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2006

## The New Covenant Law and the Law of Christ

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### Recommended Citation

Adeyemi, Olufemi I., "The New Covenant Law and the Law of Christ" (2006). *LBTs Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 273.

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## THE NEW COVENANT LAW AND THE LAW OF CHRIST

*Femi Adeyemi*

**T**he first article in this three-part series noted that the New Covenant, promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34, will provide numerous blessings for Israel when the nation is in the land and under the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. One of these blessings is the inner appropriation of God's "law." "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it" (v. 33).<sup>1</sup> Many scholars say this law refers to the Mosaic Law reinstated with Israel, whereas others say the New Covenant Law is a "renewed" form of the Mosaic Covenant. However, several arguments were given to show that these two "laws" are not the same.<sup>2</sup>

What then is the law of which Jeremiah wrote? This writer proposes that it is to be identified with "the law of Christ," which Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2.

On several other occasions the apostle Paul wrote about the New Covenant, which he affirmed was established at the Cross, with its spiritual benefits being applied to believers in the church age. In 2 Corinthians 3:3 he wrote that believers are "a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."<sup>3</sup>

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\* This is the second article in a three-part series "The Identity of the New Covenant 'Law.'"

<sup>1</sup> Femi Adeyemi, "What Is the New Covenant 'Law' in Jeremiah 31:33?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July–September 2006): 312–21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 318–21; see also *idem*, *The New Covenant Torah in Jeremiah and the Law of Christ in Paul*, *Studies in Biblical Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 1–42.

<sup>3</sup> See Homer A. Kent Jr., "The New Covenant and the Church," *Grace Theological Journal* (1985): 293.

This echoes Jeremiah 31:33, where God promised that He will write His Law on human hearts. Then in 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul stated that he and other believers “are servants of a new covenant, not of the letter [the Mosaic Law] but of the Spirit,” for the former kills, “but the Spirit gives life.”

This alludes to Ezekiel 36:27, another New Covenant text. Furthermore in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 Paul portrayed believers, both Jews and Gentiles, as New Covenant participants, since they partake of the cup that represents the shed blood of the Messiah. This clearly recalls Christ's words in the Last Supper meal with His disciples (“This cup . . . is the new covenant in My blood,” Luke 22:20), which in turn is an allusion to Jeremiah 31:31–34. And in Romans 11:25–27 Paul wrote of a future fulfillment of the New Covenant for national Israel.

Whereas Paul and Jeremiah both wrote of the New Covenant, nowhere did Paul *explicitly* identify what Jeremiah meant by the New Covenant “law.” However, some of his comments regarding the Mosaic Law and the law of Christ indicate that he probably assumed that a unique law had emerged with the inauguration of the New Covenant promise in Christ. Several facts support this conclusion. (1) Both the New Covenant and the law of Christ stand in contrast to the Mosaic Covenant and its Law in Paul's writings. (2) Both Jeremiah and Paul emphasized that the two covenants (New and Sinaitic) were different. The fact that one is “New” suggests that it replaces the Old Covenant. (3) Both Ezekiel 36:27 and Paul point to the ministry of the Holy Spirit as being unique. The following syllogism suggests how this may be reasoned. First premise: New Testament believers are under the New Covenant and not the Mosaic Covenant. Second premise: New Testament believers are under a new law, the law of Christ, and not the Mosaic Covenant. Conclusion: The law of Christ is the New Covenant law of which Jeremiah wrote.

Jeremiah wrote that New Covenant participants will be under a new, unique covenant but not the Mosaic Covenant and its Law. And Paul also wrote that believers are under a new law, the law of Christ. An examination of the verses where Paul mentioned the law of Christ bears out this identity of Jeremiah's New Covenant law with Paul's law of Christ.

