

LET EVERY MAN BE FULLY PERSUADED IN HIS OWN MIND

The place of the Law of Moses in the life of believers

The title of this document is taken from Rom. 14:5 where the Apostle Paul tackles the tensions that divided the ecclesia at Rome where Gentile converts were criticised by some Jewish converts for not keeping the Sabbath as a holy day. In addition, there were serious disagreements about foods forbidden under the Law of Moses that were freely eaten by Gentile converts. There was a need for every member of the ecclesia to be fully persuaded in his own mind what Scripture taught and required of him. It is very clear from the context and Paul's other writings on these themes that even if believers arrived at different conclusions they were not to impose their convictions on others. There can only be one reason for this and that is that the Law of Moses had been abolished as a code of ritual conduct. This treatise examines the believer's relationship to law.

CAN KEEPING THE LAW OF MOSES LEAD TO ETERNAL LIFE?

In Gal. 3:21-22 Paul wrote, "...for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." This is clear enough. The Law of Moses was never designed to be the means of attaining eternal life. Its purpose was to be a *paedagogue* (tutor slave) to lead the natural seed of Abraham to Christ (Gal. 3:24) so that they might be forgiven the sins that their experience living under the Law made obvious to them (Rom. 7:5-12). It was a principle of the Law of Moses that one single breach brought the condemnation of the whole law down upon the offender – James 2:10-11; Gal. 3:10; 5:3. If you broke one commandment you were cursed by the whole law, hence, it could not give eternal life, because as Solomon noted "there is no man that sinneth not" (1 Kings 8:46). The question then arises – could the Law of Moses give eternal life to a sinless man? The answer is in the negative for even Jesus Christ was condemned by the Law through no fault of his own.

THE LAW ABOLISHED BECAUSE IT CONDEMNED CHRIST

The all-encompassing wisdom of Yahweh was seen in the insertion a few highly significant parenthetical words in the Law of Moses, "for he that is hanged is accursed of God" – Deut. 21:23. Jesus Christ was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), but this very obedience brought him under the curse of the Law of Moses. Is this not a strange conundrum? How can the perfectly obedient Son of God be cursed by the very law he came to fulfil? Answer – because his Father intended it to be so – hence, the pre-arranged stipulation of Deut. 21:23. This was the Divinely preordained mechanism to righteously abolish the Law of Moses. Christ upheld the righteousness of God in his perfect obedience to perform the preordained will of God which was to die on the cross to demonstrate what should be done to the nature he inherited from Adam – Acts 2:22-24 – but as Peter notes, this very obedience guaranteed his resurrection from the dead. The righteousness of God demanded the resurrection of a sinless man. But how could God do this while the Law of Moses remained in place? It had condemned Christ in the manner of his death through no fault or wrongdoing on his part. As planned, Yahweh set aside the Law of Moses as a national code of regulations and rituals while preserving its principles governing individual behaviour in the law of Christ. Thus the righteousness of God was satisfied on all counts.

ARE BELIEVERS UNDER LAW OF ANY KIND?

One of the serious mistakes that some believers make is to claim they are 'free' in Christ and under no law. This is dangerously incorrect. Sadly, in some cases this misunderstanding results in looseness of behaviour. Paul encountered this problem in the Brotherhood and was even accused himself of practising sin that grace might abound – Rom. 3:7-8; 6:1,15.

The 'freedom' believers enjoy in Christ is freedom from the ritual requirements of the Law of Moses, not from its Divine principles. This is clear from Paul's statement in Gal. 5:1 – "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Throughout the New Testament bondage to the ritual requirements of the Law is likened to slavery. Paul's allegory of Sarah and Isaac, and Hagar and Ishmael in Gal. 4:21-31 being one example. Jews living under the Law of Moses (represented by Hagar a bondservant) are likened to Ishmael born a slave because of his mother, whereas those in Christ through faith in the Abrahamic promises (represented by Sarah a free woman) are likened to Isaac born free from slavery. It was this situation that was in the mind of Christ when he said to some would-be Jewish disciples in John 8:32 – "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They took umbrage to the suggestion that they were in bondage, but in fact, they were, because of their desire to remain under bondage to the Law of Moses and refusal to embrace the truth in Christ that would make them free from servitude to "the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years" (Gal. 4:9-10). In Christ there is freedom from the keeping of special days, avoiding certain foods and a myriad of other ritual and regulatory requirements of the Law of Moses. However, freedom from the Law of Moses is not a freedom from all law. Paul hints at this when he exhorts the brethren in Galatia – "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

Paul destroys any notion that believers are not under any law in 1 Cor. 9:20-21 – "And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, **(being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,)** that I might gain them that are without law." Like Paul, all true believers are subject to the law of Christ and that is spelt out in our time in the commandments of Christ.

