

We're crafting a series of episodes about limits...and this particular episode about limits is exceedingly relevant to our everyday lives—from our families to our neighborhoods to our workplaces. To get started today, let's first reach back to a time long ago...

Abraham was a man called out in relationship to God and was also called physically away from his family. You see, Abraham was a man of faith in God...*but he also listened to the voice of God!* In fact, he listened to God very well many times. That's especially interesting and even defining for the era that he lived in—and I'm going to label Abraham's era in a key way: the "After the Fall...Before the Law" era. That's right: *After the Fall...Before the Law.*

Here's the point: even after the Fall, people who sin can be very faithful and listen closely to the voice of God! Abraham did! But Abraham also evidenced *a pattern of intentional actions by faith and by listening.* Yeah, that's a combination of, first, faith in God...also, listening to God...and then taking intentional action!

And this point is very important, too: in the revealed Scriptures, Abraham enjoyed seemingly few limits—after all, the Law had not yet been given. Yeah, Abraham enjoyed a freedom under the umbrella of following God obediently. Happily, however, God did *instruct* Abraham, including leaving his family behind and being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. All that was an element in Abraham's hearing the voice of God—and then Abraham acting in obedience to those hearings. Yeah, the voice of God is key.

But wait: Abraham's hearing and obeying the voice of God was not limiting or confining—it was part of a process of liberating Abraham and God leading him to privileged position in the heart of God's purposes. Abraham exercising of his faith and trust fostered his happily obedient and fruitful listening to the ultimate manifestation of God's best!

So, when embracing a faith-relationship with God, there are seemingly few limits imposed upon God-followers and this is key: obedience to God's voice and direction. In Abraham's life, that included "After the Fall, Before the Law"—a wide-angled, joyful opportunity to follow God's newly expanded opportunities in obedience. And, yes, along those lines, God directed Abraham away from his family—that's important because family loyalties and complexities are often the most restrictive, most limiting influences on people's lives that can keep them from *hearing* God's voice and *obeying* God's voice.

So, relationally, God structured it as just the two of them: God and Abraham...with no one in-between. Yeah, that's just like Jesus and His sheep! Here's Jesus speaking in John 10:27 (ESV): "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Right, no mediator in between Jesus and each of His disciples *hearing His voice!* Yes, 1 Timothy 2:5 says *there is only one mediator between God and each person: Jesus!*

But back up a minute, you might be saying, how about the point about Abraham living before the Law...what precipitated the giving of the Mosaic Law? Well, here's the story: after 400 years of being limited by slavery under Pharaoh, the Israelites were freed by the hand of God through Moses.

And just after God's amazing miracles and deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea, they immediately did not like God's provision of daily manna for them...yes, they complained...and they actually desired to go back to slavery by Egypt. Hard to believe, but they desired to go back under the quite comprehensive limits of abject slavery under Pharaoh! But the defining, shattering issue that loomed at this point in time was this: *crucially, the Israelites didn't listen to the voice of God.* And you know what? This was a key point in all history: *the Israelites who had been liberated from Egypt didn't listen to the voice of God!* Yet God had a responsive plan to their choice to not listen to Him in His back pocket for that—a whole different plan for the limits that His people needed: the Mosaic Law, ultimately the 613 laws in the Old Testament.

Here's the stunning point: *the Mosaic Law was never the go-to ideal for the Israelites.* Yes—as jarring as that may sound—*the Law of Moses was not the ideal...the Mosaic Law was not Plan A for the Israelites.* God only gave the Law when the Israelites refused to listen to the voice of God. Do you find that hard to believe? Well, here's what Jeremiah wrote centuries after the Red Sea episode (Jeremiah 11:6-8)...

“And the Lord said to [Jeremiah], ‘Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. Therefore I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.’” ...Whoa. Let’s break that passage that shocks modern legalists down into its key points...

