

Gadsby's Questions for Law Men

John Calvin set out three uses for the law of Moses. In particular, in his third use, Calvin alleged that the law is the believer's perfect rule of life, a whip to beat him into sanctification. According to the Reformer, the believer needs this whip because he is a lazy ass.

Millions of believers during the past 450 years have adopted Calvin's scheme. Many still do, even though most of them seem rather shy at using the most severe of Calvin's terms. Many more, even though they do not realise it, have been affected by Calvin, and are what I call 'incipient' law-mongers, 'recipe preachers'.

As a result, most believers are reared on a diet of law, either overt or incipient. Sadly, this brings many of them into bondage, fear and a lack of assurance, with a corresponding loss of joy in Christ. Those who argue Scripture to show that this is all wrong are usually dismissed by law men as antinomians.

William Gadsby, the first half of the 19th century, was one such to argue against the law being the believer's perfect rule. And, of course, he was duly lambasted for his pains. He responded in several works in which he wrote cogently on the biblical teaching concerning the believer and the law, thereby exposing the wrongness of Calvin's system. On one occasion, Gadsby replied to a critic by way of a series of questions. And it is those questions that I re-publish here.

Why do I re-publish Gadsby's questions now? Because, I am glad to say, there has been a resurgence of biblical teaching on the law. Although I am only a very small cog in this large engine, in company with a growing number of other teachers I am doing all I can to set out the freeness of the grace of God in Christ.¹ Naturally, this world-wide explosion of new-covenant teaching has aroused

¹ My largest contribution thus far is my *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*, Brachus, Wilstead, 2013. But there are several works. All may be found under David H J Gay both on Amazon and in Kindle (as well as on sermonaudio.com).

Calvin's advocates, and they are retaliating by bringing out all their old well-worn criticisms. In light of this, it occurred to me that Gadsby might speak again, and speak with profit to a new generation. Hence this re-publication.

For William Gadsby's questions need to be faced by all who advocate the law as the perfect rule of life for the believer, the rule by which he is to be sanctified. When these teachers talk about 'law', however, they nearly always try to restrict it to the ten commandments, which they are pleased to call 'the moral law'. This stems from Thomas Aquinas. It has no scriptural warrant whatsoever. Nevertheless, for the sake of this article, I allow their terminology: they advocate sanctification by the law, calling it the believer's perfect rule of life.

As I say, Gadsby disagreed with Calvin and all who wanted to bring the believer under the law. He put his questions to a critic. Well, I, too, disagree with Calvin, and so, in re-publishing Gadsby's questions,² I respectfully ask all who think the believer *is* under the law for sanctification to face these questions and answer them. After all, to pose such questions – and to face and answer them – is to act entirely within the spirit of Acts 17:11: 'The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true' (Acts 17:11, NIV). In this regard, I ask all who read my work: be a Berean and not a Thessalonian.

Gadsby's questions

Gadsby wrote to his critic, asking the following questions:

1. If the law is the believer's rule of life, I shall thank you to tell me what is intended by the letter written by the apostles and elders, and sent to the believing Gentiles, as recorded in Acts 15, and shall expect you to explain the chapter.

² I have taken Gadsby's questions from my *Christ* pp519-520, slightly edited for this publication. In my *Christ*, I have included much more invaluable material from Gadsby on this subject.

2. I hope you will tell me what the apostle means in the first six verses of Romans 7, where he says that the believer is dead to the law, and free from the law; and let me know how that law can be his rule, when he is dead to it, and as free from it, as a woman is from her husband when she has him buried. Should you be disposed to say that the believer is dead to it as a COVENANT, but not as a RULE of life, you will no doubt, point to those scriptures which make a distinction between the law as a covenant and as a rule of life; for unless you do this, you will not move me.

3. You will have the goodness to inform me what is intended by the first four verses of Romans 8; and let me know how it comes to pass that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made me free from the law of death, and yet that law of death (called in other places the killing letter [Rom. 7:5; 2 Cor. 3:6-7,9]) is my rule of life; and how it is that it is my rule of life after it has killed me, and I am made free from it.

