

NOTES:

Lesson 3

Death To The Law

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THE ERA OF CONSCIENCE

Man's history of six thousand years can be divided into three distinct eras, each era lasting two thousand years. The three eras are the era of **conscience**, the era of **law**, and the era of **grace**. A common significance between the three eras is the number twelve. The twelve men in the line of faith were under conscience; the twelve tribes of Israel were under law; and the twelve apostles were under grace. The first era began with the creation of man and ended with the death of Noah. At the end of the first era, God made a covenant with Abraham that required Abraham to obey whatever God asked of him. During the first era, God did not give mankind any laws that would teach them how to conduct themselves. Mankind were free from restrictions, able to follow the desires of their hearts without God influencing them. Other than Abel's short life, man did not call on the name of the Lord until 235 years after creation:

*And Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel; for Cain killed him." And to Seth, **to him also a son was born**; and he called his name Enosh. **Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.*** (Ge.4:25-26 NASB)

From the historical record of Genesis, only twelve men in the era of conscience sought after God in faith. When Noah and his family went into the ark, no other righteous people were on the earth, for everyone else was destroyed by the flood. Since God did not establish any laws during the first era, mankind could live uninhibited; each man lived according to his own conscience.

Some people think that man could not sin if God did not give a law:

*For **where there is no law there is no transgression.*** (Ro.4:15 NKJV)

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

1. What did the era of conscience teach us about man?
2. What is the difference between the ungodly, a transgressor, and a sinner?
3. What were the terms of the covenant that God made with Abraham and Israel?
4. What definition of sin summarizes the law of the covenant?
5. Why couldn't righteousness come through the law?
6. What definition of sin summarizes the law of Christ?
7. What replaced the law of the covenant, and how is it different?
8. How do the Scriptures use the verb tenses in Romans 7:4 and Galatians 2:19 to teach us that we died to the law?

old covenant, we are not lawless; for Christ provided a better way. Jesus Christ enables us to live for God through His Spirit:

*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.* (Ro.7:6 NIV)

Once Christ began to live in us, we were placed under the control of the Spirit Who not only convicts us of the will of God but also empowers us to do His will successfully. God writes His law on our hearts and minds and makes our obedience come from within us. Therefore, we died to the law of the old covenant through Christ. Because we are born-again, the law has been replaced by the Holy Spirit Who convicts and empowers us.

Transgression is a specific kind of sin that a person commits when he breaks the law. Transgression does not exist without law; however, sin does exist without law:

Death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. (Ro.5:12-13 NIV)

People committed sin before God gave them the law. Without the law, man was ignorant of his sin. Hence, he did not feel guilt. But ignorance does not excuse sins. It only prevents man from realizing his sins. The law convicted man's conscience through guilt, allowing him to reconsider his actions. Consequently, without the law, man committed unrestrained evil:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created." (Ge.6:5-7 NRSV)

When mankind lived by conscience, their wickedness was uninhibited. Hence, they grieved God's heart and caused Him to destroy every living thing that was outside the ark. Before the flood, society was saturated by violence even though man did not violate a single command:

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them." (Ge.6:11-13 NIV)

Even though God did not give the people of the first era laws that defined acceptable behavior, God judged their behavior and declared them guilty of sin, corruption, and violence. For sin is more than a violation of a command; sin is to fall short of God's standard of perfection. Jude is the only book that has a direct quotation from the era of conscience. The quotation is from the book of Enoch:

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." (Jd.1:14-15 NKJV)

Enoch called the people of the first era ungodly, but he did not call them transgressors or sinners. In the last era, the era of grace, people failed to achieve God's mark of perfection, which Jesus Christ showed man while He was on earth. Hence, they were called sinners because they missed the mark of love. In the era of law, people broke the law of God's covenant. Hence, they were called transgressors because they disobeyed God's laws. In the era of conscience, people did not know about the law or God's mark of perfection. Hence, they were simply called ungodly because they lived contrary to the character of God. Sinners existed in every era, for every man that ever lived failed to achieve God's standard of perfection. The ungodly also existed in every era, for every era contains people who did not know the law or God's mark of perfection. But all the people of the era of conscience were called ungodly. Peter also used the term "ungodly" to describe the people of the first era:

*. . . and did not spare the ancient world, but **preserved Noah**, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, **when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly.*** (2Pe.2:5 NASB)

Even though some societies do not have the law of God, they do develop moral standards to guide themselves. When people do not have a law from God, they live by their consciences, developing a sense of right and wrong. Society uses the collective standard of public opinion to determine what is moral. This standard is based upon what the majority considers acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Consequently, as societies differ, so do their morals. Morals from the majority have allowed everything from the cannibalism of outsiders to the rape of immodest women. People from all over the world have different morals that result from the consciences of their communities and cultures. The morals of a community may seem politically correct, but the morals could be contrary to God's character. If people live by ungodly morals, they will spend eternity in hell:

There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death. (Pr.14:12 NRSV; Pr.16:25)

People who do not have God's law are ignorant of their sin and unaware of their fallen state. Although they do not know that they break God's law, God still considers them ungodly. Morality is fluid in an amoral system (a society without the moral absolutes of God's law). Unstable morals create an unstable society that exists in constant tension. While

voice signifies that man must do something in order to die to the law. To die to the law, man must respond appropriately to the Gospel message. A person dies to the law when he receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation:

*And we are witnesses of these things; and so **is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.*** (Ac.5:32 NASB)

Is the sinner's prayer a work that man must do in order to receive the Holy Spirit? Is prayer God's way to receive Christ? Many people pray to receive Christ into their lives, but the Scriptures never command people to pray in order to receive Christ:

*Peter replied, "**Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**"* (Ac.2:38 NIV)

Even though people in history have received the Holy Spirit before they were baptized, the Scripture commands a person to be baptized the moment that he professes that Christ died for his sins. God gives the Holy Spirit to a believer if he obeys God in baptism. Once the Spirit lives within a person, He will convict him of wrongdoing when He speaks into the person's heart:

*For **the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*** (Ro.8:2 NKJV)

The law of Moses was written on two stone tablets, but it led to sin and death. For the Israelites failed to apply the laws of the covenant to their hearts, bringing God's judgement upon themselves. Hence, throughout Israel's history, God left a trail of Israelite bodies throughout the desert, in foreign lands, and throughout Israel itself. However, with the law of the Spirit, God writes His law on the hearts and minds of Christians. Hence, Christians obey Christ from the center of their beings:

***This is the covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: **I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts,** and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* (He.8:10 NRSV)

The old covenant encompasses the law of Moses while the new covenant contains the law of Christ. The Holy Spirit writes the law of Christ on the hearts of Christians through discernment and conviction. If we Christians continue to live by the law of Moses, we will fail to please God just as Israel failed. Even though we died to the law of the

obey. God commands Christians to fulfill a higher level of righteousness that reflects God's true character of holiness:

So then, if you know the good you ought to do and don't do it, you sin. (Ja.4:17 TNIV)

The law of the covenant commanded the Israelites to not harm their neighbors; the law of Christ commands us to do good to our neighbors. The previous verse reflects the law of Christ—the law of love:

This I command you, that you love one another. (Jn.15:17 NASB; 1Co.9:21)

The law of Christ is a higher standard than the law of Moses. Christ not only asks us to not harm our neighbor but also to help our neighbor when he is in need. Christ's law is God's perfect standard that replaces the inferior law of God's covenant with Israel. If Christians continue to live by the law of Moses, they have fallen short of the true righteousness of God. Hence, the Scriptures teach that Christians died to the law when they accepted Christ:

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. (Ro.7:4 NIV)

Christians died to the law through the body of Christ. In Romans 7:4, the Greek verb tense of “died” is the aorist tense, **passive voice**, indicative mood—in simple English, we translate it as the past tense. The aorist tense is used for an action that is apart from time. This tense is used in Romans because we were saved by God before the beginning of time. The passive voice indicates that we died to the law apart from our own actions. When we accepted Christ as our Savior and Lord, we received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the law finally fulfilled its purpose in our lives. Since the law was fulfilled when we received the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Spirit brings death to the law:

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Ga.5:18 NKJV)

Galatians 2:19 also teaches that we died to the law:

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. (Ga.2:19 NRSV)

In this verse, we find that the verb tense of “died” is the aorist tense, **active voice**, indicative mood. The aorist tense indicates that the act is apart from time. We were saved by God from eternity past. The active

the moral idealists and the moral degenerates bully society, society will establish a moral code but will never attain absolute moral purity—the character of God. Ungodly people live by a man-made moral code but do not know when they break God's law. Sinners know what God expects of them, but they continue to live for pleasure regardless of the consequences. The Bible clearly differentiates between the ungodly and the sinner:

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?" (1Pe.4:18 NRSV)

Sinners pursue evil even though they know God's will, but the ungodly commit evil without knowing God's laws or the consequences of their disobedience:

We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murders. . . (1Ti.1:9 NIV)

In reality, there is little difference between the lifestyles of the ungodly and the sinners. They only differ in their knowledge of sin. For example, would you prefer to not know that you will be hit by a truck and killed, or would you prefer to know two seconds before the impact? Even if you knew that you would collide with an oncoming truck, you could not prevent the collision. The ungodly are oblivious to their fallen state with its consequences, but sinners are aware of their fallen state through the law but cannot overcome their sinful behavior nor escape its consequences. Ultimately, the law does not produce righteousness in man:

For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. (Ro.3:20 NRSV)

The law only made us conscious of our fallen state. The law offered us no hope of being justified before God and consequently gave us no advantage over those who sinned apart from the law. Both the sinners and the ungodly perish:

For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law. (Ro.2:11-12 NASB)

Therefore, the ungodly will perish even though they live in an amoral society and do not know that they will be punished in hell.

