

*The*  
*Fourth*  
*Commandment:*  
*LAW OR GRACE*

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A. E. Knoch

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LAW OR GRACE?

THE very First Commandment is evidence that the law was given only to the nation of Israel, for they only were brought up out of the land of Egypt (Ex.20:2; Deut.5:6). The Fourth Commandment, concerning the Sabbath Day, likewise is restricted to that nation, for it is written: "Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that Yahweh, thy Elohim, brought thee out hence by a mighty hand and a stretched out arm: therefore, Yahweh, thy Elohim, commanded thee to keep the Sabbath Day" (Deut.5:15).

Israel's greatness consisted partly in this, for "what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut.4:8). It was one of their special prerogatives (Rom.3:1; 9:4, not the giving of the law, but the legislation) in which they boasted (Rom. 2:23), and a part of the oracles of God, which were their chief advantage over the other nations. Negatively, we are told that the nations, who have no law shall perish without law and be judged by their conscience (Rom.2:12-16).

Some are inclined to repudiate these passages because of Romans 3:19, which sums up the two lines of argument the apostle has been pursuing. First he indicts the nations (Rom.1:18 to 2:16), without a sin-

gle appeal to the Scriptures. Then he turns to the Jew (Rom.2:17 to 3:19a) and quotes their own Scriptures to show their guilt. Then, having previously indicted Jews as well as Greeks to be all under sin, he quotes what the Jew says, which can only apply to those under the law, to prove Israel's guilt and thus stop every mouth, making the entire world subject to the just judgment of God.

It is foolish to insist that "whatever the law is saying it is speaking to those under the law" (Rom.3:19) and then immediately retract it and assert that the law is speaking to the whole world, whether under its jurisdiction or not. The Greek conjunction used here (*hina*, in order that) introduces a logical deduction which must be traced back to its sources. It must not be used to distort one of its premises because the other has been lost sight of.

There are two classes among those who believe, so far as their previous place in the world is concerned—those who were Jews and those who were of the other nations. Before faith comes (Gal.3:23) the former are guarded under law, but after faith is come (Gal.3:25) they are no longer under law. They are now exempted from the law, having died to that which was holding them fast (Rom.7:6). The spirit's law, giving life by Christ Jesus, frees them from the law of sin and death (Rom.8:2).

Soon after some of the nations believed, the sect of the Pharisees insisted that it was needful to command them to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:5). At the conference called to consider this matter, Peter declared that God had purified their hearts by *faith*.

“Why, then, are you now trying God, by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we are strong enough to bear? But through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are believing, to be saved in a manner even as they” (Acts 15:6-12). And even James gave it as his judgment that “I decide *not to be harassing* those from the nations who are turning back to God” (Acts 15:19). Yet they made decrees for them to keep, which were binding on those among the nations who believed until Jew and Gentile are reconciled through the cross, and are created into one new humanity, and the law of precepts in these decrees are repealed (Eph.2:15,16). The period from the council at Jerusalem until Paul’s imprisonment is the only one during which the nations were under any “law,” yet these decrees were in no sense a repetition of the ten commandments. They made no reference at all to the Sabbath.

It should be freely and fully acknowledged that our Sunday is a purely heathen holiday. It is not even referred to in the Scriptures. While the first day of the week may be mentioned in most of our versions, it has no place in the Original. We know that it was *not* a Sabbath, or day of cessation from labor, or it would assuredly have been so designated. We need hardly say that “the Lord’s day” is a modern misuse of a term which should be applied only to the day of the Lord spoken of by the prophets. The observance of Sunday was probably unknown until the time of Constantine—a name associated with much which is prized by men, but an abomination to God.

What then, is our attitude towards the law? If the

reader is a Jew, let him reckon himself as dead to it and beyond its jurisdiction. He will not keep Saturday as the Sabbath, for that is the letter of the law whose infringement would bring him into bondage. but, knowing Christ as the consummation of the law (Rom.10:4), in spirit he enjoys all that the keeping of the law could bring and far more. His Sabbath consists, not in cessation from physical labor each seventh day, but complete rest from his own efforts to attain righteousness. Christ has become this to him. The Sabbath was but a shadow of this real rest.

The danger in falling out of grace (Gal.5:4), even so little as going back to the literal observance of the Sabbath lies in the fact that the slightest infringement of the law of the Sabbath carries a curse with it. "Accursed is everyone who is not remaining in all things written in the scroll of the law to do them" (Gal.3:10).

The first sign that it has become a *legal* observance is the repudiation of Sunday for Saturday—the seventh day—which was the day God sanctified. This is but a step to the deadly bondage of the law. For if it is necessary to observe the right day it is also necessary to keep every jot and tittle of the commands concerning that day. And the slightest failure here brings condemnation. Grace brings us *beyond* condemnation: law puts us *under* it. The law says do or die; grace says believe and live.

But if the reader is not a Jew (as the writer of these lines) let us exult in the transcendent grace which has become ours in Christ Jesus, so that, though never under the jurisdiction of the law before faith came, we are not bound by its chains after we have

believed, but are free in Him. Our incentive to good deeds is not the law's loud thunders, but the gentle, but far more potent call of love—the love of Christ constraineth us.

The law has its place and function. It came in by the way in order to increase *offense*. Sins of ignorance are no offense to God. It is when sin is committed against His express commands that God is offended. And this was needed in order to magnify the grace which was about to be revealed. Yet where sin increases, grace superabounds. Thus it is with us quite the opposite of being under law. Condemnation increases as sin increases under law: *grace* increases as sin increases for those in Christ Jesus (Rom.5:20-6:1).

In conclusion, the law was a wise provision for God's earthly people and many of its enactments are fraught with physical and moral benefits which may profit us. To rest one day in seven is undoubtedly a good plan and well worth observing as a rule of health, provided it be kept out of the domain of lawkeeping. It is the motive that matters. To do aught to justify ourselves strikes at the heart of God's purpose to lock up all in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all. To keep the law after faith has come defeats His purpose to draw us close to His heart in reconciliation. It denies the gift of the spirit. It recalls the dispensation of death, which has been eclipsed by the dispensation of righteousness and life and love (2 Cor.3:7,9).

A.E.K.

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