The New Covenant Law and the Law of Christ

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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" (οι πνευματικοί) must restore wayward fellow believers, those who are involved in some “trespass” (τυν παραπτώματι). This exhortation is directly associated with the spiritually mature ones discussed in 5:16–26.4 They are those who “walk by the Spirit” (πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε, v. 16), are “led by the Spirit” (πνεύματι άγεσθε, v. 18), “live by the Spirit” (ζώμεν πνεύματι, v. 25), and who “keep in step with the Spirit” (ΝIV; πνεύματι . . . στοιχώμεν). 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.5 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).6 The identity of νόμος in Galatians 6:2 is shaped by its genitive qualifier, τον Χρίστου. This may be a genitive of source,7 suggesting that this “law” comes from Christ. In this sense νόμος in Galatians 6:2 is “the standard set by Christ”8 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.9 The articular form of νόμος and

4 Timothy George, Galatians, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 410.


6 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).

7 Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar beyond the Basics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 113.


9 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" (έννομος Χρίστου). In classical Greek έννομος was used for being "ordered by law," "keeping within the Law," being "lawful," "legal," "upright," or "just." The word έννομος 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.

Χρίστου is another genitive of source, 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."

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. Sanders maintains that when Paul said he was "under the law of Christ" (έννομος Χρίστου), he was only formulating a principle by which he could live outside the Law when evangelizing Gentiles and yet re-

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11 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).


maining “within the law of Christ and thus of God,” namely, the Law of Moses.\textsuperscript{15} Similarly Räisänen writes that in 1 Corinthians 9:21 \textit{εννομος Χριστοῦ} implies only Paul’s dependence on and obedience to Christ,\textsuperscript{16} and that with its related phrase in Galatians 6:2 (τὸν νόμον τού Χριστοῦ) this could not have implied “a new authoritative Law”\textsuperscript{17} replacing the Mosaic Law. He says it was a loose metaphor depicting the way “a life in Christ should be lived.”\textsuperscript{18} 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.”\textsuperscript{19}

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


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 80.

\textsuperscript{19} Gordon D. Fee, \textit{The First Epistle to the Corinthians}, International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 430. See also Richard B. Hays, \textit{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." 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. Yet Fee's contention that this new ethic should not be termed "the law of Christ" must be rejected. 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. 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 ἐννομὸς Χριστοῦ." Hays remarks that the law of Christ "is closely analogous to the important parallel in 1 Cor 9:21," 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" (ἐννομὸς Χριστοῦ; 1 Cor. 9:21).

The genitive construction τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ in Galatians 6:2 and in ἐννομὸς 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

22 Ibid., 217 n. 40.
23 Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, 161.
24 Dodd, "ΕΝΝΟΜΟΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," 100.
new "lifestyle" 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.

VIEWS ON 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. VanGemeren, 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. 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. This moral law, VanGemeren says, now has three uses: usus elencticus (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). VanGemeren 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.'" VanGemeren writes that the guidance of the Holy Spirit without the Law of Moses is dangerous for Christian growth.

27 Ibid., 215.
30 Ibid., 53.
32 VanGemeren, "The Law Is the Perfection of Righteousness," 42. See also Thielman, Paul and the Law, 136; 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."³³

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."³⁴ 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


one sense or another, moral. 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. 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." 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.

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

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38 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."39 The problem with this, however, is that "redefined" does not adequately interpret the genitive του Χριστου ("of Christ"). Strack and Billerbeck also say the law of Christ is the Mosaic Law "reinterpreted" by Christ.40 Betz notes, however, that since the Mosaic Covenant has been annulled,


40 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.  

Some writers believe that this law of love is the mutual love enunciated in Galatians 5:13, "Through love serve one another." 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). 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). 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. 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. Wingner writes that it means "living by the Spirit," 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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42 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.
44 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.
bore the burden of others, Christians must do the same.48 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."49 Fung remarks that it is imitating "the example of Jesus' loving character and conduct, by which his ethical teaching is confirmed."50

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."51 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."52 He adds that the indwelling Holy Spirit empowers believers to fulfill the law of Christ.53 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."54

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

48 Donald Guthrie, Galatians, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 143.
49 Colin G. Kruse, Paul, the Law and Justification (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1996), 130.
52 Ibid., 79-80.
53 Ibid.
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 ἐννομὸς Χρίστου 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, 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, 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." These commands include positive and negative commands and principles and regulations found in the New Testament, which form "a new and distinct code of ethics" to guide Christian behavior today.

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. Longenecker says that the law


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

58 Ibid., 105–13.


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."61 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.62 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.63 Lightfoot maintains that the law of Christ is the sum of what Christ has commanded.64

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."65 He reiterates that the law of Christ is not the Mosaic Law "even as 'interpreted' or 'fulfilled,'"66 but that it is God's law in its "Christian form."67 It is God's unchanging eternal moral law now expressed in the person of Christ, rather than through the Mosaic Law for Israel.68 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


62 Ibid., 191–93.

63 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.


68 Moo, "Response to William A. VanGemeren," 89.
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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