

Chapter 3: All Things are Lawful

Knowing why we do things sets the tone for how we go about doing them. In authority-driven congregations, which constitute the vast majority, Paul's assertion, "All things are lawful,"¹ is unsettling. Those with leadership titles tend to have a low opinion of the potential performance of those whom they control: without rules, the masses cannot be held in check. Yet Paul wrote to Timothy, "Law is not enacted for the righteous but for the lawless."²

What is Law?

In the New Testament, Law usually refers to the Law of Moses, but sometimes the context is more general, indicating any system of rules. The Law of Moses, the only civil law code written by God, is the best standard for comparison because that system of rules does not suffer from the internal contradictions and almost comical nonsense that finds its way into every code written by people. So, in the New Testament, law is compared and contrasted with grace, faith, and liberty, showing that these three principles do a far better job of regulating human behavior than any code of conduct, including one produced by God.

Only a tiny fraction of the world's population was ever subject to the Law of Moses. Rather, it was a contract between God and the nation of Israel. God needed a stage on which the Messiah would play; Israel was hired to do the job. God inserted illustrations like the tabernacle (and Temple), festivals, and sacrifices into the Law, along with the predictions of the prophets after Moses, to develop an anticipation for the Messiah and the necessary evidence that Jesus was He. Israel was selected because of Abraham; Abraham was God's friend.³ God had to choose a group of people for this task, so He chose the descendants of His friend. The citizens of Israel were no better or worse than any other ethnic group, they just had the inside track due to Abraham. The fraction of faithful people in Israel at any point in their history was on par with every other ethnicity – probably never exceeding single digit percentages.

As payment for services rendered, Israel would get large families, big crops, and victory in battle.⁴ Israel had no promise of eternal life other than that which was extended to any faithful person. They were contractors, not family members. Further, the devastation often visited by God on Israel was for the purpose of getting them back on task (building the stage on which Jesus would play).

God put a decisive end to the practice of the Law by destroying Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. The apostles (all of whom were Jews) continued to practice the ordinances of the Law throughout the period between the Ascension and 70 AD. A comparison may be made to the attitude of David when he was being chased by King Saul. Although David had been told that he would be the next king, he declined to kill Saul, although he had ample opportunity to speed the process along. Rather, he said, "I will not raise my hand against the Lord's anointed."⁵ He let God take care of the transition of dynasties. The apostles knew that the time for the Law was complete, but allowed God to cause the transition. Although no prophets have or will arise after

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:12 – 20, 10:23 – 33

² 1 Timothy 1:9

³ James 2:23 citing 2 Chronicles 20:7

⁴ Deuteronomy 7:12 – 16, 28:1 – 14

⁵ 1 Samuel 26:9 – 12, 24:6 – 7

that destruction,⁶ the location of the Temple has been powerfully withheld from Israelite control since that time, first by a Roman edict prohibiting Jews from even being within sight of the Temple mount, and then by possession of the site by those who desire to exterminate them, the Muslims.

The difference between the Law and the gospel is concisely described.⁷ The law was written on stone; the gospel is written on the heart. Israel was composed of a vast majority of unfaithful people, so trying to prompt them to know God was a constant struggle. Under the new covenant, only those who are dedicated to God are on the inside, so all of them already know God. Hence, no evangelism is necessary inside the church. Further, law cannot transform people, but only remind them of past failures.⁸

James contrasted the Law of Moses and the “law of liberty.”⁹ Many have missed the tongue-in-cheek use of the word, law, and set about to create a set of regulations to control Christians and the church. The standard of acceptance by God always has been faith. Abraham was counted righteous long before the Law of Moses and Jesus.¹⁰ All of the faithful people listed in Hebrews 11 lived and died before Jesus, and a significant number also were before Moses. The prophets also stressed the importance of faith rather than law.¹¹ James’ use of “the law of liberty” was to remind the reader that the self-centered viewpoint of rule-keeping was ineffective, whereas liberty requires that I think of how my liberty interacts with that of others.

The Criteria for Making Choices

“All things are lawful to me, but not all things do profit; all things are lawful, but I will not be mastered by anything.”¹² “All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”¹³ Paul laid out three general principles: profitability, control, and edification. In the first passage, Paul’s examples began innocuously with dietary rules, but quickly transitioned to immorality. In modern times, the two appear drastically different in importance. But in their time, dietary rules were a major stumbling block, as evidenced by Peter’s reaction to a vision in which he was told to consume forbidden meats.¹⁴ And, while immorality was condemned in the Law, the Hellenistic culture was much more accepting of it, so lines were blurred. In the latter citation, the illustration was meat that had been sacrificed to idols and was afterward sold in the market. Paul’s conclusion was that, although each individual was free to eat such meat because the idol was of no importance, one should be sensitive to the scruples of others. One should not go so far as to let the squeaky wheel dictate the behavior of all, but maintain a good rapport while building up the one weak in faith.

Obviously, this decision tree makes behavior rules very difficult to codify. Yet, Paul was clear that participating in prostitution was just wrong. Paul’s “all things are lawful” idea did not declare all behaviors acceptable, but rather required that people think about what they are doing rather than being guided by a set of behavior rules. First, people tend to look for loopholes born

⁶ Daniel 9:24 – 27, Zechariah 13:1 – 6

⁷ Hebrews 8:7 – 13, citing Jeremiah 31:31 – 34

⁸ Hebrews 10:3 – 4, Galatians 2:16, 3:21, Romans 3:20

⁹ James 2:12

¹⁰ Romans 4:1 – 5, *et al*

¹¹ Micah 6:6 – 8, *et al*

¹² 1 Corinthians 6:12

¹³ 1 Corinthians 10:23

¹⁴ Acts 10:11 – 14

of self-deception. Second, people tend to ban too much. For example, the Bible is clearly opposed to drunkenness, but endorses responsible drinking.¹⁵ Yet, many oppose all alcoholic beverages on “Scriptural” grounds. Certainly, even in the first century, some took Paul’s principle too far and taught that behavior was of no consequence because Jesus had redeemed everyone, once for all.¹⁶ Both Peter and Paul found it necessary to correct that inaccurate perception: “not using liberty as a cloak for vice”¹⁷ and “do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.”¹⁸ Even in the first century church, the thinking man’s organizational structure had some trouble getting started. Authority was a convenient alternative, although it is guaranteed to fail.

