

Lifebyte 44

The Grace of our God's Law

Living Righteously In The Days of Chastisement



*Jesus must remain in heaven
until the time comes for God to restore everything,
as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.* (Acts 3:21)



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Dear Friends,

We've written previously about the **Law** (God's *teaching and instruction* known in Hebrew as *Torah*) and God's **grace** (His *unmerited favor and divine power* for His own to walk in His way). Yet these two topics still seem to be a stumbling block for some. So we want to bring clarity and encouragement to those who truly do want to walk in the steps of our righteous and holy Master.

Particularly in the egocentric United States in which the universe revolves around *self*, many Christians disregard the intent of our loving Father to *establish boundaries* for His people. Those boundaries of instruction and loving command were given in the Hebrew Scriptures and proclaimed by Paul as "*holy, righteous and good*" (see Romans 7:14). Our Lord Jesus *deepened* these for His followers.

So many Christians have shipwrecked their faith by *setting in opposition* their view of God's grace against their interpretation of His boundaries — His commands — as legalistic, mechanical rules.

On the surface, modern man's *misinterpretation of grace* sounds so appealing yet it nullifies the Bible's revelation of Him as He really is:

- **God's grace is so encompassing that even "good" people who don't walk in the Lordship of Jesus will ultimately make it to heaven.**
- **God is so loving that He has set aside the righteous standards of His Law. That was just for the Jewish people anyway, not for Christians.**
- **God's grace means He overlooks and excuses our sins because we're "already forgiven".**
- **We're no longer responsible to know what is sinful, nor to recognize when we've violated His Law.**

- **We don't have to concern ourselves with *pleasing* God because that would be some sort of "works".**

Have *you* succumbed to any of these lies which have perhaps been ingrained in you since childhood? How could these *distortions* of biblical truth become so prevalent? Consider these reasons:

1. Few today realize that before the coming of Jesus there was the **Hebraic Stream** of Judaism. This remnant of Abraham's descendants *loved* God and as a result *kept His commandments*. Pleasing their God brought them the joyful satisfaction of His peaceful Presence in their lives, and demonstrated to pagans around them that *their God's ways are good* and bring blessing.

There was also the **Judaizing Stream**. This group practiced their religion through rule-keeping but had *no relationship* of loving trust in God. Fearing that they might inadvertently fall into His disfavor, their leaders *extended* God's commands. They added on detailed "fences" of traditions and requirements to ensure they didn't miss anything God might demand "between the lines" of Scripture.

Those who meticulously kept all the rules felt self-justified and proud of their own righteousness. Such were the ones Jesus decried as "Hypocrites!" Their hearts were far from God as they "**trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.**" The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican fleshes out this difference vividly, as we'll shortly see.

It is the *self-justifying, self-righteous Judaizing Stream* that both Jesus and Paul condemned. Sadly, many translations of the Bible fail to make this distinction. Many commentaries portray Paul, in particular, as *attacking* obedience to God's Law. They've missed the *vital continuity*

between both Testaments: Paul was attacking the *motive* of the Judaizers — **self-justification** — by their slavish servility to that which God had established for the *good* of His chosen people.

[For more on this, see Lifebyte 17. *Certain Of What We Do Not See—Satan’s Strategies (Part 3)*.]

2. Many clergy today measure their success by the size of their congregation. Megachurches are written about and exalted as role models by many influential leaders in western Christendom. Whatever worldly schemes are needed to attract people into their pews are used so that folks feel *comfortable* in their unconfessed sin.

Equating “being under grace” with law-less unrighteous living has deceived multitudes of pew sitters who consider themselves “Christian” but abide in unconfessed sin. And, we can see by our correspondence that some of you have bought into the lie of *worldly compromise*.

Our Father’s perspective, however, notes a *distinct demarcation* between a follower of Jesus and someone who may be religious but chooses to entertain sin in his life:

So no one who remains united with Him continues sinning; everyone who does continue sinning has neither seen Him nor known Him. Children, don’t let anyone deceive you — it is the person that keeps on doing what is right who is righteous, just as God is righteous.

The person who keeps on sinning is from the Adversary, because from the very beginning the Adversary has kept on sinning. It was for this very reason that the Son of God appeared, to destroy these doings of the Adversary.

