

THE LAW OF CHRIST: A LIVING LAW**1 CORINTHIANS 9:20-21**

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INTRODUCTION¹

Last week we focused on 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. We talked about what “becoming all things to all people” (from 9:22b) means. This morning we are going to be focusing on 9:20-21. We will be looking at the text with more of a theological eye. I have found that 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 is one of the most helpful passages when it comes to both understanding the Christian’s relationship with the Old Testament and in understanding our responsibility as God’s kids this side of the cross and resurrection. I do not pretend to be able to exhaust this subject in one morning. Certainly, this is a biblical issue that can only be settled after years of prayerful study of the Scriptures. However, Paul does say quite a few things in our passage that will aid us in gaining a biblical understanding of how the Christian is to relate with Old Covenant law. Let’s jump in head first.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAW (1 CORINTHIANS 9:20-21)

First, you will notice that Paul’s identity was not wrapped up in his nationality. That is to say that Paul makes a large distinction between himself and his Jewish compatriots. Look with me at 9:20.

²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews.

The question, of course, is; why on earth would Paul have to become a Jew to win the Jews? Wasn’t he already a Jew? Shouldn’t he have rather said, “To the Jews I became myself, a Jew, in order to win Jews.”? But he doesn’t say this. Paul certainly is a self-professed Jew. Paul’s own words in Philippians 3:4-6 should be sufficient to prove this very fact.

⁴ If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

Paul had quite the pedigree. But Paul did not identify himself first and foremost by his nationality. He saw himself as a Jew and yet he could speak of himself as being distinct from his Jewish countrymen. He ultimately identified himself as a child of King Jesus, as a Christian. That is to say, he flew the Jesus/Christian flag higher than the Jewish flag. And this was no mere personal conviction on Paul’s part. This otherworldly self-identity is par for the course in the Bible. This is, for instance, why Peter can refer to the people of God as “temporary residents” on this earth (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11), and the author of Hebrews can say that we are “foreigners and

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temporary residents” who are “desiring a better place—a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:13-16). This is such an important reality for we who live in the land of the free. So many American Christians identify themselves first and foremost as Americans. Before I go any further I want to say that I have no problem with patriotism. I would consider myself, to one degree or another, a patriotic person. After I graduated college I had to make a decision between going to seminary or enlisting in the army with the purpose of serving as a chaplain. I had contacted the army recruiter and had scheduled a face-to-face meeting with him to get the process rolling. I cancelled with the recruiter last minute because it seemed clear that seminary was right for me at the time. Nonetheless, the army was a serious consideration for me. So do not misunderstand me; I do identify myself as an American. I love our country. I love the freedoms that we enjoy in America. We certainly have a history which is just as sketchy as any other, but I am extremely thankful that God has allowed me to grow up in such a privileged place. So please do not misunderstand the comments that follow or take them out of context. However, I find it troubling when Christians in American thinking of themselves as first and foremost citizens of America and only secondarily as citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:13-16). What is also troubling is when Christians indissolubly tie together love for God and love for country. Patriotism can become a religion from which one needs to repent. Patriotism can become an idol, a true idol. I do not wish to lay forth any legalistic rules about how you show your patriotism, but do you fly the American flag higher than the Jesus flag? I am not here speaking in a literal sense—I could care less how you arrange the flags on the pole in the front of your house. I am speaking about the priorities of your heart. Is your allegiance first and foremost to King Jesus or to America? Do you identify yourself first and foremost as a child of King Jesus or as an American? To many, Paul’s words would have been deemed unpatriotic.

But what distinguished Paul, a Jew, from the rest of his countrymen in such a way that he would have to adjust to the Jews in order to win the Jews? The fact is that Paul did have to adjust to the Jews in order to win the Jews. When Paul became a Christian everything changed. He didn’t just pick up a few new convictions on the way. He was changed from the inside out. Everything changed so much that he became a foreigner to his own race—he became a stranger to his own family. So what was so different about Paul that would cause him to have to adjust to the Jews in order to win more Jews? It has everything to do with his relationship to the law. Turn with me to the second half of vs. 20.

^{20b} to those under the law, like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win those under the law.

What distinguished Paul from the average Jew was his relationship with the law. I guess it would be useless to continue this discussion without first identifying what ‘law’ Paul was talking about.² Paul is most assuredly talking here about the Mosaic law-covenant—the law that God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai.³ It would be impossible to explain every detail of the law of

² The word “law,” after all, has many different referents when used by the biblical authors. One must keep a close eye on the context of each individual passage to decipher in what sense the word is being used.

