

Howards Corner

Law and grace – A needed discussion today

I am troubled by the misunderstandings of the subject of **Law and Grace** as it pertains to a believer and how it all fits into the “Word of God (Bible)” that provides the “Law and the Prophets” and a “New Testament (Covenant)”. The scripture in Matthew 5:17 has confused many in the Christian faith today. I will try to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, help you to understand how the “Law and Prophets” are still true and that for the Christian salvation by grace through faith are still true. I am writing this to believers so that there will be unity in the Church (“Body of Christ”).

I am also writing this to those that are seeking to know the truth but have not yet committed themselves to be a believer in Jesus (Christ-Messiah) **alone** for your salvation and not in your works of keeping the Mosaic law which includes the Ten commandments. For, we that are in Christ Jesus, have been freed from the law of sin and death by the work of Jesus on the cross. To those who have believed and trusted in the blood of Jesus He has given us the Holy Spirit to seal us and to lead us and empower us to obey the teachings of Jesus. If you are seeking, then the Lord is calling you to know the truth and Jesus has said “The Truth will set you free”. It is my great desire that all who are seeking will find the truth.

To begin we must believe the whole Word of God which is contained in the written word which is the Bible. If I am going to talk to you about His word, then we must speak the same language for if I am speaking in one language and you are listening in another then it is not possible for us to understand each other. These thoughts I share with you must be accompanied by your desire to understand the “truth” and be open to reassess your thoughts and ideas according to the Word of God. It is equally important that I am diligent to search the Word in truth and not to satisfy my viewpoint. If we are both open to let the Word of God and His Holy Spirit lead us to an understanding, then maybe we can reach the truth that Jesus wants us to know.

Below are some ground rules to start our discussion:

- The Word of God is true both in the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- The Old Testament is called the “Law and the Prophets”.
- The New Testament is the message of the New Covenant made by Jesus for all believers in Christ Jesus (Christians).
- We must rightly divide the Word of Truth to understand the Word properly by both the Word and by the Holy Spirit.
- When reading scripture (both old and new testaments) look at the context.
Who is speaking?
Who are they talking to?
What is the subject they are speaking about?
What is the subject that led up to the writing?
- Seek diligently to know the truth.

I am writing first to those that are believers in Jesus the Christ (Messiah) but am also writing to those who have not yet committed to totally believe the message of salvation by grace through faith. Please stay the course and do not give up until you have heard the entire message because the Word is veiled and is not sometimes understood at first reading. This writing is with intent to unify the church and not divide.

There are also some who are searching for the truth such as gentiles that have not yet decided to follow Jesus and Jews that may be led to understand this message of the Messiah (Jesus) and why Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah already come in the flesh but has been rejected by the Jews of His day.

It is a worthwhile message for it is vital for all to believe the central message of salvation by grace through faith for in this message we are given our great hope of a right relationship with God the Father and an inheritance of eternal life and a place in the Kingdom of God.

Let us begin to discuss the subject of “Salvation by grace through faith”. So, I begin the discussion with a scripture in Matthew 5:17-20.

Matt. 5:17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. Matt. 5:18 “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Matt. 5:19 “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Matt. 5:20 “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The reason I choose to start here is that this is a pivotal point of confusion about this vital point of belief about salvation by grace. If read without a clear understanding it could and has been interpreted to mean that we as Christians are still under the Law but if we read the rest of the Bible, we will find that it is clearly taught “salvation by grace”. I will walk you through why it is true and is necessary to be saved by grace and not by law. So, let's meet this confusion head on and discover the total word and not be misled by one scripture.

Let us first discuss what is the Law or the Prophets (also referred to as “the Law and the Prophets). The Jews of the days of Jesus had no “new testament” the new testament had of course not been written so their definition of the law and prophets meant the old testament which to them was their bible.

Let us now break down “what is the law?” The Law is defined as the first five books of the bible which contains the law and all the history that led up to the writings of the Law and all the purposes of why God had written the Law. These books were written by Moses to the Hebrew nation covering how they came to be the Hebrew nation called Israel. The nation of Israel was in captivity in Egypt and Moses led them out of captivity and after a journey in the wilderness God gave them laws to live by because “they were a rebellious and stiff-necked people” and needed laws to live by. Therefore, when we read the law, it is important to look at our rules about interpretation. We look at context. Who was speaking and who was the audience and what were they talking about?

