

GALATIANS - SERMON 26
GALATIANS 5:18 — THE SPIRIT VS THE OLD LIFE
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INTRODUCTION: Read Galatians 5:18

Paul is exhorting the Galatians to live as the Christians they professed to be. To live as Christians we must not only stop doing that which is wrong, but we must start doing that which is right. Evil must be replaced with good. Paul is not the only one who has realized this important principle.

Matthew 12:43-45

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."

Our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated that it is not enough merely to rid our lives of evil. Our cleansed lives must be filled with virtues that oppose vice or else the evil will return.

Ephesians 4:25-32 is a series of examples of this principle. In the midst of this passage the example of the thief is used. It is not enough to merely stop stealing. Having ceased to steal it is then needful for that man to get employment, make money, and begin to give to others.

Sin which is repented but not replaced by righteous behavior will soon be committed again. Vices discontinued must be replaced by the virtue that directly corresponds by opposition.

Paul gives the Galatians counsel regarding this principle in two areas.

- 1 First with respect to their brethren.
 - a Negatively in respect to their brethren he has told them to stop biting and devouring them,(3:15).
 - b Positively in respect to their brethren he has told them to serve one another out of love - the opposite of biting and devouring.
- 2 Second with respect to themselves.
 - a Negatively he tells them to stop engaging in the works of the flesh.
 - b Positively he tells them to start walking in the Spirit, for one who does so cannot fulfill the imbalanced appetites of the flesh.

This is the principle of sanctification the rooting out of evil and the inculcating of holiness. This is the context of the passage in Galatians 5:18.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

This would seem to be a parenthetical remark in relation to the rest of the passage. It deserves special attention because of the abuse of this text by many (especially in our era). This passage is most frequently quoted by the antinomians in order to prove their case.

What is an antinomian? The word is composed of two words put together. The first part of the word is from the Greek word *anti* which means *against*. The second part of the word comes from the Greek word *nomos* meaning law. It signifies one who is in opposition to the law. This refers to the doctrinal position which has become prevalent in our day that states that the moral law of God, mainly the ten commandments, are not binding upon Christians as a rule of life. It is accompanied by the notion that we are now to be guided in our moral behavior by the subjective impulses that we receive from the indwelling Holy Spirit. Those directions which we receive from the indwelling Spirit are what are to guide our moral choices, not the ten commandments. This verse, Galatians 5:18 is most often cited in support of this view [along with Jeremiah 31:31-33 (law written on the heart)]. This is what antinomianism is.

From where does such a teaching arise? It arises from two motives. The one motive, though honorable, is nevertheless, misguided.

- 1 This first motive arises from wanting to preserve the doctrine of salvation by grace alone apart from the works of the law. There are some who so want to preserve that doctrine that they misunderstand many of the moral precepts issued by God in His Word. These men believe that the affirmation of justification by faith alone demands the repudiation of any and all obligation to obey God's law as being contrary to that doctrine.
- 2 A second motive is not so honorable. It arises from those who profess to be Christians but who are, in fact, not saved. According to Romans 8:7 their hearts are still at enmity against God and not subject to the law of God neither can they be.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

These second kind of antinomians love the kind of Christianity that saves but does not sanctify. They want heaven without holiness. This is often preached under the guise of salvation by grace alone apart from works of the law. In its grossest form it teaches that a believer can live in any manner or fashion he so desires and yet still go to heaven. This is called the carnal Christian doctrine. They preach only the loss of rewards, but never the failure of heaven. This is extreme antinomianism.

Antinomianism is a doctrine of error against which we must be on guard. Hence the significance of Galatians 5:18.

OUTLINE:

- I SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAW.
- II THE SPECIFIC INTERPRETATION OF GALATIANS 5:18

I SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAW.

The doctrine of the believers relationship to the law is large and complex. There are many passages that deal with this topic. Sometimes these passages seem to contradict. Rightly understood there is no true contradiction regarding the believer's relationship to the law of God.

We shall pursue a representative survey of the broad outline of the doctrine of the believer's relationship to the law and to provide ourselves with a general perspective for the right understanding of this matter.

