



*A Ministry of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)*

The Law of the Lord

A Blessing to the
People of God



The Law of the Lord: A Blessing to the People of God

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Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart (Psalm 119:1, 2).

Psalm 119 is not only the Bible's longest chapter but also its loudest praise for the law of God. Its acrostic structure, 22 sections corresponding to the Hebrew alphabet's 22 letters, is but one way the psalmist expresses the full blessing of God's revelation — i.e., His law. Each section also contains eight stanzas (verses), wherein the word *law* or one of its synonyms (*statutes, precepts, decrees, commands, word, promises, laws*) recurs in bountiful celebration. One or more of these eight Hebrew words appears in 172 of the Psalms' 176 verses. The effect is awe-inspiring!

By the 119th psalm, Christians of every age have learned that the law of the Lord is good, righteous, and eternal; tested, true, and trustworthy; precious, sweet, and wonderful. The law is all this *not* in isolation, however, but only by virtue of its relationship to God. These are *His* ways and *Your* word, the psalmist insists. The law, therefore, never stands alone as an end in itself, but points to the Lawgiver. To “keep his statutes” goes hand in hand with “seek him with all [your] heart” (v. 2). Read closely, Psalm 119 turns out to be as much a song of praise and petition to the Lord as it is applause and admiration for His wonderful Word.

Here's a small sample of how the law brings blessing to the people of God, according to the psalmist:

I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word (v. 16).

Your laws are good. How I long for your precepts! (vv. 39b, 40a).

Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens (v. 89).

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all the day long (v. 97).

Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them (v. 129).

Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws (v. 164).

Some Christians shudder at such talk, especially those who have known the heavy burden of legalism and now rejoice in the blessed righteousness by faith in the finished work of Jesus. Many consider the law limited to the old covenant, something that's outdated by the grace and teachings of Jesus. They think it's been replaced by the two great laws of love toward God and others. Based on statements from Paul, they may even consider law to be something that kills, an earlier obligation to God that Christians are no longer under.

On the other hand, many sentiments of the psalmist are significantly repeated in the New Testament by none other than Apostle Paul himself. To the Romans, for example, he writes that the singular advantage of being a Jew is that they were "entrusted with the very words of God" (3:1, 2). According to Paul, the gospel of God is

taught in Holy Scriptures (Old Testament, 1:1, 2; 16:26), which he quotes liberally. As for the law, specifically, Paul writes of Gentiles keeping and obeying it (2:26, 27; cf. 8:4). And he reminds Christians to fulfill, through love, the Ten Commandments along with a Great Commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), which he says summarizes the whole law (Romans 13:8-10).

In addition, we can scarcely miss hearing close echoes of Psalm 119 in Apostle Paul’s own words in his epistle to the Romans:

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law (3:31).

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good (7:12).

We know that the law is spiritual . . . (v. 14a).

The law is good (v. 16b).

For in my inner being I delight in God’s law (v. 22).

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law . . . (v. 25a).

How can this be — the apostle of grace writing so positively about law when he, elsewhere, had so many apparently negative things to say about it?

Let’s take another look at the law of God in both Old and New Testaments. Let’s understand its relevance, if any, for Christians who are saved by God’s grace, not by His law. Let’s see what meaning the law yet has for those redeemed by Christ’s blood

and clothed with His righteousness by faith alone (Romans 5:1, 2, 9, 17; 8:4; Ephesians 2:6, 8; Galatians 3:8; Revelation 7:14).

Ten Commandments at Sinai

When we consider the law of God, we think first of the Ten Commandments, spoken by the voice of God and written with His own finger on tables of stone. They formed a constitution of sorts for Israel, the foundation for all statutes and decrees later given to that nation. They were an integral part of God's relationship with His people under the old covenant. The following points, read alongside Psalm 119, are noteworthy:

1. When the Israelites came to Mount Sinai, where they received the Ten Commandments, they were already a redeemed people (Exodus 20:2).

Israel had already been called by God to be His people and to leave Egypt (6:6, 7). They had already exercised faith and been delivered by the blood of the Passover lamb. They had marched out of Egypt's oppression by the hand of God, and had been "baptized" by walking through the parted waters of the sea (chapters 12-15). From these we learn that the Israelites weren't delivered from Egypt because they obeyed the Ten Commandments. Rather, they were commanded to obey at Sinai *because* they had already been released from the sin of Egypt.

The order of these events is a powerful lesson for Christians. No law, including the

Ten, can serve as a means of salvation. No law can keep someone in a saved condition. Salvation is the gift of God through grace. It is *received* through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ and *maintained* by continued faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

So where does the law fit in? We love Him and keep His commands “because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19 — 5:3). Psalm 119 speaks the same critical truth: Salvation, redemption, deliverance, and “life” are God’s gift by His great love, not by the law (vv. 134, 146, 154, 156, 170, 175). His good instruction and our loving obedience will follow in their proper order (vv. 97, 113, 163, 165).

2. The commandments reflect the very nature and glory of God.

The words of God are righteous because they originate in Him. To be sure, the Ten Words, as written in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, reflect the culture of the people to whom they were first given. It is also true that most are stated negatively, “Thou shalt not. . . .” But of paramount importance is that the underlying precept of each commandment reflects the character of God. The truth of the Ten Commandments can’t be changed any more than the character of God can be changed!

God is the ultimate power and intelligence in the universe. For humans to worship anything or anybody else is wrong, then, because doing so denies the reality of who God is. It is also wrong to invoke God’s name in a way that demeans Him, or to forget the day He hallowed for humanity’s

good (commandments 1-4). In refraining from dishonor, murder, adultery, theft, lying, and coveting (commandments 5-10), we respect the honor, life, sexual purity, property, reputation, and integrity of others, because those things are not ours to take or destroy.

The precepts and principles of the Decalogue, therefore, reflect the glory of the eternal Creator of the universe. They can no more be terminated than His glory can be terminated. The psalmist demonstrates this essential relationship when he sings, “You are righteous, LORD, and your laws are right. . . . All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal” (Psalm 119:137, 160).

Ten Commandments before Sinai

Given that God’s “commands are boundless,” His “righteous laws . . . eternal” (vv. 96, 160) and that they reflect His nature and glory, we should not be surprised that they were very much a part of His will for His people before Mount Sinai. Indeed, the book of Genesis indicates that the principles contained in the Ten Words were accepted as the will of God and that breaking them was considered sin.

For example, the seventh-day Sabbath was sanctified at Creation (Genesis 2:2, 3) and the Israelites were reminded of it (Exodus 16) — before the fourth command at Sinai. Adam and Eve’s trouble in the garden started when they coveted the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 3:6) — a violation of the

tenth command. When Cain killed Abel, God punished him for murder (4:5-13) — the sixth command. Jacob ordered his family to get rid of idols (35:1-4) — the second command. Joseph knew that adultery with Potiphar’s wife would have been a “great wickedness and sin against God” (39:9), and Jacob knew that stealing was wrong (30:33) — the seventh and eighth commands.

What God said of Abraham 500 years before Sinai is similar to the law and blessing themes in Psalm 119: “all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions” (Genesis 26:4, 5; cf. Deuteronomy 30:10).

In other words, when God spoke the Ten Words at Mount Sinai, there were no surprises in content! To be sure, Israel hadn’t always followed these laws and likely didn’t teach or obey them consistently in Egypt. Still, the truths of the Decalogue were known to God’s people prior to Mount Sinai, though they may not have been formally encoded. Their lack of formal writing doesn’t mean that these commandments didn’t exist, and the giving of the code at Mount Sinai doesn’t mean they were new.

Hitting Our Weakness

Certainly, God carefully and deliberately chose the principles He spoke from Mount Sinai. He knew the nature of the human beings He had created. He knew their weaknesses and where they were likely to go astray. Like a guardrail, the commandments

He spoke were there to say, “No! Don’t do that! Stay on the right path, or you’ll hurt yourself!”

As we find throughout Scripture, the psalmist used the metaphor of a path often. Life is a journey; the law helps define and illuminate the best way to walk: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Psalm 119:1-5, 105). Living according to God’s Word, the psalmist says, keeps our eyes on the path of purity and preserves life. It also trains us to “hate every wrong path” (vv. 9, 37, 128).

But people often prefer to direct their own steps, to find their own way, and to rely on tangible things for security instead of on God’s Word. Many gods have been worshipped through the ages, including, in our own time, money, wealth, and physical possessions. The commandments address this weak spot: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol. . . .” It’s human nature to resist authority — to oppose our parents, to lust for sexual pleasure, to desire what others have, to protect ourselves by lying. It’s human nature to want all our time for work or personal pleasure. Perhaps time is the most difficult thing to give up. It takes decisive faith to trust God to sustain us for seven days, when we work only six.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul explains this role of the law in targeting our rebellious nature:

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly

and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers — and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me (1:8-11).