Reasons for Good Behavior

The New Testament provides some detail to Paul’s three evaluation criteria in 1 Corinthians 6 and 10. The following reasons may be classified under one or more of Paul’s three major headings. They are reasons, not rules; methods for evaluation, not a seedbed for multitudes of rules as the Pharisees did with “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.”¹⁹

- “We are the Temple of the living God”²⁰...“therefore, having these promises, we should cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and Spirit, having consistent holiness in the fear of God.”²¹ Paul began the paragraph with an appeal to consistency, “What connection has righteousness with lawlessness?”²² A primary motivator for good behavior is to be consistent with the Temple of God who the faithful are. In this paragraph, Paul cited Ezekiel 37:26 – 27 and Isaiah 52:11, predictions of the nature of the Messianic kingdom. The concluding phrase, “in fear of God,” is not that the faithful should behave properly out of fear of being cast out, but with fear for the unbelievers who might misconstrue inconsistent behavior as being of no importance. The overall subject of the Sermon on the Mount was consistency, peaking with the line, “Be ye consistent as your heavenly Father is consistent.”²³
- “As they did not see fit to have God in knowledge, God gave them into a depraved mind, to do things not proper.”²⁴ Examples of what is not “proper” follow in a list of various bad behaviors. In Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane, He made specific requests concerning future believers,²⁵ that they be united and that they have His character as evidence that He was sent from the Father. Therefore, for the faithful, a major motivator for godly behavior is as evidence that Jesus was who He said He was.

¹⁵ Proverbs 31:4 – 7. Many inaccurate claims have been published concerning wine in the New Testament. Dilution was not practiced except in times of short supply. Grape pressings became wine within days. Non-alcoholic wine was not technically possible in that day. Preservation techniques were designed to keep the wine from becoming vinegar, not to prevent fermentation. In John 2:9 – 10, Jesus turned water into alcoholic wine of high quality. For more information, see Volume 5, *Weeds Among the Wheat*.

¹⁶ 1 John 2:2

¹⁷ 1 Peter 2:16

¹⁸ Galatians 5:13

¹⁹ Exodus 20:8 – 11

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 6:16

²¹ 2 Corinthian 7:1

²² 2 Corinthians 6:14

²³ Matthew 5:48

²⁴ Romans 1:28

²⁵ John 17:20 – 23

- “Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”²⁶ Malice and wickedness spoil sincerity and truth. In this paragraph about immorality being accepted and approved in the congregations of Corinth, Paul used as an illustration the Passover feast in which leaven was scrupulously avoided.²⁷ The faithful pay close attention to their behavior because the whole celebration of being passed over by the death angel can be marred by the encroachments of malice and wickedness. The faithful are walking celebrations of forgiveness (living sacrifices²⁸), so such leaven is to be studiously avoided.
- “Now we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the pre-eminence of the power may be of God and not out of us.”²⁹ The faithful display humanly impossible ethics so that the power of God may be displayed. The context indicates that the observer draws this conclusion, that the behavior of the faithful could not be due to superior self-control, but must have a higher source. Therefore, the faithful pay attention to the promises of God concerning overcoming the deeds of the flesh³⁰ so that the gospel may spread miraculously.
- “I say now, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”³¹ The motivation for good behavior is not authority or fear of punishment, but a natural manifestation of the Spirit who dwells in the faithful. Lengthy contrasts were presented in two places³² to illustrate this change of focus. Good behavior is no longer pursued directly, but is obtained as a by-product through a focus on the indwelling Spirit and the promises that engenders.
- “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be entirely idle, that we are no longer slaves of sin.”³³ In this context,³⁴ Paul repeatedly declares the faithful free from slavery to sin, whereas outsiders, despite their best efforts at good behavior, continuously fail. The motivation is to allow the Spirit to perform its promised transformation rather than to continually battle bad behavior.
- “Everyone having this hope upon Him purifies himself just as He is pure.”³⁵ The motivation for good behavior is to imitate Jesus, as opposed to focusing on right-and-wrong, good deeds, fear of punishment, or merit.
- “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God in whom you were sealed into the day of redemption.”³⁶ God’s objective is to build a big family that will last. Family implies relationships. So, the faithful are developing relationships with the divine as well as with other faithful spirits. Therefore, grieving a family member would be an undesirable outcome. Just as the behaviors of many have been guided by maintaining family reputation and relationships, so are those in the eternal family.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:8

²⁷ Exodus 12:15 *et al*

²⁸ Romans 12:1

²⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:7

³⁰ Romans 8:13

³¹ Galatians 5:16

³² Galatians 5:16 – 25, Colossians 2:18 – 3:10

³³ Romans 6:6

³⁴ Romans 6:1 – 8:13

³⁵ 1 John 3:3

³⁶ Ephesians 4:30

- “‘The name of God is blasphemed because of you,’ as it is written.”³⁷ Inconsistent behavior causes the name of God to be spoken against. Christian slaves who do not honor their unbelieving masters cause the same for the name of God and His doctrine.³⁸ Poor behavior by older women (perhaps including all Christians) causes the same for the word of God.³⁹ So, the faithful are motivated to good behavior to safeguard the reputations of God’s nature, His teachings, and His philosophy.

In summary, God promises the ability to overcome. Faith causes the defeat of bad behavior. The faithful focus on the successes of faith (joy) rather than the failures of the flesh, choose good behavior to please the God they love (not the God who made the rules), and to enable the spread of the gospel.

What is Grace?

In the New Testament, lawfulness is contrasted with grace, faith, and liberty. Leadership is closely connected to these contrasts. Many church leaders are law-oriented. Just as Paul was accused of promoting bad behavior,⁴⁰ many leaders fear that teaching about grace will give the hearers the impression that behavior does not matter. Of course, such would be the case only if the teacher were unclear or incomplete. The reasons for good behavior given in the New Testament, delineated above,⁴¹ fit exactly with teaching about grace, whereas have little if any intersection with teaching about law. To appreciate the distinction, one must first define the terms.