Four principles:

A The Bible uses the word *law* in a variety of ways to refer to a variety of things. It is crucial to understand this. The word *law* cannot be interpreted in the same way at every instance of its use. This is the primary fault among the antinomians. The word *law* in the New Testament does not refer to just one idea, but rather to one of several ideas. It is the context and overall sense of the Scriptures which help us to comprehend the right meaning of the word *law* in any particular passage. Some of the various uses of the word *law*;

- 1) the whole Old Testament, for example;
John 12:34

The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"

The meaning here is that from the Old Testament the people had learned about the Messiah.

- 2) the five books of Moses, for example
Luke 24:44

Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."

Our Lord makes reference to the three major divisions of the Old Testament and calls the first division by the label *the Law of Moses*.

- 3) the old covenant established at Mount Sinai (predominant use in Galatians), for example;
Galatians 3:16-19

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise

was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.

This reference to the law is clearly to the Mosaic covenant.

- 4) the ten commandments, the moral law of God, for example;
Romans 2:17-23

Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?

In reference to the use of the word *law* in this passage the apostle quotes three of the ten commandments. Hence we come to understand that his use of the label *law* in this place is a reference to the moral law as summarized in the ten commandments.

Romans 7:7

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

A specific commandment from the ten commandments is cited here as the meaning of the use of the word *law*.

Therefore, when we encounter the word *law* in the New Testament scriptures we cannot assume that it always has the same meaning in every place. The context, the usage, and the overall teaching of the Scriptures will help us to determine what is meant by any particular use of the word *law*.

In our passage we read *if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*. If the word *law* here means the whole Old Testament then we can cast out the whole Old Testament from our Bibles. If the word only means the Pentateuch, then we can cast out the first five books of our Bibles. If it refers to the ten commandments, then we can throw out the ten commandments from our Bibles. But if it means that by being led of the Spirit we are not under the Mosaic covenant the passage makes good sense within its context. Paul has not been arguing against the ten commandments but against the use of the old covenant for the purposes of justification.

- B Not only must we understand that the Bible uses the word *law* in a variety of ways to refer to a variety of things, but we need to understand that believers are clearly required to keep the ten commandments (moral law of God) as a rule of life.

Romans 13:8-10

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has

fulfilled the law [what law?]. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

In answer to the question what law is in the mind of the apostle we need only look at the list of laws he cites. It is the ten commandments. The ten commandments inform my love for my fellow man, by not only teaching us what we ought not to do, but by insinuating that if we do the opposite we will effectively love our neighbor. For example rather than committing adultery with my neighbor's wife, I will do all I can to strengthen and encourage their marriage. Rather than lie to my fellow man I will speak the truth to him, etc. The ten commandments very adequately teach us how to love one another. In Romans 13 we have a new covenant apostle in a new covenant document telling new covenant believers to keep the ten commandments. We cannot love biblically without reference to the moral law of God.

Romans 7:12

Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Because Paul has just specifically cited the tenth of the ten commandments (verse 7) we know that the *law* to which he refers in Romans 7:12 is that which is found in the ten commandments.

Romans 7:22

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

What law is Paul delighting in according to the inward man? Is it a non-specific mystical sub-conscious law written in his heart, or is he still making reference to the ten commandments in their beauty and equity and precision. [Is the law written on his heart different from the law written on stone? (Jeremiah 31:31-33)]

Romans 7:25

I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Are these the affirmations of a man who believes that the ten commandments are abrogated? Does Paul sound like a man who is no longer under the authority and rule of the ten commandments as a rule of life.

Ephesians 6:1-3

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

Paul quotes the fifth commandment as binding upon children. Rather than submitting the fifth of the ten commandments as a rewritten or re-stated commandment, Paul quotes the commandment directly. He does not leave room here for the

commandment to have been abrogated then reissued later.

James 2:8-12

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.

What law is James reflecting upon here. He lists the summarization of the second table of the ten commandments. He claims that the law still has the capacity of convicting us of transgressions. Abrogated laws cannot convict us, only abiding laws can do so.

Note that James considers the *law* (here a reference to the ten commandments) not as a form of bondage as do the antinomians, but he calls it the *law of liberty*. Why does James consider the ten commandments a law of liberty to new covenant believers? When the law promotes bondage it convicts the unbeliever, but the one justified by faith alone finds the law to be a law of liberty demonstrating their release from bondage to sin.