No one who has God as his Father keeps on sinning, because the seed

planted by God remains in him. That is, he cannot continue sinning, because he has God as his Father (1 John 3:6-9).

Notice that this passage was written by a Newer Testament writer to those who considered themselves *believers*! Wanting God’s blessing while still wanting to appease the sin nature is nothing new. The “*deception*” to which John refers is the same lie today that’s perpetuated by the *father of lies* within Christendom: that you don’t have to “*keep doing what is right*” in order to abide in our Lord!

Yet, the person who “*keeps on sinning*” is in reality a **servant of Satan**, our Adversary. Why? Because he or she tries to persuade by word and deed that *God doesn’t mean* that we who are “under grace” have to live righteously according to His commands and His ways. Sin in our lives, therefore, becomes irrelevant.

But sin *does* matter to our God! His Name is blasphemed among the nations because so-called Christians daily choose *sinful compromise* — supported by weekly sermons of success-oriented clergy!

Now ask yourself: ***How would anyone KNOW what sin is if God’s Word didn’t tell us?*** If a person is to be found guilty of sin, then the Bible must tell us what is sinful *from God’s perspective*. And it does! As we’ll discuss, not only are many of these sins listed in the Newer Testament — they actually *expand* the commands enumerated in the Older Testament.

It’s vital that you understand that God has *never* set aside the righteous standards of His Law anywhere in the Bible. His Law and His grace are interconnected, not in opposition. Rid yourself right now of the lie that the Older Testament is the “Law”, and the Newer Testament is “grace”. That’s not true in *His* sight!

God's good and perfect Law is *still in effect* for all of us. The commands that pertain to sacrifice to *atone for sin* have been fulfilled in Jesus, our Perfect Sacrifice. However, the 613 commands listed in the *Torah* have been expanded to 1,050 in the Newer Testament!

Our God isn't short on making clear the ways of life that both please Him *and* are for our benefit.

- **How many of God's commands are you familiar with?**
- **Are you sinning against God through ignorance of His commands?**
- **Do you realize that your ignorance doesn't absolve you of your responsibility to live in obedient trust according to His Word and His Spirit?**
- **Will you purpose to please your loving Father by diligently searching His Word to apply His commands on behalf of you and your family?**

The God Of Both The Older and Newer Testaments: The God Of Grace

Our God has always recognized and made known that no person could ever pay the penalty their sins deserve. In His *grace*, our holy God made a way *from the beginning* to be reconciled with sin-prone humanity. He was willing to accept the shed blood of an innocent and spotless *substitute* to pay for man's sin.

The requirement of *death* as the penalty for sin has never changed. The only thing that has changed between the Older and Newer Covenants is the nature of the substitute. Because of His *grace*, God accepted an unblemished lamb each year to atone for the sins of His people Israel.

This *act of grace* foreshadowed the Lamb who would be offered *once and for all* to atone for man's sin. That this Perfect

Sacrifice would come in fulfillment of Hebrew Scripture prophecy is joyfully proclaimed by the Baptizer: "*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!'*" (John 1:29).

There is *continuity* between the two Testaments! Both the acceptance of the annual lamb and the once-for-all Incarnate Lamb are testimonies to *God's grace*. His righteousness and justice demand a sacrifice for the unrighteousness of sin. The Newer Testament writers leave no doubt that *Jesus* as the atoning Sacrifice did NOT abolish the law's requirement of death as the penalty for sin. He made *its meaning full* in His consummation of it!

God displayed [Jesus] publicly as the atonement in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the showing forth of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:25,26).

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to atone for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17).

Our justification, that is, the full payment for the penalty for our sins, comes only through our trust in Jesus that His shed blood has fulfilled the Law's righteous requirement of death for sin. Our *total acceptance* that the shed blood of the only Perfect Sacrifice on behalf of our sins enables us to be *justified* before our God and *reconciled* with Him as His beloved children.

It is the *grace of God* that justifies you, not your own works or efforts to earn it by trying to “be good”. This understanding of grace was true for the Hebraic Stream *before* the coming of Jesus and is the same continuation of true grace for us today.

What Is The Purpose Of The Law?