³ Here it is important to note that the law of Moses cannot stand on its own. That is to say that the law of Moses is what it is only as it is connected to the covenant which God made with the Jews. This is why we refer to the Old Covenant as the Old law-covenant. The covenant which God made with Israel was contingent upon their

Moses to you in one morning. But if you want to read the law, it is fleshed out in full detail in the first five books of the Bible (Genesis-Deuteronomy). The law is at the heart of the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel. It is impossible to separate the law from the covenant itself—the two are indissolubly tied together. It is best referred to as the law-covenant because the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel was built on the law. The law informed Israel of the stipulations of the covenant. The covenant that God made with Israel on Mt. Sinai was a conditional covenant. What was it conditioned upon? The obedience of the Israelites to the law that was tied to the covenant. God had many *unique* blessings for them if they obeyed the law (see Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28). On the other hand, God had many disastrous curses in store for them if they disobeyed the law (see Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28). I have previously referred to Leviticus 26 and 28 as the backbone of the Old Covenant. Why? Because this is where the rubber meets the road. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 answer two questions: 1. What happens if the Israelites are faithful to the covenant? 2. What happens if the Israelites break the Covenant? Covenant faithfulness (under the Old Covenant) was gauged by obedience to the law that God had given Moses on Mt. Sinai. When I say that the covenant that God made with the Israelites was conditional, I mean that it was a covenant which could be broken. The Israelites did in fact break the covenant (see Jeremiah 3).

Many people are afraid to say that the law-covenant which God made with Israel was conditional because they do not want to communicate that God ever intended that the law be used as a way of earning salvation. However, Paul's statements about the law in relationship to the promise that God made to Abraham regarding righteousness by faith should set those fears aside (read Galatians 3:10-18). The promise that God made to Abraham regarding a righteousness that is grasped only through faith was in no way compromised by the conditional nature (blessed **as a nation** if you obey, damned **as a nation** if you don't) of the Old Covenant. This is why Paul says that "the law, which came 430 years later, does not revoke a covenant that was previously ratified by God and cancel the promise" (Galatians 3:17). The Abrahamic covenant is a promise-covenant (an unconditional covenant). The Mosaic Covenant is a law-covenant (a conditional covenant). The promise-covenant was given 430 before the law-covenant. The law-covenant did not replace the promise-covenant, but was 'added' to the promise-covenant for a temporary period of time—"until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come" (Galatians 3:19). The addition of the conditional law-covenant in no way compromised the promise that God made to Abraham. So what about this covenant that God made with the specific nation of Israel? The Israelites did indeed break the covenant. They did not live according to the law, and in so doing came under the horrific covenantal curses found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. God set aside the old-law covenant because the Israelites broke it.⁴ This did not throw God for a loop. After all, He told them that they would break the

obedience to the law of the covenant. Certain theologians have tried to divide the law up into three sections: civil, moral, and ceremonial. Although this may aid in the process of constructing tidy theological systems, it simply does not square with the unity of the covenant. The covenant which God made with Israel was to be taken as one coherent whole.

⁴ This, of course, is not the only reason why God set the Old Covenant aside. He also set it aside because the law which was indissolubly tied to the covenant could not effectively deal with sin (Hebrews 8). In other words, the sacrificial system, as detailed in the law of Moses, was insufficient to actually remove the penalty of sin (see Hebrews 10:1-18).

covenant even before they entered the promised land (Deuteronomy 31:24-29). He also set the law aside because He knew that it could not produce life (Galatians 5:21). Because the law was indissolubly tied to the covenant, when God set aside the covenant He also set aside the law (Galatians 3:19-28; Hebrews 7:14). This is why God made a promise in Jeremiah 31 regarding a New Covenant. Jesus died to establish this New Covenant (Luke 22:20 Corinthians 3:6). This New Covenant was not opposed to the Old Covenant. Indeed, the Old Covenant pointed to and foreshadowed the New Covenant. The Scriptures simply do not teach that the stipulations of the Old Covenant (the law) carry over to the New Covenant. In fact, we learn that we are, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:20, “not under the law.” God specifically says that this New Covenant “will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt” (Jeremiah 31:32). What would be so different about this New Covenant? Many things. But one remarkable difference would be the internalization of the law (Jeremiah 31:33). Now before you start thinking that the law which was to be written on the heart was the law of Moses, let’s look at a few passages. What we have to realize is that the law was put in place to serve a temporary function. It only acted as the standard of covenant faithfulness under the Old Covenant. Now that the Old Covenant has been replaced by a New Covenant, the law of Moses is no longer that standard. Where do I get this? From Paul in Galatians 3:19, 22-25.