The law of Christ is actually more demanding than the Law of Moses because it deals with the heart and conscience, not externals. The seventh commandment was "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). Seven, inter-alia, is the covenant number and adultery is a heinous breaking of a covenant – Prov. 6:32; Job 31:9-11. Christ's teaching is that fixed lustful intent towards another woman is adultery (Matt. 5:28) before any physical union. Paul made this same point when he likened the intention of law keeping converts coming into Christ to continue under law as adultery (Rom. 7:1-3). His reasoning was that the Law of Moses was like a husband to which they were bound in covenant and any attempt to be involved with another man (Christ) while their first husband was alive was an act of adultery. Subservience to the Law of Moses had to be abandoned before becoming espoused to Christ.

SHOULD BELIEVERS KEEP THE SABBATH?

Adam and Eve did not keep the very first Sabbath - the seventh day of the creation week. They laboured pleasantly in the garden exercising dominion over the carnal creation while the

angels rested from their labours of the previous six days. This was imperative because it laid down the prophetic pattern for the future. After six 'days' (2 Pet. 3:8) of labour by the angels, Christ (the last Adam) and his bride (taken from his side like Eve was from Adam) will rest while the latter rule and labour pleasantly throughout the seventh day (Millennium). This is the clear message of Ps. 8 so beautifully expounded by Paul in Heb. 2:5-9.

There is no record of either Antediluvians or post-Flood Patriarchs keeping the Sabbath, simply because there was no law concerning it. That law was not introduced until Israel arrived at Sinai and the Law of Moses was given. This means that for 2,463 years since Creation (if Bro. Thomas' chronology in *Elpis Israel* is correct), the Sabbath was not observed by anyone as a special day. If we count AD 70 as the period when Yahweh brought an end to overt ritualistic law keeping in the place where He had set His name, the Sabbath was kept by Israel for a period of 1,663 years (a period much less than from Creation to the Law). From the resurrection of Christ, the Law of Moses was abolished as a system of required ritual, although its Divine principles remain (Gal. 3:13). It is significant that Christ regularly and deliberately 'broke' the Sabbath law as upheld by the Rabbinically instructed Jews of his day. This was not disobedience or defiance of Divine law but rather an insistence on keeping the spirit and intention of the Sabbath law and foreshadowing its fulfilment in the Kingdom Age. After healing the impotent man on the Sabbath he said to his critics, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). Both he and his Father worked on the Sabbath for the redemption of mankind.

The Sabbath was not simply about stopping all work. It was about ceasing one's own labours so Yahweh's work alone could be done on that day. That is why the Aaronic priests' labours doubled on the Sabbath day. Any perceptive Israelite must have wondered why he witnessed a conundrum every Sabbath. While he stood idle before his place of worship he would see the priests and Levites scurrying about completing the defined duties of the Sabbath under the Law of Moses. How come they were busier on the Sabbath than any other day of the week? The lesson was obvious to those who understood loftier principles and avoided the shallow thinking of Judaism. Yahweh was trying to teach them the lesson Christ spent his entire ministry endeavouring to teach - the Sabbath was in fact a demonstration of the principles that should govern an entire way of life. It was not about ceasing work on one day to worship God, but rather a conscious choice of always giving priority to the work of God above the work of man. In essence, every day is a 'Sabbath' to a true believer - God and His work must come first. Christ's generation never grasped this principle because of their Judaistic tendencies and sadly it remains a problem for successive generations.

When Christ specified to the rich young ruler what commandments of the ten should be kept, he excluded those which the young man's wealth-centred life did not meet (Mark 10:17-22). But he also made no mention of keeping the Sabbath which this man, as a ruler in Israel, undoubtedly strictly observed. This is a telling fact. If Christ had said the Sabbath should be kept (presumably not out of the question seeing that at that stage the Law had not been abolished), he would have created in the minds of his followers the impression that keeping the Sabbath was an essential element in following him. It clearly is not from what is afterwards spelt out in the writings of his apostles as they contended with the Judaising element in the Brotherhood.

WHAT IS JUDAISM?