Simply put, grace is the collection of godly character traits. The grace, or the gracious nature, of God encompasses all His character traits and how they interrelate to create a consistent, entirely good person. In the sections which follow, various passages in which grace is used expand on this set of traits, highlighting certain traits for the purposes of that context. In some places, grace is in a list with certain traits (like mercy or compassion), while in other passages those same traits are used as an example of certain facets of grace. So, I propose that, while grace incorporates all godly character traits, the focus is on the consistency and integration of the collection. When grace is in a list with other traits, the inference is that the other traits in the list are those of particular note in the context, but they are still part of an integrated and consistent whole.

Christians receive the Holy Spirit to accomplish the re-development of the consistent, godly character of Jesus in themselves. Grace is closely connected with glory, which is a parade of God’s character traits. Leadership in the church must be centered on displaying and teaching these godly traits. Neither authority nor control are among them.

Often, the context surrounding a mention of the gracious nature of God does not provide details into what that grace includes. But, the following do, each of which illustrates the characteristics of godly leadership:

- “...bearing witness upon the word of His grace.”⁴² The “word” comes from the Greek *logos*, meaning, the body of thought concerning something. So, Paul and Barnabas were

³⁷ Romans 2:24, from Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:22

³⁸ 1 Timothy 6:1

³⁹ Titus 2:5

⁴⁰ *e.g.*, Romans 6:1 – 2

⁴¹ Reasons for Good Behavior. Click as hyperlink.

⁴² Acts 14:3

logically connecting the attributes of God. Many have made the assumption that God is power (as have the Muslims) or that God is wrath (as those who focus on everything negative). These apostles focused on the logic that God must be the collection of positive character traits, a completely consistent being.⁴³ In another place, Paul reminded the elders of Ephesus of the same concept, “which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”⁴⁴ The logic of being consistent with the godly character traits builds up the individual and qualifies the faithful to an inheritance among those who are reserved for godly purposes.

- “...believed through grace.”⁴⁵ Apollos went to Corinth and greatly helped the fledgling believers. Luke’s descriptor is that they believed because of their understanding of the grace of God. Apparently, Paul had spent considerable time convincing people in Corinth that God was composed of all the positive character traits, or, as expressed to the Roman congregations, “the goodness of God leads you to repentance.”⁴⁶
- “...to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”⁴⁷ (Acts 20:24) Addressing the elders of Ephesus for the last time, Paul characterized the gracious nature of God as good news. In this region, the Greek pantheon and Diana, the goddess who fell from heaven, dominated religious thinking. None of these gods were consistent and none were the personification of good. Rather, all were somewhat unpredictable and known for capricious behavior. The goodness of the one true God was a stark contrast and truly good news.
- “Justified freely by means of His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”⁴⁸ Redemption of all people was accomplished by Jesus as a result of His gracious nature. Knowing that people did not have anything of sufficient value to compensate justice, Jesus determined to pay off the justice system personally, thereby allowing people to become acceptable by their faith. The grace of God included a consistent balance of justice and patience and kindness and more; one facet did not overpower the others.
- “the grace of God and the gift by grace of the one Man”⁴⁹ The gracious nature of God resulted in the justification and righteousness of the faithful. As a result of this gift, the faithful are no longer enslaved to sin, so the faithful are free to develop a similar gracious nature through the power of the indwelling Spirit.
- “My grace is sufficient for you.”⁵⁰ Paul recounted some of the many hardships he had endured while spreading the good news, including a “thorn in the flesh” for which he had thrice requested release. God declined. Understanding the consistent and entirely good character of God provided sufficient strength to carry on. Physical health was not essential.
- “Called me through His grace.”⁵¹ Paul was referring to the event on the road to Damascus,⁵² which Paul characterized as an illustration of God’s nature. Further, Paul claimed that he was summoned to his present avocation by recognizing the nature of the character of God.

⁴³ See *Think as a Spirit*, Chapter 1, “In the Beginning”

⁴⁴ Acts 20:32

⁴⁵ Acts 18:27

⁴⁶ Romans 2:4

⁴⁷ Acts 20:24

⁴⁸ Romans 3:24

⁴⁹ Romans 5:15 – 6:2

⁵⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:9

⁵¹ Galatians 1:15

⁵² Acts 9:1 – 19, 22:3 – 21, 26:9 – 18

- “...into the praise of the glory of His grace, which He has freely given us [has graced us] in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood, remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”⁵³ The glory of His grace may be envisioned as a parade of God’s character traits, as Moses requested and observed.⁵⁴ Paul inserted a small pun based on the figurative use of grace to describe a blessing typically said over food. One facet of grace mentioned here is that God’s consistent character resulted in coming to earth as Jesus to become the sacrifice through which all are redeemed.
- “That He might show in the ages that are coming the surpassing riches of His grace in His kindness into us in Christ Jesus.”⁵⁵ A major facet of grace is kindness. God came to earth not out of desperation or manipulation, but kindness.
- “Since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth.”⁵⁶ Truth is a description of reality. The hope and trust of the faithful are based on reality, not wishful thinking. The character of God is a certainty.

The gracious nature that is imparted to believers also is presented in many passages. Some, in their contexts, single out certain character traits for emphasis:

- “Great grace was upon them all.”⁵⁷ The generosity and unity of the first Christians were emphasized as dominant features of the gracious natures being built in them by the Holy Spirit.
- “When he had come and seen the grace of God.”⁵⁸ Barnabas was sent by the apostles to investigate the report that Hellenists in Antioch were responding to the good news. He observed their gracious natures, apparently to a degree not humanly achievable.
- “Through Whom we have received grace and apostleship into obedience of faith in all the Gentiles on behalf of His name.”⁵⁹ The apostles received a gracious nature as essential to their task as the original leaders of the church.
- “Grace to you and peace.”⁶⁰ The vast majority of the letters include this phrase in the first few verses. Many commentators pass over them as customary salutations, forgetting that, in the first century, no other group had as its objective the development of a gracious nature and a peaceful mindset, so no one would have thought to use it as a salutation. Not until the New Testament was completed did this become a common opening as various authors copied the inspired writers. Most of the letters both begin and end with this sentiment, announcing the objective of the letter. The topics between these statements of purpose were tailored methods for achieving that purpose. Each addressee had different needs, so the instructions are all different. But the objective was the same in all cases: development of a gracious nature and peace in a chaotic world.
- “...we have access by faith into this grace”⁶¹ In this context, the characteristics of grace into which the faithful enter are peace with God, joy, hope, perseverance, and love.