So God knew exactly what He was doing, laying down the way of law in key areas of our humanity, directing and protecting us from the suffering that results from doing what comes “naturally.” In fact, it has been said that we don’t keep the commandments; they keep us! That is, they keep us from much of the pain that results from choosing our own path and giving our natural desires free rein.

Our tendency to stray from the way is important in Psalm 119, too. After the psalmist cries, “I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands” early in the psalm, he concludes in its very last verse, “I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant . . .” (vv. 10, 176). The tendency to stray is another way of saying that we tend to sin by breaking God’s laws.

This brings us to our next subject.

Pointing to a Savior

At the same time that God, through the law, showed people how to avoid much individual and societal pain, He also demonstrated to humans how far they had fallen from His holiness, how guilty we are of sin, and how desperately we need His

forgiveness, His grace and pardon. The law is a blessing, not just that it teaches us right from wrong, but especially that it shows us our need for a Savior. Because the law condemns our sin to death, it brings us silently to our knees (Romans 3:19; 1 Corinthians 15:56). Like the psalmist who does not want to sin against God but ultimately confesses he is a lost sheep, like that publican in the temple, we too cry out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Psalm 119:11, 176; Luke 18:13, NKJV).

The law puts us in the same position as the apostle Paul, who confesses his inability to fully resist sin and even considers himself the chief of sinners (read Romans 7:23-25 and 1 Timothy 1:15). In these verses, Paul sounds like the psalmist, who loves the law but never boasts that it can save him, but who cries out instead for God's compassion to bring deliverance: "May your unfailing love come unto me, LORD, your salvation, according to your promise" (119:41; cf. vv. 76, 77, 88, 94, 134, 170, et al.). Here we see the psalmist coming to anticipate God's work of grace in the Messiah (Jesus) and in the new covenant.

To the Galatians, Paul writes that the law was a tutor bringing us to Christ (3:24, NKJV). From the context, he clearly refers to the entire codified old covenant legal system, added some 430 years after God's initial promises to Abraham. This legal system served as a schoolmaster to teach Israel about sin, its consequences, and their own inability to be holy as God is holy. Under the old covenant, the law, as Deuteronomy

27-28 warns, could bring blessing for obedience or cursing for disobedience. Due to sin's power in human hearts, the law, intended for blessing, became a curse instead (Galatians 3:13; Daniel 9:11). The law itself prophesied this outcome, as well as the new covenant solution to follow (Deuteronomy 30, 32).

Though Christians are no longer under the old covenant, the law of God at its core — which reflects the holiness and glory of God and His will for His people — continues to point out our sin and our need for a Savior. It does the same for us as it did for David and Paul. The law confronts us with our sinfulness and brings us to our knees before the mercy of God and the cross of Christ (Psalm 51; 1 Timothy 1:12-15).

How Shall We Live?

After we've accepted the sacrifice of Jesus by faith and have been reconciled to God through His grace, now that we've become God's sons and daughters and are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-9), we are compelled to ask, "How does our Father want us to live? What does He want us to do?"

This takes us right back to the Word of God — to "all Scripture" and our "training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17), from Genesis to Revelation, including the instructions and precepts of the old covenant understood alongside and through the teachings of Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17-48). As we consider all these principles, laws, and teachings, we do so as people who are not

“under the law” as a means to salvation, but “under grace” and “in Christ” by faith. This is the new covenant!

Though we are no longer under the particular legal form of the Sinaitic covenant, the eternal, moral law that reflects God’s nature, glory, and will for human behavior, which existed before Sinai, also continues after Calvary in the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 10:16, 17). The form that God’s covenant takes has changed in Christ, but the moral contents of God’s law, and its power to reveal good and evil, remain. This includes such basics as the two great commandments mentioned above: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18) and “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5), which Jesus says the whole law and prophets hang upon (Matthew 22:37-40).

Clarifying Not “Under the Law”

Paul states repeatedly in his writings that Christians are not “under the law” nor saved by observing the law. Consider the following passages from Romans and Galatians:

By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight . . . (Romans 3:20, NKJV).

You are not under law, but under grace (6:14).

By the works of the law no one will be justified (Galatians 2:16).

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law (5:18).

