

The Better Way

Volume XXXIX, Issue 39

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UNDER WHAT LAW?

Guy N. Woods

Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision openly, as it were about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in unto him, and saying to him, Cornelius. And he, fastening his eyes upon him, and being affrighted, said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and fetch one Simon, who is surnamed Peter (Acts 10:1-5).

Thus begins the narrative of one of the most historic and significant events in sacred history. Thus far, in the early church, the gospel had been offered only to Jews and proselytes of the Jewish religion, under the mistaken and persistent notion that Christianity, like Judaism, was to be limited to the descendants of Jacob; and the apostles and early Jewish Christians were exceedingly slow in recognizing that the Great Commission did indeed authorize the preaching of the gospel to all men, in all the world, rather than to the descendants of Abraham Isaac and Jacob (Mat. 27:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16). Notwithstanding the fact that Peter preached, on Pentecost, that “**the promise**” (which God made to Abraham) of salvation to all the families of the earth embraced Jews *and* all those “**afar off**” (the Gentiles), the miracle of the great sheet was required to set Peter’s mind aright regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 2:39; Gen. 12:1-3; Acts 10:44, 45). Under the total motivation of the Holy Spirit the apostle preached, *but did not understand* the significance of his own statements until some years later thus providing us with an irrefutable instance of verbal inspiration of the Scriptures! Except under such total guidance are men able to offer intelligible sentiments which they do not understand. At Acts 10:1, begins the Holy Spirit’s effort to bring the apostles, and the other saints of the apostolic church, to the realization that the Gentiles were to be received and regarded as fellow-heirs in the one body.

Cornelius was a citizen of Rome, an Italian, and an officer in the Roman army. Being a “**centurion**,” he was head of a company of men which, when full, numbered one hundred. It was called “**the Italian band**,” in all likelihood, from the fact that it was made up of soldiers born in Italy, and not in Palestine. It is of interest to observe that this remarkable man is one of three centurions favorably mentioned in the New Testament (Mark 15:39; Luke 7:2; Acts 27:1-3).

We may, at first thought, wonder why a man possessed of so many admirable traits and of such fine moral character as did he should need conversion: (1) he was a devout man; (2) who feared God with all his house; (3) who gave liberally of his possessions to the people; and (4) who prayed to God always. The word **prayed**, appearing in this context,

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SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

SUNDAY

Bible Study.....9:00 a.m.
Worship.....10:00 a.m.
Afternoon Worship.....1:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY

Bible Study.....7:30 p.m.
(via Zoom Meetings)

ELDERS

David P. Brown
Ken Cohn
John West

DEACONS

Bret Bailey
J. D. Gunter
Eric Paluka

EVANGELIST

David P. Brown

SECRETARY

Sonya West

is not the usual word for prayer, but one signifying *to beseech*. It not only means that Cornelius prayed because it is right to do so; it indicates that he continually besought the Lord for help and direction in the right way. His prayer was heard; and, his alms served as a memorial before God. Evidenced here is the fact that in spite of, and despite his many moral attainments, he had, in order to be saved, to obey the gospel. Man sustains an obligation (a) to himself; (b) to those about him; (c) to God. Men are often disposed to forget that while they are discharging their duties to themselves and to those about them they are neglecting the much higher obligation they owe to God. The most unjustifiable of all sins is the highhanded refusal to render to God His due; and this attitude is characteristic of those who, however civil and moral their conduct toward others may be, treat with contempt the commandments of the great Jehovah.

It is interesting and important, in this connection, to inquire as to the nature and identification of the law under which Cornelius, the Centurion, was worshipping God. (1) It was *not* Christianity; for, he had not thus far obeyed the gospel. (2) It was *not* Judaism, because he was neither a Jew nor a proselyte to the Jewish religion, being an uncircumcised Gentile. There has been but one *other* law, through the ages, under which God accepted worship: *Patriarchy*. (3) It follows, therefore, that Cornelius was worshipping God under a system which had continued from Eden,—the patriarchal arrangement. We should recall that the law of Moses was given *only* to the descendants of Jacob—Israel—and to those Gentiles who suffered themselves to be proselyted—by circumcision—to it (Deu. 5:2; Acts 2:10; 13:43). Inasmuch as Cornelius was neither a Jew nor a proselyte, it follows that he was worshipping God under the patriarchal system obtaining from the beginning. It had, indeed, been in the divine purpose to make of the two—Jew and Gentile—“**one new man**,” (Eph. 2:14-18) but the attitude of Jews toward Gentiles had thwarted that plan, until the events of Acts 10. Here began a series of events eventually to result in the union of all men submitting themselves to the will of God in Christ (Gal. 3:29); and, in consequence, the end of a system of worship which would have terminated at the cross but was extended to the house of Cornelius because of the shortsightedness of the Jews touching the inclusion of the Gentiles in Christ’s redemptive plan.

