

Lesson 8—Part II

The Purpose of the Law—What It Was *Not*

We may be somewhat surprised as we discover:

1. The Law was not given to men as a means of salvation, that is, a means of making men alive—regenerating them.
2. Nor was the Law given to make men righteous, that is, to give men a standing before God by keeping it.
3. Nor was it given as a way of holiness, that is, as a means of sanctification for those already saved.
4. Nor was the Law with its accompanying ceremonies given as a final mode of worship of God.

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We may be even more surprised to note the following facts regarding the Law, on the positive side:

1. God gave the Law to bring out Israel's badness, not their *goodness*.

2. Although the Law is holy, it *increases* man's sin, instead of diminishing it.

3. The Law condemns, curses and kills, instead of justifying, saving, or giving life.

4. God Himself pronounces the Law weak and unprofitable, as far as helping man's condition is concerned. He did not delight in the dispensation of the Law.

5. God Himself in the person of Christ, met all the Law's requirements against man, in order to take it and its responsibilities off man's shoulders; that man, free from all bondage, might enjoy His God, and delight himself in His presence. Righteousness brings God's utter gift of Grace.

6. To resort to the Law now for God's favor, or for salvation, is accounted by God neglect of Him and His Son, and results finally in utter darkness and bondage, and lack of faith in God's love.

We shall now cite scriptural proofs of the above statements:

1. That the Law was not expected by God to bestow salvation and life upon men is plainly seen in the following Scriptures: "If there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law" (Gal. 3:21). Here Paul declares that not only have men failed to be saved by the Law but that the Law *could not* save them; that God has never yet given a Law that could "make men alive"—that is, regenerate and save them.²

2. These Galatians having come to know God, or rather to be known of God (in the gospel), were turning back again to the weak and beggarly elements (of the Law), so that Paul wrote to them, "I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain" (4:11).

Remember, O modern denier of grace, it is written in Galatians 3:10:

"For as many as are of the works of the law are *under a curse*: for

At first thought this seems a contradiction of God's Word by Moses (Lev. 18:5): "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and mine ordinances; which, *if* a man *do*, he shall *live* in them"; and also of the like verse in Ezekiel 20:11: "I gave them my statutes, and showed them mine ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live in them." And that well-known answer of the Lord Jesus to the Jewish lawyer in Luke 10:28, who had asked what he must do to inherit eternal life, seems to be flatly contradicted here by

it is written, Cursed is every one who continueth not in ALL THINGS that are written in the BOOK OF THE LAW, to *do* them."

You claim you are under The Law as a "rule of life." But Rom. 7:4 says, "My brethren, ye also were made DEAD TO THE LAW through the body of Christ; that ye should be joined to *another*, even to him who was *raised* from *the dead*, that we might bring forth *fruit unto God*." What think *you* of this word of Gal. 3:10? Have *you* "continued in ALL THINGS that are written in the book of the law to do them?" Not, note, to *approve* them, but to *do* them! Gal. 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us [Jewish believers who had the Law] from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us"! And note the next verse: ". . . That upon the *Gentiles* might come the blessing of *Abraham* [*not* of Moses, *not* of the Law!] *in Christ Jesus*; that we all might receive the praise of the Spirit through faith."

The Law came "four hundred and thirty years after" the wonderful word of chapter 3:18, that God granted it ("the inheritance") to Abraham *by promise*.

You ask then, What need of the Law? Verse 19 answers:

"It was ADDED because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made . . . [That is, till Christ came!] But now that FAITH is come, we [Jewish believers] are *no longer under a tutor*" [the Law].

Read also the following Galatian verses:

"Now that ye have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments [or, elements], whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again?" (4:9).

"But before faith came, we [Jews] were kept in ward under the law [3:23] shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. So that the law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor. For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus" (3:23-26).

"So we also, when we were children [lit., infants, Gr., *nēpioi*] were held in bondage under the rudiments (or, elements) of the world: but when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that

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Paul in Galatians. For when Christ referred this lawyer to the Law, and he had summed it up into its two great commandments, our Lord then said: "Thou hast *answered* right: this *do*, and thou shalt live." (Instead of denying the God of Sinai, Jesus propounds the same impossible thing—salvation by works.)

But however *seeming* the contradiction be, Paul plainly declares, by the Spirit of God, that the Law *could not* make people live (Gal. 3:21). It commands, but gives no *power*. Note that, O legalist!