These and other statements in Paul's writings make clear that we are not under the law in at least three critical ways:

1. We are not under the *condemnation* of the law for having broken it, because we have been saved from the penalty for sin (death) by the blood of Jesus Christ. The New Testament says that sin is the transgression of the law (Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7-9; 1 Corinthians 15:56; 1 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 10:17; James 2:9; 1 John 3:4) and that one purpose of the law is to point out our sin. In its old covenant form, the law could bring only the curse of condemnation, but "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). In the new covenant, Jesus' sacrifice, previewed in the old sacrificial law, has delivered us first from the penalty of death (the law cursing us) and then from the power of sin (our own law-breaking).

The psalmist, like Paul, anticipates freedom from sin's dominion by God's gracious intervention: "Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me" (Psalm 119:133).

2. We are not under the law in that our *relationship* with God is not based on any law — not on the Ten Commandments, not on "Love your neighbor as yourself," nor even on Christ's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. If our standing before God were based on any of these, it would be legalism. But Paul is emphatic. The law is not a means to salvation, to righteousness before God, or to reconciliation with

God. The law can show us our sinfulness and condemn us as sinners, but it has no power to save or even forgive. Only the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, can bring us into the family of God. Grace alone, and the righteousness that comes and is maintained by faith, can accomplish this (Romans 10:1-10).

This truth is as true of old covenant believers as it is of new. As much as the psalmist praises God's law and desires to obey it, what is most evident in Psalm 119 is his close relationship with God and his dependence on God's grace: "May your unfailing love come to me, LORD, your salvation, according to your promise" and "Save me, for I am yours" (vv. 41, 94a). As important as obedience is to God's will, relationship with Him is always predicated on His grace alone.

3. We are no longer under the law as in *under the old covenant*. We need not become Jews through circumcision, or rely on temple sacrifice or priestly ritual to deal with the guilt of sin or its grip. Jesus inaugurated a new covenant by His blood (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 12:24). However, under this new covenant, as under the old, trust is followed by obedience (Romans 6:12-17). All the New Testament writers make clear that genuine faith is alive, active, and accompanied by a changing life (Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 2:10; James 2:26), where the spirit of the law is lived from the heart. Paul, for example, describes the priorities for

Christian living like this: “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts” (1 Corinthians 7:19). This resonates with Psalm 119’s positive teaching about the law and the moral life upheld by it.

Positives of the Law

For Paul, the new covenant cornerstone relationship of faith in Christ through the Spirit remarkably accomplishes all things that the old covenant law was intended for but could never achieve: righteousness and life (Romans 2:25-29; 8:1-10). This fulfills the promise of the prophets: conformity to God’s holy and just will as expressed in His law (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:25-27; 2 Corinthians 3:2-10, 18; Hebrews 10:16, 17). This theme of deliverance from inherent human limitations and future fulfillment by God’s gracious initiative abounds in Psalm 119, and is the basis of the blessed and essential obedient status held out in its opening two verses.

Paul held the law in high esteem. Like the psalmist, he considered it “holy, righteous and good” (Romans 7:12, 22; Psalm 119:70, 77). These statements do not contradict Paul’s teaching about not being under the law. He offers a clear resolution to the apparent contradiction.

God alone “quickens” (or gives life, Romans 8:11; Psalm 119:40). The law is not the means by which we enter into life, or a relationship with God. Jesus is! However, as a reflection of God’s nature and His will

for His redeemed people, as a standard of righteous conduct for those in relationship with Him by grace, the law is relevant, applicable, and worthy indeed. Always belonging to covenant life, the law is embedded in the new just as it was in the old: “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds” (Hebrews 10:16).

The life enslaved to the flesh is “hostile to God . . . does not submit to God’s law . . . and cannot please God,” but life in the Spirit reverses all three (Romans 8:7-10), just as the Ezekiel prophesied: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them . . . Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (11:19a, 20a).

The heart transformation so central to the new covenant, and to the New Testament’s complex view of the law, is essential to Psalm 119 too. Fourteen times the psalmist prays about his “heart” in reference to faithfulness to God’s law. An anticipatory cry for a new covenant heart is overheard:

Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. . . . Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain (vv. 34, 36).