¹⁹ Why then was the law given? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed [Christ] to whom the promise was made would come... ²² But the Scripture has imprisoned everything under sin’s power, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³ Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. ²⁴ The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. ²⁵ But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

There is obviously more going on in this passage than I will be able to deal with in one morning. But let me point out a few things from this important passage. *1. You will notice from vs. 19 that the law was not an eternal structure.* God ‘added’ it. There was a time when the law did not exist (see also Romans 5:12-14). The law was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai around 1500 B.C. Before this transaction on Mt. Sinai the law did not exist. This is why Paul could say that Abraham was justified on the basis of faith **before** the law was given—the law came 430 years **after** Abraham was justified by faith (Galatians 3:16-18). *2. Paul explains why God added the law; because of transgression.* Commentators have given a whole range of possibilities as to what Paul could mean when he said that the law was added “*because of transgression.*” Schreiner makes a compelling case that Paul means that the law was added “to increase sin.”⁵

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 239-240. Schreiner helpfully suggests that Paul definitely did not mean by “because of transgression” that the law was added in order to “restrain sin” or to “deal with sin.” He says, “Surely the opponents must have argued that the law’s restraining function was desperately needed among the Galatian Christians. Instead, Paul has already argued that the law curses those who are under its rule since no one can obey it (3:10). Indeed, the law is unable to grant life, and all enclosed within its realm are under the power of sin (3:21-22). Furthermore, 4:5 speaks of those who were under law as redeemed and liberated from it, indicating that

Paul does talk about sin “seizing an opportunity through the commandment, producing in me coveting of every kind” in Romans 7:8.⁶ In this sense, then, the law causes sin to salivate for unrighteousness. This is why Paul could say that “the power of sin is the law” in 1 Corinthians 15:56, and that “the law came along to multiply the trespass” (Romans 5:20). Schreiner’s position is helpful. However, it seems altogether sensible to understand that Paul could also mean that the law was added so that sin might be recognized for what it is.⁷ Paul does say, “I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, **Do not covet**” (Romans 7:7). In other words, God added the law so that the sinfulness of sin might become overwhelming evident. Thus, he is merely saying the same thing that he said about the law in Romans 7:13.

¹³ Therefore, did what is good cause my death? Absolutely not! On the contrary, sin, in order to be recognized as sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure.

What Paul is in essence saying is that the law is the good thing that reveals sin to be the real killer. This is the purpose of the law; to show how desperately and hopelessly sinful we truly are—to show us how badly we need a redeemer. Do not misunderstand the true purpose of the law. The law was never meant to be used as a tool to gain favor with God, and it was

those who are under law are enslaved to sin. Hence, there is no reason to think that the law is envisioned as restraining sin here. Quite the opposite. As in Rom 5:20, the law was given to increase transgressions. Such a perspective fits with the history of Israel, for life under law did not lead to a law-abiding society... Finally, it is unlikely that Paul emphasizes here that the law provides atonement for sin. Instead, he emphasizes in Galatians that the law does not provide full and final forgiveness, for if forgiveness is truly secured through the law and its sacrifices, then Christ died for nothing (2:21).” Ibid.

⁶ Stott’s discussion on this text is excellent. Here is a lengthy quote: “*Aphorme* (‘opportunity’) was used of a military base, ‘the starting-point or base of operations for an expedition’ (BAGD), a springboard for further advance. So it is that sin establishes within us a base or foothold by means of the commandments which provoke us. This provocative power of the law is a matter of everyday experience. Ever since Adam and Eve, human beings have always been enticed by forbidden fruit. This strange phenomenon is apparently called ‘contra-suggestibility’, ‘the propensity some people have to react negatively to any directive’. For example, a peremptory traffic signal says ‘STOP’ or ‘REDUCE SPEED NOW’, and our instinctive is, ‘Why should I?’ Or we see on a door the notice ‘PRIVATE—DO NOT ENTER’, and we immediately want to cross the prohibited threshold.”

He goes on to use an example from Augustine’s *Confessions*; Apparently Augustine “one night at the age of sixteen, in company with ‘a gang of naughty adolescents’, he shook a pear tree and stole its fruit. His motive, he confesses, was not that he was hungry, for they threw away the pears to the pigs. ‘I stole something which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing, but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong.’ ‘Was it possible’, he asked himself, ‘to take pleasure in what was illicit for no reason other than that it was not allowed?’”

Stott continues, “In all such cases the real culprit is not the law but sin which is hostile to God’s law (8:7). Sin twists the function of the law from revealing, exposing and condemning sin into encouraging and even provoking it.” John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 202-203.

⁷ Although this is not Schreiner’s position, his explanation is most clear. After quoting Romans 4:20, “where there is no law, there is no transgression”, he explains, “The law provides the standard, the measuring stick, by which sin is identified. The law classifies sin as sin in a technical or legal sense. In other words, sin is identified as ‘transgression’ when a specific law is violated.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 239-240. Although this is not Schreiner’s position, he does refer to it as “a more attractive solution”, and concedes that “it is possible that both the defining of sin and the expansion of sin are included.”

never to be used as a tool of sanctification (see Galatians 3:3-5). The law was given for the purpose of pointing needy sinners to Christ by showing them the sinfulness of their sin. And in this way it was a tool in God's hands to point people to the only One who could do them any good, Jesus Christ.

