

The Superiority of Faith to Law as Seen in Romans 3:21-10:15

(Part Four of a Four Part Series on
The Relationship Between Law and Grace)

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Paul fought a running battle with externalistic thinking within the early Church; they too had those within their number who thought that righteousness could be produced through the keeping of the Law, and this conflict shows through clearly in his Epistle to the Romans. Because of his teaching regarding law and grace Paul was, in so many words, accused of being an “antinomian”(cf. 3:8)? Let’s see how Paul deals with this subject in this letter to the Roman Christians.

Paul begins his letter by arguing that all men in their natural, unsaved state stand condemned before God. In 1:16-2:16 he argues that those who are without the Law are condemned because they have not yielded themselves to the knowledge of God in creation (1:18-19). Beginning in 2:17-29 he argues that those who do have the Law—speaking of the Jews—are also condemned because they have not keep it. In 3:1-20 he addresses the question sure to arise in the minds of his listeners: If the Jews stand condemned too, what is the advantage in being a Jew? His answer is simple; the Jews were entrusted with the promises of God. Promises which God fully intends to keep, even though the Jews, as a people, have thus far failed to respond in faith (2:2-4). [This is a reference to the unconditional nature of the covenant of promise made with Abraham. For a complete discussion of the nature of this covenant, see *The Biblical Basis of Premillennialism*, by the author online at: www.BiblicalReader.com] The great advantage of being a Jew is not as some might suppose—“that they are the inheritors of the Law”-- but rather that they are the inheritors of the promises of God (3:3-4). It is important to recognize that Paul’s teaching on this subject comes some twenty-five years after the Jewish nation rejected Jesus as their Messiah—signifying that their rejection had not nullified the unconditional promises of God. (Paul will return to this topic in chapter eleven.) The advantage then of being a Jew is that God has made special promises uniquely to them, promises He fully intends to keep in spite of the unbelief of some Jews (3:3-4). So, of what advantage is the Law? Actually none, in so far as producing true righteousness. Its only real benefit is that through men’s failure to keep it is the righteousness of God demonstrated (that is to say, it shows man how unholy he actually is). So, the one who does not have the Law is condemned apart from the Law (by his conscience), and the one who has the Law is condemned by the Law, but in both cases the end result is the same (3:9-20). How so? Because the Law is powerless to transform sinners into saints—and we are all sinners (3:23). So, what is the solution to this problem? That’s the question Paul hopes all who read this letter will ask, and his answer is given in 3:21-8:30. Let’s now focus our attention on that answer.

(Rom. 3:21-31) But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, (22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; (23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (24) being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; (25) whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; (26) for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (27) Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. (28) For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (29) Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, (30) since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. (31) Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law. [NASB]

Paul begins by pointing out that there is a kind of righteousness available to man that cannot be obtained by means of the Law. It is the righteousness of God granted to man upon the exercise of genuine faith (v. 21). Paul wants his readers to be assured that this is not some novel idea; it was a truth clearly set forth in the Old Testament (i.e., “being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets”), and in the next chapter he will develop the Old Testament roots of this truth further, but first he wants to fully develop his explanation of the kind of faith that leads to righteousness (3:21-31). The faith that results in divine righteousness is faith in Christ, regardless of one’s status as a Jew or non-Jew (v. 22). All men are sinners (v. 23), and all must be justified as a free gift from God, through grace, if they are to be saved. This righteousness cannot be purchased or earned; it can only be received as a gift, by faith (v. 24), possible only because of the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross (v. 25). Christ’s sacrifice demonstrates God’s righteousness, because God “passed over” the sins of believers in the Old Testament era (i.e., in view of what Christ would do upon the cross, God did not carry out the judgment for their sins, but instead passed over those sins, suspending judgment, until the time that Christ finally and forever dealt with those sins upon the cross, thus the judgment of their sins fell upon Christ *cf.*, vv. 25-26). [For a more complete discussion of this subject see, *Regeneration and Indwelling in the Old Testament*, by the author, at www.BiblicalReader.com.]