1. God warned the forefathers of Jews in the Promised-Land of Israel and Judah to obey His voice.
2. But the Holy Spirit reported through Jeremiah that those Israelite forefathers liberated from Egypt did not then obey God’s voice...and they did not “incline their ear” to even try to hear His voice.
3. And those Israelites liberated from Egypt walked in the stubbornness of evil hearts.
4. *Therefore*, God gave the Israelites the Mosaic Law, yes, “all the words of the covenant.”
5. Even so, the Israelites did not do the words of the Mosaic Law covenant, either then or now. That’s right, Jews did not keep the Law, from the giving of the Ten Commandments until this very day!

Imagine that: God first and preeminently directed His people to listen to and obey *His voice!* That meant the Law was not needed for Abraham to have right relationship to God—and likewise, at the outset of Abraham’s descendants’ liberation from Egypt, the Law was not positioned as needed then either. That’s right, *the Mosaic Law was never the ideal plan for the Israelites...the ideal was listening to and obeying the voice of God.* But the Law subsequently given by God was designed to be so unkeepable such that the Israelites would or should recognize their need for a Savior...and thus seek after God and His voice!

And so, this Law of Moses is the yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1)—even unto this day—the limit being that no one can keep the Law—no one, that is, *except for Christ Himself.* Wow, talk about a spiritual slavery within the Mosaic Law structure that was precipitated by the un-listening Israelites—yes, the slavery of running on a “law-treadmill” where freedom never arrives and failure never stops! *But wait, God did provide a Way* to get off that treadmill...to step off into God’s grace by faith in Christ and Him crucified!

Yes, as to the Mosaic Law, its limits were made obsolete at the Cross through Christ’s fulfilling of the Law and His blood sacrifice on our behalf: as the Bible reports, born-again believers are no longer under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14) Yes, it’s this old covenant that Jesus makes obsolete (Hebrews 8:13)!

Indeed, the law increases sin (Romans 5:20)—but Jesus fulfilled the Law on our behalf! Yes, believers are no longer under the yoke of slavery, the hard yoke of the Law. Instead, *we are under the yoke of Jesus that is easy* (Matthew 11:30)! And God’s salvific grace as well as His sustaining grace can be fully received *without the manufactured limits of every religious system or those limiting theologies dreamed up by man!*

So. Let’s recapture a snapshot of God’s amazing plan of redemption. Abraham lived by faith—After the Fall, Before the Law. Then, since the time of the giving of the Law, Jews have lived under the Law that was given *in order for them to come to their senses and seek God’s voice.* But *then...*the Cross! Now, for 2,000 years, Jew and Gentiles alike have been eligible to live under God’s grace found only in Christ—and when the invitation is accepted, each has unlimited access to God. And God’s targeted, sacrificial love knows no salvific limit: 1 Timothy 2:4 says, “God our Savior desires all people to be saved.” Yes, we see Jesus hung out with the deplorables of His time and place, even while the Pharisees wanted to limit His miracles...His associations...His voice! Yes, that’s arrogant man attempting to limit the God of the Universe!

And there’s this: Jesus literally delegated His authority to His followers to love everyone...to proclaim the Gospel of grace to every nation...to make disciples of all those deplorables. Hey, it was *literally the voice of God* commanding His disciples to live out the Great Commission—with no limits as to whom or where or when. But for 2,000 years, many millions have limited that Voice from directing their actions. And many routinely count trying to keep the unkeepable Law as the key purpose of their religious construct—this when God says His people are not under the law but under grace. ...*Hey, are you limiting God in your life?*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Did it perhaps surprise you to find that the Mosaic Law was a “Plan B” for the Israelites, that God just preeminently wanted a relationship of His people hearing and responding to His voice? Why is this truth not taught extensively in Christian churches, when in fact, true believers quite similarly “are not under the law but under grace?” Discuss.
  
2. Jesus the Good Shepherd said, “My sheep know my voice.” Do you find that most Christians believe that or actually believe and teach against that? How about you as a believer, do you know His voice? Discuss.
  
3. Upon reflection, are you perhaps limiting God and His voice in your life due to your theology, your belief set, your experiences? What are your fruits? Discuss.