



**The Christian
and the law**

Ger de Koning

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah

Nah – Nahum

Hab – Habakkuk

Zep – Zephaniah

Hag – Haggai

Zec – Zechariah

Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew

Mk – Gospel of Mark

Lk – Gospel of Luke

Jn – Gospel of John

Acts – Acts of the Apostles

Rom – Epistle to the Romans

1Cor – First Epistle to the Corinthians

2Cor – Second Epistle to the Corinthians

Gal – Epistle to the Galatians

Eph – Epistle to the Ephesians

Phil – Epistle to the Philippians

Col – Epistle to the Colossians

1Thes – First Epistle to the Thessalonians

2Thes – Second Epistle to the Thessalonians

1Tim – First Epistle to Timothy

2Tim – Second Epistle to Timothy

Tit – Epistle of Titus

Phlm – Epistle to Philemon

Heb – Epistle to the Hebrews

Jam – Epistle of James

1Pet – First Epistle of Peter

2Pet – Second Epistle of Peter

1Jn – First Epistle of John

2Jn – Second Epistle of John

3Jn – Third Epistle of John

Jude – Epistle of Jude

Rev – Revelation

Foreword

The content of this booklet has been published in several editions of a newsletter of Christians with a Calvinistic background. They have great respect for God's Word. They put questions about the law and its place in the life of a Christian. Then I was asked to write what the Bible tells about it. That resulted in the publication in the newsletter. Of course, it is a limited study on an extensive subject. But in it are the most essential features of the law and why God gave it.

On that publication I got a lot of reactions, with which I was very pleased. The responses ranged from very approvingly to clearly negative. That didn't surprise me. It is a subject that touches the life of the convinced and committed Christian deep in his heart. Whatever your views on the subject are, if as a Christian you take your life seriously, you cannot ignore it.

Scripture is the only independent point of reference to which each statement must always be checked. The writers desire is that the reader does what the Bereans did with what they heard from the apostle Paul: *"They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily [to find out], whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

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The Christian and the law

1. Introduction

All orthodox Christians agree in general that one can never deserve heavenly bliss by keeping the law. Only those who have sincerely repented for their sins and have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ by faith are saved. In this point there is no difference of opinion possible, if indeed we want listen to what the Bible says; for several times it is written that no flesh can be justified before God by works (*see Rom 3:20,28; Gal 2:16; 3:11, Cp. Rom 4:6; Eph 2:8-9*).

The situation is different when it comes to the question: In what relation has the Christian to do with the law in his daily life? There we see two views. There are Christians who consider the law as the commandment given to us to keep it out of gratitude for our redemption. There are other Christians who consider the law as not applicable to the Christian; they want to live by grace alone. Because both views are found with upright Christians and both parties try to live uprightly according to their views, it is good to examine what the Word of God says about law.

2. Not justified by law, but by faith alone

We know that the law was given to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai (*Ex 19-20*) after their deliverance from the slavery in Egypt (*Ex 12-14*). There was no law before this moment. Paul makes this very clear when he says: “For until the law sin was in the world ... Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses” (*Rom 5:13-14*). So there was a period *before* the law, where death reigned. It is clear that the law is effective since Moses, because he gave the law (*Jn 1:17*). The supposition that the law can be explained with retrospective effect from Adam has no scriptural basis.

Anyway, now the question remains why the law was given. Paul asks this same question in his *epistle to the Galatians*: “What purpose then [does] the law serve?” (*Gal 3:19*). Immediately he himself gives the answer: “It was added because of transgressions”. That means that the sins, which have always been, now weigh heavier, because anyone who sins violates a specific commandment. One can no longer plead ignorance, because what is sin is exactly laid down in the law.

Therefore, everyone knows what he must do, and what he ought not, so that he can live by that. The purpose of the law summarized briefly is: ‘The man who keeps them will live’ (*Lev 18:5*). The addition “I [*am*] the LORD” emphasizes the point that in order to be connected with Him, the living God, one must keep the law. Did anyone ever come in relationship with God by keeping the law? Did anyone ever receive life by keeping the law? The testimony of the Scripture is clear that none is righteous and that all fall short of the glory of God and thereby cannot enter into God’s glory (*Rom 3:10,23*).