Given the fact that all men, regardless of where or when they live, or their genealogical heritage, must be reconciled to God by faith apart from the works of the Law, all boasting is excluded (vv. 27-28). No one will ever contribute any righteousness, not even a speck, to that needed for his or her salvation. Does this concept in any way disparage the Law? Certainly not, because the Law was never intended for any purpose other than leading men to acknowledge this very fact, and to repent of their sins and turn to God for help. Paul now returns to an earlier thread in the discussion and seeks to establish the fact that

grace through faith is a concept that preceded the giving of the Law, and therefore the application of law is subordinate to justification by faith.

(Rom. 4:1-25) What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. (4) Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. (5) But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, (6) just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: (7) "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. (8) BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT." (9) Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." (10) How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; (11) and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, (12) and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. (13) For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; (15) for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. (16) For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (17) (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. (18) In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." (19) Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; (20) yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, (21) and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. (22) Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. (23) Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, (24) but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the

dead, (25) He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. [NASB]

Paul begins by asking: What was the experience of Abraham regarding justification? His answer is that Abraham has nothing to boast about, because he too received the righteousness that is by faith (vv. 1-3). Paul anticipated that some of his readers might confuse the relationship of this righteousness to the right of circumcision (and thus to works), so he made the observation that Abraham was declared righteous before his circumcision (vv. 9-12). In fact, circumcision had nothing to do with the obtaining of righteousness so far as Abraham was concerned. Paul contends that the promise made to Abraham and to his descendants was not to be realized through the Law, but through faith. If fulfillment were to come through the Law, then the promise would be nullified (v. 14-15). When we correctly understand the nature of the Law, as condemnatory, then we can see why the promise (both the kingdom, and the righteousness to enter it—what we commonly refer to as “salvation”) must be based upon faith, for the Law has no constructive power; it has only the power of condemnation (vv. 16-17).

Paul continues in chapter 5 to discuss the nature of grace through faith and its superiority to the Law. It ought to be obvious, but perhaps I should reiterate the observation that Paul’s entire treatise in this section—as in others—is occasioned by a flood of externalism into the church. Given the amount of space devoted to the correction of this error, it is apparent that legalism was a nearly universal problem in every church.

(Rom. 5:1-11) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (2) through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (3) And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; (4) and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (5) and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (6) For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. (8) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. (10) For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (11) And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. [NASB]

Paul says we are justified by faith; the result is peace with God. Whereas the natural man in his unsaved state is at war with God (8:7-8), the justified man is at peace with God, and anticipates sharing in God’s glory to be manifested when His promises are fulfilled

(v. 2). Though we enter into that hope through various difficulties, the result will be perseverance (v. 3), proven character (v. 4), and a hope that does not disappoint (v. 4), because it is in a God who does not break His promises. Christ died for us even while we were yet sinners. He didn't wait for the Jews (or Gentiles for that matter) to become "suitable" objects for salvation, or to commend themselves to Him through works of righteousness, for they (and we) were incapable of producing such works (v. 8). It is a hard truth for us to accept, but the fact is, God simply does not need our help to complete our salvation, nor do we have any help to offer—though we can gratefully receive His love and forgiveness, and respond from a thankful heart.

(Rom. 5:12-21) Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—(13) for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (14) Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (15) But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. (16) The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. (17) For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (18) So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. (19) For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (20) The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, (21) so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. [NASB]

When Adam fell, the entire human race fell. How this can be isn't just difficult to explain—it's impossible; nevertheless it's true. When Adam sinned, the entire human race died spiritually and the natural world was also deeply impacted in ways we are still struggling to comprehend. Even before the giving of the Law, all men eventually died—evidencing the universality of the effects of sin throughout the human race. Adam's sin was different from any other sin prior to the giving of the Law, for Adam broke a commandment from God, and until the giving of the Law there were no other commandments to be broken. Prior to the Law, all men (and women) died because they were sinners, having inherited their nature from Adam—a fallen sinner. After the Law, there was a set of commandments that could be broken; now man could be "doubly dead"—dead because of his connection to Adam and dead because of his own personal disobedience. The Law was like a blanket smothering man in condemnation, for no

