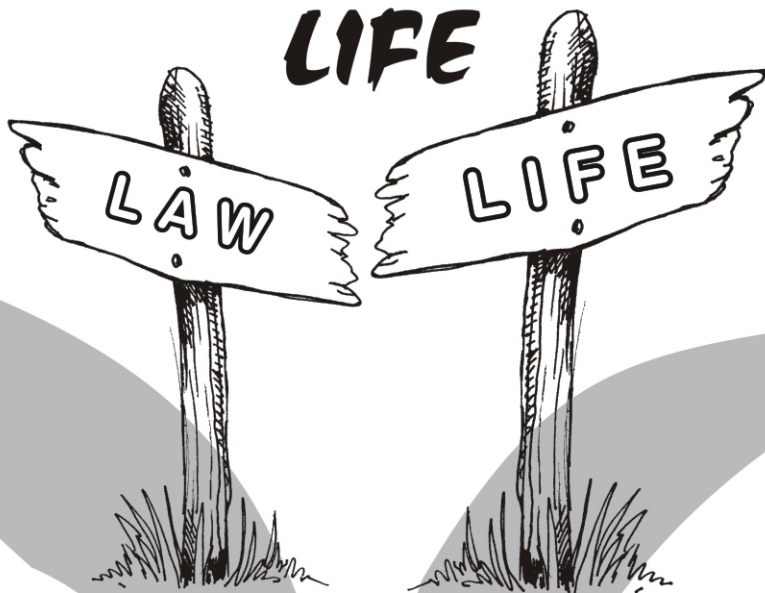


The LAW of the SPIRIT of LIFE



by
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Preface

This tract is not addressed to the unsaved or to members of any cult or sect. It is written for those who have been born of the Spirit, those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. It is addressed to all saints, however they may classify themselves in Christendom.

Every genuine believer has an inward desire to please the Lord. To this end, righteousness is of paramount importance because more than anything else, it identifies the personality and ways of God. We are called to put away sin and rebellion, and to put on the righteousness of or Lord.

Because of differing opinions on methods and priorities on how to accomplish this, conflicts and contentions have arisen that divide the body of Christ. Christian bodies are sincerely at variance with one another over what constitutes righteous conduct and what should be legislated against. There is not agreement on what it means to walk in the Spirit. This tract has been written to shed light on this issue.

The Three Spiritual States of Man

We can better understand what God expects from us concerning righteousness if we start at the beginning. Since creation, there have been three periods of time in which three distinct states of spiritual relationship have existed between the Lord and His people. If we examine each of these, we will discover there has always been a consistent harmony in the revealed will of God for believers. This should not be surprising, for He does not change; He is the same yesterday, today and forever. We are the ones who must change.

The three spiritual states we are concerned with are the following:

- The fallen state of innocence: the period of time before Adam sinned.
- The fallen state when God's covenant people did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- The fallen state where the redeemed of the Lord are indwelt by His Spirit.

As we understand the will of God in the first two periods of our history we will more clearly see what His heart's desire is for us today.

Adam's Choice

God was very explicit in His charge to Adam. He set before Adam (and his wife) a binary choice: life or death. This was expressed in terms of two trees. On the one hand, there was the "tree of life," which, as long as it was available to him, ensured Adam of immortality. Secondly, there was the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." They were forbidden to eat of this tree on the pain of death (Genesis 2:16-17).

If Adam failed in other commissions given him, such as replenishing the earth, there was no mention of death. This particular tree of the knowledge of good and evil was set forth as the way of death. It is evident that it had no capacity for life since the Lord told Adam that he may eat the fruit from any tree in the garden which had seed, a feature that is necessary to reproduce life (Genesis 1:29). Thus, this particular tree obviously had no seed (which also tells us that it was not

an apple tree). It *could not* bring life, only death to Adam.

What the physical appearances of these two trees were, we do not know. However, the Lord's instructions concerning them expressed the essence of His will for Adam. There were two main issues:

- Adam must choose by the exercise of his own will how he would walk, God *did not* force him to act righteously.
- In his choice, Adam had to choose one of two ways; he could choose the way of life through obedience, or the way of death through disobedience. The way of death was "*the knowledge of good and evil.*" This expression is the best definition of law that I know of. Law defines that which is right or correct, and that which is wrong or evil. The choice for Adam was to abide in life or to come under the curse of law, the knowledge of good and evil.

Israel's Choice

After the sin of Adam, mankind was in a fallen state, alienated from God without any defined basis for relationship with Him. The Lord then called the man Abram (Abraham) to leave his family and homeland, and go to a new land. Here, God promised He would bless and multiply him, and through his seed He would bless all nations. In this, and subsequent promises to him, the Lord established a covenant with Abraham that was the foundation for man's redemption.