THE ERA OF LAW

The era of law began when God made a covenant with Abraham. Within the covenant, God commanded Abraham to leave his country and go to the promised land that He would reveal to him. Abraham agreed to walk in obedience to God when he entered the covenant with God. Later, while Abraham was in that promised land, God commanded him to circumcise every male. Over four hundred years later, God renewed the covenant with Abraham's descendents, the nation of Israel. God gave Israel laws to govern their society. These laws further defined the will of God for His people. The actual law of the covenant consisted of the Ten Commandments:

And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice. So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.

(Duet.4:11-13 NKJV)

The terms of the covenant were ten simple commands written on two stone tablets. These tablets contained a written contract that God offered to the people of Israel. God did not have to make a covenant with the Israelites; but in His grace, He offered Israel the opportunity to prove their commitment to Him:

When I went up the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. And the LORD gave me the two stone tablets written with the finger of God; on them were all the words that the LORD had spoken to you at the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly. At the end of forty days and forty nights the LORD gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant.

(Duet.9:9-11 NRSV)

God asked Israel to keep ten simple commands. The first four commands were about unfaithfulness to God, and the other six commands were about man's relationship with others. Nine of the laws were negative statements. They focused the Israelites' attention on what they were not to do rather than what they should do. When the Israelites strove to obey the law, it reminded them of the evil behavior that the law forbade. For example, a father told his daughter, "Never eat a banana." When the daughter remembered to never eat bananas, she reminded herself that bananas exist, and she began to wonder what they

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

(Ro.7:14-20 NIV)

The law did not empower Paul to overcome his sinful nature or sin's power. For under the law, Paul remained unspiritual—spiritually dead. Hence, the Scripture concludes that man could not and cannot obtain righteousness through the law:

I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

(Ga.2:21 NASB)

Christ came to enable man to live a righteous life. God used the law to establish His standard of righteousness. When man failed to conform to God's standard, man would realize that he could not please God. Consequently, man would call upon Jesus to be his Savior—to save him from his hopeless position:

But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

(Ga.3:22-25 NIV)

In Christ, Christians are no longer under the law; but the law of Moses will continue to exist until judgement day to convict the world of sin and the need for a Savior:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

(Mt.5:17-18 NRSV)

The law of God will continue to convince people that they are evil. However, people deceive themselves if they use the law of the covenant as the absolute standard of righteousness. The law is a standard of righteousness, but it is not God's perfect standard that Christians must

Now we know that whatever **the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law**, so that every mouth may be silenced, and **the whole world may be held accountable to God**. For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, **for through the law comes the knowledge of sin**. (Ro.3:19-20 NRSV)

The law merely defined sin. It did not enable man to obey God. The law did not make anyone righteous, but it made man conscious of sin. If a person broke the least significant command, he would be guilty of sin:

For whoever **keeps the whole law** and yet **stumbles at just one point** is guilty of breaking all of it. (Ja.2:10 NIV)

To steal a cookie, a car, or someone's spouse is equally sinful in God's sight. All of these actions are morally unacceptable to God and thereby are evil. If the Israelites disobeyed any of the Ten Commandments, they **would not** instantly experience God's wrath; but they **would** break their covenant with God. People entered the covenant with God by circumcision, but then they were obligated to keep all ten commandments of the covenant:

Once again I testify to every man who **lets himself be circumcised** that **he is obliged to obey the entire law**. (Ga.5:3 NRSV)

The Israelites had to obey the Ten Commandments in order to remain the people of God. The very essence of the covenant of law can be summarized by the statement, "Do this, and you shall live":

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "**The man who does these things will live by them**." (Ro.10:5 NIV)

When the people of Israel failed to keep the law, they were under a curse because they had broken their covenant with God:

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "**Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law**." (Ga.3:10 NRSV)

Everyone under the law sinned. The only exception was Jesus. In fact, Solomon, the wisest man in the Old Testament, made a conclusion about mankind and sin:

When they sin against you— for there is no one who does not sin. (1Ki.8:46 NIV)