Thankfully, the Apostle Paul responds at length to this issue raised among the Roman and Galatian faith communities. But first, let’s set the stage with a couple of scenarios:

You’re driving down a road and a policeman pulls you over. He gives you a ticket, citing you for *talking with a passenger in your car*.

What’s wrong with this picture? There is *no law* against conversing with occupants in your car while driving.

What if you’re driving down the same street and the posted speed limit is 25 mph. The policeman pulls you over because his radar caught you doing *40 mph*. Can he legally give you a ticket?

Yes, because a *law stipulates* that the maximum speed limit on that road is 25 mph — and you *violated the law*. In essence, the posted speed limit is there for two purposes: It establishes both a *boundary* — the maximum speed you can drive; and it gives you the *freedom* to drive at a safe speed up to 25 mph. This is the same with God’s laws. Some of them provide righteous boundaries, while others describe your areas of freedom within those boundaries.

Laws are established to support harmony and safety among people. In effect, they help minimize interpersonal *apprehension and tension*.

**And, isn’t this why a loving God,
Whose greatest command is to
love Him and love one another,
would establish laws that contribute
to our harmony and safety?**

The *Law of the Spirit of Christ* was completely upheld by Him, and we follow in His steps when we *abide in His Spirit* and walk *as He did* in the Spirit’s power. We are no longer enslaved to our sin nature; as bondservants of Christ, we have His love and His power to resist sinful inclination — *law-lessness*.

The “law” of sin and death *perverts* the good boundaries and freedoms our Father established, distorting them into a legalistic system of rules to earn God’s approval and prove that we somehow *deserve* salvation.

So while our Father’s good and gracious Law still applies to us today, particularly as it has been deepened by our Lord Jesus, some aspects have changed. Let’s look at the original purpose of the Law as Paul explained:

But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Galatians 3:23-25).

The “schoolmaster” in ancient Greece was a hired servant who was responsible to make sure his master’s son made it to and from school. He did whatever was necessary to make sure the boy was obedient — and sometimes that took *harsh discipline!*

The *Judaizing Stream* took God’s loving boundaries and built fences of additional, burdensome rules around them.

God's Law was perverted into a harsh discipline of *legalistic rule-following*, a "schoolmaster" which they could in no way obey in all aspects.

Only trust in Jesus the Messiah could spring them from the guilt of their failure. And the crushing weight of guilt drove them *to* the joyous freedom that the penalty for that guilt had been paid! Once they were *in Jesus*, the perversion of rules had no hold on them. They were free in His power to walk in the steps of their Lord that He demonstrated so amply during His three years of ministry — always obedient to the *commands of His Father*.

Remember that the righteous Law of God was given to Moses *well after* the time of Abraham. The *Hebraic Stream* understood that the Patriarch related to God through *trust*, not through rule keeping. Paul affirms this important connection for us followers of Jesus who become "children of Abraham" through like trust:

Understand, then, that those who trust are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:7-9).

We who are followers of Jesus are in loving relationship with Him *by faith*. That relationship is *not* based on keeping rules (see Hebrews 4:1,2) to earn His acceptance. It's through faith we have a love-based relationship with our God.

So how does the Law fit into this relationship? Very simply:

When you cherish someone with wholehearted devotion and apprecia-

tion, you want to know if anything you're doing *grieves* them. You want to know if anything *impedes* your love relationship with your beloved.

Our holy and loving God deeply desires a *love relationship* with those He has called out as His own (see Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Matthew 22:36-40; John 14:21, 15:10)! He has revealed through His law (remember, "law" means God's *instruction and teaching*) that which *hurts* our relationship with Him (and with one another), and that which *contributes* to our relationship with Him and with each other.

The evidence of love in a relationship is the *responsive action and attitude* toward the other, whether our Lord or our fellow humans made in His image.

Until Christ came, the Jewish people needed the Law as a *schoolmaster* to reveal to them their freedom and boundaries. In reality, the Law also showed them, as it does us today, where we *all fall short* of God's holy requirements (see Psalm 143:2; Romans 3:23).

Each year at the Feast of Pentecost, the Jewish people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, as well as worshipping God for His provision of the life-sustaining harvest. As the *blessings* for keeping God's law and the *curses* for breaking it were recounted (see Deuteronomy 28), the people were reminded of their absolute dependence on the *grace of God* to sustain them.

