

Hey, listen to this, especially if you're still raising kids or influencing grandchildren or teaching a youth group. If there's one thing that has broadly infected so many Christians in America, it's a misunderstanding of the role of the Law of Moses in the Christian's life and how to best think about obedience to God!

Here's the deal. Every person is simply unable to keep the Law of Moses. God knows that! In fact, the Law of Moses does perform a very important function—it points every person to the need for a Savior because every person falls short. Every person except Jesus, that is. Jesus's words are found in Matthew 5:17, where He teaches us that He came to fulfill the Law. And He did just that! And aren't we deeply grateful for that? Of course that's true, because His sinless life, His death, and His resurrection are exactly what are needed for us to be pardoned for our sins! That's God's gift of grace, in action!

Still, my experience in teaching Christian students at the university level reveals that many have a bit of a Biblically-sketchy approach that seems in turn to reflect how many modern Christians think—that is, while they may report that grace is the key to Christianity, they still pretty much try to straddle law and grace. They do this by first working diligently to obey the Law as they see it, essentially to gain God's approval, then asking for a teeny-weeny bit of that essential grace where they do perceive themselves to fall short. And they often seem more concerned about non-Christians' moral failings than they are about their lack of faith in Jesus. And it's no big surprise that few perceive that as much grace is needed for them as the abortionist needs or the bank robber needs—after all, we Christians are “better” than that!

In fact, when you start poking around on it, a key number of these young Christians innately view that the whole of the Old Testament narrative is underpinned and directed by the Law of Moses. So, many are often startled to truly realize that the Law was given to Moses years, even centuries, after many familiar, *faithful* Old Testament people were on the scene. Yes, from Enoch to Noah to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, God's giving of the law of Moses was still far into the future! You know Hebrews 11—what's often called the “Hall of Faith” chapter in the New Testament—well, that chapter profiles many of these folks very favorably. But it also includes some others who were on the scene *after* the Law of Moses was given. Indeed, in that faith chapter, Moses himself was called out for his faith in several Old Testament events, even regarding happenings before Moses himself was given the Law for the Israelites.

This podcast episode is one in a series about Abraham, a man of great faith in God! No one in the Old Testament was blessed more by God than Abraham, including God's covenant of mind-boggling reach! Indeed, Abraham provides an excellent story of thriving with our God of relationship, our God who values faith, that faith that responds in an “occupying” fashion—all before the Law of Moses was given!

Here's how the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament accounted for Abraham's faith in three short sentences. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”

Now this quote from Hebrews 11:8-10 is from the English Standard Version (ESV) and the editors of the ESV labeled the start of Hebrews 11 section with these words: “By Faith.” Similarly, the New International Version (NIV) labelled the start of Hebrews 11 as “Faith in Action.” The New American Standard version (NASB) labelled it as “The Triumphs of Faith.” Indeed, Christians themselves can *only* triumph for eternity by responding to God's gift of grace via faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). That's *your* personal triumph... “by faith!”

Let me ask you a direct question. Have seen a section of the New Testament that could be labelled, “The Triumphs of Moses' Law”? Well, hardly, because no eternal triumphs come from every person's deficient compliance with the Law of Moses. Hey, if the Law of Moses could provide the truly necessary triumphs for humanity, *then the Cross of Christ was simply not needed!* That's right, if the Law of Moses was sufficient, then Jesus's sacrifice on the Cross was unnecessary, superfluous!

But instead of the NIV's "Faith in Action" label, how about considering the label "Law in Action"? Well, ironically, a couple of passages in the New Testament could be labelled "Law in Action," for example, when the Pharisees were busy condemning others, even trying to trap Jesus Himself, while they were falling short of the very Law they were supposedly stewarding for God.

But in a very weird but profound sort of way, such Pharisees and others like them were indeed fulfilling Bible *truth*, because the Bible teaches that law increases sin! (Yes, the Bible says that law increases sin! See Romans 5:20, Romans 7:5, and 1 Corinthians 15:56.) Now, that's not the ordinary message you hear in church, is it? But that doesn't make it any less true and wonderfully applicable to our lives! The extraordinary, liberating truth that was crafted only through Jesus's death and resurrection is that born-again Christians are not under the Law, they are under grace! (Romans 6:14) Now, that's...amazing...grace!

So, in this context, what does Abraham "do" for us—for you and for me—in this day and age? Well, Abraham also wasn't "under the Law" of Moses either, again, because that Law hadn't yet been given by God. But that didn't stop Abraham from being lauded by the Word of God for his *obedience*! Hey, the first ten words of Hebrews 11:8 in the ESV are these: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go..."

What? Did that say "obedience"? Isn't "obedience" all about following the letter of the Law of Moses and rule-following under civil authorities? Well, yes, but God's emphasis is faith-focus! That's because we are destined to fail in keeping the Law of Moses, but we definitely can succeed by *obeying* God by *faith*—just like Abraham did! That's what the report in the New Testament Bible verse means when it says, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go..." The Old Testament rendering of that story says that Abraham "went" "as the Lord had told him," leaving behind everything familiar to him! In this way, Abraham started actually "occupying" the promises of God—yes, obeying by faith, by acting faithfully and holding fast onto God's promises! Abraham is certainly held up by Scripture—in the Old Testament *and* the New Testament—as a shining example of an "occupying" faith in God's actions and promises!

You see, God is like a landlord who has set up a perfect dwelling, say, in the form of a completed action that requires a faith response—like "Christ and Him crucified"—or in the form of a promise—like "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Our response is to be a great tenant in such dwellings, moving in faith to occupy the promises made! That's essentially what Abraham did—he occupied God's promises by leaving his relatives, leaving his homeland, embracing the covenant with God, and offering up his son Isaac. All these were essentially *obedience*, they are responses *in faith*, full-fledged *occupyings* of the promises offered by God.

And here's the big-picture point for the Christian. Full obedience to the Law of Moses is a task that can easily become an foreboding drudgery, something necessary for the willing but something that can never be correctly fulfilled. But obedience to a promise from God—now that's something to occupy! This...*this* is the life of the Christian: obediently occupying God's promises by faith, joyfully expecting the fullness of what God has for His child of the covenant.

This "*occupying obedience*" is one incredible example that Abraham has modeled for us as Christians. Abraham, too, like born-again believers today, was not under the Law, so he could look at the walk of his ancestor Enoch and the faith of his ancestor Noah and, in so doing, recognize that the promises of God are the wonderful havens for us to occupy obediently, joyfully, expectantly! And this is one key reason why the writer of the book of Hebrews wrote chapter 11, specifically for his Jewish Christian audience—to highlight key examples of occupying obedience in faith from Old Testament characters, whether they occupied the promises of God before or after the Law of Moses was given!

Like Abraham, this is very personalized to us, in every nook and cranny of our lives—where we work, who we see, who or what we steward. God gives us amazing promises, and, our occupying, joyful obedience to those promises is exactly what our loving Father rejoices in. How amazing! How's your "occupying" ...?

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. So, the life of a born-again Christian “not under the law but under grace,” as the Word of God teaches. How is that manifested in your everyday life? Be specific.
  
2. As a Christian, you have responded to the unique action taken by Jesus on the Cross...hallelujah! How are you responding to the other specific promises God has made to believers in the New Testament? Give specifics.
  
3. Abraham waited years to father a child—a gift he clearly needed to help fulfill his covenant with God. Do you believe God has promised you something specific to your life, but you have grown discouraged “occupying” that promise by faith over a lingering period of time? Perhaps because that promise appears to not be answered? Describe how “occupying” works in your life.