

Truth and Spirit Ministries

The True Meaning of First Fruits Part I

By Denise Bostic

Have you listened to those in the Christian media who are so intent on teaching the Body of Christ about giving a first fruit offering today? And have you also been wondering about whether or not this teaching is actually legitimate for those in the modern day Church? If you are, you're not alone. Maybe you have heard about this from a popular television preacher, a traveling minister that visited your Church or maybe even from the leaders of your congregation. No matter how you have come into contact with teachings on first fruits though, most often than not, it is probably being taught according to the ordinances of the Old Covenant Law instead of according to the realities of the New Covenant in Christ.

Since this teaching about the first fruit offering has been promoted through the seemingly "safe" mass media of Christian television, many Pastors have blindly embraced this doctrine and are now spreading this teaching and practice to their congregations without ever having proved its validity for the New Testament Church. Today more and more believers are hearing from their leaders that they are commanded to give a first fruit offering. Because of this, a lot of believers are now asking, "What are first fruits?" "Are believers in Christ commanded to bring a first fruit offering today?" and "Does the first fruit offering mean giving money?" We should not be looking for the answers to these questions under the shadow of the Old Testament Law as some do. Instead we will find our answers in Christ and the New Testament scriptures. Here we will find that the true meaning of first fruits.

From Confusion to Clarity

There have been an increasing number of Christians today that have become confused over this doctrine of first fruits and rightly so. The confusion stems from those that teach believers in the New Testament Church that they are obligated to pay the first fruits of their income according to an ordinance from the Law of Moses. (Exodus 23:16, Leviticus 23:9-14, Nehemiah 10:32-37) Confusion always results when others try to put the yoke of the law upon those that are called to live by God's grace. (Galatians 5:7-10 NIV) The good news is that this confusion can be remedied very quickly. Clarity comes to us when we really grasp and understand this one vital truth: **"You are not under law, but under grace."** (Romans 6:14)

This powerful truth taught by the Apostle Paul is a must for every believer to be free from the yoke of the Law, to live in the power of Christ and receive the realities that he has given us under the New Covenant. The New Testament scriptures have given overwhelming proof that *all* believers have been set free from the law by Christ and now

that we have been set free, we are warned not to let ourselves be burdened again by this yoke of slavery or allow others to try to place it on us either. (Romans 6:14; 7:1-6; Galatians 1:6-10; 2:1-5; 5:1-10, 18)

Understanding Foundational Truths

To understand the true meaning of first fruits we must first come to learn and understand some foundational biblical truths that will help us to understand the difference between law and grace. It's so necessary to first be rooted and grounded in Christ and his grace in order to receive and walk in all that he has provided for us under the dispensation of the New Covenant. It's also important for us to be able to recognize when someone is trying to bring us back under the bondage of the law. We must not be ignorant of his Word and we must rely on the Holy Spirit for understanding and also to help us discern when someone is trying to bring us into this bondage. (II Corinthians 2:9-16; I Corinthians 12:10; I John 4:1)

When you hear a teaching, please ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you whether it is according to the truth of the gospel or not. When studying the word during your private time, ask God to give you divine revelation of His word. (I Corinthians 2:1-16, 12:10, I John 4:1, II Timothy 2:15, Acts 17:11) God does not require us to be obedient to the Law of Moses today but instead he requires us to be obedient to the Gospel of Christ. (Romans 10:16, II Thessalonians 1:8, I Peter 4:17)

Many are being deceived. In the last several years there has been a resurgence of believers in Christ (both Jew and Gentile) that are being brought back under the bondage of the Law and at an alarming rate. This is due to those that are teaching the Old Testament Law to the body of Christ instead of teaching New Testament Grace. They do not understand that believers in Christ have in reality died to not only sin and death **but also to the law** and that **Christ died in order to set all men free from all of these**. (Romans 7:1-6, Galatians 2:19-20)

When Jesus died upon the cross dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the scriptures declare that we also died with him. We died with him to sin, the law and death through his vicarious sacrifice. (Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 2:19-21) Some are not able to have a revelation of this astounding truth because they have become blinded by the law. (II Corinthians 3:14-16) Some have had a false gospel preached to them instead of the true gospel of Christ. They have received a gospel of "works" instead of the gospel of grace.