⁵³ Ephesians 1:6 – 7

⁵⁴ Exodus 33:18 – 19, 34:5 – 7

⁵⁵ Ephesians 2:4 – 9

⁵⁶ Colossians 1:6

⁵⁷ Acts 4:33

⁵⁸ Acts 11:23

⁵⁹ Romans 1:5

⁶⁰ Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4, Philemon 3, 2 John 3

⁶¹ Romans 5:2

- “Through the grace given to me.”⁶² The grace given to Paul enabled his message, including boldness, wisdom, and revelation.
- “Gifts differing according to the grace given to us.”⁶³ The context that follows includes prophecy, faith, service, the ability to teach, the ability to exhort, liberality, leadership, mercy, love, kindness, affection, joy, hope, longsuffering, and hospitality. Everyone receives a different mix of God’s character traits.
- “For the grace of God that was given to you.”⁶⁴ Paul thanked God for the grace that had been imparted to the faithful of Corinth, specifically including public speaking and knowledge.
- “If I partake with grace...”⁶⁵ Paul used a play on words between the grace of God and thanking God for a meal to show that a gracious nature includes an attitude of thankfulness.
- “We conducted ourselves...by the grace of God.”⁶⁶ The specific character traits in this context were simplicity and sincerity.
- “Grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.”⁶⁷ Despite their many problems, the faithful of Corinth were so remarkably gracious, as compared to their former manner of life, that observers thanked God for this parade of godly character traits (glory).
- “Not to receive the grace of God in vain.”⁶⁸ The preceding context specifies that this grace is not of appearance but of heart, including the traits of love, service, and a devotion to spreading the message of reconciliation.
- “The grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.”⁶⁹ This grace included generosity, faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, and love.
- “God is able to make all grace abound into you.”⁷⁰ This grace included sufficiency to accomplish every good work.
- “The grace of God in you.”⁷¹ This grace included steadfastness and sharing.
- “To each one of us grace was given.”⁷² In this case, the specific examples were leadership positions.
- “Impart grace to the hearers.”⁷³ That grace to be imparted included edification and was in contrast to corruption.
- “You all are partakers of grace with me.”⁷⁴ That grace included affection, knowledge, discernment, sincerity, and the fruits of righteousness.
- “Singing with grace in your hearts.”⁷⁵ The specific characteristics of the grace in their hearts were wisdom, teaching, and admonishing.

⁶² Romans 12:3, 15:15, 1 Corinthians 3:10, 15:10, Galatians 2:9, Ephesians 3:2, 7, 8

⁶³ Romans 12:6

⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:4

⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:30

⁶⁶ 2 Corinthians 1:12

⁶⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:15

⁶⁸ 2 Corinthians 6:1

⁶⁹ 2 Corinthians 8:1

⁷⁰ 2 Corinthians 9:8

⁷¹ 2 Corinthians 9:14

⁷² Ephesians 4: 7

⁷³ Ephesians 4:29

⁷⁴ Philippians 1:7

⁷⁵ Colossians 3:16

- “Let your speech always be with grace.”⁷⁶ Grace was characterized as wise, witty, and capable of being explained in several ways as necessary for the comprehension of the hearer.

Grace versus Law

In Galatians and Romans, Paul contrasted grace versus law.⁷⁷ The summary statement was “You are not under Law but under grace.”⁷⁸ Being under Law implies slavery to sin because all have sinned and have no inherent mechanism to overcome the debt. The fact that Jesus paid the debt for everyone⁷⁹ released everyone from that slavery, so people are indebted to His gracious nature, not simply released from responsibility.

Paul was aghast that the faithful of Galatia were being deceived by legalists who wanted to incorporate the Law into the gospel, in particular circumcision but sometimes including the observation of the dietary rules and the festivals.⁸⁰ The summary was that “if righteousness comes through Law, then Christ died needlessly.”⁸¹ Legalism and grace were entirely at odds. Attempts to merge them would result in expulsion from the family of God.⁸² Yet, many church leaders excuse the incorporation of rules (neglecting grace) as necessary to follow the example of the first century church (a notion debunked in the appendix⁸³), or to corral the immature.

Faith versus Law

Biblical faith has been defined elsewhere.⁸⁴ Paul contrasted faith and law in both Romans and Galatians.⁷⁷ Certainly, both government and business would collapse without law, because, to summarize Paul’s comment to Timothy, “Law is for the lawless.”⁸⁵ Both God and church leaders operate on a different level, which is one of the remarkable characteristics of the church. The individuals get along and function as a body without law because they love one another. Church leadership must be by faith, not law.

- “Gentiles, not pursuing righteousness, have attained righteousness, righteousness now that is out of faith; however Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, into law has not attained. Why? Because it was not out of faith, but as out of works.”⁸⁶ Certainly, some faithful people dotted the history of Israel, as attested in Hebrews 11. But, the majority were neither faithful nor followers of the Law. Paul wrote here of the minority who had some notion of the One True God, but sought to be acceptable (righteous) by following the rules. Both the rule-followers and the faithful performed the same rituals and observed the same

⁷⁶ Colossians 4:6

⁷⁷ Of course, one could develop separate descriptions of each topic, as I have done, then compare the various facets developed in those descriptions. However, the comparison sub-sections have been limited to passages in which a direct contrast was made by an inspired writer. Our uninspired conclusions about differences may or may not be valid or, if valid, may or may not be important to God.