## GALATIANS 6:2

Paul wrote to the believers in Galatia, “Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” This admonition follows Paul's imperative in the preceding verse that believers “who are

spiritual" (οἱ πνευματικοί) must restore wayward fellow believers, those who are involved in some "trespass" (τινὶ παραπτώματι). This exhortation is directly associated with the spiritually mature ones discussed in 5:16–26.<sup>4</sup> They are those who "walk by the Spirit" (πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε, v. 16), are "led by the Spirit" (πνεύματι ἄγεσθε, v. 18), "live by the Spirit" (ζῶμεν πνεύματι, v. 25), and who "keep in step with the Spirit" (NIV; πνεύματι . . . στοιχῶμεν). Walking in the Spirit is possible because believers are free from the demands of the Mosaic Law (5:1). This is redolent of Ezekiel's prophecy that the New Covenant will mean God's Spirit will indwell believers (Ezek. 36:27) and Jeremiah's affirmation that the New Covenant is unlike the Mosaic Covenant.

In the New Testament, νόμος ("law") appears about 195 times, of which 121 occur in the Pauline Epistles.<sup>5</sup> It is used of the Mosaic Law (John 7:19; Heb. 7:5) and of the entire Old Testament Scriptures (Matt. 12:5; James 4:11). Paul used νόμος of a principle (Rom. 7:21a), human nature (v. 23), and the principle of faith in Christ (3:27) that is wrought by the Spirit (8:2).<sup>6</sup> The identity of νόμος in Galatians 6:2 is shaped by its genitive qualifier, τοῦ Χριστοῦ. This may be a genitive of source,<sup>7</sup> suggesting that this "law" comes from Christ. In this sense νόμος in Galatians 6:2 is "the standard set by Christ"<sup>8</sup> for believers to follow as a new standard or system of conduct. In his ministry in that region Paul already introduced this "law of Christ" to the Galatian believers, as indicated by the articular form of νόμος in that verse.<sup>9</sup> The articular form of νόμος and

<sup>4</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 410.

<sup>5</sup> *Concordance to the Novum Testamentum Graece of the Nestle-Aland, 26th Edition, and to the Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed., ed. Institute for New Testament Textual Research and the Computer Center of Munster University, with Horst Bachmann and Wolfgang A. Slaby (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1987), 1300–1303.

<sup>6</sup> Νόμος may mean (a) procedure or practice that has taken hold: custom, rule, principle, norm; (b) a constitution or legal system, that is, law; or (c) a collection of the holy writings precious to God's people (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 677–78).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 113.

<sup>8</sup> Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 677.

<sup>9</sup> The expression "the law" fits the "well-known" classification of articular nouns (Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 225).

the genitive phrase τοῦ Χριστοῦ affirm the distinct nature of this "law" as coming specifically from Christ.

### FIRST CORINTHIANS 9:21

In 1 Corinthians 9:21 Paul wrote that though he was not under the Mosaic Law, he was "under the Law of Christ" (ἐννομος Χριστοῦ). In classical Greek ἐννομος was used for being "ordered by law," "keeping within the Law," being "lawful," "legal," "upright," or "just."<sup>10</sup> The word ἐννομος is used only twice in the New Testament. In Acts 19:39 it refers to a "legal" assembly, a group of people who were legally convened and thus were acting in accord with the law. And in 1 Corinthians 9:21 Paul used it of himself as one who was "subject to a law," that is, to the jurisdiction of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Χριστοῦ is another genitive of source,<sup>12</sup> which indicates that this law comes from Christ. In verses 20–21 Paul drew a clear distinction between the Mosaic Law and what he called "the law from Christ."<sup>13</sup>

However, many scholars argue that the Mosaic Law and the law of Christ are the same. Schreiner says that when Paul wrote that he was "not . . . under the law" (1 Cor. 9:20), the apostle was referring only to the insignificant rituals of circumcision, food, and Sabbath-keeping, and laws pertaining to certain days.<sup>14</sup> Sanders maintains that when Paul said he was "under the law of Christ" (ἐννομος Χριστοῦ), he was only formulating a principle by which he could live outside the Law when evangelizing Gentiles and yet re-

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<sup>10</sup> Henry George Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., rev. Henry Stuart Jones et al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 570.

<sup>11</sup> Being "under the law of Christ" means being "subject to the jurisdiction of Christ" in contrast to "Mosaic jurisdiction" (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 537–38). "I identified as one outside the Mosaic jurisdiction with those outside of it; not that I am outside God's jurisdiction for I am inside Christ's [jurisdiction]" (ibid., 338).

