

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Dennis A. Wright & Lion and Lamb Apologetics Present



"Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their command" (2 Chronicles 12:32 ESV).

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Avoid Legalism: Emphasize the Law

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Many of today's young evangelicals have happily thrown off the legalistic fundamentalism of their childhood. They've come to a greater understanding of God's abundant grace, and the gospel has liberated them from slavery to guilt and fear. That's a very good thing. But I submit that recovering the gospel alone isn't enough to keep legalism at bay. We need a renewed emphasis on the law of God or else legalism will inevitably reemerge. Specifically, we need a clear emphasis on (1) the law as a covenant, and (2) the law as a standard or rule.

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One passage of Scripture that teaches the distinction between the law as a covenant and the law as a rule of life is Romans 7. Romans 7:4 says that believers have “died to the law through the body of Christ,” showing that we are no longer in a marriage covenant with the law (Rom 7:1-3) to obtain our justification; rather, Christ kept the law for our justification (cf. Rom 3:20, 28; 4:5-6, 5:18-19). But Romans 7 also teaches that the believer aims to follow the law as a rule of conduct in his sanctification. Paul, the mature believer, says, “I delight in the law of God in my inner being” (Rom 7:22) and “I myself serve the law of God with my mind” (Rom 7:25). In Romans 8:4, we’re told that Christ died for us, “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled *in us who walk* not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

There is nothing other than what our Baptist forebears taught in the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*. “Although true believers are not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned, yet it is of great use to them as well as to others, in that as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty” (19.6).

THE LAW AS A COVENANT

The law as a covenant says, “Do this and live” (Lev 18:5; Ez 20:11; Lk 10:28; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12). It demands perfect obedience for eternal life (Gal 3:12; 5:3). It makes no provision for forgiveness of sins (Gal 3:10). The law covenant is inflexible and absolute. Even one sin against the law covenant brings guilt and eternal condemnation. That means that in Adam, all are condemned in the court of the law covenant. The good news is that Christ’s perfect obedience to the terms of the law covenant brings justification and eternal life for all who belong to Him.

If, however, we forget the law covenant’s strict requirement of *perfect* obedience for justification and eternal life, then we’ll inevitably start to think that we can *imperfectly* keep the law for our justification and eternal life. This isn’t theoretical. N.T. Wright, popular among many evangelicals, teaches that we initially receive justification and life by grace, but we retain our justification and life by a kind of imperfect soft-obedience to the law. Wright, and those who follow him, have forgotten the strict demands of the law as a covenant.

Evangelicals who follow Wright on his doctrine of justification will find themselves re-enslaved to the legalism from which they thought they were liberated. They’ll try to keep the law to retain God’s saving love and favor. They’ll fear losing Christ and His good graces; so, they’ll perform. Moreover, the works they do won’t really be “good” because they won’t flow from faith resting in Christ’s complete satisfaction of the terms of the law as a covenant. “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).

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THE LAW AS A STANDARD OR RULE

In Christ, we're free from the law as a covenant! That means we're free from trying to keep the law for our justification, and we're free from trying to keep the law to avoid condemnation. But we're not free from the law as a standard or rule. After Christ justifies us, He graciously points us to His good law as our guide in sanctification. Christ teaches believers to express their love for Him and for others by learning to keep the standard of His law more and more. The law of God is the very definition of how we're to love God and men. And in Christ, the law cannot hurt us. It cannot destroy or condemn us because we're already justified. It merely shows us the way to love, enjoy, and commune with the Christ who bought us. The law of God is the Christian's "rule of walking" faithfully in Christ. Romans 7:12 says, "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."

If we don't emphasize the law as the sufficient standard of faithful conduct, then we'll start to make up our own standards in sanctification. This is legalism. Preachers will teach "practical" ways of applying the gospel that aren't anchored in God's law but only in their own experiences and preferences or subjective sense of what it means to "live in light of the gospel." That's authoritarianism. Church cultures, rather than God's law, will tell us how to live in light of the gospel. Extra-biblical emphases and practices will arise by the "leading of the Spirit," while God's own law is marginalized. If we don't emphasize and apply the biblical doctrine of God's law, we'll inevitably be enslaved to a form of legalism.

The Bible teaches "through the law comes knowledge of sin," (Rom 3:20), "where there is no law, there is no transgression" (Rom 4:15), and "sin is not counted where there is no law" (Rom 5:13). The doctrine of Christian liberty is based on the Bible's doctrine of the law. If we lose the doctrine of law, then we'll lose our liberty. We will become legalists. But when we emphasize the law of God, we'll be free from all extra-biblical commandments to walk wisely in light of His sufficient commands. As our Lord Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

The gospel alone isn't enough to keep us from legalism. We need both the law and the gospel to keep us from legalism. And the law of God, correctly understood as a covenant and a standard or rule, is a necessary and powerful protection from legalism.

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Tom serves as the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Clinton, LA. He's married to Joy, and they have four children: Sophie, Karlie, Rebekah, and David. He received his MDiv and PhD degrees from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with a major in Church History, emphasis on Baptists, and with a minor in Systematic Theology. Tom is the author of *The Doctrine of Justification in the Theologies of Richard Baxter and Benjamin Keach* (PhD diss, SBTS). He serves on the board of directors for Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary and is an adjunct professor of historical theology for the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics Update

- Summer is the time of year that most of our annual expenses for website hosting, license renewals, and programming renewals come due. ***Please assist us in making a difference!*** Lion and Lamb Apologetics is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and all gifts are tax deductible in the United States.
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Who's That Knocking on My Door? Mormon Missionaries, Mormon Temples, and the Mormon Worldview



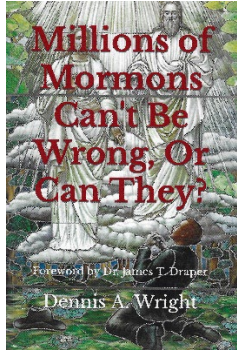
Dennis A Wright, DMin

Join Dr. Dennis Wright as he leads this informative seminar on Mormonism. In this session, he explores the origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, key

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Mormon doctrines, and the significant differences between Mormon theology and historic biblical Christianity. This seminar is designed to equip believers to understand Mormon beliefs, discern doctrinal differences, and engage in gospel-centered conversations with Mormons in a gracious and biblical manner.

This 90-minute video presentation can be viewed [HERE!](#)



This presentation is based upon *Millions of Mormons Can't Be Wrong, or Can They?*

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