

LAW IN THE KINGDOM  
THE KINGDOM ECONOMY 9



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**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

A REVISION STUDY

Law in the Kingdom  
The Kingdom Economy Part 9  
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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### Welcome to *Law in the Kingdom*

We have been looking at the Law of God, to understand its role in the economic, cultural, and social life of the Kingdom economy. Some readers still may feel a bit queasy about all this reliance on the Law of God. But we should realize that the Law of God, in its teachings about grace and justice, has much more to say, and many more blessings to yield for the Church within the Kingdom economy of God. In this series we want to look more closely at the rationale for and proper use of the Law of God for advancing His economy.

The Law of God remains valid for the followers of Christ as we continue to pursue His ongoing work and Kingdom. But that statement needs some serious qualification, for unless we look to the Word of God to guide us in how to make best use of the Law, we will surely mistake its aims and misuse its teachings.

God's Law is designed to bless His people and to show His wisdom, grace, goodness, and justice to the world. Beginning in the life of each believer, then working out in local churches, and through them, into the larger communities, the Law of God defines the way of freedom from sin and self-love into a full and abundant life of love for God and neighbors.

In this, part 9 of our series on *The Kingdom Economy*, we want to look more closely at the place of God's Law in His Church, as we continue to pursue the Kingdom economy in these last days.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

Visit our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), to subscribe to our free instructional newsletters, including *ReVision*, *Scriptorium*, *The Week*, and *Crosfigell*, featuring insights from Scripture and our Celtic Christian forebears.

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## 1 Not a Jot, not a Tittle

*“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”* Matthew 5:17, 18

### *An ongoing responsibility*

It never fails: All I have to do in a sermon, lecture, or essay – or a series of studies such as this – is mention something about the Christian’s ongoing responsibility to keep the Law of God, and someone will be there to take me to task. “I’m not under Law, I’m under grace.” “You’re preaching salvation by works.” “This is not a theocracy, you know.”

So go the objections, some more passionate than others, but each along the same lines. What do Christians have against the Law of God? Why are we so adamant to deny any ongoing responsibility for walking the same path Jesus walked? Haven’t we seen, already in these studies, that the Law of God holds much benefit for those who embrace and submit to it? Even to whole societies who borrow from it, albeit unknowingly?

Of course, to remember what we said earlier, not all the Old Testament Law of God continues to have validity. The writer of Hebrews explains, in chapters 7-10, that the laws defining and guiding the work of priests changed as the Old Covenant was replaced with the New. While we can still learn principles of holiness and right worship by studying the laws of sacrifice, diet, and so forth, these no longer bind us as *ethical* norms. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, “For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law” (Heb. 7.12).

For the Old Testament priestly rights and duties, Jesus has substituted the sacrifice of His own life, the ordinances and sacraments of the Church, and His ongoing intercessory and sanctifying work. Valid principles may still be derived from these religious laws, but not to the same extent or scope as we find in the rest of the Law of God.

### *The Law and our salvation*

As we’ve seen, that still leaves the Ten Commandments and the civil laws of ancient Israel. The New Testament – beginning with the Lord Jesus – indicates that these have continuing value and must not be neglected or set aside.

Christians are called to keep the Law of God, not in order to *be* saved but so that they might *bring their salvation to light* in lives of good works. The Law of God is the Law of liberty, to free us from the bonds of sin, and the Law of love, to guide and direct us for lives of grace and justice.

Christians don’t keep the Law in order to *be* saved; we keep it because we *are* saved, and we recognize its value for helping to realize more of the life of good works for which we have been redeemed (Eph. 2.8-10).

### *Reasons for keeping the Law*

Let’s say a bit more about this. There are at least five reasons why Christians today should continue to keep the Law of God.

First, the Law of God encodes the very character of God – holiness, righteousness, and goodness (Rom. 7.12). Since we are God’s children and the Spirit of God is at work within us, transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18), it makes sense for us to know and follow the Law of God.

