

Right And Wrong Uses Of The Mosaic Covenant And Law

The right use of the Mosaic Law by David, Isaiah, Daniel and Hosea

I have spoken to Christians who have the false idea that anyone in the Old Testament who emphasised obedience to the Law of Moses was legalistic. They fail to see there were wrong and right usages of the Mosaic Law in Old Covenant times.

In 1 Timothy 1:8, Paul refers to the right use of the Law when he says *“the Law is good if one uses it lawfully.”* In 1 Timothy 1:6-7, he mentions religious people who desire to be teachers of the Law, but who do not understand what they are saying. Today there are many churchgoers who spread all their false theories about the Law, confusing and misleading others.

A wrong use of the Law is what the New Testament calls *“works of Law”*. Works of Law involve trying to earn or deserve salvation through obeying the Law by mere human self-effort.

A right use of the Law can be seen in the words of the prophets David, Isaiah, Daniel and Hosea. These prophets emphasised the importance of Old Covenant believers aiming to obey the Law. But they *were not legalists*. They sought to obey the Law through God’s power by faith.

David stressed the Law in 1 Kings 2:3, 1 Chronicles 22:12, Psalms 1:1-3, 37:31 and 40:8. Psalm 40:8 says: *“I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart.”* 1 Kings 15:5 refers to David obeying the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant and Law: *“because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.”*

In Isaiah 1:10, 5:24, 8:16, 8:20, 30:9, 42:24, 51:4 and 51:7, Isaiah spoke of the importance of the Law to Old Covenant believers. Isaiah 8:20 says: *“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”*

The prophet Daniel emphasised obedience to the Law of Moses in Daniel 9:11. The Book of Hosea is one of the most wonderful accounts in the Bible of God’s grace and mercy. But note Hosea stresses the importance of obedience to the Law of Moses in Hosea 4:6, 8:1 and 8:12.

Anyone who would label David, Isaiah, Daniel and Hosea as legalistic, has a poor understanding of both the Law and legalism.

Right attitudes to the Law in Psalms 1 and 119

Psalms 1 and 119 are good reflections of a right attitude to the Mosaic Law among people of faith living under the Mosaic Covenant.

For example, in Psalm 119:88, the inspired writer asked God to revive him by God’s *lovingkindness* or “hesed”, so he could *obey God’s testimonies*. The word “hesed” relates to

God's undeserved mercy, kindness and love. In the original Hebrew, the word "*testimony*" in this verse is "edut". In the Old Testament, the word "edut" mostly refers to the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 31:18, 32:15-16 and 34:29). So Psalm 119:88 reveals true believers living under the Mosaic Covenant understood they needed God's help in order to be able to obey the Ten Commandments.

Note also Psalm 119 refers to the Law of Moses as *a treasure* greater than any earthly wealth (verse 72), *a delight* (verse 92) and *an object of love* (verse 97). Psalm 119:45 says the Law is *a means of liberty* or *freedom*: "***And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.***" This verse refers to using the Law rightly as a means of liberty and not as a means of bondage as many of the Pharisees in Christ's time used it. The use of the Law by these Pharisees was different from that of godly men of faith such as the writer of Psalm 119.

Observe Psalm 1:1-3 refers to God blessing and prospering believers under the Mosaic Covenant who *delighted* in the Mosaic Law: "***Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.***"

Note the God-inspired writer of Psalm 119 spoke much about how he *loved the Law*. Four times, he said he loved the law (see verses 97, 113, 163 and 165). In verses 119 and 167, he said he *loved God's testimonies*. In Hebrew, the word "*testimonies*" here is "eda" which means "laws as divine testimonies or solemn charges".¹ The word "charges" means "commands". In verses 47, 48 and 127, he declared he loved God's commandments and in verse 159 God's precepts. "***Precepts***" refers to "the responsibilities that God places on his people".²

Psalm 119:97 states: "***Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.***" Psalm 119:127 declares: "***Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold.***" Psalm 119:165 says: "***Great peace have those who love your law...***"

Some people may say it is wrong to love God's Word. They may call this Bible-worship. But note the God-inspired writer of Psalm 119 refers to loving the Law as being a good thing and not sinful idolatry. The Hebrew word for "*love*" used in the above mentioned verses from Psalm 119 is "ahab" – the word used in Exodus 20:6, Deuteronomy 5:10, 6:5, 7:9 and 10:12 for loving God and in Leviticus 19:18 for loving one's neighbour. This does not mean God wants us to love His Word instead of Him. But it does mean He wants us to love His Word because it is what He has said.

It is sinful to treat the written Word of God as a lucky charm by putting it under your pillow, trusting it will keep you from being harmed. Also, we should not bow down and worship the written Word. But it is good to love God's Word. Psalm 5:11, 69:36 and 119:132 refer to loving God's Name. It is not a sin to love God's Name. This is because His Name reveals His character and nature.

