

Arbor Foundations
10 – Law and Grace
Nov 18, 2018 – John Raquet

Key Ideas / Biblical Basis

A. What is meant by the “law”?

- The word “law” does not have a single, uniform meaning in Scripture
- There are different ways to categorize the law, but for the purposes of today, we will look at it this way (attempting to follow Scriptural patterns):
 1. God’s moral law, as summarized in the 10 commandments
 - Scriptural examples:
 - Deut 4:13 (referred to explicitly as “Ten Commandments”)
 - Rom 2:12-29 (vv. 14-15 only makes sense when thinking of the moral law, not civil or ceremonial; examples given in vv. 20-21 are directly from the 10 commandments; v. 27 makes no sense if “law” here includes OT ceremonial law, because circumcision was part of OT ceremonial law)
 2. OT ceremonial and civil law, given specifically to the Israelites
 - Scriptural examples:
 - Example of OT civil law: Lev 25:23-34 (rules for land ownership)
 - Example of OT ceremonial law: Lev 1 (laws for burnt offerings)
 - Heb 7:28 (specifically referring to ceremonial law)
 3. God’s commands—this is “law in the broad sense”, and includes both God’s moral law as expressed in the Old Testament as well as Christ’s and the Apostle’s “fleshing out” of the moral law with more specific detail.
 - Scriptural examples:
 - 1 Cor 9:21: the phrases “law of God” and “law of Christ” are used as synonyms here, and by context refer to God’s commands in general that apply to all Christians.
 - 2 Thess 3:14: A command to keep away from any professing believer who is not walking according to the teachings of the apostles.
 - Matt 5:27-28: Jesus declaring that lusting after a woman is breaking the 7th commandment (“thou shalt not commit adultery”).
- There are some who would assert that it is invalid to separate out the ten commandments from the many civil and ceremonial commands given in the old testament. However, scripture itself does seem to make a distinction

between the 10 commandments and the rest of the law given through Moses.

- The 10 commandments are the first commands given on Mt. Sinai, given as a distinct set.
- The 10 commandments were verbally spoken by God such that all could hear (see Ex 20:22).
- The 10 commandments were the only laws written by the hand of God onto the stone (Ex. 32:16, Ex. 34:1, Ex. 34:38, Deut 4:13). The rest of the Mosaic law was spoken to and recorded by Moses.
- The 10 commandments were placed into the ark of the covenant.
- They are referred to as a unique group within scripture: “The Ten Commandments” (Ex 34:28, Deu 4:13, Deu 10:4).

B. The OT civil and ceremonial laws are no longer binding

- Symbolized by the curtain in the temple being torn in two at Jesus’ death (Matt 27:51)
- Acts 10-11: Peter being shown that the gospel is for the Gentiles as well, and they don’t need to follow Jewish ceremonial dietary laws (and he didn’t either).
- Heb 10:1-18: Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, and all OT sacrifices were simply a shadow of Christ’s sacrifice to come, and weren’t in and of themselves able to take away sin. Because the perfect sacrifice has come, there is no need to continue to offer the ceremonial sacrifices.
- As far as the civil laws, even the Jews at the time of Jesus weren’t living according to many of them, because they were under Roman rule. The civil laws were given specifically to the Israelites as their nation was being formed, and don’t directly apply to everyone everywhere. That being said, there are still principles found in the civil law (based on God’s moral law) that are good for us to consider. (For example, the principle behind an “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Lev 24:20), meaning that the punishment should fit the crime, is a valuable principle to be applied in any judicial context). The specific civil laws are not binding to us, however.

C. The 10 commandments are an expression of God's moral law, and are still valid

- Jesus explicitly said that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (and fulfilling it doesn’t make it no longer applicable).
 - Matt 5:17-18: *"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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*
 - He also stated that the law will stay in effect until heaven and earth pass away. It seems that he must be referring to the moral law here, because the civil and ceremonial parts of the law surely have passed away.

- Jesus teaching corrected and clarified misunderstandings about the true meaning of the moral law. Examples:
 - o Matt 5:21-26: Anger is violating the 6th commandment (you shall not kill).
 - o Matt 5:27-30; Lust is violating the the 7th commandment (you shall not commit adultery),
 - o Matt 5:33-37: Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.
- The apostles in their writing seem to assume the validity of the ten commandments.
 - o Eph 6:1-3: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."
 - Note: Paul directly quotes from one of the ten commandments, and he even refers to the ordering of the commandments. If the ten commandments are null and void, why would Paul apply them here?
 - o Rom 13:8-9: Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
 - Paul is quoting the commandments as being applicable.
 - o 1 Cor 7:19: For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.
 - This would seem to imply the ten commandments.
 - o 1 Tim 1:8-11: Law is good if used lawfully. Lists many of the worst violations of the 10 commandments in order: for those who strike their fathers and mothers (5th), for murderers (6th), for sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality (7th), for enslavers (stealing men) (8th), for liars, perjurers (9th).