God is talking to the Nation of Israel and God was talking to them about their behavior and that they were a rebellious people and therefore needed rules or

laws to live by. So, God gave them Laws of behavior for almost everything they would face. They were also given rewards if they obeyed and consequences if they disobeyed. Therefore, since the time of Moses the nation of Israel has lived by the laws, but it is obvious that they have not been able to keep these laws and have received the consequences of not obeying the law.

You will read in the old testament the history of Israel and the repeated attempts to live by the law but there was failure after failure. At the times of the failures God sent them prophets to warn them of impending judgement so we have prophets added to the old testament.

Let us now discuss the prophets and why God used these prophets to write the part of the old testament that is call the "Prophets". We generally think of the prophets to be major prophets like Isaiah or Jeramiah or Ezekiel or Daniel or others but there were other prophets also. To name a few Moses was prophetic in his writings and the Psalms are full of prophesy. Even in Genesis there are important prophesies.

In all these prophetic writings God was calling Israel to both hear Him and repent and turn to Him for forgiveness and to receive a new heart which the law could not provide but He knew they would not listen to Him so in His prophesies He made a way that is spiritually hidden to the Jews. The eyes of the spirit of God opens eyes for those He has chosen. He prophesied the coming of the Messiah which began in Genesis 3 and continued through most of the old testament prophets.

Even with all the law and all the prophets Israel could not keep the law and reaped the results of their disobedience and were exiled from their land. These exiles were to the Northern Kingdom first and they have never been brought back to this date and are sometimes referred to as the 10 lost tribes of Israel. The other two tribes of Benjamin and Judah were exiled for a period of 70 years to Babylon before being returned to their land. They have been under the reign of gentiles to some measure until today. This is the "Age of the Gentiles", But they have been expecting their Messiah because of the teaching of the law and prophets.

Therefore, it is in this setting that Jesus comes to the Jews of His day presenting Himself to them as Messiah. He is seeing how they are now worshipping God with a law that has been compromised with other oral teaching that have been passed down by word of mouth and are traditions and not written. The Pharisees and Scribes had assembled the oral teachings and tradition into what they call the Mishnah. They were following the Mishnah and not the written word. The written word is the Law and Prophets and not the Mishnah.

Jesus says to them **Matt. 5:17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.**

Let us look at what Jesus is saying. Since the definition of the “Law or Prophets” is the written words of the Old Testament, which is their bible, He is saying that He has not come to abolish the written word of the Old Testament which is both Law and Prophecy but to fulfill all those writings.

5:18 “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Jesus is saying that the words of the old testament are not abolished but that the written word will not pass away until heaven and earth have passed away. Not even the smallest stroke of the pen but He came to fulfill the law and the prophets written word.

Let us then look at what all this means to the Jews of His day to whom He is talking and to us today as Christians.

Fulfilling the Law

As for the Law given to the Jews to live by, it is not abolished for the Jews that have not accepted Jesus as Messiah and savior and Lord they are still under the terms of the law and will be accountable for their lives under the Law. Therefore they, the people Jesus is addressing, are still under the law until heaven and earth pass away or until they accept as a Nation the Messiah.

Individual Jews have the choice to accept Jesus as Messiah and be redeemed but the Nation of Israel is still under the agreement of the law. This agreement was made as a Nation and will not be removed from the requirements of the

law until they do so as a Nation. This agreement was made between God and the Nation of Israel and the Nation of Israel said they would keep the terms of the law which is recorded in Deuteronomy and God has not released them but has offered the Messiah to give them a way out (escape clause) of the agreement. This Messiah is standing in front of the leaders of the Nation Israel and offering them the way out of the law agreement.

He is offering to be their Messiah if they will receive Him. You will see in reading the rest of Matthew that Jesus does many miracles and performs many wonders in front of the leaders of Israel. Some of the miracles were specific miracles that only the Messiah could perform. The Scribes and Pharisees were witness to these miracles and signs but in chapter 12 Jesus performed a miracle of healing a demon possessed man who was blind and mute which was one of the Messianic miracles. Their response was "It is only by Beelzebub the prince of demons that this fellow drives out demons." When they said this, it was the "unpardonable sin" for they had blasphemed the Holy Spirit. The Nation of Israel had rejected Jesus as Messiah and Jesus for the rest of Matthew taught only in parables so that only the elect could hear the truth.

From this point on the message of Jesus was for the individual Jews who were open to the message of the messiah. This then also opened the door to the other "sheep pen" which is the gentiles of the world which was later to become the church.

