

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMBSY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

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THE LAW. DID IT PASS AWAY?

Perhaps you have never heard of antinomian theology, but it is alive and well in the church today. Antinomian is defined by Webster as: “one who holds that under the gospel dispensation of grace the moral law is of no use or obligation because faith alone is necessary to salvation.” Thus the Law has been set aside as having passed away. In Christ we are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14) but this does not mean that the law died. Rather we died to the law. Using the example of a woman bound by law to her husband until the husband dies (Rom. 7:1-6) Paul shows that we “were made to die to the law through the body of Christ” (Ver 4). Anders Nygren, the great German theologian in his *Commentary of Romans* states: “To Paul there can be no thought of the law dying. It is not a case of the Christian’s decision to regard the law as repealed and nonexistent nor can it be said that, with the coming of Christ, the law was outdated and abolished. The law continues and it constantly lays its claim on man, regardless of whether he acknowledges it or not. One does not escape the sway of the law by neglecting its mandate. The law does not die. There is only one way to liberation. Only in the fact that the Christian has died with Christ is he really and truly set beyond the realm of the law”.

But doesn’t the Scriptures teach that Christ “cancelled 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” (Col 2:14); and didn’t He abolish “in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances” (Eph. 2:15)? Note that it is the “certificate of debt consisting of decrees” that was nailed to the cross, and that it was the “commandments contained in ordinances” that were abolished in His flesh. This leads me to conclude that there were three aspects of the law: the ceremonial, the judicial and the moral. The ceremonial law concerned the offerings, sacrifices, feasts, holy days and priestly rituals. This was the “certificate of debt consisting of decrees which was against us and contrary to us and hostile to us” which was taken out of the way by having been nailed to the cross. All the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ. The judicial law, or civil law, was the law that governed Israel as nation. When the nation was rejected by God (Matt. 21:43) and was destroyed in 70 AD there was no longer any applicable civil law, because there was no longer a nation to which these laws applied. This leaves the moral law which will never become outdated. This opinion is not shared by many scholars. Leroy Garrett in *The Stone-Campbell Movement* in commenting on Campbell’s famous *Sermon on the Law* quotes him as saying “the clergy had long divided the law of Moses into three parts, the moral, the ceremonial and the judicial. Campbell rejected this as unsupportable by

Scripture, and insisted that ‘the whole law of Moses stands or falls together. If we ‘are not under law but under grace’ then we are not under any of the Mosaic law.” The late Rousas J. Rushdoony, an ardent advocate of keeping the entire law, in *The Institutes of Biblical Law* states: “It is a serious error to say that the civil law was abolished, but the moral law retained. What is the distinction between them? At most points they cannot be distinguished”. However he does say “It is clearly only the sacrificial and ceremonial law which is ended because it is replaced by Christ and His work. The old, typical laws of sacrifice and their priesthood and ceremonies were succeeded by the atoning work of Christ, the great High Priest (Heb. 7)”. Garrett further refers to Campbell making this distinction: “‘the law’, without any restrictions, always refers to the law of Moses; whereas ‘the law of liberty’, ‘the law of faith’ or the ‘law of Christ’ refer to the new order” Some have followed Campbell’s leading by saying that the “royal law” and “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:8) does not refer to the law of Moses, but to “the law of Christ”. However James clearly shows he is speaking of the ten commandments (the moral law) by saying: “If you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture (The Old Testament Scripture, HB), ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Lev. 19:18), you are doing well...for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point has become guilty of all, for He who said ‘Do not commit adultery’ also said ‘Do not commit murder’ now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:8-11). Jesus has much to say about the law. One of the most important statements concerning the law is His declaration in the Sermon on the mount: Matthew 5:17,18: “Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter and stroke shall pass away from the law, until all is accomplished”. There are two different words used here to convey the idea of fulfill. In verse 17 the word “fulfill” means to make full, amply supply, and finish. The word “accomplished” (fulfilled, KJV) in verse 18 means to become, to come to pass, to happen. (*Strong’s Greek Dictionary*). Neither of these words can be interpreted as meaning the end of the law. Fulfilling is not abolishing, but meeting all the law’s demands, something no human being could do. An example of His fulfilling the law is seen in the fact that the law condemns sin, and the condemnation of sin is death. The law pronounces that death must pass upon all who have sinned. This punishment must be carried out. Christ therefore paid the penalty of death by dying on the cross and thus fulfilled the law in that respect. In Romans 8:2-4 Paul links together the way Christ fulfilled the law Himself and the way in which He fulfills the law in us: “For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh God sending His own

Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit". Carl F.H. Henry in his book *Christian Personal Ethics* in commenting on Matthew 5:17 states: "not only does His teaching on murder and adultery immediately recall the sixth and seventh commandments, there is a considerably broader connection. If we turn to the ethical teaching of Jesus as a whole we find remarkable evidences of Jesus' assertion of the permanent validity of the commandments. In a classic passage (Mk. 7:21f) Jesus asserts that the real cause of all moral impurity is internal; He brings into view at least five of the commandments in a single sentence: 'for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, coveting and wickedness as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness, these things proceed from within.'"