Second, the Law of God defines the terms of goodness which must characterize the works for which Christians have been redeemed. When Paul wrote that we are God's workmanship, redeemed for good works, he clearly had in mind the works outlined in the Law of God (Eph. 2.8-10). Without a fixed standard of goodness like the Law of God, believers will have a difficult time fulfilling their reason for having been redeemed.

Third, obedience to the Law of God proves a believer's discipleship, as the Apostle John explains (1 Jn. 2.1-6). How do we know we are disciples of Jesus Christ? Because we walk the path He did, the path of God's commandments.

Fourth, following the teaching of the Law guides us in the way of love. Love is the hallmark of Christian faith, as well as the fulfillment of the Law (Jn. 13.35; Matt. 22.34-40). Love is neither mere sentiment nor good intentions. Love is specific, God-defined actions, by which we channel the grace of God to the world.

Finally, keeping the Law of God, strange as it may seem, appeals to the conscience of the unbeliever. This is because God has written the works of the Law – the basic standards of right and wrong – on the soul of every person (Rom. 2.14, 15). As unbelievers observe Christians living according to the Law, they will be attracted to the teaching of Christ, which is the entry point to holiness, righteousness, and goodness (cf. Deut. 4.6; Mic. 4.1-5).

The Law of God must, therefore, have a vital place in the life of the Church. Just what that place is we will explore in the remainder of this series.

*For reflection*

1. How would you describe your attitude toward the Law of God at this time? What place does the Law have in your walk with and work for the Lord?
2. We're not saved *by* the works of the Law; but we're not saved *without* them. Explain.
3. Why do you think so many Christians today are wary of taking the Law seriously?

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some of your Christian friends about the three questions "For reflection."*

## 2 The Church is not Ancient Israel

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant...* Hebrews 12.22-24

### *A matter of time and place*

We have seen that the Ten Commandments and the civil laws of ancient Israel still have binding validity on the followers of Jesus Christ. Much benefit can be gained for expressing and advancing the Kingdom economy of God by better understanding and more consistent use of the Law of God.

But there are some qualifying criteria which we must understand before we go out and start building railings around our roofs, stoning our recalcitrant children, or driving an awl through some employee's ear.

Simply put, the Church is not ancient Israel; rather, the Church is *new* Israel, a *new* community established on the foundations of the old one – and, thus, having some similarities and continuity with it – but identified by new traits and characteristics which guide it in understanding how to follow the Law of God today.

What are the implications of this? Ancient Israel represented a unique combination of priestly and civil rule. It was designed to be, in the purest sense, a theocracy, in which God ruled His people directly through the work of magistrates and priests. Moreover, ancient Israel occupied a unique setting of time and place. While some of Israel's laws can seem harsh and unyielding, they put pagan laws to shame with their practical concern for justice, righteousness, and neighbor-love. God told His people to expect that as they kept His Law, the nations around would marvel at the wisdom by which they lived (Deut. 4.6).

### *A heart for the Law?*

These conditions alone make it necessary for us to approach the Law of God carefully, with a view to understanding its teaching for *our* day.

But, most important of all, ancient Israel lacked the heart – and the Spirit of God – for obeying God's Law (Deut. 5.29; Deut. 30.1-10; Jer. 31.31-34; Ezek. 36.26, 27). One important implication of this is that the laws of ancient Israel were especially harsh in exacting certain kinds of justice; otherwise, the unbridled hearts of the people would run rampant with passion – as in the Book of Judges.

We may expect that, in these last days, this season of grace, in which the Holy Spirit of God dwells within the followers of Christ, some mitigation of the penalties of ancient Israel's laws is to be expected. This is precisely what we find, for example, in 1 Corinthians 5, where Paul substitutes excommunication for the death penalty, thus leaving room for grace to work repentance and renewal in the sinner.

### *Built on the foundations*

In the ancient Middle East many cities were founded on what are called *tells*. A tell is a mound or hill on which a city is located, which has been built and re-built on the ruins of earlier cities that went before. Each time a city was razed and a new one erected, archaeologists expect to find certain similarities – the “footprint” of the city, building materials, and some cultural items – but also new technologies and artifacts at each successive level of construction. The city is still the same city; it's just undergone some changes due to place and time.

