

The Bible: A Love Story

Pt 4: The Law of Love

The question is often asked: are we, as Christians under the New Covenant of Grace, still obliged to keep the law (as much as is possible with the help of the Spirit of God)? And if so, what does it mean that we are **"no longer under law but under grace"** (**Romans 6:14**)? And didn't John say that **"the law was given through Moses; grace and truth was given through Jesus Christ."** (**John 1:17**) In fact, Paul did go on to describe himself and other believers as being *dead to the law*, (**Romans 11:7**; **Galatians 5:19**).

So what's the story? Is the law irrelevant to the believer today?

To answer this question, we must go back to the time when the law was first give at Mt Sinai. The Old Covenant that Yahweh made with Israel is what gives us a clear insight into the nature and purpose of the law - as well as its specific relevance to us in the Church, the spiritual Body of Christ.

Let me make this clear at the onset: although I will, in this message, be equating the keeping of the law to an expression of true love for God, I am doing so strictly in the scriptural context of this

discussion of the Old and New Covenants. Love is, of course, far greater, deeper and more wide-ranging than the mere keeping of the law.

But back to our subject:

In our previous messages in this series, we saw how that the law - specifically the ten commandments - was given to the nation of Israel as part of a "*Ketubah*" - a marriage contract - the "*Old Covenant*" ([Exodus chapters 10, 20 and 24](#)). It constituted no less than a record of the obligations imposed on the bride as a means of her demonstrating love for, and devotion to her intended 'husband'. It was her side of the covenant and required of her because genuine love and willing obedience always go together. One can never operate without the other: they are two sides of the same coin - operating spiritually in the specific context of a love relationship! We see this conjunction of love and obedience (loyalty) in the following verses:

[Deuteronomy 7:9](#) "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments."

As Christ said to his disciples: [John 14:21](#) "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."

And John adds: "In fact, this is love for God: *to keep his commands.*" (1 John 5:3)

Christ himself demonstrated this perfect blend of love and obedience in his relationship with the Father:

"I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me."(John 14:31)

And in his turn, Christ asked the same of his disciples: "If you love me, keep my commands." (John 14:15)

We further saw how Israel's marriage to Yahweh ended in divorce because of her lack of love for God and her consequent inability to obey her "husband". Even the Pharisees' attempts to stick rigidly to the outward requirements of the law proved to be mere legalism. Not only had their hearts not changed, but Christ levelled this chilling indictment:

John 15:24 "they have hated both me and my Father."

Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). And what does He find there?

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? " (Jeremiah 17:9)

No wonder Christ identified the inward motivations of the heart as being the impulse and motivation for outward actions:

Matthew 5:28 "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

This verse has been often misunderstood. Christ wasn't saying that a lustful look and adultery are synonymous - but simply that it is adulterous thoughts in the heart that lead to the outward lustful look. Sin must begin somewhere - and it begins in the heart - then manifesting itself in action. That's also the thought behind Christ's statement that:

"Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." (Mark 7:15) See also: **James 1:14-15.**

No wonder Israel was incapable of keeping her side of the old contract - as faithful obedience can only be produced by genuine heart-felt and perfect love:

Luke 6:45 "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

To the rich young ruler who said about the law:
" All these I have kept....What do I still lack?"
(**Matthew 19:20**), Jesus answered:

" If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
(**v.21**).

And of course the rich young man couldn't do it! The Lord was unerringly putting his finger on what was truly important! Not the outward actions (the keeping of the commandments) but the inward motivation. It was love that was looked for and Jesus was asking for something that would require pure love - something that the rich young man simply didn't have!

So, as we saw in the last message, Israel would need a transformed mind and heart if she was to be capable of loving and obeying her estranged, spiritual 'husband'. Therefore we read of a New Covenant proposed by God - one that would furnish a new heart and mind - enabling the wife

to be reconciled in a new, lasting relationship with Yahweh. As [Jeremiah 31:33](#) records:

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

God's law put in the mind and written on the heart suggests a new creation - a new, transformed individual who would, in both thought and feeling, instinctively appreciate and love God's law.