sinner could keep it, not even the smallest part of it, at least inwardly, for man is sinful through to the core; every level of his being, body, soul, and spirit is under the influence of evil, selfish motives. Why did God give the Law? It was a light intended not to correct man's condition, but to expose it so the solution could be applied; that solution is grace—the grace of God manifested in Christ and His sacrifice upon the Cross, for just as through Adam's sin death spread to all men, so in Christ's one act of obedience (His death upon the Cross) there resulted justification of life to all—at is, to all who would accept it by faith (vv. 15-21, cf. 3:21-22). The question sure to arise is this: If the Law was useful in the past to show men their sinfulness, and thus their need of grace, could it not be useful for that purpose today? Certainly, the Law has been exposing sin all down through Church history—even though its covenant force ceased at the cross. This is one of the great benefits of the reading and preaching of the Old Testament: We don't have to return to slavery to learn that we don't want to be slaves. We have the record of life under the Law in Holy Writ so we can learn from the experiences of others. The fact is, if men refuse to learn these lessons from Scripture under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, they wouldn't learn them under the Law either. We don't need to return to the Law—what we need is the powerful proclamation of the whole truth of Scripture.

Paul now turns his attention to the more practical matter of life under grace, and he answers questions sure to arise in the minds of his readers.

(Rom. 6:1-14) What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? (2) May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? (3) Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, (6) knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; (7) for he who has died is freed from sin. (8) Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, (9) knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. (10) For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. (11) Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (12) Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, (13) and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (14) For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. [NASB]

Undoubtedly Paul was aware of the accusations that had been made against him concerning his teaching of grace. And he now proceeds to answer the questions of those

who might innocently misunderstand, or others who might intentionally distort his position. The first question Paul addresses is this: Does the teaching of grace imply that believers should not be concerned about sin (v. 1)? The logic Paul is addressing runs like this: The more one sins, the more grace God bestows; therefore, sin promotes grace. Paul's answer is firm: Absolutely not! Such thinking is a complete misunderstanding of grace (v. 2). Grace is not freedom to sin—it is freedom *from* sin (vv. 5-7). That release is first from sin's power (death), then from sin's perversion of the human nature (at the completion of our redemption, the redemption of the body), and finally from sin's presence (in God's eternal kingdom). What possible motivation could a regenerated person have for returning to that which killed him? Paul puts it this way: "You have died with Christ and have been raised up with Him for this purpose—that you might walk in newness of life" (vv. 3-5). The one who has faith in Christ has, in God's manner of reckoning, been crucified with Christ, in order that they should no longer be slaves to sin. How does this work? Before faith, a man or woman is a slave to sin; every part of their nature is under sin (body, soul, and spirit), but when faith comes (as a gift of God, *cf.* Eph. 2:8-9) Christ's death, with all of its sufficiency and efficacy, becomes theirs. The application of the atonement, accomplished by Christ's sacrifice, is in stages. First, the spirit is immediately and instantaneously cleansed of sin (Rom. 8:10), and the Spirit of God takes up residence within the believer infusing him with spiritual life (regeneration); then the Spirit of God works progressively to sanctify the soul—the seat of the heart and mind. Finally, God will redeem the bodies of His saints when He comes to resurrect them; this is often referred to as "glorification," but is simply the final step in the larger work of sanctification. Notice the character of this work—it is a work of redemption from the power, perversion, and presence of sin (*i.e.*, separating the believer from sin). In light of this, who would suggest that entanglement with sin could be good? There is nothing in the redemptive work of Christ that leads one toward sin. Of course, there will always be those who use grace as an excuse to sin, just as there were those in Jesus' day who distorted the intent of the Law to justify their sin. Such people are always with us, but their distortion of the truth is not an argument against the truth, it is only a memorial to their own foolishness and self-deception. Believers under grace are going to sin because they are not yet perfect as they will be; but grace, properly understood, promotes holiness and imparts the power through the regenerating and indwelling Holy Spirit to produce works consistent with righteousness (Rom. 8:3-17)—something the Law can never do. How is the power of sin broken? It is broken not by the Law, but by grace (vv. 12-14). Paul was so burdened to emphasize this truth that he repeats essentially the same arguments again in verses 15-23. He continues his argument that the believer is no longer under Law.