So it is with the Law of God and the Church. While the Church is being erected on the “tell” of Old Testament Israel, it is *not* ancient Israel; therefore, while there are certainly many areas of continuity with

ancient Israel, and many similarities of purpose and character between Israel and the Church, the Law of ancient Israel must be understood anew and applied in a manner consistent with the age of grace and the Spirit in which Jesus is building His Church. Not everything that applied to Israel applies to the Church, and in those areas of the Law that *do* have abiding validity, our task, as we've seen, is to discover *principles* that can lead us in the *practice* of grace and justice in our secular and materialistic age.

This means we must look to the Law as the Law of liberty and the Law of love, the acorn to the oak of divine revelation, and the cornerstone of our Christian worldview. The Law provides divine directions for helping us to avoid the pitfalls of self-love, and reliable guidelines to lead us in discerning the best ways of loving God and our neighbors.

The Church is the new Israel, the spiritual Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and He rules the Church by His Law and all His Word, through His Spirit, unto His Kingdom and glory.

Here is a challenge for church leaders, and one they must labor to understand and pursue within the framework of God's more complete revelation in Scripture, as well as of the teaching and practice of previous generations of the followers of Christ.

*For reflection*

1. In what ways is the Church today *not* like ancient Israel? In what ways is the Church the *new* Israel?
2. Why does it make a difference in how we understand God's Law that we now, in these last days, are living in an age of grace and the Spirit of God?
3. "But, most important of all, ancient Israel lacked the heart – and the Spirit of God – for obeying God's Law (Deut. 5.29; Deut. 30.1-10; Jer. 31.31-34; Ezek. 36.26, 27)." What does it mean to have a "heart" for God and His Law?

*Next steps – Preparation: Meditate on Matthew 24.12. Why does this make the Law of God essential to the Kingdom economy? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.*



### 3 The Church is not the Civil Magistrate

*I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! 1 Corinthians 6.5, 6*

#### *Justice in the civil arena*

We're examining some of the criteria which must guide contemporary believers in applying the Law of God to life in the Church and the Kingdom economy today. We have said that the Church is not ancient Israel. Rather, as the *new* Israel, living in the age of grace and the Spirit, church leaders will need to reflect carefully – following the example of Jesus and the Apostles – on how the statutes and precepts of ancient Israel are to be obeyed in our own day.

We do not keep the Law in order to *earn* our salvation, but to *realize* our salvation, prove our discipleship, and thus make progress in spreading the grace of Jesus Christ to all people.

Just as the Church is not ancient Israel, so it is not the civil magistrate either. The statutes and precepts of the civil law of Israel are still binding today – as Paul, James, and Jesus indicate. But they must be interpreted into the life of the *new* Israel, which, while it is built on the foundation of ancient Israel, faces altogether different historical and cultural contingencies.

The Law of God includes many guidelines for achieving justice and restoring order to a community. Believers should study the Law, live by it, and teach it to one another, submitting to the shepherds of their church and the protocols of disciple-making in order to embody the principles of love they are learning. Where necessary, the local church has sanctions it can apply to help those who are faltering in obedience.

But the ultimate responsibility for ensuring justice in the civil arena lies with civil governments – local, state, and federal. The Church must not presume on the prerogatives of the state in seeking justice between its members.

#### *The Church and the civil magistrate*

Thus, where an infraction has been committed against the Law of God by a member of the Christian Church, believers must apply the principles of church discipline in seeking to *restore* justice. We shall have more to say about this in due course.

However, where church discipline fails to bring about a proper resolution of disputes, members should expect that the civil government may be invoked or appealed to for a just outcome, just as Paul appealed to Caesar in seeking justice in his case. But the courts should be the *final* bar of appeal for believers in civil matters, not the *first*.

The state, as Paul and Peter remind us, has been established by God to accomplish His good purposes (Rom. 13.1-4; 1 Pet. 2.13, 14). God's Law is good and wise, and it proves to be beneficial when communities abide by principles derived from God's Law, even when they do not acknowledge the provenance of those principles and practices. Thus, believers must work within the civil structures of society to ensure that governments act in accord with the teaching of God's Law. The Church must not presume to enact *civil* judgments against its members or others. Rather, because the state also is subject to the righteousness and justice of God's Law (Ps. 9.7, 8; Dan. 4.27; Matt. 14.1-4), believers must labor to *persuade* civil magistrates of the essential wisdom, goodness, and justice of the Law of God.

