. Nowhere does Scripture say that the law is the power of God to salvation.

The Power of God for Salvation

The law is the power of sin leading to death. What is the power of God leading to salvation? It is something utterly opposite to law. It is the Gospel of the free gift of salvation.

In Romans 1:16-17, Paul writes, "For I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes; for the Jew first, and also for the Greek. For in it is revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith. As it is written, 'But the righteous shall live by faith.'"

The exact opposite of attempting to earn salvation by law-keeping is the free gift of grace through Christ. The Gospel, or Good News, of Christ is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. Believing is the same as having faith. So, while the law is the power of sin and death, "the righteous shall live by faith." Trust in the Gospel is the power of life and salvation. Jesus paid for the believer's sins. Jesus' righteousness is freely given to whoever trusts in Him. That's all there is to it.

Paul explained, "For Christ is an end of law for righteousness to every one who is believing" (Romans 10:4, *Young's Literal Translation*). I've used a literal translation to make clear the fact that, in the original Greek, there is no definite article—that is, no "the"—before the word "law." What Paul is speaking of here, just as he and his fellow New Testament writers do in many other passages, is law in general. He is not identifying a particular law, such as the Law of Moses, but the concept that embodies all laws. Christ is the end of law for righteousness.

In Galatians 3:10-11, Paul uses a quote from the Law of Moses to illustrate a principle of law: "For as many as are of works of law are under a curse, for it hath been written, 'Cursed is every one who is not remaining in all things that have been written in the Book of the Law—to do them,' and that in law no one is declared righteous with God, is evident, because 'The righteous by faith shall live'" (*Young's Literal Translation*). Again, the righteous live by faith. No one is declared righteous by trying to live by law. Law curses anyone trying to live by law. The only way any of us are going to live is by grace through faith.

Let's read Romans 6:14-18:

For sin will not have dominion over you. For you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? May it never be! Don't you know that to whom you present yourselves as servants to obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas you were bondservants of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered. Being made free from sin, you became bondservants of righteousness.

Paul makes his argument: Sin will not dominate us because we are not under law but under grace. He then answers the obvious objection: If we are not under law, won't we then sin? He answers, no! Why? Because we are servants to whatever we put ourselves under obedience to. We can put ourselves under law so that we will obey sin, which leads to death; or we can be under grace and obey righteousness.

It is at this point that so many people misunderstand. They see "obey righteousness," and they conceive of this as meaning obeying laws, commands, or precepts. This is why some teach that the so-called "moral" laws of the Old Covenant are still binding for Christians. And it is also why others, often New Covenant theologians, merely shift believers from being under the Law of Moses to being under the law of Christ. But this thinking is precisely the opposite of what Paul is teaching.

I have explained in this article that we are *not under* the law of Christ: "Are We Under the Law of Christ?" (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/under-law-of-christ/>)

Paul is saying that we believers are under grace, and, because we are under grace, we are not under law. If you hear a teacher say that believers are still under law, that teacher is directly contradicting Scripture!

Faith (belief) and repentance are flip sides of the same coin. Repentance does not occur first. When we believe, we also repent (change our minds from or turn from unbelief and sin to believing the Gospel which is the power of salvation).

Repentance is *not* turning from sin to a determination to keep the law. That would make repentance a work. We will never be saved by works, and preaching that repentance is turning to the law is biblical heresy. Hebrews 6:1 tells us that among the foundational first principles of Christ are repentance from dead works and faith towards God. What works are dead? The works of the law. If we then turn back to law, we are turning back to the power of sin and away from faith and grace (Galatians 3:2-5; 5:4). We turn from freedom to bondage and the power of sin and the power of Satan.

Next, we'll look at Paul's conversion. (Continued in part 2)