New Covenant believers are not under the Mosaic Law. But they should love the written Word of God as a whole.

¹ Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 730.

² Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 732.

Loving God is a key command of the Mosaic Covenant

I have listened to Christians who believe the Law of Moses was based on a cold, merely external dutiful obedience to a series of supposedly loveless rules. They think the Mosaic Covenant involved serving God without any expression of love. But note Exodus 20:6 records that the second command of the Ten Commandments emphasises loving God: **“but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”** Deuteronomy 5:10 records the same thing.

The importance of loving God is mentioned many other times in the Mosaic Law – Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 11:1, 13:3, 30:6 and 30:20. In fact, Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 13:8-10 and Galatians 5:14 show that all the commands in the Law of Moses were based on loving God and other people. Romans 13:8-10 says: **“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.”** Matthew 22:37-40 records: **“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”**

Love is part of God’s own nature (see 1 John 4:8 and 16). So every law God has made has to be based on His love in some way. Also observe Leviticus 19:18 commands Mosaic Covenant believers to love others.

A common misunderstanding of the Mosaic Covenant

An illustration of the common misunderstanding of the differences between the Old and New Covenants is found in the words of E.W. Kenyon: *“Israelites were the servants of God. No one had ever intelligently called God, Father. No one had ever recognised God as a Father. They feared Him. They did not love Him. They obeyed Him as a servant, as a slave. If they did not obey Him, they were punished.”*³

In Psalm 68:5, Isaiah 9:6, 63:16 and 64:8, God is revealed as our Father. Even in Deuteronomy 1:31, 32:6 and 32:18-19 in the Law of Moses, Moses taught that God was His people’s Father. Deuteronomy 32:6 declares: **“Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you...”** David understood God’s Father heart, as Psalm 68:5 shows: **“A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation.”** The prophet Isaiah had a wonderful revelation in Old Testament times of God being a Father. Isaiah 63:16 says: **“Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O Lord, are our Father...”**

Kenyon’s claim that none of the Israelites in Old Testament times loved God is false also. Psalm 18:1 and 27:4 reveal how David loved God. Psalm 18:1 states: **“I will love You, O Lord, my strength.”** Psalm 116:1 speaks of the unknown author loving God. 1 Kings 3:3 says

³ E.W. Kenyon, “What Happened From The Cross To The Throne”, Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing, pages 146-147.

Solomon loved Him. In Psalm 145:20, David refers to other people loving the Lord: ***“The Lord preserves all who love Him...”***

Kenyon says the Israelites only feared God, but did not love Him. Under the Old Covenant, true believers both feared and loved God (see Psalms 5:7, 18:1, 22:23, 25:14, 116:1 and 145:20).

This is just like under the New Covenant in which believers are commanded to both fear and love God also. New Testament verses which emphasise that under the New Covenant, we must love God are Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 8:28 and 1 John 5:2. Note 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 5:21, Hebrews 12:28 and 1 Peter 2:17 all stress believers under the New Covenant must fear God also. 1 Peter 2:17 commands us: ***“Fear God...”***

Revivalists and prophets under the Mosaic Covenant

Do you think that in times of revival under the Mosaic Covenant, the Israelites were full of faith in and love for God but had little concern for obeying the Mosaic Law? Well, look what the Word of God records about the revivalists Joshua in Joshua 11:15: ***“As the Lord had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses”*** and Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 17:3-4: ***“Now the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his father David; he did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not according to the acts of Israel”*** and Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 31:20-21: ***“Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered”*** and Josiah in 2 Kings 23:24-25: ***“Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord. Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him”*** and Nehemiah (see Nehemiah 8:1-10:31).

Mosaic Covenant believers who had strong faith in God and loved Him were highly motivated towards obeying the Mosaic Law. They did not try to earn salvation through it, but aimed to obey it from the right motives. Nor did they try to maintain their righteous legal standing before God through good works done in obedience to the Mosaic Law. Actually in Joshua and Nehemiah’s times, the whole Law was read to the people (see Joshua 8:32-35 and Nehemiah 8:1-18).

Also 2 Kings 17:13 shows God sent His Old Testament prophets to turn the people back from their sins to obeying the commandments and statutes of the Mosaic Law: ***“Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, namely every seer, saying, ‘Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets.’”***

The prophets did teach about loving God (see Psalm 18:1, 31:23, 69:36, 97:10, 116:1, 145:20, Isaiah 56:6 and Daniel 9:4) and trusting in Him (see Psalm 18:2, 26:1, 28:7, 31:14, Isaiah 26:4, 50:10, 57:13, Habakkuk 2:4 and Zephaniah 3:12). Also, the prophets attacked a

mere outward loveless, faithless observance of the Law (see Ecclesiastes 6:1, Isaiah 1:11-20, Jeremiah 7:22-23 and Micah 6:6-8). But they also emphasised obeying all the specific commandments of the Law. Look up Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to see the very large number of times the word "**Law**" is used in relation to the Mosaic Law in the Psalms and in the Books of the prophets from Isaiah through to Malachi.