There has been only one Person Who has merited life: Jesus Christ, the Righteous. He kept the law perfectly. But what do we see of Him? That He let Himself to be made a curse that is everyone’s part who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and does them (*Gal 3:10-13*). Christ is the end of the law for him who, after realizing that he cannot keep the law, confides in Christ Who alone could vouch for the sinner before God (*Rom 10:4*). It means that the end of the law as a means of justification came with the coming of Christ on the earth. Now God can justify one only when he accepts by faith that he needs Christ. For such a person the law is no longer the means of justification, for the law has fulfilled its role as soon as one realizes that it is impossible to be justified through it. Whoever gives up his own efforts and looks on what Christ has done and believes that, subjects himself to the righteousness of God.

3. The law: for Israel *and* the nations?

We saw in the previous paragraph that not the law but only faith in Christ is the basis on which God justifies a person. Whoever believes this agrees with the Scripture, which says: “*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ*” (Gal 2:16).

One can however place an important question with regard to law: To whom was the law given, to whom God has intended the law? As already said, Moses gave the law to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. That historical occasion is the answer. The law was given to Israel. However, can one say that what was applicable to the people of God in the Old Testament is applicable to what are the people of God today? We find a clear answer to this question in *Acts 15*. (It is good to read that chapter first.)

In *Acts 15* the point is that no one can obtain salvation otherwise except by faith in Jesus, and indeed without any additional condition. In *verse 1* we read that the believing Jews, Jewish Christians, from Judea came to Antioch. They had heard about the work of God among the gentiles. These Jews, who still lived according to the demands of the law, had now come, to lay these demands on the believers out of the nations. They emphasized strongly that the gentile believers cannot be saved unless they fulfilled the requirements of the law.

The Jewish Christians remained zealous for the law. For them Christianity was a continuation of Judaism, but now with faith in Messiah Jesus added to it. For them the churches among the nations were nothing but churches of proselytes that is heathens converted to Judaism. They considered these believers out of the nations as people who switched to Judaism. For them there was nothing next to Judaism. But they were wrong; for Christendom is something completely new, which has nothing in common with Judaism.

These wrong teachings of the Jewish Christians caused great discussions and confusion. Paul and Barnabas saw their work among the gentiles threatened and they protested vigorously against these false teachings. Fortunately, the brothers in Antioch had so much confidence in Paul and Barnabas that they ordered that they both had to go together with some others to Jerusalem in order to lay this issue before the apostles and the elders there (*verse 2*).

Even in Jerusalem there was much dispute (*verses 6-7*). After Peter, Barnabas, and Paul had spoken (*verses 7-12*) James started to speak (*verse 13-18*). He was the leader of the church in Jerusalem and therefore had a special status. In this discussion his words about the meaning of the law for the gentiles were conclusive. His great zeal

for the law was clear to all. When he would say that the Gentiles do not need to keep the law, it would have silenced all the zealots of the law.

At first James refers to Peter's report, which says how 'God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His Name (*verse 14*). He confirms this act of God by quoting from *Amos*, the prophet. Then he comes to the conclusion that says: "*That we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God*" (*verse 19*). With 'we should not trouble' he means that the yoke of the law should not be laid on them. The Gentiles have their own place in the ways of God, apart from the obligation to become Jew and keep the law.

After this judgment of James the outcome of the consultation was recorded in a letter to the brothers from the nations (*verses 22-29*). The conclusion of the Jerusalem Council is clear: The law is not meant for the Gentile believers, but only for Israel, the people to whom it was given. God never gave the law to the Gentiles. We read about the Gentiles who do not have the law (*Rom 2:14*). They had no part at all in something what God had given to Israel (*Eph 2:11-12*). The law and Israel exclusively belong to each other (*see Act 7:53; Rom 2:17-20; 9:4; Ezek 20:11*) A combination of the law and the Gentiles is not found in the Scripture.

Just a note in between: It is good to notice that the situation that is described in *Acts* is a transition situation. God still tolerated that the Jews who became Christians continued to keep the law. He tolerated this attitude until the year 70, when the Romans conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple, with which the Jewish way of worship came to an end. In the church which comprises all true believers there is neither Jew nor Greek (i.e. Gentile), for they are all, without difference, one in Christ Jesus (*Gal 3:28; Col 3:11*). The Jew that comes to faith in Christ ceases to be a Jew, which therefore means that the law also does not apply to him anymore.