3. *The law was purposed to function only for a temporary period of time.* You will notice the word "until" in vs. 19, 23, and 24. In vs. 19 Paul says that the law was in effect "until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come."⁸ In vs. 23 he says that "we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed." In vs. 24 he says that "the law... was our guardian until Christ." You will also notice the phrase "no longer" in vs. 25. He says that now that Christ has come "we are **no longer** under a guardian." The guardian is clearly the law, as Paul makes explicit in vs. 24. What is the point of all of this? The law was in effect **until** Christ came. Now that Christ has come and fulfilled the law we are **no longer** under the law. The law served a temporary function. This is why Paul speaks of the law as a "guardian." A guardian (παιδαγωγός, *paidagōgos*) was

"a slave in Hellenistic society who acted as a tutor and guardian to children as well as imposing discipline. The slave also led the children to school, 'helped to bring up the child and at school must have been a helpful overseer.' Hence, the *paidagōgos* was a trusted member of the family and even sometimes had charge of 'home-schooling' before group schooling became accepted."⁹

One of the primary reasons Paul speaks of the law as a pedagogue was because a pedagogue served a temporary function. Once the child reached full maturity he was no longer under the rule of the pedagogue. Once he reached full maturity he entered into the responsibilities and privileges of full sonship. What Paul is saying is that the people of God were like those under the authority of a pedagogue, the law, until Christ came. When Christ came He lived under the law and then died under the curse of the law to make us full-blown sons, no longer in need of a pedagogue, the law. Paul goes on to flesh out the implications of this truth in Galatians 4:1-31. The law served a temporary purpose.

We can liken the law to scaffolding. Suppose a man was to construct a massive building. As the building is being erected people begin to wonder what the finished product will look like. Once construction stops the owner of the building stands in front of the building and decides that he would quite prefer to keep the scaffolding erected around the building. This, of course, would never happen. But what a tragedy if it were to happen! The fact is that scaffolding is a temporary structure that is purposed to come down once construction (painting, masonry, etc.) is finished. To keep the scaffolding up is to cover up the masterpiece around which the scaffolding is built. The law is the scaffolding which was erected around the center piece, Jesus Christ. Now that Christ (the Seed to whom the promise was made) has come, the law, if it is to

⁸ We know that the "Seed" is a clear reference to Christ because Paul says so in 3:16. "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say 'and to seeds,' as though referring to many, but referring to one, **and to your seed**, who is Christ."

⁹ Ralph P. Martin and Julie L. Wu, *Galatians*, in the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, Edited by Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 284.

be used lawfully, must be taken down. To treat the law as if it were a purposefully permanent structure is to assault both the law and the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Paul's whole point in Galatians 3:19-26 is that the law has served its purpose. That to which the law pointed has come. The law has been fulfilled in Christ. As of late I have heard increasingly more and more believers question whether or not we are to live under the Mosaic law. The reasoning goes like such: Paul's beef with the Judaizers in Galatia is not that they were living under the law; it is that they were living under the law as a means of gaining acceptance before God on the basis of their obedience to the law. Certainly, Paul's concern is that they were using the law as a way of gaining a right standing before God. This is true. But Paul is opposed to this *damnable* use of the law (Galatians 1:6-9; 5:1-4), not just because it relegates Christ to merely one of the many means by which a believer becomes right with God, but also because it is a misuse of the law. In other words, just as we just saw in 3:19-26, one of the primary reasons why Paul was so opposed to the false teaching of the Judaizers was because they failed to recognize the temporary function of the law. If the Judaizers would have understood the temporary purpose of the law, they would never have used it as a tool for gaining a right standing with God in the first place. It is also true that if they had understood its temporary function they never would have used it as a tool for sanctification either. Let me state all of this in a way that squares with us in our own experience; a Christian who submits him/herself under the Mosaic law as the rule of life, even if they trusting Christ alone for salvation, is misusing the law. Carson would even suggest that to "rely on it [the law] as if it were the ultimate revelation, instead of grasping that to which it points, finally flirts with idolatry."¹⁰ We are no longer under the guardian—the law—because the One to whom the law pointed has come. He has fulfilled the law in every sense of the word.

Many take issue with what I am saying here by pointing to Matthew 5:17-18.

¹⁷ Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished.

¹⁰ It will be helpful to read the quote above from Carson in its full context: "From Paul's perspective, the true significance of the old covenant is rightly perceived only when one has come to terms with Christ. And the epistle to the Hebrews repeatedly deploys a salvation-historical argument to prove that *already in the Hebrew canon* the biblical writers announce the obsolescence in principle of the Mosaic Covenant. Thus if, centuries after the establishment of the Levitical priesthood, Psalm 110 announces a priest in the order of Melchizedek, implicitly it is announcing the insufficiency of the Levitical priesthood—and therefore of the law with which it is inextricably entangled (Hebrews 7). If Jeremiah foresees a 'new' covenant, 'he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear' (Heb. 8:13). Eventually the conclusion is specifically drawn out: 'The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves' (Heb. 10:1). From a Christian perspective, that does not deprecate the law-covenant: it merely encourages people to recognize it for what it is, and not to take it for something else. *To rely on it as if it were the ultimate revelation, instead of grasping that to which it points, finally flirts with idolatry.*" ¹⁰ D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 340-341.