In the New Covenant times, believers are not under the Mosaic Covenant and Law. But they need to be careful not to talk about the Mosaic Covenant and Law as bad and not inspired by the Holy Spirit. In Chapter "Not under the Mosaic Covenant 1" and Chapter "Not under the Mosaic Covenant 2", I will discuss in detail this issue of New Covenant believers not being under the Mosaic Covenant and Law.

Wrong non-Christian Jewish attitudes to the Mosaic Covenant

In Romans 2:17-29, Paul corrects a number of wrong attitudes which many religious Jews had at his time. It is probable Paul is referring in these verses to religious Jews in general at his time and not just to sects like the Pharisees and Sadducees. Romans 2:17-20 and 25 states: ***"Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law...For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision."***

In verse 25, Paul infers the type of Jew he is referring to believed circumcision – the sign of being under the Mosaic Covenant – was profitable. But note Paul stressed circumcision is only of spiritual value if the person keeps the Law. The Law is the *terms* and *conditions* of the Mosaic Covenant.

In verse 17, Paul said these same religious Jews *rested* on the Law. In Greek, the word "**rested**" here is a form of the word "epanapauo" which means "find rest, comfort or support in something"⁴ or "to rely on..."⁵ When saying these Jews rested on the Law, Paul was meaning they were *relying* on merely being under the Mosaic Covenant and having been given the Law by God as a sign they were righteous in God's eyes and accepted by Him. They were blind to the fact the Law actually condemned them because of their failure to obey it completely.

Paul tried to make these Jews aware of the Law's condemnation of them when he said in Romans 2:21-23: ***"You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?"***

Here Paul was stressing it is little use boasting about being under the Mosaic Covenant and being given the Mosaic Law by God when you do not obey it. Non-Christian Jews boasted about having God's glorious revelation of His will as found in the Law. These Jews saw themselves as standing before the pagan world holding in the Book of the Law God's revealed absolute truth which the pagans did not possess. As Paul says in verses 18-20, these Jews were

⁴ Bauer, page 283.

⁵ Perschbacher, page 154.

instructed in the teachings of the Mosaic Covenant and Law, knew His will and believed they were the instructors, teachers, guides and light for blind pagans who did not have the Law. In verse 18, Paul said these Jews approved of what the Law taught. They approved of the revelation that they were redeemed and adopted by God as His children. They also mentally approved of what the Law commanded.

In verse 17, he said these Jews made their boast in God. In other words, they thought they knew God merely through being a part of the nation to which He gave the Mosaic Covenant and through having and knowing the terms and conditions of this Covenant found in the Mosaic Law. They believed the greater privileges God gave them indicated they were righteous in His sight.

These Jews did not take into account sufficiently the full revelation of God's character as the perfectly holy righteous Judge. Jeremiah 14:10, Daniel 9:11, Hosea 4:1-10, 12:2, Amos 3:2 and many other Old Testament verses reveal God the Supreme Ruler and Judge held the people of Israel responsible for their sins despite them having been given the wonderful privileges of being under the Mosaic Covenant. Amos 3:2 was God's Word to the nation of Israel: ***"You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."***

This is why in Romans 2:9-16, Paul emphasises God will judge both the Jews and non-Jews because of their sins. In Romans 2:11, Paul says: ***"For there is no partiality with God."*** Paul wanted Jews and non-Jews to see they would both be judged according to the different levels of privileges and revelation given to them by God. The theme of God's judgement continues in Romans 2:25-3:20.

In Romans 3:1-2, Paul said it was an advantage being a Jew because the Jews were given God's oracles or written Word. But then in Romans 3:9-20, Paul stressed all Jews and Gentiles are charged with sin by God, are condemned as guilty by the Law and are not righteous through obedience to the Law.

In John 5:45, Jesus revealed that many unbelieving Jews trusted or relied on the Covenant and Law given through Moses, but did not understand Moses' words would be the very thing which accused them of sin: ***"Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trusted."***

Paul's words in Romans 3:25 about circumcision imply many Jews thought that merely being under the Mosaic Covenant would save them. In Matthew 3:7-10, John the Baptist challenged similar false Jewish attitudes to the Abrahamic Covenant: ***"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'"***

A similar tendency to use the privileges of the Mosaic Covenant in order to justify sins can be seen in Psalm 50:16-21: ***"But to the wicked God says: 'What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things you have done,***

and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes.”

I know of religious churchgoers who today are similar to those Jews Paul mentioned in Romans 2:17-25. These churchgoers boast about knowing God, rest in the fact they know about the New Covenant, were pleased to be water baptised, know His will about many things, approve of the Bible in a general sense and believe they are guides to help non-churchgoers find God.