Most Christians have no problem accepting the fact that the moral law is still in effect until it comes to the fourth commandment: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Nowhere in the teaching of Jesus do we find any declaration that the Sabbath is to be abolished, nor is there any questioning of its validity on the basis of the divine command. However, we cannot overlook the teaching of Paul in Colossians 2:16,17 where he lists the Sabbath day among "things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ". This makes it clear that the ceremonial significance and formalism of Sabbath observances were ended, being swept away by Christ. The fulfillment of the Sabbath, then, is in the new creation. As W.F. Moulton noted in *Ellicotts Commentary*: Heb. 4:10: "Man's Sabbath-rest begins when he enters into God's rest (Gen 2:2); as that was the goal of the creative work, so to the people of God this rest is the goal of their life of 'works'". Hebrews 3 and 4 shows the Sabbath prefigured our rest in Christ, both now and in eternity. The essence, then, of the Sabbath is our rest in Christ. The Pharisees and legalist among the Jews of Jesus' day had added so much tradition as to make the Sabbath a burdensome religious requirement. Those today who insist a Christian keep the day as the Jews did fall into the same legalistic trap, not realizing the significance of the ceremonial aspect being fulfilled in Christ, and fail to see the spiritual aspect of our rest in Him.

Jesus summarizes the moral law in His answer to the lawyer's question "Which is the greatest commandment in the law?". Jesus' answer: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, this is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole law and Prophets" (Matt. 22:35-40). The first of these commandments is relative to our relationship to God, summarizing the first four of the ten commandments and the second is relative to our relationship to one another summarizing the last six of the ten commandments. It is in this context that we see the New Testament expression "the law of Christ". (Gal. 6:2; I Cor. 9:21). There is no way we

can conclude that the moral law has been abrogated. Sin is a transgression of this law. (I John 3:4) In light of all this what, then, did Paul intend when he described Christians as being "not under Law" (Rom. 6:14ff) and "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4)? John Stott in his commentary: *Romans, God's Good News For The World* gives an excellent answer to that question: "Paul used this expression in two different letters and contexts, and so in two different senses. He also clarified the meaning of each by contrasting phrases he added. In Romans 6:14f he wrote that 'you are not under law, but under grace'. Here the antithesis between law and grace indicates that he is referring to the way of *justification*, which is not by our obedience to the law, but by God's sheer mercy alone. In Galatians 5:18, however, he wrote that 'if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law'. Here the antithesis between law and Spirit indicates that he is referring to the way of *sanctification*, which is not by our struggling to keep the law, but by the power of the indwelling Spirit. So for justification we are not under law but under grace; for sanctification we are not under law but led by the Spirit. It is in these two senses that we have been 'freed' or 'released' from the law. But this does not mean that we have been divorced from it altogether, in the sense that it has no more claims on us of any kind, or that we have no more obligations to it. On the contrary, the moral law remains a revelation of God's will which He still expects His people to 'fulfill' by living lives of righteousness and love (Rom. 8:4; 13:8, 10)".

In the book of Acts we find the record of the Judaizing teachers who dogged the footsteps of Paul on all his missionary journeys. (This could have been his "thorn" in the flesh). As they wanted to add obedience to ritual law to faith in Christ, so today the Antinomians want to subtract the moral law from faith in Christ.

THE POWERFUL DEATH LOBBY

For many years I have pointed out the fact that many Christians and churches actually glorify death. Refusing to recognize death for what it is: an enemy, it has become to many a "door" into a better life, so we have glorified it in song and sermon (especially funeral sermons), and have given so much attention and exhortation about death and dying that we have ignored life and living in the present day. Many times I have felt alone in my crusade against the Christian's love affair with death. It was refreshing to read a recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly* (a purely secular publication), which discusses what it calls "our support system for death". The article goes beyond the funeral parlors, cemeteries and crematoria and shows how doctors, lawyers, insurance companies, the Social Security trust fund, family structures and organized religion in which all play a part in our embracing what it calls our "death program". After speaking of the powerful lobbying interests in Washington to keep pet policies intact, the article states: "The death lobby must be the most powerful of all". All this says that the secular press sees what many Christians and churches refuse to see: we are sometimes more interested in death than in life.