<sup>12</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 113.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Thielman, *A Contextual Approach: Paul and the Law* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 104. He observes that Paul "considered this law to be different from the Mosaic Law, at least as the Mosaic Law was used to distinguish Jews from Gentiles" (ibid.). See also Brian Wintle, "Paul's Conception of the Law of Christ and Its Relation to the Law of Moses," *Reformed Theological Review* 38 (1979): 48–49.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Law of Christ," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 543–44.

maining “within the law of Christ and thus of God,” namely, the Law of Moses.<sup>15</sup> Similarly Räisänen writes that in 1 Corinthians 9:21 *ἐννομος Χριστοῦ* implies only Paul’s dependence on and obedience to Christ,<sup>16</sup> and that with its related phrase in Galatians 6:2 (*τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ*) this could not have implied “a new authoritative Law”<sup>17</sup> replacing the Mosaic Law. He says it was a loose metaphor depicting the way “a life in Christ should be lived.”<sup>18</sup> Fee reads the law of Christ in this same way, for he writes that although Paul used the word “law” in this place as a wordplay to characterize the Christian ethical imperative, “this does not mean that in Christ a new set of laws has taken the place of the old.”<sup>19</sup>

This view, however, contradicts Paul’s clear statement that he was not under the Law (1 Cor. 9:20). The way “a life in Christ should be lived” could not be the same way a life was lived under Judaism as dictated by the Law of Moses. Further, Paul’s comments in verses 20–21 have nothing to do with the Jewish ceremonial laws of circumcision and feasts. Instead they refer to idolatry, an ethical issue in the Old Testament. The ethics Paul followed in this context can hardly be identified with the ethics dictated by the

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<sup>15</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 138 (italics his). See also idem, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977), 98–156. Also Hans Conzelmann rejects the view that *ἐννομος Χριστοῦ* implies a new law different from the Mosaic Law. He says this differs from Paul’s normal use of *νόμος* (*1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 161. However, Paul did not always use *νόμος* with the same meaning. See H. Kleinknecht, “νόμος,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 1022–35; Walter Gutbrod, “νόμος, ἀνομία, ἀνομος, ἐννομος,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:1035–88; and Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 21–34.

<sup>16</sup> Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 79.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 430. See also Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 154. He says that Paul did not mean he had acquired a new set of commands to obey, such as the teachings of Jesus; instead he was “asserting a pattern of Christ’s self-sacrificial death on the cross [that] has now become the normative pattern for his own existence” (ibid.).

old Torah. Dodd writes that the Mosaic "Torah is not conceived as being identical, or equivalent, or at any rate co-extensive, with the Law of God, which is either a different, or a more inclusive, law than the law of Moses."<sup>20</sup> He believes that this shows Christians may be free from the Mosaic Law and yet stay loyal to the law of God as expressed in the law of Christ. Fee concedes that the Christians' ethical standards are what Paul termed the law of Christ.<sup>21</sup> Yet Fee's contention that this new ethic should not be termed "the law of Christ" must be rejected.<sup>22</sup> Conzelmann believes that the Christian ethical imperatives are a new way of life that reflect the teachings of Jesus, and yet he still holds that this does not imply a new law for the New Covenant participants.<sup>23</sup> Yet it is clear in Paul's epistles that the new way of life in Christ differs from the old way of life dictated by the Torah of Moses for Israel. The New Covenant participants are free from that old way of life and are bound only to the new way of life in Christ. .