(Rom. 7:1-6) Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? (2) For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. (3) So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an

adulteress though she is joined to another man. (4) Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. (5) For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. (6) But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. [NASB]

Paul continues his argument by drawing upon a concept with which his readers were already familiar—the concept that the law of marriage is binding until death (vv. 1-3). He then takes them to the next level of the argument by explaining that their participation by faith in Christ’s death had caused them to die to the Law, that they might be married to another—that is, to Christ Himself (v. 4). This transfer from bondage to the Law, to being joined to Christ is the only way believers can bear spiritual fruit. In fact, Paul points out that the Law actually “arouses” sinful passions (v. 5). How so? It is a simple, and apparently a universal truth that when you tell a sinner not to do something, that’s the very thing they will desire to do! (Parents of small children learn this concept quite early.) True righteousness cannot be produced by the prescription of external regulations; it is the product of a transformed life (v. 6); Paul calls it “newness of spirit” (not “Spirit” as the NASB has it, but “spirit,” *i.e.*, the renewed, regenerated spirit within the believer). It has been said previously, but is worth repeating, that the Law cannot produce righteousness; even acts of outward obedience to the Law must be distinguished from righteousness. Righteousness is more than outward obedience; it is obedience from the heart—an obedience that exalts God and responds to His sovereignty over one’s life; thus true righteousness is obedience that is borne out of the love of God (just as sin is borne out of the love of self). Such acts of righteousness only come forth from one who has been regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

(Rom. 7:7-12) What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “YOU SHALL NOT COVET.” (8) But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. (9) I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; (10) and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; (11) for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. (12) So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. [NASB]

If the Law arouses sinful passions (v. 5), is it then bad in some way? Paul’s answer is an absolute “No!” It’s not the fault of the Law that we are sinners incited by the words “Thou shalt not!” On the contrary, apart from the Law we would not know what sin is (v. 7). Unfortunately, the more a sinner discovers about sin, the more he is drawn to it

(v. 8); this is not the fault of the Law, but the perverseness of our fallen nature. The principle we have to take away from this discussion is that by the Law is the knowledge of sin, and that knowledge does not produce righteousness, it produces a downward spiral of condemnation and more sin. The Law can be useful in the hands of the Holy Spirit to draw God's elect unto Himself, but it can never produce righteousness, nor can it bring about God's kingdom. Nevertheless, the Law does still serve an instructive purpose--it shows man his sin.

Paul next focuses on the heart of the problem. There is nothing really wrong with the Law, it's just that our problem can't be solved from the outside; it can only be solved through a process of sanctification, which begins within man's innermost being.

(Rom. 7:13-25) Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. (14) For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. (15) For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. (16) But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. (17) So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. (18) For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. (19) For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. (20) But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. (21) I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. (22) For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, (23) but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. (24) Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? (25) Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. [NASB]

Paul begins by describing the perplexing situation in which he found himself—and which is true of everyone who has begun the process of sanctification; he found that he is not doing the good that his inner man desired, but rather the very thing he doesn't desire—that is, “sin” (v. 15). In so saying, he is not disparaging the Law, rather he is acknowledging his sin, as evidenced by the fact that he agrees with the Law that his sin is, in fact, “sin” (v. 16). Antinomianism, on the other hand, denies either the reality of, or responsibility for sin; thus Paul's statement can never properly be labeled as “antinomian.” By acknowledging his sin for what it is, Paul is in effect confessing agreement with the Law—not that he is under the Law, but that sin is always sin, even for a person under grace. Being under grace doesn't change the nature of sin, but it does change how that sin is dealt with. Under the Law there were legal prescriptions for

dealing with sin (albeit symbolic rather than efficacious). Under the Law, Paul would have observed these outward legal prescriptions (which would have had no efficacy, but would have reminded him of the redemption to come in the work of Messiah); however, under grace Paul experienced conviction wrought by the indwelling Spirit of God and the recognition that his only acceptability before God is based upon God's gift of righteousness through faith in Christ. Would Paul have been better off under the Law? Would he have been less likely to sin? Of course not, sin is a universal problem whether under Law or grace. For anyone who is tempted to think that the application of Old Testament Law would make an individual or a society more righteous, they should carefully study the history of ancient Israel; that history is filled with idolatry, social injustice, and personal and national sin of every sort (Acts 7:1-53).

