

An Introduction to God's Law In the New Testament

By Bruce Scott Bertram

This article was written in the hope that some possible misunderstandings about the Law could be cleared up. It is important to clarify these things, because an accurate understanding of the Word of God will help us to have intimacy, and a more fruitful walk, with God. Jesus said that *"man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4 quoting Deuteronomy 8:3). He also said, *"eternal life is this, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* (John 17:3). We need to take in, understand, and act on His Words for our very lives. If part of it is ignored or explained away, it is like taking needed vitamins and minerals from our food. Our mouth may be moving and our stomach may be filled, but the nourishment for life and health is missing. My hope is that some of the information presented here will help you determine for yourself meaning from the text, without the need for an intermediary, and that your understanding will be illuminated by the Holy Spirit, leading to deeper intimacy with the Father and His Messiah.

How Jesus Used the Law

Jesus used the Law in His responses to the Satan, even when the Enemy tried to use Scripture in his temptation (in Matthew 4:6 the Satan misuses Psalm 91:11-12):

"Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of Adonai." (Matthew 4:4 CJB quoting Deuteronomy 8:3)

The term "every word" means all of God's utterances.

"Do not put Adonai your God to the test." (Matthew 4:7 CJB quoting Deut. 6:16)

"Worship Adonai your God, and serve only him." (Matthew 4:10b CJB quoting Deut. 6:13)

He didn't argue, He didn't use seminary doctrines; He just used the Father's Word.

What Jesus said about the Law

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-19 NASB)

Notice that He includes the prophets, and the same word "fulfill" is used of both the Law and the Prophets. Some people say that the word "fulfill," means to eliminate, which

would mean that if the Law got eliminated, then so did the Prophet's writings. And we know that there are many prophecies yet to be "fulfilled." However, the word actually means to "fill up full" like filling a cargo ship. The same word (different form) is used in Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 where Paul tells us that the "fullness" of the Father or Deity dwells in Jesus. Obviously God was not "eliminated" when He "filled up full" the person of the incomparable Messiah. Therefore, Jesus "fills up" the Law with Himself. God's Word (whether written, oral, or physically represented by Jesus) always has been "filled up full" and always will be this way. But some people try to drain the Messiah from the Law, which reduces it to a dead letter.

Other people teach that Jesus "raised the bar," saying that He made the "Law" "harder." However, Jesus did not "raise" the bar but "returned" the bar back to its original position. God's perfection has always been the correct position of the "bar." Otherwise it was unfair of Him to separate Adam and Eve from His presence simply because they ate a piece of fruit.

Jesus also said:

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. (John 15:9-11 NASB)

The key to loving Jesus or God is to follow His commandments. At the time Jesus was speaking these words the so-called New Testament (a name given by men) was not written. The commandments He was referring to were delivered in the Torah, written centuries before. In case we are in doubt about this, Jesus clarifies in verse 15 of John 15 that the words He gave to us He got from the Father. Jesus also defines "abiding in His love" as obedience to what He said, not just mental agreement.

Jesus tells us in John 10:35 that "*... the Scripture cannot be broken.*" At this time the Scripture was what some call the Old Testament.

Jesus also relates to us a story in Luke 16:19-31, in which a rich man in hell ends up begging Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers. In verse 31 Jesus relates Abraham as saying

But he replied, "If they won't listen to Moshe and the Prophets, they won't be convinced even if someone rises from the dead!"

This is obviously a statement and a prophecy. If a person will not listen to the Law and the Prophets, then they won't listen to Jesus (since Jesus did rise from the dead).

Some points to keep in mind as we continue:

1. God never changes, and His Word will never cease.
2. Jesus and God are One.

3. Jesus is the physical representation of God. If God looked in a mirror He would see Jesus.
4. Every time people "saw God" in the so-called Old Testament (another man-created name) it was Jesus (John 6:46, John 14:9). Ask me for a list if you want.
5. Since Moses talked to God "face to face," he was talking to Jesus (Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 5:4, 34:10; see also I Corinthians 13:12).
6. Therefore, **Jesus gave the Law to Moses**. He was the Intermediary (Galatians 3:19).

What Paul said about the Law (holy, righteous, good, and spiritual).