The key of success for Abraham, and from those of his seed who would inherit the promises, was to believe God and having faith in His words to walk in obedience with Him on the basis of their faith. Abraham believed God and righteousness was imputed to him (Romans 4:3). These promises, of course, were all centered in Christ who was the promised seed. They contained God's plan of salvation with the promise of life and righteousness through the Holy Spirit. they were intended for *all* who would believe the, bringing the believer salvation by grace through faith.

Many of Abraham's seed only had faith to believe God's promises for natural blessings (such as the promised land). This company of people were to become "as numerous as the dust of the earth" (i.e. an earthly people). Those who would believe for the intended promise of the Spirit through faith in Christ were a spiritual seed, who the Lord said would become "as numerous as the stars of heaven" (i.e. a spiritual people). Thus, there arose two classes of believers from the covenant made with Abraham: a people of the flesh and a people of the Spirit. These two have always been in conflict with each other with those of the flesh persecuting those of the Spirit (Galatians 4:29).

Because of the continued sin and unbelief of His people (who were by this time the nation of Israel), the Lord, through Moses, mad an additional covenant with them. It was the Mosaic covenant of law. It was not intended to reveal the holiness of God, but to reveal to Israel the sinfulness of sin and expose to them the condition of their hearts.

. . . I would not have come to now sin except through the Law . . . (Romans 7:7)

And the Law came in that the transgression might increase . . . (Romans 5:20)

. . . that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.” (Romans 7:13)

The covenant of law (the Mosaic and Levitical laws) was *not* part of the Abrahamic covenant, but it was *added* because Israel did not choose to walk in righteousness.

*. . . why the Law then? It **was added** because of transgressions . . . (Galations 3:19)*

Furthermore, this covenant did not set aside the covenant made with Abraham over four hundred years earlier.

*. . . the Law which came four hundred and thirty years later, **does not** invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God . . . (Galations 3:17)*

God’s inheritance for His people continued to be based on their faith in His promise and *not* on obedience to law, for *no law* can bring life.

. . . for if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. (Galatians 3:21)

Thus, the children of Israel faced two choices in how to relate to God:

- to walk under the law, trusting in their obedience to please Him, the way of obligation (or the way of the flesh).

- to walk by faith believing in God's promise of life to come through the promised seed; the way of choice (or the way of the Spirit).

They faced the same two options that Adam had faced: law or life!

Scripture compares the way of flesh and the way of promise to the births of Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. The mothers of these two sons, allegorically speaking, are said to represent the two covenants: Hagar representing Mount Sinai and the bondage of law, while Sarah represents Mount Zion above with the promise and freedom of spiritual life (Galatians 4:21-31).

Law is not the way of faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God. Law can only result in His wrath, not His justification.

However, the Law is not of faith . . . (Galatians 3:12)

For the Law brings about wrath . . . (Romans 4:15)

Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight . . . (Romans 3:20)

David is one example of an Israelite who chose the way of life. This is why He is called a man after God's own heart. He was not always righteous in his actions, but he had faith to repent, to believe the Lord's promise of forgiveness and change his ways (Psalm 51).

The Early Christian's Choice

Christ came as the promised seed. His life and conduct fulfilled all requirements of the law. He then put the law away by nailing it to the cross in His crucifixion so that believers can be justified by grace through faith alone, and receive the promise of the Holy Spirit. He became the mediator of a better covenant, a new covenant in which the old (the law) became obsolete (Hebrews 8:6, 13).

*Christ **redeemed us from the curse of the Law**, having become a curse for us (Galatians 3:13)*

*But now we **have been released from the Law**, having died to that which we were bound, so that we serve in **newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of letter**. (Romans 7:6)*

*Therefore, my brethren, you also **were made to die to the Law** through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. (Romans 7:4)*

*Therefore the Law became our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are **no longer** under a tutor. (Galatians 3:24-25)*

*Having **canceled out** the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has **taken it out of the way**, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:14)*

The choice for the first Christians seemed clear enough. They were to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ

Who had fulfilled and set aside the law, and to receive through Him the promises made to Abraham. They were to be filled with the Holy Spirit by whom they could live according to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1-2). In contrast to the obligation of the law, this was a way of choice and liberty in the Spirit. It was the *perfect law* to bring them into righteousness, and they were to speak and act accordingly. The Spirit of the Lord indwelt them, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

*But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, **and abides by it**, not having become a forgetful hearer **but an effectual doer**. this man shall be blessed in what he does. (James 1:25)*

***So speak and so act**, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. (James 2:12)*

However, the inclination of human nature, the way of flesh, is *always* toward tradition and law. A number of Jewish converts sought to combine their religious traditions with the message of grace. They were stirred to envy by the freedom enjoyed in the gentile churches established by Paul. Some of them came among these gentile saints, particularly at Galatia, and began to corrupt the grace of God by imposing laws on circumcision, food and the observing of days. Paul's epistle to Galatia sharply rebuked these "false teachers," who were also men seeking personal recognition and converts to follow them (Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1-3; 4:17; 5:10-12; 6:12). Paul's message clearly distinguished between law and grace as a way of life for believers.

