

The Christian's Relationship To The Mosaic Law

By Philip Mauro

The Gentile Believer and The Law

We have said that the experience of the "wretched man" of Romans 7 is not the normal experience of a converted Gentile. It is, nevertheless, a sad fact that it may (and often does) become the abnormal experience of converted Gentiles, who, through ignorance of the great gospel truths revealed in Romans, or through the influence of Judaizing teachers and legal systems of theology, fall from their standing in grace, and seek justification, or the gift of the Spirit, through law-works. Hence the solemn warning of Galatians 5:4: "You are deprived of all effect from Christ, whosoever in law are being justified; you are fallen from grace." For as there were in Paul's day, so are there now, many who desire "to be of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm."

So also the struggle of that "wretched man" becomes the experience of many unconverted Gentiles who, totally ignorant of remission of sins through faith in the blood of Christ...are seeking perpetually (because seeking vainly) for an inclination of the heart to keep the Mosaic law. The condition of such, if they be earnest and sincere in their desire to keep the law, is indeed "wretched" in the extreme.

It was needful, therefore, that, in addition to the revelation given in Romans 7 of deliverance for the believing Jew from the yoke of the Law, the Epistle to the Galatians should have been incorporated into the Word of God, in order to instruct and warn Gentile believers against putting themselves under that yoke.

In referring, however, to Galatians our object will be simply to seek the light it throws upon the conflict described in Romans 7. What we find in Galatians affords strong confirmation to the view that the experience described in Romans 7 is that of a conscientious unconverted Israelite, and not at all a "Christian" experience. In fact, the main object of the Apostle in writing to the assemblies of Galatia was to warn them against teachings which would lead them into such an experience.

Galatians 2

In Galatians 2 Paul relates how he remonstrated with the Apostle Peter for compelling the Gentiles to live as do the Jews (v. 14). We may be sure that the matter in dispute is esteemed by the Spirit of God to be exceedingly important; otherwise it would not be brought to our attention in the form of a rebuke administered by Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, to Peter, the leader of the twelve. In this connection Paul draws the line sharply between Jews and Gentiles, saying:

"We, Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified out of the works of the Law, but out of the faithfulness of Christ, even we [Jews] have believed on Christ Jesus that we might be justified out of the faithfulness of Christ, and not out of works of Law" (vv. 15-16). And he adds: "For if I build again the things I threw down, I constitute myself a transgressor." That is to say, if he should set up the Law again as an obligation for himself, he would make himself a law-breaker. "For," he continues, "I through the Law died to the Law, that I might live to God." Here Paul again brings himself forward, as a typical Jew, and repeats in few words the doctrine elaborated in Romans 7. "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live"; or, as the Greek may be equally well rendered, "I am not any longer living, it is Christ that lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God."

It is possible for every believer to reach the place where he can make this saying of Paul his own. It involves death to sin and life to God in Christ, and the abiding presence of the Spirit of Him who raised up Christ from the dead. This verse obviously contains a condensed statement of the truth revealed in Romans 6 and 7 concerning the believer's death (as to his old nature) with Christ, and his living again in the supernatural life of the risen Christ. That new life is not lived under the Law of Sinai.

"I do not," says Paul, "make void the grace of God" (as Peter was doing by his dissimulation and by returning to the practice of Judaism) "for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died for nothing" (v. 21).

Galatians 3

Having thus dealt with the case of the believing Jew, who had been delivered from the Law by means of Christ's death, the Apostle directly addresses the Galatians, who, being Gentiles, never were under Law, but began their relations with God in the Spirit. The Jew began his service of God in the flesh. For him, therefore, there might be found some excuse for continuing after conversion as a man in the flesh under Law, not exercising the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free. But for Gentile believers, who never were under the Law, but had the great advantage of beginning in the Spirit, to put themselves under Law and to attempt to be perfected in the flesh, was the "senseless" action of those who had been "bewitched." "O senseless Galatians, who had bewitched you," that you should act thus after the truth concerning Christ crucified has been plainly put before you? "Are you so senseless? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected in the flesh?" (Gal. 3:1-3). It was indeed "senseless" in the extreme to undertake the perfecting in the flesh of the work that was begun in the Spirit.

The Apostle then refers to Abraham, whose faith was accounted to him for righteousness, and points out that the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles out of faith, proclaimed that good news to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all nations (Gentiles) be blessed." (Gal. 3:8).

