

Dead to the Law

A Study on Romans 7:1-6

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Controversy has raged among Christians for centuries as to the relationship of the believer in Christ to the Mosaic Law. This is no easy subject, but the key to the solution is found primarily in the writings of Paul.

In Christian circles today there are three general viewpoints concerning the Mosaic Law:

1. Seventh Day Adventists believe that the Christian is under every aspect of the Mosaic Law with the exception of the ceremonial part. Thus, Christians are to meet on the Sabbath Day, the seventh day of the week.
2. A great portion of Christendom believes that the spiritual aspects of the Mosaic Law are binding on all Christians because Christians are “spiritual Israel.” Thus they believe that the Sabbath has been changed from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week.
3. Other Christians (and I am among these) believe that the Christian is under no aspect of the Mosaic Law whatsoever, but meets with other Christians on the Lord’s Day (first day of the week) for instruction in the Word, fellowship, prayer, and the Lord’s Table. Christians are under the New Covenant, and our law is the Law of Christ which is a higher law than the Law of Moses, and is a more perfect reflection of God’s eternal moral law.

I will not attempt to refute the above positions, but will set forth what I believe concerning the Christian’s relationship to the Mosaic Law. But before we can give an exposition of Romans 7:1-6, we must have some background concerning the Law.

THE GIVING OF THE MOSAIC LAW

The Mosaic Law was given to the nation of Israel (Ex. 19:1-8), and was a gracious provision of God to keep the Israelite nation separate from the Gentile world. It was composed of 613 individual laws that may be divided into three general categories: (1) moral (hundreds of commands and the Decalogue); (2) ceremonial (the tabernacle, feasts, priesthood, circumcision, offerings, etc.); and (3) civil (having to do with community, such

as sanitation, rotation of crops, quarantine, diet, etc.). It is obvious that the Law was designed particularly for the nation of Israel.

The Law is a unit, and if one aspect is to be kept, then every aspect is to be kept:

“For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law” (Gal. 5:3).

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

The Law was given as a rule of life for Israel, and it was never intended to be a way of salvation. Salvation in every age has always been by grace through faith. A Jew gave evidence of his saving faith by his desire to conform to the teachings of the Mosaic Law.

The Law had strict penalties and punishments for those who failed to keep it. In some cases, like picking up sticks on the Sabbath, it imposed the punishment of physical death.

THE END OF THE MOSAIC LAW AS A RULE OF LIFE

Christians are not under Law but under grace: “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law but under grace. What then? shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Rom. 6:14-15).

Those led by the Spirit (all Christians) are not under the Law but under the new law of the Holy Spirit: “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” (Gal. 5:18).

Christ is the end of the Mosaic Law for all who believe in Christ: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom. 10:4).

It is evident that all are not under the Law: “And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 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” (1 Cor. 9:20-21).

Christ, in his death, ended the authority of the Mosaic Law for the Christian: “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Col. 2:14).

These are just a few verses to show that the Christian is no longer bound to the Mosaic Law as a way of life. The Christian is now under the Law of Christ; he is free from every aspect of the Mosaic Law as a way of life.

THREE REACTIONS TO THE END OF THE LAW

One reaction to the end of the Law for Christians is legalism. The legalist believes that sin cannot be curbed unless man is put back under the Law, either totally or partially.

The libertine or antinomian reacts by thinking that if he is not under the Mosaic Law, then he is free from all restraints and can do as he pleases.

The law-abiding Christian understands the grace of God and realizes that he is not under the Mosaic Law as a rule of life. He also realizes there are many moral and spiritual principles in the Mosaic Law which are reflections of the will of God for believers in any age. Those aspects of the Law which deal with moral, ethical and spiritual principles he delights to obey through the indwelling Holy Spirit. "Thou shalt not steal, commit adultery, lie, kill, or covet," etc., are binding principles throughout the ages, for these laws are a reflection of the holiness of God.

All the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament except one — the fourth: Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. But even this commandment may be carried over to New Testament Christians. It is a creation ordinance; one day in seven rightly belongs to the Lord. However, the "rest" of the Sabbath and the "rest" of the Lord's Day are different because we live in a different age.

THE ARGUMENT OF ROMANS 7:1-6

In the sixth chapter of Romans Paul said that the Christian is not under Law but under grace. A Jew who heard Paul make this statement would have accused him of blasphemy because a Jew's whole religion was bound up in keeping the Law for salvation and sanctification. So, in chapter Seven Paul explained why and how the Christian is free from the Mosaic Law.

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS 7:1-6

“Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?” The Mosaic Law is binding on a person only as long as he is alive. When he dies, the Law has no authority over him.

“For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.” Paul uses the illustration of marriage to show how the Christian is no longer under the Mosaic Law. A woman is bound in marriage to her husband until he dies. When he dies, she is no longer bound, but is free to marry another.

“So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.” A woman is an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is living (if she does not have a biblical reason for divorce). If he dies, she is free to remarry and live with another man without being an adulteress. She is not bound by the law of her first husband.

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ.” The Law is still in force, but not for the Christian. Christ’s death brought an end to the Mosaic Law as a way of life. The Christian shares Christ’s death through union with him. Thus, the Christian has died to the Mosaic Law. He sustains a new relationship to the Law, for it no longer has authority over him nor is it a rule of life for him.

Frank and Jessie James were two notorious outlaws. The law said that if they were ever caught alive they would either spend 100 years in jail or hang until dead. One day Frank and Jessie were holding up a bank, and just as they were getting the money from the tellers the sheriff and his posse caught them red-handed. The sheriff said, “Up with your hands you dirty, low-down, bank-robbing varmints!” Jessie and Frank fired at the sheriff and made a break for the back door of the bank, but their luck ran out. The sheriff and his men shot both of them dead. Then the sheriff said, “I’m glad I shot them, but I wish they were living so I could see them hanging by their necks. But there is no hope of that, for they are dead. Now the law of the land can’t touch them and has no authority over them.” Why? They were dead to the law.

“That ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead.” The Christian is dead to the Mosaic Law and is united to another, Jesus Christ. When we are Christians, the Law no longer has dominion (lords it) over us, but Christ becomes our new Lord.

“That we should bring forth fruit unto God.” Through faith in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Christian can now bring forth spiritual fruit (good works) for God. What he produces is not because of the Mosaic Law, but through Jesus Christ. It is not through an impersonal law but through a person, Jesus Christ, that he can live unto God.

“For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” In our unsaved state, the Mosaic Law simply aroused our sinfulness, and this brought spiritual death. The Law condemned us and proved us sinners.

“But now we are [have been] delivered [discharged] from the law, that being dead wherein we were held.” Here is a clear statement that the Christian has been completely discharged from the Mosaic Law as a rule of life.

“That we should serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” God has written his law upon our hearts through the person of Christ. We have been set free from the Mosaic Law to live by means of the Holy Spirit, not by a legal system which has been superseded by a new covenant (Heb. 8:6-13).

CONCLUSION

The Christian is free forever from the Mosaic Law for salvation or sanctification, for his rule of life is the Law of Christ, not the Mosaic Law. Yet many people today believe that if they do their best to keep the Ten Commandments, God will accept them. Actually, the Ten Commandments only prove that we are sinners because no one has ever kept the Mosaic Law perfectly. The Law points to the fact that we are sinners, and the gospel points us to the truth that Christ died for sinners. If you will believe in Christ as your personal Saviour, he will give you forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He will also come into your life and give you the power to produce the righteousness of the Law in your life.