Human nature is naturally biased towards failure and the heart of man is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9). It even deceives in the arena of religion and worship. There is a certain attractiveness to the flesh in having a set of rules governing worship and service. The 'checklist' approach provides a sense of comfort and security and a feeling of satisfaction that we have performed effectively in the sight of God. The only problem with this is the source of the motivation. In Christ motivation is crucial. Paul makes this clear in Phil. 2:13 – “For it is God which worketh (*energeo* – to be active; efficient) in you both to will and to do (*energeo*) of his good pleasure.” The will to 'do' must come from God, not man. When man creates a list of acts to perform or rituals to follow, particularly those that God does not require of him, it is man that dictates motivation, not God. That is Judaism.

Judaism is not well understood in the latter days. It was a huge problem in the first and second centuries after Christ, eventually producing the great apostasy of the Roman Catholic system that grew out of the Brotherhood through a commercialised religion brought back from Babylon. In Romans Paul explains how Judaism operates. It is essentially a ledger mentality. In a ledger there is both a credit and debit column. When men perform religious acts and rituals and feel they have pleased God they add those acts to the credit column. Sins of course must be added to the debit column. Providing the sum of credits outweighs the debits, man has effectively placed God in his debt and therefore deserves a 'reward'. As Paul noted, “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt” (Rom. 4:4), and, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6). We are saved by grace through faith in the work God accomplished in Christ. The works we must reveal are works produced out of faith and love generated by the Word of God, not rituals and law keeping.

People of truth must be motivated by a superior motivation to the keeping of days and rituals, namely, God manifestation. Yahweh calls upon us to imitate Him and that can only be done by following the example of Christ (the Word made flesh) who like his Father worked on the Sabbath (John 5:16-18; 9:4,14) and refused nothing of the good gifts of God presented to him.

This way of serving God is achieved by daily ingestion of the Word of life which creates the intent to be "doers of the Word" because of a Divinely infused way of thinking (Phil. 2:13; Rom. 2:14-15). This is far superior to any 'rules based' or ritual form of religion because the glory is given to God and not man (Jer. 9:23-24). Bro. Roberts beautifully expressed this way in The Ecclesial Guide Clause 34 - 'The True Secret of Success' when he wrote: **“This lies in the rich indwelling of the word of Christ in each individual member of an ecclesia—a state to be attained in our day only by the daily and systematic reading of the Scriptures. When every mind is influenced by the Word, the worst rules work smoothly. When it is otherwise, the best will miscarry. The system of daily reading, laid out in *The Bible Companion*, has for years been followed by thousands with increasing benefit.”**

HOW DOES THE WORD OF GOD WORK IN OUR LIFE?

The parable of the farmer in Mark 4:26-29 (unique to Mark) is based on the parable of the sower and amplifies the lesson of Mark 4:23-25 revealing how the Word of God produces the fruit of God's character in believers – “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you:

and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.”

Hearing is the key. The more intelligent hearing and comprehension there is, the more spiritual growth accrues. Effort to hear is rewarded, but a penalty applies for lack of consistent effort to hear, even loss of all. So why is hearing the word of God consistently and diligently so important? Simply because it is the source of Divine power that shapes thinking, attitude and character. This is where the motivation comes from that Paul refers to in Phil. 2:13 – “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

This is what the parable of the farmer teaches in Mark 4:26-29 – “And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, **he knoweth not how**. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.” When the seed of the Word sinks deep into the soil of a fertile and willing mind, the farmer’s contribution is largely done, except for diligent maintenance (rising night and day), until harvest time. The final crop now depends upon the operation of God’s established laws, as in the laws of nature. How the seed grows and produces a harvest is a secret of God, the farmer “knoweth not how”. All he knows is that if he plays his part diligently, it is God that gives the increase. That increase is witnessed in the development of Yahweh’s character. Any form of Judaism – rules based service; a checklist approach to service with its ledger mentality; and placing more importance on service on one day over another are all powerless to produce this outcome.

Mark 4:27 – “And should sleep”. Even sleep is important in the process. Modern science thinks it has discovered something about how sleep contributes to mental development. “Sleep has been identified as a state that optimizes the consolidation of newly acquired information in memory. Consolidation refers to a process that transforms new and initially labile memories encoded in the awake state into more stable representations that become integrated into the network of pre-existing long-term memories. Consolidation involves the active re-processing of ‘fresh’ memories within the neuronal networks that were used for encoding them.” - Cited from ‘The Memory Function of Sleep’ - Susanne Diekelmann and Jan Born - Nature Reviews Neuroscience/Aop, published online 4 January 2010.

Perhaps this fascinating discovery is even hinted at in Ps. 127:2 – “...for so he giveth his beloved sleep”, or as Bullinger says it should be translated – “in sleep”; i.e. while they sleep; i.e. without their labour. In the end it all depends upon our God working in us by His Word.

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