Let us once again go back to the council of the apostles in Jerusalem to hear Peter's outstanding and informative contribution during the consultation (*Act 15:7-11*). He remembers first of all how God had chosen him that by his mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. That they indeed came to faith, God proved by giving them, Peter says, the Holy Spirit just as he did to 'us', which are the Jewish believers. By giving His Spirit to the converted Gentiles God bore witness that He had saved them (*Rom 8:9; Eph 1:13*). God had sealed their faith with the Holy Spirit, without any precondition, but exclusively on the basis of faith.

But also later, after someone has come to faith, it is wrong to impose additional conditions. Peter makes that clear by referring to the function and effect of the law. He speaks of the law as "*a yoke ... which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear*"

(verse 10). Peter confirms here two things we noticed earlier. Firstly he confirms that the law was given to Israel. He speaks about "*our fathers*", who are none other than the previous Israelite generations, and about "*we*" with which he means the Jewish believers whom he addresses, including himself. Secondly he confirms that no man can keep the law whether one is a believer or an unbeliever.

4. Which period the law is valid?

We saw that the law was given only to Israel, which means the law is limited to one nation. There is a still further limitation, and that is the period for which the law was in force. We read about that in *Galatians 3:23-25*.

In this section, Paul compares two periods of time with one another. The one is the era of the law, which means the period in which God deals with people on the basis of keeping the law, which means that people must do what the law says. The other era is the period of the faith, and that means the period in which God deals with people on the basis of faith. The era of 'the faith' in essence is the Christian era, the period that after Christ came upon the earth, finished His work on the cross, and went back to the Father. Thereafter the Holy Spirit came on the earth; that was the beginning of Christendom.

The era of the law was characterized by strict statutes, which God had imposed upon His earthly people Israel. It was a yoke for the Jew who suffered under it as a prisoner, like the one in custody (*Gal 3:23*). It took away all his freedom of action, his whole life was controlled by it. He had to obey the law on penalty of death. At the same time the law like the prison was a protection, for it prevented him from mixing with the people around (*Eph 2:14*). Yet the era of the law was limited. It lasted till "*the faith which would afterward be revealed*" (*Gal 3:23b*), which means till the revelation of the object of this faith, that is the Lord Jesus Christ. With His coming a new era dawned.

It is good to note and examine the word "*guard*" Paul uses as an example for the law in this portion (*Gal 3:24a*). A 'guard' is the one who takes care of a child committed to his care that is of his bodily well-being. So is the function of the law. That the law is the guard up to Christ does not mean that it shows the way to Christ, but means a period in salvation history in which God controlled the life of his people Israel through the law. This period came to an end with the coming of Christ.

During that period man proved that he was an incorrigible sinner and therefore God had to judge him inevitably. Faith in Christ and in His atonement work on the cross is necessary to escape from this judgment. Since the Lord Jesus finished His work on the cross it has become possible to be justified before God on the principle of faith (*Gal 3:24b*). This is possible only through faith, and never ever by the law, nor by any other effort on the part of man. Since Christ has accomplished work, God deals no more with men on the basis of the law, but solely on the basis of faith.

That is why it can be said in *verse 25*: "*But after faith has come, we are no longer under a*

tutor" (Gal 3:25). Once again: "*faith*" means the era of faith. The law has had its time. The Galatians should be consciously aware of this and in this consciousness they should be able to reject the Jewish false teachers. For us Christians also it is important to understand this. The law is the prison that takes away every freedom from all those who stand under it. By faith in Christ a man is freed from this prison.

Yet if anyone wants to take the law again as his life's principle, it means a return to the era of the law and hence a return to the prison. Whoever returns there robs himself of the freedom he received by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and he robs himself of every blessing in Christ that is his portion by faith in Him (Gal 5:4a). In the next part of this verse Paul says to the Galatian *believers* that this is the consequence of their desire to be justified by the law. This also means that they have fallen from grace. It here says that the believer who wants to keep the law does that in order to be justified, although he perhaps affirms very sincerely the opposite. The matter however is not about the motives of the believer to keep the law, but about what the law is and why God has given him.

We already have seen that no one could and can keep the law and that therefore it was and is impossible to be justified by the law. Now we see that a believer, when he wants to keep the law, again takes before God exactly the same ground, namely to be justified by the law. But that does not change the fact that anyone who wants to keep the law, in some way or other, places himself under the curse. Earlier in his epistle to the Galatians Paul has said: "*For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse*" (Gal 3:10). Whoever takes the law of God earnestly gives his assent to its claims.