*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that **you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things**, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. (Galatians 4:9-10)*

*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and **do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery**. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:1, 4)*

Paul's emphasis to these saints was on the life of Christ within them.

*My children, with whom **I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you** . . . (Galatians 4:19)*

. . . walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh . . . if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (Galatians 5:16, 18)

Paul addressed the same heresy in his epistle to the Colossian saints:

*Therefore let **no man act as your judge** in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. (Colossians 2:16)*

He also dealt with this issue of legalism in his epistles to Corinth and Rome (1 Corinthians 8; Romans 14). To the Corinthians, Paul speaks of law as the ministry of death and condemnation, and the way of life as the ministry of the Spirit and righteousness (2 Corinthians 3:7-9). The essence of his instruction is

simple: walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).

Our Choice

The choice is the same today as it has always been. How can we benefit from this history of instruction? How should the principles of righteousness and holiness be established in the church, and the faults of legalism avoided? I have found the following five guidelines to be helpful.

- First of all, we should recognize that it is not a question of a “little law” and “lots of grace,” it is *totally* grace; for law is *useless* in the matter of righteousness.

*For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of **its** weakness, **and** uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (Hebrews 7:18-19)*

- Secondly, the fact that law is useless to produce righteousness does not mean that it is wrong or bad. Indeed, it is our human nature that is at fault, not the law (Romans 7:14). The law served Israel as a tutor (or instructor) to lead them to Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). In the same way, we make laws for our children in order to guide them until they can be led to Christ, and learn to walk in the Spirit. We must recognize that above all else, legislated behavior is *not* righteousness, nor will it ever produce righteousness. That can only come from the Holy Spirit within us as we choose to be led by Him (Romans 8:14). We are

not to be lawless or without laws; we are to be a people under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, a people who have His laws written in their heart (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:8-12).

In our relationship with other Christians, we are to recognize that there will be areas where there is room for our personal preference and convictions that are not binding on others. For example, my wife and I emphasize natural foods and vitamins in our family diet. However, we are not religious about it; it is simply our preferred lifestyle.

*One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. **Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.** (Romans 14:5)*

Such preferences are not to be laid as laws upon others.

- Thirdly, righteousness demands that we be guided by the Spirit who reproves or directs us in our decisions. Therefore, it is vital that we remain tender and sensitive in our conscience. If we disregard the inner “voice” of our conscience it can eventually become hard or seared and we could lose all sense of guidance. Our conscience must be clear and our heart tender toward the Lord as we are to walk in the Spirit (1 Timothy 3:9; 4:2; 1 Peter 3:16).

However, our conscience can be affected by inputs other than from the Holy Spirit. For example, if we are taught that something is wrong, and we believe it to be wrong, our conscience will warn us against it and condemn us if we act.

*I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; **but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.** (Romans 14:14)*

*however not all men have this knowledge (that there is but one God); but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; **and their conscience being weak is defiled.** (1 Corinthians 8:7)*

In order to protect our conscience from such influences so that we can be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we should avoid religious laws and human traditions to govern our conduct. Such things may have an appearance of 'good, but in the end their influence is harmful to our conscience. We are to walk in the faith of our own conviction by the Holy Spirit.

*The faith which you have, have as your **own** conviction before God. Happy is he who (whose conscience) does not condemn himself in what he approves. (Romans 14:22)*

The emphasis toward new converts should not be the imposition of rules dealing with such things as clothes, appearance or conduct (except for overt sin); rather, the focus should be on bringing them into a personal relationship with the Lord so that He can give them direction in righteousness. They have died with Christ in the new birth, so that baptism in water to "bury their old nature" is the place to start (Romans 6:1-6). In the end, it will be His life in us that enables us to rule over the appetites of our flesh, not regulations and laws. Although the areas of concern in conduct today may vary from those of the early church, our human natures remain the same and God's rem-

edy for us *has not changed*. Paul was very explicit in his instructions on this subject.

*If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as “do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” . . . in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, **but are of no value against fleshly indulgences.**” (Colossians 2:20-23)*

A word of counsel offered in private to a new convert, such as a word on modesty to a new sister, is far more godly than imposing a statute on dress code.

