

The Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ (VIII)

Consequences of Going Back to the Law

By Cecil Willis

This is now the ninth lesson which we have devoted to trying to learn the proper relationship existing between the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ. We also have sought to demonstrate from God's Word the attitude that one should have toward the Law of Moses. This week's points will be taken directly from Paul's instructions to the Galatian brethren recorded in the book of Galatians. We recognize that every cause has an effect; every antecedent a consequence; and every "now" an "afterwards." So there are certain consequences of going back to the Law of Moses. We are not referring only to those, who like the Jews accept only the Old Testament, but we are referring to *anyone* who professes to be a Christian, wearing the name of Christ, and yet relies upon the Old Testament as a source of authority in religious matters under this Christian dispensation. Some of the Galatian brethren were attempting to take a portion of Judaism, and intermix it with Christian teaching; thus they corrupted both. Paul said there are consequences of such a practice.

Consequence: Paul Labored in Vain

First of all, Paul said if *they went back to the Law*, he had bestowed labor upon them in vain. "Howbeit at that time, not knowing God, ye are in bondage to them that by nature are no gods; but now that ye have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again? Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain" (Gal. 4:8-11). The apostle Paul had gone on evangelistic tours, and he inevitably went into the synagogue of the Jews to dispute with them, to try to persuade them that they should be amenable to the Gospel of Christ instead of the Law of Moses, since Christ had nailed the Law to His cross. These Galatians were some that he had been able to reach, and he had persuaded them to forsake the imperfect Law of Moses, and follow the perfect Savior of the World. His sacrifices had been immense that enabled him to go preach to these people. Now, they were on the brink of returning to the weak and beggarly rudiments of the Law from which Paul had labored to free them. If they went back to the Law, Paul had wasted his time and effort on them. He had worked in vain.

Consequence: They Suffered in Vain

A second consequence of going back under the Law was one personal to the Jews who were going back. They had suffered in vain. Paul said, "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified? This only would I learn from you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh? Did ye suffer so many things in vain? if it be indeed in vain" (Gal. 3:1-4). One of the reasons why some of the Jews, who had accepted the Gospel, were going back to the Law was persecution. Their former Jewish brethren, still under the Law, were making it rough on these Jews who had obeyed the Gospel. Paul rebuked the Hebrews for giving up, and going back to the Law without shedding their blood. He said, "Ye have not resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (Heb. 12:4). But why were these brethren suffering? Or why had they already suffered so much? It was merely because they had left Judaism and had become Christians. Now, if they already had suffered for being Christians, and were now going to give up their Christianity for Judaism and the Law, they suffered in vain. They should have just remained Jews, religiously, and averted any persecution. But there are consequences far more serious than these of going back to the Law. To these we now turn.

Consequence: Christ Profits Nothing

A third consequence of going back to the Law of Moses is stated in Galatians 5. Paul said, "For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing" (Gal. 5:1,2). To go back under the Law is to forfeit the profit we have through Christ. This is a most serious consequence, yet the vast majority of religious people today go back to the Law of Moses for authority in religious matters. Circumcision is a part of the Old Testament Law, so in receiving circumcision, they were giving up the blessing they enjoyed through Christ. Paul taught that if they could be saved by observing the Law, or by living as best they could under the Law, the death of Christ was needless: "I do not make void the grace of God: for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nought" (Gal. 2:21).

The Jews had the Law of Moses long before Jesus Christ came to the earth. Now they are placed in the position of going back to that which they had before Christ died. If the Law of Moses could save them-if righteousness is of the Law-then Christ died for no good reason. If they can be saved by the Law, why was it necessary for God, in the fullness of times, to send His Son to die a horrible death on a cross?

One of the reasons why Christ died was to redeem us from the curse of the Law, and now these people, having once tasted the goodness of the grace of God, want to go back under the Law. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of

the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). Now if Christ died to redeem us from the curse of the Law, and they were to go back under the Law, so far as these individuals are concerned Jesus' death was to no avail. The course of the Law was that it condemned all those who lived under it, for all sinned, and no forgiveness could be had under the Law without the death of Christ. Jesus died for the salvation of those under the Law, as well as for us in the Christian age. Heb. 9:15 reads, "And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, they have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." So if there was no curse under the Law, Christ died for nought. And if they now went back to the Law, so far as they were concerned, Christ still died for no good reason. Let us again read Gal. 5:2,3: "Behold I Paul say unto you, that if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing. Yea, I testify again to every man that receiveth circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law."

The fourth consequence of going back under the Law is that one is a debtor to do the whole Law. Paul said if one received circumcision, he is a debtor to do the whole Law (Gal. 5:2,3). The reasoning back of this statement simply is that one cannot be justified *both* by the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ. It has got to be by one or the other. If one chooses to give up the blessed promises of the Gospel in exchange for the Old Testament system, he must completely forfeit any blessing based on Christ, and rely solely on the Law of Moses. But under the Law of Moses, the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, therefore if one is to be saved by the Law, he must do the whole Law.

Notice carefully, friends, what Paul said. He declared that if one tried to bind circumcision, one part of the Law, he was morally obligated to keep the whole Law. This principle is equally as applicable today. If one wants to bind the Sabbath (Saturday) worship upon himself or any other, he is obligated to keep all the other portions of the Law. If one is going to cite the Old Testament usage of mechanical instruments of music as his authority for their use *today*, Paul said, "he is a debtor to do the whole law." This means, if you are giving up the Gospel authority in one instance, you have staked your hope of eternal life on the Law of Moses instead of on Jesus Christ. Therefore to be saved by the Law, one must keep *all* the Law's ordinances, so do the whole Law.

If we could get people to realize this one principle, certainly they would not argue that anything done in the Old Testament worship is permissible in New Testament worship. If one takes one thing from the Law, he is obligated to do the whole Law.

The fifth and final point which Paul made as a consequence of going back to the Law is found in Galatians 5:4, the very next verse from the ones we

have just read: "Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace." Notice he said that if you try to be justified by the Law, you are severed from Christ and fallen from grace. What does it mean to be severed from Christ? Jesus Christ is life. John said, "in him was life and the life was the light of men" (Jno. 1:4). Now to go back to the Law is to be cut off from Christ, or severed from Christ. So to be severed from Christ is to be severed from life. It is to be lost. He emphasized this point by saying that to try to be justified by the Law is to be fallen from grace.

There is a prominent religious organization that teaches that once one becomes a child of God, it is impossible for that person to so sin as to be eternally lost in hell. They express this doctrine by saying, "once in grace, always in grace." But Paul not only said it is possible to fall from grace, but he declared that if a fellow tries to be justified by the Law, or should try to justify his actions by referring to the Old Testament, not only is it possible for such an individual to fall from grace, but he already has fallen. To go back to the Law of Moses is to fall from grace and to fall from grace is to be lost.

In conclusion let us review the five consequences, as stated by Paul, of going back to the Law of Moses: (1) Paul's labor had been in vain (Gal. 4:8-11); (2) They had suffered in vain (Gal. 3:1-4); (3) Christ will profit nothing (Gal. 5:2); (4) Ye are debtor to do the whole Law (Gal. 5:3); (5) Ye are severed from Christ and fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). May God help us to remember these points from God's Word when we are tempted to cite the Old Testament in justification for our practice in the New Testament era.