Christ came to establish this covenant by his death (signed with his blood: [Matthew. 26:28](#); [Hebrews 12:24](#)) and to reconcile with the erring wife ([2 Corinthians 5:19](#)). He had stated that he was **“sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”** ([Matthew 15:24](#)) and that he had come to **“seek and to save the lost.”** ([Luke 19:10](#)).

In short then, if we look back to [Jeremiah 31](#), we see there that this promise of a New Covenant involved forgiveness of Israel's sin ([Jeremiah 31:34](#)) and the Divine conferring of a new heart and mind which would naturally fulfil the conditions of a new marriage contract - submission and obedience to the law of God ([Jeremiah 31:33](#)).

All of this would be brought about by the death of Christ. His shed blood would atone for Israel's sin (1 John 2:2). remove from Israel the guilt and curse of a violated Covenant (Colossians 2:13-14) and also, via the indwelling Spirit of God, enable new life (the risen life of Christ) to be breathed into a spiritually dead nation (Ezekiel 37:5, 9, 14).

But of course, as we know, it was not to be at that time for the nation of Israel itself! As John tells us: "...he came to that which was his own but his own did not receive him." (John 1:10).

As we said before, instead of love for Yahweh, the Jews as a whole displayed only hatred for the Father and the Son (John 15:25) and the only possible mediator of the promised New Covenant (1 Timothy 2:5) was nailed to the cross! In consequence, the reconciliation between Yahweh and His 'wife' would have to be postponed until a coming day (Hosea 2:16-20, 23; Jeremiah 31:22, 31-34).

But God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." (Ephesians 1:11). Accordingly, in His miraculous wisdom and grace, He then used Israel's rejection of her Messiah in order to bring blessing to the Gentiles:

Romans 11:11-12because of their [Israel's] transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. [12] their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles.." And **Romans 11:15** goes on to say thattheir rejection brought reconciliation to the world....."

Israel *as a nation* may have been temporarily set aside as God's people but the New Covenant was indeed transacted with Israel as promised - except that it was only with a "*remnant*" of Israel - firstly the disciples and afterwards around 8,000 Jews saved at the time of Pentecost (**John 1:12**; **Romans 11:3-5**). Eventually, as foretold in the prophets (**Isaiah 49:6**), multitudes of Gentiles would be added to this small group, beginning with those saved in the household of Cornelius.

Peter had foreseen how this "Church" ("called out assembly") was destined to grow. He made this prophetic declaration in **Acts 2:39**,

"The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off---for all whom the Lord our God will call."

This prophesied extension of the Church took place a few years later in the household of Cornelius. It was there that Peter preached and

the entire Gentile household was converted, with similar results as had been experienced by the Jews on the day of Pentecost, Peter recognised the significance of that occasion when he later said:

“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism [35] but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.” (Acts 10:34-35).

In fact, Peter further acknowledged that this entrance of saved Gentiles into the (then Jewish) body of Christ via the New Covenant was equivalent to the earlier experience of the Israelite remnant at Pentecost. He had this to say to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem:

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them *as he had come on us at the beginning.*” (Acts 11:15) (emphasis mine)

And later, speaking of the resultant composition of the Church, Paul explains in **Galatians 3:28** that:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant would not be restricted to one particular nation since

Israel *as a nation*, had been side-lined because of unbelief. Instead, the New Covenant, the new marriage contract - this time between Christ and the Church ([Ephesians 5:27, 31-32](#); [Revelation 19:7, 20:17](#)).- would be enacted with individuals drawn from among the nations (as evidenced by the speaking in tongues (different languages) at Pentecost ([Acts 2:11](#); see also [Isaiah 28:11](#))). This joining of saved individuals would result in the spiritual body so beautifully described in [Ephesians chapters 2 & 3](#).

This new body of believers, the spiritual Bride of Christ, was to be quite different from Israel of old. Perhaps the clearest differences can be seen in a nutshell when we read Peter's epistle to the Jewish believers exiled in the great Jewish "*diaspora*" (dispersion) of the first century AD. Peter pointed out that they had been chosen, not as an existing earthly nation but '**according to the foreknowledge of God**' ([1 Peter 1:2](#)) - which associated these Jews with all those believers described in [Ephesians 1:4-5, 11](#). They were, in fact, elect of God in eternity to a spiritual body ([Ephesians 1:5](#)) before nations (including the nation of Israel itself) even existed!!