"So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin." (Romans 7:12-14)

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (I Corinthians 2:14)

"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully..." (I Timothy 1:5-8)

By the way, a person who wants to be a "teacher of the Law" includes those who teach that it has been eliminated.

Paul says of himself and the Law:

"But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets..." (Acts 24:14)

Paul teaches "traditions:"

"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you." (I Corinthians 11:1,2 NASB)

"So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." (II Thessalonians 2:15 NASB)

I assume that these traditions would be the ones in agreement with the revealed Word of God (Torah) and not the ones that agree with doctrines of men.

Definitions

The Word of God. Also can be thought of as the Words of God, and includes all of His Words no matter what "time" it appears that He uttered them to us. His Word is timeless, it is Bread, it is Life. This includes what we think of as the Law. "For I, the Lord, do not change..." (Malachi 3:6 - Compare also 1 Samuel 15:29). His Words are not first "old" and then "new." They, like Him, are "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus is The Word made flesh, and this Word was in existence before all things were made and will continue after material things are renewed. No part of what God has ever said can be considered old or outdated. He does not change, even though we may change. If we say that God spoke one thing in times past and then changed the meaning or the speaking later on, then we cannot count on Him as a Rock. All our hopes are in vain if we think God will change from one "time" to the next.

For those who love Him His Word is **love** (John 15:10, 12-14), **light and lamp** (Proverbs 6:23; Ps. 119:105; Isaiah 8:20; Revelation 21:23, 22:5); **life** (Deuteronomy 4:1, 32:46-47; Proverbs 1:17, 8:33-36; Matthew 19:16,17); **seed** (Matthew 13:18-23), **instructions** (Isaiah 1:10; Exodus 16:4 24:12; Jeremiah 35:13; Job 22:22, 36:10; Psalm 78:1; Zephaniah 3:1-7; Malachi 2:1-9, Proverbs 1:2,3,7,8 4:1,2; Romans 15:4; Ephesians 6:4; 1Timothy 1:5; 1Thessalonians 4:1, 5:12; 2Timothy 4:2); **law** (Jeremiah 6:18-19; Zechariah 7:12; Deuteronomy 5:5 17:11, 27:1-3, 26, 30:10,14, 32:46,47; John 15:25; Acts 6:2-4,7 13:44,48,49, 28:23; Romans 9:28,31,32; 1Corinthians 15:2; Galatians 5:14); **commands, judgments, teachings & ways** (Isaiah 2:3; Proverbs 5:12 7:2 8:10 1:8 4:2 3:1 6:20-23; Jeremiah 32:33; Deuteronomy 4:1; 2Chronicles 15:1-7; Matthew 4:23 7:28,29 9:35 13:54 15:9 28:20; Acts 2:42 4:2 18:11; Romans 12:7; 1Corinthians 14:26); **wisdom**, and **truth** (Psalm 119:43,44,142 138:2; Proverbs 23:23; Malachi 2:6; 1Kings 2:3-4; John 17:17, 18:37-38, 8:31-32; James 1:18, 21-23,25). It is the straight paths for our feet and a light to our way. It is a rod for discipline (Isaiah 11:4; Ezekiel 7:11) and a staff for us to lean on (Genesis 49:10; Psalms 23:4; Zechariah 11:9-12) and a yoke for us to walk side by side with Him (Jeremiah 5:5; Matthew 11:29,30). A copy of these references all typed out is in the article "The Word of God" available on the web at <http://www.wholebible.com/PdfLibrary/The%20Word%20of%20God.pdf>.

The Spirit of Truth. Also known as the Holy Spirit. He was sent by the Christ to lead us into all Truth after He rose. This Truth is God's Word.

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you. (John 16:13-15 NASB)

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, *“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”* (John 8:31,32 NASB)

Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” (John 18:37 NASB)

“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.” (John 17:17 NASB)

Sin. Transgression of the Law (any Word of God). Adam and Eve sinned when they disobeyed God. I John 3:4

Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

Death. The penalty for transgression of the Law (any Word of God). The Law is not death, but the result of disobedience is death. Death is another way of describing separation from God who is Life. God's Word (the Law) is not death. Disobedience is death.

Legalism. God's Word (including the Law) without the Spirit, or misuse of the Law by application without relationship with God. There are no Hebrew or Greek words that are translated by this word. It is purely an English construct. However it does serve to help us describe in shorthand form a concept taught all throughout the Word, which is the act of trying to “earn” something from God because of following some rules. Whether these rules are man-made or twisted forms of rules made by God, there is no way that following them will gain salvation for us. God chastised Israel because they did not follow all of His Laws, although they followed some to the letter. Another word for this concept is “merit.” Some people thought (and think) that we could become righteous enough to earn salvation from God by following rules. This is never taught in the Word, and is also a “doctrine of men.”

Law. This word is a translation from the Greek word *nomos*. *Nomos* means “that which is assigned” and can mean any kind of rule, regulation, or law; from natural law such as the law of gravity up to and including God's Laws (although technically gravity is also God's Law). There are several Hebrew words for the rules given at Mt. Sinai, but the main one is Torah. This word is better translated by the word “instruction.” Torah comes from a root word (*yarah*) that means, “straight shooting” or, “to hit the mark.” Torah, or all the Words of God (filled with Messiah), is the mark to aim for.

Torah is specifically the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). The commands given in these books were the Instruction of God on how to live a life pleasing to Him (hit the mark). The writer of Hebrews tells us that this was also the gospel (the missing ingredient was faith).

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. (Hebrews 4:2 NASB)

God never promises salvation for following some rules anywhere in the Word. However, after we are saved then blessings are bestowed for obedience, while disobedience brings curses (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

Oral Law. The Jewish concept of Law also included rulings from their religious leaders called the Oral Law. The Jews grouped the Oral Law and the Torah together most of the time, and the Oral Law was held to be on an equal footing with the Torah. If the rulings were in agreement with Torah then they were good. But frequently the rulings departed from the Spirit-filled meaning of the text, and could be classified as merely the “traditions of men.” If you read the text carefully you will see that on every occasion that Jesus contended with the religious leaders about the Law, the subject was not Torah but the traditions that had grown up around Torah. This was also the case with Paul.

Jews. There are no Jews in the first five books of the Bible, only Israel. Israel is not the same thing as “Jews.” A Jew was actually of the tribe of Judah, a name given after Israel split into a northern and southern kingdom with Judah and Benjamin in the southern kingdom. This means that the Law is not a Jewish thing but a God thing.

Circumcision. In the 1st century circumcision was the name of the ceremony for becoming a Jew. However, there is no ceremony specified anywhere in the word for becoming a Jew. Circumcision is not found in the Law given at Sinai except for circumcising babies at eight days old. Jews at the time of Paul thought that in order to have a part in the heavenly kingdom of God one must convert to Judaism, because only Jews were going to be saved, and circumcision was the way to become a Jew. However, this is not taught in the Word. It is a “doctrine of men.” Righteousness has always been imparted by Grace through Faith, and was never bestowed by becoming a Jew. This is why Paul makes the argument in Romans 4:9-13 that Abraham was given the promises before circumcision.

In the New Testament “circumcision” refers to a Jew or to a ceremony for becoming a Jew while “un-circumcision” is another name for Gentiles (Galatians 2:7, 12,13). Although circumcision included the idea of accepting Torah, it was not a reference to Torah. Becoming a Jew meant accepting both the Oral and the Written Law.

Abraham. This was a Gentile who believed God and acted on that belief (faith), so he was given the Promises. Genesis 17:1 has God telling Abraham to walk before Him and be blameless, Genesis 18:19 tells us that God chose Abraham so that he would command his children to walk after the way of the Lord, and Genesis 26:5 tells us that Abraham obeyed God's commandments, statutes, and Laws so he was given the blessings and

promises (v. 26:4). This is the essence of true faith – hearing the Word of God and acting on it in obedience. All true children of Abraham do the same thing.

Gentile. A person not physically born into the nation of Israel; a member of one of the other nations. Also called the “uncircumcised” because they don’t have the advantage of exposure to God’s Word from birth as a member of the covenant. However, all births are directed by God in His Grace, and He since the beginning He has provided a way for all people to be part of His family by Grace through faith.

Curse. A result of going our own way instead of God’s Way. Lack of blessing or the presence of God typified by suffering, hardship, hurt, and harm. God allows us to feel the consequences for our sin to cause us to turn from our way to His Ways. God’s Word (the Law) is not a curse. Disobedience to God’s Word brings curses.

Old Man. The flesh or a person without faith and the Spirit of God. Since the “old man” doesn’t have the Spirit, it does not have the power to be right with God. If the old man tries to “earn” enough right standing with God to be saved, he is doomed to failure because of the lack of the Spirit. After repentance and renewing our relationship to God, we continue to contend with the flesh or old man in order to strengthen our faith and grow to spiritual maturity. The old man is not God’s Word. The old man disobeys God’s Word (the Law) and runs headlong to death.

One New Man. Ephesians 4:4-6 describes the status of God’s people.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

There is only one. Gentiles who obey the Father are “grafted in” (Romans 11) to a new man. There is no longer Jew or Gentile but “one new man.” And what God has joined together let no man split asunder.

Righteousness. Rightness with God, complete harmony with His Word, perfection. Jesus paid the penalty for our disobedience to God’s Word (ways, teachings, instructions, Law), and we are granted right-standing before Him through our acceptance of that payment. This rightness is only obtained by God’s Grace through our trusting obedience or faith. It cannot be obtained as if it were wages by adhering to rules. It is impossible to earn this righteousness by some supposed following of a law, because without having a relationship with God in the first place we cannot perfectly conform to God’s Word. Adam and Eve had relationship by Grace first, but refused to obey. Israel was rescued from Egypt by Grace through trusting obedience to His Word.

The entire book of Galatians is written by Paul to refute the belief that one must become a Jew in order to inherit eternal life, and he includes the broader concept of the insufficiency of “merit” for earning salvation.

Cannot “do” the Law. This is an incorrect doctrine of man based on an incomplete understanding of the Word, and there is no reference in the Word that states this. What we cannot do is earn salvation righteousness by following a rule. The Law can be “done” but only if we have Jesus. If we say we “cannot do” the Law then we are implying that God told us to do something that is beyond our capability, which He would never ever do. Or, worse, we are implying that there were two methods of salvation – that of salvation by Law (outdated since Jesus) and salvation by Grace. Salvation has always, and I mean always, been by Grace through faith. If we say that we cannot do the Law then we also make God out to be a liar. Philippians 4:13 says

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

“All things” pretty much includes “doing” the Law.

Under the Law. (Romans 2:12, 3:19; I Corinthians 9:20,21; Galatians 3:23, 4:4-5, and 5:18.) No Gentile was ever “under the Law” in the sense of a covenant relationship. So what does this term mean? Are we reading it from our own modern viewpoint with current word definitions or was there a different meaning from Paul’s viewpoint using his definitions? I think we can define this best by letting Scripture speak for itself. Romans 11:2 says that we are all “shut up under disobedience.” Galatians 3:22 says we are “shut up under sin” which would be the same thing. In Galatians 3:23 Paul says we are “under the law.”

This just means that without the righteousness from Jesus, we are under the authority of the Law as regards righteousness. But we can’t obtain this righteousness without faith in Jesus first because the flesh is weak and incapable of pleasing God. Remember the verse that says “without faith it is impossible to please God?” (Hebrews 11:6.) This is always true (always has been). The only reason an animal sacrifice ever worked to cover sin was because the sacrifice is connected with the sacrifice of Jesus (which is appropriated by faith).

Paul is saying that before we exercise our faith the Law will only judge us because we can’t do it without Him. We are “shut up” or “enclosed” by the Law without the ability to follow it. But after we establish a relationship with God by faith in the Son, then we are empowered to “do all things.”

Freedom in Christ. We are no longer subject to the authority of the Law as a means of securing our righteousness, but have been given righteousness by Grace through faith so we can “walk worthy of the manner in which we were called.” Romans 6:7 says that we have been “freed from sin” but we have not been freed from having to “walk worthy.” Paul says in Romans 6:18 that we are “slaves to righteousness.” As a matter of fact, we are either “slaves to sin” or “slaves to righteousness” and there is no in-between (Romans 6). Paul also says in I Corinthians 9:21 that he is not “without the Law of God” but “under the Law of Christ,” indicating that they are both the Same Law. Therefore, we are “free” to obey our Father. It doesn’t mean “no rules,” it means “free to follow” His rules.

