Law and Grace
Distinctions between the Old and New
John 1:17
For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. NASB

What is the Law?

For a glossary of terms used in this study, see the appendix "glossary."

Definition and Terminology
The Law is most commonly used to speak of God's moral standard by which He judges righteousness among mankind, both in people's relationship to God and people's relationship to neighbor, as outlined in the writings of Moses. It may have reference to a certain section of Scripture, or may be in general a reference to God's standards for general or specific things. Many times it is used to refer to the Decalogue (10 Commandments), or the Torah (The Pentateuch or the first 5 books of the Bible), or even the entire Old Testament. It is helpful to make the distinctions of moral, civil, and ceremonial. That is the law was really threefold: the Moral Law, as summed up in the Decalogue, the Ceremonial Law, prescribing the ritual and all the typical (shadow) enactments, and what might be called the Civil Law, that relating to the people in their national, political life. The distinction is not closely observed, though sometimes the reference emphasizes one aspect, sometimes another, but generally the whole Law without any discrimination is contemplated. Sometimes the Law means the whole Old Testament Scriptures, as in John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25. At other times the Law means the Pentateuch, as in Luke 24:44.

The Law is a major theme in both Old and New Testaments. Because God is the Judge of all mankind (Gen 18:25, Psa 94:2, Heb 9:27, 12:23), He judges according to the righteous standard of His holy Law. In this judgment, God expects perfect righteousness, as He has subjected all mankind in His Law to the standard which the Law puts forth (Rom 3:19-20). Therefore, when one transgresses God's Law, it is called sin, and act of lawlessness or a transgression of God's Law. This standard is consistent with God's own moral character (Rom 7:19) and explains how that moral character is implemented and carried out in our human existence and relations with both God and neighbor.

The Law can also be referred to as the Mosaic Covenant, which is the covenant that God made with Israel after He delivered them by His grace from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. In this sense we also refer to it as the Old covenant. Generally speaking, and looking back from a New testament perspective, we refer to the Law in the same sense that we do as the Old or Mosaic Covenant. At times, we may refer to the whole Old Testament as the old covenant or the Law, but when doing so, one must give some context to this as these terms can be easily misconstrued or confusing.

In the New Testament, we look back at the Old Testament and see that its fulfillment has come in Christ. In this way, much of New Testament teaching is seen in contrast to the Law, or the old
covenant, or even the entire Old Testament. Context is always important in these matters, but generally, the New Testament holds forth a **distinction between the Law and the Gospel.** The **Law** being God's righteous standard of the Old Covenant which all people have violated (Rom 3:23,5:12, Gal 3:22, 1 John 1:8), and have thus become sinners worthy of judgment and death (Gen 2:17, Eze 18:4, Rom 6:23, Jam 1:15), and the **Gospel** being what God has done in the person and work of Christ (Rom 3:21-24) to deliver the believer from sin and death (Rom 8:1-4). This distinction between Law and Gospel is the very heart of the Christian Faith and the most important message in the Bible because it is the heartbeat of God’s redemptive work the history of Creation and mankind.

The word “law” in the Bible is used in several different ways. It is used as a term to describe;
- **regulations** for a society (Est 1:19, 3:8, Dan 6:12, 15, 7:25, 1 Cor 6:4, 6)
- **as a general principle** (Rom 3:27, 8:2)

**The Mosaic Covenant Law**

In both Old and New Testaments, the **Law** most commonly refers to the commands and regulations of the **Mosaic Covenant.** These are contained in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Although the word “Law” in the Bible is usually referring to **Torah** as a whole, which also includes the book of Genesis. These first five books of the Bible are also referred to as the **Pentateuch.** Usually when it is used in this common way, it is capitalized, “Law,” and this is because it is a formal rendering referring to the Mosaic Covenant Law delivered by God to Moses at Mount Sinai. It is often referred to as **“the Law of Moses.”**

- **Joshua 8:32** - 32 And he wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel. NASB
- **Nehemiah 8:1 - 8** And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. NASB
- **Luke 24:44** - 44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." NASB
- **Hebrews 10:28-29** - 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. NASB

As the **“Law of Moses,”** it was a strict moral code that God gave to govern the society of the Israelites, God’s chosen people. It was instructive, teaching them who to treat one another in a Theocracy (a society governed by God), and this aspect of the **Law** is commonly called the **Moral Law.** It also gave them regulations for how God was to be worshipped, through the means of a Priesthood, an altar for blood and grain sacrifices, performed at a Tabernacle, and these are commonly referred to as the **Ceremonial Law.** It also contained laws, both perceptive requirements as well as penal sanctions, that were meant to bring authoritative order to the entire Israelite assembly. This aspect of the **Law** is commonly called the **Civil Law.** This means that God, as Lawgiver and Judge, would command for people to do certain things (perceptive requirements), and NOT to do other certain things for which there were penalties which could be even as severe as death (penal sanctions). Therefore the governance of this Israelite society was seen as a matter of the authority of God their ruler and King, under His holy Law as their Lawgiver, by which the people would be judged in His court as their Judge.