2. The Law was not given to give men a standing as righteous before God by their keeping it. Here human reason utterly breaks down. We can conceive how the Law might not be able to quicken or regenerate men—to give *life* to those "*dead* in trespasses and sins" (as all men are). But how else could a creature have a standing before God—how else could he be made righteous—but by keeping God's commandments? Righteousness surely arises (saith man's reason) from doing righteous things and can arise in no other way. For if God hath given commandments (and here in Exodus He speaketh aloud from the mountain ten great "words" and that in a terrible voice, calling men to obey Him)—if, then, God giveth commandments, how else shall we become righteous before Him than by obeying these commandments? Thus man's *reason* argueth, in all ages.

Then cometh God's Word: "*By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight*" (Rom. 3:20; see also

were under the law, that we [Jewish believers] might receive the adoption of sons [*huiōi*]" (4:3-5).

And please note these "untils," *after which* "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ":

"For all the prophets and the law prophesied *until* John" (Matt. 11:13).

"The law and the prophets were *until* John" (Luke 16:16).

"What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, *till* the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made" (Gal. 3:19).

"So that the law is become our tutor *unto* Christ . . . we are no longer under a tutor" (Gal. 3:24, 25). No longer *infants* (*νηπιοι*).

Gal. 2:16). Here is a plain statement by the very Person Who gave the law, that no human being will become righteous in His sight by keeping it.

The question at once arises, Were these commandments of God *unrighteous*? If no one can become righteous by keeping the Law, must it be a bad Law? The answer comes from God. "The law is holy, and . . . righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). Then is our reason in deeper perplexity than ever. God gave these commandments; they are holy and good; and God saith, "Keep them." And then the apostle saith, "By keeping these commandments thou shalt never become righteous, thou shalt not be justified. Though God did indeed give thee these commandments thou shalt not gain any standing before God whatever by keeping them."

Then, when man's reason begins to rebel utterly against such foolishness as that God should give a Law, and not give man credit for keeping it, then God's Word again comes in with a last and fatal blow to all man's wisdom: "As many as are of the works of the law are under a curse" (Gal. 3:10). Now, to be "of the works of the law" is simply to be seeking righteousness by doing what the Law commands. Such, saith God, are *under a curse*. So far from becoming righteous, they are bringing doom upon their heads—nay, doom hangs already over them, for they *are* under a curse.

3. Not only are men *not* made alive or made righteous by the Law, but they are not made *holy* by it. That is, neither was the Law given to save men, nor was it given to sanctify men after they are saved. By and by we shall consider how men are saved and made righteous, since the Law cannot help them to salvation; but of course we *naturally* suppose that after a man *is* saved God gives Him the Law to obey and to be holy thereby.

Paul, in Romans 6, is dealing with this very question of the holy living of those already saved. In chapters 3 to 5 the question is *how* to be saved. But from chapter 6 on it is *how* to live a holy life *after* you are saved. And he says this is not to be through the Law; that the Law will not

enable even a saved man to live a holy life, but, on the contrary (as the seventh chapter of Romans shows), if a man tries to be holy by the Law he will fall into worse and worse bondage, and finally into utter despair in the matter.

So that Paul makes the astonishing announcement (Rom. 6:14), that saved people are *not under Law*, but live in another arrangement altogether. And he further says that saved people have been made *dead* to the Law, and are now *discharged* from it (Rom. 7:4, 6, R.V.). And the object of our being set free from the Law, he says, was that we might, at last, in this state of freedom, "bring forth fruit unto God" which we never did or could do, under the Law. For, as he explains (Rom. 8:3), the Law was utterly powerless to make us fulfill its requirements (for reasons we shall see later) and *could not* bring us into a holy life. So that the Law was not given to justify, for it never justified anybody; nor was it given to sanctify, for it never sanctified anybody.

4. The Law, with all the ceremonies that were connected with it, was not intended by God as a permanent or in any respect a final mode of *worship*. For, in Matthew 27:51, we see the veil of the temple rent in twain, and thus the whole system of things, of which the Law was the center, done away; as is stated by the Holy Ghost in Hebrews 8:13, where the whole legal covenant is said to be "old," "aged," and "vanishing away."

The Purpose of the Law

What, then, is the Law? Why did God give it? If it was not to bring men life nor righteousness, nor holiness, if not a means of access and worship, what then was it for?

The answer is exceedingly plain from Scripture, as we have seen.

But ah, how few really *believe* it, when they hear it! How few really *accept* in their inner *hearts* the truth we now approach! For, though they may outwardly assent to the doctrine, they secretly *doubt* of it. The reason will be apparent why the natural heart has no relish for the truth as to God's Law, as He Himself reveals it to us.