It was also during that memorable first post-Resurrection Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came to rest as a tongue of fire on each of the faithful followers of Jesus, recalling the fire on Mt. Sinai! The *external* manifestation which accompanied the giving of the Law was a shadow of the *internal* fire of God's teaching being

written on their heart by the Holy Spirit as the prophet foretold (see Jeremiah 31:33).

For those indwelt by the Spirit, the Law is no longer needed as a schoolmaster. As Paul assures the Roman followers of Jesus, we are *justified* by our trust *apart from* observing commands of the Law. Our *faith in Jesus* is that which will ultimately lead to our salvation before His Throne.

But our faith does *not* mean that the Law has been done away with! Keep in mind that *trust in God* is the very basis of the Law having been given to the Jewish people.

Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish [confirm, uphold] the law (Romans 3:31).

As with the Hebraic Stream who related to God as Abraham did in obedient trust, we followers of Jesus have a love relationship with our God that's evidence by *our* obedient trust. Sin ruptures this love relationship and breaks fellowship with Him (see 1 John 1:6-9). So out of *love* for us, our God is still making clear through His commandments our freedom and boundaries, especially as they were *expanded and deepened* by our Lord Jesus.

If there were no Law — the commands by which Jesus lived and that which He taught — we *wouldn't recognize* when we've sinned against our God. And, if we didn't appreciate that our sins separate us from our holy God, then the crucifixion of Jesus which reconciles us to our Father would be robbed of its significance.

Why would we need Jesus to die on our behalf if there is *no penalty for sin* to be paid? And, sin wouldn't be realized as a *violation* of God's ways if there was no Law to stipulate what *constitutes* sin.

Paul makes very clear how valuable the Law is to reveal to us how we've violated our God and are *desperately in need* of the righteousness of Christ to atone for those violations!

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned — (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not counted as such when there is no law...

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet" (Romans 5:12,13; 7:7).

Our *hearts* are already predisposed to follow our sin nature because we are descendants of Adam, the one through whom sin entered the world. However, we wouldn't *know* when we've sinned against God if He hadn't given us His righteous standards in the Bible.

What is called the "**Law of God**" — His good and righteous instruction for our lives — provides us with the *boundaries* to know when we've sinned against Him by violating them. As well, His Law shows us the arena of *righteous freedom* so we can live in a way that pleases Him.

For instance, the 54 "one-another" commands in the Newer Testament show us what pleases our God as we use our freedom in Christ to bless others (see Galatians 5:13).

Remember: You Are NOT Justified Before God By Keeping His Law

Many translations of the Bible misinterpret Paul's letter to the Galatians to make it seem as if any keeping of the Law is wrong. However, Paul's intent was

to expose and warn against the *Judaizers* whose goal was to be **self-justified** in keeping the Law and to convince others to do the same.

Self-justification is known as **legalistic perversion**—attempting to gain salvation through works *apart from* the sacrifice of Christ and regeneration through His Spirit. Legalistic perversion *nullifies* the need for Jesus as the Substitute for the death we all deserve.

[We commend the *Complete Jewish Bible* by David Stern for his insightful and accurate interpretation concerning this issue, as well as his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* which apperceives the continuity of the Hebrew Scriptures with the Newer Testament text.]

Paul issues an emotionally charged warning to followers of Jesus who were being *bewitched* (see Galatians 3:1) into casting aside the true Gospel in order to be justified by observing the Law. However, these *Judaizers* were way off base in regard to their *own* understanding of Hebrew Scripture.

Bible-practicing “Hebraic Stream” Jews were well aware that rule keeping *without a loving trust relationship* with God availed nothing:

We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we [Jews by birth] too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (Galatians 2:15,16).

Paul goes on to reiterate the means through which we *are* justified, and reveals that we who have trusted in the reconciling sacrifice of Jesus reap a rich promise:

But that no one is justified [declared righteous] by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith” [apperceiving Habakkuk 2:4]. Yet the law [as a set of rules apart from faith] is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.”

Christ has redeemed us from the curse [the consequence of violation] of the law, having become cursed on our behalf (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” [apperceiving Deuteronomy 21:22,23]), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in union with Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:11-14).