⁷⁸ Romans 6:14 – 15, the context being 5:15 – 6:15

⁷⁹ 1 John 2:2

⁸⁰ Galatians 1:6 – 9

⁸¹ Galatians 2:21

⁸² Galatians 5:4

⁸³ **Error! Reference source not found.** Click as hyperlink.

⁸⁴ *Think as a Spirit*, chapter 4, “The Faith Economy”

⁸⁵ 1 Timothy 1:9

⁸⁶ Romans 9:30 – 32

festivals. Motivation was the key factor. For nearly two millennia, a disturbing number of church leaders have opted for rules over faith. Of course, those leaders cannot speak for themselves, being long dead, so their motives must remain unknown. Perhaps this is all they knew. Perhaps they distrusted followers. Perhaps they were afraid that someone could manipulate God and be accepted inappropriately. Paul's point was that following rules has a long and unbroken history of failure. Faith is God's objective and has a much higher success rate of good behavior.

- “A man is not justified out of works of law but through the faith of Christ Jesus, even we into Christ Jesus have believed, that we may be justified out of the faith of Christ and not out of the works of the law; for out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”⁸⁷ See the discussion of “faith in” versus “faith of” elsewhere.⁸⁸ The faithful are not declared square with justice (justified) as a result of their own faith, but out of Jesus' faith which made Him the acceptable sacrifice through which the right-and-wrong system was paid up. The works of the law were illustrations and demonstrations of concepts, not goals in themselves. The practices of the Law of Moses were for a small percentage of the world's population, in a limited geographic region, for a defined period of time. The faithful today have different illustrations and demonstrations to act out, but the reasoning is the same. The works themselves do not square one with justice; Jesus did that once for all.
- “He who is supplying the Spirit to you and working miracles in you, is it out of works of law or out of hearing of faith? Just as Abraham, ‘believed God and it was accounted to him into righteousness.’⁸⁹ Know then that those out of faith, these are sons of Abraham. Having foreseen then the Scripture that God justifies the Gentiles out of faith, foretold the gospel to Abraham that ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’⁹⁰ So then those out of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. For as many as out of works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’⁹¹ Now, that in law no one is justified is evident because, ‘the righteous out of faith will live.’⁹² Yet, the law is not out of faith, rather ‘the man who does them will live in them.’⁹³ Christ redeemed us out of the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone hanging upon a tree’⁹⁴), to that the blessing of Abraham might come into the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that the promise of the Spirit we might receive through faith.”⁹⁵ Leaders who depend on rules to achieve certain behavioral results achieve only condemnation. A great many church leaders rely on rules to keep order and control, but thereby forfeit the miraculous work of the Spirit to achieve the humanly impossible.
- “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; having been orchestrated by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not for one only, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given able to impart life, truly

⁸⁷ Galatians 2:16

⁸⁸ *Think as a Spirit*, chapter 4, “The Faith Economy”

⁸⁹ Genesis 15:6

⁹⁰ Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14

⁹¹ Deuteronomy 27:26

⁹² Habakkuk 2:4

⁹³ Leviticus 18:5

⁹⁴ Deuteronomy 21:23

⁹⁵ Galatians 3:5 – 14

out of law would have emerged righteousness. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, so that the promise out of the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those believing. But before faith came, we were kept under custody under the law, confined into the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore, the law became our tutor into Christ, so that out of faith we might be justified. Faith having now come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through the faith that was in Christ Jesus.”⁹⁶ Paul was writing to a group composed of predominantly Jewish Christians who were having trouble reconciling the Law (which was given by God) with salvation by faith. Paul explained that one of the functions of the Law of Moses was to hold Israel together until the time for the Messiah could come. At that time, faith would become the governing principle. Acceptability by God based on achieving certain benchmarks was disallowed. Rather, the faith of Jesus was the quality that was able to pay off the right-and-wrong system, thereby allowing for the adoption of the faithful into the family of God.

Spirit versus Law

The contrast between the Spirit and the Law⁷⁷ was most succinctly expressed in the section above, “He who is supplying the Spirit to you and working miracles in you, is it out of works of law or out of hearing of faith?”⁹⁷ The faithful have abilities beyond what normal humans have due to the Spirit that dwells in them. So, leadership in the church should be dedicated to training others how to access that power rather than the thoroughly human and guaranteed-to-fail rules. In His last conversation with the Eleven, Jesus noted that His departure was to their advantage because, when He went away, the Helper would come.⁹⁸ In the two following passages, a strong argument is made that taking advantage of the power of the indwelling Spirit is a necessity.

- “Likewise, my brethren, you also have been put to death to the law through the body of Christ, into belonging to another, – to the One having been raised out of the dead, so that we should bear fruit to God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions that were through the law were at work in our members into bring forth fruit to death. But now we have been released from the law, having died in that which we were bound, in order for us to serve in newness of Spirit and not in oldness of letter.”⁹⁹ Paul’s comparison was to marriage which is ended when, in Paul’s example, the husband dies. The Jewish Christians were released from their lifelong commitment to the Law so that they could be married to Christ. In the continuing context, Paul reminded his readers that rules cause people to ponder the line between right and wrong, and to contemplate sin, which arouses sinful passions through the contemplation of them. The Spirit, in contrast, focuses the faithful on good only. Because all other organizations are built around rules, leaders are guaranteed to see that rule-keeping mindset in all new Christians, and must immediately work to release them from their marriage to law and refocus them on the power of the Spirit.
- “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death...But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. However, if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him. If, however, Christ is in you, indeed the body is dead through sin, but the Spirit is life through righteousness.

⁹⁶ Galatians 3:19 – 26

⁹⁷ Galatians 3:5

⁹⁸ John 16:7

⁹⁹ Romans 7:4 – 6

Now if the Spirit of the One having raised up Jesus out of the dead dwells in you, the One having raised up Christ Jesus out of the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit dwelling in you. So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”¹⁰⁰ Obviously, the faithful seek good behavior as an outgrowth of their faith. Paul explicitly states that the indwelling Spirit must be present and in control for the individual to be a part of the family of God. One of the functions of that Spirit is putting to death old bad habits. Rules bring forth evasive tactics to avoid the truth about oneself. The Spirit crushes bad behavior. Again, the task of leaders is to demonstrate how that works.

