

Are You Living Under the Law?

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Scripture References: 2 Cor. 11:4, Gal. 1-5

One of the problems I see while traveling around America today is the same one Paul had to address in his time with the churches under his apostleship and for the same reason. I've seen this problem for over 20 years but it doesn't seem to be abating; in fact, it's probably worse now because so many churches are in the Apostasy Paul spoke about in his letters to Timothy and the churches.

The problem exists, too, for the same reason that Paul had to address to the Church at Corinth and the Galatian church(es). The problem was brought about through false teaching and false apostles. There were many different *versions* of this false teaching and false gospel then and there are many more today; however, one of the main ones in Paul's time were the *Judaizers*. This was a sect who taught that Christians had to be circumcised and live under the Law of Moses – in effect, they had to become Jews first and keep the Law to be Christians.

In the Book of Acts you'll note that this problem became so contentious that the Apostles at Jerusalem had to convene a council to deal with the problem. Peter, because of the vision and *revelation* the Lord gave him (Acts 10) was a leading spokesman along with the Apostle James (Jesus' half-brother) who had obviously studied the Scriptures on the issue because he got the *revelation* and corroboration to support Peter and Paul's ministry to the Gentiles from Amos 9:11-12 (*cf.* Acts 15).

Today we have different versions of the Judaizers such as Seventh Day Adventist and others who simply refer to themselves as "Sabbath Keepers." Many of these sects are Pentecostal. You find them more in the northern states than in the Bible belt of the South. I think this is primarily due to the fact that much of the Bible belt is dominated by Southern Baptist churches who, though not Spirit-filled, know much more about salvation than most Pentecostals, Methodists, Nazarenes, etc.

When we first moved to Libby, Montana, and went on the radio, we met a couple who eventually attended the CCI church we started there in 2002. The husband was President of the Full Gospel Businessman's Fellowship and he had formerly been a

Mormon. They asked us to go to dinner with them and we learned that they were heavily into Jewish dancing. Now I don't see anything wrong with Jewish dancing but during our fellowship over dinner some ideas were brought out by them concerning Jewish Law and Christians that prompted me to say, "Well, perhaps you should spend quite a bit of time reading and meditating in the books of Galatians and Hebrews."

Christian friends, the Apostle Paul, writing under direction of the Holy Spirit, totally **annihilates** any idea that Christians are under any part of the Law. We're going to discuss his argument because you need to settle forever in your heart the notion that any part of the Law is applicable to those "in Christ." Remember, Paul studied under Gamaliel, the most noted authority on Jewish law of his day, so if anybody knew the Law well it was Paul.

Today, however, most of these sects don't teach that a Christian has to keep all of the Law (an impossible task) – they're not (yet) looking for the Red Heifer – but rather only a portion of it, e.g., worshiping on the Sabbath, not eating pork, etc. Where do they get these ideas? Primarily it comes from the same reason Jesus addressed with the Pharisees and Sadducees of His time – "not understanding the Scriptures."

Interestingly, the Sabbath was one of the main, if not the main, areas where Jesus encountered conflict with these religious leaders and it's because as He told them, they didn't understand the Sabbath!

The fact that these very studious *Lawyers, Pharisees and Sadducees* of Jesus' time did not understand God's theology very well does not bode well for most "pastors" and theologians in our time, especially in Pentecostal or charismatic churches. My observation is these churches have always tended to be weak where the Word was concerned although they used to be strong in the area of the Spirit. You need both for a balanced spiritual life – the Spirit and the Word. Most evangelical churches are weak where the Spirit is concerned because they have neither the experience nor the teaching about the Holy Spirit and His gifts, etc.

However, Pentecostal type churches tend to be weak where the Word is concerned in that they rarely ground their people in the basics of covenant, salvation, etc., that traditional evangelical churches used to do. For example, when I became Spirit-filled 30 years ago and began attending charismatic churches I was shocked at their theology. In particular the lack of hermeneutics in basic homiletics (preaching/teaching) that a person learns in seminary or some Bible schools.

Hermeneutics, from the Greek word *hermeneuo*, deals with the science of Bible interpretation and it refers to a process of scriptural interpretation. Its earliest example dates to 515 B.C. during the Second Temple era of the Jews. It is important for you to have a basic understanding of hermeneutics and exegesis in biblical interpretation. Often the two terms are used interchangeably but they should not be. A hermeneutic is a *practical* application of a certain method or theory of interpretation

that often revolves around the contemporary relevance whereas an *exegesis* of a particular text is on the basis of the text itself.

When I began attending charismatic churches back in the '70s I was shocked to hear all the preachers using scriptures from all over the Bible as if, because the Holy Spirit wrote them and they were in the Bible, they were interchangeable and applied to us today, especially those from the Old Testament. You simply cannot do this. Now, if the Spirit gives you a *rhema* word from the Old Testament, e.g., He says, "Go read Is. 65:3" then that is different; He is speaking to you from that text. But you simply cannot take Old Testament passages and apply them to the Church or yourself indiscriminately.