But these churchgoers believe all the privileges of the New Covenant give them liberty to sin in whatever way they choose and permit them supposedly to receive Jesus Christ only as Saviour and not as Lord and still be saved. These followers of the false easy believism “gospel” are tragically deceived just like the Jews Paul wrote about in Romans 2:17-25.

The misuse of the Mosaic Covenant in Christ's time

In the following pages, I will be referring to the Pharisees and sometimes the teachers of the Law. But note these comments apply as well to some but not all other Jews living at Jesus’ and the Apostles’ time. There were different Jewish groups at Christ's and the Apostle’s time. For example, the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots had different teachings and practices about various matters. Also, it is debatable whether these following comments apply to many or all Pharisees and teachers of the Law living at Christ's and the Apostles’ time.

Many or all of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law misunderstood and misused the Mosaic Covenant and Law in the following ways:

- a) They misinterpreted the Mosaic Covenant to mean that God wanted them to do good works in obedience to the Law in order to merit the maintenance of their grace-based God-given relationship to Him through the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. Romans 9:30-10:5 relates to this: ***“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at the stumbling stone. As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offence, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’ Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those shall live by them.’”***

In Romans 10:2, Paul said many of the Israelites had a zeal for God but *not according to right knowledge*. They misunderstood God’s purposes for the Mosaic Covenant and Law.

Commenting on Romans 10:5, Leon Morris says: *“There are two ways of taking the words. We may understand them as meaning that the Jews did not take the law in which they delighted seriously enough. The law pronounces a curse on anyone who does not keep all its requirements (Deut. 27:26). Salvation by works meant doing all (and not just most) of the things the law teaches. If they had really taken notice of the law and compared their lives with its teaching, they would have seen that they did not and could not keep all of the law. Since they were not meeting its demands, they needed*

a Saviour. The other way is to understand Paul to be saying that the law really pointed people to Christ. If it had been properly observed, it would have taught the Jews that God's way is grace. As we have seen, Paul certainly taught that. It was basic to his understanding of the law...Both these ways of taking the words then are true, and both are found in Paul. There seems no reason for choosing between them.”⁶

- b) They had the false idea that God would declare them righteous now and at the future Final Judgement if they obeyed the Law of Moses *nearly all the time* by their own abilities, though not perfectly every moment of every day. This is despite the fact it is probable that most or all Pharisees understood that as babies, they entered the Mosaic Covenant by God's undeserved grace and mercy and not by works of Law or good works.⁷

Many or all of the Pharisees taught that after their initial entering the Mosaic Covenant and later at the future Final Judgement, they were justified as a merited result of a high though imperfect level of obedience to the Ten Commandments and other non-ceremonial Mosaic commands and a flawless or near flawless level of obedience to the ceremonies and atoning sacrifices of the Law. They had no understanding of verses such as Psalm 143:2: **“Do not enter into judgement with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous”** and Ecclesiastes 7:20: **“For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin”** and Psalm 14:2-3 and 53:1-3.

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law did not understand that because all humans are descendants of Adam, they were born with inherited sinful natures (see Ephesians 2:3), have had Adam's sin, guilt and condemnation debited to their account (see Romans 5:12-19) and therefore could never be declared righteous by God by their mere human efforts to obey the Law. They did not grasp the full implications of David's words in Psalm 51:5: **“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”** and the words of Jeremiah 17:9: **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”**

In Luke 18:9-14, we see Jesus' comments about the Pharisees who trusted in their own self-righteousness. Only someone who had no understanding of his own inherited sinful nature and Adamic debited sin could speak as the Pharisee does in Luke 18:9-14.

Luke 16:14-15 reveals Jesus said many or all of the Pharisees declared themselves righteous to other people, even though God thought otherwise about the true state of their hearts: **“Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.’”** The blindness of these Pharisees and teachers of the Law to their own lack of obedience to the Mosaic Law can be seen in verses such as Matthew 23:23-24.

Romans 8:3 shows that because of the weakness of the flesh, the Law could not provide any human with a righteous legal standing before God the Supreme Ruler and Judge: **“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.”** Acts 13:39, 15:10, Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16 stress that no one can be declared righteous by obeying the Law of Moses.

⁶ Leon Morris, “The Epistle to the Romans”, I.V.P., Leicester, 1988, page 382.

⁷ It is possible, however, that some Pharisees believed they *partially merited* entry into the Mosaic Covenant through being circumcised. They may have seen their entry as a mixture of God's grace and human merit.

Galatians 3:21 emphasises that eternal life cannot in practical terms be obtained by obedience to any law or set of laws: “...***For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.***” The word “law” here can refer to the Mosaic Law, the two love laws of Christ, God’s law on conscience and any other system of God’s laws we can name.

