

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Under Law But What Law? I Corinthians 9:21

You don't have to be a rocket scientist or a brain surgeon to figure out that the American society is crumbling morally murder in the streets, lying everywhere, homes breaking up, sexual morals jettisoned. The Church is also compromising ethics lying everywhere, broken homes, sexual immorality running rampant. The individual Christian seems to have little sense of right and wrong and society is dictating the actions of Christians. Why? One of the major factors is that moral law has been abandoned or compromised.

It is not uncommon today to hear evangelical Christians say, "We are not under law but under grace," or "We want nothing to do with the Law of Moses in the Old Testament but want only the love of Christ in the New Testament." Lawlessness is the spirit of the age and evangelicals are merely mimicking the secular culture, even attempting to use Scripture to get around moral law.

My objective today is to show that all people everywhere are under God's moral law and that the Christian is also under law, not the Mosaic Law but the eternal moral law of God as it is manifested in the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ is the Christian's objective standard for holiness of life and the power to keep that objective standard is Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Years ago I would take verses like Roman 6:14, "You are not under law but under grace" or Romans 7:6, "We have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" to show the Christian is free forever from the Mosaic Law and all law and our way of living today is Christ alone through the Holy Spirit. It is wrongly reasoned that Christians don't need law because they have Christ and the Holy Spirit who restrains sin in them. Yet, there were other verses which haunted me but I couldn't fit them into my theological system such as Romans 3:31, "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold it," or I Timothy 1:8, "We know that the law is good if one uses it properly." I was puzzled because if the law was so bad why did King David say, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (Psa. 119:97) or why did the Apostle Paul say, "For in my inner man I delight in God's law" (Rom. 7:22). After years of wrestling with the problem of law and grace, I think I have answers which satisfy me but they may not satisfy you, and if you don't agree with me I completely understand.

CONTEXT OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

Last week we showed how in things indifferent, neutral morays, questionable practices, doubtful things, Paul was willing to accommodate both Jews and Gentiles. He would change form but not content, methods but not the message. He would never break any laws of God to win people to Christ but he would accommodate himself to their culture so as not to confuse custom with the true gospel.

When reaching the Gentiles who had no written religious law as did the Jews, he accommodated himself to their culture in order to reach them for Christ. He made this statement: "To those not having the law (Gentiles) I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law)" (I Cor. 9:21). God's law here is a reference to the eternal moral law of God and Paul said he was never free from it. He was also under the law of Christ which I believe includes the moral law and is a higher law than that of the moral law. All people everywhere are under moral law but only Christians are under Christ's law.

The Bible never uses the exact term "the moral law." This must be implied from scripture and be deduced theologically. It is sometimes called "the law" or "God's law" and the context must determine whether it is Mosaic Law or moral law which is being referred to by the writers. Without moral law there is no basic structure for society, the church or the individual Christian because there is no basis to know right from wrong except through written law which is objective revelation from God.

What then is moral law? Moral law is the reflection or expression of the moral nature of God. God is holy, just and good and the law which is also holy, just and good is simply the correlate of the holiness and justice and goodness of God.

MORAL LAW AND THE MOSAIC LAW

The Mosaic Law consisted of 613 commands which were given specifically to the nation of Israel to establish a theocracy (a nation ruled by God). The Ten Commandments were part of the 613 commands. The Mosaic Law for practical purposes has been divided (mostly by Christian scholars) into moral law, social law, civil law and ceremonial law. Moral law has to do with moral actions towards God and others and is summed up in the Ten Commandments. Ceremonial law involved religious activity as seen in the tabernacle, feasts, priesthood, circumcision and sacrifices which all pointed forward to Christ as types and shadows and were fulfilled and done away with by Christ (Heb. 10:1). Civil law included governmental laws for running a theocracy (God ruled state) which are no longer binding today because the Church is not a theocracy and it would be virtually impossible to have any nation as a theocracy today. Social law dealt with things like sanitation, rotation of crops, quarantine and diet.

It is not always easy to distinguish moral law from ceremonial, civil and social law.

Therefore, there is some subjectivity and Christians disagree over the extent the Mosaic Law has over the life of the Christian, the Church and the State. There are fine Christian scholars today who are called Theonomists who believe the civil law with all or many of its penalties should be applied to the secular State, causing the State to be a theocracy (ruled by God). However, most Christians believe the moral law is still binding on Christians today and this moral law is summed up in the Ten Commandments. God set the Ten Commandments apart from the rest of Mosaic Law because it was written on two tablets of stone by the finger of Almighty God. Reformed Christians have declared the moral law is summed up in the Ten Commandments. The moral law is broader than the Ten Commandments but the essence of the moral law is found in the Ten Commandments.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, "Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?" The answer is, "The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments."

MORAL LAW BEFORE THE MOSAIC LAW

Adam and Eve

When God created Adam and Eve, He created them in His image, making them responsible to and dependent on the sovereign, holy, eternal God. They were to conform in every way in their moral being to God Himself, who insists that his creatures be holy, for He said, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." They were to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. Moral law was stamped on the hearts and minds of Adam and Eve by Almighty God. They were to obey the moral law of God.