The heavenly visitor said to Cornelius, “**Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God.**” A “**memorial**” is a remembrance; thus Cornelius’ prayers and alms served to recall for the Lord matters earlier announced. What were they? The answer to this question is to be found in the results which followed; viz., the promise of salvation to *all* nations through Christ. The time had arrived for the accomplishment of this divine purpose; hence, the effort to bring Cornelius—the first Gentile convert into the kingdom of Christ. Hitherto, he had worshipped God under the only arrangement available to him—that which had obtained for those not Israelites since the events of Sinai. *This was the patriarchal system*. To deny this, one must affirm one of two propositions: (1) There was no salvation for the countless multitudes of people who lived and died outside the fold of Judaism, from Sinai to the cross, regardless of how much of the moral law was written in their consciences and exhibited in their lives *or* (2) uncircumcised Gentiles were members of, and always participated in the blessings of the Jewish covenant! The second proposition is obviously absurd; and, the first proposition is clearly shown to be false by Paul’s affirmation in Romans 2:12-16. That the devout officer was worshipping God under the system of patriarchy is the only conclusion harmonizing the difficulties of the case. It is, to this, no valid objection that, *after* the angel’s visit, Cornelius was to hear words whereby he and his house were to “**be saved**”; at the moment the angel appeared to him he became accountable to God under this, the Christian dispensation; prior to this visit of the angel he was answerable only under the system which alone was available. Nor, can it be affirmed, from these premises, that on the foregoing assumption, all men, who have not heard the gospel today ought to be regarded as in his category. No one lives in his category; the gospel had never been extended to embrace the Gentiles prior to the events of Acts 10. It follows, therefore, that the condition of the Gentiles, from Pentecost to the house of Cornelius was legally that which characterized the Jews from the cross to Pentecost. When one law supersedes another, the *effects* of the superseded law carry over to the point where the newer law becomes effective. The events in Caesarea made clear the fact that God no longer regarded the Jews, *because they were Jews*, above others; thenceforth men of all nations who fear Him and work

righteousness are acceptable to Him (Acts 10:34, 35).~

Deceased

GRACE AND/OR LAW

G. K. Wallace

In studying about the law of Moses and the grace, of God, we should be careful to make a correct distinction between what is sometimes expressed as “**grace and law.**” No one is naive enough to believe that man can save himself. No one who has ever studied the Bible can come to believe that a man can be saved by the Mosaic law. The weakness of the law was in that it did not make provision for the salvation of man. Some years ago while in a debate with an Adventist, who believes that there are two laws in the Old Testament, he hung up a chart with the ten commandments on it and said that the Bible teaches “**the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.**” He said, “This is the law of God and I challenge you to show a single mistake in it.” I replied that there was nothing wrong in what God said and the weakness of the law was in what was left out. The Ten Commandments which is only a *portion* of the old law made no provision for the blood of Christ. The old law (which contained the Ten Commandments) provided only the blood of an animal (Heb. 10:1-4).

The grace of God does not *exclude law* but it is based upon and grows out of “**the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus**” (Rom. 8:2). The grace of God is revealed through the commandments of God in the New Testament. John said, “**Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye heard from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard. Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in him and in you**” (1 John 2:7-8). Too, John said with relation to the propitiation for our sins that we have knowledge of salvation and the atoning sacrifice only through obedience to Christ (1 John 1:1-2). John said:

And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him: he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked (1 John 2: 3-6.)

Let us not in our enthusiasm to teach the truth about the place of the old law thereby exclude the law of Christ. The grace of God does not remove all law. It simply removes the Mosaic law as a rule of life. We are still under law to God. Paul says there is “**a law of faith**” (Rom. 3:27). If this is not so, then the Apostle John has greatly deceived us.

