

Christian Doctrine

From Old Testament Law to the Law of Christ

Galatians 3:21-28 (NASB95)

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INTRODUCTION:

We are in a new topical series that I have entitled "Christian Doctrine". The goal for this series is to cover the basic doctrines of Christianity that are revealed to us through the scriptures. We started this journey by revealing how the scriptures are inerrant and have to be inspired by God. Then we looked at how the Old Testament foreshadowed a Messiah to come and how the New Testament reveals the reality of that foreshadowing by Jesus. Jesus lived a **sinless** life and fulfilled the Law. He also performed all of the prophecy concerning Him from the prophets as well as His own claims and promises that were to be accomplished after the arrival of the true Messiah during His lifetime. We looked at the **impossible** probability that a mere man could accomplish this feat based upon our human experiences on earth!

The New Testament scriptures were written within seventy years after Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. If the message was not accurate, the people in the first century would have exposed the falsehood and Christianity would have immediately died. Also we know that the disciples would not have been willing to sacrifice their lives for the cause if they knew it was a lie.

Then we looked at the **Purpose of the Law**. The purpose was to teach us that we are all sinners and were utterly incapable of living perfectly according to the Law. We **desperately** needed a Savior! Jesus came to this earth to accomplish that feat for us! And finally we looked at how Jesus accomplished that feat by living a sinless life and becoming a perfect sacrifice for us on the cross. This paid the penalty for the sins that **we** had committed and filled us with His righteousness thus obtaining our eternal salvation.

Jesus came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. In fact, the ceremonies, sacrifices, and other elements of the Old Covenant were "only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves". Here is how the writer of Hebrews tells it.

This morning, Lord willing, we will look at the Law of Christ, how it replaced the Law and the Prophets, and how it impacts our Christian lives today. Then in the next few weeks, we will look at how the annual festivals and the Sabbath were replaced by the Law of Christ.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Galatians 3:21-28 (NASB95)

²¹ Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. ²² But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

²³ But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us to* Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Prayer

BODY:

I. Do Christians have to Obey the Old Testament Law?

The key to understanding the relationship between the Christian and the Law is knowing that the Old Testament law was given to the nation of Israel, **not** to Christians. Some of the laws were to reveal to the Israelites how to obey and please God (such as the Ten Commandments). Some of the laws were to show the Israelites how to worship God and atone for sin (as in the sacrificial system). Some of the laws were intended to make the Israelites distinct from other nations by the food and clothing rules. None of the Old Testament law is binding on Christians today. When Jesus died on the cross, He put an end to the Old Testament law.

In place of the Old Testament law, Christians are under the Law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2 (NASB95)

² Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

Matthew 22:35-40 (NASB95)

³⁵ One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
⁴⁰ **On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."**

If we obey those two commands, we will be fulfilling all that Christ requires of us. We will cover this in detail later in the sermon.

I want you to understand that this does **not** mean that the Old Testament law is irrelevant today. Many of the commands in the Old Testament law fall into the categories of "**loving God**" and "**loving your neighbor**". The Old Testament law can be a good guidepost for knowing how to love God and knowing what goes into loving your neighbor. At the same time, to say that the Old Testament law applies to Christians today is incorrect. The Old Testament law is a unit.

James 2:10 (NASB95)

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

So how can we love God and our neighbor?

1 John 5:3 (NASB95)

³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

We obey God's commands **not** because we are attempting to attain our salvation by our works, but because of our love for Him and for what He has done for us for our salvation through grace.

The Ten Commandments were essentially a summary of the entire Old Testament law. Nine of the Ten Commandments are clearly repeated in the New Testament. The lone exception is the observance of the Sabbath day. We will deal with this in the near future.

Obviously, if we are loving God, we will not be worshiping false gods or bowing down before idols. If we are loving our neighbors, we will not be murdering them, lying to them, committing adultery against them, or coveting what belongs to them. The purpose of the Old Testament law is to convict people of our inability to keep the law and point us to our need for Jesus Christ as Savior. The Old Testament law was never intended by God to be the universal law for all people for all of time. We are to love God and love our neighbors. If we obey those two commands faithfully, we will be upholding all that God requires of us.

II. What Does it Mean that Christians are not Under the Law?

Since Jesus specifically said that He did not come "to abolish" the Law "but to fulfill". How is it then that we are no longer under the Law?

An examination of **Romans 10:4**, which says: "**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**," will help in understanding what it means that Christians are not under the law.

We know that the Law taught us that **all** have sinned (whether Jew or Gentile) and are in need of a Savior. Therefore if we are without Christ, we are justly condemned in God's sight by the Law that was given to His servant Moses. However, we might argue that those who are not Jewish and therefore do not benefit from the knowledge of the Mosaic Law (including the moral and ceremonial laws), should not be condemned in the same way. This is dealt with by Paul.

Romans 2:14-16 (NASB95)

¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, ¹⁶ on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

The Law is the issue that has to be dealt with in order to bring us into a right relationship with God.