- c) They had a *limited understanding* of the *faith* and *God’s mercy* aspects of the Mosaic Covenant. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 23:23: “***Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.***”

In Romans 9:30-10:5, Paul teaches that religious Jews in general who rejected Christ had a poor understanding of faith. Many or all of the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees did not fully understand the clear mentions and implied references in the Mosaic Covenant to trusting faith in God. Nor did they comprehend the large number of verses in the Psalms, the writings of the Prophets and other parts of the Old Testament about trusting and depending on God. Also they had a sinful proud trust or belief in their own abilities to obey and please God. As a result, these Pharisees and teachers of the Law underemphasised the importance of faith in God and of His mercy.

Luke 18:9-14 records what Jesus said about many or all of the Pharisees: “***Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess’. And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house, justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’***” Jesus implies here that these Pharisees did not see how deeply they needed God’s mercy.

Because these Pharisees participated in the sacrificial offerings in the Temple in relation to their sins, they would have understood God’s mercy to some extent. Also they would have been aware that God chose the nation of Israel as an act of grace. But in Luke 18:9-14, Jesus implies they did not recognize the degree of sinfulness in their own nature and lives and correspondingly their enormous need of God’s mercy.

It is likely these Pharisees saw their need of God’s grace and mercy in relation to certain obvious sins in their own lives. But they did not understand they needed God’s grace and mercy in every area of their lives.

- d) They had no understanding of justification by God’s grace through faith which was taught in Old Testament verses such as Psalm 5:11-12, 11:1-3, 31:18-19, 32:10-11, 34:21-22, 37:5-6, 37:39-40, 52:6-8, 64:10, 125:1-3 and Isaiah 26:2-4. Refer to Chapter “Being justified in Old Testament times” for more details about justification by God’s grace through faith in Old Testament times.
- e) They did not aim to obey the Law of Moses on the basis of deep *love for God*, but instead did it more as *outward religion*. Matthew 23:23-28, Luke 11:39-40 and 11:42 relate to this. Matthew 23:24-28 records: “***Blind guide, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!***”

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

In Luke 11:42, Jesus revealed that many or all of the Pharisees neglected the love of God: *"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."* In the original Greek, the words *"pass by"* is a form of the word *"parerchomai"* which means "...disregard, neglect".⁸

Note that many times in the Mosaic Covenant, God reveals that obedience to His laws *must be done in connection with love for Him*. Read Deuteronomy 5:10, 6:1-9, 7:9, 10:12-13, 11:1 and 30:16.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 says: *"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?"* Deuteronomy 30:16 states: *"in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgements, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess."* Many or all of the Pharisees minimized the importance of this foundational feature of the Mosaic Law – love for God.

- f) They were so deceived they even set up their own extra man-made rules or interpretations of the Law as supposed "laws of God" (see Matthew 15:1-20, Mark 3:1-6 and 7:1-23).

Obviously, not all Pharisees and teachers of the Law were the same. But the above lists many of their major problems.

The weaknesses of the Mosaic Covenant and Law

The Mosaic Covenant itself and its associated Law were ineffective in saving those under it also because:

- its sacrifices did not really in themselves cleanse the guilt of sin (see Hebrews 7:18-19 and 10:1-11). The fact they had to be repeated endlessly showed their ineffectiveness (see Hebrews 10:1-4).
- its sacrifices were ministered by High Priests who were sinful themselves (see Hebrews 7:22-8:6).
- it did not provide access to the permanent residence of the Holy Spirit within all believers. The fact the Holy of Holies remained closed to all Israelites except the High Priests shows

⁸ Vine, page 461.

that the animal sacrifices did not provide Israelites with permanent continual access to God's Presence.

Note Psalm 110:4 reveals that even during Old Covenant times, God had *already planned* that the Old Covenant High Priesthood would be replaced by the Messiah who would be God's High Priest forever: ***"The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*** This verse is related to Psalm 110:1 which speaks of the Lord (or "YHWH" in Hebrew) telling the Messiah or the Lord (or "Adonay" in Hebrew) some wonderful things. In Matthew 22:42-44, Jesus shows Psalm 110:1 is a prophecy about Him. Hebrews 1:13 reveals Psalm 110:1 relates to Him. Hebrews 7:17 and 7:21 also refer to Jesus Christ being God's High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

God knew the weakness of the Mosaic Covenant High Priesthood and had eternally pre-planned its replacement by Jesus Christ.

The primary problem is us, not the Mosaic Covenant with its weaknesses

Because New Covenant believers are not under the Law of Moses, some speak badly of the Mosaic Covenant and Law. But note Romans 7:7, 12 and 14 show the *Law is good, holy, just and spiritual*. Romans 7:12 and 7:14 state: ***"Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good...For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin."***

Hebrews 8:7-8 says God found *fault* with the Mosaic Covenant and in 2 Corinthians 3:6-11, Paul said the New Covenant was superior to the Old. As a result, some believers have thought of the Mosaic Covenant and Law as being unspiritual and bad in certain ways. But Paul and the writer of Hebrews (who was either Paul or someone else) did not think this. Just because the Mosaic Covenant has faults or weaknesses, does not mean it is bad or unspiritual.

