



WHAT THEN OF THE LAW

When reading the letter of Romans, it's common for questions to arise about Paul's (and the Scriptures!) attitude toward the Law. Paul will variously speak of the Law as it relates to Jews, Gentiles, as well as Christian believers from both groups. Sometimes Paul seems almost dismissive of the law's continuing significance. At other times he seems to speak with an almost Psalm-like delight in it!

This variation in Paul's tone concerning the law (not just commands, but the Pentateuch) is *not* reflective of any indecision he has about the Law's significance for Christian believers. Rather, Paul's varying tone relates to the differing ways he is using the law to make his argument across the letter.

i) WE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW:

Paul insists that Christian believers are not “under the law” (Rom 6:14-15). Even Jewish Christians are said to have “died” to the Law through Jesus (Rom 7:1-6). Paul lays aside the Law as a covenant basis for how God and believers relate. (Note even Rom 2:14 does not suggest that Gentiles are “under the law”, despite having a knowledge of the truth written on their hearts).

ii) WE ARE NOT GOVERNED BY, NOR LIVE BY, THE LAW:

Paul insists that *Christian living* is *neither* directed or governed by the Law, but rather by the “law of Faith” (Rom 3:27, 8:1), or as being “fulfilled in us by the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4, 13:8-9), or as being a matter of “righteousness, peace and joy in the Spirit” rather than a matter of law compliance (Rom 14:7).

iii) THE LAW DOES TESTIFY TO GOD'S WORK IN THE GOSPEL:

Paul does continue to view the Law as a “witness” or “testimony” to God's work. Paul cites the Law along with the Prophets as offering a testimony/witness to the Gospel of Jesus (Rom 3:21, 10:5-9, 15:8-12, 16:25-26). The Law also fulfills the purpose of holding Jewish believers (and by extension the world) accountable to God, testifying to their sin. The Law testifies to human sin (Rom 5:20-21) and prepares the way for the reception of Grace.

Paul sometimes seems to view the Law as a kind of wisdom testifying to the shape of creation and God's character, and therefore as something that may inform our reflection upon Godly living (Deut 4:6, Rom 15:4). Yet even this positive view of the Law is seriously muted by Paul's reflection that one's delight in God's law will ultimately turn to wretched despair (Rom 7:24-25) on account of the weakness of human flesh.

For more see Brian S. Rosner's “Paul and The Law: keeping the commandments of God”, and Lionel Windsor's review of the book [here](#) (the above draws from these two resources).