In Romans 3:20, as we saw, Paul tells us, "By the law is the knowledge of *sin*."

Again, in Romans 5:20, "The law came in . . . *that the trespass* might abound."

Again, in Romans 7:7, "I had not known *sin*, except through the law: for I had not known coveting [that is, I would not have known coveting as a sin], except the law had said, Thou shalt *not* covet."

Again (Gal. 3:19), "What then is the law? It was *added*, because of *transgressions*."

"That sin might be shown to be sin." That sinful men might discover how utterly bad they really are, in God's holy sight, God gave certain of them His Law, saying, "These commandments express what you as children of Adam on earth ought to be—what I desire you to be and to do. Now *do* these commandments. *If* you do them, you shall live by means of them."

Thus our Lord spoke to the young lawyer, who said, "What must I *do* to inherit eternal life?" Of course, if he is going to be saved by *doing*, there is only one place to refer him! God had already told men what to *do*, if they would live (Lev. 18:4, 5). So Christ referred him to The Law and said, when the man summed up The Law well: "Thou hast *answered* right; this *do*, and thou shalt live." (Most people, in reading this sentence, wrongly emphasize the words "right" and "live.")

The great trouble with men is just this: NOT ONE OF THEM HAS EVER FULLY KEPT GOD'S LAW; that is, MEN HAVE ALL SINNED. Moreover, men all have a SINFUL NATURE, A NATURE WHICH IS UNABLE TO DO GOOD, IN GOD'S SIGHT. Also—and remember this!—no "good works" that men do will CHANGE that *evil nature*. (Jer. 10:23; 13:23. Read and believe it!)

Now God knew all this when He gave men His Law. But men did not know it. And they must FIND IT OUT BY EXPERIENCE. So God gives them His holy Law to keep, saying if they keep it they shall have life and blessing by it. He knew they would utterly fail. But they shall have

their trial: that they may find their sinfulness and His Grace.

And a long, bitter history that trial was! It extended from Sinai to Calvary. At Calvary men showed their exact character by seeking to *destroy God Himself*; for God was *manifest in the flesh*, in Christ. Men had dreamed they were good and holy and that they knew God and were serving Him. When at last they saw Him, they said, "Come, let us kill Him!"

Do you wonder that God, who really *knew* men, did not expect The Law to bring out any righteousness, or holiness, or goodness in man? We shall see how The Law brought out the utter *badness* there was in man! "The Law," God definitely tells us, "come in that the trespass might abound" (Rom. 5:20).

Lesson 8—Part III

God's Objects in Giving the Law

The Law of God, being infinitely holy in its character and in its requirements, *must condemn sinners*. Some people think that God will, at the judgment day, balance up a man's good deeds against his bad deeds and save the man on the principle of general credit, if his good works outweigh the evil ones! But such an idea is preposterous, when we reflect on the *absoluteness* of God's holy being. Even on earth, when a man breaks the law, there must be penalty. For a convicted murderer, for instance, to ask the judge to release him on the plea that his life has been respectable, will at once be seen to be the height of unreason. The *Law* has been *broken*. There must be satisfaction. Nor would the plea (made toward God by sinners constantly) that hereafter he will murder no more, be accepted! *Neither past goodness nor future promises* can atone for breaking a law. Suppose a criminal should say to the judge, "If you let me off I will come to your house and

work for the rest of my days," you would cry out against that plea as rank bribery, and you would be right. But that is the very plea sinners constantly make toward God. They have sinned, they admit; but surely God will be satisfied if they do good works the rest of their days for Him. And so men make God lower than an earthly judge! What shame! What folly! GOD MUST PUNISH SIN. His nature necessitates it. His government demands it. Human reason must admit it. Human conscience testifies and warns of it. But, last and finally, *God's Word* declares it, "He will by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. 34:7). If God forgives the sinner, it can be only after the sinner's sin has been *righteously* dealt with.

A man may step up and pay another's fine when the convicted man cannot himself do it. But that is not setting aside the Law, but obeying it and honoring its claims.

Now God knew that men had all sinned. He Himself declares that (Rom. 3:10-18, 22, 23). The whole race, Israelites as well as Gentiles, were under sin (Rom. 3:9). The Law, therefore, could do nought for Israel but condemn. Especially is this so, since the Law is "spiritual" (Rom. 7:14) and must search the heart of man and condemn the least secret departure from God's will. Indeed, the tenth commandment of the Law is, literally, *Thou shalt not desire*. That is, *Thou shalt have no other will or choice or secret longing after anything but the will of God*—what He wills you to have, and because He wills you to have it! This sums up the Law as a whole. It is practically the same as "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5). No room was given to anything besides God and His will in the human heart: *all the heart—the whole being*, was claimed by God, as His constant due.