The Christian no longer lives in relationship with the law but in relationship with Christ. He is not under law, but under grace (Rom 6:14). Grace means not to expect anything out of his self but to surrender to God wholly. Only under grace there is power to live for God.

5. How is it possible that the Christian is no longer under the law?

Just for clarification: Paul nowhere says that law is not good. On the contrary, he puts clearly that *“the law [is] holy, and the commandment holy and just and good”* (Rom 7:12). How can something that comes from God be bad? What is not good then? It is not good to use the law as a means to be justified. Whoever uses the law for his justification discovers his sinfulness and must acknowledge that he deserves death.

This is what Paul says in *Galatians 2:19*: *“I through the law died to the law.”* He acknowledges the death sentence on him contained in the law. By acknowledging this he takes the law earnestly. He recognizes its authority. The law has made clear to him what sin is, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20; 7:7). He acknowledges also the wages of sin: death (Rom 6:23), as it is written elsewhere that whoever rejects the law of Moses dies without mercy (Heb 10:28; see also Rom 4:15; Jam 2:10-11). The law is not called without reason *“the ministry of death”* and *“the ministry of condemnation”* (2.Cor. 3:7,9).

While Paul approves the just judgment on him as sinner, he says at the same time that from this moment on the law has nothing more to say about him. For what effect the law can have on someone who is dead? Can such a person be addressed with ‘you shall’ and ‘you shall not’?

In *Galatians 2:19-20* Paul explains as to how he is dead to the law and how it stands with him now. *“For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the [life] which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* He says thereby: ‘Pertaining to my old man my old ‘I’, I am crucified with Christ; but I also have a new ‘I’, that is, my new life that lives by faith.’ Therefore he says: *“I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* Power ‘to live for God’ is always available when one looks on to Jesus Christ the Son of God.

That death makes a person free from the law, is also clearly stated in *Romans 7:1-6*. There the argument is that it is clear to everyone that a law rules over a man as long as he lives. There is no sense in imposing a fine on a person who violated the traffic rule and dies himself. Someone who is legally responsible for a violation receives a punishment in order to make amends. It is impossible to do so with a dead person. In jurisprudence every case against a person becomes void if he is dead.

Paul illustrates this in *Romans 7* with an example of marriage (*verses 1-3*). He says that according to the law a marital relationship is valid as long as both the partners live. This relationship becomes void in only one way and that is if one of the partners dies.

Then the woman is free from the law that binds her to her husband. She can marry another person. She will be an adulterer if she became the wife of another man while her husband yet lives.

When Paul applies this analogy in *verses 4-6* to the relationship between a believer and the law, he says as follows. According to the law the sinner must be put to death. That is what happened to the believer. He has become dead to the law through the body of Christ (*verse 4a*). That means that when Christ died, the believer also died. But Christ was resurrected from the dead. The believer therefore is no longer connected to the law but with the risen Christ Who also does not have anything more to do with the law. The law has been carried out on Him to the full extent. The believer therefore is no longer connected to the law, but to the risen Christ, by which he can bear fruit for God. The Holy Spirit works out this fruit in the believer (*Gal 5:22*) in whom He dwells after his accepting the gospel of salvation (*Eph 1:13*).

When the Spirit lives in the believer, this means that he is obliged to be led by the Spirit and has to walk by the Spirit (*Gal 5:16,18*). Who is led by the Spirit and walks by the Spirit is freed from preoccupation with self, with the law and with the flesh. "*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*" (*Gal 5:18*). The Holy Spirit came on the earth not to give power to believers to deal with the law or to fulfill the law and thereby to be kept occupied with himself, but to proclaim Christ and to glorify Him (*Jn 16:13-15*).

Further, it means that the one who lets the Holy Spirit to lead him fulfills all the holy requirements of the law (*Rom 8:4*). The Spirit will never bring anyone to violate any commandment of the law. When one is focused on Christ it goes without saying that he automatically does what the law says. However, the point is that the law brings the believer to be occupied with himself, while the Holy Spirit brings the believer to be occupied with Christ.

6. The right use of the law and Christ as a rule of life

We are not left in uncertainty about the right use of the law. Inspired by the Holy Spirit Paul explains clearly the right application of the law in *1 Timothy 1:8-11*. These verses are extremely important to the Christian. Here we get the teachings about the 'legal' or 'lawful' use of the law – which means a use that is in tune with its purpose. When we understand this teaching well, we will be kept from wrong use of the law, and we will not deal with the law in a way it is not meant for.

