

# Old Covenant Law and New Covenant Law—Are They the Same?

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Do you know that apples and oranges are not the same thing? Sure you do. I'm sure you also know that elephants and crocodiles are not the same. What about light and dark? That's right, they're not the same. These are pretty simple concepts. It is amazing, then, that so many preachers have such a gigantic problem with understanding that the law of the Old Covenant and the law of the New Covenant are not the same. The Bible clearly distinguishes the two.

Here are some basics:

- The law we Christians have is called the law of Christ. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).
- Jesus called His law a new commandment. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34).
- It is further broken down into many other commandments found in the New Testament.
- The relationship between Old Covenant law and New Covenant law is not one of equality, nor one of basic and more detailed, nor one of v 1.0 and v 2.0, nor even one of good and improved. Rather, the relationship of Old Covenant law to New Covenant law is one of type and antitype. Old Testament laws, including the Ten Commandments, were mere shadows or types of New Testament commands.
- Even the Old Testament Sabbath command was a shadow of God's true rest in Christ that Christians have entered. There is no Sabbath day for Christians to keep because we rest from our sinful works every day in Christ. He is our Sabbath rest.
- The Decalogue was external, written on stone. The New Covenant commands are internal, written on our hearts.
- Under the Old Covenant, the law could only condemn. "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Galatians 3:10).
- New Covenant law does not condemn. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

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New Covenant theologians, in saying that the Old Covenant law has ended, are often accused of taking away the basis for morality. But the Bible teaches the opposite. Being free from Old Covenant law—the law of sin and death—does not cause us to give in to fleshly desires. In fact, "sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead" (Romans 7:8). In other words, far from causing Christians to give in to fleshly desires, being free from Old Covenant law has the opposite effect!

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.  
Romans 8:2-6

The table on the following page shows some of the differences between the Old Covenant law and the New Covenant law of Christ and illustrates the striking dichotomy between the two.

Characteristics	Old Covenant Law	New Covenant Law
Old, decayed, vanished away	✓ <sup>1</sup>	
New		✓ <sup>2</sup>
A shadow	✓ <sup>3</sup>	
A yoke of bondage	✓ <sup>4</sup>	
Frees		✓ <sup>5</sup>
Condemns	✓ <sup>6</sup>	
No condemnation		✓ <sup>7</sup>
A better covenant established on better promises		✓ <sup>8</sup>
Temporary	✓ <sup>9</sup>	
Eternal		✓ <sup>10</sup>
Given to ancient Israel only	✓ <sup>11</sup>	
Given to the called who believe from all nations		✓ <sup>12</sup>
Allows sin to have dominion	✓ <sup>13</sup>	
Frees us from the dominion of sin		✓ <sup>14</sup>
Makes us servants of sin	✓ <sup>15</sup>	
Makes us free from sin		✓ <sup>16</sup>
Makes us free from righteousness	✓ <sup>17</sup>	
Makes us servants of God		✓ <sup>18</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 8:13; 2 Corinthians 3:11, 13

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 8:13

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 10:1

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:1-4

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:2; Galatians 5:1

<sup>6</sup> Romans 7:24-8:4; 2 Corinthians 3:9

<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:1-2

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 8:6; 9:14-15

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 3:19

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 9:15; 13:20

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 5:1-3

<sup>12</sup> Acts 2:39; Romans 10:4; Hebrews 9:15

<sup>13</sup> Romans 6:14

<sup>14</sup> Romans 6:14

<sup>15</sup> Romans 5:20; 6:17

<sup>16</sup> Romans 6:20; 7:4; 1 John 3:9

<sup>17</sup> Romans 6:20

<sup>18</sup> Romans 6:22

Characteristics	Old Covenant Law	New Covenant Law
Makes us free from death		✓ <sup>19</sup>
Brings death/law of sin and death	✓ <sup>20</sup>	
Law of life		✓ <sup>21</sup>
Causes us to bring forth fruit unto death	✓ <sup>22</sup>	
Causes us to bring forth fruit unto God		✓ <sup>23</sup>
Pictured by Mt. Sinai	✓ <sup>24</sup>	
Pictured by Mt. Zion		✓ <sup>25</sup>
Dead	✓ <sup>26</sup>	
Christians delivered from it	✓ <sup>27</sup>	
Christians dead to it	✓ <sup>28</sup>	
Causes deception	✓ <sup>29</sup>	
Shuts up unto faith	✓ <sup>30</sup>	
Law of faith		✓ <sup>31</sup>
Law of works	✓ <sup>32</sup>	
At best, served by the flesh in the letter	✓ <sup>33</sup>	
Served by the spirit in the spirit		✓ <sup>34</sup>
Written on stone	✓ <sup>35</sup>	
Written in our hearts		✓ <sup>36</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Romans 8:2