Galatians 2:16 (NASB95)

¹⁶ nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified (made righteous or found sinless before God) by the works of the Law but through **faith** in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

This passage reveals that the Law cannot justify, or make righteous, any man in God's sight, which is why God sent His Son to completely fulfill the requirements of the Law for all those who would ever believe in Him. Jesus redeemed us from the curse that has been brought through the law by becoming a curse for us.

Galatians 3:13-14 (NASB95)

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"—¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Jesus substituted Himself in our place and upon the cross took the punishment that is justly ours so that we are no longer under the curse of the Law. In doing so, He fulfilled and upheld the requirements of the Law. This then means that we are free from the Mosaic Law and instead are under the law of Christ, which is to love God with all of our being and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Christ became the end of the Law by virtue of what He did on earth through His sinless life and His sacrifice on the cross. So, the Law no longer has any bearing over us because its demands have been fully met in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ, who satisfied the righteous demands of the Law, restores our lost relationship with God and keeps us there.

III. What is the Law of Christ?

The phrase "Law of Christ" is found only twice in the New Testament.

Galatians 6:2 (NASB95)

² Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the **law of Christ**.

A second occurrence is found in...

1 Corinthians 9:20-21 (NASB95)

²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; ²¹ to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the **law of Christ**, so that I might win those who are without law.

What exactly is the law of Christ, and how is it fulfilled by carrying each other's burdens?

The Bible does not precisely define the law of Christ. However, Christ does tell us of a "new commandment".

John 13:34-35 (NASB95)

³⁴ A **new commandment** I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Jesus also told us of the two greatest commandments.

Mark 12:28-31 (NASB95)

²⁸ One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; ³⁰ and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

All of the Old Testament Law can be placed in the categories of “**loving God**” and “**loving your neighbor**.” In place of the Old Testament Law, Christians are to obey the law of Christ. Rather than trying to remember the over 600 individual commandments in the Old Testament Law, Christians are simply to focus on loving God and loving others. If Christians would truly and wholeheartedly obey those two commands, we would be fulfilling everything that God requires of us. Here is how Paul described it.

Romans 13:8-10 (NASB95)

⁸ Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has **fulfilled the law**. (Did you hear that? "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law!") ⁹ For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore **love** is the fulfillment of *the law*.

Christ freed us from the bondage of the hundreds of commands in the Old Testament Law and instead calls on us to love and accept His grace for salvation.

Some claim that since we are not under the Old Testament Law we have an excuse to sin. The apostle Paul addresses this very issue in Romans.

Romans 6:15-16 (NASB95)

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! ¹⁶ Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

For the follower of Christ, the avoidance of sin is to be accomplished out of love for God and love for others. Love is to be our motivation. When we recognize the value of Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf, our response is to be love, gratitude, and obedience. When we understand the sacrifice Jesus made for us and others, our response must be to follow His example in expressing love to others. Our motivation for overcoming sin should be love, instead of a desire to legalistically obey a series of commandments in order to earn salvation.

CONCLUSION:

The “spirit of the law” is often contrasted to the “letter of the law.” In that context, the spirit of the law has to do with the deeper meaning or reason for the law, whereas the letter of the law refers to exact wording, literally applied, without regard for any deeper meaning. Children are good at emphasizing the letter of the law to the exclusion of the spirit of it. Let me illustrate it this way:

ILLUSTRATION:

A child comes home from school and is told, “Do not watch TV until you finish your homework.” A few minutes later, his mother finds him watching cartoons on his tablet, with his homework untouched. The child protests that his mom only told him not to watch TV—she never said anything about watching cartoons on a tablet. In this example, the child has kept the letter of the law, but he has violated the spirit of the law. If the mother had said, “Finish your homework before you watch cartoons,” then perhaps the child would have watched a baseball game instead—once again keeping the letter of the law. She could have been even more specific: “Do not watch any kind of show on any electronic device until you finish your homework,” but then the child might decide to go outside and play, leaving his unfinished homework inside. The frustrated mom could have said, “Do not do **anything** until you finish your homework,” but the child, taking it literally, could then claim to be unable to open his book bag to get his homework. Obviously, focusing on the letter of the law can be a tactic to negate the intent or spirit of the law.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus interprets the Mosaic Law according to the **spirit** of the law, not the letter. The law forbade murder, but Jesus said that anger or mockery also makes one guilty of murder, because the same attitudes that produce murder also produce anger and contempt.

Matthew 5:21-22 (NASB95)

²¹ “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go into the fiery hell*.

The law also forbade adultery, but Jesus said a lustful look is adultery in the heart. A man who never touches a woman other than his wife but who indulges in sexual fantasies is obeying the letter of the law, but not the spirit of it.

Matthew 5:27-28 (NASB95)

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; ²⁸ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

So, according to Jesus, obeying only the letter of the law instead of the spirit of the law is not an option.

People who focus on the letter of the law often point to their obedience as a means to justify themselves, even as they flagrantly violate the law’s intent; however, God will judge according to the spirit of the law, not just the letter.

Go Tell It on the Mountain.