The Galatians are warned of two serious facts. First, Paul teaches that all who are of the works of Law (in contrast to those that are "of faith") are under the curse of the Law. Second, he asserts that the curse comes upon every one who continues not in all things which are written in the

book of the Law to do them. From this it follows that no one is being justified with God in virtue of Law: "For the just shall live out of faith; but the man that does those things (required by the Law) shall live in virtue of them" (vv. 10-12).

In view of this, it would naturally be asked, How does it come about that the Jews, who were placed under the Law, which none of them has kept, have escaped from the curse of the Law? The answer is, "Christ has redeemed us (Jews) from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us." This statement manifestly applies solely to Israel, for the curse of the Law was never pronounced against the Gentiles. Hence Paul uses in verse 3:13 the pronoun "us." The contrast between Jews and Gentiles is again clearly marked by 3:14, which goes on to say that Christ was made a curse for the Jews in order that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles in Christ Jesus. The contrast between the curse of the Law, pronounced upon those who were under the Law, and the blessing of Abraham coming to the Gentile believers in Christ, is very instructive. And an additional result of the endurance by Christ of the curse of the Law is then set forth, namely, the we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The promise was made to Abraham and to his seed long before the Law was given. From this it follows that the promise cannot be nullified by the Law, which was given 430 years after. If then the Law was not given for the purpose of adding anything to the promise, or of taking anything from it, why was it given? It was added for the sake of transgressions, that is in order that the repeated transgressions of the Law by every Israelite might reveal the presence and nature of sin in the flesh, and show the futility of attempting to secure justification out of Law-works. Moreover, it was given, not as a permanent institution, but only "until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made." (Gal. 3:19).

This statement shows that the period of the Law was strictly limited in time, as it was limited also in scope to the children of Israel. Its era did not begin until 430 years after God had begun to deal with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants; and it ceased when the promised Seed died under the Law. The curse of the Law was exhausted when Christ was made a curse by hanging on a tree (Deut. 21:23). Whatever God's purposes were with the Law, they were all accomplished when the promised Seed died on the Cross. Since that event even the Jew is no longer a man under Law, for by no amount of law-keeping can he now secure the promised blessings of the promised land. The old covenant is entirely at an end (2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:13). The words on the Cross, "It is finished" (in the original it is the single word "accomplished") included the purpose of the Law, which thereupon came to an end.

The temporary character of the Law as a Divine institution is further set forth, with great clearness, in verses 23-25. "Before faith came," says the Apostle, "we [Jews] were kept [or guarded] under Law, having been shut up to the faith which was about to be revealed. Wherefore the Law has been our pedagogue [tutor] up to Christ in order that out of faith we might be justified. But faith having come, we are no longer under a tutor." By noting the tenses of the verbs, as given in the above renderings, the sense will be readily and clearly apprehended. It is very clear indeed that these statements apply only to Israelites. The Gentiles were not kept under Law, but were left without Law. They were not "shut up" in any way, but allowed to follow the devices of their own hearts. They were not under a pedagogue, or under tutors and governors (4:2), for God had no dealings with them. God has called Israel His "Son" (Hosea 11:1; see

Amos 3:2); and of Israel alone, of all the peoples of the earth, can it be said that they were under tutors awaiting the time appointed of the Father.

After speaking in the first person of the Jews, the Apostle, addressing the Gentile Galatians, says by way of contrast: "For you are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek." The contrast between the "we" of verses 24, 25 and the "you" of verse 26, is very significant....

Some of the statements (in Galatians 4) are broad enough to embrace both Jews and Gentiles, for both were, before conversion, in bondage to the elements of the world; but the special bondage of the Jew - the yoke of the Law and the penalty of its curse - is also specifically mentioned. As the heir is "under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father; even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem those that were under the Law, that we [Jews] might receive the status of sons. But because you [Gentiles] are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, 'Abba Father.'" (Gal. 4:2-6) The defective reading of verse 6 in the A.V. "And because you are sons," instead of "But," as it is in the original, hides the contrast between the case of the believing Israelite and that of the believing Gentile. The former needed to be redeemed from under the Law before he could receive the status of a son ("adoption of sons"); whereas for the latter there was no such need. The bondage of the Gentiles was a different kind of bondage. They, not knowing God at all, were in bondage to those who by nature are not gods (Gal. 4:8); but the point we wish to examine is that they were not under Law at any time, and this point is very clearly presented in the passage we have been examining. (Editor's note: Randall Seiver has presented a better explanation of this passage in his book on Galatians "The Fulness of Time" available from Sound of Grace, Webster N.Y.)