This we do through the political process, by electing leaders who fear the Lord, and working for laws and

other forms of public policy that reflect the character and purposes of the Law of God.

But even in this arena believers must remember that, in the age of grace, not even the vilest offender is completely cut off from the reach of God's Spirit and truth. Penalties for violating the Law of God must, therefore, leave room for grace to work; they must not be so harsh as to harden hearts, but they must be sufficiently harsh as to achieve justice, encourage behavioral change, and deter other would-be offenders.

There is a role for civil government to fulfill in overseeing a just society, where neighbor-love obtains through submission – even grudging submission (Ps. 81.15; Ps. 66.3) – to the standards and sanctions of the Law of God. It is the duty of local churches to support the civil magistrate and even to encourage magistrates to enact policies consistent with the teaching of God's Law.

But in the Church, no actions must be taken against offenders of God's Law to which they do not willingly submit or which go beyond the church's purpose of making disciples. The local church appeals to the Law of God to right wrongs within the community, but it has no power of retribution in its decisions. The single exception would be in the Church's authority to excommunicate unrepentant offenders, leaving them to the wiles of the devil and the pleasure of the state until they repent of their wickedness, make all due restoration, and return to their proper place in the Body of Christ.

*For reflection*

1. What is church discipline? When is it appropriate? How should church discipline be related to the Law of God?
2. What are some ways Christians in your community might work to help local government be more a channel of God's grace?
3. The church does not wield the sword of punishment, but the sword of the Spirit: Explain.

*Next steps – Conversation: Does your church practice church discipline? Ask a pastor or church leader to explain to you how your church uses this important tool.*

## 4 The Church and the Grace of God

*For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”* 1 Corinthians 5.12, 13

### *Judge righteous judgment*

The Apostle James instructs us to live as those who expect to be judged by the perfect Law of liberty (Jms. 2.12). He’s not referring only to the final judgment, when all our works will be weighed against the Law of God. As he shows us in chapter 5, the Law of God is to be used in judging the conduct of believers in the church, to urge them to keep to the path of righteousness (Jms. 5.1-4).

It’s not that believers – and the Church as a Body – are not to exercise judgment against sinners. We are, as our Lord Jesus explained, but strictly according to the standards of righteousness – or justice – in the Law of God (Jn. 7.24; cf. Deut. 16.18-20). Beginning with our own lives, we must submit to the Law of God to guide our steps and help us in making sure grace flows throughout our community unto the justice of the Lord (Heb. 10.24).

And since the Church is not the state, believers do not wield the weapons of the state in seeking to achieve justice within their own communities. Rather, the church applies the methods of church discipline in order to cleanse the Body of sin and to restore relationships and justice among the members.

### *Church discipline*

Church discipline is not consistently practiced within churches in our day. As we recover a proper place and uses for the Law of God, we’ll want to recover church discipline as a valuable tool for helping to keep grace flowing in our midst.

Jesus outlined the steps of church discipline in Matthew 18.15-20. If a brother sins against another, the one offended must go and confront his brother, calling him to repentance and standing ready to forgive and restore the relationship when repentance is in evidence. If that does not lead to repentance, the one against whom the transgression has been committed must take another church member with him to confront the sinner. Hopefully, the testimony of two witnesses will be compelling, and repentance will be achieved.

Suppose that fails, however. In that case, the one offended against must take the sinner to the church – typically, to its rulers, the elders and pastors of the church (the “judges” of the new Israel). There a formal charge may be laid, the leaders of the church can weigh the evidence and claims, and, through prayer and searching the Scriptures, they can reach a just judgment.