How can we hold that we are no longer under the Mosaic law when Jesus so clearly says that even the tiniest little stroke of the law remains authoritative¹¹ “until heaven and earth pass away”? Of course the law is still authoritative. It is the word of God. The Old Testament, which contains Old Covenant law, is just as authoritative for us today as it was for Moses and Joshua and David. The difference, of course, is that it is authoritative only as it points to and has been fulfilled in Christ. Christ came to fulfill the law—that is, he came to “bring it to its intended eschatological climax.”¹² Thus Craig Blomberg can say that “all of the Old Testament remains normative and relevant for Jesus’ followers (2 Tim 3:16), but none of it can rightfully be interpreted until one understands how it has been fulfilled in Christ. Every Old Testament text must be viewed in light of Jesus’ person and ministry and the changes introduced by the new covenant he inaugurated.”¹³ R. T. France is excellent as well:

In the light of that concept, and of the general sense of ‘fulfill’ in Matthew, we might then paraphrase Jesus’ words here as follows: ‘Far from wanting to set aside the law and the prophets, it is my role to bring into being that to which they have pointed forward, to carry them into a new era of fulfillment.’ On this understanding the authority of the law and the prophets is not abolished. They remain the authoritative word of God. But their role will no longer be the same, now that what they pointed forward to has come, and it will be for Jesus’ followers to discern in the light of his teaching and practice what is now the right way to apply those texts in the new situation which his coming has created. From now on it will be the authoritative teaching of Jesus which must govern his disciple’s understanding and practical application of the law... If in the process it may appear that certain elements of the law are for all practical purposes ‘abolished,’ this will be attributable not to the loss of their status as the word of God but to their changed role in the era of fulfillment, in which it is

¹¹ I used the word “binding” instead of “authoritative” in the sermon from which this manuscript came. After further reflection I thought it would be most profitable to speak of the Old Testament as authoritative instead of speaking of it as binding. Of course, the two terms are closely related. However, considering the fact that the average reader would take ‘binding’ to mean that we are still somehow ‘under the law’ I thought it best to use the word ‘authoritative.’ We must remember that we are bound to whatever is to us an authority. So I am not afraid to say that the Old Testament is binding, but prefer to speak of it as authoritative for the sake of clearer communication. This is semantics, of course. But semantics are important. Semantics, after all, have to do with meaning (or better, nuanced meaning). The fact is that the people of God are no longer under Old Covenant law. While it remains authoritative as it has been fulfilled in Christ, we are only under that to which it points—and since the law begs for the fulfillment that only Christ could bring we are under the authority of the law only as it has been fulfilled in Christ.

¹² See Douglas J. Moo, “Jesus and the Law,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, IVP Dictionary Series, Edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 457. This entire article by Moo can be found online and is well worth the read. See

<http://www.ccctucsonmedia.com/pdf/JesusLaw.pdf>

¹³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, 103-104. Blomberg states it well, “Christ makes clear that he is not contradicting the law, but neither is he preserving it unchanged. He comes ‘to fulfill’ it, i.e., he will bring the law to its intended goal.”

Jesus, the fulfiller, rather than the law which pointed forward to him, who is the ultimate authority.¹⁴

That to which the law pointed is authoritative for us. Jesus upholds the law by using it to point away from itself to Himself. In so doing he does not undermine the normative and relevant authority of the law. He is merely using it as it was intended to be used. This is why Paul can say that...

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness” (Romans 10:4).

The word “end” (τέλος, *telos*) can be taken to mean “termination” or “goal.”¹⁵ It is best to understand that He is both the terminating point of the law and the goal to which the law points. These two words are, after all, inherently connected. The law pointed away from itself to Christ and thus when Christ, the One to whom it pointed, came, the law was no longer necessary as it stands as an unfulfilled body. The law is not an end in itself. Christ is the end of the law. To treat the law as an end in itself is a misuse of the law.

To not cling to that to which the law points is to not keep the law. In this way, the law served a similar function as that of John the Baptist. The whole ministry of John the Baptist was to draw everyone to himself so that he might point everyone away from himself, to Jesus (John 2:22-30). To follow John the Baptist as if he were the prophet of prophets would be akin to idolatry. The whole thrust of John’s ministry was to call attention to himself so that he might point to Jesus. To obey the law, we must use the law lawfully. The law is only lawfully used when it is used for the purpose for which God gave it. To extend the law to serve an unfulfilled function on the other side of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is to use the law unlawfully. That is to say, to live under the law as if it hasn’t been fulfilled in Christ is to live in disobedience to the law (or, to say it another way; to extend the law to serve an unfulfilled function on the other side of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is to use the law in a way that the law itself would condemn). To not go to the place that the law is pointing is to transgress the intention of the law.