Adam and Eve sinned against God breaking the moral law. Being sinful in nature, they could no longer obey God, but that did not change the moral law of God which is a reflection of the character of God. As sinful people, the image of God in them was marred by sin. As sinful, they still had the moral law stamped on their heart but now there was a desire either to warp or escape from the moral law.

Gentiles

Gentiles had the moral law of God written on their hearts as descendants of Adam long before God gave the written Mosaic law to the nation of Israel. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) (Rom. 2:14-15). They knew generally to worship God, honor parents, not to lie, steal, covet or commit adultery even though it was not written in stone but in the heart because man was originally created in the image of God.

Man has a conscience and that means that in some vague sense at least he recognizes that there is a distinction between right and wrong (John Murray, Collected Writings).

Man's conscience is fallen because of sin. Man's sinful conscience is warped by prejudices, distorted by passions and corrupted by habits. The conscience has a warped concept of moral law. Only divine revelation can tell us the absolute truth of what is right and wrong. The moral law is not summed up in the conscience but in the Ten Commandments.

MORAL LAW AFTER THE MOSAIC LAW

Christ

When Jesus Christ came into this world as the God-Man and died on the cross, He established the New Covenant. In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Lk. 22:20). At the cross, Christ did not destroy the Mosaic Law but fulfilled it. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). The New Covenant (Testament) established by Christ now replaces the Old Covenant (Testament) set forth by Moses. Christians are now under the New Covenant not under the Old, Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Law with its 613 commandments is not a rule of life for the Christian. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

Unsaved

The Ten Commandments which is God's holy standard and a reflection of His holy character are to be held up to all non-Christians (Jews and Gentiles) to show them they are sinful and that God requires the perfection of the moral law to get into heaven. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (Rom. 3:20). The moral law convicts of sin and is an instrument which threatens the unsaved with eternal punishment if the laws requirements are not met.

The moral law brings a curse on the unsaved and it assures of damnation. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). The Law says, "Honor father and mother" or "Do not lie" or "Do not use the Lord's name in vain" or "Do not covet." If a person has ever broken any of these commandments even once he or she is a convicted sinner and no sinner can be accepted by God who is perfect. The sinner must be forgiven and given a perfect righteousness which will make him acceptable to God. Only Jesus Christ can give forgiveness of sins and grant a perfect righteousness to a sin-cursed man or woman. God made him (Christ) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him (Christ) we might become the righteousness of God (II Cor. 5:21).

Saved

There is also a right use of the Law for the Christian. We know that the law is good if one uses it properly (I Tim. 1:8). Almost all Christians would agree the moral law should be preached to the unsaved Jews and Gentiles to convict of sin so as to turn them to Christ for salvation. The question is, "is there a proper use of the Mosaic Law for Christians?" The answer is positive if the Law is used correctly as part of the moral law of God. If the Ten Commandments or any part of the moral law in the Old Testament can be preached to the unsaved to bring conviction of sin, then God is saying the unsaved are breaking the Law which God expects them to keep. When a person gets saved, he is to keep the Law in some sense or God's threatenings make no sense.

The Ten Commandments which are moral law are still binding on the church collectively and the individual Christian as New Covenant believers. Christians are spiritual Israel (circumcised in heart) and still have a relationship to the Ten Commandments as moral law. The reasons for this are: 1) Christians are told to uphold the Law. Do we, then, nullify the Law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law (Rom. 3:31). 2) Even though he was in conflict with sin and law, the Apostle Paul desired to keep the Law in his walk with Christ. For in my inner being I delight in God's law.. . (Rom. 7:22). 3) All the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament except, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." 4) Four of the Ten Commandments are mentioned as to be kept through love by the Christian. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10). in Romans 13:9, after listing four of the Ten Commandments, Paul says, "And whatever other commandment there may be" which includes the other six commandments including the Sabbath.

The Christian sustains a new relationship to the Ten Commandments as moral law because of the New Covenant. This is true because: 1) The righteous demands of the Law have been fulfilled in the Christian through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Christ fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law for every Christian without exception. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the Law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (Rom 8:3-4). Because Christ fulfilled the Law in and for the Christian, the Law can no longer condemn the Christian. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ... (Rom. 8:1). However, the Ten Commandments can be used to point out sin in the Christian's life. 2) The Christian has been released from the Law as a condemning code threatening curses against his actions. The Christian now has the Holy Spirit who works inwardly to give power, new motivation and

restraint of sin. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 7:6). 3) The Christian is not under the Mosaic Law with its 613 commands as a way of life but is under grace. You are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14). But the Ten Commandments as moral law are still binding. The Ten Commandments which are a general summary of moral law is still helpful to the Christian. They were God's standard of righteousness in the Old Testament, and after being poured through the New Covenant, are still God's standard of righteousness in essence and a reflection of the Holy character of God. However, in the New Covenant (Testament) people are not put to death for lighting a fire on the Sabbath or a woman put to death for adultery or children stoned for disobeying parents. The standards remain but the penalties drop off in the New Covenant 4) While the Ten Commandments still convict Christians of sin, the Law cannot bring the Christian spiritual life or holiness in any form. This must come from the internal work of the Holy Spirit 5) When the Christian is living by faith in Christ through the Holy Spirit, he does not need any law to correct him because his law is coming from the inside not from some external code. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23). However, the Christian does not always walk in dependence on the Spirit; therefore he needs moral law. 6) The Holy Spirit uses the external moral law to convict the Christian of sin and drive him to Christ. After wrestling with law and sin in his life, the Apostle Paul cries out, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God— through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (Rom. 7:24-25).