But what if, even in the face of evidence sufficient to convince the judges of the church, the sinner continues to insist he has done nothing wrong, or refuses to abide by the decision of the church’s leaders? At that point, the unrepentant sinner must be put out of the church – excommunicated (note the NKJV’s citation of four references from the Law of God to support this action in 1 Cor. 5.13). Excommunication is a formal and public act in which the congregation as a whole is informed of the situation and the judgment of church leaders. Members are then expected to abide by that decision and have no fellowship with the unrepentant believer until he recovers his senses, repents of his sins, and sets about to achieve restoration and a changed life (1 Cor. 5.11).

*Two intermediary steps*

Historically, in most churches two steps precede that of excommunication. The first is admonition, in which the church's leaders prepare a formal judgment in writing, together with instructions for corrective behavior, and put it in the hands of the offender. If that does not lead to repentance, the offender can be suspended from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, since to eat and drink the body and blood of Christ in an unworthy manner brings judgment and discipline from the Lord against offenders (1 Cor. 11.27-32).

But if admonition and suspension do not accomplish the righteous judgment determined by church leaders, then excommunication must follow.

*Room for grace*

It's not hard to see how, at every step of the process of church discipline, ample room for grace is permitted, and the Holy Spirit is given abundant opportunities to convict the guilty and lead him to repentance. Such acts of the local church must be kept within the circle of the sin for as long as possible. Only when the final judgment of excommunication has been enacted should the congregation be apprised of the situation, for then it, too, becomes involved in enacting judgment against the sinner and seeking justice for the one offended against.

And even excommunication is not the last step. For if one who has been excommunicated finally comes to his sense, repents, and seeks forgiveness, then it is the church's duty to receive him back into full fellowship as a returning prodigal (2 Cor. 2.3-8).

Not many churches today practice church discipline with any degree of consistency. As a result, sins of all kinds ravage the Body of Christ, grace is not provided the necessary space in which to work, the Holy Spirit is squelched, the holiness, righteousness, and goodness of God's Law is denied, and the progress of the Kingdom economy slows, stalls, and staggers.

*For reflection*

1. Does your church practice church discipline? Ask a church leader.
2. How can you see that church discipline follows the *retributive* and *restorative* dimensions of Old Testament Law, but leaves room for grace and the Spirit to work?
3. What is an individual believer's role in the practice of church discipline?

*Next steps – Preparation: Study the practice of church discipline by meditating on the Scriptures mentioned in this article. Pray that your church will be consistent and gracious in using this important tool of the Kingdom economy.*

## 5 The Church and the Holy Spirit

*Do not quench the Spirit.* 1 Thessalonians 5.19

*The work of the Spirit*

That is a curious word, “quench.” It means “to extinguish” or “to put out” or “restrain.” It’s curious to think that human beings somehow possess the ability to restrain or extinguish the work of the Spirit in their lives.

But what is the work of the Spirit?

In simplest terms, we can say that the work of the Spirit, Who dwells within each believer, is to make us willing and able to do the good pleasure of God (Phil. 2.13). Notice the dual emphasis: The Spirit must work both on our *desires* and *aspirations* – so that we are, first of all, *willing* to do God’s pleasure; then He must actually *empower us for the doing* of whatever it is that pleases God, since apart from our Lord we can do nothing (Jn. 15.5).

Our hearts, we know, are not naturally inclined to seek or obey the Lord (Jer. 17.9); thus, if we are ever going to be, in the first place, *willing* to do what pleases God, we must have some drastic overhaul of our hearts – our affections.

This is precisely what the Spirit comes to do in bringing us into the new covenant, as David, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel testify (Ps. 51.10; Jer. 31.31-34; Ezek. 36.26, 27).

*Power to be witnesses*

From the moment we are given the Spirit of God, Who is the Agent of new birth (Gal. 4.4), we begin to be *willing* to do what pleases our heavenly Father, out of gratitude for the saving mercy He has extended to us in Jesus Christ.

But being willing is not enough. We must also be *able*.

Jesus said that, when the Spirit of God comes upon us, He would bring with Him spiritual power to enable us to be witnesses for Jesus Christ (Acts 1.8). Apparently, *being* witnesses for Christ pleases the Father, for it is this work that the Spirit is primarily commissioned to accomplish within us.

