

Codes of Behavior

The moral law revealed in the Decalogue and expounded in other parts of the Bible is an expression of God's righteousness, given to be a code of practice for God's people in every age. The law is not opposed to the love and goodness of God, but shows what it is in action. The Spirit gives Christians the power to observe the law, making us more and more like Christ, the archetypal observer of the law (Matt. 5:17). ("Antinomianism," New Geneva Study Bible. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995. 1990)

Not long after their regeneration, many new believers find several persistent questions arising in their hearts, including, "Now that I am saved, how do I live the Christian life? How can I please my Savior God? What does the Lord Jesus want me to do now?" The New Geneva Study Bible attempts to answer these questions in an essay entitled "Antinomianism." The short essay insists that the believer is obliged to keep the moral law as "a code of practice for God's people in every age," based on the premise that "God's law in Scripture should directly control the Christian's life." It goes on to condemn as antinomian anyone who does not hold to this notion that the law has primary, direct control over the New Testament believers' daily living. Antinomianism literally means "opposed to law," and the essay focuses, in particular, on what it terms *spiritual antinomianism*, that is, putting "such trust in the Holy Spirit's inward prompting as to deny any need to be taught by the law how to live," resulting in "freedom from the law as a guide to conduct." The essay maintains not only that "keeping the law is a continuing obligation for Christians" (1990), but also that it is for the purpose of keeping the law that the Spirit empowers the Christian. In addition, it asserts that the means for the believer to become more and more like Christ is the observance of the law. Since it views Christ as "the archetypal observer of the law," it implies that His intention is to reproduce His believers as law-keepers. This essay errs by making law-keeping the focus of the believer's daily life, by citing the believer's observance of the law as the reason for the Spirit's empowering, and by implying that the ultimate goal of the believer's pursuit is to become a law-keeper like "Christ, the archetypal observer of the law."

The essay properly states that the law "is an expression of God's righteousness." The law is surely an expression of

the Law-giver, and Paul unequivocally affirms that the law is good (Rom. 7:12). A Christian should never hold the law in contempt, because its source is God; therefore, it affords us some needed insight into the divine nature of God's person. The essay also correctly states that the Spirit empowers believers in their daily walk. These two assertions merit a hearty affirmation. Several conclusions, however, particularly in regard to the focus and goal of the believer's pursuit and the purpose of the Spirit's empowering, are more problematic.

The Christian's Focus Is Not Law-keeping

When a consecrated believer rises each morning, he initiates a series of decisions in his pursuit to please God. If he heeds the counsel of the essay, he is pointed to a continuing obligation to keep the law as "a code of practice." Such a focus will cause every aspect of the believer's spiritual pursuit to be misdirected. He may read the Bible, but his focus will be on learning more of God's requirements and broadening his understanding of Christian ethics. He may pray, but mindful of his obligation to keep the law, he typically will pray for strength to obey the righteous requirement of the law. He may care for his testimony and living before men, but, being calibrated to the standard of keeping the law, he will measure his spiritual progress each day by behavioral successes or failures. Throughout his daily life, he will seek to imitate Christ, asking himself, "What would Jesus do?" and then proceed to do his best to live according to his understanding of Christian ethics. And at the end of his life, he will consider himself to have succeeded in pleasing God if his behavior has been adequately modified and his character molded to a "code of practice."

The New Testament teaches another way. In contrast to keeping the law, the New Testament consistently directs the believer to Christ Himself as his life, his person, and even his daily living. Such a believer lives under the governing view that God in Christ as the Spirit indwells the believer through regeneration, growing and spreading into every facet of his soul by making home in his heart, and by organically, inwardly transforming him day by day. Such a believer awakes each morning with the desire to be in personal and intimate contact with the indwelling Christ. When he reads the Bible, his ultimate goal is to contact the Author, to breathe in what God has breathed out (2 Tim.

3:16). He receives enlightenment of biblical truths, but more importantly, he is in fellowship with the Lord as he reads. When such a believer prays, his focus remains on his life-union with the Lord. As he prays, he turns his being to the Lord in his spirit and prays as one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). Such a believer may pray over many matters, but his focus is on Christ, and he is not satisfied unless his prayer is a genuine experience of Christ. Unlike a law-keeper, such a believer does not pray for strength to keep the law; rather, he seeks to experience Christ in his prayer, realizing that Christ Himself is the power of God (v. 24). Thus, in his daily walk, the measure of his testimony before men is not his success in keeping the law, but on whether Christ Himself is seen, known, and heard through him. Such a believer can never be satisfied with a mere code of behavior. Rather, he is satisfied when Christ is experienced by and expressed through him to others, for he knows that in this the Father is well pleased.