D. Our salvation is entirely by grace, not by adhering to God's commands

- Eph 2:8-9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
- Rom 3:27-28: *Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*
- See also 2 Tim 1:9, Tit 3:3-5

E. What is the Christian’s relationship to God’s commands?

1. The law by itself brings condemnation, but there is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1).
2. God’s commands define for us what is right and wrong more clearly than our conscience can.
 - As believers, with God’s Spirit within us, we have a desire to obey God
 - Rom 6:17-18: *But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*
 - Ps 119:35: *Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.*
 - As such, we will actually want to know what God commands, because we are generally now bent toward obedience to these things.
3. Obedience to God’s commands does not make us righteous or justified in his sight, but God’s commands are a rule of life for the believer, describing how it is that we should live.
 - We obey in response to the grace that we have been shown, not in order to gain grace.
 - See Col 3:2-5. Note that the “because” in these verses is v. 3 (your life is hidden with Christ). The “therefores” are then found in v. 2 (Set your minds on things above) and vv. 4-5 (Put to death what is earthly within you). We are to do the “therefores” because of our identity of being in Christ, not in order to gain or maintain that identity.
4. From a practical point of view, obeying God’s commands is the place of safety and blessing
 - Ps 119: 98-100: *Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. ⁹⁹I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. ¹⁰⁰I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.*
 - When we break God’s commands, we generally find that we’ve created more difficulty for ourselves and others.
5. God’s commands are not burdensome, like they were prior to us becoming Christians.
 - 1 John 5:2-4: *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. **And his commandments are not burdensome.** For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*
 - Why? In the new covenant, God has written the law upon the hearts of every member of the new covenant community.
 - Jer 31:33-34: *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be*

their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

- See also Ezek 11:19-20.

6. What does Paul mean when he says we are not under law but under grace?
 - Rom 6:14: *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*
 - The clearest reading of this passage in context is that as believers, we are no longer condemned under the law (like all unbelievers), but rather are under grace, meaning we have had Christ’s righteousness applied to us and our sin to him. As a result, our sin no longer has dominion, in the sense that it is no longer the determining factor in our relationship with God (like it was prior to salvation).
 - Note that the two verses immediately preceding v. 14 are specific commands of God to believers. If v. 14 means that only grace matters and the law is no longer relevant, then what are we to do with these commands?
 - The fact that our standing before God is based on grace and not on the law does not mean that the law is no longer applicable or relevant. As stated above, the law is still a “rule of life”, but we are no longer condemned by our sin (failure to obey God’s commands).

F. We need to strive for the right balance between law and grace

- Two things that are both true:
 - Grace: we as Christians have been justified by Christ’s atoning work on the cross and are forgiven and righteous in God’s sight.
 - Law: We should exert effort to be conformed to the image of Jesus (becoming more like him by seeking to better obey God’s commands)
- What is the balance between these?
 - We should look to Scripture for the overall balance
 - Both take up significant portions of the NT, and they cannot be ignored without ignoring lots of clear teaching in scripture.
 - They are not contrary to each other. In fact, without law, grace would be of no value, and without grace, law would be a condemning thing to be feared.
- Based on how scripture treats these topics, we would propose the following balance:
 - The **dominant** factor in a Christian’s life is grace—that they have been justified by Christ’s atoning work on the cross, and they are forgiven.
 - Another part of every Christian’s life is obeying God’s commands—being conformed to the image of Jesus (becoming more like him,

struggling against our remaining sin), in which we are called to exert real effort.

- That being said, a Christian's struggle against remaining sin and efforts to be holy are a major emphasis, but not the primary emphasis of scripture.
- It is difficult for a church and for an individual to maintain this balance
 - Personalities
 - Personal history
 - Other factors
- It is wise for each person to attempt to recognize and account for their own imbalances in this area.

G. What about the Sabbath?

- We believe that command to honor the Sabbath is still a rule of life for believers, because it is part of the ten commandments.
- There were ceremonial/civil aspects of the Sabbath that do not apply any longer.
 - Ex 35:2-3: *Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day."*
- It appears that the early church met for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 16:2, Rev 1:10).
- We are clearly taught to prioritize meeting together
 - Heb 10:24-25: *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*
- God created a pattern in creation to work for six days and then to rest.
- Putting all of this together, we would say that God's intent is for us, for our good, is to set aside a day for worship and rest.
- The specifics of how each person works this out will almost certainly vary, and we have made this a point of contention or close scrutiny.

So What?

What happens if an individual or a church focuses so much on grace that they avoid pursuing obedience to God's commands?

What happens if the opposite is true—an individual or a church focuses so much on pursuing obedience to God's commands that grace is a relatively minor focus?

Why is it hard to keep the balance between law and grace?

For Further Study

Martin Luther's Commentary on Galatians

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/luther/galatians/>

John Bunyan, "The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded"

<https://www.amazon.com/Doctrine-Law-Grace-Unfolded/dp/1610100379>

Sinclair Ferguson, "The Whole Christ" (Crossway)

<https://www.crossway.org/books/the-whole-christ-hcj/> * The Whole Christ:
Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy
Still Matters

Jerry Bridges, "The Joy of Fearing God" <https://www.amazon.com/Joy-Fearing-God-Jerry-Bridges/dp/1854244531>

J. Douma, "The Ten Commandments"

<https://www.prpbooks.com/book/ten-commandments-the>