As Dodd writes, by obeying the injunction to bear one another's burden in Galatians 6:2 "a man will be fulfilling the law of Christ; or, in other words, in acknowledging himself bound by such injunctions he is *ἐννομος Χριστοῦ*."<sup>24</sup> Hays remarks that the law of Christ "is closely analogous to the important parallel in 1 Cor 9:21,"<sup>25</sup> and Moo indicates that although Paul used the phrase "the Law of Christ" only once (Gal. 6:2), it is similar to Paul's being "in-lawed to Christ" (*ἐννομος Χριστοῦ*; 1 Cor. 9:21).<sup>26</sup>

The genitive construction *τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ* in Galatians 6:2 and in *ἐννομος Χριστοῦ* in 1 Corinthians 9:21 indicates that this law has its source in Christ, not the Law of Moses. This "law" from Christ is the way a believer's life in Christ should be lived. It is a

<sup>20</sup> C. H. Dodd, "ENNOMOS XPIETOY," in *Studia Paulina: In Honorem Johannis de Zwaan Septuagenarii*, ed. J. N. Sevenster and W. C. van Unnik (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1953), 99.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon D. Fee, "Freedom and the Life of Obedience (Galatians 5:1-6:18)," *Review and Expositor* 91 (1994): 202-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 217 n. 40.

<sup>23</sup> Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 161.

<sup>24</sup> Dodd, "ENNOMOS XPIETOY," 100.

<sup>25</sup> Richard B. Hays, "Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 275.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and the New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 208.

new “lifestyle”<sup>27</sup> in Christ and the new law for the New Covenant participants. However, scholars differ on the meaning of this law. The following pages discuss eight views.

## VIEWSON PAUL’S LAW OF CHRIST

### THE MORAL ASPECTS OF THE MOSAIC LAW

Most covenant theologians identify “the law of Christ” as the moral law in the Mosaic Covenant. VanGemerén, a proponent of this view, explains that God supplemented the moral or the natural law that He had given to the patriarchs with the ceremonial, civil, and penal codes given to Israel.<sup>28</sup> This “supplemental” law was what God gave to national Israel, but being complex, it made the Mosaic Law burdensome. However, Jesus with His New Covenant work on the cross, carried the burden of that Law, abrogated the later supplements given to Israel, gave it further clarification, and turned it into the law of Christ for the New Covenant.<sup>29</sup> This moral law, VanGemerén says, now has three uses: *usus elenchticus* (pedagogic instruction for sinners concerning the will of God); *usus politicus* (the restraining exercise that law gives to Christians as it reminds them of the consequences of sin); and the *usus in renatis* or *usus normativus* (the Holy Spirit uses the law to teach the will of God and conform believers to God’s will, like a rigorous enforcement officer).<sup>30</sup> VanGemerén says the third use of the Law is the most important today. Kaiser concurs; he says it guides believers in righteousness, providing a basis for obedience, “without enslaving any who are bound to this, which may now be called the ‘law of Christ.’”<sup>31</sup> VanGemerén writes that the guidance of the Holy Spirit without the Law of Moses is dangerous for Christian growth.<sup>32</sup>

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27 Ibid., 215.

28 Willem VanGemerén, “The Law Is the Perfection of Righteousness,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 36; Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos* 2; and idem, *The Constitution of the Holy Apostles* 6.3.20–24.

29 VanGemerén, “The Law Is the Perfection of Righteousness,” 36, 53.

30 Ibid., 53.

31 Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Response to Willem A. VanGemerén,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 75.

32 VanGemerén, “The Law Is the Perfection of Righteousness,” 42. See also Thielman, *Paul and the Law*, 135; and idem, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul’s View of the Law in Galatians and Romans*, Supple-



One of the problems with this view is that no verses show that Paul divided the Law of Moses into ceremonial, civil, penal, and moral codes. Paul categorically stated that the Decalogue kills and that the Sinaitic Covenant is a covenant of death (2 Cor. 3:6–7). Gentiles cannot simply pick and choose within the Mosaic Law what they want to obey (Gal. 5:2–3). Writing on the antithesis in Romans 7–8 between the Spirit and the Law (which is similar to Paul’s argument in Gal. 5:16–26), Schrenk remarks that the Mosaic Law can never accomplish what is done by the Holy Spirit, that the Law has no power to enable people to obey it, and that “it is not even remotely suggested that πνεῦμα might use γράμμα (synonymous to νόμος in Paul) to bring about this observance.”<sup>33</sup>

The source of morality for believers is life in the Spirit, not the Decalogue (Gal. 2:1–10; 4:10; 5:1–4, 13, 16–26). Galatians 5:16–26 and 6:1–2 do not suggest that “life in the Spirit” *complements* the Decalogue for New Covenant believers. Instead it *replaces* the Decalogue. Thus the moral aspects of the Mosaic Law are not to be identified as the law of Christ.

