

## The Controversy

**Memory Text:** “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17)

**Setting The Stage:** Years ago, a large statue of Christ was erected high in the Andes on the border between Argentina and Chile. Called “Christ of the Andes,” the statue symbolized a pledge between the two countries that as long as the statue stood there will be peace between Chile and Argentina.

Shortly after the statue was erected, the Chileans began to protest that they had been slighted – the statue had its back turned to Chile. Just when tempers were at their highest in Chile, a Chilean newspaper writer saved the day. In an editorial that not only satisfied the people but made them laugh, he simply said, “The people of Argentina need more watching over than the Chileans.” A good way to solve a brewing conflict!

Unfortunately, conflicts exist everywhere. Some are small, others are much more significant. When it comes to the biblical subjects of law and grace, many in the Christian community see a conflict between the two. Never the twain shall meet, seems to be the thinking of the day. But is that so?

Our memory verse seems to think so, or at least on the surface it appears so. Let’s unpack this.

### Sunday – A Better Covenant

Hebrews 8:6-10; 2 Peter 1:4

The story goes of a man who got a job chopping down trees. The first day his foreman noticed he had cut down only ten trees while the other men had cut down a hundred or so. “Oh well,” thought the foreman, “it was his first day.” But the next couple days went the same way, so the foreman decided to have a talk with the new worker. “I am sure you have noticed you are not cutting down nearly as many trees as the others are,” the foreman began. “Yes I know, sir, but I am having trouble with this saw you gave me,” said the new worker. The foreman took a look at the saw and pulled the cord to start the motor. The buzz of the motor scared the new worker, and he jumped back shouting, “What is that sound?”

The new worker didn’t realize he was not expected to saw down a hundred trees in his own power. He did not realize what power was available to him. It’s the same way today.

Many people shirk at keeping the law, thinking it's an impossibility, not realizing they were never expected to keep it in their own power, and like the power saw, there is plenty of power available.

**Hebrews 8:6-10:** "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them,' says the Lord. 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' "

There are those who would have us believe that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding because God realized they were unreasonable and couldn't be obeyed. However, that is not the case. Ps. 19:7 says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul."

The law is not faulty. Heb. 8:8 says the fault was not with the law but with the people (see Ex. 19:8). So why would God change the law when the law was not the problem?

The New Covenant was not an afterthought after the first covenant didn't work. The new covenant was actually God's original plan. What we call the "old covenant" was actually man's idea thinking he could save himself by his own strength and effort. It was not a faith response. Man's effort failed, so God re-introduces His original plan and says, "Are you ready to give up trying to do it on your own and let me write my law on your heart Myself?"

You see, the old covenant was not called old because it was the first covenant. It was called old because it was a useless covenant that God never asked them to make. He never asked Abraham to have a son on his own. He never asked us to keep the commandments on our own. This is what Paul is talking about in Heb. 8:6 when refers to better promises. The new covenant is based on better promises because they are God's promises!

**2 Peter 1:4:** "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

## Monday – Jewish Laws & Regulations

John 1:17; Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 5:17-20

Based on the aforementioned, why would John be contrasting the law with grace as if the two were in conflict with each other (see John 1:17)? Keep in mind that Bible writers don't argue with each other, instead they compliment each other. Let's understand a few things.

The word "law" that John uses includes more than just the moral law. It's the system of revealed religion under which the Jews lived in OT times, divinely ordained but gradually perverted by human tradition.

### What did the "law" include?

1. The Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:1-22), which God spoke with His own voice and engraved on stone with His own finger. This is the great moral law that is still binding on all of humanity still today (Matt. 5:17-20).
2. Judgments (Ex. 21-23), or civil laws that breathed the principles of the Ten Commandments and were written in a book. These laws, in part, could no longer be imposed after the Jews lost their independence and came under civil control of another nation.
3. Ceremonial laws (Leviticus 1-7; 23), also written in a book by Moses, and was given to teach people God's plan of salvation and point His people to the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. These services and feasts came to a close when type met antitype in Christ.
4. Health laws (Lev. 11-15), given for the purpose of preventing disease and premature death. These laws are still relevant today if we care about our health and the prevention of the spread of disease.

In and of itself, as originally given by God, the law was good (Rom. 3:1, 2). The fact that some didn't believe but sought salvation by the works of the law, rather than by faith, and as a result failed to enter into the spiritual rest God intended for them, does not mean that the system itself as ordained by God was faulty. All that God does is perfect (Deut. 32:4). There were many in the OT who obtained a "good report through faith" (Heb. 11:39). In fact, there never has been any other way to obtain a "good report" than "through faith."

**"Grace & truth"** were divine attributes inherent in the system of revealed religion in OT times (Ex. 34:6, 7), but had, for practical purposes, been lost under a thick layer of human tradition. The contrast between "law" and "grace" is really between the perverted interpretation placed upon the revealed grace and truth of God by the official teachers of the law, the rabbis, and the truth as revealed in Jesus Christ.