- The fourth guideline concerns a very important consequence of righteousness, namely the influence that our conduct has on those who we come into contact with. We are to walk so that others can see Christ as they follow us. Leaders in particular, are to be examples to the church. *We are not to be standards, nor are we to set standards.* There is one standard that we all are to follow: the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only standard!

How should we walk before those, who, because of legalism are weak in the faith? The answer is that we do not live for ourselves alone; we are our brother's keeper. For this reason, our conduct should not offend or wound the conscience of these saints. To do so, is to sin against Christ, for they belong to Him.

*But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. **But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.** For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, **that I might not cause my brother to stumble.** (1 Corinthians 8:8-13)*

These Scriptures establish a priority in righteousness: it is far more important that I not cause a brother to stumble than it is to act in faith in what is a good thing to me (Romans 14:16). To the eating of meat could be added: “manners of dress, hairstyles, watching television, drinking wine, etc., etc.

*It is good **not to eat meat or drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.** (Romans 14:21)*

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle (i.e. a law) or a stumbling block (i.e. our liberty) in a brother's way. (Romans 14:13)

However, there is no merit in being weak in the faith. Such Christians are to be loved, encouraged and taught how to walk in the law of the Spirit of life. How is such a change accomplished? It must begin with repentance, It is just as important to repent from dead

works as it is from evil works. Dead works are religious acts that we do for God purely out of our humanity; He has no part in them. The birth of Ishmael is an example of such works; man-made religious laws are also dead works. Our conscience is cleansed from dead works through repentance and the blood of Christ, just as our soul is cleansed from sin or evil works.

. . . how much more will the blood of Christ . . . cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living god. (Hebrews 9:14)

*Therefore **leaving the elementary teachings** about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, **not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works** and faith toward God. (Hebrews 6:1)*

Repentance from the dead works of law is not only profitable for individual Christians who are under their bondage, it is also needed today to heal and strengthen assemblies in the body of Christ at large. Prejudice and dogmatism in legalism has frequently divided assemblies, separating believers and bringing shame upon the church.

But shun . . . disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless. (Titus 3:9)

- The fifth and last guideline concerns the discipline that each of us are responsible to exercise in our personal life. The Lord never forces us to do anything; it is always a matter of choice on our part. He instructs us; we must act. Just because something is lawful for me does *not* mean that it is always expedient for me to pursue it. Anything, except Christ, that dominates my life

is in. I am not to be mastered by anything: appetite, recreation, social life, possessions, work, money, ministry, tradition

*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will **not be mastered by anything.** (1 Corinthians 6:12)*

It is sin for a man to give himself so totally to ministry that he neglects his responsibilities as husband and father. I know, for I have some scars in this area of my own life.

It is sin when Christians extend the liberty of their choices into an excess of sensual pleasures. They stand in danger of turning the grace of God into licentiousness, and becoming like the world that they have been called out of. I have observed that when Christians, who are under the bondage of church laws, are freed from these laws, they frequently go to excess in those areas of conduct covered by the laws. Why is this so? It is because the laws had not worked righteousness in the hearts of the people. There was no conviction within them. They need the law of the Spirit of life to do this work in their hearts.

Our discipline is to be motivated by the love of God. His love is invariant; it is unchanging whether I fail or succeed. When motivation is out of a fear of God (other than reverential fear), there will be an inclination to replace the discipline with laws.

Summary

The law of the Spirit of *life* in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and *death*. If the law of Moses is

called the law of sin and death, how much more are the laws of men? Law is only intended for those who are dead in sin.

*. . . realizing the fact that law is **not** made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane . . . for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and (1 Timothy 1:9-10)*

*For Christ is the **end of the law for righteousness** to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)*

The one basis for a victorious walk in righteousness is the lordship of Christ within us. If we sow to the Spirit, we will also reap His ways. He will lead us as He sees fit, to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness. He will teach us to glorify God in our body by fleeing youthful lusts. He will show us that what is lawful is not always profitable for us, lest we become mastered by it. He will teach us how to be examples of righteousness to others.

He will cause us to know that, although we walk by faith in the freedom of His leading, it is to be a faith that works by love for other. We are to walk circumspectly before those whose consciences are weak so that they will not stumble.

*For the **whole law** is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Galatians 5:14)*

He will show us how to love and help those who are weak; how to bring them to maturity and more perfectly into the ways of the Spirit.

Bear one another's burden, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

Finally, righteousness has its origin in God. It *must* come from heaven to be present on earth. Our part is to open our hearts and let the life that He has created within us spring up in righteousness.

Drip down, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds pour down righteousness; let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit, and righteousness spring up with it. I, the Lord, have created it. (Isaiah 45:8)

This is the law of the Spirit of life.



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