

ROMANS 2: What is Law

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Romans two picks up immediately where Romans one left off; having made the point that God's wrath and reward have been revealed, the point is that men have no excuse for not be righteous.

ROMANS 2:1-11

But what is righteousness, and what is unrighteousness? This is the main point of chapter two; God makes the determination of what a man's person is, not man. Verses 7 and 8 are key to the definition of right and wrong. A person who is right is one who **SEEKS GLORY BY DOING GOOD**; the person who is wrong is **SELFISH AND DISOBEDIENT**. No other passage in Scripture is quite as straightforward to define with men good and evil.

However, God does not determine this based merely on a whim. Paul's first concluding point is key: "For there is no partiality with God". This point is important; how does God make an impartial determination who is good and who is evil? The answer to this is by **LAW**. In 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Paul declares that Law is necessary for this purpose. In that passage, he makes an unusually identification with **LAW** and the **GOSPEL**. This will make more sense when we see that a **LAW** is part of a **COVENANT**, and that the **GOSPEL** is the **COVENANT** of Christ.

ROMANS 2:12-29

In Romans, it can be confusing because Paul uses the word **LAW** to mean one of two things, depending on the context. **LAW** generically is the expectation of God for men to be obedient; **LAW** specifically is the Law of Moses, brought down from Mount Sinai by the lawful mediator Moses, and constitutes what we call the Old Testament (Exodus through Malachi). Genesis is considered law (and sometimes called the Old Testament) too, but it is **NOT** the law of Moses. Many English Bible translations attempt to help us by capitalizing "Law" when it appears to be speaking about the Law of Moses. To understand Law, we need to understand that Law is a subset of a covenant.

What is a Covenant?

There are a number of ways that people define covenants. Some will call it a form of a contract, but that is not entirely accurate. Others will call it a law, but that too does not fully explain what it is. A covenant is the merger between aspects of criminal coded law (i.e. penalty) and aspects of the contractual law (i.e. rewards for performance). In simplest terms, a covenant is a law and a promise (even in our legal system, a contract is sometimes called a promise and performance). This is why the covenants of Scripture are often called Law and called Promises.

Covenants are referred to as Law

*Hosea 8:1 "Set the trumpet to your mouth! He shall come like an eagle against the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed My covenant And rebelled against My law
Psalm 78:10 They did not keep the covenant of God; They refused to walk in His law*

Covenants are referred to as Promises

Ephesians 2:12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Hebrews 8:6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises

Covenants are Laws and Promises

Romans 9:4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;

Within a covenant, a law is a command or rule with a penalty for breaking; this can be found defined in Hebrews 10:16. A promise is a contract or reward for the right completion; this definition can be found in Hebrews 8:6. Paul tells us that a covenant is an unbreakable, unchangeable oath (Galatians 3:15). An example of a covenant is marriage (Malachi 2:14, Matthew 19). Marriage has a law, commands which must be kept or face judgment (consider the rules of marriage found in I Corinthians 7:1-56, Ephesians 5:22-33 & IU Peter 3:1-7). As a covenant, marriage is meant to be permanent/for life, it is therefore ended at death, and if we violate our marital covenant there are penalties. As well, we cannot enter into multiple covenants. These ideas are true of covenants in general, as Paul was pointing out in Galatians 3:15.

In the Bible, there have been many covenants. God made six covenants (not counting one with nature) in the Old Testament. There is the covenant between God and Adam (Hosea 6:7); the covenant between God and Noah (Genesis 9:9); the covenant between God and Abram (Genesis 15:18, 17:2); the covenant between God and Israel through Moses (Exodus 6:4, 24:7); the covenant between God and Phinehas (Number 25:12); and the covenant between God and David (2 Samuel 23:5). There are also covenants between men throughout the Bible. Sometimes the expression is used "a covenant of salt" (Leviticus 2:13, Number 18:19, 2 Chronicles 13:5); it likely references an ancient practice of making a covenant by exchanging pinches of salt. It was then said that the covenant could be revoked if only that salt exchanged was returned, an impossible feat. Thus, it refers to the idea of the irrevocable nature of a covenant.

Seeing that there have been multiple covenants in the past, we find only one in the New Testament, the Covenant of Christ, which is meant to replace all previous covenants. In truth, the covenant of Christ replaces the covenant of Adam, and all of the covenants from Adam until Christ were subsequent to that first Adamic covenant. This meant that the covenants after Adam and before Christ did not replace Adam's covenant, but were under that covenant's Law and Promise. We find this in Galatians 3:17:

Galatians 3:17 What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

Here Paul is saying that previous covenants are not invalidated by subsequent ones. If you consider the nature of the old covenants, you would notice that each one was made with the

descendants of one man in mind. Adam (as Mankind) was to all men; Noah too would be all men, but uniquely his descendants; Abram was (partially) his descendants; the covenant of Israel was only the descendants of Jacob; the covenant of David was only his sons; the covenant of Phinehas was only his sons. Yet each of these covenants fall under the authority of the first. Thus none of them were truly new covenants, and none of them could restore what was lost in the first covenant (eternal life). As well, in a fashion, each of the subsequent covenants pointed to Christ as the solution to the covenant crisis which specifically was the fall of man with Adam, but generally speaking was revealed in the covenant of Moses as the problem of sin:

Romans 8:3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

In this passage Paul uses law to (contextually) refer to the covenant of Moses as a whole; that covenant's purpose was in part to reveal the real issue with all covenants before Christ: the absence of a solution for sin.

Romans 7:13 Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

The promise of the first covenant was eternal life, and was lost to all by constant. This is what Jesus sought to accomplish, to reverse THAT covenant; in doing so He necessarily fulfilled all subsequent covenants. This is why He is contrasted to Adam:

1 Corinthians 15:45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

Romans 5:14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Covenant Party	Law/ Command	Promise/ Reward	What Ended It
ADAM Genesis 2:16	Do not eat of the tree	Eternal life in paradise	Romans 7:4
NOAH Genesis 9:9	Noahide Law	Never again flood the earth	Romans 7:4
ABRAHAM Genesis 17:2	Leave home, Sacrifice	Land Promise Seed Promise	Romans 7:4
MOSES Exodus 19:5	Law of Moses	Promised Land	Romans 7:4
CHRIST Hebrews 8:6-8	Law of Christ	Grace Salvation	I Corinthians 15:24

Looking at the nature of covenants, the end of covenants, and the creation of covenants, we can discern a great deal about the purpose of our Lord's coming and His death. If you notice, none of the covenant promises after Adam are as significant as the covenant promise of Adam. This is why the Hebrew writer makes the case that Christ's covenant is superior to all.