Kaiser agrees that the Law exhibits a certain unity and that “the Bible does not explicitly classify laws according to the scheme of civil, ceremonial, and moral laws.”<sup>34</sup> Yet he argues for the same tripartite division of the Mosaic Law and the exaltation of its moral laws above all other segments of that Law. Though Kaiser appeals to Matthew 23:23 (“the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness”) as emphasizing the moral part of the Law of Moses, Dorsey shows that contextually Kaiser’s application of Matthew 23:23 to the moral law is different from Jesus’ point in that verse. Dorsey also notes that rabbinical writers and the New Testament writers saw the Law as monolithic. Also this theological category is questionable, since every aspect of the Mosaic Law is, in

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ments to *Novum Testamentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 118. Thielman says the Holy Spirit enables believers (the restored “Israel”) to fulfill the Law. This, he adds, is in line with the Old Testament prophets (Isa. 2:3; Jer. 31:33) who had prophesied that in the eschatological age the Spirit will enable people to obey the Law and the higher ethics of the kingdom (ibid.).

<sup>33</sup> Gottlob Schrenk, “γράμμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (1964), 766.

<sup>34</sup> Kaiser, “The Law as God’s Gracious Guidance,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 189–99; and idem, “The Weightier and Lighter Matters of the Law: Moses, Jesus and Paul,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 175–92.

one sense or another, moral.<sup>35</sup> Above all, since the phrase “the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2) means that the source of that law is Christ, it cannot be the Mosaic Law.

#### THE ENTIRE MOSAIC LAW

Kaiser writes that the third use of the Mosaic Law (*usus in renatis* or *usus normativus*), “which may now also be called ‘the Law of Christ,’” remains the most useful for Christian growth in sanctification.<sup>36</sup> Yet he argues elsewhere that the *entire* Mosaic Law is the law that will be written on the hearts of the New Covenant people. “Why will God want to take this same Torah and place it on the hearts of all who believe in the new covenant (Jer 31:33)? . . . Surely it is the same ‘law’ God revealed to Moses that is to be put on the hearts of those in the new covenant.”<sup>37</sup> Kaiser concludes that if the Mosaic Law is the law to be placed in the hearts of New Covenant believers, the Law of Moses has not expired.

However, Jeremiah 31:31–32 states that the law that will be written on the hearts of the New Covenant participants will *not* be the Mosaic Law. The negative clause “not like the covenant which I made with their fathers” (v. 32), makes this clear, since a covenant cannot be divorced from its stipulations. The New Covenant and its features are presented as new by Jeremiah and the New Covenant is seen (v. 33) as proceeding directly from Yahweh at the time of the cutting of the New Covenant.<sup>38</sup>

Also Paul’s point in 2 Corinthians 3:3–18 is that the Mosaic

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<sup>35</sup> David A. Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991): 329–31. Charles C. Ryrie writes that the law is a unit and that Judaism divided the Torah differently from the modern theological construction on this issue (“The End of the Law,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 [July–September 1967]: 240). See also Moo, “The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ,” 206; and idem, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses,” 336–37. Here Moo reiterates that “it is not easy even within the Ten Commandments to distinguish clearly between what is ‘moral’—and therefore, it is assumed, eternal—and what is not. . . . An even thornier problem for those who would elevate the Decalogue to the status of eternal moral law is presented by the Sabbath commandment” (ibid., 337).

<sup>36</sup> Kaiser, “Response to Willem A. VanGemeren,” 75.

<sup>37</sup> Kaiser, “The Law as God’s Gracious Guidance,” 189.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon Fee says the law of Christ in Galatians 6:2 refers to Christ Himself. He sees the genitive “of Christ” as appositional: “the law, that is, Christ” (*God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994], 463–64).

