

# Law, Grace and The Believer

by Pastor Bill Reed

## Introduction

The beauty of God's Word is that it is timeless. The problems that the early Christian church fathers faced and addressed in their letters to various local assemblies, are as real today as they were then. And the solutions to those problems which Peter, Paul, James, and John brought forth inspired by God are as relevant to deliverance from and victory over those problems today as they were then. One of the greatest dangers facing the early church was the misunderstanding of the law and grace in regards to salvation, both from the penalty of sin and from the power of sin. The misunderstanding continues to this day, and divides the Body of Christ and hinders individuals as well as corporate maturity.

It is our desire to present the biblical facts concerning law and grace, so that the believer will be set free to worship God in spirit and in truth. It is not my desire to divide the body of Christ, God knows we have enough schism! Yet it is my hope to unite us all to the mind of Christ, by once and for all separating the believer from the error, that keeps many in bondage, knowing that the truth will set us free.

## The Law, What Is It?

When we use the word 'law' in this pamphlet, we will be using it the way God did in the gospels. Out of forty-one times it is used in the gospels, thirty-four of those times it refers to the Mosaic Law given at Sinai. Now this Mosaic Law was in three parts:

The Decalogue or the Ten Commandments which is known as the moral law.

The Ceremonial Law, which was given throughout Israel's history to govern their feasts, their sacrifices, and their priestly functions. Some were before Moses, such as circumcision. (Genesis 17)

Civil law, to govern society interaction.

The majority of the New Testament references deal with the moral aspect of the Decalogue and the ceremonial aspect of the Law, therefore we will examine these in relation to the believer. As we get started, it is important to understand that “the Law is holy and the commandment holy, and just, and good,” as revealed in Romans 7:12. It is equally important to understand that the Law being “holy”, was given with a precise purpose. Therefore, we must examine the Holy Scriptures and let them speak to us truth concerning the purpose of the Law. For once the purpose of the Law is understood, grace can then be properly perceived and received.

## What is the Purpose of the Law?

Did God speak to Moses the moral law on Sinai, to reveal to him and to mankind the way for man to be justified in His sight? In other words, was the Law given to show men that the way to be justified in God's sight was through obedience to the Law? Let us, without prejudice, seek God's word for our answer, not denominational upbringing and human opinion. Let us with meekness receive God's word by faith. Paul the apostle tells us in Romans 3:19, that, **“the law speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God.”** Now let us notice upon closer examination that it **“speaks to those who are under the law”**. Now that is very clear. Therefore it does not speak to the believer since the believer is **“not under the law but under grace.”** (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 5:18)

Now most believers today that hear or read this truth, will try to rationalize this portion of God's word, because they live in natural viewpoint and not divine illumination. Why can't we just believe that we **“are not under the Law”**, and then seek God's word for further truth in this matter. Now since it is clear that the Law does speak to those under the Law, and it is true that the believer is not under the Law but under grace, the Law must be speaking to the unbelievers. Now follow this carefully, the Law speaks to the unbeliever so that, “every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God.” Notice it does not say that the Law speaks of deliverance or becoming just before God. But it speaks of guilt. The Law reveals the perfect standard of God and it exposes the sins of the unbeliever producing guilt. It is by the Law that the unbeliever discovers what is sin.

**“I had not known sin, but by the law. For I had not known lust except the Law had said, thou shalt not covet.”** (Rom. 7:7)

**“For by the law is the knowledge of sin”** (Rom.3:20)

So the Law was given to expose the sinfulness of humanity, to stop our mouths from blaming others and making excuses for our sin, and to stop us from judging others. It produces guilt in the conscience of the unbeliever. Now if this were the end of the Law's purpose, we would be most miserable. But in the book of Galatians, we see the **“line upon line, precept upon precept”**, continuation of truth, that the Law was **“our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.”** (Gal. 3:24) The Greek word for schoolmaster is *“paidagogos”*, which refers to an instructor who leads from the place of ignorance to maturity. So the Law, by revealing the sinfulness of the unbeliever and producing guilt, instructs the unbeliever that he or she needs a savior from those sins and the resulting guilt. That savior being Jesus Christ!