The Bible clearly and plainly teaches that the Mosaic law fulfilled its purpose and ceased by divine limitation. Jesus regarded the law of Moses as an obligation fulfilled (Mat. 5:17). Paul taught the Romans that the old Mosaic law was a relationship dissolved (Rom. 7:1-7). The Apostle Paul taught the Corinthian brethren that the law of Moses was a veil removed (2 Cor. 3:14). Paul taught the Ephesians that the law was a partition torn down (Eph. 2:7-11). Paul also taught the Colossians that the law was only a shadow that was cast (Col. 2:13-17). The writer of the book of Hebrews says the law was a covenant removed (Heb. 8:10-13). The writer of the book of Hebrews also says that the law was a will (testament) replaced by a new will or new testament (Heb. 9:15-16).

Law was never designed to save. Paul said that “**through the law cometh the knowledge of sin**” (Rom. 3:20). The Hebrew people would not have known the difference between right and wrong unless God had told them. Through God’s rules and regulations they came to know what was right and what was sinful. Law did not justify them. It made them aware of wrong. Pardon or justification for a violation of the law had to be secured from the law giver or the judge.

I travel a great deal in these United States and I find that various states have different traffic laws. For example, in the state of Florida one may turn right on a red light at any place in the state (providing there is no special sign erected to prohibit it) and if the traffic in the street is judged safe by the driver. If one violates a traffic law in Florida or any other state, he is not justified by the law, he is *condemned* by the law. In order to receive pardon or justification, he must appear in a court of law to plead his case. He may have an advocate to plead his cause. If he is pardoned, it will be at the mercy of the court.

We could not operate successfully in the various states of the union without law. Christianity cannot be operated without law. The biggest mistake the moralists make today is in leading people to believe there are no laws. Preachers are telling others that since we have the grace of God that we have no rules nor regulations.

Such philosophy is destructive, not only to Christianity, but to the nation in which we live. This kind of approach to the relationship of law and grace is conducive to the spread of a relative concept of morality. We must teach all to respect and obey the laws of Christ.

We must also remember that all the laws of the gospel and of the word of Christ are a part of the grace of God. The grace of God hath appeared **“instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world”** (Tit. 2:12). By the grace of God we are instructed in the principles of righteousness. There are certain things that are specifically forbidden by the Apostle Paul (Gal. 5; Col. 3). There are certain things we must do in order to get into Christ (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38). We are not justified by these conditions. We are justified by the blood of Christ, but without obedience to these laws we are unjust and stand condemned.~

Deceased

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- . Articles
- . Lectureship videos
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- . Bible Study Course
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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- **This Tuesday, September 24th:** Ladies' Bible Class. Jenny Gunter will be teaching a lesson on "The Joy Of Purity."
- **Saturday, September 28th:** Fall Fellowship at Walker County Fairgrounds, Huntsville, TX. Sign-up sheets in kitchen.
- **Sunday, September 29th:** Monthly meal.
- **Saturday, October 26th:** Fish Hatchery Road Lectureship. "James: Practical Christianity Part 3."
- **Saturday, November 23rd:** Chili Cook-off at Burroughs Park.

THOSE TO SERVE

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2024

Announcements	John West
Scripture Reading	Eric Paluka <i>Revelation 22:6-9</i>
Song Leader	Bret Bailey
Prayer	Andrew Paluka/J.D Gunter (AM) Joshua West/Gary Blasingame (PM)
Speaker	David Brown
Lord's Table (AM) <i>(Luke 22:39-44)</i>	
Stephen Cohn	Jonathan West
Eric Paluka	Joshua West
Lord's Table (PM)	
J.D. Gunter	Bret Bailey
Audio/Video Monitor	Jonathan West
Camera/Door Monitor	Gary Blasingame

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

(via Zoom Meetings)

Announcements	Bret Bailey
Speaker	Ken Cohn
Bible Class Teacher	David Brown

FOR SEPTEMBER

Prepare Communion	Gunter
Lock Buildings	Gunter
Prepare Bulletin Board	Mercier/Ferguson

IN NEED OF PRAYERS

Robbie Kirby, Edith Young, Zack Nero, April McCain, Debbie Brannon, Noah & Glenda Hackworth, Cynthia Jackson, Elnora Oxendine, Charles & Ann Nero, Chuck & Nancy Verkist, Freda Smith, Orlinda Chumbley, and Roelf & Janice Ruffner.

TEST YOUR BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

Where were the 12 stones taken from Jordan set up in Canaan?

Answer to last week's question:
Gilgal; Joshua 4:19