

## Creative Nonfiction



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# Jesus' Fulfillment of the Law Affects Believers Today

Paighton Boldt Vanguard College student.

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After being set free from the life sentence you brought upon yourself, why is it that you keep returning to your jail cell? The truth is that so many Christians fall victim to the idea that they are not fully saved by grace. There is a culture within biblical circles which pressures believers to keep the old covenant law in order to work or earn their salvation in some way. This comes when the church teaches to volunteer, give generously, and live a servant lifestyle without specifying that all these things are meant to be an overflow from knowing God's grace and love. Without teaching that what brings people close to God is grace, not one's good works, regular churchgoers are bound in chains to something they have never been able to do: keep the law. In studying why the law was given and how people receive salvation, major distinctions can be made about salvation through works contrasted to salvation by grace and faith in Christ. Through Jesus' fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, Christ followers are no longer bound to Old Testament regulations to keep themselves clean. Rather, believers now get to live authentically with a new Spirit-filled heart, where righteousness flows not to achieve salvation, but as a by-product of God's grace.

### Receiving Salvation

You can be saved, but not by your own strength. As protestant Christians, we often recognize that people are saved by grace through faith. However, as lies or misunderstood teachings creep in, such as the need to prove something to God or work hard to be good in His sight, this good news of salvation loses its truth within one's heart and life. A Barna research study found that 81% of self-identified Christians claim that Spiritual health is "trying hard to follow the rules described in the Bible". However, this is not at all the relationship God wants to have with His children. God wants an intimate personal connection with any who calls upon Him, regardless of what they have done. With this in mind, it is critical for people to take time to understand salvation through grace, which has nothing to do with themselves. In knowing that one is saved not by what they do for God, but by Jesus' sacrifice, one's relationship with the Lord becomes far more intimate and free. Through observing why God created the law and gaining understanding of the Lord's overarching plan for salvation, one can realize how their good works are not useful in achieving salvation.



## **Why was the Law Given?**

The list of commands given in the Old Testament were quite extensive, containing roughly 613 laws, plus the 10 commandments. The breaking of any one of these laws would lead to one's separation from the Lord, which required frequent animal sacrifices be made in order to atone for one's shortcomings. Despite these numerous commands for righteous living, the New Testament makes it clear that one cannot be made right by works of the law or through animal sacrifices. One is only saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, if the law was not given to sanctify humans, why was it given at all?

### ***To Reveal Humanity's Shortcomings***

God has always known of humanity's need for salvation. He was aware that humans would sin long before the world began, and yet still chose to create people. Humans, however, have not been so inclined to recognize their shortcomings. Time and time again, people have made a glorified image of themselves, forgetting that they have fallen short from God's standard. Since the fall, the idea of right from wrong has been skewed in the minds of all people. As a result, people lost their way as to what was good and what made them unclean. Therefore, the law was given to the Israelites, so that they may know how to live righteously. God wrote down right from wrong so that people may have something to follow.

### ***To Reveal God's Character***

God chose to reveal His character through the Law. In this, God's justice, kindness, and love are displayed. God's justice is seen in the sense that no sin may be left unpunished. Additionally, God's loving kindness has been revealed in His commandments to protect women, slaves, and those who cannot defend themselves. One of the many examples of this, is the command to leave the edges of crop fields unharvested so that the poor may eat from them. Laws like this take care of everyone among God's people, showing His love for not just the wealthy but also the lowly.

There is a second way in which God reveals His character through the Law: Jesus claims to be the fulfillment of the law in Matthew 5:17. As Jesus is known to be "the visible image of the invisible God", displaying the Father to all those who encounter Him, He displays God's character. Therefore, it is through Jesus' revelation of the Father that we can understand His fulfillment of the Law. Jesus revealed God in the same way that the law had done previously, fulfilling that role of the law. It is now through Jesus' character, the Holy Spirit, and God's Word, that the Lord reveals Himself to us; not only the law or the Torah.

### ***To Set Apart His People***

Finally, as God chose to reveal Himself to the Israelites through the law, He also desired to show His character to surrounding nations. The commands God gave to the Israelites were far different than how other nations lived their lives. Where slaves in secular nations were considered worthless and could be abused in any way, God created laws which protected slaves against such harm. In this way, God was calling His people to be Holy, living a set apart life. As the Israelites walked in God's ways, onlookers got to learn the character of God, and were subsequently blessed through this.

Therefore, in knowing God's laws, the Israelites had the opportunity to exhibit the ways of the Lord to others who did not have the law.

### **Being Justified**

In understanding that the law was never given for one to receive salvation, it follows that people have no way of saving themselves from their sins through works. Rather, it is the finished work of Jesus Christ which allows people to be justified for their sins. The word "Justified" or "Justification" is a judicial term, relating to one's legal standing before God. As the Lord is fully just, He requires atonement for the sins of His people in order for them to be clean and saved from death. In essence, a guilty party must not go unpunished. Therefore, the Lord did what only He could do – He sent His only Son, who was fully God and completely human, to die the death penalty in exchange for the one you and I rightfully deserve. Now, anyone who believes in Jesus as the risen Savior and Lord, receives justification and is saved from their sins. This act from God to take the penalty for our sin, was motivated entirely by love. He was not under any obligation to free people from their death sentence, however, it was His desire to do so out of love. As a result, the price of a believer's sin has already been paid by King Jesus. Because of this, all Christians are now meant to live in freedom from the law, knowing that Jesus' work has set them free from sin and not their own works.

