

# Gadsby's Questions About the Law

William Gadsby

William Gadsby (1773-1844) was the pastor of the Strict Baptist church in Manchester, England, for 38 years. Today, he is best known for his hymnbook, *A Selection of Hymns for Public Worship* (better known as *Gadsby's Hymns*), which he describes as a "selection of hymns [written by Gadsby, Hart, and others] free from Arminianism and sound in the faith." In my opinion, it remains the best collection of sovereign grace hymns ever compiled. In his day, he was also known for his preaching. He preached nearly 12,000 sermons. He also traveled over 60,000 miles, often by foot and helped start forty congregations. The following article is excerpted from his work, *The Present State of Religion*. I think that anyone might profit from it, but if you happen to think that the Ten Commandments are the believer's rule of life, you might try answering Gadsby's questions. Can you?

Dear Sir, Friend G. informs me you wish me to write to you, and inform you what law it is that I say the believer is in no sense under. I therefore write to say (though I cannot help thinking you must know) that it is the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai, commonly called the moral law, or ten commandments, recorded in Exod 20, and hinted at, with its curses annexed to it, in Deut 27. This is the law I intend, and do venture to say that the believer in Christ is in no sense whatever under it; so that it is not a rule of life to that man who is led by the Spirit. As you promised to answer me if I should write to you, I will propose to you a few questions, and I hope I shall do it in the fear of God, and shall expect you to answer them in plainness of speech; and,

1st. If the law is the believer's rule of life, I shall thank you to tell me what is intended by the letter written by the apostles and elders, and sent to the believing Gentiles, as recorded in Acts 15, and shall expect you to explain the chapter.

2ndly. I hope you will tell me what the apostle means in the first six verses of Romans 7, where he says that the believer is dead to the law, and free from the law; and let me know how that law can be his rule, when he is as dead to it, and as free from it, as a woman is from her husband when she has buried him. Should you be disposed to say that the believer is dead to it as a covenant, not as a rule of life; you will, no doubt, point to those scriptures which make a distinction between the law as a covenant and as a rule of life; for unless you do this, you will not move me.

3rdly. You will have the goodness to inform me what is intended by the first four verses of Romans 8; and let me know how it comes to pass that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made me free from the law of death, and yet that the law of death

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(called in another place the killing letter) is my rule of life; and how is it that it is my rule of life after it has killed me, and I am made free from it?

4thly. You will read 2 Corinthians 3, and let me know how it is that the administration of death, written and engraven on stones, is the living man's rule of life, and how this can be consistent with what he observes in verse 11, where he says "it is done away," and in verse 13, where he says "It is abolished." Now, my dear son, you are to tell me how that law which is done away and abolished still remains the believer's perfect rule of life.

5thly. You will also show me how it is that the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that when faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster, and yet that this schoolmaster is our rule of life after faith is come (Gal 3:24,25).

6thly. You will inform me how it is that if we be led by the Spirit we are not under the law, and yet that the law is a perfect rule of life to that man who is led by the Spirit (Gal 5:18). There are many things in the Epistle to the Galatians which you will find worthy of your attention in this business. I hope you will read the whole.

7thly. I shall expect you to tell me how it is that the hand-writing which was against us, and contrary to us, is taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross (as Col 2:14) and yet remains a perfect rule of life. Should you be disposed to say that the ceremonial law is here intended, you will tell me how that law, which was the gospel in its day, came to be against the believer, and what there was in it contrary to him.

8thly. You will be sure to inform me how it is that that law which is not made for a righteous man is the righteous man's rule of life (I Tim 1:9).

9thly. As Christ was made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law (as Gal 4:4,5) you will say how it comes to pass that they still remain under it in any sense that Christ was made under it, seeing he was made under it to redeem them from under it.

10thly. But as whatsoever the law says, it says to them who are under the law (as Rom 3:19) and as the believer is not under the law (as Rom 6:14; Gal 5:18) you will inform me what the law says to them who are not under it.

11thly. If the law contains the whole revealed will of God, as to matter of obedience, as Fuller and others have said, you will let me know upon what ground you prove that unbelievers have no right to be baptized, and partake of the Lord's supper, seeing that what the law says it says to them that are under it; and if it contains the whole of obedience it must require unbelievers to be baptized. You will be sure to reconcile this, if you can.

12thly. You will inform me how it is that while men contend for the law being a perfect rule of life to believers, and call those ill names who do not, they can and do, openly, knowingly, and designedly, break the fourth commandment every week. You will inform me whether doing every sort of work on the seventh day is walking

according to that rule which says, Thou shalt not do any work, no, not so much as kindle a fire (Exod 35:3).

13thly, and lastly. You will inform me how it is that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom 10.4) and yet that the believer, who is got to the end of the law at once, namely, by faith in Christ, must come back again, and begin at the beginning, by taking it for a perfect rule of life.

It does appear that most teachers think there should be a distinction made between the sheep and goats, but does it not appear that the greatest part of preachers, in this day, are attempting to give to the goats what belongs to the sheep, and to the sheep what belongs to the goats? For when on the one hand they address the unconverted, they tell them that it is their duty to look to Christ, and believe in him, and that they are warranted to offer them all the blessings of the gospel, thus making the gospel the unconverted man's rule of faith and practice; they, on the other hand, send the sheep to the law of works, and tell them that their comfort depends upon their walking according thereunto. And when any poor soul is in darkness, through the power of the world, the flesh, or the devil, instead of pointing them to Christ, and telling them that it has pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell, they tell them to "remove the cause, and the effect will cease"; and thus the goats are sent to the law of life, and the sheep to the killing letter. But there will be a reckoning day by and by; and a thousand to one but some of these men will be proved to have got over the wall. Thus, my dear Sir, I have proposed a few plain, simple questions, and shall expect you to come to the point in your answers, and it shall be my prayer to the great Head of the church that God will be with you. Waiting your answer, I remain,

Yours, tried, and condemned, upon the evidence of Diotrephes, by the Associated Ministers,  
LOVE-TRUTH  
Manchester, Aug. 8, 1806

It has been 200 years, and I know of no one who has been able to best Gadsby on these questions.  
Peter Ditzel