As you can see, I almost sound as if I am speaking out of both sides of my mouth. I have been arguing that we are no longer under the law of Moses and yet that the law of Moses, as part of God’s holy Word, is still authoritative. I understand that this may sound contradictory. However, we must above all be faithful to the whole counsel of God’s word. The two following sets of Scriptural precedents must be adamantly affirmed in the discussion:

- On the one hand we must understand that 1. we are “not under the law” (Romans 6:14-15; 1 Corinthians 9:20; Galatians 5:18), 2. that “Christ is the end of the law for

¹⁴ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 183.

¹⁵ See Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 330-331. Moo has a helpful word picture. “Let’s picture Israel as a runner, the law as the race, and Christ as the finish line. What Israel has failed to understand, Paul is saying, is that the finish line has been reached. The Messiah and the salvation he brings have come. Thus, the ‘race’ has attained its end and goal—or, to use the best English equivalents, its ‘culmination’ or ‘climax.’”

righteousness” (Romans 10:4), 3. that the law has served its temporary purpose (Galatians 3:19-26), 4. that the old law-covenant has been replaced by a new covenant, such that the author of Hebrews could emphasize the ‘old’ part of the old law-covenant and then suggest that this old covenant “is about to disappear” (Hebrews 8:7-13)¹⁶; 5. that “the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the actual form of those realities” (Hebrews 10:1); 6. that “we are no longer under a guardian” (Galatians 3:25), 7. that we “are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:15), 8. that we “were put to death in relation to the law through the crucified body of the Messiah” (Romans 7:4), 9. that “we have been released from the law” (Romans 7:6), and, to end with a bang, 10. that Jesus, “in His flesh, made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations” (Ephesians 2:14-15).¹⁷

- On the other hand we must understand that 1. “**All** Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, (2 Timothy 3:16),¹⁸ 2. that Jesus did not come “to destroy the law or the prophets” (Matthew 5:17), 3. that Jesus emphatically (“For I assure you”) states that “until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished” (Matthew 5:18), and 4. that Jesus warns that “whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches people to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).¹⁹

¹⁶ And the old law-covenant was ultimately set aside through the death of Christ (Colossians 2:14-17) and was officially ‘disappeared’ when the Romans destroyed the temple as they ransacked Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

¹⁷ As Paul makes abundantly clear in the context of Ephesians 2, the law was the “dividing wall of hostility” which kept the Jews and Gentiles in disunity. One of the purposes of the death of Jesus was to destroy this dividing wall. After all, the law was the covenant that God made specifically with the nation of Israel. In order to establish the New Covenant, a covenant which is decidedly multi-national, God had to destroy this law that demanded conformity to the external markers (circumcision, Sabbath, observance of days, dietary code) of the specific nation of Israel. Jesus’ purpose in destroying the dividing wall (or to say it another way; Jesus purpose in making “of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations” vs. 25) was to “create one new man from the two, resulting in peace.” The law was an obstacle to maintaining and preserving peace in the multi-national “new man” (new humanity) which Jesus died to create. The peace (reconciliation) which the death of Christ established was purposed to flow on both the vertical plane (peace with God) and on the horizontal plane (peace between those multi-national people for whom Christ died to redeem). Thus Paul can say that Jesus “made of no effect” the law “so that He might reconcile **both to God in one body** and put the hostility to death by it” (Ephesians 2:16). This is why the law had to be set aside. The goal was not to merely reconcile Jews and Gentiles to God, but to “reconcile both to God **in one body**.” Thus, now that the law has been set aside Gentiles can be full-blown citizens of God’s kingdom without identifying themselves as Jews externally (see Ephesians 2:11-22 in its entirety). To continue to hold up the law as an unfulfilled structure as our way of life is to expose the church (which is the multi-national ‘new man’ which Christ died to create) to the very same disunity that plagued the early church (read Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and 1 Timothy to get a sense of just how serious a threat an unlawful use of the law is to the unity of Christ’s multi-national, blood-bought bride—and an unlawful use of the law is a use of the law that doesn’t see itself as having been fulfilled, and thus mediated by, Christ).

¹⁸ The “All Scripture” which Paul is speaking about must first and foremost be understood as a reference to the Old Testament. After all, this was their Bible.

¹⁹ Many of those who suggest that the law is still binding on the people of God today say ‘Gottcha!’ when Matthew 5:19 is read. However, those who hold to such a position are quite choosy about which parts of the law they will

God's people must cling to both truths about the law. The law, as Spirit-inspired Scripture is authoritative, even if we have died to it. To emphasize one to the neglect of the other will only lead to an unbiblical understanding of the content and purpose of God's most holy word. If one cannot preach relevant sermons authoritatively from the Old Testament something has gone awry. However, one is equally wrong if he cannot ultimately preach the law as it has been climactically fulfilled in Christ. The law is only relevant for us as it has been fulfilled in the person, teaching, and ministry of Jesus Christ.²⁰ These two sets of truths do not contradict each other. In fact, they gel quite nicely.