We know that the law did not make anyone righteous but instead generated unrighteousness. Before Paul became a Christian, he was a devoted Jew who could not do the good that God required:

tasted like. Hence, the father's command constantly tempted the daughter to eat a banana. Hence, the law continually presented the Israelites with the choice to do evil—temptation. For example, God commanded, "Do not commit adultery." This negative command focused man's attention on evil behavior. God could have commanded "Be faithful to each other and only find joy and fulfillment in your spouse." This positive command would have focused man's attention on godly behavior. However, if God only mentioned godly behavior in the law, the Israelites would not have known when or how they displeased God. Positive commands could not establish the moral absolutes that man should not cross. The law of the covenant defined and established the minimal standard of acceptable behavior, yet it presented the temptation to sin. The law is similar to the building code for carpenters. The building code establishes the minimal standard of acceptable construction to ensure a safe building. A carpenter can build a stronger building than the code requires, but very few carpenters surpass the building code because of the expense. In general, carpenters aim to fulfill the minimal standard that the building inspector requires. The purpose of the building code is to ensure that all structures are relatively safe. In the same way, the purpose of the law of the covenant was to warn man of those actions that would harm him or others and that would offend God. We know that the law failed to promote godliness and to keep man from breaking God's minimal moral standard. For example, according to history, the ten tribes of Israel constantly refused to keep the ten simple commands of the covenant. Hence, God scattered the ten tribes of Israel among the nations:

Then **the king of Assyria carried Israel away into exile to Assyria**, and put them in Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, **because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant**, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded; **they would neither listen, nor do it**. (2Ki.18:11-12 NASB)

The ten tribes, the nation of Israel, never reclaimed their portion of the promised land but were lost in exile because they did not keep the ten commands. The other two tribes, the nation of Judah, were also banished into exile, but only for seventy years:

The LORD, the God of their ancestors, **sent word to them through his messengers again and again**, because he had pity on his people and

on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, **despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused** against his people and there was no remedy. . . . God gave them all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. (2Chr.36:15-17 TNIV)

After seventy years, God returned the survivors of the exile to the promised land of Israel. However, once again, the nation of Judah did not keep God's law; consequently, God remained silent for four hundred years until the era of grace. Therefore, the law failed to deter Israel from sin and did little to enable people to please God.

THE FAILURE OF LAW

We must understand the concept of law to comprehend why it failed. A law is a command that is given by someone in authority. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* of 1975 defines "law":

"a binding custom or practice of a community : a rule of conduct or action prescribed or formally recognized as binding or enforced by a controlling authority"

Once an authority makes a law, the people under the law must choose to obey the law or to rebel against the law. Most laws are made in response to the actions of a few irresponsible people whose behavior is unacceptable to society:

We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers. And it is for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. (1Ti.1:9-11 TNIV)

A law is made to ensure that people know that a certain behavior is unacceptable and that the behavior will bring a specific penalty. A new law draws attention to an action and causes people to form an opinion about both the action and the law. Their opinions determine whether they will obey or rebel. A law does not ensure compliance but rather removes ignorance and creates accountability. When an authority declares that an act is unacceptable, he removes the people's innocence and educates them about the action. Thus, a law actually teaches innocent people a new way to commit evil:

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

(1Co 15:56 NASB)

For decent people, a law not only removes their innocence but also increases temptations. Hence, law is the power of sin:

On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. (Ro.7:7-8 NASB)

The power of sin took the command "You shall not covet" and caused man to look at his neighbor's possessions in a new light. Before man knew the command, he did not think about his neighbor's things. But because of the command, he began to covet—to desire what his neighbor owned. Once man does what the law tells him not to do, he transgresses the law:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

(Eph.2:4-5 NASB)

Even though man transgresses when he breaks the law, not all laws are morally based—right or wrong. The purpose of these laws is to establish uniformity. For example, some countries have the law that drivers must drive on the right side of the road. It is not evil to drive on the left; but to allow drivers to drive on any side of the road would lead to confusion, chaos, and possible collision. Therefore, even though disobedience to a law is transgression, not all transgression is sin. But to transgress God's law is sin, for the law of God is a standard of "rightness" that reflects His absolute moral perfection. The Scripture gives a definition of sin that summarizes the law of the covenant:

All wrongdoing is sin.

(1Jn.5:17 NRSV)

To harm someone in any way is to sin. Moral perversion (sin) was in the world before God gave the law. For sin is simply wrongdoing:

For before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. (Ro.5:13 NIV)

Moral sin existed during the time of Cain, who sinned when he killed his brother Abel. Cain sinned even though no command was given about murder, for murder is morally unacceptable behavior in God's eyes. The purpose of God's law is to make man conscious of morally unacceptable behavior—sin: