

The question arises how we as Christians should relate to the Law. A variety of responses arise because of some apparent tensions in Scripture and a failure to clearly understand what is meant by the law and being under the law. Paul wrote that all Scripture is God-breathed and all is profitable, which includes the law. Therefore, we should be looking at the law. But we need to understand what it is, what it is intended to do, and what it cannot do. (The next message will deal with what Jesus has done and how that related to the law.)

I. **Acknowledging the apparent tensions**

Apparent tensions are not contradictions but differing perspectives which force us beyond superficial knowledge to a deeper understanding.

1. *The tension in how we view the law: beauty versus burden*

- a. On the one hand the Law is portrayed as something good and beautiful in both the Old and New Testaments. See Psalm 19:7-10; 119 (e.g., vv 14, 16, 24, 39, 47, 72); Romans 7:12, 16; 1 Timothy 1:8.
- b. On the other hand we cannot escape the fact that the law was a burden that could not be borne. See Acts 15:10; Galatians 5:1; 1 Corinthians 15:56.

2. *The tension that arises when we consider the duration of the Law: eternal or temporal*

- a. There are statements concerning the eternality of the law. See Psalm 119:160; Isaiah 40:8 Matthew 5:18-19; Luke 16:17.
- b. There are also statements which seem to say that the Law has had its day. See Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:18; Hebrews 7:12; 8:13.

3. *The tension in how people should respond to the law: freedom without license, obligation without enslavement*

Two passages particularly highlight this contrast.

- a. Galatians 5:1, 13 – There is freedom but not license to sin. There is obligation to serve, but no yoke of slavery.
- b. Romans 6:15 – We should by no means sin because we are not under law but under grace.

II. **Defining “law”**

1. *The terminology*: A small minimum of occurrences use “law” in the general sense of any principle or rule. The remaining occurrences of “law” has at the core of its meaning, God’s revealed will in the Old Testament, and particularly in ever tightening circles the Pentateuch, the Mosaic Law, and sometimes even just the Ten Commandments. Therefore, when we read about the law, we must begin normally with the idea of the Mosaic Covenant or Mosaic Law which God had given to Israel as reported in Exodus.
2. *The Mosaic Law*: The Mosaic Law was God’s covenant with Israel, His stipulations for their behavior as His people. Though having moral, ritual, and civil aspects, it was an indivisible unity. See Matthew 5:17-19; James 2:10; Galatians 5:3. It was composed of both commands and penalties, blessings and cursings (cf. Deuteronomy 28). One’s response to the commands of the whole Mosaic Law had consequences.
3. *“Under law”*: The nation of Israel and individual Israelites was “under law”, subject to the Covenant. The preposition “under” carries with it the idea of subjection or submission to. To be “under law” in the New Testament means to be in subjection to the Mosaic Law with all its commands and all its penalties.

III. **Recognizing what the law can and cannot do**

1. The Law cannot justify (Galatians 3:11; Romans 3:20).
2. The Law cannot give life (Galatians 3:21).
3. The Law can restrain sin (Galatians 3:19; 1 Tim 1:9-10; cf. Galatians 3:23-24).
4. The Law stops every mouth and makes everyone accountable (Romans 3:19).
5. The Law provides the (full) knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).
6. The Law shows the vast number of transgressions (Romans 5:20)
7. The Law shows the terrible nature of sin (Rom 7:8-13).
8. The Law witnesses to the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21-22).
There is a righteousness of God totally apart from the law. However, the law witnessed to or testified to this righteousness through prophecies, types and figures which we have already seen in Genesis and Exodus and which will continue throughout the Law and the Prophets. We can find Christ in the Law and the Prophets and glimpse at the righteousness from God which comes through faith in Him.

We have access to the Law and it is good because it comes from a good God and it does good. But if we turn to the law to gain righteousness by doing it, we take upon ourselves an unnecessary burden. We cannot give what is required. Listen to its testimony, but don’t rely upon its power, because it is powerless to justify or give life.

The law as a covenant law binds all who are under it to do all that it says and condemns anyone who fails. But the law remains a revelation of the will and character of God.

The law may have done its work revealing sin in your life. The answer is not found by getting under the law but by coming to God through Jesus Christ.

Those who have trusted in Christ should not turn to the Law for righteousness. New life began by the work of the Spirit in our hearts and it must continue the same way. Walk by the Spirit and you will not be under the law.