



*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

*II Peter 1:3*

## THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LAW

By Gordon H. Clark

Not only do denominations differ over their interpretations of various Biblical doctrines, but within each denomination individual members have their personal peculiarities. Therefore when ministers assemble for a sedate colloquium or college students get together for a friendly bull session, and a question on Biblical doctrine arises, the discussion is bound to be interesting.

Within the past year two such meetings took place—one almost exclusively of ministers and professors, the other almost exclusively of students. It may not be so surprising that the subject of divine guidance and right conduct was taken up at both meetings, but it is worthy of note that in the first meeting a minister from a liturgical and rather formal denomination and in the second meeting some students from much more informal groups, expressed similar sentiments on the Christian's relation to the law of God. It may also be worthy of note that few of the ministers agreed with the minister, while most of the students agreed with the students.

The sentiments referred to emphasized salvation by grace and God's nearness to the individual soul; but this emphasis went to the length of denying that God's commands, which of course are law, had any relevance to the Christian life.

We are not under law, but under grace, they said; and having begun in the Spirit, are we now perfected in the flesh? The law is not of faith. When we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were through the law, wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death; but now we have been delivered from the law, so that we serve in the newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. For the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

The converse of this repudiation of the law is that our daily decisions are to be directed immediately by the Spirit. The new birth has given us a new nature, and in this new nature the Spirit instructs us what to do. The Lord will guide us with his eye, and neither the law in the Old Testament nor the commands in the New Testament lay any obligation upon us. They are neither prerequisites for salvation nor guidance for life. This substantially, and without exaggeration, was the position maintained.

On more than one occasion and on more than one subject, devout men have expressed opinions from which others have later drawn distressing conclusions. I knew one man who took such a

serious view of divine guidance that one evening he stood for an hour in his chicken yard waiting for the Spirit to tell him whether or not to feed the chickens. And I have heard rumors of people who pray for guidance as to whether or not they should disobey some Biblical command. In previous ages of church history (e.g., the early Gnostics) a repudiation of the law has led to gross sin. Someone has characterized this antinomianism by a parody on a gospel hymn: "Free from the law, O blessed condition; I can sin as I please and still have remission."

Such a conclusion was not the intention of the minister and the students above referred to; but though it was far from their intention, each one of us must determine whether or not this view of law and divine guidance leads logically to what is absurd or sinful. Each of us must also determine what significance there is for us in the Ten Commandments and the various commands and directions in the New Testament.

Perhaps a point of general agreement from which we may start is the Biblical teaching that Christ saves us not only from the penalty of sin, but from sin itself. "He died that we might be forgiven; he died to make us good." Or, in Scriptural language, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."

If this be agreed upon, if we all admit that we must no longer be the servants of sin but must present our members as instruments of righteousness unto God, the next question logically is: What is sin, what are good works, what is righteousness? We want to do good works, we want to avoid evil works; but how can we distinguish between them?

There need be no vague guessing as to the answer to these questions. The Scripture speaks very definitely. The Scripture says precisely what sin is. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). "Where no law is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). "Through the law cometh the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). It should be clear then that sin is always defined by the law. Unless one knows the law of God, he cannot know what is wrong, evil or sinful.

Is it wrong to worship Mary and bow before angels? Is it wrong to swipe gadgets off a dime store counter? Is it wrong to work on the Lord's Day? We do not need to stand in a chicken yard waiting for an answer to these questions. Divine guidance is

a wonderful thing; but more wonderful is the fact that God has already given us His guidance in easily understood sentences.

The converse also follows. If sin is what the law forbids, good works are those which the law commands. No guessing is necessary. The Scriptures say precisely what good works are. Good works are only such as God has commanded in His Holy Word, and not such as without the warrant of Scripture, are devised by men out of blind zeal or upon any pretense of good intention. Those who vainly worship God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men, may have a certain zeal, but not according to knowledge. "He hath shown thee, O man, what is good."

It should be evident therefore that good and evil are defined only by the law of God.

This conclusion is reinforced by the strictness with which God enjoins obedience. "This is the way, walk ye in it. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left. Thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand or to the left." It should not be thought that these Old Testament principles do not apply to us; nor should anyone suppose that all this is inconsistent with grace. Salvation in the Old Testament is as truly of grace as salvation in the New Testament. Justification by faith is an Old Testament doctrine: Paul took it from Habakkuk. Regeneration, which Nicodemus should have known about, is explained in Ezekiel 36. If therefore grace and law are not incompatible in the Old Testament, there is no *a priori* reason why they should be so in the New Testament.

However, to make doubly sure and not to rely wholly on the Old Testament, some New Testament passages may be adduced. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." And further, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him. By this we know that we love the children

of God, when we love God and keep his commandments; for this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."

Such specific statements should be accepted as decisive.

There is one final point to be made. Someone may now admit that we are under obligation to obey God's commands, but he may argue that in addition to the Bible we need further guidance. The Bible is all right so far as it goes; but the Christian life is wider than the Bible, we meet situations that Biblical commands do not cover, and so we must look to God for additional information on what to do. After all, is there any harm in adding to the Bible, provided only that we do not subtract from it?

This type of argument, however, contradicts the express statement of Scripture, and is therefore dishonoring to God. We are all familiar, no doubt, with the phrase, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," but have we carefully read what follows? Of course, Scripture is profitable for doctrine, and for instruction in righteousness; but for what purpose? Note the next verse: "that the man of God may be perfect [or, perfected], thoroughly furnished [completely furnished, or equipped] unto all good words [unto every good work]." The statement is comprehensive: it includes every good work. There is no good work for which the Scripture does not prepare us perfectly. It is the law of God stated in the Scriptures that defines sin and good works.

God has given us all the guidance we need. We do not need Roman Catholic tradition; we do not need mystic visions; we do not need additional revelations. But we do need, and need sorely, a great deal of Bible study. In the Bible, and in the Bible alone, we find the rule of life. **END**  
P.S. If you have chickens, a horse, or a pet dog, study Exodus 20:10; 23:5, 12; Deuteronomy 25:4; Proverbs 12:10; Matthew 12:11; and feed them.