Today, those that teach giving a first fruit offering according to the law are actually teaching believers to earn their blessings through works of the law instead of receiving them freely by grace and faith in Christ as God has intended. (Romans 4:13-16, Galatians 3: 14-18) Some insinuate that since Jesus and the first converts in the Church were Jewish that this means that it's ok to live like a Jew under the law in the New Testament Church. Although it is true that Jesus and the first converts in the Church were Jewish, this does not mean that you and I must become Jewish (live under the law) in order to live a life in Christ. The New Testament scriptures make this very clear.

We are not to live by the law but by faith in Christ. The bible says that the law is not of faith. (Galatians 3:11-12) When we are doing works of the law we are not walking by faith. Living

by works of the law actually frustrates the grace of God in our lives and renders our faith impotent or inoperable. Living like a Jew, i.e., keeping works of the law also cannot justify us before God or give us any more favor with Him than those who do not. We are to walk by faith in Christ and what He has done for us. We cannot earn our blessings from God. (Acts 15:7-11, 19-24, Galatians 2:11-21, 4:8-11, Colossians 2:16-17) In spite of this clarity within the epistles of the New Testament, we still find a growing number of those within the body of Christ pushing an agenda of law keeping, of which the giving of the first fruits offering is included.

Different ministers teach giving a first fruit offering for different reasons. Although we might not know the motives for doing so, we definitely should be judging whether or not their teaching is biblically sound and for the Church in the New Testament. Some teach works of the law (tithing, first fruit offering, Hebrew Festivals, etc.) because they may have been sincerely deceived by false teaching. Others may do so because they believe that mixing law and grace will help believers be balanced spiritually. Then there are some (unfortunately) that teach this because they are greedy and see this as a sure way to gain a lot of money. Others may be doing so because they have the hidden agenda of bringing believers back under the rules and regulations of the Law. Some have a false assumption and belief that God is restoring the Torah or Law of Moses to the Church in the latter days. Nothing could be further from the truth!

A careful study of the New Testament teaches us that those who teach the Church works of the law are in direct opposition and disobedience to the Gospel of Christ (whether knowingly or unknowingly). These words may seem very weighty for those reading this but please understand that this can be fully backed up with many New Testament scriptures. It's harmful to our spiritual life if we bring ourselves back under the dominion of the law and this is not something to be taken lightly. (Galatians 1:6-10, 2:14, 5:1-4)

Many saints today have been deceived into believing that it's not harmful to keep the law or that it is actually beneficial. The letters of Paul teach otherwise though. As Paul wrote in his epistle to the Galatians, **“Tell me you who want to be under the law. Are you not aware of what the law says?” (Galatians 4:21)** The law requires that if you want to be under it that you have to keep it in its entirety. You must know though that if you break even one law you have broken all of it. (Galatians 5:1-4; James 2:10-11) Paul taught that this is impossible system for man to keep and this is why Jesus came to fulfill the law for us and die for our sins. The dangers of bringing ourselves back under the Mosaic Law is that we will alienate or cut ourselves off from Christ and his sacrificial atonement and fall from grace. (Galatians 1:6-9. Galatians 2:11-21, especially verse 14, Galatians 4:8-11, Galatians 5:1-4)