Law has been abolished, not that it is still operative in some way for believers. The New Covenant is glorious, abiding, and life-giving through the Spirit, whereas the Old Covenant was an instrument of death. How is it that the Mosaic Covenant can be part of what gives life? New Covenant participants fulfill the law of Christ as they walk in the Spirit, who gave them life (Gal. 5:25). And as already seen in 1 Corinthians 9:21, Paul wrote that he was “in-lawed to Christ” now that he was no longer under the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law is no longer in operation but the law of Christ *is*.

### THE LAW OF LOVE

Most commentators say that the law of Christ is the law or principle of love—either the concept of love found in the Mosaic Covenant (“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” Lev. 19:18) or the principle of love Jesus exemplified and taught. Barclay writes that Galatians 6:2 must be seen in the light of 5:14. “The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” He then proposes that the law of Christ is the Mosaic Law “redefined through Christ.”<sup>39</sup> The problem with this, however, is that “redefined” does not adequately interpret the genitive τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“of Christ”). Strack and Billerbeck also say the law of Christ is the Mosaic Law “reinterpreted” by Christ.<sup>40</sup> Betz notes, however, that since the Mosaic Covenant has been annulled,

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<sup>39</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988), 131–35. See also James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Black, 1993), 323–24. Moo observes that “loving the neighbor in Lev 19:18 means to love a fellow-Israelite, not, as Jesus demands, to love the enemy ([Matt] 5:43–47)” (“The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ,” 205). He notes that Paul's citation of Leviticus 19:18 in Galatians 5:14 is “due to the fact that Jesus had already singled it [love] out as central to his demand [and is] an Old Testament commandment *already transformed into the demand of Christ* (Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses,” 360 [italics his]).

<sup>40</sup> Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck'sche, 1928), 1–25. They write that since Israel anticipated their Messiah to be a Teacher of the Law, He was expected to interpret the Mosaic Law in a new way by digging up all the wealth of knowledge hidden in that Torah and resolving all of its difficult interpretations so that the Torah would appear like a new one. They say Jesus did not abolish the old Law but lifted a new interpretation from it as seen in His Sermon on the Mount. But as David Lowery points out, many of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (on oaths, retaliation, etc.) went beyond the Old Testament prescriptions, thus setting aside that Law as no longer applicable (“A Theology of Matthew,” in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck [Chicago: Moody, 1994], 47–49).

this love cannot be the love that is commanded in Leviticus 19:18.<sup>41</sup>

Some writers believe that this law of love is the mutual love enunciated in Galatians 5:13, "Through love serve one another."<sup>42</sup> Others believe the law of love refers to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross (Rom. 15:1–4; Phil. 2:1–8; 1 John 3:16).<sup>43</sup> Still others say that the law of Christ refers to Jesus' command to love one another (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17) and the principles He espoused in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7).<sup>44</sup> However, it seems preferable not to limit the law of Christ to the principle of love.

#### LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

Burtchaell holds that the law of Christ is a new kind of law, the "law of faith" (Rom. 3:27) or "the law of the Spirit" (8:2). It is the inner working of the Holy Spirit, not a legal code.<sup>45</sup> Michels writes that the law of Christ is the moral precepts that regulate Christian living, precepts that somehow have the characteristics of "law," but not in prescribed codes. It is a new law, the law of the Spirit, that controls believers' minds and hearts.<sup>46</sup> Wingner writes that it means "living by the Spirit,"<sup>47</sup> a life in which believers follow the "rules" or principles Paul set forth in his epistles. Guthrie says that the law of Christ means submitting to Christ, and that as Christ

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<sup>41</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 298–301.

<sup>42</sup> H. A. Ironside, *Expository Messages on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1941), 216; and Martin Luther, *A Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Robert Carter, 1860), 546.

<sup>43</sup> E. H. Perowne, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 73. See also Arthur Pridham, *Notes and Reflections on the Epistle to the Galatians* (London: James Nisbet, 1872), 297–300; and Otfried Hofius, "Das Gesetz des Mose und Gesetz Christi," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 80 (1983): 285.