By affirming that the "truth" comes through Christ, John identifies Him as the reality toward whom pointed all the OT types and ceremonies, which were no more than a shadow of better things to come. In no sense does John imply that the OT system was false or in error.

Also keep in mind that the word “but” has been supplied by the translators, making the contrast between law and grace more than John probably intended. John doesn’t mean to imply that the system revealed through Moses was bad, compared with that which is revealed in Christ, but that, good as Moses system was, Christ’s is better. And we would agree with that today, wouldn’t we?

## Tuesday – As The Custom Of Moses

Acts 15:1, 5; Romans 2:29

**What was the specific point of dissension that the early church had to contend with?**

**Acts 15:1, 5:** “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved...But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.’ ”

This was considered a salvation issue. Of course, there is a difference between the law of God and the law of Moses (Deut. 4:13). The contention wasn’t over the Ten Commandments, but over some of the things Moses had written – circumcision and the ceremonial laws.

**What was the purpose of circumcision?** Circumcision was a sign of conversion. Even in the Old Testament, there was recognition that physical circumcision was not enough. Moses commanded the Israelites in Deuteronomy 10:16 to circumcise their hearts, and even promised that God would do the circumcising (Ibid. 30:6). Jeremiah also preached the need for a circumcision of the heart (Jer. 4:4). True circumcision, as Paul preached in Romans 2:29, is that of the heart, and it is accomplished by the Spirit.

**Romans 2:29:** “But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”

So a person today enters a covenant relationship with God not based on a physical act but on the Spirit’s work in the heart.

## Wednesday – The Gentile Believers

Acts 15:2-29

**How did the early church settle this dispute that threatened the unity of the church?**

**Acts 15:2-23.** First, notice Paul’s willingness to be sent to Jerusalem to counsel with the elders and apostles. Although he had the prophetic gift, he submitted to go to a church council to get the issue settled. What is your attitude toward church leadership? How cooperative are you? How could we function if everyone wanted

to be independent of the larger body? According to Acts 15, unity includes being together theologically and functionally.

**What decision did the council come to, and what was its reasoning?** The decision was against the desires of the Judiazers. Circumcision was not necessary for a Gentile convert to Christianity to perform. However, the council, in an effort to ensure that Gentile converts didn't do anything that would be highly offensive to the Jewish converts who were united with them in Jesus, instructed them to abstain from meats offered to idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood.

Keep in mind that although the Ten Commandments aren't mentioned, this doesn't mean that they weren't to be observed. The issue at stake had to do with those things that the Judiazers were needlessly insisting upon Gentile converts, and in turn the need for Gentile converts to be sympathetic to the Jewish converts sensitivities and not think their freedom in Christ equaled irresponsibility.

## **Thursday – Paul & The Galatians**

Galatians 1:1-12

**Galatians 1:1-12.** When Paul would travel to Galatia and other Gentile cities, he would go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel first. He would go to synagogues to preach the gospel. Sometimes he was successful, other times he was not. The Jews already had a background to the gospel and so it would make sense to present Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT prophecies concerning His first coming.

After Paul had preached to the Jews he would share the gospel with the Gentiles. And Paul didn't require that the Gentile converts be circumcised or keep the ceremonial feasts. In some communities this caused great consternation among the Jewish Christian's who believed it would alienate the Jews by not requiring them to keep the laws of Moses.

A "General Conference Session" had already decided to not place any undue burdens on the Gentiles converts regarding the ceremonial laws (Acts 15). Of course they weren't to eat things that had been strangled, or blood, and they were to keep themselves from fornication and idolatry. The decision had been made (biblically and Spirit led), and now all the churches were to follow suit to promote unity.

The Jewish Christians really needed to show unity with the Gentile converts. They were supposed to be one. They weren't supposed to be meeting in two different groups. What kind of message was that going to send to the unconverted? Genuine unity was being threatened. And this is what Paul was dealing with in Galatians.

Obedience to the Ten Commandments was never an issue. Those who make it an issue are reading into texts something Paul wasn't dealing with. Of course, those who seem opposed to the Ten Commandments really only have an issue with the Sabbath. **What are some of the arguments people use to claim the Ten**

Commandments aren't binding? How do we answer those claims without compromising the integrity of the gospel?

**1 John 2:3, 4:** "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

A major concern of many church leaders and laity is a growing laxness when it comes to traditional lifestyle standards. This decline in laxness not only spans dietary guidelines, but also modesty in dress, adornment, and the frequenting of venues once believed to be off-limits (theatres, etc.). Where do standards end and legalistic attitudes begin? How do we maintain a balanced approach in our thinking on these issues?

**1 John 3:22:** "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

**John 8:29:** "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him."