Let me be very clear here, however, so you don't misunderstand because I get a lot of *revelation* about God and the Church today from the Old Testament every day. This doesn't mean you cannot learn principles about God, His nature, right and wrong, etc., from the Old Testament but you cannot strictly apply these scriptures to yourself or the Church, e.g., the Ten Commandments. This is an area where many Christians get angry because they've been taught the Ten Commandments all their life but the fact is the Ten Commandments were not given to the Church! They were given to Israel in the dispensation of the Law and the Church is not under the Law as Paul so aptly argues. That doesn't mean it's okay to commit adultery or to steal or to have other gods; clearly it's not okay but one of the main points of Bible interpretation for all Scriptures is, "Who is this text given to?" In this example, who did God give the Ten Commandments to? The Ten Commandments has been superseded in The New Testament by The Royal Law – the law of love as taught by Jesus and also later by Apostle's James and Paul (Matthew 22: 36-40, Romans 13 8-10, James 2:8).

Jesus came to free us and all mankind from the Law; Paul's argument is that the Law was given to bring us to Christ; it was a "schoolmaster" in that it teaches us that no human being can keep the Law. Often when I discuss this with Sabbath Keepers they will defend the Law and respond (always) that Jesus came to fulfill the Law. That's true but they don't understand how He did it. He fulfilled the Law by living a perfect, sin-free life and was the only "man" ever able to do so. By fulfilling the Law He was able to set us free from the Law and death.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

An interesting fact I shared in *The High Calling of God* in the chapter on covenant has to do with the word translated, Gentile. The word comes from the Hebrew, *goi*, and the Greek word, *ethne*, from which we get our word ethnic and it referred to any distinct group of people not a blood descendant of Abraham. In the Old Testament it generally meant any group of people not from the 12 tribes of Israel; however, it's usage changes in the New Testament to any group of people outside the Body of Christ. This change shows the New Testament position Paul holds to that the New

Covenant includes both “Jews and Greeks”; in other words, the Church is comprised of Jewish converts as well as previous Gentiles. This distinction shows that the Church is a blood descendant of Abraham through Jesus Christ.

Paul fought many false gospels, false teachers, false prophets and doctrinal errors in his day; we must do the same if we are to be good *apologists* and “earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” (Jude 3)

Paul’s gospel is very clear and we should make no mistake about it and the position he sets forth very forcefully in Galatians:

1. We are not under the Law but rather under Grace.
2. He received his gospel by revelation directly from the Lord. (1:11)
3. Whether Jew or “Gentile sinner,” “a man is not justified by observing the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.” (2:15-16)
4. You cannot receive the Holy Spirit by “observing the Law.” (3:2)
5. It is foolish “after beginning with the Spirit” by faith in Jesus Christ to “now try to attain your goal by human effort [keeping the Law].” (3:3)
6. “Those who believe are children of Abraham.” (3:7)
7. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us ... that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” (3:13-14). This was the main stumbling blocks to the Jews of Paul’s day in receiving Jesus as their Messiah; they knew He was “hung on a tree” and so under the Law was cursed. They did not understand the fact that this did away with the Law and that Jesus became sin (a curse) for us so that we might be free from sin.
8. The Law given 430 years after the covenant promise to Abraham “does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.” (3:17)
9. “What then was the purpose of the law? It was added because of sin” (3:19) and “The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin” (3:22)
10. “Before faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law as put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.” (3:23-24)
11. “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” (3:25)
12. If you have become free through Christ Jesus, why do you want to go back to the slavery and bondage of the Law and sin? (4:8-10)
13. Finally, and perhaps the most important thrust of Paul’s concern for his brethren at the Galatian church, if you try to become justified by observing one point of the Law then you are obligated to keep the whole Law (5:3) and those “who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” (5:4)

My brothers and sisters in Christ, it's important to maintain the freedom that Christ Jesus purchased for you and not to become entangled again with elements of the Law. As I said earlier, it's good to study the Old Testament, Jewish culture, etc., but there is a danger in getting caught up in Messianic Judaism, Sabbath Keeper sects, etc. Paul said you could lose your salvation and "fall from grace" if you decide to go back to the Law. The same argument is very forcefully made in the Book of Hebrews and I'd recommend you read *Hebrews: the Book of Better Things* available through our online bookstore. Justification by God and reconciliation to Him only comes "through grace by faith" and not works. Martin Luther learned this 400 years ago leading to the Protestant Reformation.

Let's not go back to the old (the Law) but rather continue to embrace the new. We are "new creatures" created in the image of Jesus Christ; let's allow the Spirit of God to continue forming us into His image and not go back to trying to be an "old" man, lost in sin. The butterfly is often used as an image of this "new creature" and his "New Birth" in Christ. You don't want to go back to the sarcophagus of the cocoon and be a caterpillar again instead of soaring as a butterfly in freedom, do you?