<sup>44</sup> C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians with Notes Exegetical and Expository* (Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), 314; and John Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1853; reprint, Minneapolis: James Family, 1979), 278.

<sup>45</sup> James Burtchaell, "A Theology of Faith and Works: The Epistle to the Galatians: A Catholic View," *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 45.

<sup>46</sup> Florence Michels, *Paul and the Law of Love* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967), 30–32.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Wingner, "The Law of Christ," *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000): 537–46. Wingner rejects the view that the Law of Christ is the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself.

bore the burden of others, Christians must do the same.<sup>48</sup> Kruse writes that it is "a life lived in the service of Christ out of gratitude for his amazing love in which the commandments of Christ are gladly obeyed."<sup>49</sup> Fung remarks that it is imitating "the example of Jesus' loving character and conduct, by which his ethical teaching is confirmed."<sup>50</sup>

However, although Paul commanded believers to live in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25), he did not state that living in the Spirit itself is the law of Christ. Instead, living in the Spirit is the *means* by which believers fulfill the law of Christ. This is in line with the New Covenant text of Ezekiel 36:26–27, in which God promised that He will give His Spirit to enable His people to obey His eschatological Law.

#### BELIEVERS' RESPONSIBILITY TO FELLOW BELIEVERS

Guldin believes that the law of Christ is the responsibility a believer has toward other believers but not to unbelievers. "Paul, in referring to 'the Law of Christ,' is speaking of an 'intercommunity practice.' Therefore . . . 'the Law of Christ' governs the conduct of believers with one another and does not include the conduct of believers with those outside the body of Christ."<sup>51</sup> Guldin says that the law that "governs the conduct of believers with those outside the body of Christ" is the "royal law" (James 2:8), and that these two laws both have their "source in Christ."<sup>52</sup> He adds that the indwelling Holy Spirit empowers believers to fulfill the law of Christ.<sup>53</sup> Holding this same view, Wintle says, "Paul's primary emphasis in Gal. 6:1–5 is on the believer's responsibility to his fellow believers and the loving concern Christians should have for such believer's spiritual well-being."<sup>54</sup>

However, there are reasons for believing that the law of Christ includes more than restoring erring believers. For example in the

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<sup>48</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Galatians*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 143.

<sup>49</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *Paul, the Law and Justification* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1996), 130.

<sup>50</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 289.

<sup>51</sup> John C. Guldin, "A Study of the Pauline Concept of the 'Law of Christ' in Galatians 6:2" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 79.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–80.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Wintle, "Paul's Conception of the Law of Christ," 49.

same chapter in which Paul mentioned the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) he said believers are to “do good to all people” (v. 10). And when Paul used the phrase *ἐννομος Χριστοῦ* in 1 Corinthians 9:21, it was in the context of dealing with Jewish and Gentile unbelievers.

#### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Strelan holds that the law of Christ refers to providing financial support for believers,<sup>55</sup> both in giving material support for Paul and his coworkers and in taking collections for poor saints in Jerusalem. However, this is not the primary context of the law of Christ in Galatians 6:2. The call for financial support in verses 6–10 extends beyond the needs of church workers. It is an appeal to help all people who are in need.

#### THE WILL OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMANDS

Chafer writes that the law of Christ is the will of Christ for believers today,<sup>56</sup> and he distinguishes this law from the Law of Moses for Israel in the millennium. Ryrie believes that the law of Christ “is the ‘system of rules or principles for conduct’ of the Christians today. . . . The law of Christ is a definite code containing hundreds of specific commandments . . . composed of the teachings of grace.”<sup>57</sup> These commands include positive and negative commands and principles and regulations found in the New Testament,<sup>58</sup> which form “a new and distinct code of ethics” to guide Christian behavior today.<sup>59</sup>

Davies says that the law of Christ refers to the teachings of Jesus. Jesus’ words became the new law that now functions as the authoritative law for the church.<sup>60</sup> Longenecker says that the law

<sup>55</sup> John G. Strelan, “Burden-Bearing and the Law of Christ: A Re-Examination of Galatians 6:2,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 266–76.