Joyfully appropriating *by trust* that Christ has borne the consequence of our violation of the law of God is a wonder in itself — we’re now reconciled with our loving Father through Him! So why is receiving the *promised Holy Spirit* such a blessing as well? Paul makes sure there’s no doubt about this intimate indwelling as our Father’s beloved children:

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Dear Father!” (Galatians 4:4-6).

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:16,17).

A truth we shared in our Hebraic Article, *The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*, bears repeating:

When we embrace the stipulations of our Father's Covenant, He consummates the Covenant by sealing us with His Spirit, guaranteeing His part of the Covenant.

The indwelling Holy Spirit is our assurance that we truly belong to Jesus (see Romans 8:9). If you don't belong to Jesus as confirmed by His Spirit in you, does anything else really matter?

Please anchor this for yourself:

We're NEVER justified by keeping God's Law. Those who try to "be good" apart from union with Jesus commit the sin of "**self-justification**". Trying to keep God's Law as a means of appeasing Him and earning acceptance is called "**legalistic perversion**". Many of the Pharisees perpetrated this practice, and Jesus called them "*Hypocrites!*"

By their very pursuit, self-justifiers nullify the crucifixion of Jesus (see Galatians 2:16) by trying to show their inherent worthiness of acceptance by God. On the contrary, there is NOTHING you can do to pay the penalty for your sins! *Apart from Christ*, your good works avail you nothing in God's sight.

Just as God's grace accepted the offering of an unblemished lamb as a substitute in the Older Testament, His grace accepts the sacrifice of His Son Jesus for your sins as your only acceptable Substitute. Paul warned the Galatians about pursuing self-justification. He connected that to *enslavement*:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not

be subject again to a yoke of slavery ...You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Galatians 5:1,4).

- Can you picture yourself being alienated from Christ through self-justification?
- What do you think "alienation" means?
- Paul warns against "falling from grace". What does that mean to you?

The heart difference between the self-justified Judaizing Stream and the mercy-dependent Hebraic Stream is crystallized by our Lord Jesus. One focuses arrogantly on SELF; the other, humbly on his God:

Jesus spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess."

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 18:9-14).

[For more on self-justification, see: Certain Of What We Do Not See, #7. Satan's War Against Us, Part 3: Schemes and Strategies, Self-justification and Lawlessness]

Remember: God's Grace Is NOT His Means For You To Go On Sinning

People who perceive God's love and grace as a blanket covering of forgiveness for any sin they might willfully commit now or in the future rely on what we call "**greasy grace**". Devoid of any fear of God, they presumptuously claim salvation even as they *nullify* obedience to His Word through their sinful attitudes and actions!

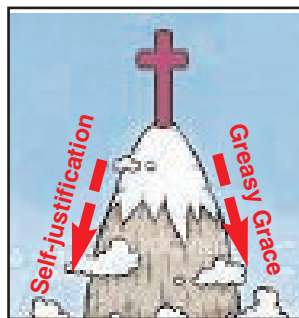
Let's see how "greasy grace" differs from the biblical concept of *authentic* grace:

1. Greasy grace *excuses* your ignorance of God's commands, and enables you to keep on sinning until you *decide* to turn from sin. After all, "forgiveness has *no righteous standards*, and I'm *already* forgiven of anything I do."

2. Greasy grace enables you to *feel comfortable* in your unrighteousness. You're never convicted to turn from wrong, or to know and to obey God's righteous ways, because you're not "under the Law". In reality, however, you are LAWLESS, bringing down the holy reputation of the Lord you claim to serve.

Human sinful nature loves greasy grace! *No one* finds it easy to be fully obedient to God's commands as His Spirit directs and empowers us to be. Our sinful nature looks for ways to get around walking in Jesus' footsteps of obedience.

[For more on "greasy grace", see our May/June 2004 Newsletter: "Be Warned! Greasy Grace Fuels the Fires of Hell".]



What Does Jesus Say About The Law?

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven

(Matthew 5:17-19).

Jesus didn't *do away* with the Law. Rather, He affirms that the *teachings of God* — the Law — is still in effect in His Kingdom. He came to give the Law *fuller meaning* so that the uprightness of our lives through His Spirit would reflect the kingdom of heaven.