But *being* witnesses is, first of all, a matter of the *kind of people we are* and only secondarily of *what we do in the world*. The Spirit brings power not, in the first instance, so that we might *go* witnessing, but that we might *be* witnesses. The work of the Spirit in enabling us to do what is pleasing to God is above all a work of character-formation, making us into the very character of the Lord Himself (2 Cor. 3.12-18). This is above all a work unto *holiness*, which every believer is commanded to seek and pursue (2 Cor. 7.1).

*Unto holiness*

Which only makes sense; He is, after all, the *Holy* Spirit, and we would expect any power that He exerts within or through us to be expressive of His presence and character. He is working in each believer to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ, and in every church to build it up as a holy temple unto the Lord (Eph. 2.21, 22). All other works and manifestations of the Spirit of God in or through the believer are merely incidental or instrumental to the larger end of making us willing and able to do what pleases God so that holiness may ensue.

*God's pleasure*

So, what is it, precisely, that pleases our heavenly Father?

Various things: It pleases Him to give us the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit (Lk. 12.32; Rom. 14.17, 18). God is pleased with the life of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and, hence, that we should walk in His steps and follow in all His ways (Lk. 2.22; Matt. 17.5). And it pleases God that we should *not quench the work of His Spirit*, Whom He and the Son have sent in order that we might be holy.

Thus if we as individual believers, and our churches as expressions of the Body of Christ, would not *quench* the Spirit, but would realize His full working in and among us, we must resign ourselves to His purposes and His means of accomplishing the ends for which God has sent Him to us. And that has little or nothing to do with ecstatic utterances, mystical visions, or signs and wonders.

Rather, it has everything to do with being taught the Law of God by the Spirit of God that we might live, by His power, the life of Jesus Christ unto holiness (Ezek. 36.26, 27). If we neglect the Law of God – through indifference or outright rejection – we quench the Spirit, and thus displease our heavenly Father, to such an extent that even our prayers become an abomination to Him (Prov. 28.9).

The mind of the Spirit comes to increasing fullness in those who delight in, love, and obey the Law of God (Rom. 8.5-9). Love the Law and you enter the freedom and power of the Spirit to set you free from sin into a life of grace and justice. Ignore or neglect the Law, and you quench the power of God for righteousness, peace, and joy.

*For reflection*

1. How would you explain the work of God's Spirit in a believer's life to someone who has just come to faith in Jesus? How should that person *engage* the Spirit's work? How will he *quench* it?
2. Meditate on Deuteronomy 30.1-10, Jeremiah 31.31-34, and Ezekiel 36.26, 27. What is the role of the Spirit of God in the new birth? How does He use the Law for our good?
3. Why can we not have the mind of the Spirit apart from the Law of God?

*Next steps – Transformation: Spend some time in prayer today, waiting on the Spirit to search you (Ps. 139.23, 24). Are there any areas of your life where you are quenching rather than engaging the Spirit?*

## 6 Uses of the Law in the Church

*Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.* Romans 3.31

### *No place for the Law?*

Paul had just completed a summary argument *against* the idea that people can be saved by keeping the Law of God. This is what certain Jewish sects were teaching in his day, and Paul denied such teaching vigorously. Men cannot by their own efforts at keeping the Law of God attain the righteousness necessary for finding acceptance with God. Only Jesus Christ can provide that; we are saved, Paul insisted, by clinging to Jesus and appropriating, by grace through faith, His righteousness as our own.

That being the case, it might seem that there is no place for the Law of God in the life of the believer or his church. If the Law can't save us, and Jesus can, then all we need is Jesus, right? The Law is no longer relevant, it would seem.

Immediately Paul moved to disabuse his readers of any such notion. "Do we then make void the law through faith?" he asks. And then answers emphatically, "Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

The Law will not save us, but it is not made void. Jesus saves us; His righteousness is credited to us; and the Law is established still.

But established for what purposes, Paul?