The main problem was not the Mosaic Covenant itself with its weaknesses, but the fact *no fallen sinful human could be saved merely by following any set of laws* even if these were God-given (see Galatians 3:21).

Romans 8:7 reveals that because of the sinful nature we are all born with, we do not have the ability to obey God's laws perfectly: ***"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."*** Also Romans 7:10-11 shows if we try to be saved by obeying the Ten Commandments and other moral aspects of the Law of Moses, we will end up condemned to a state of spiritual death forever: ***"And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me."***

No matter how hard we try to obey the Mosaic Law, we will end up condemned because James 2:10 reveals in God's eyes, just one disobedience to the Law is like breaking every one of its commands: ***"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."***

The Mosaic Law as a yoke and ministry of condemnation

The above teaching about the Law being spiritual, good, holy and a delight must be balanced by Bible verses which show what happens when the Law is used wrongly. In Acts 15:10, Peter refers to the Mosaic Law as a *“yoke on the neck”*: *“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”* Peter here is referring to the fact the Mosaic Law figuratively becomes a heavy yoke on the necks of those who try to maintain their right standing under the Mosaic Covenant and to be declared righteous and saved at the Final Judgement by their obedience to the Law.

In Galatians 5:1-3, Paul refers to the Mosaic Law as *“a yoke of bondage”* in which believers should not allow themselves to become re-entangled: *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.”*

But note in Matthew 11:30, Jesus Christ referred to His own New Covenant yoke as being *“easy”* and not a heavy burden or bondage.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-9, Paul calls the Mosaic Law *“a ministry of death and a ministry of condemnation”*. This is because no human can be justified by the Law (see Galatians 2:16 and Romans 3:20). The Mosaic Law shows all people that because of their sins they are condemned with the curse of death (see Romans 3:19-20, 7:13, Galatians 3:10 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

God’s real purposes for the Mosaic Law

Verses such as Leviticus 26:44-45, Deuteronomy 4:6 and Psalm 14:19-20 suggest the giving of the Mosaic Covenant and Law involved *imparting some blessings* to the Israelites. But some might argue that the Law of Moses was an alternative means of salvation God wanted the Israelites to try instead of having trusting dependent faith in Him. If this was true, this means God instead used the Law to curse or destroy the Israelites. He knew no person, except Jesus Christ, could perfectly obey it. Obviously, a God of justice, unfailing love and mercy would never do such a thing.

Galatians 3:17-18 and 21 reveal the Mosaic Law was not given as an alternate means of obtaining God’s inheritance to the receiving of it through the Abrahamic promises of grace through Christ: *“And this I say, that the law which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by purpose...Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.”*

In Romans 3:20-28, Galatians 2:16 and 3:11, God opposes the idea any human can be declared righteous now or at the future Final Judgement by merely obeying the Law of Moses. Trying to be declared righteous now and at the future Final Judgement by attempting to obey the Mosaic Law is called *works of law*.

As babies, all Jews became a part of the Mosaic Covenant through God's grace and mercy. They did not enter this covenant through works of Law. Even circumcision of Jewish baby boys was a gracious sign of being under the Mosaic Covenant but was not the means of entry.

Note, however, that many Jews wrongly believed that they maintained their grace-based righteous standing before God through works of Law. They also falsely thought they would be declared righteous at the future Final Judgement through their works of Law.

Also Hebrews 10:1-14 reveals the ceremonial aspects of the Law of Moses – the animal blood sacrifices and so on – can never in themselves cleanse people from sin. Hebrews 10:1-14 shows these animal sacrifices were only effective in the sense they were shadows of Jesus' later death.

Galatians 3:15-24 indicates the Mosaic Covenant was not given to act in competition with the Abrahamic Covenant, but to *lead us to Jesus Christ*, the very Person on which the Abrahamic Covenant was based and by which it was fulfilled. Galatians 3:16 says: ***“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.”*** The Mosaic Covenant and Law was not given as an alternative means of being declared righteous by God and saved, but was given:

1. to show every human, who hears the Law being taught, how sinful they are (see Romans 3:19-20, 4:15, 5:20, 7:7, 7:13 and Galatians 3:19). By giving a *clear written description of sin*, the Mosaic Law provided another powerful means besides God-given conscience (see Romans 2:15) through which the Holy Spirit could convict believers under the Old Covenant and unbelievers in general of their sin.
2. to express through the set up of the Tabernacle that because God is sinless and perfectly holy, He cannot allow any person into His Presence who has even the slightest sin in their lives and the only way He can do otherwise is if a perfectly innocent substitute suffers the death penalty on their behalf.
3. to reveal it was impossible for any human to be declared righteous now or at the future Final Judgement by their own self-efforts or human “goodness”. The Law of Moses showed that just one disobedience to its many commands made a person deserving of God's righteous anger and eternal condemnation (see Deuteronomy 28:15-68, Romans 4:15, Galatians 3:10 and James 2:10).
4. to provide shadows or types of Jesus' later substitutionary death in the animal blood sacrifices involved in the regular offerings, the annual Day of Atonement, the Passover Feast and other ceremonial laws (see Hebrews 10:1-4 and Galatians 3:24).
5. to show them they needed a Saviour from their sin, guilt and sentence of condemnation to death – spiritual and physical (see Galatians 3:24).
6. to reveal the character of God (see Psalm 119).
7. to restrain sin to some degree in the world at large.

Other purposes of the Mosaic Law were given earlier.

The Mosaic Law reveals all humans are sinners

Romans 3:19-20 says: ***“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*** Note verse 19 above reveals the Law shows the people of the world that they are guilty before God. The world includes not just unbelieving Jews but unbelieving non-Jews as well.

Romans 4:15 states God gave the Mosaic Law to reveal in what ways people were transgressing His standards and to thereby show they were under His wrath: ***“because the law brings about wrath...”***

Romans 5:20 says: ***“Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound...”*** When commenting on this verse, Leon Morris in his book *“The Epistle to the Romans”*⁹ says, ***“Law, says Paul, was added, the verb showing that it held no primary place. Its purpose was that the trespass might increase. It was not concerned with preventing sin (it was too late for that). Nor was it concerned with salvation from sin (it was too weak for that). The law can only condemn (4:15). It was concerned with showing sin for what it is, and it certainly showed magnificently that there was much sin (3:19-20). Notice the singular; Paul does not say that the ‘trespasses’ increased; it is what sin essentially is that the law magnified.”***

Romans 7:7 states: ***“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’”*** The moral laws given through the Mosaic Covenant not only show what is right and wrong. They also reveal that if we think or do a wrong, we have therefore also sinned against God. All sin is ultimately against Him and makes us guilty before Him. In Psalm 51:4, David refers to his committing of murder and adultery as being sins against God and not just against people.

Romans 7:7 means the Law reveals what is sin in general. But this verse also refers to the Law showing individuals their own specific sins against God. Paul’s usage of the 10th commandment against coveting helps to stress sin is *not only outward action* but is *also an inner heart attitude*.

The Law works *like a magnifying glass*. It does not increase the number of dirty spots in our heart. Instead the Law makes any dirty spots we knew stand out more clearly and those we previously could not see, now observable. Compare this to looking at a dirty towel under a microscope.

In Romans 7:13, Paul declares: ***“Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.”*** Paul here shows that it was his own sin (his sin-tending pre-conversion nature) and not the Law (called ***“what is good”*** in this verse) which produced spiritual and physical death in him.

Prior to conversion, Paul’s sinful nature had used God’s good holy Law for sinful death-producing purposes. As an unsaved Pharisee, Paul’s sinful nature had used the Law wrongly. But through all this, the Law ended up showing Paul that his own sinfulness was exceedingly more sinful than he had previously realised. Even the best of human “goodness” without Christ is shown by the Law to be sinful and in rebellion against God.

⁹ Morris, page 241.

Galatians 3:19 says: ***“What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made...”*** Here Paul stresses that God gave the Law of Moses to show that they had disobeyed God and in what specific ways they had done this. In the original Greek, the word ***“transgressions”*** in this verse refers to breaches of known commandments of God.

If unconverted people only have a vague awareness that their own lives and hearts are not right with God, they will rarely look to Him to save them. But if through their reading of Bible verses or hearing God’s commandments, the Holy Spirit convicts them that their wrongs in heart and life are things for which God the Supreme Ruler and Judge will hold them accountable, they will see their guilt and desperate state and possibly be willing to receive Christ as Lord and Saviour.

In Colossians 2:14, Paul refers to the written moral commandments of the Law being against us when we were not in Christ.

God did not set up the Mosaic Covenant and Law as an alternative means of salvation which He supposedly found did not work to His surprise. He always knew no person could ever be saved this way. Those who suggest He did this are accusing Him of setting up a deceitful trap to ensure every human ends up in hell.

God wants to save people and *not produce tricky means of ensuring they end up in hell.* Matthew 18:12-14 says: ***“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.”***

Being led to Christ by the supervisor, discipliner and trainer

Galatians 3:24-25 states: ***“Therefore the Law has become out tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”*** (N.A.S.B.)