In a positive way, Paul calls the new heart relationship with the law under the new covenant the “law of faith,” the “law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” and the “law of Christ” (Romans 3:27; 8:2; Galatians 6:2, NKJV). James describes the law in Christian

experience as “the perfect law that gives freedom” and “the royal law found in Scripture” (1:25; 2:8). John refers to our new covenant orientation to the law like this: “This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome . . .” (1 John 5:3; cf. John 14:15).

These New Testament authors sound like the psalmist in Psalm 119, who could speak so confidently of the blessing of God’s law and Word. Their words are grounded firmly in new covenant faith of Christ and the transforming work of His Spirit. Our Lord Jesus himself teaches us how the law should be understood and fulfilled in our lives, which the New Testament summarizes as the law of love (Matthew 5:17-20; cf. Romans 2:27; 8:4; 13:8; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8).

Covenant Analogy

Let’s say you enter a lease agreement for the basement apartment of a house. The landlord lives upstairs. The lease specifies that you will mow the grass, shovel snow, carry his garbage out with yours on Thursday, live quietly, etc. You hardly know the landlord and you don’t enjoy the chores, but you comply to keep your living quarters.

Then, you get to know and respect the landlord personally. He gets to know and love you also, and eventually reveals that he is your biological father by an early, short-lived marriage. He says that you are his sole heir, that he’s tearing up the lease, and that you can continue to live with him

and have access to the whole house. What a blessing! You accept.

Now what about mowing grass, shoveling snow, and taking out garbage? Can these duties be neglected since the contract is gone? On the contrary, they still need to be done, not because they're written on paper but because they still reflect the will of your landlord — your father. Now you do these and more out of love and gratitude for your dad because you want to please him and because you know the house will be yours someday. You begin to help your father in things that go far beyond what the lease spells out.

Similarly, the unchanging will of God that was written into His “lease agreement” with ancient Israel is relevant to redeemed believers in the twenty-first century, even though we are not under that lease. But no longer do we obey just because Exodus 20 says so. Rather, we obey for the fundamental reason that it pleases our Redeemer and Father. Indeed, the will of God is now written in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, as Scripture says (Hebrews 10:15-18; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Every day we rise to ask not “What do I *have* to do today?” but “How can I *please* my Lord today?” To answer that question, we search all the Scriptures — the Law, Prophets, and Psalms; the Gospels, Acts, and the writings of Paul and the other apostles. To be sure, many elements of the old covenant in Scripture no longer apply — just as there were terms of the written lease that were not relevant after the landlord tore it up, like rent payments. But basic principles

reflected in the terms of the lease remain.

Not all Christians will agree precisely on which teachings of the old covenant are still relevant for those saved by grace. But all should be motivated by love for God, not by a sense of obligation to comply with the terms of the old “lease agreement.”

This new covenant relationship to God and His law brings us full circle to Psalm 119:1, 2 and those two blessings to those who walk in the law of the Lord and seek Him with their whole heart. This way of life was commanded from the very beginning: “keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him” (Deuteronomy 11:22, KJV; cf. 5:33; 8:6; 10:12; 13:5; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16).

But not until the new covenant is established by Christ and experienced through the Spirit is this command to love and obey God finally fulfilled. That blessed way of life in Jesus, anticipated by the psalmist, is now manifest by those who “walk in newness of life. . . . That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 6:4; 8:4, KJV; John 14:6).

Concluding Blessing

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus, Paul, James, and the other apostles freely cite the laws of the Old Testament, the only Scriptures extant at that time. They quote from the law numerous times, repeating in word or in principle all of the

Ten Commandments and numerous other laws from the Old Testament, even as they affirm that right standing with God can be neither gained nor retained by observing laws. They understand fully that the law is not a means to salvation. But as a reflection of the nature of God, as a standard for human conduct, and as a source for understanding God's will for His people, the whole law of Scripture and the specific individual commands within it are important.

The psalmists understand these distinctions as well, as does Paul. The twin blessings of Psalm 119:1, 2 for those who walk in the Lord's law are balanced with the twin blessings of Psalm 32:1, 2 for those who are saved by the Lord's grace: "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them." So in the end, the blessings of grace and of truth go side by side, hand in hand: "Blessed is the one who trusts in you. . . . Blessed is the one you . . . teach from your law" (Psalm 84:12; 94:12). As in the old covenant, so in the new.

Christians, therefore, should be able to say wholeheartedly with the psalmist and the apostle Paul, "Oh, how I love your law! . . . Your statutes are wonderful . . . If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction . . . the law is good . . . I delight in God's law . . . I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law."



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