Liberty versus Law

See chapter 1 for a lengthy description of New Testament liberty.⁷⁷ As in countries in which liberty is allowed, history shows that those liberties are slowly eroded out of fear and laziness. Throughout history, people with liberty often have exchanged it for an illusory safety. The same is true in the church. Not understanding the power of the Spirit, the faithful give up liberty out of fear or laziness. Church leaders must resist the tendency to distrust followers, despite the fact that they often are, in fact, untrustworthy. Rather, they must teach others how to access that power.

- “Through false brothers brought in secretly, who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might enslave us.”¹⁰¹ The context reveals that the objectives of these false brethren were to import facets of the Law of Moses into the gospel. Modern congregations have imported seemingly normal customs of their cultures, hardly recognizing the loss of liberty. For example, in most congregations in the United States, democracy is a valued concept. So, democratic processes have been introduced despite God’s displeasure with the attempt by Korah to introduce it into Israel. God’s clear disapproval of democracy in the kingdom was displayed by the earth opening up and swallowing all the democrats.¹⁰² Liberty is the death knell of authority. Church leadership must not be allowed to morph into authority.
- “In liberty, Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and not entangle yourselves again with a yoke of slavery.”¹⁰³ The preceding context relates an analogy between Sarah and Hagar versus freedom and bondage. Isaac was the child of promise, the miraculous, unnatural child. Ishmael was born by the usual, natural way. Liberty seems impossible, just as Isaac was impossible. Law is the natural way, but is called bondage. Church leadership must embrace the impossible liberty of the gospel and not resort to the natural way.

¹⁰⁰ Romans 8:2, 9 – 13

¹⁰¹ Galatians 2:4

¹⁰² Numbers 16

¹⁰³ Galatians 5:1

What are Works?

The word is used in several contexts in the New Testament. God worked;¹⁰⁴ Jesus worked;¹⁰⁵ Jesus finished God's work;¹⁰⁶ some works are not related to God but just the things we do;¹⁰⁷ some works are evil;¹⁰⁸ the good works of some faithful people were applauded;¹⁰⁹ faithful people are enjoined to good works;¹¹⁰ faith is said to be a type of work;¹¹¹ and our judgment is said to be based on works.¹¹²

Many have claimed that works are unimportant to the faithful, which is an obvious overstatement in light of the references in the paragraph above concerning faithful people being enjoined to good works. The attitude of that claim, while purporting to express freedom from law, is legalism in disguise when the faithful are discouraged from good works. The proponents have set a physical threshold of zero. Rather, as James wrote, "Faith without works is dead."¹¹³

Others emphasize that faith must result in works, shifting the focus to the works at the expense of faith. The checklist mentality arrives.

Others cite only the nine passages that state clearly that we will be judged by our works (not faith), overlooking the twenty-odd passages that connect salvation with faith.

Rather, works may be seen by God as good, evil, or misdirected, depending on the context. As long as we are physically alive, we will work. What we must learn is how God interprets that activity and, most importantly, how God interprets our motivation for that activity. Simply put, an activity motivated by trusting the promises of God is viewed positively.

Faith versus Works

Faith and works are contrasted in the letters of Paul and James.⁷⁷ As will be apparent in the context of each, the works under consideration are those performed for the purpose of earning a benefit from God. As listed in the previous section, the faithful are enjoined to do good works as a natural outgrowth of faith, not to avoid good works so that grace might increase.¹¹⁴

In a lengthy passage in Romans,¹¹⁵ Paul first pointed out that a primary function of law is to codify and illustrate bad behavior. Unfortunately, learning about the line between right and wrong brings a contemplation of wrong, followed by temptation and crossing the line.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁴ Acts 15:8, Romans 14:29, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 1:10, 3:9, 4:3, and Revelation 15:3.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 11:2, Luke 24:19, John 5:20, 5:36, 7:3, 7:21, 9:3 – 4, 10:25 – 38, 14:10, and 15:24.

¹⁰⁶ John 4:34 and 17:4.

¹⁰⁷ Mark 13:34, Acts 7:2, and 2 Peter 3:10

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 23:3, 23:5, John 3:19 – 21, 7:7, Acts 7:41, Romans 13:12, a Corinthians 5:2 – 3, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 5:11, Colossians 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:14, 4:18, Hebrews 6:1, 9:14, 2 Peter 2:8, 1 John 3:8, 3:10, 3:11, 3 John 10, Jude 15, Revelation 2:6, 2:22, 3:2, 3:2, 3:15, 9:20, 16:11, and 18:6.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 26:10, Mark 14:6, Acts 5:38, 9:36, 13:2, 13:41, 14:26, Romans 15:18, 1 Corinthians 3:13 – 15, 9:1, 15:58, 16:10, Philippians 2:30, Revelation 2:2, 2:5, 2:9, 2:13, 2:19, and 3:8.

¹¹⁰ Matthew 5:16, John 8:39 – 41, 14:12, Romans 13:3, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Galatians 6:4, Ephesians 2:10, 4:12, Philippians 1:22, Colossians 1:10, 3:17, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 2:17, 1 Timothy 2:10, 3:1, 5:10, 5:25, 6:18, 2 Timothy 2:21, 3:17, 4:5, Titus 2:7, 2:14, 3:1, 3:8, 3:14, Hebrews 4:10, 6:10, 10:24, 13:21, James 1:4, 1:25, 1 Peter 2:12, and 1 John 3:18.

¹¹¹ John 6:28 – 29 and Acts 26:20

¹¹² Romans 2:6 – 7, 2:15, 2 Corinthians 11:15, 1 Peter 1:17, Revelation 2:23, 2:26, 14:13, 20:12 – 13, and 22:12.