<sup>20</sup> Romans 5:20-21; 7:9-11; 8:2

<sup>21</sup> Romans 8:2

<sup>22</sup> Romans 7:5

<sup>23</sup> Romans 7:4

<sup>24</sup> Galatians 4:24-25; Hebrews 12:18-21

<sup>25</sup> Galatians 4:26-31; Hebrews 12:22-24

<sup>26</sup> Romans 7:6

<sup>27</sup> Romans 7:6

<sup>28</sup> Romans 7:4

<sup>29</sup> Romans 7:11

<sup>30</sup> Galatians 3:23

<sup>31</sup> Romans 3:27; Galatians 3:11

<sup>32</sup> Romans 3:27; Galatians 3:10-12

<sup>33</sup> Romans 7:6, 25; 8:1ff

<sup>34</sup> Romans 7:6; 8:2ff

<sup>35</sup> Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 34:1; 28; Deuteronomy 4:13; 2 Corinthians 3:3, 7; Hebrews 9:4

<sup>36</sup> Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Corinthians 3:3; Hebrews 8:10

In closing, I'll answer this question: Do Romans 6:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:21 contradict?

No, they do not. Romans 6:14 says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." This tells us that sin cannot rule us because we are not under law (there is no definite article before the word "law" in the Greek), but under grace. Thus, we are neither under Israel's Old Covenant law given to Moses on Mount Sinai nor any other law. It also tells us that we are under grace, which means that no law can condemn us in God's eyes.

Now let's look at 1 Corinthians 9:21. This verse is in the context of Paul explaining how he tries to be all things to all men in his preaching of the Gospel: "To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law." The point in question is that Paul says he is not really without law but—as the King James Version says—"under the law to Christ." So, how can we be "not under law" (as stated in Romans 6:14) and also be "under the law to Christ"?

The answer is found in the fact that the King James Version and some other versions poorly translate the Greek behind the phrase "under the law to Christ." The three places where this verse says "without law" are translated from the Greek word *anomos*, which is an adjective that literally means "no lawed" or "lawless." "Under the law" is translated from the Greek word *ennomos*. This word literally means "in-lawed." In just the previous verse (verse 20), Paul used the phrase "under the law" three times. These three instances of "under the law" are translated from *hupo nomon*, and "under law" is the correct translation. But in verse 21, *ennomos* should be translated "in-lawed." Paul is saying he is not really without law to God but he is in-lawed to Christ. That is, the Christian's relationship to law is only to Christ's law, and that relationship to Christ's law is dependent on his being in Christ. In Christ, who is the New Covenant (Isaiah 49:7-8; 1 Corinthians 11:25), we are lawful or righteous because of Christ's righteousness. Jesus died for our past sins (Romans 3:25), and He has done all of the rest, too. We are lawful because of His death and life for us. Thus, we can say that we are not under any external law, such as the Old Covenant, but we are in-lawed or lawful because we are in Christ and in the New Covenant. In this state, nothing can condemn us because Christ's perfect righteousness is also our righteousness. Although we may still struggle with our flesh, being in Christ, we have already gained the victory: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Thus, there is no contradiction between Romans 6:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:21. We are not under law; we are under grace, and we are under grace because we are in Jesus Christ with His righteousness imputed to us and because we are in the New Covenant. We are not *under* the New Covenant's laws; we are *under* grace. The New Covenant's laws are *in* us, written on our hearts. That is, they are internalized. They contain no condemnation and can never impute sin. So, we are under grace, in Christ, with the New Covenant laws in us motivating us to walk after the Spirit: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1-2).

*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*Romans 8:32-39*