So what is the point of all of this? You probably forgot why we even got talking about Paul's view of the law. Let me take you back. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul talks about his slavery to the Jews. He says that he, as a slave to everyone, became like a Jew to win more Jews. He explains what this becoming a Jew to win more Jews thing entails. It entails becoming "like one under the law... to win those under the law." In vs. 22b Paul says very clearly that he himself is not under the law. So Paul has to adjust, as a slave, to those under the law if he wishes to win those who are under the law. Paul cannot win those under the law if he simply remains as he is. Because as he is, he is not under the law. You will notice here that Paul did not have lawaphobia. Paul was not afraid to submit himself under the law for the purpose of the advancement of the Gospel. You will remember from last week that Paul had Timothy circumcised for the sake of the advancement of the Gospel among the Jews (Acts 16:1-4). Paul did not obey the law as an end in itself. He only subjected himself to it for evangelistic purposes.

The question then arises; if we are not under the law of Moses, which law are we under? Paul answers that very question in **1 Corinthians 9:21**.

subject themselves to. Those who hold to such a position immediately clarify their position by saying that in light of Hebrews 6-10 all the laws regarding the sacrificial system are no longer binding. Okay, so there goes about 50% of the law (the garments, the sacrifices, the priestly duties, the arrangements of the temple, etc.)! Appealing to Hebrews 6-10 is deemed sufficient reason to nix the sacrificial system out of the Christian 'to-do list.' How, then, do we obey it? They would say, 'By clinging to that to which it pointed, the sacrifice of Christ!' What is most interesting is that those who argue like such are generally the first to point out the fact that the law is a unit, and that it cannot be dissected into the three common divisions: civil, ceremonial, and moral. And yet they divide it right up. What about all the judicial laws regarding capital punishment? I still have yet to meet a believer who will push for legislation to exact capital punishment on Sabbath breakers (Exodus 32:32-36). If one can point to Hebrews 6-10 as reason to suggest that the believer can only sit under the authority of the sacrificial laws by clinging that to which it points, why can't the same be said in regard to the Sabbath laws in light of Colossians 2:16-17, Hebrews 4, and Romans 14, or in regard to the dietary laws in light of Mark 7:17-23; Romans 14; and 1 Corinthians 8? Christ truly has come to fulfill the law!

²⁰ Do I need to state that we cannot treat only the 'red letters' as the official teaching of Christ? I shouldn't have to, but I will say it anyway. One of the primary reasons why Jesus sent the promised *paraclete* (see John 14:15-18; 14:25-26 15:26-27; 16:7-11) can be found in John 14:25-26; "I have spoken these things to you while I remain with you. But the Counselor [*paraclete*], the Holy Spirit—the Father will send Him in My name—will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you." The *paraclete* (Counselor) was sent to aid the apostles in faithfully recording the things which Jesus taught while He was with them. The *paraclete* was indeed sent after the resurrection of Christ. Because of this it is erroneous to treat the rest of the New Testament as if it were somehow less determinative than the red letters.

²¹ To those who are without that law, like one without the law—not being without God’s law but within Christ’s law—to win those without the law.

Paul is here talking about how he becomes a slave to those who are not under the law of Moses. In other words, he is talking about how he adjusts to Gentiles to win more Gentiles. Paul explains that he becomes like one without the law in order to win those without the law. So Paul neither views himself as being under the law of Moses nor does he see himself as being lawless. He is a third type of person. Paul is not under the law like the Jews, nor is he lawless like the Gentiles. Rather, he is under the law of Christ.

What, then, is the law of Christ. A few things can be said. **1.** Paul clearly distinguishes the law of Christ from the law of Moses. He specifically says in vs. 20a that he is “not under the law”, making clear reference to the law of Moses. Now he says that he is under the law of Christ (vs. 21). **2.** At the very least we can say that the law of Christ is that to which the law of Moses points. **3.** We need to be careful that we do not separate the law of Christ from the person of Christ. You have to understand that Christ is the embodiment of the righteous standard of the law. Let me put it this way; God did not decide arbitrarily what would be right and what would be wrong. It is not like He sat in the heavens saying, “Hmmm... stealing... I will make that... uhhh... let me flip a coin. Heads its right, tails its wrong.” No! All law flows from the character of God. Unrighteousness, that which is opposed to God’s law, is anything that runs contrary to His perfectly holy character. Righteousness, that which is in accord with His law, is anything that reflects His perfectly holy character. Jesus is the law. He is a law unto Himself. So what happens when the law-giver, the One from whom all law emanates, indwells you? Sounds like you may have a law written on your heart! You have to understand that the promise of the New Covenant given in Jeremiah 33:31 has everything to do with the promise of the indwelling that we now enjoy in the New Covenant. Consider Jeremiah 33:31 with me.

³¹ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days—the Lord’s declaration. I will put My teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people.

