



Letter to an Israelite concerning LAW & GRACE



Here is Part 2 of a letter I wrote years ago to a man who, though he had no discernible Jewish heritage, claimed to be a natural-born Israelite. Because we are about to enter into chapter 11 in the Romans Series, I thought it would be an appropriate time to share this respectful though heated exchange concerning law, grace, and the future of Israel. I opened last week with the man's letter to me, and proceeded to give you Part 1 of my answer. As a refresher, here is the man's letter again, and Part 2 of my response. As always, may God bless your reading. I will be back into the Romans Series next week! —MZ

Dear Martin,
I settled back on Friday evening to enjoy your latest newsletter, but found myself very saddened instead. I enjoyed it like a toothache. I think I must have cried myself to sleep that night after reading it. It appears to me that you have never really read through all

of the law of God, much less studied it, before presuming to chop it into firewood for burning.

The first page was really atrocious! Do you really feel that God is/was so unjust as to subject those who sin in ignorance to capital punishment? The strident tone made it seem clear that you were accusing its author, God Himself, of sin and unrighteousness. Mr. Zender, Sir, the Bible does not teach what you accused God of doing. Numbers 15:25 says, "It shall be forgiven them, for it is ignorance..." Please see all of verses 24 through 36.

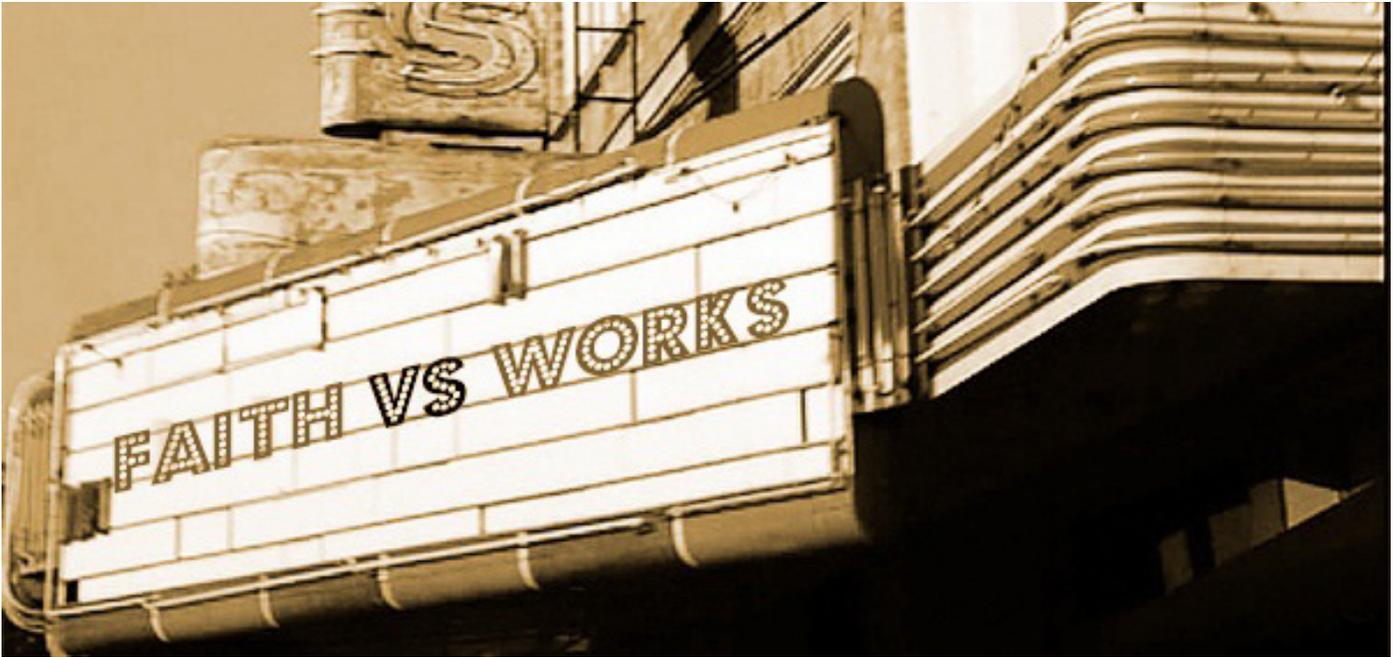
As I started reading, I thought, "I'll bet he doesn't mention or even consider verses from the Gospels which contradict his argument." Sorry to say, I guessed right. To use your own reasoning, Matthew 5:17-19 does not need to be explained, only believed.

I believe that, in some sense the law continues for the Christian today, and in some sense it does not. Truth is seldom found at the extremes. Just as it is not true to say that the law saves us, the other extreme which says the law of God is totally done away is also very untrue. The key is to understand what that continuing purpose is for us today. Important to understand is that God's law was not to be abolished for the Christian, but instead to be written on our hearts and put into practice. Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8:10 tie this to the New Covenant, so it is something which has begun to take place during this present "Pentecostal Age," not just in a future age.

Sorry for the tone of this letter, but I cannot hide my disappointment with your latest writing. In my opinion, it seemed poorly researched, outright false on page one, disparaging to God's righteousness, and one-sided in its view of this subject in the New Testament.

—I am an Israelite

Dear Israelite,
I did not dodge Matthew 5:17-19. It's just that eight pages of my newsletter accommodate only so much explanation. With this question, you



have forced this newsletter into a tremendously broad vein of truth. The following cannot be a play-by-play analysis, but only a highlight film.

Rather than reprint the entire context of Matthew 5:17-19, I will play excerpts from it against statements from Paul. I believe that you will find these statements as contrastive as can be—

Jesus: I came not to demolish [the law], but to fulfill [it].

Paul: Yet now, apart from law, a righteousness of God is manifest (Romans 3:21).

Jesus: Till heaven and earth should be passing by, one iota (the smallest Hebrew letter) or one serif (the small projection which distinguishes Hebrew letters) may by no means be passing by from the law till all should be occurring.

Paul: Yet now we were exempted from the law (Romans 7:6).

Jesus: Yet whoever should be doing and teaching them (the precepts of the law), he shall be called great in the kingdom of the heavens.

Paul: You were put to death to the law through the body of Christ (Romans 7:4).

Jesus: Whosoever, then, should be annulling one of the least of these precepts, and should be teaching men thus, the least in the kingdom of the heavens shall he be called.

Paul: We are reckoning a man to be justified by faith apart from works of law (Romans 3:28).

Now we're getting to the crux of a long-running theological argument: Is the law done away with, or isn't it? As usual, Paul throws a wrench into everything. In these verses, Paul seems to be undoing everything Jesus said. He even seems to be pitting our Lord against Himself. In the second to last example, we have believers being put to death to the law through the same Christ Who forbade His followers to annul it.

“I disagree with you that truth is ‘seldom found at the extremes.’ Truth *lives* at the extremes.”

When we try to reconcile these statements, we end up making confusing statements like the one you made on page one of your letter: “In some sense the law continues for the Christian today, and in some sense it does not.”

I disagree with you that truth is “seldom found at the extremes.” Truth *lives* at the extremes.

Here's the answer to the argument: *the statements quoted above are not supposed to be reconciled.*

TREMENDOUS DIFFERENCES

There are tremendous differences between what are known in the Scriptures as “the evangel of the Circumci-

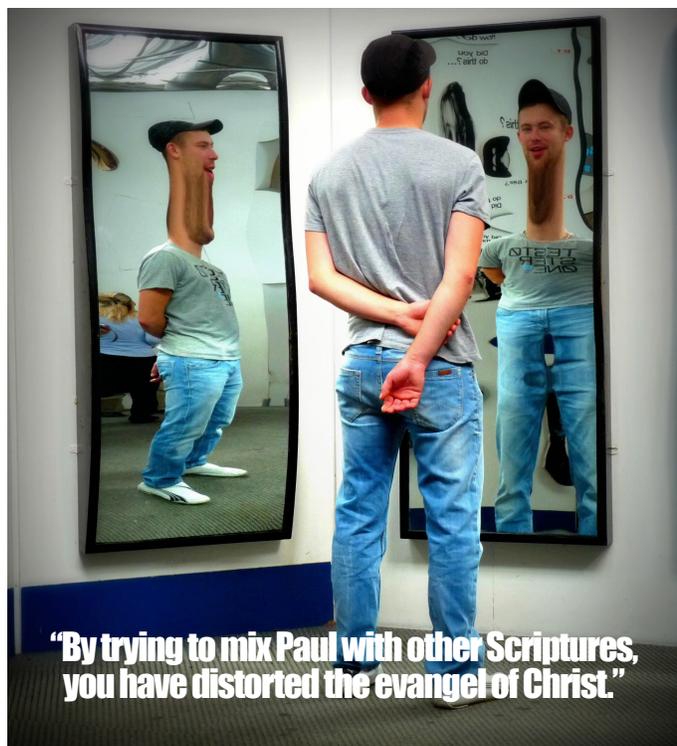
sion” and “the evangel of the Uncircumcision” (Galatians 2:7). This is not the same evangel (“gospel”) going two different directions. No, these are two different evangels (different “good newses”), one going to Israel via Peter, and one going to non-Israelites (and to those of the chosen nation who could hear it), via Paul. Peter did not pass the baton of the Circumcision evangel to Paul, as is popularly supposed.

Paul states in Galatians 1:12 that he did not accept his particular good news “from a human.” Obviously, then, he did not receive it from Peter. This, along with the fact that Paul had to explain his evangel to Peter (Galatians 2:1-2), demolishes the idea that Paul dispensed the evangel of the Circumcision. “Nor was I taught it,” Paul declares, “but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12).

Understand the differences between these two evangels, and many so-called contradictions in the Bible will disappear. Scriptures that wax fragrant in one place smell like fish elsewhere. Kept where they belong, all Scripture satisfies the soul.

The differences between these evangels lie at the heart of our argument about law. In failing to understand these differences, you continue under the false assumption that the words our earth-bound Lord spoke to Israel must be reconciled with those the risen Christ gave to the nations via Paul. Instead of “correctly cutting the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15),” you have tried to fix it.

Let no man join what God has put asunder.



You wrote: “In some sense the law continues for the Christian today, and in some sense it does not.” No, my friend. Law and grace do not and cannot mix. By trying to make the grace of Paul “fit” into the law of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Hebrews, James and the rest, you have created a Frankenstein monster. In short, you have “distorted the evangel of Christ” (Galatians 1:6-7).

THE EVANGEL OF THE CIRCUMCISION

When Christ was on earth, He was “the Servant of the Circumcision, for the sake of the truth of God, to confirm the patriarchal promises” (Romans 15:8). Jesus Himself said, “I was not commissioned except for the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). The Circumcision, obviously, are your brethren according to flesh. The patriarchal promises include the promise God made to your forefather, Abraham. This promise concerns Abraham’s descendants (which includes yourself) becoming a channel of blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3). Later, the good news that these promises would be fulfilled through Jesus Christ, the Messiah, became known as “the evangel (“gospel,” or “good news”) of the Circumcision” (Galatians 2:7).

IT CONCERNS THE EARTH

Only an Israelite—or one closely associated with the chosen nation—would have understood the evangel of the Circumcision. Not only was Israel the sole recipient of Circumcision, but she was the only nation selected to mediate between God and other nations. Under the headship of Messiah, she would teach the other nations about God during a glorious, thousand-year kingdom (Revelation 20:4) on a restored earth (Acts 3:21; Ezekiel 34:27), when the law would finally go forth with power (Micah 4:2). After our Lord ascended to heaven following His rejection, death and resurrection, Peter became the caretaker of this evangel.

Again, the promises and prophecies from God to Israel concerned the earth. The “kingdom of the heavens” Jesus constantly referred to was heavenly in character, (it was *of* the heavens), but it was located on the earth (Matthew 5:5). Even the holy City, new Jerusalem would not be in heaven, but would descend out of it (Revelation 21:2), to earth. If you had asked Peter, after Christ’s resurrection, “What do you think heaven is going to be like?” he might have answered, “I’ve never really thought about it.” Why would he? Peter’s heart’s desire was to sit on a throne and

judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:27-28). In heaven? No. “Thou dost also make them a kingdom and a priesthood for our God, and they shall be reigning on the earth” (Revelation 5:10). No human being had ever heard of “going to heaven” until Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians.

LIMITED AND LOCAL

Up until now, we have dealt exclusively with your expectation, and that of your brethren according to flesh, who are Israelites. I think you have forgotten that the Mosaic law (and the evangel of the Circumcision) was given only to your nation and its proselytes. It was not given to anyone removed from the sphere of Judaism. Paul says in Romans 2:14 that the nations (understood in this context to mean non-Israelites) “have no law.” You are trying to include everyone under a set of decrees that was given exclusively to members of your race. As the law never came to non-Israelites, it certainly cannot continue with them. I am not claiming that the law is totally done away for you and those of your race who embrace the evangel of the Circumcision. What I am claiming is that the law does not even exist for those among the nations to whom it never came.

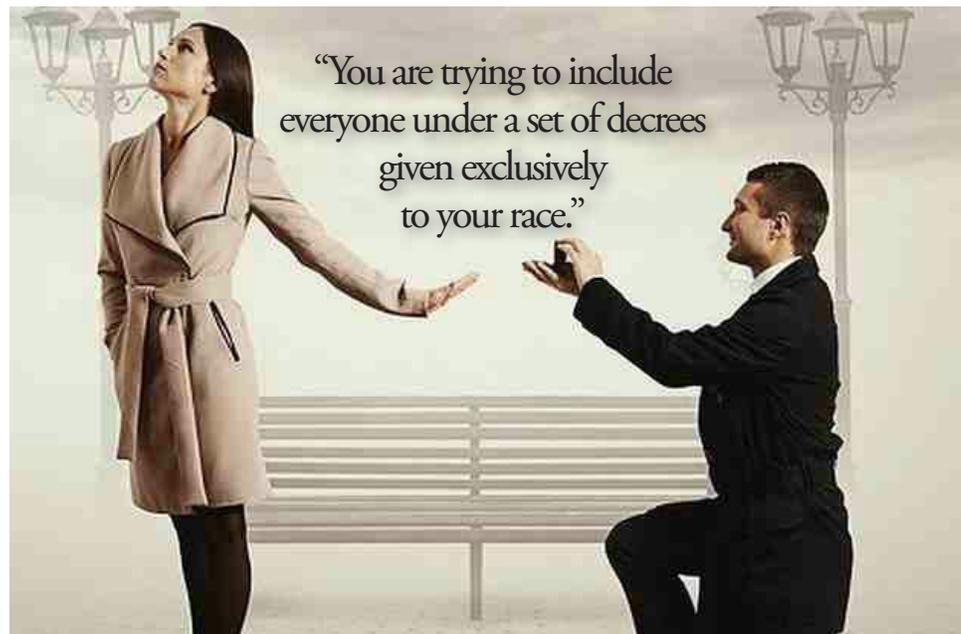
The Mosaic law is not the foundation of God’s dealing with humanity as a whole. The law was a limited, local, and national demonstration for one nation (Israel) and one land (from Dan to Beersheba) and one religion (Judaism). It was not designed for all human beings in every land and every nation. For these, God had a completely different program in mind, with a completely different good news (“gospel,” or “evangel”) to go with it. We will be looking into that evangel shortly.

ONE BOMB AT A TIME

Jesus Christ’s focus during the days of His flesh was purposely narrow. As our Lord ministered to His brethren concerning the earthly kingdom, none could have dreamed of the new evangel He would announce after His ascension

among those who had never heard of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This new evangel would not flower until about thirty years later, when the apostate nation had been temporarily cast away (Acts 28:26-28, Romans 11:15).

Our Lord’s kin couldn’t even understand their own call to shepherd the earthbound (Genesis 12:3), let alone a ministry among celestial beings where they would lose their fleshly advantage (Ephesians 3:6). Jesus said to Nicodemus: “If I told you of the terrestrial and you are not believing, how shall you be believing if I should be telling you of the celestial?” (John 3:12).



While He was on earth, our Lord did not tell Nicodemus, or anyone else, about the celestial inhabitants who, just as much as the earthly ones, needed reconciled to God (Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:20). These deeper, more radical counsels would emerge later with the proclamation of the new evangel, to become known as “the evangel of the Uncircumcision” (Galatians 2:7).

Under our Lord’s earthly ministry, non-Israelites could only receive the scraps that fell from the table of the chosen nation (Matthew 15:27). At that time, non-Israelites were “apart from Christ, being alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and guests of the promise covenants, having no expectation, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). This was before the calling of Saul/Paul.

ENTER A NEW EVANGEL

Things began to change when a bloodthirsty Pharisee named Saul encountered Christ on the road to Damas-

cus (Acts, chapter nine), outside the land of Israel. The risen Lord was now apprehending a messenger who would disclose His deepest counsels, including heretofore unimagined aspects of the cross (Colossians 1:20) and unheard-of realms of ministry (Ephesians 2:6). This unworthy (renamed Paul) was given secrets (1 Corinthians 4:1, Ephesians 3:3, Colossians 1:27) that were, until that time, concealed in God (Ephesians 3:8-9). That's right. You will find no hint of this ministry in either the Old Testament, or in the four gospel accounts, or in the book of Acts, or from Hebrews on to the end of the Bible.

(Why did Christ choose Saul? Christ's message through Saul/Paul was to be one of utter grace: no law, no baptism, no Sabbath-keeping, no covenants. Grace of such novel proportions shined brightest among the vile. And so that is where it first went. As with Saul, this message changed those it engulfed.)

This new evangel, while not displacing the Circumcision evangel (important to note), would eclipse it in sphere and in glory. While God-fearing Israelites hoped for forgiveness (Acts 5:31), a new birth (John 3:7), and an earthly inheritance (Matthew 5:5), tree-worshipping sodomites were encountering justification (Romans 4:5), a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), and every spiritual blessing among the celestials (Ephesians 1:3). Do you see problems arising with Israel? Me, too.



Grace declares
the vile to be a
new creation.

SCRATCHING HEADS, THROWING ROCKS

So radical were the truths Paul dispensed among non-Israelites that not even Peter could fully grasp them. In 2 Peter 3:16, the disciple of our Lord writes that there are, in Paul's epistles, "some things hard to apprehend." Those Israelites who couldn't write, threw rocks.

Because this evangel (Paul boldly calls it "*my* evangel"—Romans 2:16) operated apart from their law, apart from their covenants, apart from their baptisms, apart from their circumcisions and (this really irked them) apart from their mediation, most Israelites (believing Israelites, mind you) hated it. Some,

like you, denied that it even existed. Most vented their frustrations upon the lonely caretaker of this evangel: Paul. Again, while this new evangel did not displace the evangel of the Circumcision, it clashed with it on nearly every point. And it still does today. Like the disputes in the first century churches, most modern theological arguments stem from a failure to distinguish between these two good newses.

Take Paul's letters out of the Bible, let the book of Acts snap up against the book of Hebrews, and you have a complete, smooth, and consistent revelation of God's counsels for the earth, via the priesthood and kingship of Israel. Paul is a pause in God's program with the chosen nation. (Even Paul's name, in the Greek, means "pause.") For the Scriptures to make sense, Paul's writings must be considered a separate revelation.

SPEAK FOR THY SELF

You quote Jeremiah, chapter 31 and Hebrews, chapter 8 to prove that "God's law was not to be abolished for the Christian, but instead to be written on our hearts and put into practice." Again, the law cannot be abolished among people to whom it never came. When you say "the Christian" and "our hearts," you must be speaking for yourself and your fellow Israelites. Not only are these passages excerpted from writings given to your brethren (Jeremiah and Hebrews), but you are the only nation on the face of the earth to be given God's law (Romans 2:14,17-18; 9:4). The law of God was never to be written on the hearts of any but Israelites. God deals with the Uncircumcision apart from law (Romans 3:21). Those who receive Paul's evangel are "exempted from" the law (Romans 7:6), most having never received it in the first place. Why would anyone "put into practice" something he is exempted from?



Again, I am not discarding God's promises to you. The key here is: *to you*. One of the biggest mistakes believers make today is spiritualizing (which is only a fancy word for disbelieving) God's literal promises to literal Israelites concerning a literal kingdom. Because they don't see this kingdom literally happening, they either pretend that it's spiritually happening ("preterism") or suppose that it won't happen at all ("amillennialism").

Because blessings come now apart from Israel (Romans 11:15), those who spiritualize Scripture imagine that it will always be so. If they could grasp the difference between the evangel of the Circumcision and that of the Uncircumcision, they would not try to force so many of God's promises onto peoples and times where they do not and cannot belong.

IN CLOSING

The evangel of the Uncircumcision is not limited to non-Israelites. Rather, it calls together into one body those chosen to hear it (Ephesians 1:4), who lose their national distinctions (Galatians 3:28) under the headship of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). This evangel must be distinguished from that of the Circumcision, which, even in the thousand years (Matthew 19:28), and in the new earth (Revelation 21:1), continues to recognize Israelites (Revelation 21:12).

You are a believer in Jesus. God has already chosen you long ago for one evangel or the other. Either you are a part of the bride of the Lambkin (John 3:29; Revelation 21:9), or you belong to the body of Christ (Colossians 1:24). You cannot be both, any more than a bride can simultaneously be a bridegroom. Your zealotry for law, your national pride, and your puzzlement over Paul do seem to tie you to the former. But only God knows. Paul invites you to greater graces.

Sincerely, Martin Zender

To everyone else who is reading: *Have the words and actions of our Lord on earth sometimes disquieted rather than comforted you? Our Israelite friend is comforted by these words, yet puzzled by Paul. Perhaps it has been the opposite for you. Does the gospel of God's lavish grace you read of in Romans, chapters three through eight, thrill you? Do these radical doctrines suit your disposition? Does the idea of righteousness apart from law cause your spirit to soar? Does the earth seem a foreign place to your feet? Yes! But how often has your spirit been shipwrecked when trying to make this gospel fit with the rigid severity of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Hebrews, James and Revelation? Just*

when you thought you were saved for good, a foreign gospel pummeled your peace.

All Scriptures were written for us, but not all of them were written to us. The Jesus Who walked the earth will not be disappointed if you now turn to hear His grand, celestial secrets, whispered from heaven to an unworthy sinner named Saul. —MZ



Dear Martin,

Looks like Christ motivated you this week!
You have changed my life by heralding the truth
with your quirky sense of humor and view of it.

Be encouraged—He is coming soon. Your
good work is not for naught.

I think Jesus Christ is sitting on His throne
at the right hand of God, probably having some
high spirited beverage and enjoying the message
He is inspiring through your pen and voice.

Look up, from whence He comes!

As always,
MT