God didn't impart His commandments and teaching as a set of rules to be kept so that people could feel *self-justified* by rote obedience. This motive, unfortunately, impelled many of the Pharisees and experts in the Law. Self-justification led to religious pride — the same sin that motivated the Judaizers who attempted to spiritually seduce the Galatians.

Jesus made clear that keeping the Law is an issue of a *heart* that responds in ways that please God according to His commands, His revealed Law (see Matthew 5:20-28). According to Jesus, sin is the end result of the *attitude and motive* already present in your heart.

His summary of sinful motive and its need to be controlled might be considered extreme until you realize just how abominable sin is in God's sight:

*If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be **thrown into hell**. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to **go into hell** (Matthew 5:29,30).*

Was Jesus calling for self-mutilation as a cure for sin? No! *Body parts* don't cause the sin — our sinful hearts do. Yet out of *love for God* His Spirit enables us to *want* to walk obediently in His Word — the good Law of His Father.

Some Might Say, “The Law Is Only For the Jew”

If God's Law — His teaching and commands — were only for Jews, then you'd expect silence on the part of the apostle to the Gentiles. However, not only Paul but also his contemporaries address the reality of sin. As stated earlier,

- If it weren't for the Law, sin wouldn't be counted against us.
- So if the Newer Testament writers warn us against sinning, then the Law must still be in effect for us.

Paul offers a veritable litany of specific violations of God's Law to followers of Jesus as a warning to refrain from them:

*But if you are **led by the Spirit**, then you are not under the law [or, not in subjection to the system that results from perverting the Law of God into legalism]. And it is perfectly evident what the **sinful nature does**. It expresses itself in sexual immorality, impurity and indecency; idol-worship, sorcery, in feuding, fighting, becoming jealous and getting angry; in selfish ambition, factionalism, intrigue and envy; in*

*drunkenness, orgies and things like these. I warn you now as I have warned you before: those who **practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God!** (Galatians 5:18-21).*

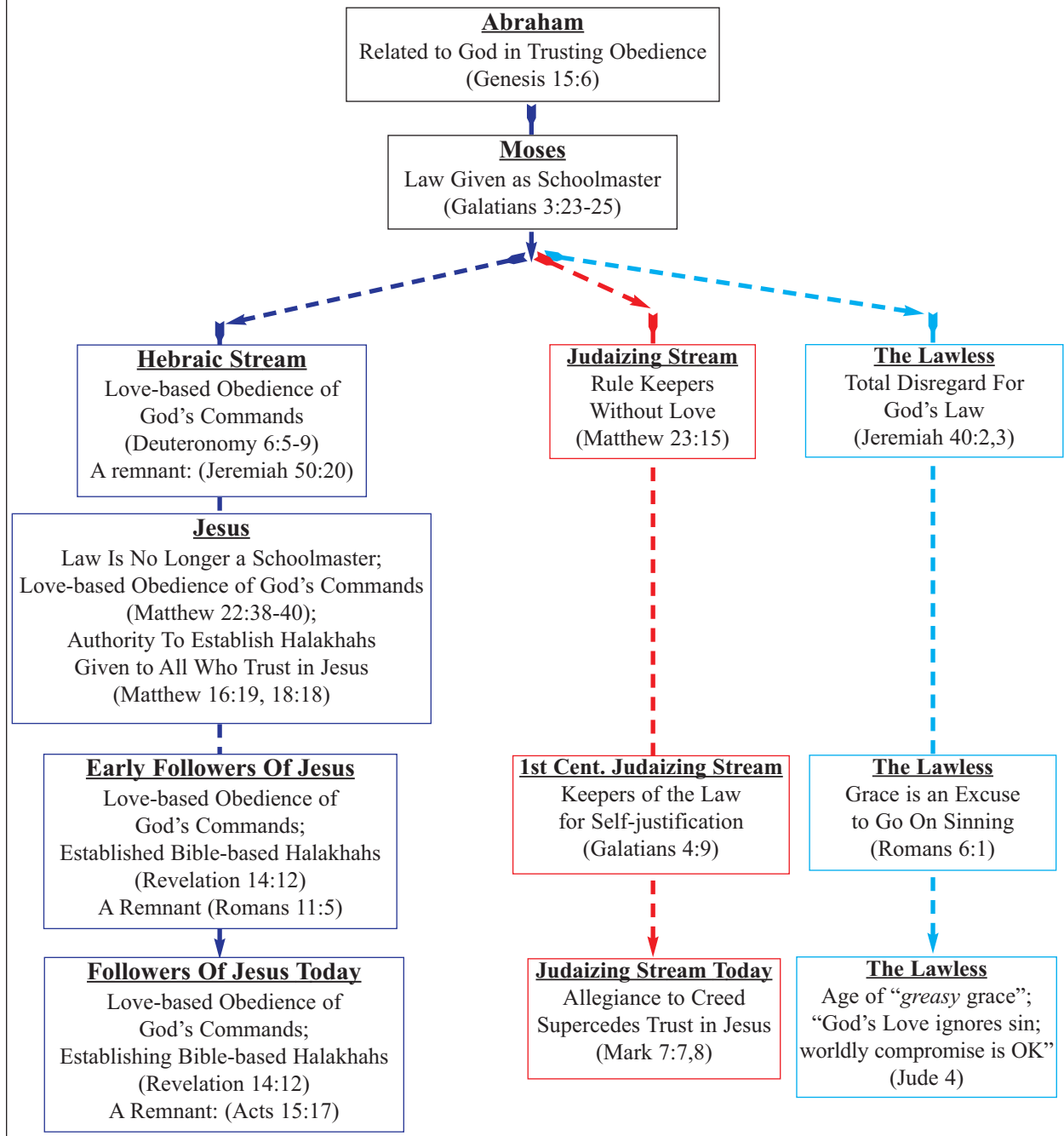
Because Paul is warning them against specific sins that he addressed to them previously, he must have been instructing them from the Law. Therefore, he recognized God's standards as still in effect! For more Newer Testament passages that discuss sin as the violation of God's law, see the following Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 5:1-13
1 Corinthians 6:18
Colossians 3:5
1 John 2:15-17
1 Peter 4:3
Hebrews 12:1,4
Revelation 22:15