¹¹³ James 2:26

¹¹⁴ Romans 6:1

¹¹⁵ Romans 3:19 – 4:8

¹¹⁶ Romans 7:7 – 24

Historically, people have not done well with laws, although laws are necessary for maintaining a society composed of a substantial fraction of non-faithful people. However, God's purpose in creation was not to select out those who do marginally well with rules, who achieve an arbitrary benchmark of legal success. If good works were the goal, God could have achieved it through robots. Creating people with all their variations and having the freedom to choose would run counter to a behavioral objective. Rather, God created for the purpose of building an incubator for faith.¹¹⁷ Faith is an essential characteristic for participants in an eternal family. Without mutual trust, a family will fall apart. So, faith (mutual trust) is the benchmark for acceptance, not behavior. Paul used Abraham as his example. Certainly, Genesis records several mistakes made by Abraham. Yet, God called him acceptable. The standard of that acceptance was faith. Flawless execution is not the point, but rather that every choice be made with an absolute trust that God's promises will happen. Our quirks and foibles were paid up by Jesus, the propitiation. The acceptance criterion for people always has been trust.

Later in Romans, Paul approached the topic of faith versus works from a different direction: God's promises versus human achievement.¹¹⁸ Using the illustrations of Abraham facing childlessness, Jacob versus Esau, the Pharaoh who opposed Moses, and a potter with some clay and the pottery he made. Abraham's trust that he would have a son through Sarah despite their advanced ages was the qualifier. Those with that level of trust¹¹⁹ are accepted. Humans, no matter the ethnic group, are accepted if their lives are characterized by acting on God's promises.

Jacob was chosen not because he achieved. In fact, he was a scoundrel. The illustration is that Jacob was chosen by God before birth; he was not acceptable because he was successful. God did not choose Jacob to endorse bad behavior, but to illustrate that God can work with defective people and still execute the plan.

Keeping in mind the necessity of free will (because without free will there is neither faith nor love, and therefore no purpose for creation), Paul cited the example of the Pharaoh who opposed Moses. Paul concluded that Pharaoh could not have been judged if God had caused him to make those choices.¹²⁰ God used him. God did not violate Pharaoh's free will, but rather placed him in a series of situations in which he repeatedly chose badly. God promised faithful people that they would never face a temptation greater than they could bear, and that a way of escape always would be provided.¹²¹ Pharaoh, obviously, had no regard for the one true God, so was doing the best he could against an overwhelming foe.

The last illustration was of a potter who made all types of pots from the same clay. The pottery, if it were animate, would not be allowed to complain about its form or application. It is what it is. Paul's point was that the differences between people are not up for debate. Anyone can be faithful, although the performance of each will be drastically different. Therefore, a law system, which by nature treats everyone as if they were equally skilled, can never find success.

Multiple times, Paul specifies that his readers have been justified (or found righteous) based on Jesus' faith. Unfortunately, translators, most of whom refuse to believe that Jesus had faith, have changed those passages from "the faith of Jesus" to "faith in Jesus," tremendously

¹¹⁷ See *Think as a Spirit*, chapters 3 and 4.

¹¹⁸ Romans 9:6 – 33

¹¹⁹ Romans 4:16

¹²⁰ Romans 9:19

¹²¹ 1 Corinthians 10:13

overvaluing the quality of our faith.¹²² Paul drew a contrast between Jesus' faith and the works of the law.¹²³ If, as translated by many, this is a contrast between the quality of my faith versus the quality of my works, Paul's point might be lost. My experience has been that, for many church goers, the works are of higher quality than their faith. However, in this contrast, the objective was to define the source of justification. On what basis did God pay up the right-and-wrong system? Paul's conclusion was that righteousness became available because of Jesus' faith. Law has no inherent ability to make people right, only to declare them wrong.

Reviewing the history of the gospel in central Turkey (Galatia) that is recorded in the New Testament reveals that Paul brought a message of faith, but after he moved on to new fields, some Jewish Christians who had not yet let go of their baggage came along and convinced the Gentile Christians of that region that, to be Christians, one should be circumcised and observe the dietary and holiday rules. The hearers should have seen that something was amiss because a Jew in central Turkey cannot abide by the Law because the Temple is simply too far away to be able to visit it four times each year (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, and Yom Kippur) as required. So, these Jewish Christians were teaching a rationalized version of the law. Paul, however, focused on an even more obvious flaw in their additions and corrections to Paul's gospel. "Did you receive the Spirit out of the works of the law, or out of the hearing of faith?...Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made flawless in the flesh?...Therefore, The One supplying to you the Spirit and working miracles among you, is it out of the works of the law or out of the hearing of faith?"¹²⁴ Historically, the law did not cause people to perform miracles. Faith did. Updating to modern times, the miraculous works of the Spirit who indwells the faithful should be the death of legalism.

Paul continued with another comparison between the results of faith versus the results of law.¹²⁵ Those under law can only be cursed for shortcomings. By contrast, because of Jesus' faith allowing for justification, the just shall live by faith. That life is made possible by the Spirit who is given to dwell in the faithful.

Paul repeated the idea¹²⁶ with the added caveat that, since redemption was a gift resulting from God's gracious nature, the faithful have no grounds on which to boast that they achieved acceptability either through their own faith or through works. Paul ended the thought by identifying the proper position of works; the faithful were "created in Christ Jesus for good works." Good works are expected of the faithful¹²⁷ as a response, not a rite of passage.

James provided a lengthy treatise on the place of works in a system governed by the gracious nature of God and the confident expectations (trust) of people.¹²⁸ He affirmed quite pointedly that if self-proclaimed faith does not result in good works, the claim is without foundation. Works verify the reality of faith to the observer. Without physical proof, claims to faith are empty. Apparently, some had reduced the proof of faith to ridiculous minimums, so that mere claims were enough. First, God cannot be fooled with empty claims. Only those who have God's version of faith are acceptable. Second, empty claims dilute the gospel so that faith is on par with idol worship. Those whose faith is only self-deception spread that expectation to

¹²² See *Think as a Spirit*, Chapter 4, The Faith Economy.

¹²³ Galatians 3:16

¹²⁴ Galatians 3:2 – 5

¹²⁵ Galatians 3:10 – 14

¹²⁶ Ephesians 2:8 – 10

¹²⁷ Titus 1:16

¹²⁸ James 2:14 – 26

those whom they teach. So, the Spirit never gets the chance to provide miraculous transformation. Christianity is the only religion with physical evidence.