Some may argue, “Galatians 3:24 does not mean that the Mosaic Law was meant to lead the Israelites to Jesus Christ. This is because the word ***‘tutor’*** or in Greek ‘paidagogos’ in this verse does not refer to someone who teaches or instructs but instead relates to a servant who was a babysitter of young boys. In agreement with Galatians 4:1-7, Galatians 3:24 instead means that the Mosaic Law was given to the people of Israel to direct their behaviour until the time of maturity when the promised Messiah would be manifested.”

Much of the above argument is true. But it needs to be qualified by the below facts:

- a) In the time of Paul, a “paidagogos” or tutor was not an academic teacher but was the discipliner, supervisor, guide and trainer of young children. “Paidagogos” meant “a person who guides, directs and shows concern for..., a man, usually a slave, whose task it was to conduct a boy to and from school and to *supervise* and *direct* his general conduct. He was not a teacher”¹⁰ or “a guide or guardian or trainer of boys”.¹¹ Perschbacher confirms that a “paidagogos” exercised “a constant *superintendence* over their (the boy’s) conduct and

¹⁰ Louw and Nida, page 466.

¹¹ Vine, page 329.

safety”.¹² Vine says of “paidagogos”: “...In this and allied words the idea is that of *training, discipline*, not impartation of knowledge. The paidagogos was not the instructor of the child; he exercised a general supervision over him and was responsible for his moral and physical well-being”.¹³ “Paidagogos” literally means “a leader of boys” or “a leader of children”. This is because “paidagogos” is derived from two Greek words: “pais” meaning “a boy or child” and “ago” meaning “to lead”.

Therefore, Galatians 3:24 does not say that the Mosaic Law was a teacher who instructed the Israelites to come to Christ. Instead this verse teaches that God used the Law of Moses to train, discipline and supervise the Israelites until Christ came. But as well as this, the verse also reveals that the Mosaic Law *has become permanently* a trainer, discipliner, guide and supervisor to lead Israelites to Jesus Christ. In Greek, the phrase “*has become*” is in the perfect tense. The Greek perfect tense refers either to a *completed* action with *continuing* effects or to a state resulting from a previous action.

- b) Through its discipline, training and supervision, the Mosaic Law showed Israelites their sin (see Romans 3:20, 7:7 and 7:13) and their need of atonement and of justification by God’s grace through faith.
- c) Just as one of the responsibilities of the “paidagogos” was to make sure the child made it to school safely and returned home safely, so it is the responsibility of the Law to take Israelites safely to Christ for salvation.
- d) In its strict context, Paul seems to be referring to himself and his fellow Israelites and not to non-Israelite Christians in Galatians 3:24. But it is also possible to argue that any non-Israelite who is trained and disciplined by the Mosaic Law can be led to Christ through it also (see 1 Timothy 1:8-11).

Bible Study Questions

1. Were the prophets David, Isaiah, Daniel and Hosea legalists? Or did they use the Mosaic Law rightly?
2. In which verses did David, Isaiah, Daniel and Hosea emphasise that Mosaic Covenant believers should obey the commandments of the Mosaic Law?
3. What attitudes to the Mosaic Law were expressed in Psalms 1 and 119?
4. Some Christians believe that the Law of Moses was based on a cold merely external obedience to a series of supposedly loveless rules. But which Bible verses show the Mosaic Law commands emphasised love and were based on love?
5. Give Biblical reasons why E.W. Kenyon’s claim in the section “A common misunderstanding of the Mosaic Covenant” is wrong.
6. What are the differences between rightly loving God’s written Word and the sin of worshipping the Bible?
7. Were great revivalists like Joshua, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah and Nehemiah full of faith in and love for God with little concern for obeying the commands and statutes of the Mosaic Law? Give Biblical proof for your answer.
8. In Romans 2:17-29, what wrong Jewish religious attitudes did Paul correct?

¹² Perschbacher, page 302.

¹³ Vine, page 327.

9. In Matthew 3:7-10, John the Baptist attacked a sinful attitude to the Abrahamic Covenant. In Psalm 50:16-21, the Psalm-writer corrected a wrong attitude to the Mosaic Covenant. What were these wrong attitudes?
10. In what ways did many or all of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law in Christ's time misuse the Mosaic Covenant?
11. Why was the Mosaic Covenant and its associated Law ineffective in saving those under it?
12. What is the main problem – the Mosaic Law with its weakness or our fallen sinful state? Provide Biblical proof for your answer.
13. Romans 7:7, 7:12 and 7:14 show the Law is good, holy, just and spiritual. So why does Peter refer to the Mosaic Law as a “*yoke on the neck*” in Acts 15:10 and Paul call it “*a yoke of bondage*” in Galatians 5:1-3?
14. What were God's real purposes for the Mosaic Law?
15. Explain what Romans 3:19-20, 7:7 and 7:13 teach about the Mosaic Law.
16. What does Galatians 3:24-25 reveal about the Law?