### *Uses of the Law*

In Romans 7, Paul explains three uses of the law in the life of the believer. I know that some will argue that, in Romans 7, Paul is describing his pre-Christian experience. But this argument derives, I believe, from a predisposition against the Law of God as having any abiding validity in the life of the believer or the Church. If we let Paul speak for himself, he doesn't appear to be describing a *past* experience in this chapter; all the crucial verbs are in the present tense. He's talking about his *ongoing experience* as a believer, and anyone who reads this passage for its plain meaning can certainly identify with what the apostle describes.

What, then, are the uses of the Law of God, as Paul outlines them in Romans 7?

First, the Law of God is useful to *define the nature of sin* and to alert the believer or the congregation to its presence (Rom. 7.7). Remember, the Spirit of God is at work within us, to make us willing and able to be pleasing to God. A central part of His work is to convict us of sin (Jn. 16.8-11), which He does by shining the pure light of the Law of God on the dark recesses of our souls. Paul says we'll never know what sin is, or be aware of its presence, if we refuse to subject our souls to the searchlight of God's Law. James described the Law as the Law of liberty precisely because of its power, through the Spirit, to *liberate* us from the strength of sin.

Second, Paul insists that the Law of God *marks out the path of holiness, righteousness and goodness* for the believer, who has been redeemed by grace through faith unto a life of good works (Rom. 7.12; Eph. 2.8-10).

Again, the Spirit within us works not only to convict us of *sin*, but also to convict us of *righteousness* (Jn. 16.8-11), and the holy and righteous and good Law of God is His instructional aid of choice. By the Law, the Spirit shows us where we have strayed, and in the Law, He shows us how to get back on the path of love.

Finally, the Law of God *puts in stark relief the law of sin* that operates within us as a result of the lingering effects

of the fall (Rom. 7.21-23). The Spirit uses the Law to convict us of judgment, that is, to warn us of divine displeasure, should we choose to follow the law of sin instead of the Law of God, and of Fatherly discipline which will surely ensue (Jn. 16.8-11; Heb. 12.10, 11). This is similar to what we see Moses doing in Deuteronomy 28, where he warned the people of Israel against flouting the Law of God. The Law thus reminds us of the holiness of God, of His faithfulness to His Word, and of His power to bring discipline against us when we stray from the path of righteousness (Heb. 12.3-11).

#### *Abolish the Law?*

The Law of God is thus *essential* to such elemental aspects of the life of faith as spiritual growth, being equipped for ministry, exercising church discipline, stimulating one another to love and good works, raising our children unto the Lord, admonishing, correcting, and teaching one another, and understanding and learning from the trials and afflictions God brings our way from time to time.

The Law is also important in doing the work of evangelism, for only in the light of the Law will unbelieving sinners be able to see their sinful condition and understand the reason for God's provision of Jesus and His righteousness.

Shall we abolish this holy and righteous and good Law? Shall we ignore or neglect it, or fail to delight in and love it?

As Paul would say, "Certainly not!"

#### *For reflection*

1. How is the Law of God *established* for living in the Kingdom economy of God?
2. Can we experience the transforming work of the Spirit apart from the Law of God? Explain.
3. Along with the Law we need all the rest of God's Word, to help us know Him and understand His will. But we must not neglect the Law, for it is the acorn to the oak of all Biblical revelation. Explain.

*Next steps – Demonstration: How might you use the Ten Commandments as part of your Gospel presentation? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.*



## 7 Teaching the Law of God in the Church

*Blessed is the man*

*Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,*

*Nor stands in the path of sinners,*

*Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;*

*But his delight is in the law of the LORD,*

*And in His law he meditates day and night.* Psalm 1.1, 2

*The indispensable Law*

We have seen that the Law of God is indispensable to a healthy, growing Christian life, as well as to the nurturing of a healthy, growing local church. The Law of God is integral to seeking and living the Kingdom economy of God, and it is a primary means whereby the grace of God flows through believers and the Church into the world.

The Law of God is the curriculum of God's Spirit whereby He intends to form the believer and the congregation into the image of Jesus Christ. The fashionable neglect – or worse, despite – afforded the Law of God by many contemporary Christians represents an unwise posture and course. Instead, we should be seeking ways to be more firmly grounded in the Law of God, until we all, as individuals and congregations, delight in that Law and in the use the Spirit of God makes of it in our lives.

