

John 3:20-25 (W.G.B.) 51672

Things New and Old: Volume 32, Law or Grace, Which?

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1. In God's dealings with men He made a marked distinction between Jew and Gentile. (See Rom. 2:9, 10.) Of the Gentile He says: "As many as have sinned without law:" of the Jew: "As many as have sinned in the law" (Ver. 12.) Verse 14 states distinctly that "the Gentiles have not the law." The Jew, on the contrary, "rested in the law" (ver. 17); "knew God's will" (ver. 18); "had the form of knowledge and of truth in the law" (ver. 20); and "with the letter and circumcision transgressed the law." (Ver. 27.) This is in contrast to "without law." (Ver. 12.) Note a cognate word in 1 John 3:4, revised version, is translated correctly "lawlessness," so that this would be "lawless."

To the Jews "were committed the oracles of God" (chap. 3:2), that is, the Old Testament Scriptures, including the law; and the Gentiles have been proved guilty before God by His testimonies to them, that is, in creation (chap. 1:19-23, "therefore without excuse") and conscience. (Chap. 2:15.) The Jews are proved guilty before Him by their own law. (Chap. 3:10-18.) "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law" (ver. 19), clearly distinguishing between the two classes, Jew and Gentile, as does also chapter 2:6-16. If both were under law there would be no sense in these scriptures, nor in the argument of chapter 4, where the Jews are called "they which are of the law" (ver. 14) in contrast to Gentiles which "have not the law." (Chap. 2:14.) Chapter 9 again: "Israelites, to whom pertaineth.... the giving of the law" (ver. 4); verses 30, 31 Contrast Gentiles and Israel, the latter as having "followed after the law of righteousness."

Gal. 4:4, 5: "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law."

Note. —See also Exod. 25:2; Deut. 27:10, 14, 26; 32:10, 2-4; Josh. 22:5 Kings 17:13, 34, 37; 21:8; 2 Chron. 33:8; Neh. 8:1; Psalm 78:5; Mal. 4:4— ("The law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms"); John 7:19, 51; 8:5, 17; 10:34; 15:25; 8:31; 19:7; Acts 7:53; 18:15; 24:6.

2. Rom. 3:20-22: "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; but now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ." (N.B. Not by the law-keeping of Christ in whole or in part.) Verses 24, 25: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in his blood [not in his law-keeping] to declare his righteousness," &c. Verse 30: "It is one God which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith." In what? "His blood." (Ver. 25.)

Chapter 5:1: "Being justified by faith." "On him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." (Chap. 4:24, 25.)

Note. —Chapter 5:18, 19, have nothing to do with the question of imputed righteousness, for the law was not against sin, that is the "original sin" of our nature, but was "added because of transgressions." (Gal. 3:19.) Now Rom. 5:18, 19 refer to sin: ("as by one man sin entered into the world," ver. 12), and show how God dealt with that, even by "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and by a sacrifice for sin [margin] condemned sin in the flesh." (Chap. 8:3.) This is the one righteous act referred to in verse 18, bringing in "Justification of life" for all men (contrasted with the one offense of Adam which brought condemnation upon all men); but it is those only which believe who receive it, and are constituted righteous, that is, stand in righteousness with Him, being connected with Christ as Head of the new race. In verse 19 the obedience of the one by which many are constituted righteous is His "obedience unto death even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), in contrast with! the disobedience of the one—Adam's act in Eden—by which many were constituted sinners by nature, that is, those connected with him as head of the fallen race. The teaching of Galatians is equally clear upon this point. Chapter 2:16: "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ," not in His law-keeping, but in His blood-shedding; "for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," neither our works of the law nor His, for whose-ever they are, they are "works of the law," and not "without" or "apart from the law." And the apostle concludes his argument in verse 21, by saying: "If righteousness come by the law [whoever keeps it, we or He] then Christ is dead in vain."

Moreover in the nature of things one man's law-keeping could not be imputed to another who was a law breaker. "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them." (Lev. 18:5.) The man who did keep them should live in them, not someone else, or millions of others. "And it shall be our righteousness if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us" (Deut. 6:25), that is, the righteousness would belong to the person who did the commandments, not to others. And further, according to this scripture this would be "our" righteousness, i.e., human righteousness, the righteousness of man as such. What the apostle calls "mine own righteousness" (Phil. 3:9), law-keeping righteousness, or human righteousness. Not divine, not "the righteousness which is of God by faith." Not the law-keeping righteousness of Christ as a man imputed to us—the law could not be addressed to Him as God. So that though Christ as man kept the law, yet that human righteousness is not at all what is meant by "the righteousness of God" which is what God has done in our redemption through Jesus Christ.

But now the righteousness of God is manifested, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe. (Rom. 3:21, 22.) "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," (Rom. 10:4), that is, He bore its penalty for those who were under it, and; ended the possibility of obtaining righteousness from that source for all.

3. The Gentiles never having been under the law ("without law," Rom. 2:12), it follows that Christians from among the Gentiles must have been put under it since the cross by a distinct divine enactment, if they are under law now. But there is no such thing to be found in the New Testament. On the contrary, when Judaizing teachers of the sect of the Pharisees insisted that it was needful to circumcise the Gentiles and

to command them to keep the law of Moses, (Acts 15:5), Peter asked: "Why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Ver. 10.) So far from the Gentiles being put under the law, Jewish believers were delivered from it, God " blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." (Col. 2:14.) "For I through the law [that is, through Christ bearing the penalty of the broken law, death] am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." (Gal. 2:19.) "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made," that is Christ. (Gal. 3:19.) But before faith came we were kept under the law.... "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster unto Christ! ... but after that faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster." (Verses 23-25.) "We, when we were children, were in bondage.... but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.... Wherefore thou art no more a servant but a son." (Chap. 4:3, 4, 5, 7.) The three foregoing passages show the duration of the law, and when its jurisdiction came to an end. (Rom. 10:4.) Jerusalem which now is in bondage with her children. "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." (Gal. 4:25, 26.) "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (Chap. 5:1.) And if those who "are justified by the law are fallen from grace" (ver. 4), assuredly those who take the law as a "rule of life" are departed from grace.

It all arises from not seeing and believing that we have died with Christ—died to sin, died to the law, died to the world. Laws are not made to control dead men. The Holy Ghost is the power of the new resurrection life of the believer, and hence the injunction: "Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." (Ver. 16.) "But if ye be led of the Spirit [that is the rule or line followed] ye are not under the law." (Ver. 18.) Why add more? God emphatically states ye are not under the law, here and in Rom. 6:14 In the latter because we have died with Christ; in the former because we are alive in the Spirit, as long as man was alive under the law sin had dominion over him (Rom. 6:14), and people want Christians to go back under that which never gave power against sin, but left a man under its power. The law was never given to give power against sin; all it did was to forbid and to condemn; it even set sin in motion through the flesh suggesting the thing forbidden. (Rom. 7:5.) Moreover "the law is not made for a righteous man" (1 Tim. 1:9), and the Christian is constituted righteous. (Rom. 5:19.)

Maintaining that the believer is under law is a sad proof how thoroughly Judaized the professing church is. Grace teaches, the jurisdiction of the "schoolmaster" having ended. Grace teaches "us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." (Titus 2:12.)

From the above we gather—1st. That the Gentiles were never under the law.

2nd. That "the righteousness of God" is apart from the law.

3rd. That the believer is not under the law as a rule of life.

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