

A Biblical View of Law and Grace: Implications for Same-Sex Marriage

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For many it is argued, “We are not under law but under grace!” (Rom 6:14). Likewise, Paul declares, “I died to the law so that I might live for God” (Gal 2:19; also Rom 7:6; 1 Cor 9:20). Therefore, the Old Testament law has been abolished, they claim, including the laws concerning homosexuality. And yet, Paul affirms that “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, righteous and good” (Rom 7:12), also citing it as warrant for his ethical judgments among the churches (1 Cor 9:9; Eph 6:1-2). He candidly states, “In my inner being I delight in God’s law” (Rom 7:22).

So, how do we understand this apparent ambiguity concerning the law in the New Testament?

Paul resolves it when he declares, “But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it *lawfully*” (1 Tim 1:8 NASB). As we have already seen, he affirms it as good and holy. He also affirms it as “spiritual” (Rom 7:14), so that those who live “according to the Spirit” will indeed fulfil the “righteous requirement of the law”, whereas “the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law” (Rom 8:4, 7). So, clearly the law of God and walking in the Spirit are not mutually exclusive—one’s response to God the Holy Spirit is revealed in one’s obedience to the law.

Nonetheless, as Paul explains to Timothy, it is possible to use the law of God *unlawfully*. The law must be used according to God’s purpose for it. For example, the Pharisees and Judaizers used “the works of the law” for self-merit before God—for their own justification. This was not God’s design for the law, producing – even though the law is good and holy – a far from “good” effect: a pharisaic pretence of righteousness.

So, how does one use the law *lawfully*? As Paul explains, according to the *law of faith*; and thereby, distinguishes between the *works of the law* and the *law of works*:

27 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*. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from *works of the law*. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Rom 3:27–30 (emphasis mine)

We may define the *works of the law* as obedience to the law’s moral injunctions; and therefore, as good, holy and spiritual. It is using the law *lawfully*—that is, for the purpose of *sanctification*.

We may define the *law of works* as pursuing the righteousness of the law through a principle of self-effort and self-justification, in contrast to the *law of faith* that places confidence in Christ and *his* justifying work. The *law of works* uses the law *unlawfully*—that is, for the purpose of *justification*.

The Pharisees and Judaizers used the law *unlawfully* by attempting to do the *works of the law* (i.e. obedience to the law with its rabbinical additions) through the *law of works* (i.e. the principle of self-effort and self-justification), thus rejecting the *law of faith*; for as Paul shows, “... ‘The just shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:17b). Paul explicates this further later in Romans:

30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. ...

Rom 9:30–32

So, when Paul declares “we are no longer under law but under grace” (Rom 6:14) what does he mean? He means that the believer is not under the *law of works* as a justifying / condemning principle, which only leads to death because of our inability to obey the law (Rom 2:25-27; 3:19-20; 7:5-12; 2 Cor 3:6; Col 2:11-14); instead we are now under grace through the *law of faith* because Christ has satisfied the law on our behalf:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. ... 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Rom 3:23–26

So, what now happens to the Old Testament law?

In the last verse of Romans 3 Paul poses this very question: “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Rom 3:31). The law is to be upheld—that is, the *works of the law* must still be done.

While, in Christ, we are dead to the law so as to live by the Spirit (Rom 7:4-6), the law itself is not dead—it is to be upheld. But what does it mean for the believer to be dead to the law? It means to be dead to the *sin-enlivening effect* of the law and its consequent condemnation, for the law itself remains holy, righteous, and good (Rom 7:7-12)—and thus to be maintained.

Our Lord himself makes this clear:

17 “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. 18 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. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt 5:17–19

Putting aside the arguments about the meaning of “fulfil” (v.17), it is clear that the law is not repealed, nor is the believer freed from its moral imperatives and commands. In fact, the one who teaches this is considered to be least in the kingdom of God. As earthly kings establish their domain through their laws, likewise, the kingdom of God is exercised through his law.