4. You will read 2 Corinthians 3, and let me know how it is that administration of death, written and engraven on stones, is the living man's rule of life, and how this can be consistent with what the apostle observes in verse 11, where he says 'it is done away', and in verse 13, where he says, 'it is abolished'. Now, my dear sir, you are to tell me how that law which is done away with and abolished still remains the believer's perfect rule of life.

5. [I have omitted this question].³

6. You will inform me how it is that if we are led by the Spirit we are not under the law, and yet that law is a perfect rule of life to that man who is led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18). There are many

³ Here is Gadsby's question: 'You will also show me how it is that the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that when faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster, and yet that this schoolmaster is [alleged by the law men to be] our only rule of life after faith is come (Gal. 3:24-25)'. As I made clear in my *Christ* pp51-61,127-140,348-358,420-430, I disagree with Gadsby's preparationist view of Gal. 3:24-25, arising out of a mis-translation of the text. Nevertheless, Gal. 3:25 invincibly makes Gadsby's point.

things in the letter to the Galatians which you will find worthy of your attention in this business. I hope you will read the whole.

7. I shall expect you to tell me how it is that the handwriting which was against us, and contrary to us, is taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross (as Colossians 2:14), and yet remains a perfect rule of life. Should you be disposed to say that the ceremonial law is here intended,⁴ you will tell me how that law, which was the gospel in its day,⁵ came to be against the believer, and what there was in it contrary to him.

8. You will surely inform me how it is that the law which was not made for a righteous man is the righteous man's rule (1 Tim. 1:9).

9. As Christ was made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law (as in Galatians 4:4-5), you will say how it comes to pass that they still remain under it in any sense that Christ was made under it, seeing he was made under it to redeem them from under it.

10. But as whatsoever the law says, it says to them who are under the law (as Romans 3:19), and as the believer is not under the law (as Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:18), you will inform me what the law says to them who are not under it.

11. If the law contains the whole of the revealed will of God, as to the matter of obedience...,⁶ you will let me know upon what ground you prove that unbelievers have no right to be baptised, and partake of the Lord's supper...

12. You will inform me how it is that while men contend for the law being a perfect rule of life to believers, and [use] ill names [to describe those] who do not, [many of them who do contend for the

⁴ I do not accept Gadsby's terminology: 'the ceremonial law'. There is no *scriptural* warrant for the threefold division of the law. See my *Christ* pp100-104,392-400.

⁵ That is, in the old covenant, the law (and the prophets) pointed the Jews to Christ in the new.

⁶ That is, if the law really is the believer's perfect rule, it must contain all the revealed will of God, all that the believer needs to know about everything to do with the Christian life. This is self-evidently false.

law being a perfect rule] can and do, openly, knowingly, and designedly, break the fourth commandment every week. You will inform me whether doing *every* sort of work on the seventh day is walking according to that rule which says: ‘You shall not do *any* work, no, not so much as to kindle a fire’ (Ex. 35:3).⁷

13. You will inform me how it is that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes (Rom. 10:4), and yet that the believer, who is got to the end of the law (namely, by faith in Christ), at once must come back again, and begin at the beginning, by taking it for a perfect rule of life.

Gadsby said he received no reply. Indeed, he found it necessary to correct false reports which his critic had circulated about him. Gadsby still received no satisfaction on the points he had raised. I do not intend to be patronising when I respectfully ask Gadsby’s questions of any reader who feels I have gone astray in setting out the believer’s rule in my *Christ is All*. May I ask that you act as Priscilla and Aquila, and explain to me ‘the way of God more accurately’ (Acts 18:26, NKJV), and do so from Scripture? I will be grateful.

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⁷ Gadsby is referring to the hypocrisy of sabbatarians who profess the highest possible regard for the sabbath, and threaten the direst of punishments for sabbath-breaking (as the Mosaic law truly did), yet they, themselves, regularly and constantly break sabbath laws. Their excuses and tortuous reasonings to get round the law are often ludicrous. If the matter were not so serious, it would be highly amusing.