

Living above the Law
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The tension seems ever present. What is a correct understanding of the place of grace and law in the life of a Christian? Further, what is an appropriate contrast? Law vs. no law? Law vs. grace? Law vs. gospel?

Paul addresses some of the issues surrounding the place of the law in the life of a Christian in the book of Galatians. Based on the first few verses of Galatians 3, one might even ask if the correct contrast is law vs. Spirit.

Where does the Christian exist between law and no law? Should we conclude that law is focused on the flesh and the absence of law focused on the Spirit? The declaration is clear: sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). That antinomianism (no law) is not an option seems obvious.

I believe a helpful corrective is to rethink the role of grace in the life of a Christian. In Gal. 5:16-24, we are admonished to walk in step with the Spirit to avoid fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. Gifts are given for our benefit, that we might excel and attain the nature of God in our lives. Among these gifts are the fruits of the Spirit (or at least the Spirit is a gift, and the fruits follow). The gift of the Spirit is an evidence of God's grace.

Let me clarify. There is no grace unless there is a standard or norm (law). How do I know that I did not get what I deserved, unless there is a standard that defines what I deserve? Law and grace must coexist; grace is not the absence of law. In fact, grace demands law. The question for the Christian is not law or no law. As a Christian, law exists, but I do not choose to live by a law ethic. I choose to live above law—in step with the Spirit. Life in the Spirit makes the law irrelevant.

Allow me an illustration from everyday life. I drive on the interstate highway several times each week, speed limit 70. I generally set my cruise at 68. I like that speed—I find it comfortable and it doesn't make much difference in my arrival time on the trips I make. When I set my cruise at 68, the law becomes irrelevant to me. I don't constantly look around to see if a policeman is near. I don't have to put on my brakes when I see a policeman ahead. I don't even disengage my cruise control. I just keep right on going. The law is irrelevant. It is not that law doesn't exist, but when I choose to live above the law, the law becomes insignificant as a guide for my life.

In the spiritual realm, the law is not my guide—life in the Spirit is my guide. Even law forbids lowering one's self below the nature of God within us. That is the purpose of law. Law keeps me from living on the bottom.

Paul in Gal. 5:24, says we ultimately reach this goal by passing from law to grace. Christ has liberated us so that we might be genuinely free (Gal. 5:1). Life for the Christian, in step with the Spirit, does not focus on the flesh and its desires. Rather, as Christians we live above the law which forbids that we lower ourselves and deny God's nature and Spirit within us. The result of living by grace and in the Spirit—above the law, is genuine freedom. The centrality of the cross (Gal. 6:14) empowers a life of reconciliation and salvation.