Fundamental Beliefs
Church of God, a Worldwide Association

Sin and God’s Law
Handouts/Study Material

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Sin is the transgression of the law of God, which is spiritual, perfect, holy, just and good. God's law is based upon the two great principles of love toward God and love toward neighbor. The Ten Commandments expound these foundational principles of God's law of love. Breaking any part of God's law brings upon a person the penalty of death. Those who love God and seek eternal life will strive to keep God's commandments. Obedience to God's law produces happiness and peace of mind. Disobedience to God's law produces misery and strife and ultimately eternal death.


God created humankind to become members of His family. Human beings were created to inherit immortality and live in a harmonious relationship with Him and each other for eternity (Hebrews 2:6-13). In order to become members of God's family, we must share His thoughts, agree with His approach, embrace His way of life, appreciate and uphold His values as expressed by His law (Philippians 2:5-13). In God's written revelation to mankind, the Holy Scriptures, He reveals this needed knowledge to us through His laws and teachings (II Timothy 3:15-17). This forms the foundation and basis for the everlasting relationship God desires to have with us. Therefore, it is imperative that anyone who seeks this ultimate relationship with God must heed the directives of God's law as revealed in His Word.

Sin is defined as the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). It was introduced to humanity from the beginning in the Garden of Eden. Satan lied to Adam and Eve concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:4; John 8:44). Contrary to Satan's statement, Adam and Eve did die. As their descendants, we all share the common condition of mortality (Hebrews 9:27). Sin's universal presence in all humans (Romans 3:23) is connected to death and the withholding of God's gift, eternal life (Romans 6:23).

The insidious nature of sin and death is demonstrated by our tendency to disregard and disobey God's law (Romans 8:7). We deceive ourselves into departing from God's perfect guidelines (Jeremiah 17:9; Jeremiah 10:23). The influence of Satan is unmistakable in human lives, both directly (Ephesians 2:1-3), and indirectly through those he deceives (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Satan became the adversary of God through his own rebellion, and has covertly enlisted the human race in his battle, since all sin, in addition to its effect on humans, is by definition against God (Genesis 39:9; Psalm 51:4).

Violating any of God's instructions is sin (1 John 5:17), but failure to do what we know is right is also defined as sinful (James 4:17) or violate one's conscience (Romans 14:23). Sin is an enslaving power from which we need ransom and release (Romans 7:23-25). We are powerless to bring about this ransom on our own (I Peter 1:18-19). Since sin in any form brings about alienation from God (Isaiah 59:1-3; Ephesians 4:17-19) and eventual death, no amount of obedience following such conduct can reverse its effect, even though obedience is expected. Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ can procure our ransom from sin (Hebrews 2:14-15) and reconcile us to God. Through grace, which is the undeserved forgiveness of sin (Romans 3:24), a Christian finds freedom in
obeying God's law (James 1:21-25). Rather than being enslaved to sin by disobedience, we serve God by obedience and walk the path God intends to lead us to eternal life in His Kingdom by His generous and undeserved gift (Romans 6:16-23).

When one returns to a life of sin after being redeemed, it is a very serious matter in the sight of God (II Peter 2:20-22). However, the only sin that cannot be forgiven is the willful rejection of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, by which forgiveness of sin is made possible (Hebrews 6:4-6). This sin is described by Christ as "blasphemy against the spirit" (Matthew 12:31 NKJV), a knowing rejection of the power and authority of God. After every human being has had a full opportunity for salvation, those still unrepentant will be destroyed (Revelation 20:14-15), thus fulfilling the ultimate penalty of sin, the second death.

Each individual is responsible for his own sin (Ezekiel 18:4, 20), but Satan the devil is identified as the deceiver of mankind and the one ultimately responsible for leading humanity into sin (Revelation 12:9; 20:1-3).
Law of Moses

The term law is widely used in scripture and is often inclusive of several different laws. From a practical perspective, the Bible speaks of three types of laws: ceremonial; civil; and moral or spiritual. All law falls under these three general categories. One must take care when studying the Bible. The term “law” may mean: ten commandments; sacrificial law; civil laws; the first five books of the Bible; statutes and judgments; or all of the above. One must study the context before jumping to a conclusion.

The term “law of Moses” is used interchangeably with “law of God (LORD)”; “book of the law”; or simply “law.” It is often used to describe the first five books of the Bible—the Pentateuch or the Torah. The term doesn’t mean that this was Moses’ law as opposed to God’s law. They were one and the same. The law of Moses was the Law of God as given to Israel through Moses. It was written by Moses’ hand (except for the Ten Commandments).