Therefore, Jesus fulfilled the law in that the Nation Israel are still under the law and that the consequences of the law will apply to the Nation Israel which will be fulfilled by the Nation's destruction in AD 70 and their scattering to the nations for the last 2000 years. Although the nation of Israel has been scattered, they still have a prophesy that is not yet fulfilled and that will not happen until the end of the tribulation time when after great persecution and trials they will be offered a way out (escape clause of the law). That is, the Nation will accept the Messiah as Jesus and be saved at His second coming but only a remnant will be saved.

Jesus fulfilled the law when He lived a perfect life keeping all the law and shedding His blood for us that are in Him. I will discuss more later.

Fulfilling of the Prophets

Now as for fulfilling the prophets Jesus the Messiah also came to fulfill the prophets. Some of the fulfillments of the prophets have already been fulfilled at Jesus's first coming but other fulfillments are yet to happen.

After Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and Scribes He continued to teach by way of parables and to teach His disciples. This went on for a while and what He taught is now for gentiles and for individual Jews. These teaching are for His disciples and to those that will later be His church.

At His last appearance at the temple, He was being examined by the Scribes, Pharisees, and Lawyers to see if He were the spotless lamb which would be offered up on the coming "Passover day" which was coming up in a few days. They did not know that was what they were doing but it was required that the Passover lamb had to be perfect and without blemish and that the priests had to examine the sacrificial lamb to insure they were perfect without spot or blemish. So, they questioned Him in many points and could not find guilt on any point. They were blinded and could not understand that Jesus was the Passover Lamb who was to be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

This Passover was given as instructions for the Nation Israel that when the plague God placed on Egypt, for the first born of Egypt to die, they were to place the blood of a perfect lamb without blemish on the door of their house so that the death angel would pass over and not take the first born in their house. This is a foreshadow in the old testament of the Messiah being the Passover lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. So, they fulfilled the law to inspect the Lamb of God (Jesus) and found him perfect.

They however had already made their decision to seek to kill Him and it will happen on Passover although they did not understand that. This then fulfilled the old testament prophetic writing that the Passover lamb Jesus would die on Passover day as our savior.

Events then happened that one of His own disciples would betray Him on the night which is the start of Passover. The Jews started a day at about 6 pm of the evening before what we would normally call the beginning of the day. So, their day is from about 6 pm in the evening and ends about 6 pm the next day.

Therefore, when Jesus was with His disciples having His last supper, it was the evening of the day which started the Passover. He was betrayed on Passover evening and was crucified on Passover day. This betrayal was also a fulfillment of a prophetic writing that He would be betrayed by one of His own.

On that night while He was in the garden praying and asking that this cup be taken from Him, but He added not my will, but Your will be done. It was a fulfillment of prophecy that all His would abandon Him and scatter, this happened when they arrested Him. So, it was God's will that Jesus was then to be taken prisoner and led before the Jewish leaders and in a mock trial was declared guilty for claiming to be the Son of God.

They then carried Him to Pilate the governor and insisted on having him crucified. Pilate resisted them at first but finally gave in to their insistence. So, it was the world that crucified Him, but the greater blame was to the Jews. They led Him to the cross and crucified Him who was perfect in all ways and without blemish even in the eyes of the Jewish leaders.

He went to the cross at 9 am at the time the Jews were killing their ritual lamb in the temple. This was a fulfillment of the Lamb of God shedding His blood on the cross like the ritual lamb. He died on the cross on that Passover day at 3 pm and the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom showing that the veil of the temple no longer separated, us that believe, from the Father God. Many other things happened that day that displayed the power of God.

Many old testament prophecies were fulfilled that day. Look at Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 are examples of the old testament prophecies fulfilled on that day. Therefore, Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets that day although there are still prophecies to be fulfilled in these last days. I could go on and give you many writings in the law and prophets as examples of Jesus fulfilling the law and prophets but there are many more if you need further proof.

Jesus died that day on the cross as the "Lamb of God" to take away the Law of sin and death. He said, "It is finished". The law has been satisfied by His perfect keeping of the law and by the shedding of His blood for there is no forgiveness except by the shedding of blood. This then ends the need any longer for those that are in Christ Jesus to live under the law for its requirements have been

satisfied by this sacrifice on the cross for His blood covers our sins by our faith in His works. He has become our righteousness and we who are in Christ are no longer under the law. He has fulfilled the law and its requirement for Christians, and He has fulfilled the prophets that are applicable to the present day.