As is evident in the Newer Testament, sin is still an issue for followers of Jesus to confront and overcome. And, in order for sin to be an issue, there must be a Law which has been violated. So the Law that provides the *freedom and boundaries of a holy God* for His people still applies to us who are in Jesus.

[Because of the sacrifice of Jesus which paid the penalty for sin once and for all, the regulations pertaining to the *Temple sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood* have been done away with. Our Lord Jesus fulfilled every aspect of those requirements as the Perfect High Priest, so followers of Jesus are *not* under a Levitical priesthood or the Temple system any longer. The laws regarding these no longer apply since they've been made complete in Jesus. The *priesthood of Melchizedek* is that which He now fulfills on our behalf. For more on this, see our March, 2001 Newsletter: *Living As The Family Of Melchizedek*.]

Law & Grace: From Abraham to the Followers of Jesus



What A Follower Of Jesus Must Do When He Sins

Those of us who follow Jesus *don't want* to go on sinning. We realize, as Paul experienced, that the sin nature is constantly trying to revive its influence in our lives so we *will* sin. But, if we *do*

sin, the shed blood of Jesus has paid the penalty for that sin. Out of grateful and loving hearts, we must be very careful that we *don't deceive* ourselves as followers of Jesus. To live with *unconfessed sin* is to live in the darkness that denies the truth:

If we **claim** to have fellowship with Him yet **walk in the darkness**, we lie and **do not live by the truth**.

But if we **walk in the light**, as He is in the light, we **have fellowship** with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our sins**, He is faithful and just and **will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness** (1 John 1:6-9).

Scrutinize this passage! If we're to remain in fellowship with our Lord and be cleansed from all unrighteousness, we must live repentantly. That means we confess our sins as soon as we're made aware of them.

How Does a Follower Of Jesus Keep From Sinning Against God?

We've shared that the Law of God is His good and holy plan for our lives. Our willingness to keep it is a *heart* issue in response to the power and the will of the Spirit of Christ within us. We want to keep His Law out of our love for our Lord because this response pleases our Father:

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

As the writer to the Hebrews encourages us, the Holy Spirit confirms the prophetic promise of the covenant Jesus' called-out ones are privileged to enjoy:

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write

them," then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Hebrews 10:14-16).