Paul makes a very interesting statement in verse 17. He says, in essence, "I'm not the one doing these things, but the sin dwelling in me is doing them." Is Paul attempting to sidestep responsibility for his sins? No, he has already acknowledged responsibility (v. 15), but he is revealing a profound insight into the nature of salvation, of which one of the components is sanctification (separation from sin). He reveals here that sanctification is a progressive work. When he came to faith in Christ, something happened within him, he became a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17), his inner man (i.e., his spirit, 7:22 *cf.* 8:10) was sanctified (made holy). Now that inner man, living in continual union (fellowship) with the Holy Spirit desires only to please God. So why did Paul as a believer continue to struggle with sin? Because only part of his nature—his spirit—was sanctified; his flesh (a euphemism for the rest of his human nature which includes the body and soul) was still un sanctified, and will not experience complete sanctification until he is transformed in Christ's presence (1 Thess. 5:23). Until that time, Paul and all believers struggle with sin (vv. 21-25). Why did Paul share his deeply personal struggle? Because he knew it to be a universal struggle—one we all face, and need to own up to.

Having addressed the universality of the struggle with sin, Paul is now ready to deal with the question of how the believer is to live in light of this struggle—not through the application of legal prescriptions, but through inner transformation by the Spirit of God.

(Rom. 8:1-11) Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (3) For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, (4) so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (5) For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, (7) because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, (8) and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (9) However, you

are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (10) If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. (11) But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. [NASB]

For the sinner (and we are all sinners, even those of us who have come to Christ by faith) there is no greater truth in Scripture than that expressed in Romans 8:1. We may be sinners, and we are not proud of it, yet for those in Christ there is no condemnation. Paul tells us why in the next three verses: It is because Christ has fulfilled the Law for us (v. 4), that is, for those who are not seeking to be justified by the deeds of the flesh (i.e., by works). The Christian life is a Spirit-led life. We are saved by faith, and we are transformed into Christ's image, little by little, by faith, as we "walk by the Spirit." God knows that changing a man's outer behavior only produces a self-righteous legalist who begins to compare himself to others externally; but changing a man or a woman from within produces the kind of true humility and brokenness over sin that we see evidenced in Paul's own experience, a brokenness that exalts only God and refuses to gauge itself by what others do or don't do. Do you see why the principle of law doesn't mix with grace? A man cannot operate by both principles. If he chooses to be governed by law he will either experience condemnation and shame, or he will convince himself that he can meet the requirements, in which case he becomes a legalist. On the other hand, if he chooses to be governed by grace, he admits that he is a needy sinner, able to please God only through the enablement of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and that though he might fail a thousand, or a million times, God loves him nonetheless and is there to move him forward no matter what circumstance he may have created for himself. Those who claim that teaching grace is to give license to sin, evidence in their thinking that they have already become legalists, for they have bought into the notion that external regulation produces righteousness--but they are wrong. It is the uniform testimony of Scripture, that only the work of the Spirit within the heart of man can produce true works of righteousness.

(Rom. 8:12-17) So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—(13) for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (15) For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. [NASB]

Does grace mean that the believer simply gives up on living righteously? Certainly not. We are under obligation, but it is not an obligation to the flesh, nor is it an obligation to

the Law, but rather an obligation to the Spirit. In fact, Paul goes so far as to say that it is those who are being led by the Spirit who are the sons of God (v. 14). Does this sound like an abandonment to sin? Those who know Christ as Savior do not serve Him out of the fear of retribution (the principle of law), but because they have been adopted into a new family, and God has become their Father (v. 15).