Unlike their 'earthly' counterparts who, like Thomas (a type of Israel), refused to believe until they had seen physical proof of the risen Messiah (the "**sign of the prophet Jonah**" [[Matthew 12:39-](#)

40]) these exiled Jews loved and followed a risen, glorified Lord in heaven (1 Peter 1:8). Consequently, chosen in heaven, born again by the indwelling Spirit and as spiritual descendants of a heavenly Adam (1 Corinthians 15:48-49), they now followed a heavenly Messiah and could (together with the believing Gentiles) look forward to a glorious incorruptible inheritance in heaven - a destiny far greater than the earthly kingdom awaiting the nation itself (1 Peter 1: 4).

So what is the relevance of the Old Covenant law to the new creation: the "Church"? Are we, as believers in Christ, expected to obey the Ten Commandments given to Israel?

The answer to this displays the wonderful unity of the Old and New Testaments! As we have pointed out earlier, the relationship of the Church to the Lamb is, as Israel's was with Yahweh, also analogous to a marriage with the 'husband' being Christ and his 'Bride': the Church (Ephesians 5:27,29-32; Revelation 19:7)

This being so, the response of love and obedience previously demanded of Israel, has of course been similarly required of the Church - in our spiritual "*ketubah*", if you will! The requirements enshrined in the law of God are just as surely, incumbent on the Bride of Christ because the law of God has

never changed as the benchmark of perfect love and obedience!

And this brings us to a second vital role played by the law of God. The moral law delivered by Yahweh actually represents the nature of God Himself. I say this because God is love - and the keeping of the law - given by a God of Love - represents the outward manifestation or practical outworking of love itself! Paul explains it in this way:

"The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law." (Romans 13:9-10)

Galatians 5:14 "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

And when asked what was the greatest commandment of all, Christ said this:

Matthew 22:37-39 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. (Commandments 1-4). And the second is like it:

'Love your neighbor as yourself.'(Commandments 5-10).

And he also said this to his disciples:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35).

A disciple's purpose is to become like his master! In our case, the more we love, the more like Christ we become because God is love!

So when Yahweh gave the law to Israel, He wasn't just requiring that they show their love for Him by doing as He asked of them; He was, in effect, saying: "if you want to be *with* me, you must be *like* me!" This was implied in the giving of the law through Moses and first stated explicitly in [Leviticus 19:2](#)

" Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy."

This makes sense! If two are to be in union, they must be compatible. Man was made in the image of God so that he could fellowship with God. Later we find that none of the animals could serve as a suitable companion for Adam because they didn't

have the same nature. The only being in the universe who could be one with the man was Eve, because she was taken from the man and consequently shared his nature ("**bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh**" [[Genesis 2:24](#)])

And this essential requirement has never changed! We who have entered into a spiritual marriage relationship with Christ are, like Israel at Sinai, not only required to vouchsafe our love for our intended by keeping his commandments but also, in doing so, demonstrate that we, as a Bride, are compatible with our heavenly Bridegroom.

That's why the injunction to Israel is repeated to the Church!

1 Peter 1:15-16 " **But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."**

So the expectations placed on the Bride have never changed! How could they? God can't change - His character and, by extension, His Law, remain perfect and unchanging ([Numbers 23:19](#); [Hebrews 13:8](#); [James 1:17](#) then [Psalm 19:9-11](#); [Romans 7:12](#)).

But the Israelites, as we saw in our second message, were incapable of fulfilling their 'wedding' vows because they were operating in the

flesh. However, the New Covenant - this new marriage relationship - would be enacted under very different conditions: it would be a spiritual covenant of grace - not law!

Now grace (Gk: charis) means kindness and favour shown to and bestowed upon someone entirely unworthy and therefore undeserving! It really represents a free gift given for no reason and with no conditions attached! So what makes the New Covenant a covenant of Grace is that it's completely one-sided! Christ has done, and now does, everything necessary to fulfil both sides of the covenant ([Hebrews 7:25; 10:12](#)).