Scriptural References to Law of Moses

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Notes for Acts 15

Luke 2:22  “purification according to the law of Moses”
Luke 24:44  “written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms
John 7:23  “circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken”
Acts 13:39  “not justified by the law of Moses”
Acts 15:5  “commanded them to keep the law of Moses”
Acts 28:23  “out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets”
1 Corinthians 9:9  “written in the law of Moses”

Law in Scripture

Leviticus 6:9  “law of burnt offering”
Leviticus 6:14  “law of meat offering”
Leviticus 14:57  “law of leprosy”
Numbers 5:29  “law of jealousies”
Numbers 6:13  “law of the Nazarite”
Deuteronomy 4:44-45  “And this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel: These are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which Moses spake unto the children of Israel, after they came forth out of Egypt,”
Deuteronomy 31:26  “Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.”
1 Chronicles 16:40  “law of the LORD”
2 Chronicles 31:3  “He appointed also the king’s portion of his substance for the burnt offerings, to wit, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the LORD”
2 Chronicles 34:14  “And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses”

Nehemiah 8:1-2, 8  “And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation . . . So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly”

**Proselytes (Jewish Converts)**

A proselyte is a convert from one religious practice to another. In the OT, this term was applied to a “resident alien.” This individual was circumcised and partook of the religious practices of the Jews. In the NT this term was used of those who converted from Gentile to Judaism. They were required to: (a) give up all heathen practices; (b) give up all heathen associates; (c) be circumcised; (d) enter into covenant to serve the Lord; (e) and observe the law of Moses as Jews.

The Pharisees who converted to Christianity were insistent that no Gentile could become a Christian without first becoming a Jew (proselyte). The primary outward sign of this conversion was circumcision.

**Acts 15 in the Greek**

Acts 15:5  ἠξενεστησαν δὲ τινὲς τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἱρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες λέγοντες ἐστὶ δὲ περιτέμενιν αὐτοὺς παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωσέως.

Comments: Underlined word τε is translated “and” in the King James. It means: “in addition or connected to.” The Pharisees insisted the Gentiles be circumcised and thereby keep the law of Moses. Circumcision was keeping the law.


Comments: A transliteration of this verse would be “We have heard that some people went out from among us without our authorization, and that they have upset you with their talk, unsettling your minds.” The word law isn’t mentioned except in KJV and NKJV. The following translations leave this section out: New American; the American Standard; the New American Standard; the New International Version; the Revised Standard Version; the New Revised Standard Version; and the Jewish New Testament.

- “Further, there is little evidence in Paul’s letters that he thought of himself as leaving Judaism, though he was aware that his opinions could be construed as transgression. Rather, Paul considered himself as part of a new Jewish sect and hoped to convince both fellow Christians and Jews of his vision of redemption. History after Paul has judged Christianity to be different from Judaism. That fact seems undeniable today, but it was hardly evident in the first century. Paul would have objected strenuously against any distinction between his faith and his Judaism, for he continuously preached unity in Christ between Jews and Christians.” (Page xiv of the Introduction).

- “In later tradition, the cultic requirements of conversion [from Gentile to Judaism] were three, as the statement attributed to R. Judah the Prince (fl. 200 C.E.) makes clear: ‘Rabbi says: Just as Israel did not enter the covenant except through three things—through circumcision, through immersion, and through the acceptance of a sacrifice—so it is the same with proselytes.’ (sifre Num. 108).” (Page 98).

- “Although ‘works of the law’ is a direct translation of the Hebrew Ma’ asei ha-torah, Paul is not referring to Torah but to the observance of Jewish ceremonial practices.” (Page 124)

- “Works of the law means the ceremonial Torah, those special ordinances that separate Jews from Gentiles.” (Page 124).

- “This is the ambiguity: when Paul talks about the works of the law, he is talking about the ceremonial laws of Judaism. When he says: ‘By the works of the law shall all [pasa] not be justified’ (Gal. 2:16), he can mean either or both of two things. Although it has most often been taken to mean no one shall be justified by law, it literally says that not by works of law shall all men be justified. So it is possible that Paul means to set up a second possibility for salvation, faith, without denying the validity of the first, Torah or law, for all.” (Page 130).

- “He [Paul] was defending a gentile minority against a majority opinion in Christianity that they all must become Jews before they could be accepted as Christians.” (Page 132).

- “Paul’s private opinions are expressed in Galatians, where he says that the experience of faith overrides the ceremonial Torah by making circumcision unnecessary for anyone.” (Page 190).

- “The issue for Paul is the basis of salvation for the Christian. One cannot become the equal of a Christian by becoming Jewish. It is unnecessary and insufficient to become a Jew because Judaism does not include the faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16). Thus, in Gal. 3:2-5, Paul is opposed to the works of the law and to any attempt to follow the special laws of Judaism, presenting in its place the preaching of faith.” (Page 211).
Paul and the Galatians

- “James D.G. Dunn, ‘Works of the Law, and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10-14).’ . He explicitly translates the term erga nomou as ‘service of the law.’ I think he could have paraphrased it as observance of the ceremonial laws, which is what Dunn actually means. Dunn’s translation is justifiable because it is the context of the discussion rather than the word itself that gives this meaning. Paul is talking to a gentile community about the ceremonial requirements for entrance into Judaism and Jewish Christianity, arguing away the gentile doubt that they are necessary for full membership in their new order.” (Page 333).

Who Are the Galatians?