To put **His laws** into our hearts is part of God's grace to us. Grace is the **desire** and the **power** to obey His Law — His good and perfect will. What makes this possible? The indwelling Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, Who both inspired the Scriptures and now empowers you to *keep them*.

His grace is shown to be at work in you whenever you study and apply the Bible to your life (see Psalms 119:11). It is the Spirit Who makes your obedience to God's righteous instruction possible.

Consider Paul's words as a note of encouragement written *specifically to you*:

You make it clear that you are a letter from the Messiah placed in our care, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on human hearts... He has even made us competent to be workers serving a New Covenant, the essence of which is not a written text but the Spirit. For the written text brings death, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:3,6).

So please, don't ever consider that the opposite of grace is the Law. Lawlessness, that is, your disregard for God's righteous commandments, is the opposite of both God's grace and His Law. Grace through the Spirit enables you to walk righteously according to His ways to glorify our God.

Grace is the blessing our Lord gives when we're told to use His Law — especially the teachings and commands of Christ — to develop *halakhahs*: biblical applications for our lives.

In Teaching E-mail 32. *Are You Trusted By Your Family?* (November 1, 2007), we

share how important it is for you and your family to develop prayerful applications of God's Word. Your *applications* show that you are an *epistle of the Spirit* who enacts God's truth *from your heart*.

To encourage you to rely on the grace of the Holy Spirit to apply God's commands and teaching to your life, below are four steps from our book, *Christian Halakhahs*:

Steps in Establishing *Halakhahs*

When you are prompted by a need or concern in your life or that of a family member, begin to prayerfully seek God to determine how the Word would apply.

- 1 Prayer.** To establish a *halakhah* for your particular issue, pray. Ask for a spirit of wisdom and revelation (see Ephesians 1:17), entreating our Father to *convey His will* regarding your issue or concern.
- 2 Bible passages.** Next, ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind any verses or passages from the Bible that would apply to your situation. Don't try to apply anything to your situation *until* you are sure that you have compiled all possible biblical references. Some verses will be more pertinent than others. One or more of the verses will be more foundational to the issue. Other verses will add understanding. When you have taken the extra pain to pursue all the biblical leads prompted by the **Holy Spirit**, a sense of peace will rest on you and those sharing this investigation with you.
- 3 Biblical application.** Armed with the appropriate verses and passages, you can address your problem and concern. Be careful to not get into "if—then" reasoning as you try to apply the Word to the situation. The normal tendency after pondering the Bible application to the situation is to immediately draw conclusions and ask

questions. What will this decision cost you? How will this affect others? What changes will you need to go through if you decide to live by this new conviction? No matter how strong the urge is to *weigh the personal cost* of your decision — **don't!** You must first determine in your heart that you *do* have the correct biblical application for your situation. The **Holy Spirit** will again give you peace if this is what God wants for you.

- 4 Action to take.** Only after you are convinced in your heart that you have correctly applied God's Word to your situation is it time to take the next step, application of grace. **Grace is the power and desire to uphold God's truth in your life no matter what it costs you.** Remember, you are applying *halakhahs* to your life because of your **love for Jesus**. The goal is *not* right behavior for its own sake. If correct behavior in the hopes of gaining God's favor is your motivation, you will become prideful. You may even disdain others who don't live or think the way you do. God's grace will enable you to keep your new conviction because of your desire to **lovingly obey Him**. Continue to pray for grace. And repent for not having known these new truths or lived by them before now.

If this method hasn't been part of your faith enactment before, it may take a little time to develop the halakhic process for yourself and for those close to you. Be patient with each other! Each of the four steps is important. Go over them again to be sure you understand the importance of each one.

Be warned that if you fail to *apply God's Word* to your life, you may be sinning against Him in your ignorance. You need to confess and receive His forgiveness and cleansing for restored fellowship.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation (Hebrews 9:27,28).

Let us live our lives with the *grace* the Holy Spirit gives to live according to the way He's outlined in His Word as good and holy. That grateful, obedient trust will display for others our confidence as we eagerly await His return!