That's the crucial difference between the two covenants. In the New Covenant, the requirements of the law (the eternal stipulations in the spiritual "*Ketubah*") have *already* been perfectly fulfilled by Christ who was acting as our substitute, representative or, if you like, our proxy! So just as the human race has been identified with Adam in his sin of disobedience in the garden, so the believer has been identified with Christ in his act of obedience on the cross! ([Romans 5:18](#)) So much so that we are actually described as having, in the eyes of God, died on the cross with Christ! ([Romans 6:3-7; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:3](#)). Further to this, we are right now living a new life because of his resurrection ([Romans 6:4](#)) and we will be raised physically one

day as he was raised ([Romans 6:5](#)). In fact, in the person of our substitute, we are already seated in heavenly places in glory ([Ephesians 2:6](#)).

In effect then, the Bridegroom has fulfilled both party's side of the new contract.

Firstly his own side: unconditional love ([Ephesians 5:25](#)), tender, loving care ([Ephesians 5:29](#)), undying faithfulness ([Hebrews 13:5](#)) provision of every need ([Philippians 4:19](#)) the granting of a new status as a spiritual nation of kings and priests ([1 Peter 2:9](#)) and unfailing assistance in every situation ([Hebrews 13:6](#)).

And our side of the contract? Well - here's the blessedness of the New Covenant - and why it's called a Covenant of grace! Our Bridegroom has also fulfilled *our* side of the contract on our behalf - as our representative - as we have just seen.

Keeping the law was to be Israel's way of showing her love for her husband and also the way in which she could become like Him - thereby serving as a suitable companion for Him. In Christ, all this is made true for us! Christ satisfied perfectly all that the law (the Bride's conditions) could demand - and he did it on our behalf! He kept the law in his own life and then, as a law-keeper, was made sin for us, the law-breakers, and, in his

substitutionary death, satisfied all that the law required of us.

Because of this, our Lord rose from the grave with a righteous, glorified life, triumphant over sin and death! He has then, via the new birth, transmitted his risen life and righteousness to all who receive him by faith ([Romans 5:17-19](#); [Galatians 2:20](#); [Colossians 1:27](#)).

So the New Covenant, signed in his blood ([Luke 22:20](#); [Hebrews 12:24, 13:20](#)) is eternally valid! The Bridegroom took upon himself the responsibility of fulfilling all the obligations of the Bride "*on behalf of the Bride*" and we are therefore credited with his righteousness and obedience. That is the true meaning of substitution! The terms of the New Covenant have in effect been perfectly fulfilled by both parties and the marriage of the Lamb and his Bride can proceed. If, according to the custom, anyone is asked if they object, the reply is given in [Romans 8:33-34](#),

" Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died---more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. "

All that Israel was to become, if they could have kept the law ([Exodus 19:5-6](#)) the New Covenant has conferred on the new, spiritual nation - the Church ([1 Peter 2:9](#)).

And because we have received Christ's nature via the new birth, we instinctively and lovingly obey our Lord from heaven. His law is, in that, sense, written on our hearts and minds We are a new creation in Christ Jesus ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)) This being so, the heavenly Bride is being right now prepared to join with her long-awaited Bridegroom in glory.

But the Bride (the heavenly Eve) is not yet made completely compatible with her long-awaited Adam - the 'second man' who is 'of heaven' ([1 Corinthians 15:47](#)). We, as members of the Bride have regenerated spirits ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)) but our bodies are not yet like his! This blessed event awaits the coming of the Bridegroom in the Rapture (discussed in a coming message). Suffice here to say that this meeting in the air will involve the completion of our transformation into Christ's likeness! Then, body soul and spirit, we will finally be fully compatible with our heavenly Bridegroom as he comes to sweep us up and take us back - over the threshold of glory - and into the marriage home prepared for us! ([John 14:2-3](#)) (See message "The Rapture".)

Philippians 3:20 "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

The result? It's the answer to the benediction pronounced by Paul in his first letter to the Believers at Thessalonika:

1 Thessalonians 5:23 " May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the meantime, still struggling in these bodies of sin, we strive to become more and more like Christ and grow into his image! The Bride is becoming progressively conformed to her beloved:

2 Corinthians 3:18 " And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

So, in summary, is the law relevant to us as spiritual children of God and members of the Lamb's Bride? Of course, because everything the keeping of the law was designed to demonstrate:

the obedience that stems from love as well as providing a template for godly likeness (which is love in any case). And this has all been brought about our being placed in Christ (justification) and Christ dwelling in us (sanctification). All made possible by the indwelling Spirit of God!