When the Law of God is our delight, and as it lights our daily path, the *wisdom* of God will become manifest in us to the watching world, and many in these last days will want to know more about how this wisdom can become theirs as well (Deut. 4.6; Mic. 4.1-5).

*Getting the cornerstone in place*

How then shall we set about to restore a proper place for the Law of God in the teaching of the Church?

First, we must understand the place of the Law in the canon of sacred Scripture. In one sense all of Scripture is the Law of God, in that all of Scripture reveals the norms and standards and guidelines whereby God intends His people to know and serve Him. The Law of God, given through Moses, acts rather like a cornerstone for the rest of Scripture, giving shape and direction to the life of faith and manifestation of God's glory in love to God and neighbors. The Law is the acorn to the oak of Scripture (Deut. 32.45-47).

And at the heart of the Law of God – the nucleus of the Law, as it were – as well as its end, is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is both symbolized and foreshadowed *in* the Law, obeyed and fulfilled *all* the Law, and is the *end* toward which obedience to the Law of God carries us (Jn. 14.15; 1 Jn. 5.2, 3)..

If we do not establish the Law of God in our lives and churches, we should not expect to see the full flourishing of the Kingdom economy which the Law promotes.

*Individuals and the Law*

We restore the proper place of the Law of God in the life of the Church by, first of all, encouraging and exhorting every believer to make meditation on God's Law part of his or her daily devotional life. If only to spend time each morning, meditating in listening prayer, on one of the Ten Commandments, this would be a quantum leap beyond where most congregations and believers are at present.

But then we must also teach the Law of God in a thorough and systematic manner – through preaching, in Sunday schools and Bible study groups, and as part of the written communications of our church. It will not

do simply to offer a series of messages on the Law from time to time. While that is a good idea, the Law of God, as the cornerstone to all of Scripture, should have some place in *all* our teaching and preaching.

*The Law and disciple-making*

Then we must use the Law in the work of disciple-making, including the work of church discipline. Elders and other church leaders should devote special attention to reading and discussing the Law of God, so that they may be equipped to deliberate situations that may arise from time to time within the church. Like Ezra, church leaders in particular should set their hearts to study the Law of God, and to do it and teach it in all aspects of the life of the congregation (Ez. 7.10).

Church members must learn the Law, and become skilled in its various uses, in order to fulfill their roles as members in the Body of Christ for the mutual edification of one another and the building-up of the church as a whole.

*Witness to the world*

Finally, the Law of God must feature in the church's witness to the surrounding community – both to individuals in need of saving grace, and to the powers-that-be concerning their duty to rule according to God's good purposes and plan.

We must be neither afraid or reluctant to say to the lost or to those in places of power and influence, "This is what the Lord says," and then proceed to explain more carefully what, in their heart of hearts (Rom. 2.14, 15), they know most certainly to be true. If in our personal lives and churches we are *living* the Law, and manifesting its witness to the community, our task of flowing the grace of God through every available channel will be greatly facilitated.

The Law of God must become more central to the lives of believers and their churches, for we will not know the fullness of God's blessings in Christ apart from delighting in and obeying that holy standard.

*For reflection*

1. Why do you think the Law of God has been neglected by so many Christians?
2. Suggest some ways you might begin to become more familiar with the Law, so that it can fulfill its important role in your life.
3. "The Law of God must become more central to the lives of believers and their churches, for we will not know the fullness of God's blessings in Christ apart from delighting in and obeying that holy standard." Do you agree? Explain.

*Next steps – Transformation: What can you do to encourage more teaching of the Law in your church? Talk with a pastor or church leader.*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Why is it important that Christians pay more attention to the Law of God?
2. Can we expect to see progress in the Kingdom economy of God apart from the Law? Explain.
3. How does the Law relate to the work of the Holy Spirit? If we neglect or ignore the Law, can we expect to know the full blessings of God's Spirit? Explain.
4. How can Christians encourage and help one another to make good use of the Law in their walk with and work for the Lord?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you planning to implement that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.