Paul's Epistle to the Romans emphatically declares that Christ is the end of the law to those who believe (10:4). It is not *faith* in Christ, but *Christ Himself*, His wonderful person, who is the end of the law for believers. Note that it is for *believers* that He is the end of the law. This means that after we believe in Christ, to whom the law as a child-conductor has led us (Gal. 3:24), the law is superseded by the person of Christ. Paul pointedly speaks of the termination of our former relationship with the law in Romans 7:4: "You also have been made *dead* to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be *joined to another*, to *Him* who has been raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God" (emphasis added). It is not that the believer is opposed to the law; it is simply that his portion as a believer in Christ is far superior to the law, for he is now organically joined to Christ (1 Cor. 6:17). He is not contra-law; rather, he has simply and irreversibly died to the law that he might live to God (Gal. 2:19). He is not an enemy of God's law; rather, he has been fully discharged from it through the terminating and germinating death of Christ that he might "serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter" (Rom. 7:6). Correspondingly, the believer should focus on Christ, who now indwells him as the Spirit. He thus declares with Paul, "I am able to do all things in *Him* who empowers me" (Phil. 4:13, emphasis added). He seeks to magnify Christ (1:20), not out of obligation or by any behavioral code, but by the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (v. 19). Such a believer awakens each morning to have intimate communion with the Lord, to enjoy the riches of His divine life and nature, to know Him experientially, and to live Him (v. 21). His daily life is filled with a desire to partake of Christ in order to live because of Him (John 6:57). Christ is his center, and he therefore lives on a plane far higher and sweeter than that afforded by the keeping of an obligatory code of behavior. Certainly he is able to fulfill the righteous requirement of

the law, but not by his own effort. Rather, the law is spontaneously fulfilled, and Christ is magnified as the believer walks according to the Spirit (Phil. 1:19-20).

The Christian Goal Is Not Law-keeping

The essay concludes with the notion that God's goal for us is that we would become more and more like Christ in His role as the archetypal law-keeper. Undoubtedly, Christ has fulfilled the law, but to what end? His intention in satisfying the law's demands was not to produce law-keepers; it was to accomplish redemption as the spotless Lamb of God (John 1:29). Based on the redemption of Christ, God can fulfill His heart's desire to produce the church, His Body, as the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). The church as His living and organic Body is not an assembly of law-keepers, but His magnification and enlargement on the earth. It is not merely *like* Christ; it *is* Christ lived (Phil. 1:21), Christ known (3:10), Christ magnified (1:20), Christ reflected (2 Cor. 3:18), Christ grown (Col. 1:28), and Christ reproduced (Acts 9:5; Rom. 8:29-30). The New Testament presents to believers a goal far superior to obligatory law-keeping. Our goal is to be transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18) and to be built up with others as His corporate and enlarged expression (Eph. 2:21-22; Rev. 21:2).

It is for this lofty purpose that the Spirit empowers us. When we experience the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we become His magnification, His enlarged expression. The power of Christ's resurrection also enables us *to know Him* (Phil. 3:9-11). Further, the power that raised Christ from the dead results in the producing of the church as His living Body, His full expression (Eph. 1:19-23). God's powerful operation in the believers is for the working out of their organic salvation, a sanctifying, renewing, and transforming work that consummates in the eternal New Jerusalem. In short, the indwelling Christ empowers us not to obligatorily keep the law, but to live in Him and by Him—even to live Him. For this reason, the apostle Paul prayed that we would be "strengthened *with power* through His Spirit into the inner man [our spirit], that Christ may make His home in [our] hearts" (Eph. 3:16-17, emphasis added). In sum, the Spirit's empowering is for the accomplishment of Christ's reproduction and His expansion in His expression.

