

# What is a Christian's Rule of Life, Christ or the Law?

## FAQ

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It is commonly taught among Christians, that the believer's rule of walk is the moral law, or the Ten Commandments. It is admitted, of course, by all, that the believer is not justified by the deeds of the law, and that if the law be thus used, it will only add to man's condemnation. His justification must clearly be by grace, and on the principle of faith; but when justified, what is the standard by which his life is to be governed? This, it is generally held, is the moral law, which was undoubtedly the rule given to Israel, and for its own purpose is, therefore, as perfect as all the other works of God's hands. It is true that believers are said to be under grace, and not under law; but this, it is maintained, applies to justification, not to walk. They are urged also not to return to law, but this is explained to mean the ceremonial law, not the moral. These distinctions are intelligible, but are they scriptural? Where does the word of God speak of a believer as being under the law for one purpose, and not for another? Where does it declare that while the ceremonial law is abrogated, the moral law is still in force as the rule for Christian walk? No doubt there is a distinction between the moral and ceremonial law, and also between the law as a ground of justification, and the law as a rule of life; but when this distinction is used to make Scripture harmonize with theology, it behoves us to inquire whether Scripture is thus fairly interpreted.

It is said, "that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth;" but it is added that the believer does not live, having "become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that he should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Rom. 7: 1, 4.) Then follows — "Now we are delivered from the law, having died to that" (the true reading) "wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." (v. 6.) Here, as usual in this epistle, man is looked at as first alive in the flesh. Such is his standing before God, and in this standing the law "hath dominion over" him. But believers are "dead with Christ" (Rom. 6: 8), and are therefore "become dead to the law" — "delivered from the law, having died to that wherein they were held." No language can be clearer. The believer, as dead with Christ, is free from the law.

Is this the ceremonial law? Evidently not; for the passage goes on — "I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (v. 7); so that it is of the decalogue itself that the Holy Ghost is here speaking, and to the decalogue itself that the believer is declared to be dead. Is he dead to it, then, only as concerns justification, and still alive to it as a rule of conduct? In the above passage the question of justification is not even alluded to; and the reason why we are said to have "become dead to the law" is, that we "should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." When "in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members, to bring forth fruit unto death." (v. 5.) The contrast, then, is not between justification and condemnation, but between the fruits produced under the law, and those produced by our being "married to another." We cannot be "married to another" until we are dead to the law. If alive to the law, we are not dead with Christ, and the result is "fruit unto death." If married to Christ, we are dead to the law, and the result is "fruit unto God." The believer is, therefore, dead to the law, not only as a ground of justification, but as a rule of walk. The law can no more produce fruit to God after his conversion, than save him from his sins before his conversion. So in the previous chapter it is said, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." (Rom. 6: 13, 14.) Here, again, the subject is not justification, but walk. Our justification is assumed, and the question is, whether, being justified, we shall serve sin or God. What delivers us from the power of sin? When "in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." Now, however, being "not in the flesh," but "dead with Christ," are we put under the law again to be kept from sin, and to bear fruit for God? Just the contrary. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." In a word, the power for walk is not in our

being under the law, but depends upon our being dead to the law.

The apostle then asks, "Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." (v. 15.) But what is the ground for this decided negative? Does he say, "You must not sin, because, though not under the law for justification, you are under it for walk"? Surely if this had been true, it would have been the obvious reply, and that the apostle does not so reply proves that the doctrine is not true. Instead of drawing this theological distinction, he shows that the new basis of Christian morality is, not the law partially revived as a rule of conduct, but the new position into which the believer is brought as dead and risen with Christ. The law, so far from being the rule of life for a believer, works nothing but misery when the believer thus uses it; for even of a quickened soul it is said that "sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (Rom. 7: 8), while elsewhere it is written that "the strength of sin is the law." (1 Cor. 15: 56.) So the apostle reproaches the Galatians for bringing in the law after grace was known. "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect in the flesh?" (Gal. 3: 2, 3.) This is very striking, for the Holy Ghost here speaks of the introduction of the law, after they had believed, as a reverting to the flesh. He then shows that the law, however introduced, is fatal; "for as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continued not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (v. 10.) It may be said that this refers to justification, not to conduct. It is, however, addressed to persons already justified. Moreover, the principle is a general one, applying to any use of the law whatever, and showing that there is no such thing as being half dead to the law, and half alive to it; but that if we are under the law at all, we are under the curse. So it is taught elsewhere, "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law." (Gal. 5: 3.) How could Scripture and theology more flatly contradict each other? Theology says that we are under the law in one way, and free from it in another. Scripture says that we must be under the law altogether or free from it altogether.