<sup>56</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948; reprint [8 vols. in 4] Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 4:160.

<sup>57</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody, 1963), 105, see also 96.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 105–13.

<sup>59</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, “The End of the Law,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 (July–September 1975): 246.

<sup>60</sup> W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (New York: Harper, 1948), 34, 136, 141–44. Whereas Davies limits the law of Christ to the teachings of Christ, Ryrie says it refers to all New Testament teachings. See also J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 130.

of Christ is a new Torah for believers today. "The law of Christ is . . . [a] standard which in its negative aspect objectively passes judgment on the self-assertion and waywardness of the Christian and in its positive purpose gives direction through authoritative principles."<sup>61</sup> The early Christians promoted this new concept, Longenecker argues, as seen in the fact that Jesus was often addressed as Rabbi, Teacher, or Prophet, with the result that His words became authoritative for the church.<sup>62</sup> Longenecker notes, however, that the law of Christ is not limited to the teachings of Christ. It includes the mind of Christ, communicated through the Holy Spirit.<sup>63</sup> Lightfoot maintains that the law of Christ is the sum of what Christ has commanded.<sup>64</sup>

According to Moo, "This 'law' does not consist of legal prescriptions and ordinances, but of the teaching and example of Jesus and the apostles, the central demand of love, and the guiding influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit."<sup>65</sup> He reiterates that the law of Christ is not the Mosaic Law "even as 'interpreted' or 'fulfilled,'"<sup>66</sup> but that it is God's law in its "Christian form."<sup>67</sup> It is God's unchanging eternal moral law now expressed in the person of Christ, rather than through the Mosaic Law for Israel.<sup>68</sup> Strickland agrees that this law of Christ, which is a new Torah, is the New Covenant's counterpart to the Mosaic Law. It is the expression of God's unchanging, eternal moral standard, which is energized by the

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<sup>61</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 192.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 191–93.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* However, Longenecker warns that this new Torah, the law of Christ, does not consist of detailed codes with specific answers to every circumstance and situation. It gives only general principles.

<sup>64</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 8th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1884), 216. See also Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *A Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Galatians*, trans. G. H. Venable (Edinburgh: Clark, 1873), 323.

<sup>65</sup> Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 343; and *idem*, "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ," 215–16.

<sup>66</sup> Moo, "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ," 216.

<sup>67</sup> Moo, "Response to Greg L. Bahnsen," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 170; and *idem*, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," 343.

<sup>68</sup> Moo, "Response to William A. VanGemeren," 89.

Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's regenerated people.<sup>69</sup>

Dodd writes that the law of Christ is a new Torah embodied in Jesus' teachings, recorded in passages like Matthew 5–7 and 18:15–20, which Galatians 6:2 echoes.<sup>70</sup> This view seems more appropriate than the other proposed views since it understands the New Covenant Law as a new Law that has its source in the Messiah for New Covenant participants who are not under the Mosaic Law. The view is in line with the grammatical implications of *τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ* in Galatians 6:2 and in *ἐννομὸς Χριστοῦ* in 1 Corinthians 9:21.

### CONCLUSION

The identity of the New Covenant Law becomes clear as Paul contrasted the promises of the New Covenant with the Old Covenant. After Paul affirmed that believers are free from the Mosaic Law (Gal. 5:1–4, 13), he encouraged Christians to walk in the Spirit (vv. 16–26), who is associated with the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6, 17). Living in the Spirit is the only means by which Christians can fight the flesh (Gal. 5:17–21) and restore fellow Christians who have fallen into sin (6:2) and thus fulfill the law of Christ. Although church-age believers are not under the Law of Moses, the law of God, which is the law that comes from Christ, is their guide. By obeying God's will, as revealed in Christ's teaching and the New Testament imperatives for believers, Christians fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) as those who are under His jurisdiction (1 Cor. 9:2).

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<sup>69</sup> Wayne G. Strickland, "The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 272, 276–77.

<sup>70</sup> Dodd, "ENNOMOS XPISTOY," 97–110; cf. idem, *Gospel and Law: The Relation of Faith and Ethics in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 65–68.