Some in the Church falsely assume that since we've been given the entire Bible (both Old and New Testaments) by God that he intends for us to adhere to all of it. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. (Acts 15, Ephesians 2:15, Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 10) Contained within the Bible are two major covenants. The Gospel declares that the first or Old Testament is now obsolete and the second or New Testament is an eternal covenant that has been instituted by Christ. (Hebrews 8:13; 10:9) The false teaching that we have to keep both covenants has caused many believers to be caught in the trap of **legalism**. The Gospel of Christ declares that we cannot mix law and grace. God does not want us to be in

bondage to legalism by serving rules and regulations of the law. Instead, he wants us to receive his grace and serve Christ in the freedom newness of the Spirit. (Romans 7:6, II Corinthians 3:6-8) It is written:

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.” (II Corinthians 3:17)

True freedom can only be found by following Christ and his Spirit. The apostle Paul reminded the Galatians of the freedom that Christ had obtained for them through the cross. He then admonished them to stand firm in this salvation and not to bring themselves back under the yoke or bondage of the law. He said:

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1)

We must take a firm stand against those that would want to enslave us with the rules and regulations of the Mosaic Law. When others tell us that we must keep works connected to the law, i.e. keep the Sabbath, Feast Days, tithe and give offerings (such as the first fruit) we must reject their message. We are not under law but grace! We must also understand that Jesus didn't come to form another **religion**, but came to restore all men back into a **relationship** with God. He was not making an extension of Judaism, Paganism or any other “isms”, but making new creatures in Christ that have been born again from above from a Kingdom not of this world. We are born again of the Holy Spirit and have become sons of God through spiritual adoption. (John 3: 1-8, John 1:12)

I said all of that to help you to understand that those who are teaching believers today that they must give a first fruits offering according to the law are in effect bringing believers back under its dominion (rules and regulations). This is a dangerous direction to be heading however. The Law of Moses was a total, complete system that could not be broken up into parts. We cannot just pick and choose which parts that we want to keep and ignore the other parts because it was a covenant that was to be kept in its entirety. The problem with going back to the law is that all we will continue to find is more and more rules and regulations to keep. Paul had a saying that described this perfectly. He said, **“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” (Galatians 5:9)** A little legalism will lead to a lot if not stopped. This is one of the reasons that the Lord came to die for us. He died to set us free and bring an end to the law for all who believe and who have received the atonement or reconciliation to God. (Romans 4:10; Romans 5:11) To go back under the ordinances of the law is trample on the blood of the New Covenant and to insult the Spirit of grace. (Hebrews 10: 28-29)

The Temporary Purpose of the Law

There are some ministers that cite scriptures from the book of Nehemiah as proof that first fruits are separate from the tithes so that you will give a first fruit offering above and beyond the tithe. (Nehemiah 10:29-35, 12:44) In doing this they are adding more weight of the yoke of the law upon the Lord's sheep in order to extract additional money from them. It's like adding an extra brick to those already loaded down. (Matthew 23:1-4) To make their teaching credible, they must bring believers back under the dominion of the law to try to

give the first fruit offering some sort of legitimacy. They use the ordinances of the law to impose commands from an first covenant that is no longer in effect and has been set aside by Christ due to the Cross.(Hebrews 10:9)

The truth is then, it makes no difference that tithes and first fruit offerings were separate under the law. *They are both ordinances under the law* and believers in Christ are no longer under the dominion of the law! (Nehemiah 10:32-35, Malachi 3:7-11, Romans 6:14 KJV) The law (its commandments and ordinances) were nailed to the cross and abolished in Christ. (Ephesians 2:14-15, Colossians 2:13-14) God only made the Old Covenant (and all its commandments) with ancient Israel and *throughout their generations* and only up until the time of the coming of the Christ or Messiah:

“These are the words of the covenant, which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.” (Deuteronomy 29:1 KJV)

God commanded the Israelites and their generations *only* to keep all the Law (including the first fruit offering) until the Lord would establish a New Covenant with the house of Israel. God made it clear through the prophets of old that this New Covenant would not be like the old one. (Leviticus 23:9-21, Nehemiah 10:34-37, **Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:6-13**) This teaches us that there is a remarkable difference between the two Covenants.