But no man of Israel (to whom the Law was given) perfectly kept this great Law of God—we remember God's word in Romans 3:20, 23, "All have sinned." The Law, therefore, when it is truly set forth, at once discovers man's sin to man himself, and condemns him for it. Nor can the Law show mercy. "The law is not of faith" or Grace (Gal.

3:12). It proceeds upon principles of absolute justice; and it must, therefore, *condemn* all human beings to whom it is given; for it finds them all guilty of breaking it. And man has no power to keep it. It therefore "shuts up all things under sin" (Gal. 3:22, R.V.). And that was just what God gave it for, THAT THOSE WHO WERE ALREADY, BOTH BY NATURE AND PRACTICE SINNERS, MIGHT FIND OUT THEIR SIN. For the Law, by making known what God's will was for His people Israel, showed how far short they were coming. We repeat, "By the law came the *knowledge* of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

So let us once for all (if possible, for it is hard to do), rid our minds of the thought that God was giving the Law at Sinai, expecting that men would be able to keep it, or be really inclined to keep it. He knew what was in man (John 2:25). Long before the Law was given—centuries before—God had declared what was in man. (See Gen. 6:5, 12; 8:21.) Read these verses carefully. Even Moses discerned what was in Israel. (See Deut. 31:24–29.) And Joshua also saw this people's real *moral inability* to carry out their resolutions for good. (See Josh. 24:19.)

The great objects God had in giving the Law, then, evidently were:

1. First of all to reveal what God is! What His holiness and righteousness are; that He hates sin and must righteously deal with it. That He loves and will reward all regard for Himself.

2. By this revelation of His holy character and requirements to show men ³ their own sin, in that they fell short

3. What the Israelites were ignorant of: (1) The holiness of Jehovah. (2) What sin was and what was sin. (3) God's plan of putting away sin by the atoning death of His Son.

(Of course, they were also ignorant of what is right and best for human beings.)

If we would understand God's speaking from Sinai the Ten Commandments and afterwards in the altered covenant (which included Israel's pardon), we must remember that Israel were thus in a state of appalling ignorance, both of Divine things and of what was best for humanity.

How else, indeed, was sin or evil to be known by this nation Israel,

of keeping His Law; and also to show men their helplessness, in that they would find themselves unable to change their nature and keep His Law, even after it was given them.

3. As to Israel, He would prepare the way, thus, for the revelation of His mercy and grace in Christ, Who would, by God's love (John 3:16) in due time, have all man's responsibilities toward God laid by God upon Himself and would answer to God for the human sin by suffering sin's penalty in His own Person, on the Cross. The Law would convict, condemn and curse man. Then, when man at last realized his *need*, his *lost* condition, he would be ready to accept of a *Saviour*. Thus Israel were to wait for the "fullness of the time" (Gal. 4:4), for God to send forth His Son.⁴

except by Jehovah's particular and legal instruction? The nations all about them were living like the beasts that perish,—nay worse, for beasts do not bow down to works made by themselves!

Therefore the Law, the Ten Commandments, and the particulars of worship in which the Israelites were directed by Divine announcement were, primarily, instructive. Then, coming from God, they were authoritative: that is, they not only announced God's ways and will, but commanded observance of the same.

So we earnestly beseech, *Believe God*, that the Law was given "that the trespass might abound," and man know himself guilty. And that the good news of righteousness by faith, not by works, might be preached to him. Why did Jehovah give the Law if righteousness and salvation were not obtainable by it? Because the blind, sinning human heart knew nothing of the holiness of God—expelled as the race had been in Adam from the Garden of Eden. Remember the Cains and the Canaans, and the rushing of the race into the state of Genesis 6:11, 12: "Corrupt before God . . . filled with violence . . . *All flesh* had corrupted their way upon the earth." Remember the race scattered by God at Babel into nations, lest there be a united rebellion as will indeed come under Antichrist.

4. Of course, during the centuries from Moses to Christ, individuals who realized their need of mercy (as David, in Psalm 51), found mercy. They threw themselves upon God, despairing of their own righteousness, just as we do now. Faith in God is in all ages essentially the same. See Hebrews 11. But we now have the finished work of Christ declared to us. We are told in the Gospel of what God, by Christ, *has* done; those before Christ looked to what God *would* do for them. They knew but dimly what it would be; but they knew the Holy God would do right regarding their sin, but that in His mercy He would save them. He would, they trusted, be "a just God and a Saviour"; how, they knew not fully (Isa. 45:21).