The ignorance that the unbeliever is lead away from is the ignorance of thinking that by obedience to the law he or she can be justified. Now before you get to worked up over this statement lets see what God's word has to say:

**“By the deeds of the law (obedience) there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.”** (Rom.3:20)

**“We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”** (Rom. 3:28)

**“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”** (Gal. 2:16)

I believe it is very clear, that no one will be justified by obedience to the Law. For a man to be justified by the law he would have to be perfect in his fulfillment of the law. Not one slight deviation, not one slip in disobedience. **“For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”** (James 2:10)

I hope as you read this pamphlet, you see the beautiful truth revealed in God's Word. Since we have all sinned, (Rom.3:23) and come short of God's glory, and God's own Word reveals that there is none good, no not one, (Rom. 3:10) then I ask you, how can we ever think that by obedience to the Law we can be justified? It is only by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ that any of us can be justified. Romans 8:3 tells us that **“the law was weak through the flesh”**, this means that the Law could not produce righteousness in a man because the flesh in man, or his sin nature, could not perform the duties required by the Law perfectly. Therefore verse three also reveals to us that **“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”**.

If mankind could have obtained salvation through the keeping of the Law, then Jesus Christ would not have needed to die in our place. His plan is perfect. We receive a sin nature, imputed to us, because of the disobedience of one man, Adam. (Rom.5:12; 18; 19) This at first seems unfair to us, but then we read that we can receive the **“abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness”** (Rom.5:17) by the obedience of one man Jesus Christ. (Rom.5:19) That is the beautiful plan of God's salvation whereby he justifies the ungodly, whose faith in Christ is counted for righteousness. (Rom.4:5) **“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.”** (Rom. 4:1-2)

### **What Did Abraham Discover About His Flesh?**

The answer is obvious, he found his flesh to be sinful. If justification came by works, Abraham could glory in the facts of his obedience. Hebrews 11:8-19 even boasts of his accomplishments in the divinely inspired scripture. God, Himself, boasts in his servant's accomplishments.

### **But What Was His Accomplishment?**

Verse eight says it was faith, verse nine says it was faith, and verse seventeen says it was faith! Do you get the picture? Before men, he could boast in his work but not before God. God recognized his faith not his works.

### **What About James Chapter Two?**

There are many believers today that use James 2:14-26 to teach justification before God by works. Then, in error, teach the possibility of losing salvation quoting, **“Faith, without works, is dead.”** Now, there is either a contradiction in the word of God, in regards to this matter, seeing that Romans 4:2 clearly states, that if Abraham **“were justified by works he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.”** Romans 4:6 states, **“God imputeth righteousness without works.”** Galatians 2:16 clearly states, **“That a man is not justified by the works of the law -- for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”** Now to make it even clearer to the reader, I will give you one more verse on the side of justification in the sight of God by faith alone, without works of the Law, even though there are many more. Galatians 2:21 says, **“If righteousness comes by the Law, then Christ is dead in vain.”** It is obvious from the overwhelming evidence of scripture, God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5), freely by grace, (Rom. 3:24) apart from the works of the law, (Rom. 4:6; Gal. 2:16) by faith. (Rom. 5:1) Therefore, either James contradicts Paul, or there must be an interpretation of James chapter two that lines up with the rest of Scripture.

Since we believe the book of James to be inspired by God, then we know that there is no contradiction concerning justification in the sight of God. The principles of interpretation force us to look for another possible interpretation for James chapter two, since the most popular one today, goes against an overwhelming amount of scriptural evidence of justification in the sight of God, by grace through faith alone.

