

AN ORDER TO IT ALL 1: RULES AND GRACE

...you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:14, NIV)

AMONG AVID GOLFERS, you will typically find two approaches to the game. One is very strict, with every rule followed in virtually every round. The other is lenient, with mulligans and gimmes and various other modifications the first group would label anathema.

But it isn't that easy.

A new member at a club expressed disfavor that others were not putting out to the end. Rather than tap in their one- and two-footers (sometimes longer), they would rake them away. "These should be putted," he said, "for everyone's handicap to be accurate." Two things seemed to be missing from this fellow's understanding. First, they were typically playing match play, where you would run a putt past in order to give yourself an increased chance at halving a hole. The gimme that ensued might be four feet long, but you may have taken a more cautious approach if you were strictly playing stroke play. Second, gimmes only help to *lower* one's handicap index, which prevents the sandbagging that seemed to be this man's concern.

This tangle in golf reflects closely the difficult conversation had among those who read the Bible and wonder how new the New Covenant really is. Let's explain. The New Covenant, which is life in Christ under grace, sets us free from the governance of the Old Covenant, or the law. That law, given by God to Moses for the people of Israel, is still closely observed by orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jews around the world. But what of those in Christ? Do we need to follow the 613 commands of the law, only the Ten Commandments, or no commands at all? Where is the line between rules and grace?

In the weeks ahead, we will explore several facets of this issue, but today we'll begin here: *The law has no power to save.* Only in the righteousness of Christ are we justified before God. Our own efforts at impressing God are foolish and empty. *And the Lord Jesus Christ has ordained a new righteousness, the law of love.* We follow this law, with many of its applications spelled out in the gospels and the apostles' teaching, out of appreciation for the grace purchased with Jesus' own blood and in love-driven obedience to his instruction.

When we understand these two basics, we can begin to survey the Scriptures with right insight and grasp what we should be doing when we follow Christ.

Opening questions So which kind of golfer are you? Are you more comfortable when every rule is followed or when there is an agreement among the players to be more relaxed?

READING Galatians 2:11-21; John 14:15-21; Galatians 5:14

The importance of the matter (Galatians 2)

What does the contention between Paul and Peter (Cephas) tell us about how important the law-grace debate is? What arguments did Paul make about grace's superiority? From verse 20, how did Paul live his life?

Our motivation in following Christ (John 14)

How did Jesus say his disciples would express their love for him? Who will help us in fulfilling this expression? How will Christ respond?

The simple law (Galatians 5)

How did Paul reduce the whole law to a single line? What will it take for you to obey this law today? every day?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2018 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/SVG7ySfjgZ0>