Jesus and John both tell us that commandment keeping is essential to loving Christ and proving the genuineness of our salvation.

John 14:21-24

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

In the sermon on the mount our Lord specifically referred to specific commandments from the ten commandments, not abrogating them but exeging them. The commandments of Jesus are nothing more or nothing less than the ten commandments [which he uttered initially at Sinai].

1 John 2:4

He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

There is abundant evidence that the commandments of the New Testament are the same as those recorded once on stone as the ten commandments. They are not different, they are not abrogated, they are not altered or even enlarged. Jesus' attitude towards the antinomian is severe.

Matthew 5:17-19

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

It is important for us to know that teaching people the duty and necessity of obeying the ten commandments is not legalism. It is obedience.

What is legalism? Legalism consists of two things - according to the Scriptures. First, it is making up laws that are not in the Scriptures and binding men's conscience to them. Second, it is use of the law in order to justify oneself before God savingly. These two things only are valid uses of the term legalism. Urging believers to obey Christ is not legalism. In many of the discussions regarding these matters a good place to begin is with a definition of biblical legalism. Much can be cleared up here.

- C Not only does the Bible use the word *law* in a variety of ways and not only does the Bible require believers to keep the ten commandments, but also the moral law is crucial to the preaching of the gospel. The preaching of the law of God brings men under the conviction of sin. It does so by defining the nature of sin.

Romans 7:7

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

How did Paul know sin and that he was a sinner? It was by the knowledge of the law - one of the ten commandments actually.

1 John 3:4

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Who is under the law - *every mouth* and *all the world*. The law does not justify (*by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified*), but it educates the sinner of his sinfulness (*by the law is the knowledge of sin*). The law leads men to see their need of Jesus Christ.

- D Passages which seem to indicate our freedom from the law fall into two classes.

- 1) . . . those which declare that we are free from the condemning power and penalty of the moral law.

Galatians 3:13

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"). . .

Christ died for our transgressions of the ten commandments. He paid the penalty and suffered the curse of the law without freeing us from the obligation of the law.

As an example: one who drive 85mph in a 55mph zone who is caught and given a ticket, might have that ticket absolved by a judge thereby removing the curse of that law from him. But this in no way indicates that the offending driver is now allowed to drive 85 in a 55 from that time forward. He is still under the obligation to keep the law, though he has not suffered the curse and penalty of it.

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law [its curse] but under grace.

- 2) . . . those which declare that we are free from the restrictions of the old covenant, sometimes called *the law*.

Galatians 3:23-25

But before faith [new covenant] came, we were kept under guard by the law [old covenant], kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law [old covenant] was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith [new covenant] has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

He is not saying we are no longer under the ten commandments, but that we are no longer under the old covenant.

II THE SPECIFIC INTERPRETATION OF GALATIANS 5:18

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The subject of the epistle to the Galatians has largely been related to a repudiation of the false doctrine that we must return to the old covenant for justification. The Judaizers were encouraging a return to the old covenant ritual and ceremony.

What does it mean to be *led of the Spirit*? It is the same as being filled with the Spirit, as being saved.

Romans 8:14

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

To be led by the Spirit of God is to be a son of God. If you are saved, thus led by the Spirit of God under the gracious influences of the Spirit as manifested in your submission to His will and in the mortifying the deeds of the flesh, then you are not under the *law* -

the old covenant as a rule of life. You need not submit yourself to the old covenant ritual and ceremony as a means of pursuing victory over the flesh. The old covenant will not accomplish such a thing. The old covenant will not set us apart or sanctify us. The indwelling Spirit will do that. It is the Spirit of God and not the old covenant that sanctifies us.

Not only is the old covenant law ineffectual in the justification of a sinner, it is also ineffectual in the sanctification of a justified sinner. The old covenant used to be a means of sanctification to set apart the Jews, but such is no longer the case. Now that Christ has come and given to us the Spirit. In comparison with the benefit and power of the Holy Spirit indwelling us, the old covenant ritual and ceremony is among the weak and beggarly elements. The law is too weak to accomplish the job of sanctification and mortification.

This passage has nothing to do with the ten commandments. It addresses the old covenant as a means of sanctification.

Conclusion:

Therefore, this verse gives no support to the antinomian.