### **Actions and Heart Response to Grace**

In this knowledge that one is free from sin only by the blood of Christ, a Christian may wonder what attitudes or rhythms they can adopt in light of God's grace. This desire to act as a response to God's truth seems like a reasonable goal, however there is a far better question that one can be asking in order for righteous fruit to flow from their lives. This question is: what is my new identity?

### **New Identity in Christ**

2 Corinthians states that "if anyone is in Christ, [they are] a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." This shows that those who once were dead in sin now have a new identity through inviting God into their hearts. Because of the saving work of Jesus, believers have been adopted as Sons and Daughters of the King. Christians can come boldly before the Lord, as He is a father who delights in His children. Additionally, eternal life has been given as an inheritance to God's children, which has been sealed and confirmed through believers receiving the Holy Spirit. Now, because of Christ's blood shedding, everyone has the opportunity to become citizens of Heaven. In the same way that an immigrated resident must go through a process to legitimize their residence in a new place, Christ has legitimized all who believe. Therefore, Christians have been given a Heavenly status, not because they were born in Heaven, but because God claims them as His own. Now, Christians not only receive life as God's children, but they also have a permanent home with the Lord. Christ-followers are now saved, children of the King of Kings, who can have an intimate, personal relationship with their Savior. They are God's beloved; this is their new identity.

All those who follow Christ now can live in this identification and walk in the truth of who God has called them to be.

### **Our response to our new identity**

There is a natural desire, as one who loves Jesus, to want to please Him. If someone grew up in church knowing that God loved His rules and regulations, out of a desire to please the Lord they may try their best to follow at least the 10 commandments. However, it can also be recognized that following a list of things to do for God with the intent to make Him happy can quickly become an obligatory task, making one distanced from the Lord. This is not how God desires people to follow Him or live in righteousness. Yes, Jesus longs for His people to be Holy as He is Holy, but this is to be done as a response to knowing Him, not out of obligation. 1 John says that “no one who is born of God will continue to sin, [...] they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.” Once the Holy Spirit enters a believer, the person has God’s new law written in their hearts, which pleases God when they walk by it. This law is not the old covenant, which has been outdated, but the new righteous way of life desired by God for His people. Jesus says this plainly, that “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, [...] will teach [His people] all things and will remind [them] of everything [I (Jesus) have] said.” This is how to live righteously: by inviting the Holy Spirit into one’s life. In this way, a person’s former heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh, leaving new desires that align with God’s righteous ways.

Do not hear this message wrong in thinking that a Christian does not have to do anything to strengthen their faith or worship the Lord. These things are truly important in living a life with and for Jesus, but one must not be measuring their heart based on the actions they are doing. Acts that bring glory to God or draw one near to Him, are beautifully done when in response to seeking the Lord. However, actions which cause one to want to measure their work for God or keep track of what they have done, often hinder one’s relationship with Christ. This is because God wants connection with His Children and not anything they could try to give Him. What a truly intimate experience: people now get to seek the almighty God who is embedded in their hearts, learning His voice and enjoying His company. No longer do people have to meet a list of requirements to connect with God, rather He dwells within the hearts of His people. There is no distance between God and those who have accepted Him, and no part of the old covenant separates those who have the Holy Spirit from their Father. Paul writes to the Galatians church that “[once one is] led by the Spirit, [they] are not under the law.”

This is a divine confirmation that people are no longer meant to live under the Old Testament law, which is outdated and is not the method for how people can now meet with Christ. Rather, people get to connect with Christ through His Spirit and New Testament Word, and experience the personal transformation that comes from this. Paul personally experienced the life change that comes through learning his identity in Christ. In recognizing Jesus as Messiah, Paul’s heart and goals changed from persecuting those who followed the Way, to being persecuted for his following of Christ. Paul experienced the life-changing shift that occurs when knowing one’s identity in the Lord. Because of this, Paul went on to be one of the most impactful messengers of the Gospel to this present day. Therefore, it can be confirmed that one’s heart and actions flow from knowing their identity in the Lord. Additionally, believers are no longer bound to the law, as it has no power in salvation and has been fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Through the saving grace of Jesus Christ, all Christians can receive freedom from their sins and an intimate relationship with the King of Kings. This salvation is not something that can be earned, therefore we must not strive to receive it. Rather, freedom from sin is a priceless gift from God, which He has given because of His love. In understanding why the Old Testament law was established and how Jesus Christ has fulfilled it, one can fully live in the truth that they are saved by grace. No longer do righteous acts need to be done out of obligation to please God, for those who truly know and seek Christ naturally begin to resemble Him in their heart. This change in heart posture affects one's works and desires to imitate the Lord as well. As a result, no longer do you (or any other believer) have to hide in a jail cell of sin until you can step out by your own strength. Rather, by the saving works of Jesus Christ, your life sentence has been lifted and you have been justified, and you can now do life in the hands of your Father, free from sin and shame.

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