To Whom Was the Law Given?

This Mosaic law, was it given to the whole race, or only to Israel? This is an all-important question, and must not be lightly passed over.

In the first place, we have seen the race as a whole tested three times, and proved each time a failure. (See opening lessons on Genesis.) Then we found God setting aside the race as a whole (so far as His direct dealings were concerned), and choosing a special seed; which, in Exodus, we have seen developing into a nation. After the sign of redemption by blood (the Passover), this nation Israel was brought out of Egypt, to be a *separate* and distinct people to God—His chosen nation on earth.⁵

5. Jehovah was acting in *grace*, of course, in calling the nation of Israel. His promise to Abraham was unconditional, as are the announcements of His purpose of blessing even after their continued failure, as revealed in the books of the prophets.

However, two things were to be learned by Israel: first, that they were Jehovah's *peculiar people*, not to mingle with the idolatrous nations of earth; and second, that when they despised this separate state and served idols, punishment must and would be administered by Jehovah their God,—although by their own acknowledgment Jehovah was gracious and merciful to them. But He would punish forgetfulness of Him, and idolatry, even to the destruction of Jerusalem and His temple among them, they were told.

(Here read again Nehemiah 8 and 9.)

Indeed, the messages of *Israel's prophets* sent from Jehovah kept before the nation these several things:

1. Their Divine deliverance from Egypt.
2. Their refusal, through unbelief, to enter the land.
3. Their banishment to the wilderness for forty years.
4. The construction of the Tabernacle and its proper worship.
5. The entrance into Canaan under Joshua, and Jehovah's defending them there.
6. Their age-long tendency to unbelief and rebellion.
7. Not only their captivity under Babylon, but their subjection to the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires in succession (see Daniel); and their being scattered over the earth.
8. Their (future) smiting "the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek" (Mic. 5:1); their "piercing his hands and feet" (Ps. 22), in crucifixion.
9. Their abiding "many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without pillar, and without ephod or teraphim" (Hos. 3:4).
10. The coming of a terrible day when Jehovah would apparently

Now it would be quite strange if God should turn to the human race as a whole again, after He had set it aside, until, at least, His immediate purposes regarding *Israel* have been fulfilled. Indeed, we trace throughout the Old Testament the fact that, from the time God chose Israel until they had so sinned against Him that He could no longer own them, He regarded all other nations as outside His covenant-dealings, as, indeed "no nations," in comparison with Israel. (See, for instance, Eph. 2:11, 12; Deut. 32:21; Ps. 147:19, 20.) In giving the Law to Israel by the hand of Moses, then, God is simply proceeding with His purposes as to *Israel*, not the other nations. Nowhere in the Bible, moreover, does God say that He gave the Ten Commandments to the race as a whole. On the contrary, He declares that He gave them to *Israel*; and He constantly deals with Israel on this basis, that they had His Law—while other nations or people He regards as not being possessed of His Law, other than that written in their hearts. See, carefully, Exodus 31:12-17, where the Sabbath, the token of the national covenant with Israel, as the rainbow had been of the Noachian Covenant, and circumcision of the Abrahamic covenant, is said (v. 17), to be "a sign between me [Jehovah] and *the children of Israel*, forever." And in Exodus 34:27, after the terrible breach of chapter 32, Moses is told to write the words of the renewed form of the legal covenant. Because, says God, "after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee [Moses], *and with Israel*." In Deuteronomy 4:6-8, 33-37, we see how distinctly Moses realized that this Law at Sinai was not given to the other nations, but to Israel only. This same consciousness appears in all the teachers and prophets of Israel throughout the Old Testa-

desert them utterly (the Great Tribulation under Antichrist—still future).

11. Their being besieged in Jerusalem by all nations; their city taken (Zech. 14:2 ff.), unexampled ruin coming upon them, and their Messiah's coming to their rescue (Zech. 14:4). "His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives"—again! This is Christ's coming to Israel, *after* the Church-days.

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ment. Paul declares, also (Rom. 3:2, 9:4), that it was *to the Israelites* the Law was committed, and to none others. This is a self-evident truth to the open-minded student of God's Word.

But we need faithfully to apply this great fundamental fact. Thousands of professing Christians—real Christians, too, many of them—really believe that all *the world* was put under the Law. Many even hold that Christians are still under it, after conversion! Of this we shall speak more fully by and by.