Therefore, I believe that James is not speaking about being justified in the Sight of God, but in the sight of men. Now carefully notice the context of James 1:6-8, he begins by encouraging them not to waver and to be double minded. Then James informs them that they should receive with meekness the engrafted Word of God, which is able to save their souls.

Now, here is where the beginning of error comes. The majority of believers *think* James is speaking about saving their souls from the penalty of sin and hell fire, which he is not! James is *speaking about saving their souls from the 'power of sin'* and is warning them that wavering and double mindedness will result in self-deception and lack of blessing from God. (1:22-25)

Now, James continues with practical exhortation to live godly and to be a doer of God's word and not just a hearer. (1:22) Then notice carefully that he speaks of the **“royal law of love”**(2:8) this not being the Law of Moses, but the law given to the believer who is under grace to **“love thy neighbor as thyself.”**(2:8) He then reminds them that if they violate the law in one point they are guilty of all. (2:10) Then he begins to speak about judgment. Yes this is a judgment for the believer (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:8-16), but it is not a judgment for the believer's sins since Christ was judged in our place for our sins. And it will not be a judgment to determine whether we will have entrance into heaven. Entrance into heaven and the gift of eternal life is entirely **“by grace through faith”**, in the Finished Work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. (Eph.2:8-9; John 19:30) and Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly tell us it is **“not of works”**. So this judgment, spoken of by James, is the judgment of the believers works (1 Cor. 3:8-16) and First Corinthians 3:15 clearly states that there will be those who will suffer loss (of rewards), **“but he himself shall be saved.”**

James then encourages them to exhibit mercy one to another, so that at this judgment of works, they will receive mercy, **“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; for mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”** (2:13)

Now don't get weary in reading, for we are about to reveal the interpretation, of James that agrees with Paul's teaching, concerning the believers justification. James 2:14 says, **“What doth it profit my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?”** So many *misunderstand* this Passage because they don't consider the context as we have here. And what does the context help us to understand? That if a man professes to believe in Jesus Christ and does not yield to the Spirit in his daily walk, he will have no Spirit-produced works, but only works of the flesh. He will obviously then **not** be operating in mercy, since the giving of mercy is a work of the Spirit.

I ask you then -- will his profession of faith save him from a harsh judgment at the judgment of works for the believer? The answer is again obvious -- **no!** But the believer who exhibits mercy to others that fail, living in the royal law of Love, will face the Judge of our works, unafraid seeing that the Judge will take into account the mercy that the believer demonstrated on earth.

James continues on with a practical illustration that if someone is in need and the believer shows no mercy towards the one in need, his faith is dead, or useless to the one in need. (2:15-17) James then writes that his faith in God will have a demonstration of good works, because **“faith without works is dead.”** Now verse twenty-one tells us that, **“Abraham was justified by works”** but this is not speaking about justification in the sight of God for salvation, but it speaks of *Abraham being justified in the sight of men* because he followed up his profession with good works.

Faith without works is dead, or unable to save us from judgment at the believers judgment for his works, and has no ability to save us from the misery sin causes on this earth. So you see this has nothing to do with obedience to the law of Moses but everything to do with obedience to the royal law of love, and it has nothing to do with loss of salvation but the loss of rewards and mercy at the judgment for the believers works.

**“Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets, I am not come to destroy but to fulfill for verily I say unto you till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law -- until all be fulfilled.” (Matt.5:17-24)**

Jesus Christ has fulfilled the law. And through the imputation of his righteousness to us, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us. (Rom.8:4) Let us not **“frustrate the grace of God”** (Gal. 2:21) by living in human opinion, but let us proclaim the salvation message of grace throughout the world, even in the face of Pharisaical, modern-day Judiaizers who try to get us back under the Law.

**And remember:**

- **You are saved by grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- **You stand in grace** (Romans 5:2)
- **You grow in grace** (2 Peter 3:18)
- **You serve by grace** (Hebrews. 12: 28).
- **Grace teaches us, the believer, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts** (Titus 2:11-12)