The Believer's State Is Not One Of Lawlessness

In emphasizing the important truth that the believer is not under the Law, because, if a Jew he was delivered from the yoke of the Law by the death of Christ, and if a Gentile he was never under the Law at all, must not obscure the important fact that the state of the believer is not one of lawlessness - far from it. What is spoken of in Romans 7 as "the Law" is the Law given to the Israelites through Moses. That Law was by no means a complete statement of God's requirements, though it was quite sufficient for the purpose of revealing the presence of sin in the flesh, for demonstrating the utter corruption of human nature, and for making manifest the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The teachings of Jesus Christ showed that the full requirements of God's holiness and righteousness are far above those of the Law of Moses. "You have heard that it was said by (or to) them of old, You shall not kill...But I say to you, Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause, etc." (Matt. 5:21-48).

The believer of this dispensation is not living under the Law of Moses. That law was given for the regulation of the conduct of men in the flesh. The believer is "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit." (Rom. 8:9). He is not, therefore, in the sphere in which the Law of Moses was effective.

The child of God, though not under the Law of Moses, is "not without Law to God, but in-law to Christ" (enormous Christou, 1 Cor. 9:21). He owns the risen Christ as His Lord, and judges that his entire life in the body is to be lived no longer unto himself, but unto Him who died for him and rose again (2 Cor. 5:15). Being in the Spirit he is to be governed by "the law of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:2). Being in Christ he is to "fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). This is a condition very different from that of the Israelite under the Law of Moses, and on a much higher plane. The life of the child of God is not a life hedged about by constraints and prohibitions, but a life of liberty in which he is free to follow all the leadings of the Spirit, and all the inclinations of the new nature which the Spirit imparts to those whom He quickens. It is a life of freedom - not freedom to sin, but freedom not to sin. He who practices sin is the slave of sin; only the free man can refuse obedience to the demands of sin, and yield himself to God as one who is alive from the dead. The Word of God abounds in directions addressed to the children of God, by which their walk, while yet in the body, is to be guided and controlled. These directions are found in the commandments of Christ, and in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, whom the risen Lord empowered to be the channel for the revelation of His special communications to and concerning the Church. And these directions are illustrated by all the holy Scriptures, the things which happened to the Israelites having been written, not for our imitation, but for our admonition (1 Cor. 10:11).

The believer has been called into liberty; and he is exhorted to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made him free (Gal. 5:1). Yet he is not to use his liberty so as to furnish occasions for gratifying the desires of his old nature (Gal. 5:13). Having been brought, through the resurrection of Christ, into the sphere of the Spirit, the believer is commanded to remain there; that is, to be occupied with and interested in the things of the Spirit. While so engaged he cannot at the same time be fulfilling the desires of the flesh. "This I say then, walk in [or by] the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). "If you be led of the Spirit you are not under the Law" (Gal. 5:18).

Ephesians, which especially reveals the position of believers as quickened together with Christ, raised up (i.e. ascended) together with Him, and seated together in the heavenlies in Christ, abounds in practical directions for the believer's guidance in all his earthly relations. We...call attention to them in order to guard against the supposition that, because the believer of this dispensation is not under the Law of Moses, he is therefore in a state of lawlessness.

The main points, then, of the teaching we have been examining are these:

1. That the sufferings of Christ were incurred for the sins of His people, that is to say, the sins of those whom God justifies upon the principle of faith.
2. That the death of Christ delivers the believing sinner, whether Jew or Gentile, from the servitude of sin.
3. That the death of Christ also brought the economy of the Law to an end, and delivered all converted Israelites from the yoke of the Law.

4. That the resurrection of Christ brings all believers into the sphere of a new humanity, where there is a new life, whose Source is the risen Christ, which life is imparted by the Spirit of God to the believer while the later is yet in the mortal body.

5. That believers, though not under the Law of Moses, are governed by the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and are required to "fulfill the law of Christ."