The ordinances (rules, regulations or commands) that were given to the Israelites under the law were only carnal and temporary according to Hebrews 9:10.

“They were only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings-external regulations applying until the time of the new order.” (NIV)

If you back up to Hebrews 9:9, you will find that the writer is speaking of not only the sacrifices of the law, but also the gifts (or offerings) of the law as well. This would include *all the offerings of the law*, which would have **included first fruits**. These were outward rules that were to be kept in the power of the flesh. They were only temporarily imposed upon Israel until the new order or the New Covenant could be instituted by Christ. The apostle Paul also taught that the law was temporarily imposed on Israel until faith (in Christ) came.

“Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” (Galatians 3:25)

You may ask, “If we are no longer under the law what do we follow now?” We are now to follow the law or doctrine of Christ and his Spirit. We are to receive the doctrines that Christ has given his Church as given through the books of the New Testament scriptures and also what he speaks to us today through the Holy Spirit. (II John 9-10; Hebrews 3:1-12; Revelation 2:11) The words that he has spoken out of his mouth have now become a law to us. (Matthew 17:5, Hebrews 1:1-2, I Corinthians 9:19-21, Revelation 2:7) We are also taught to follow the Spirit and look to him to now lead us into all righteousness. When we follow the Spirit, we do not need to look to the supervision of the law. (John 16:12-15, Galatians 5:16-25)

A False Revelation and a Faulty Foundation

Those ministers today that teach believers that they must give a first fruits offering (Old Covenant style) may tell you that they've had a "revelation" from God about first fruits and that this is for the Church today but do not believe them. They did not receive this by revelation from Christ or his Spirit, but they got it straight from the law and teach it according to the law. God will not go against the Gospel of Christ. He will not take you and I back to a ministration of *death*. The apostle Paul called the Old Covenant Law a ministration of death. Why? It's because the Old Covenant could only accuse us of sin and condemn us to death due to man's inability to keep it perfectly. (Romans 7:7-24) Those in Christ are not under the condemnation of the law today however. Paul wrote:

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:1-2 NIV)

Never allow anyone to put you under the condemnation of the law because you refuse to give a first fruit offering. Believers are in no way bound to the rules and regulations of the law now that all men have been set free from it by Christ. Now we are under the ministration of the Spirit who imparts to us the life and grace of God. (II Corinthians 3:6-16) In light of this, which Covenant do you want to be under? I'm sure that like me, you want to be under a New Covenant that administers grace and life more abundant through Christ and the Holy Spirit!

Some also claim that the "revelation" that they have received is also a **pattern** or **precept** for all believers to follow because it is based on the foundation of God. This "pattern" that they speak of however is a pattern that has been patterned after the law and this "precept" is a precept that they have lifted up out from the law. Also, what foundation are they speaking of? The foundation they are speaking of is not the foundation of Christ, *but of the law*. These so-called Bible teachers are building on the wrong foundation. Every believer under the New Covenant should only have the foundation of Christ. Only Jesus Christ kept and fulfilled the entire law on our behalf. His life and sacrifice have now become the foundation on which we may now build upon with the help of the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians 3:11-16) His finished work is the only acceptable sacrifice that God the Father is pleased with and accepts. (Hebrews 10:1-14) The Lord Jesus declared:

"Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offering you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He set aside the first to establish the second." (Hebrews 10:8-10)

God does not accept a first fruit offering according to the law anymore. In fact, this scripture teaches us that *any* and *all* offerings under the law are no longer accepted by God. Why? It is because these all were *insufficient* sacrifices. The Father is only pleased with the complete and all-sufficient sacrifice and offering of Christ, who fulfilled the entire law perfectly in our stead. Only Jesus could bring fulfillment to what all these offerings represented under the law. (Hebrews 7:11-12, 26-28, 10: 1-18) We cannot add to or take away from the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