- There are basically two possibilities. The letter could have been sent to the ethnic Galatians, three Celtic tribes akin to the Gauls, who had invaded and subsequently occupied central Asia Minor in the third century before Christ. This is called the “North Galatian” theory.
- Despite much discussion on the subject, it now seems fairly well established that Paul in his letters usually employed the title of the Roman province to describe an area and its inhabitants, rather than using ethnic or linguistic titles. For Paul, “Galatians” simply means “inhabitants of the Roman province of Galatia.” This was a diverse group, with a gentile heritage and a pagan religious background. It can also be shown that Jewish influence was stronger in this area and that Paul visited the cities here. This is called the “Southern Galatian” theory.

Why Was the Letter Written and When?

- Galatians 5:2 The problem Paul is addressing in Galatia involved the acceptance of circumcision as a necessity for salvation. In a more general way, Paul was arguing the same case that he argued in Acts 15. Is a Gentile required to become a Jew through ceremonial rituals before he can become a Christian? Paul said no and the Council in Jerusalem said no. This did not prevent the Jews from following the ceremonies of Judaism, but it established clearly that this was not a requirement for salvation or a test of Christianity. This was unacceptable to the Judaizing Christians who plagued Paul in Antioch and also in Galatia.
- The book of Galatians was written around the time of the Jerusalem conference (49 A.D.). The temple was still standing in Jerusalem and the vast majority of the Christians were Jews. Some scholars believe the book of Galatians was written before the conference in Jerusalem, but this would make the book one of Paul’s earliest writings. The evidence is a lack of reference to the conference. Surely Paul would have made reference if the conference had already occurred?—This is the argument. Others cannot accept that Galatians was written so early, but that it must have been shortly after the conference—in the early 50s A.D. Neither position can be definitively proven. What can be shown is that the same problem which prompted the Jerusalem conference was at issue in Galatia.
Study of “Fulfill” in Matthew 5:17

35.33 πληρῶ: to provide for by supplying a complete amount - ‘to provide for completely, to supply fully.’

πεπλήρωμαι δεξάμενος παρὰ Ἐπαφροδίτου τὰ παρ᾽ ὑμῶν ‘I have been fully provided for, now that Epaphroditus has brought me your gifts’ Php 4.18. ‘To be fully provided for’ may be expressed as ‘to have all that one needs.’

33.144 πληρῶ: to give the true or complete meaning to something - ‘to give the true meaning to, to provide the real significance of.’

οὐκ ἔλθον καταλύσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι ‘I did not come to destroy but to give true meaning to’ Mt 5.17;

ὁ γὰρ πᾶς νόμος ἐν ἑνὶ λόγῳ πεπληρωται, ἐν τῷ Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πληρήσων σου ὡς σεαυτόν ‘for the whole Law has its true meaning in one expression, Love your neighbor as yourself’ Ga 5.14. In speaking of ‘true meaning,’ it may be useful in some languages to use a phrase meaning ‘real intent’ or ‘real purpose.’

59.37 πληρῶ: (derivative of πλήρης ‘full,’ 59.35) to cause something to become full - ‘to fill.’ ἤν ὅτε ἐπληρώθη ‘when (the net) was full’ Mt 13.48;

ἡχος...ἐπλήρωσεν ὅλον τὸν οἶκον ‘a sound...filled the whole house’ Ac 2.2.

33.199 πληρῶ: πληροφορέω: to relate fully the content of a message - ‘to proclaim, to tell fully, to proclaim completely.’

πληρῶ: πεπληρωκέια τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Ἑρωδίου ‘I have told fully the good news about Christ’ Ro 15.19.

πληροφορέω: ἵνα δι’ ἐμοῦ τὸ κήρυγμα πληροφορηθῇ καὶ ἀκούσωσιν πάντα τὰ ἐθνη ‘so that I was able to proclaim completely the message for all the Gentiles to hear’ 2 Tm 4.17.

4137 πλεροῦ: -- play-ro'-o

from 4134; TDNT - 6:286,867; AV - fulfil 51, fill 19, be full 7, complete 2, end 2, misc 9; GK - 4444 \{ πληρῶ \}

1) to make full, to fill up, i.e. to fill to the full
   1a) to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally
       1a1) I abound, I am liberally supplied

2) to render full, i.e. to complete

2Ibid.
3Ibid.
4Ibid.
2a) to fill to the top: so that nothing shall be wanting to full measure, fill to the brim

2b) to consummate: a number
   2b1) to make complete in every particular, to render perfect
   2b2) to carry through to the end, to accomplish, carry out, (some undertaking)

2c) to carry into effect, bring to realization, realize
   2c1) of matters of duty: to perform, execute
   2c2) of sayings, promises, prophecies, to bring to pass, ratify, accomplish
   2c3) to fulfil, i.e. to cause God’s will (as made known in the law) to be obeyed as it should be, and God’s promises (given through the prophets) to receive fulfillment

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1. Where do we find a clear definition of sin?

2. How does Paul describe the law in Romans?

3. What does David write about the law in Psalms 19?

4. What does James write about the law in the book of James?

5. Explain Matthew 5:17, especially the word “fulfill.”

6. What is the Old Covenant?

7. What is the New Covenant?