Salvation. Restoration to intimate relationship with God. All who are not thus restored will eventually have separation from God made permanent. God is Life, so separation from Him is death. We are “saved” from this state by God’s Grace.

Life. In a word, Jesus (or God). He is the source of all things good, holy, perfect, right, pure and healthy. His Son is the agent by which He works to impart His Life. He who has the Son has Life, he who doesn’t has death. The Son has always been in the Law (or all Words of God) and always will be.

Discipleship. If you are with me still, you are wondering that, if the foregoing is true, then how are we to understand the Law? Simple. The Law is what it has always been – a part of His Word that is a guide for discipleship. It is His Word applied to daily living, a lifestyle, a testimony. It helps us learn and grow in His Ways by showing what is inside of us. Since all the penalties for disobedience have been paid there is no fear in learning how our Father wants us to walk. Our actions must conform to His Ways or we cannot claim to be one of His children. Where there is no behavior change there is no internal change. This is why Jesus said “if you love me you obey.” If we really “trust” the Father we will act on that trust by following what He says. The Law is not “sin and death” but it can cause sin and death if it is misused or a relationship with God is absent from the usage.

There are many man-made discipleship programs but they do not work very well because they aren’t backed up by the authority and power that are behind the Word of God. Those who belong to Him do not have to be afraid of any Word that He speaks because they are all Life to our very bones.

The problem has never been God’s Word (Law) but the refusal (and inability) of people to obey or conform to His Word.

Disputatious Matters. In Romans 14 Paul speaks of “disputatious matters.” However, a disputatious matter never, ever included God’s Word. In the context, starting at the end of chapter 13, Paul is speaking of Love being the fulfillment of the Law. (There’s that word again – “filling up full.”) Also note verse one of chapter 14, where Paul indicates he is speaking about the opinions of men. This was a reference to men’s opinions in general, and probably included the Oral Law. People may not like His Torah, but that does not mean it is unclear and needs to be argued about. Paul is here referring to those things that are not clearly defined in the word such as timing of events and what is included in the designation “unclean.” Never is the Torah referred to as “disputatious.” If we refer to the Father’s Torah this way, we do a disservice to the whole of the Word. We imply, wrongly, that God changes His mind or that we cannot rely on His word because it might change again.

Elementary things of the world. Paul tells us in the book of Colossians to stay away from these things. But if you read the context carefully and you will see for yourself that Paul is speaking of the philosophy, empty deception, and traditions of men (Colossians 2:8). Paul equates these things to the “elemental things of the world” (verses 8 and 20 of chapter 2). These could never be confused with God's Torah (instructions to us for holy living). Indeed, Paul contrasts the elemental things of the world with allowing the Word of Christ to dwell richly in you (Colossians 3:16). And as we have already seen, the Word of Christ was received from the Father and included Torah (Spirit-filled Torah).

Summary. There is probably enough in this article so far to give you a good head start on figuring out the true meaning of the text for yourself. If you need more help please let me know and I can either assist you or direct you to someone else who can assist. Thank you for giving the time to read, and I fervently hope that you will grab hold of the truths revealed in the Word that will help you “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; don't let me stray from your mitzvot (commandments). I treasure your word in my heart, so that I won't sin against you. (Psalms 119:9-11 CJB)

The mouth of the righteous articulates wisdom, his tongue speaks justice. The Torah of his God is in his heart; his footsteps do not falter. (Psalms 37:30-31 CJB)

“Listen to me, you pursuers of justice, you who know justice, you people who have my Torah in your heart: don't be afraid of people's taunts, don't be upset by their insults. For the moth will eat them up like clothing, the worm will eat them like wool; but my justice will be forever, and my salvation for all generations.” (Isaiah 51:7,8 CJB)

The Torah of Adonai is perfect, restoring the inner person. The instruction of Adonai is sure, making wise the thoughtless. The precepts of Adonai are right, rejoicing the heart. The mitzvah (commandment) of Adonai is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of Adonai is clean, enduring forever. The rulings of Adonai are true, they are righteous altogether, more desirable than gold, than much fine gold, also sweeter than honey or drippings from the honeycomb. Through them your servant is warned; in obeying them there is great reward. (Psalms 19:8(7)-12(11) CJB)

May the Lord Bless you and Keep you
Bruce Bertram