It is absolutely essential that every believer today be rooted and grounded in Christ and New Covenant grace. Again, if we do not understand grace, we will fall victim to the false teachings of the **legalists**. Since they are deceived, those that follow them will be deceived also. The Lord wants us to be able to discern false teaching when we hear it. We can automatically rule out a lot of false teachings that we hear today if we understand that we are not under the dominion of the law-period. We are now called to live and walk in the Spirit. We should pray and ask God to open the eyes of those who have come under the bondage of the law to have a revelation of New Testament grace. It's so important that ministers within the Church teach truth because teachers shall be judged more strictly and are held accountable for their teachings before God. (James 3:1)

Why the Law Was Removed By Christ

At this point I would like to ask you a question. Did you know that Jesus fulfilled and abolished the Law for many reasons and with great purpose? As I wrote before, he fulfilled the law perfectly in our stead because we were not able to. Although there was nothing wrong with the law, the sinful flesh of man caused the law to not be able to do the work that God intended it to in the lives of his people. (Romans 7:7-14, 8:1-4) The only thing that we could do is fail to live up to God's righteous standards as given in the Law. The only thing that the Law could do then is accuse us of sin. It could not empower us to overcome sin and could only judge us guilty. Do you see what a serious dilemma that this put men in? People are unable to keep the law as it was meant to be kept because of the sinful nature and because of this it can only keep them in a constant and vicious cycle of defeat and eventually death. This is what the apostle Paul was talking about in Romans chapter 7. He boldly declared however that Jesus Christ is the only one that is able to rescue us!

Do you see why Jesus had to set all men free and deliver all men from the law? If we truly understand these things, we will not want to bring ourselves or allow others to bring us under the works of the Law. It is a deception to believe that any of us can keep any of the law, it is IMPOSSIBLE! Only Jesus could perform such an impossible task, only he could rescue us from the law, sin and death.

Many do not realize that the Law of Moses was only given to the Nation of Israel and excluded the Gentiles. This is another reason that God removed it out of the way. When the Lord did this it opened the way of salvation *for all men* to have access into the presence of God and be included in a better and New Covenant. Some get offended when they hear teaching that the Law of Moses has been nailed to the cross, done away with or abolished. Those that teach this however did not say this, God did! (Ephesians 2:15, Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 10:9) If someone is offended by these terms then they are truly offended at the cross and the word of God! The question is do we really believe what God has said? If we do, we will receive what he said and live under grace and not Law.

Real Is Better

All of these foundational things must be understood if we are to truly understand the real meaning of first fruits and the reality that they have become under the New Covenant. The first fruit that the nation of Israel was commanded to bring under the Old Testament Law

only represented a picture or shadow of a greater reality that would come through Christ and the New Covenant. A picture or shadow of something or someone is not the same as having the real however.

Think about it: If you were really hungry and had the choice between having only a picture of a steak dinner or actually having a real steak dinner, which one would you choose? If you had the choice between having only a picture of your spouse or actually having your spouse, which one would you choose? If you had the choice between having only a picture of your child or actually having your child, which one would you choose? And here's the best one of all, if you had the choice between only a picture of the Lord or actually having Him in your life for real, WHICH ONE WOULD YOU CHOOSE? I'm sure that like me, you would want the real deal! Remember, Israel only had a shadow or picture; we have the substance in Christ. Why would any one want to go back to a shadow when they can have the reality? Forget the shadow, give me the substance!

Remember, the Law was only a shadow of the good things that have actually come under the New Covenant, not the realities themselves. (Hebrews 10:1) Also if you keep this truth in the forefront of your heart and mind that **“You are not under law, but under grace”** then you are well on your way to understanding the true meaning of first fruits! As you continue on to Part Two of The True Meaning of First Fruits, you will learn the symbolism behind what the first fruits of the Law actually pointed to and also the reality of what they have become in Christ.

Go To Part II