(Rom. 8:18-30) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope (21) that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (23) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (24) For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? (25) But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (26) In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; (27) and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (28) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (30) and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. [NASB]

God cursed the world when man fell; He did that in order to make redemption possible (vv. 19-22), and in the meantime life is difficult, but God is at work doing what man cannot do for himself. God gives those who place their faith in Christ His Spirit, that is to say, He implants the Holy Spirit within them, both as a guarantee of the completed redemption to come (Eph. 1:13-14) and as a helper at the present time (Rom. 8:26). Ultimately, it is God who sees the believer through this process (vv. 28-30). It isn't up to the believer to save himself, or to sanctify himself, or to glorify himself; all of this is God's work, man is the object—not the subject in the salvation process.

Paul isn't quite finished with the conflict between law and grace. He points out the reason for Israel's failure (9:30-10:21), and their ultimate conversion through the triumph of faith (11:1-32).

(Rom. 9:30-10:15) What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; (31) but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. (32) Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, (33) just as it is written, “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” (10:1) Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. (2) For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. (3) For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. (4) For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (5) For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. (6) But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: “DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?’ (that is, to bring Christ down), (7) or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).” (8) But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, (9) that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; (10) for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (11) For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” (12) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; (13) for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” (14) How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? (15) How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”

Paul begins with this enigma: How is it that the Gentiles, who were not pursuing righteousness, attained righteousness; while the Jews, who were pursuing righteousness, failed to obtain it? The answer, Paul says, is because the Jews were pursuing righteousness through works of the Law, rather than by faith; and since the Law is powerless to produce righteousness, the Jews failed (though some few—like Paul—did obtain righteousness by faith). While the Jews were seeking their own righteousness, in accordance with the Law, they failed to subject themselves to the righteousness of God, which is by faith (10:1-3). Why? Because faith and law are mutually exclusive. The Law does not lead one to Christ until he or she gives up and confesses that they are unable to keep the Law. As long as one thinks he can keep it, he is under the delusion of self-righteousness. This is why in verse 4 Paul says, “For Christ is the end of the Law to

everyone who believes.” How many times must he repeat this? Faith can only begin when a person realizes they cannot keep the Law, and that is just as true of a saved sinner as it is of an unsaved sinner! Attempting to keep the law is the ultimate self-deception. In order to think we can, we have to be under the assumption that we can do what only God can do—that is, to ascend into Heaven (v. 6), or descend into hell and rise again (v. 7). In essence, when we seek to obtain our perfection by the law, we make ourselves out to be “God!” Paul seems to be implying that legalism is actually a form of idolatry. The key to righteousness is not the Law, but faith in Christ (vv. 9-12).

Can the Law transform a believer into a more spiritual person? According to Paul, the answer is, “No.” As we have seen, the Apostle repeatedly refutes the notion that Law plays any part in our perfection. The Law is powerless to bring about anything but condemnation and death, and it is incompatible with the concept of inner transformation by the power of the Spirit on the basis of grace through faith. Do we need to know about the Law and man’s failure under law historically? Of course we do. The Holy Spirit can use that as He can all other Scripture to our benefit, but that is not the same as being subject to the Law’s condemnation.

Conclusions From Paul’s Teaching

From the passages we have surveyed one thing is abundantly clear—the New Testament provides no support for legalism. The New Testament writers were emphatic in stating that the promises made to Abraham—which include both eternal salvation and the kingdom—can be obtained only through faith, and they are equally emphatic that faith and Law cannot co-exist. This doesn’t deny the goodness of the Law (when properly understood for what it was intended), nor does it result in antinomianism, as is sometimes alleged, rather it leads to the recognition of a higher law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, a different kind of law with transforming power.

There is a reason the word “gospel” was chosen to describe the message of Christ’s atoning work. The word “gospel” means “good news.” Before the cross, the message received from the Law was bad news—news of death and eternal condemnation (Rom. 7:9-10). The gospel of Christ is the good news of freedom, life and righteousness, provided on the basis of grace through faith in Christ, plus nothing. The voice of legalism is not the voice of the New Testament gospel (Gal. 1:6-8)—it is the voice of slavery, death, and despair. It is, as Paul pronounced, a tainted and “accused gospel,” which proceeds from the rationalizing mind that has yet to comprehend the transforming power of the true gospel of grace through faith alone.

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