The HCSB unhelpfully translates the word *torah* as “teaching” instead of “law.” God is here promising that He is going to make a New Covenant with His chosen people. The promises of this covenant will include Him putting His law within us and writing it on our hearts. What is this promise pointing to? Here is where many go wrong by asserting that the law that is written on the heart is the law of Moses. But to even think in such boxy categories is to miss the point altogether. God is not here promising that he going to make a carbon copy of Old Covenant law and transfer it onto our hearts. What then is this promise all about? It is pointing to the reality of the indwelling which Jesus spoke so clearly about in John 14-16. The Spirit of Christ, who is the standard of all righteousness, is the law that is written on our hearts. It is not as if God has some sort of a heart chisel. It is not as if He is chiseling away a newly revised bullet point law system on our hearts. This is what makes the indwelling of the Spirit so superior to the law of Moses. The law of Christ is a living, personal dynamic that gives life and actually creates obedience (Ezekiel 36:27) while the law of Moses was an external, bullet-point system law that could not produce life or obedience (Galatians 3:21). This is why we can speak of the Spirit as

the interior imperative. The Spirit indwells and is in and of Himself the source of righteousness. He is the standard.

Thus, the law which we are under is the law of Christ. The law of Christ is the living/dynamic presence of the Spirit of Christ within the heart. This, by the way, does not in any way call into question our need for the external word of God. After all, we do have a responsibility to test the spirits (1 John 4:1) and the external word is in perfect conformity with the inner witness of the Spirit. Not only that, but the Spirit who indwells also states that He works powerfully through the word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). It also goes without saying that the authors of the Scriptures wrote while being “moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). We must not separate the ministry of the Spirit from the ministry of the word. However, we must also never forget that the One who indwells us is God Himself, the standard of all truth and righteousness. Thus Paul could say to the new-born Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10:

⁹ About brotherly love: You don’t need me to write you because you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. ¹⁰ In fact, you are doing this toward all the brothers in the entire region of Macedonia. But we encourage you, brothers, to do so even more...

Why didn’t the Thessalonians need anyone to teach them about loving the brethren? Because they “are taught by God to love one another.” We must remember that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians while the Thessalonians were still fledgling believers who had no real leadership of which to speak of. Paul and his missionary team had to abandon them just as the church was getting off the ground because of intense persecution (see 1 Thessalonians 1-3). Paul sent Timothy to check up on the vulnerable Thessalonians to see how they were faring in the midst of horrific persecution (1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5). Timothy came back with a resoundingly encouraging report (1 Thessalonians 3:6-10). What is most amazing is that Paul was not surprised by the Thessalonians abounding love for God and each other. Why? Because “you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” Because they were taught by God they were excelling in love, which is the greatest commandment.

What would be a tragedy would be to boil the law of Christ down to a bullet-point list of do’s and don’ts. What makes the law of Christ so superior is that it is the living dynamic of the indwelling Spirit of Christ ruling, transforming, and teaching from within (one may see this reflected in, for example, Romans 8:1-11). I am afraid that many have merely replaced the bullet-point Mosaic Law system with a bullet-point Christ-centered law system. This is to miss what makes the New Covenant superior to that of the Old. Let me put it this way; an exterior, bullet-point Christ-centered law system cannot produce life. So what if the bullet-point system is built on an understanding of progressive revelation if that law is not written on the heart? External laws cannot produce life or obedience. This is why Paul suggests that there is such a thing as a powerless, word-only ministry.

⁵ For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with much assurance.

This is not to say that there are not do's and don'ts in the New Covenant. There certainly are! But the glory of the New Covenant and the glory of the law of Christ, which defines covenant faithfulness in the New Covenant, is that it is not merely external, but is living, powerful, and relational. After all, this law is the person of God Himself. Once again, this does not in any way diminish the necessity of the written word of God. Rather, this upholds the written word by affirming the reality about which the written word speaks so clearly.

CONCLUSION

I want you to think about something for a moment. It is impossible to become like one without the law if you are still under the law. Paul had the flexibility to win all sorts of people because he was under the law of Christ. If you believe that you are still under the law of Moses, I pray that you would be set free so that you might be able to become all things to all people. It simply isn't possible while you are still under the law. How can one who is under the law become all things to one who is without the law? He can't. The law of Christ is a law that sets one free, not to serve self, but to serve others for the sake of the advancement of the Gospel. I hope that you have seen something of the glory of Christ this morning. I hope you have seen something of how privileged we are to live on this side of the cross. In John 16:7 Jesus says to His disciples before He died on the cross:

⁷ It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send Him to you.

So many people wish so badly that they could have been alive when Jesus was still on earth. But Jesus Himself speaks of the age of the Spirit as the most privileged of all. He says, "It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don't go away the Counselor will not come to you." The Spirit has been sent. He now indwells His people. This should profoundly shape the way you think about the Christian life. You should understand that living a life which pleases the Father is not impossible. You can live victoriously. The Spirit of Christ Himself indwells you. You haven't been given a merely external, lifeless bullet point law system to follow. Rather, the law-giver has taken up residence with you and He creates life within you and conforms you to His own righteous self from the inside out. You can live victoriously because the source of all righteousness indwells you. He is the living law!