The first thing Paul says is that anyone who applies the law understands "*that the law is not made for a righteous person*". A righteous person is someone who has been declared righteous on the basis of faith in Christ (*Rom 4:5; 5:1,9*). The law can no more be applied on such a person, because Christ Himself bore the judgment on his behalf and freed him from all his sins. The claim of the law got its full effect in Christ when He died. He who believes in Him died with Him in His death.

Every believer is a righteous person, and for him the law is no more the means that regulates his relationship with God. But the law is from God and therefore it is useful if it is rightly used, indeed on the conscience of the sinner. The sinner can be convicted by the law that he is a sinner. Paul mentions a few categories of sinners and concludes with an all-inclusive broad category called "*any other thing that is contrary to the sound doctrine*" (verse 10). The list of sinners clearly states the inner depravity of man and his alienation from God, as well as their acts as a result. All these acts are direct violations of specific commandments of the law.

But the sins mentioned in this section are not only judged by the law. They also stand contrary to the sound doctrine of the New Testament. That is why Paul does not conclude the list with 'anything against *the law*', but with "*any other thing that is against the sound doctrine*". It is important to note this fact. The sound doctrine is a much higher criterion to determine what sin is than the law. The sound doctrine perfectly maintains the holiness of God. This teaching is pure and clean and fully in agreement with "*the glorious gospel of the blessed God*". God is the blessed God and He has all the blessings in His Being, but Who also wants people to partake of His blessings through the gospel.

This gospel far exceeds the law. In the gospel God does not speak through thunder and lightning as from Sinai, but in the fullness of His grace and truth in Christ Jesus in order to show mercy to lost sinners. The fullness of God is not visible on Sinai. There He made Himself known by His requirements. The glory of God on the contrary is the total of all His perfections that became visible in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth and above all on the cross. In "*the glorious gospel*" the glory of

God is revealed in Christ (2Cor 4:4). The eyes of the believer are opened to see that glory. The great effect of this gospel is that the believer who is occupied with the glory of Christ is brought in conformity with Him more and more (2Cor 3:18).

This leads to Christ as rule of life, that means that the rule of life is not a list of commandments (and still more of prohibitions), but a Person. How a Christian can live to the honor of God he does not learn from the law, but by looking unto Christ. The Lord Jesus has shown how one should worship and serve God. Did not the Lord Jesus keep the law? Of course He did and in the perfect way indeed. But the Christian is not saved by the keeping of the law by the Man Jesus Christ. He deserved life because He kept the law perfectly. However, if He had entered life without dying – as the just reward of His keeping the law –, we would have been lost forever, having been sentenced by the very same law which He kept perfectly.

Therefore it is so impressive to see that Christ has done far more than what the law demanded. He speaks of a commandment that He received from the Father to lay down His life to take it again (Jn 10:18). Where do we find in the law this was asked of Him? Nowhere, for there is not such a commandment written anywhere in the law. By His act of laying down His life, we come to know not of His obedience to the law and of God as Claimant, but of His love and of God as the Giver (see Jn 4:10).

What is now to be expected of a Christian who knows the Lord Jesus and has received Him as his life (1Jn 5:11-12)? That he gives his life for the brothers (1Jn 3:16). Where do we find this commandment written in the law? Nowhere, for nothing is written about it in the law. In the same way we learn from Him – and not from the law – how we must forgive one another: “Even as Christ forgave you, so you also [must do]” (Col 3:13). It is all about what the Christian heard from Christ and what Christ taught him (Eph 4:20-21).

A Christian will act like Christ when he has the sense and the mind of Christ. The mind of the law leads people to bite and devour one another (Gal 5:15). The mind of Christ leads one to put his own interests behind those of others: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8)

This Savior is the model, and the rule of life for the Christian!

Other Publications

On the website www.oudesporen.nl, Main Menu, English publications Ger de Koning, more Bible commentaries and publications that have been translated into English are available and will become available. They can be downloaded for free as PDF and e-book.

The original publications have been written in Dutch. These and other Dutch publications are available under Main Menu, Publicaties Ger de Koning.

Some publications have been translated in other languages than English. You can find them under 'Other languages'.