Leadership in the church focuses on faith, not works. Building faith using God's descriptions¹²² produces the works. Focusing on the works fails to give the follower the tools to accomplish them. Anyone can do nice things. Only those who rely on the power of the indwelling Spirit can accomplish the humanly impossible. Outsiders who accept the gospel because of slick doctrine and many verses never learn of the promises of God (an essential facet of Biblical faith), so what they follow never rises above human effort: works. But, when the gospel is accompanied by works that are beyond what ordinary people can do, the goodness of God, not the goodness of people, is displayed. The observer can tell the difference.

Grace versus Works

Another contrast to be illustrated and emphasized by leaders is that between grace and works. Works arises from an attitude of earning, even manipulating God to achieve acceptance, instead of realizing that the source depends, first and foremost, on the gracious nature of God, as pointed out by Paul, "Wages are not counted as grace but as debt."¹²⁹ Certainly, all of the positive character traits of God (grace) must be in harmony. Fortunately for humans, God chose to satisfy justice through His own life on earth and subsequent sacrifice, allowing room for patience and justification through faith. Paul quoted David in expressing, "Blessed [above the cares of this life] are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin."¹³⁰ Works attempt to pay off justice; the grace of God did that through Jesus, so wages have no place in the forgiveness equation.

"Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace."¹³¹ As illustrated by Paul in this context with a reminder about the lament of Elijah, thinking he was the only one left, God reminded Elijah that He had at least 7000 faithful just in the Northern Kingdom. Those who chose to trust God (the faithful) were termed the elect, those who waited faithfully for God to fix their debt to justice because they understood that works could never rise to that level of compensation.

"[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, having been given to us in Christ Jesus before time eternal, but has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ..."¹³² God's purpose (a big family that will last) and gracious nature produced a plan before the beginning for redemption by Jesus, although the plan was not revealed until that time. Jesus was not a stopgap measure after several plans had failed, but the one and only plan. Works never were the coin of the realm; faith was. The plan sprang from God's gracious nature. People have been rescued through that appearing and were called into that plan.

"But when the kindness and the love of humanity, of God our Savior, appeared, not out of works in righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified out of His grace we should

¹²⁹ Romans 4:4

¹³⁰ Romans 4:7 – 8 from Psalm 32:1 – 2

¹³¹ Romans 11:5 – 6

¹³² 2 Timothy 1:9

become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”¹³³ All through human history, people have assumed incorrectly that the purpose of life was to behave well. First, that sentiment has not come from God but rather is a filter through which the Scriptures have been interpreted. Second, the goal is unattainable because those who set out toward it invariably fall short and have no means by which to satisfy justice. So, God’s plan has always included the fix for what ailed us (mercy: one step beyond compassion, including an unquenchable desire to fix the problem) by coming to earth to pay off justice and to provide the indwelling Holy Spirit to accomplish the transformation of the faithful into that same gracious nature.

Leadership in the kingdom helps other faithful people avoid the pitfalls that have plagued humanity since the beginning – not in terms of behavior since we have proven that we fail repeatedly; try harder, fail bigger. But, because the part of humanity that cares not for God needs to be harnessed if society is to function at all, everyone is accustomed to regulations; people drag their outside cultural norms into the church. Leadership in the kingdom illustrates the true goal, to be of the character of Jesus, which is accomplished through the power of the Spirit. The sacrifice of Jesus was a gift, unearned, as is the indwelling Spirit. The objective is not good behavior but good character. Regulation to achieve good behavior fails while good character succeeds.

Grace versus Wrath

Many have incorrectly characterized God as being different before and after Jesus, that the God of the Old Testament was a God of wrath whereas the God of the New Testament is a God of love. Paul specifically refutes this error by citing Abraham, that he was accepted as a result of his faith, along with all who have Abraham’s type of faith: “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”¹³⁴ Law brings wrath. The grace of God, which resulted in redemption through Jesus’ sacrifice, makes the promise of inheritance certain.

Certainly, wrath is mentioned more times in the Old Testament than in the New: 400 to 50. The reason is obvious. Much of the Old Testament describes the history of a contractual relationship between God and Israel. Israel was to build the stage on which Jesus would play. As payment for services rendered, Israel was to receive big families, big crops, fertile cattle, and victory in battle. The penalty clauses for non-performance included a laundry list of calamities. When Israel became distracted from their contracted tasks, the wrath of God was displayed because they were in violation of the contract. God invoked the penalty clauses as any contract manager would do. The Law was not for “going to heaven.” The Law was for setting up for Jesus. The percentage of faithful people in Israel never got very large. The fortunes of the country were determined by whether those faithful people were in charge or not. The vast majority of the population had to be managed through laws because that is what unbelievers need for their society to function. Oddly, the grace of God is mentioned far more times in the Old

¹³³ Titus 3:4 – 7

¹³⁴ Romans 4:13 – 16

Testament than in the New, probably due to relative numbers of pages. God did not change; the humans in the stories changed, from largely unfaithful to largely faithful.

Leadership in the kingdom must remind the faithful that their long habit of law is not needed in the kingdom, only out in the world. The family of God is built upon mutual trust and selfless concern. With those, the faithful can get along just fine.

Summary

The family of God on earth and that in heaven are almost the same. The difference is the physical stuff. Faithful humans, both breathing and not, angels, and God are all part of the picture. When the physical passes away, this family of spirits will be of one composition: spirit. For the sake of visualization, a good substitute for spirit is character. Within the family, we will relate with the characters of other faithful beings. We can see on earth that different faithful people are different, largely depending on maturity and experience. Our unity is not based on uniformity but on mutual trust and selfless concern. Within the earthly church are many different levels of successful decision making. But, because we trust and care about each other, we laugh off the sincere-but-misguided attempts and set off together again. I picture the same in eternity. The collection of faithful characters will encompass a lot of differences. Rather than letting it upset us or divide us, we will laugh, pick up the one who stumbled, and get back to working together. Among the faithful, truly all things are lawful because we trust each other and fix things as we continue building character. Leadership in the church must stop distrusting the followers and stop demanding uniformity. Our diversity should be a source of joy and laughter.