Romans 5:5 "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

So, as children of God, we're born of love! As the soon-to-be Bride of Christ, we instinctively love our now-absent betrothed and deep within each born-again believer (although too often well-hidden) is a natural desire to be like him and to submit to him in love: a responsive love in which we, as the Bride, ".....love because he first loved us." **1 John 4:19**

So intimate and complete is the union between Christ and his Church that we are described as members of a body whose head is Christ - another image that graphically depicts the wonderful truth that we complete him to form one whole spiritual man (Ephesians 1:23).

Ephesians 5:31-32 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." [32]

This is a profound mystery---but I am talking about Christ and the Church.

And to draw out the practical lessons to be learnt from this wonderful marriage union, we find that It isn't a 'marriage' relationship that's based on its similarity to a human marriage. Quite the opposite! In actual fact, Paul uses our divine union with Christ as a template for how earthly marriages between believers should operate:

Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.*" (emphasis mine)

This is the only command to love that's given here in Ephesians - and the reason is clear. Love on the husband's part is essential and primary because the husband models the role of Christ himself who is love personified and who taught us how to self-sacrificially love: (**John 13:34**). And it's only because of this love that the wife can willingly submit to her husband.

This makes complete sense. I will only *willingly* give myself wholeheartedly to someone and do whatever they ask if I have complete confidence in their reliability, good intentions and above all, in their love for me.

Think of the relationship between the Father and His Son! It was a relationship of pure love and what was the result? The Son demonstrated pure love by unforced and total obedience.

So, continuing his advice to husbands and wives, Paul says:

Ephesians 5:24 "Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."

What has happened here? The husband is commanded to love his wife and put her first - her happiness and interests before his own; The woman (based on the example of the spiritual Bride) then responds to her husband's love by loving him (as we love Christ) in return:

1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us."

And how does she express this responsive love? As Israel were expected to do, by following his lead in the 'marriage'. By willingly and joyfully submitting to him! And because of *his* love, like a devoted, loving newly-wed, this is not at all difficult for her to do! (**Matthew 11:28-30; 1 John 5:3**)

So how are we dead to the law? We are dead to the law in that it's no longer a broken law in our

case! This is because our sin has been paid for and the law therefore has no claims against us whatsoever. Going even further, we're also dead to the law in that it doesn't even recognise our existence because we're in Christ ([Galatians 2:19](#)).

Take the case of the average individual in society. He don't even effectively exist in the eyes of the law (we are dead to the law) until he commits an offence! Only then does he "come to the attention" of the police - and enter as part of the legal machinery.

Thank God that we are eternally dead to the law because every sin that we have committed or will commit - until that glorious day when sin will be no more - has been paid for by that incredible sacrifice on Calvary. We are now - and forever - covered by the blood of Christ!

So is the law essential for the believer? Absolutely - provided that we remember that it's a law of love! For us It's no longer the judgmental framework that that the unrepentant sinner has forced it to become ([Isaiah 28:13](#))- but a description of what will be the natural outcome of unforced love for our Lord and Saviour - our coming Bridegroom!

In conclusion, imagine a young bride deeply in love with her Prince Charming! She loves, trusts and respects him! She knows he has only her best

interests at heart! Can you imagine her drawing a line in the sand and saying: "This is where your influence ends! I'll do what you want to a certain extent - but only to this point! I need my independence!"

Of course not! A young bride in love, with stars in her eyes, has no difficulty whatsoever in doing what her beloved desires.

That is the heart of the Christian experience - the essence of holy living and the key to a joyful and fruitful relationship with the Lord!

Revelation 22:17, 20-21 "The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.....[20] He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. [21] The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. "

"Oh I am my beloved
And my beloved us mine
He brings a poor lost sinner
Into His house of wine

The Bride eyes not her garments
But her dear Bridegroom's face
I will not gaze at glory

But on the King of grace

**Not at the crown he giveth
But on his piercèd hands
The Lamb is all the glory
In Emmanuel's land".**