Sinking theology, then, and following Scripture, we find that the believer is dead to the law, not only for justification, but as a rule of life, and that its introduction in any form is a departure from the principle of grace. But does this give rein to lawlessness? The apostle deals with this very question in the Romans. If the law were retained as a rule of life, it could never have arisen, and the fact that it did arise proves that the law was not so retained. But if not, what barrier is there against lawlessness? A twofold barrier; first, that being "dead to sin," we cannot "live any longer therein" (Rom. 6: 2); and next, that being "married to another," we can "bring forth fruit unto God." As dead with Christ, we are dead to sin, and the

practical teaching founded on it is, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." (Rom. 6: 12.) As having life in Christ, we are "alive unto God," and the practical result ought to be, "that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (v. 4.)

The law was, of course, perfect for its own purpose; but, working through the flesh, it not only could give no power against lust, but positively created lust. Being "weak through the flesh," it could not "condemn sin in the flesh." (Rom. 8: 3.) But now we, being "married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead," are able to "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," and thus "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us" (v. 4). While under law, we are, through the flesh, unable to fulfil its righteous requirements. Freed from the law, walking as those who are dead and risen with Christ, its righteous requirements are fulfilled in us. Thus the attempt to put the believer under the law as a rule of life defeats its own purpose. It is only when we are completely emancipated from it, that its righteous demands are brought out in our lives. For the law, while it gives directions, gives no power. Power comes from the new life in which we are quickened together with Christ. Having the life of the risen Christ, we are able to show forth that life in our walk and conversation.

But it may be asked, Did not Christ fulfil the law? was He not "made under the law?" and if we are to show forth His life in our own, must not we be under the law too? Undoubtedly Christ, as a man born into this world, was "made under the law." But we are not "married" to Christ as a man born into this world, but as the man "who is raised from the dead." It is as united with Christ risen that we have, and are enabled to "walk in, newness of life." Christ as man met every righteous requirement of the law, even to death, which He endured on our behalf. Is Christ risen and glorified under the law? If not, neither are we; for we are dead with Him, and thus delivered from all out of which He has passed, while our life, as quickened with Him, is the same as His own.

But is not the law appealed to by Paul himself? Does he not say that "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, — Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"? (Gal. 5: 14.) Does he not quote the fifth commandment in speaking to children, "Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth"? (Eph. 6: 2, 3.) And do not these and kindred passages show that the believer is still under the law? Such passages doubtless show that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." To the Galatians his reference to the law was most apt; for they wished to put themselves under the law, and what more telling than to show them that the law itself condemned them? But surely we can quote the law as indicating God's mind without putting ourselves under it. Some of our judges have cited the

Roman law, because of its admitted excellence, in delivering their judgments; but who dreams that these judges held the Roman law to be binding in our country? If God lays down principles in the law, they must be perfect, and as such Paul quotes them. But this no more proves that we are under the law of the Ten Commandments, than a judge's reference to Roman law proves that Roman law is the law of this realm. On the other hand, if believers are under the law as a rule of life, why is this rule so rarely named? Why is the apostle constantly urging other motives, and hardly ever even alluding to that code which, according to theology, is the Christian's real guide? This alone suffices to show how widely the theological dogma of the believer's being still under the law as his rule of walk departs from the true teaching of God's word.

The rule for the believer's walk, then, is Christ, and not the law. He may follow the law ever so diligently, but the result will be that "the commandment which was ordained to life" will be "found to be unto death."

(Rom. 7: 10.) Just so far as his walk answers to the truth that he is "married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead," will he "bring forth fruit unto God." In all cases our rule of life depends on the position we occupy. A child and a servant both owe obedience to the head of the house, but the child's obedience should flow from his position as a child, the servant's from his position as a servant. An Israelite's relationship with Jehovah was determined by the covenant made at Sinai, and his rule of life was, therefore, the law. Our relationship with God is determined by our having received the Spirit of adoption, and our rule of life is, therefore, Christ, "the first born among the many brethren" to whom we belong, the Son, whose Spirit "God hath sent forth into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." As dead with Christ, we are dead to the law; as quickened with Christ, we can walk in newness of life; as beholding the glory of Christ, we "are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3: 18.)

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