

# WORDS OF TRUTH SERIES

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## Are Christians "Under Grace," to Keep the Law?

[The following excellent article was written by the editor of the *Sunday School Times*, and published in that paper Jan. 3, 1914. While the writer employs some forms of expression which might properly be modified, the argument on the whole is clear and conclusive.— ED.]

FROM what are we freed by our Christian liberty? Wherein is a Christian freer from the law of God today than were the children of Israel upon whom God through Moses laid the strict requirements of his clearly defined law? Our recent Sunday school study of the Old Testament law has given rise to profitable inquiry into these questions. An Idaho reader asks, "To what extent are Christians under grace bound by the ten commandments?" And another reader enlarges the question in the following letter:—

"In what sense are we who are under grace not under law?"

“There are a great many who say they do not have to keep the Sabbath (Christian sabbath), and they quote this passage (Rom. 6: 14): ‘Ye are not under the law, but under grace,’ and say that Christ has made us free from the law. Do they not use their liberty for an occasion for the flesh?

“The commandments were observed before the law was given; should they not be established, and have greater force with us today?

“Jesus said that one jot or one tittle should in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Was the law fulfilled by Christ on the cross when he said, ‘It is finished,’ in the sense that we should not observe it?”

While God remains God, his moral law will be binding upon all who would have any part in his life. God’s moral law is eternal; it is an expression of his very being. As such it can no more be abrogated than can God himself.

Jesus put his own seal on the law when, as the inquirer points out, he said, “Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.” “Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill.” “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

And the Holy Spirit through Paul put his

seal upon the law. To the Romans Paul wrote: "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good. . . . For we know that the law is spiritual." And Paul was writing as a Christian to Christians.

Yet over against the eternal obligation of the law is the blessed truth that since Christ came, and died for us, and rose again, and joined us to himself by his Holy Spirit, we are not under law, but under grace. But what does this mean? It means that we are not living in the age or dispensation when, because of the hardness of their heart, men were allowed to suppose that they could be saved by keeping the law, but we are living in the age when God has revealed to the world that men can never be saved by keeping the law, but only by accepting a Saviour who has kept the law, and who will enable them, after saving them, to keep the law. "Under the law" men sought to keep the law in order to be saved. "Under grace" men keep the law because they are saved; they are saved in order that they may keep the law. They are not saved because they obey; they obey because they are saved. Their keeping of the law is never the test of their salvation; it is an outcome of their salvation. The test of their salvation is always and only their acceptance of a perfect, law-keeping, life-giving, empowering Saviour, Christ Jesus. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness." Rom. 4: 5. There is our salvation

by faith, not by works. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance [or, requirement] of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Rom. 8: 3; 4. Thus our salvation results in works that we could never have done until we were saved. In the old dispensation men worked *for* eternal life; in the new, men work *from* eternal life. Life then was the goal of works; now it is the starting of works.

A fact that we are in danger of overlooking as we think of those of the old dispensation who lived "under law" is this: the Old Testament saints were never saved because they kept the law. Israel as a whole, like the natural man today and in every age, thought they could be saved in that way. And God met them on their own ground. He offered them the law, not as a means of salvation, but to show them the hopelessness of their keeping the law, and their need of his grace. So the law was their schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ, that they might be justified (not by works, but) by faith. Gal. 3: 24. No Old Testament saint was ever justified by works. His way of salvation was "under grace" just as much as ours, but he lived in an age when God's people were brought "under law" in order to teach them what they insisted on learning that way. The individual Old Testament saint was always

and only saved by faith, through the grace of God, by the same Christ who saves us, though Christ's earthly work was not then done. They "drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ." 1 Cor. 10:4. "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. . . . David also pronounceth blessing upon the man, unto whom God reckoneth righteousness apart from works." Rom. 4:3-6. That the man-invited dispensation of law was a failure as far as concerned man's being saved by the law, is plainly shown. "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight. . . . But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ into all them that believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God. . . . God is one, and he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith." Rom. 3:19-30. In the Old Testament it was law first and grace afterward; and in the New Testament it is grace first and law afterward.

We must, of course, distinguish clearly between the *ceremonial* law of the Old Testament and the *moral* law. The eternal

requirements of the moral law are always binding upon God's people; but the details of ceremonial law which typified Christ's atoning and cleansing work were done away with when Christ, their great antitype, completed the work which he came to do, and which they foreshadowed. The believing Old Testament saint, saved by grace, was under the obligation of a ceremonial law from which we have been freed because Christ fulfilled and finished all that the ceremonial pointed to.

But, while we are freed from the ceremonial law, the obligation to keep the moral law rests even more heavily upon us who live in the enlightened age of grace than upon those who were living, by men's own choice, under law. We have in fulfillment in Christ that which they had at the best only in prophecy. Their belief may have given them, through Christ, the same divine power to obey the law that we now have in him; but we live in the noonday light of the revelation of his consummated work; they moved in the twilight of yet unfulfilled hope. "Not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things;" for "the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them." I Peter 1: 10-12.

Our Lord's triumphant word on the cross, "It is finished," declared the fulfillment of

that which he had come to earth to do: the supernatural work of atonement and cleansing to which the Old Testament ceremonial pointed was completed, and therefore all further necessity for such ceremonial was done away with, as the rent veil in the temple signified; the perfect keeping of the moral law, on earth, in man's stead, was finished; and the final releasing to men of that divine power whereby they themselves, after his resurrection and ascension and gift of the Spirit, could, in union with Christ, keep the law of God, was accomplished. But we must never suppose that Christ's words, "It is finished," meant our release from the obligation of keeping God's eternal law; for such a release would be our cutting off from fellowship with God.

So our Christian liberty, while freeing us from the "under law" bondage of supposing that our law keeping can save us, also sets us free to keep the law because we have been saved. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus gives us freedom to live in unswerving and joyous obedience to the eternal moral law of the ten commandments; and this includes, of course, Sabbath observance,—our recognition of the day of rest-privilege which God ordained when he created the world.

Christian liberty brings us into the most exacting and the gladdest constraint in the world,—the constraint of the love of Christ to live, under grace, in obedience to the law of his Father and ours.

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