MORAL LAW AND THE LAW OF CHRIST

In I Corinthians 9:21b Paul says, "Though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law." The New Covenant Christian is not free from God's moral law but he is under the Law of Christ. In the New Covenant, the Christian is bound by the Law of Christ which includes all pre-Mosaic moral law, Old Covenant moral law and moral law as taught by Christ and the Apostles.

The Law of Christ is based on love. When we are bearing the spiritual burdens of others, we are fulfilling the Law of Christ. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). The Ten Commandments are filled by love. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery" "Do not murder" "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10). Love fulfilling the Law is not a new teaching for Jesus told us that the whole Old Testament Law was fulfilled by loving God and loving others. "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:37-40). What then is new in the Law of Christ? The Mosaic Law said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" but the Law of Christ says, "Love one another

as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). Christ's law is a higher law than the Mosaic Law or the moral law.

What moral law does is help the Christian understand what love is. If there were no moral law, we would not know that stealing, lying, coveting and so forth is sin. Love is not "sloppy agape" where people operate on mystical feelings. Love is based on moral law.

I have counseled with several men who have told me, "I love my wife and I want her alone to by my wife, but I also want several mistresses on the side to meet my personal sexual and ego needs. These men had a warped concept of love. God's moral law says, "You shall not commit adultery." Love in marriage is not cheating on your wife and we would not know that except the moral law declared it to be so.

Moral law gives definition to love. Love, however, does not give definition to moral law.

We are not saved by obedience to the law, but we are saved unto it. In their insistence upon love they have placed love in opposition to law. We have just to remind them with well-balanced emphasis that love is the fulfilling of the law. It is not love in opposition to law but love fulfilling law. What our modern apostles of love really mean is the very opposite of this: they mean that love fulfills its own dictates, that love not only fulfills, but that it is also the law fulfilled, that love is as it were an autonomous, self-instructing and self-directing principle, that not only impels to the doing of the right but also tells us what the right is. This is certainly not what Paul meant when he said, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." (Murray, Collected Writings).

MORAL LAW THE CHRISTIAN'S FRIEND

Moral law is not in opposition to the gospel as Luther taught but it is complementary to the gospel as Calvin taught. Moral law is not a dreaded enemy of the Christian but a friend to point out how to love God and others and to convict of sin when we don't. Moral law points out the Christian's sin and points him to Christ who can forgive him and empower him by the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life.

Moral law is more than the Ten Commandments but the Ten Commandments sum up in essence the moral law of God. A recent survey was taken of 1,200 people, ages 15-35. It found out that most of those polled could name no more than two commandments, and they were not too happy with some of the others when they were told what they were. Remember, without moral law there can be no basis for society, no conviction of sin and no definition of love. Here are God's Ten Commandments: 1) You shall have no other gods before me; 2) You shall not make a graven image; 3) You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain; 4) Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; 5) Honor your father and mother; 6) You shall not murder; 7) You shall not commit adultery; 8) You shall not steal; 9) You shall not bear false witness; 10) You shall not covet

CONCLUSION

All people everywhere are under the eternal moral law of God and will be judged by that law, and all will be proven guilty. It will show they have not kept the moral law. They need forgiveness and a perfect righteousness, and only Christ can give these to them. Christians are also under law - the law of Christ and the moral law of God. To be under law is to be under its authority. Christians are men and women under the authority of Christ and His law.

Many so-called Christians who want to be politically correct would like to change the Ten Commandments to the Ten Suggestions because it is not vogue to respect authority. "May I suggest it is not wise to lie. May I suggest it is generally not a good idea to commit adultery."

God's moral law cannot and will not change because it is a reflection of God's holy character. It is not to be reinterpreted to meet our petty whims such as, "You shall not steal except if you can cheat Uncle Sam who is cheating you" or "You shall not murder" except to get an abortion so as not to inconvenience your lifestyle" or "You shall not covet, except if illegal money comes your way and it can make you rich" or "You shall not commit adultery, except you are unhappy in your marriage and taking your personal secretary in an affair brings you personal fulfillment" or "Honor your father and mother, except they try to discipline you and then turn them over to the HRS as child abusers."

Christians, we are men and women under gracious law, under the gracious authority of a gracious God. Christ tells us to love, and moral law tells us how to love. Law is our friend. Hopefully as Christians you can say, "I delight in God's law:" and "Oh, how I love your law."