The New Testament reveals God's economy, focuses the believers on Christ, and emphasizes a walk according to the Spirit and in the grace of Christ. Endorsing this central line in Scripture does not make one antinomial. Being *for* grace does not require one to be *opposed* to the law. The law is an expression of God and is good, bringing to light our need of a Savior and thereby conducting us to Christ. After receiving Christ, we certainly honor the commandments of God, but the focus and goal of God's New

Testament economy is much higher than simply empowering Christians with enhanced vigor to keep the law. Romans 8:4 assures us that we will spontaneously fulfill the righteous requirement of the law when we walk according to the spirit. This same chapter consummates with the highest goal—being conformed to the image of His Son as the full reproduction of God’s firstborn Son (vv. 29-30).

God’s intention for His children is not simply to supply them for a virtuous living, a behavior according to an elevated ethical code. Rather, God intends to give us Christ Himself. Thus, the highest ethic is actually Christ expressed within our human virtues. When Christ is lived out through His many brothers, divinity is expressed through humanity, and all the requirements revealed in

God’s law are more than adequately fulfilled in us. We certainly should not make the mistake of deliberately shunning ethics. However, the Bible reveals that genuine ethics are found in the living out of Christ through the members of His Body. These ethics are the expression of God’s divine life in man. The expression of Christ as the image of God through the believer is the excelling human virtue and ethic. All virtues, ethics, human conduct, and law-keeping, when devoid of Christ, cannot compare to what is manifested in a Christian who is living out Christ. When Christ is lived out through His believers, He is reproduced and enlarged in His expression; as a result, the Father delights to see His well-beloved Son expressed and glorified in His many brothers, His multiplication.

by Gary Evans

Footnotes from the Recovery Version of the New Testament on the Law and the Spirit

“For that which the **law** could **not** do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be **fulfilled** in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit” (Rom. 8:3-4).

law: In the flesh nothing good dwells (7:18); only sin dwells in the flesh (7:17). Furthermore, the flesh is of death (7:24). Hence, no man can be justified before God out of the works of the law through the flesh (3:20). Because of such a weak and impotent flesh, there is something that the law could not do. (v. 3, Note 1)

not: On one hand, the law of God outside man is a law in letters, is dead, and lacks the power of life to supply man to meet its demands. On the other hand, man’s body has been corrupted by Satan to become the flesh of death, and as such is incapable of keeping the law. It is because of these two factors that there is “that which the law could not do”; that is, the law is incapable of pleasing God through man’s keeping of it. (v. 3, Note 2)

fulfilled: Not consciously kept by us through our outward endeavoring but spontaneously and unconsciously fulfilled in us by the inward working of the Spirit of life. The Spirit of life is the Spirit of Christ, and Christ corresponds with the law of God. This Spirit within us spontaneously fulfills all the righteous requirements of the law through us when we walk according to Him. (v. 4, Note 1)

“But I say, **Walk** by the **Spirit** and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these oppose each other that you would not do the things that you

desire. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the **law**” (Gal. 5:16-18).

walk: The Greek word here means *to tread all around, to walk at large*; hence, to deport oneself, move, and act in ordinary daily life, implying a common, habitual daily walk (cf. Rom. 6:4; 8:4; Phil. 3:17-18). (v. 16, Note 1)

Spirit: According to the context of the chapter, the Spirit here must be the Holy Spirit, who dwells in and mingles with our regenerated spirit. To walk by the Spirit is to have our walk regulated by the Holy Spirit from within our spirit. This is in contrast to having our walk regulated by the law in the realm of our flesh. See note 3² in ch. 3. The flesh is the uttermost expression of the fallen tripartite man (Gen. 6:3), and the Spirit is the ultimate realization of the processed Triune God (John 7:39). Because of Christ’s redemption and the Spirit’s work of regeneration, we who have received God’s dispensing can walk by the Spirit, by the processed Triune God, instead of by the flesh, by our fallen being. Paul wrote this book not only to rescue the distracted Galatian believers from the law, on the negative side, but also, on the positive side, to bring them into the realization that the believers have the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit in their spirit that they may live, walk, and have their being in this Spirit. (v. 16, Note 2)

law: The law is related to our flesh (Rom. 7:5), and our flesh is against the Spirit (v. 17). Hence, the Spirit is in contrast to the law. When we walk by the Spirit, who is in our regenerated spirit, we will not fulfill the lusts of our flesh (v. 16); when we are led by the Spirit, we are not under the law. The Spirit of life, not the law of letters, is our guiding principle, regulating our Christian walk in our regenerated spirit. (v. 18, Note 1)