It beggars theological belief to imagine that the mission of Christ was to render it now morally acceptable to engage in behaviours contrary to the law of God: murder, stealing, bestiality, adultery, rape, or homosexuality! Christ did not come to change the righteous standard of the law, but rather the means by which it is to be obeyed. Not only was Christ the *eschatological* (final) fulfilment of all that the “law and the prophets” foreshadowed typologically, but also the *soteriological* (salvation) fulfilment—“in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom 7:3). The law’s moral imperatives still apply! Rather than the believer attempting to obey the law in their own strength for their own justification they can now obey the law through the power of the Holy Spirit unto sanctification (Rom 7:4-7; 8:1-8).

Heaven and earth will not pass until every detail of the law is accomplished—in us and, as we will see momentarily, in the whole world when we consider the role of church and state. The Great Commandment to love the Lord and our neighbour is merely a summary statement of the Ten Commandments and their application through specific case laws in Israel’s daily life (Mtt 22:35-40; Ex 20-23). The Great Commandment, as a comprehensive statement of the law, cannot be pitted against the law’s specific details, as some attempt to do—the New Testament summary statement and the Old Testament detailed specifics go hand-in-glove. Thus Christ reiterates the moral requirement of the law in all its specifics, which includes homosexuality.

At this point it is necessary to appreciate the three-fold distinction of the law (moral, civil, and ceremonial), which a revisionist pro-homosexual theology seeks to disregard, preferring to teach that the whole law – without distinction – is superseded. The three-fold distinction is far from arbitrary; rather it emerges from Scripture’s own internal logic as it interprets itself: moral

law defines justice, including its civil applications, while ceremonial law guides redemptive restoration in the light of that justice. The moral *and* civil law answers the question, “How should I live?”; the ceremonial law symbolically answers the question, “How can I be restored to God’s favour after breaking His moral law?” Recognising this distinction, consequently clarifies both the *continuities* and *discontinuities* between Old and New Testaments.

As we have already shown, the moral requirements of the law are restated by Christ and the apostles, and thus, continue through into the new covenant. However, the ceremonial laws of sacrifice, priesthood and temple discontinue; although they do continue as type through to antitype, from shadow to substance, as spiritual realities, having been fulfilled in Christ (Heb 8-10; Col 2:11-17). As cultic laws they no longer apply.

Some argue that the prohibition of homosexuality is a ceremonial law, and thus temporary; but one must ask how, as such, it serves as a type of Christ’s redemptive ministry. Additionally, the fact that homosexuality was sanctioned by the death penalty demonstrates conclusively that, in fact, it was treated as a moral and justice issue. We will discuss Israel’s civil (and judicial) laws and their potential applicability for today under the head of church and state.

In concluding this section, it remains to be said that pitting law and grace – Old Testament law and New Testament gospel (grace) – as antithetical either/or options echoes the heresy of Marcionism.

Around AD 144 Marcion dualistically represented the God of the Old Testament as a vengeful tyrant while the superior God of the New Testament was one of love and forgiveness—and never shall the twain meet! This heresy is alive and well as many Christians buy into the false antitheses between Old and New Testament as one of law and grace. It is not biblical Christianity and leads to antinomianism—a gospel of grace to the exclusion of objective ethical requirements; thus opening the way for homosexuality to be considered as either a virtue, or at least as morally neutral. And yet, Jesus declared, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15; also 15:10) and Paul that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10b; see also 1 Jn 2:3-6; 5:3; 2 Jn 6; 1 Pet 2:21). Clearly love and law-keeping are not antithetical. As we have already seen, both the Old Testament law *and* grace apply in the dynamics of the gospel: the law – in summary and specifics – is written on the fleshly tables of our heart (2 Cor 3:3; Heb 8:10).

The situation Jude confronted is being revisited in the contemporary homosexual apology:

4 For **certain persons** have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who **turn the grace of our God into licentiousness** and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

5 Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. ... 7 just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and **went after strange flesh**, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

Jude 1:4–7 NAS (emphasis mine)

Through a misinterpretation of the scripture, “we are not under law but under grace”, the grace of God has been turned into licentiousness. By divorcing the law of God from the grace of God a revisionist homosexual theology has justified an immoral behaviour clearly censured in both the Old and New Testaments.

Excerpt from [Same-Sex Marriage: Should it be a Civil-right? A Biblical View](#)

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