

If We Are Not under the Law, How Do We Avoid Sin? (part 2)

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Law Mongers

Of the Galatians, who were beginning to believe that they needed to perfect themselves through the law, Paul wrote, "I just want to learn this from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now completed in the flesh?" (Galatians 3:2-3). The legalist Judaizers who were tempting them might well be called law mongers. They were purveying a method of salvation that said, Sure Jesus took care of our past sins, but now we must keep the law to remain moral. Too many people assert that the only issue among the Galatians was that they were being falsely taught to be circumcised. But this wasn't the only issue.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul many times addresses the problem of returning to the law. Here are just a few examples:

Yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no flesh will be justified by the works of the law. But if, while we sought to be justified in Christ, we ourselves also were found sinners, is Christ a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I build up again those things which I destroyed, I prove myself a law-breaker. For I, through the law, died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ living in me. That life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me. I don't make void the grace of God. For if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!

Galatians 2:16-21

See how Paul again speaks of being crucified with Christ and how, if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing. Those

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who preach the law—and so many do—are putting themselves and those who follow them under a curse:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who doesn't continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them." Now that no man is justified by the law before God is evident, for, "The righteous will live by faith." The law is not of faith, but, "The man who does them will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."

Galatians 3:10-13

And in Galatians 5:18, Paul explicitly states the dichotomy between being led by the Spirit and being under the law: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Thus, as I've pointed out with so many Scriptures in this article, keeping the law—to stay moral, to do the finish work, to strive against the flesh, to avoid licentiousness, or whatever excuse we come up with—logically puts us under the law and not led by the Spirit. Those who teach the law, those who say that we must keep a day, those who preach that we must keep the Ten Commandments given to Moses and the children of Israel under the Old Covenant (the "service of death, written engraved on stones"—2 Corinthians 3:7) are modern-day Judaizers. These Judaizers often accuse those who stand in liberty as being antinomian. The truth is, the Judaizers ARE NOT LED BY THE SPIRIT. Do not listen to their false Gospel that denies the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ:

I marvel that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different "good news"; and there isn't another "good news." Only there are some who trouble you, and want to pervert the Good News of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any "good news" other than that which we preached to you, let him be cursed.

Galatians 1:6-8

Don't fall under the spell of thinking that, surely, there is some law-keeping still to be done:

Stand firm therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and don't be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Behold, I, Paul, tell you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing. Yes, I testify

again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. You are alienated (*katargeō*) from Christ, you who desire to be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace.

Galatians 5:1-4

Katargeō means "rendered entirely idle." Those who desire to be justified by the law are rendered entirely idle away from Christ. If you are at all keeping the law because you feel that doing so adds to your righteousness, or your justification, or your sanctification, then you are not fully trusting in Christ and have strayed from grace. We are not to keep the law to add to our righteousness because, "if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!" (Galatians 2:21). We are not to keep the law to add to our justification, because if we "desire to be justified by the law [we] have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4). We are not to keep the law to add to our sanctification because Jesus Christ is our sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30).

You say you keep the law because you have been saved. This sounds good, many people say it, and it may even be close to the truth. But, while close may count in horseshoes and hand grenades, it does not count in theology. Remember, Jesus freed us from the law, nailing it to His Cross. To return to the law after He has freed us from it dishonors Him. The law was our old husband who is now dead and buried. Our new husband is Jesus Christ. Surely, our new husband does not want us to try to show Him our appreciation by returning to our old dead husband. This would be a morbid form of spiritual adultery.

We don't keep the law because we are saved. We love because we are saved. Love fulfills the law (Romans 13:10). "And whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22). What commandments? "This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he commanded. He who keeps his commandments remains in him, and he in him. By this we know that he remains in us, by the Spirit which he gave us" (1 John 3:23-24). We are to believe and to love—that's all (Galatians 5:18).

Their Heart Is Covered

We've seen that the law causes sin and death, and it is a curse. It also covers the heart of those who look to it so that they do not see its end and the free grace that Christ ushered in with the New Covenant. "But to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart" (2

Corinthians 3:15). But what does the veil do that lies on their heart? It is explained in the context. "Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness of speech, and not as Moses, who put a veil on his face, that the children of Israel wouldn't look steadfastly on the end of that which was passing away" (2 Corinthians 3:13). The veil prevented them from looking steadfastly—gazing—on the end (*telos*, which can also mean the "goal") of that which was passing away (*katargeō*—the same word we saw earlier that means "rendered entirely idle"). What was ending? The Old Covenant with all of its laws, including the Ten Commandments.

But now he has obtained a more excellent ministry, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which on better promises has been given as law. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. For finding fault with them, he said, "Behold, the days come," says the Lord, "that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they didn't continue in my covenant, and I disregarded them," says the Lord. "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days," says the Lord; "I will put my laws into their mind, I will also write them on their heart. I will be their God, and they will be my people. They will not teach every man his fellow citizen, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness. I will remember their sins and lawless deeds no more." In that he says, "A new covenant," he has made the first old. But that which is becoming old and grows aged is near to vanishing away.

Hebrews 8:6-13

And so, when Moses—the law—is read, the hearers of the law have their hearts veiled so that they perceive neither the end—the goal—of the law nor its ending (its being rendered entirely idle). Further reading: "Should we preach the law to bring people to Christ?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/preachlawqa.htm>) and "When Did the Old Covenant End and the New Covenant Begin?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/newcovenantstart.htm>). Not perceiving this, they do not understand the significance of the crosswork of Christ and the New Covenant that His death brought into effect. They will give lip service

to it, but as soon as they add law-keeping to it, they are denying the full grace of it.

Overcoming

What about overcoming? Surely we must use the law to strive against our carnal flesh so that we can be counted as overcomers, mustn't we? In fact, no. Overcoming is real, the Bible speaks of it, but the common understanding is a distortion. Jesus speaks of the overcomers eight times in Revelation 2, 3, and 21. This is commonly misunderstood to mean overcoming sin by keeping the law. But numerous Scriptures tell us that Jesus does all of the overcoming for us. Revelation 12:11 explains, "They overcame him because of the Lamb's blood, and because of the word of their testimony. They didn't love their life, even to death" (Revelation 12:11). (Further reading: "In Revelation, Jesus speaks of those who overcome. What must I do to overcome?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/overcomingqa.htm>). Notice also what John says: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5). We don't overcome by the law. We overcome through faith in Jesus Christ.

To use carpenters' language, Jesus didn't just do the roughing in and then leave the finishing work up to you with your tools of the law. If we try to do anything beyond what He has done, we are denying that He completed our salvation, denying what He came to do in the flesh (2 John 1:7). Jesus did it all. He finished your salvation, and He hands it to you complete and free. As Romans 11:6 says, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work." Grace and the works of the law don't mix.

How, then, do we avoid sin if we are not under the law? By not being under the law, but under grace; by trusting in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, remaining in Him, and being led by the Spirit who will motivate us to love one another, our neighbors, and our enemies, which is the fulfillment of the law.