Therefore, if having received such a great salvation we reject it and put ourselves back under the law we are turning our back on His work and are trusting ourselves to keep the law perfectly and we cannot live the law perfectly. Only Jesus has done so. Therefore, our only hope is in the shed blood of Jesus and not in our works of keeping the law. We have liberty from the law of sin and death but not a “liberty to sin”. The Holy Spirit will lead us into all righteousness.

Witness in the New testament of salvation by grace

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Word was passed on to the Apostles and others to witness the message of salvation by grace to the whole world for now the Jews as a Nation had rejected Jesus and had paid the price by being destroyed in AD 70. The witness passed on to believing Jews and to the gentiles which is the other “sheep pen”.

These words have now become what we now know as the Bible. The Bible records many explanations of this great salvation by grace. I will bring to your attention a few scriptures that clearly explain the truth, but the message is so widespread in the new testament I would basically have to rewrite all the words again for you, but it is for you to diligently seek the truth.

I will begin by saying that at first the church was mostly Jews who had been under the law all their life. To them, I would think it would be difficult to lay aside all the teachings and traditions of the law for it was so ingrained in their society and was expected of them to follow the law that they were in great peril to profess Jesus as Messiah and not the traditions of the law. They knew that if the Jews killed their Messiah, they would also be subject to dying for their stance to follow Jesus.

As time progressed in this new church persecution did break out against the church and many were scattered from Jerusalem to Samaria and to other parts of the world. Peter was given the word to go to gentiles when he was given the vision of the sheet coming down from heaven filled with what Jews would call

unclean things, but God told Peter to not call things unclean that He said were clean. He then went to the house of Cornelius who was a gentile and God poured out the Holy Spirit on them also as He had done for the church at Pentecost. The church had now come to the gentile as well as the Jews.

As the church spread to the gentiles who had never been under the law it became a question as some of the Jews were hanging on to the law, but the gentiles had never been under law and not been required to be under the law to receive the Holy Spirit. Paul came along and taught very strongly that this great salvation was **“by grace through faith and that not of yourselves but is the gift of God and not by works so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8).**

This then became a contention point between Jews in the faith and gentiles in the faith as many Jews had come into the church and were stirring up the gentiles to believe they had to also take on the requirements of the law. So, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem and address this question to the leaders of the church which were James and Peter and others. This question was then addressed in Acts 15.

Believers from the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” Peter stood to say **“some time ago God made a choice among you that the gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God who knows the heart showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them for He purified their hearts by faith. Now then why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? NO! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved just as they are”.**

James went on to add many things and that even the prophets agree. **It is my judgement therefore that we should not make it difficult for the gentiles who are turning to God.** He then added four things for the gentiles-- Abstain from food polluted by idols and from sexual immorality and from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

There are many more scriptures that tell you the same thing. Read for yourselves the writings of Paul for he has written on the subject in many of his letters, especially in Romans. Seek and you will find.

Therefore, the question was answered early in the teachings of the gospel. Why are we still discussing this at this last stage of the church age? During the time since, there have been many things that have crept into the church so do not be surprised because the enemy goes about trying to deceive. Sometimes we still think that it is “too good to be true” and that we must somehow prove our righteousness to God by our works, but it has been said plainly it is not by our works but by the work of Christ Jesus on the cross.

I call on all Preachers and Pastors and Bishops and teachers and all forms of leadership in the church to teach the whole truth for there is a hunger in the church to know the truth and as these later times come upon us it will be necessary for us to have the message solidly in us because the enemy is deceiving many today. We must be standing on the solid rock of Jesus and not on law but on the grace, He has provided through the shedding of His blood on the cross.

Stay in the faith and trust the Holy Spirit to lead you into all righteousness!

Your fellow servant in Christ Jesus
Howard Beasley

Postscript— I acknowledge the teaching I have received from versebyverseministry.org and Steven Armstrong the founder of that ministry. It is free of charge to any that want to learn the scriptures. I strongly recommend this teaching web site. Although I have studied the scriptures for many years, these teachings I received from Steven Armstrong provided more understanding, in the last year, than I had accumulated in those other many years. He opened the door of understanding for me. Steven Armstrong passed away from the Covid19 pandemic. He was only 55. I will miss him greatly

although I never met him. His favorite saying was “Keep your eyes on eternity”. His website is still operational.