

Conclusion: The Law of Love as Fulfilling the Law of Christ

This study has shown that any biblical consideration of law and Christian ethics must begin with the Bible's conception of law as *Torah*. In contrast to the way law is conceived in western culture (as impersonal rules and somewhat arbitrary ethical dictates), *Torah* refers to God's communication to men. It consists of revelation, instruction and prophecy, and it is in that respect that it calls for obedience. *Torah* doesn't prescribe compliance to regulations or rules, but conformity with relational definitions; *Torah* reveals and defines the relationship between God and His human image-bearers and it calls them to embrace and conform to that relationship in truth. The divine-human relationship, in turn, expresses itself in the relationship between human beings. This is why Paul, following Jesus' own instruction, could insist that *love* is the full substance of *Torah* and fulfills it in practice (cf. Matthew 7:12, 22:35-40; Romans 13:8-10). It is also why Jesus and His disciples proclaimed that He is the grand subject of *Torah*; He is the One in whom the truth of God and man and the relationship between them is truly and fully realized. He is the One in whom human beings come to know the living God and also discover and experience authentic humanness – man as God intended. Jesus has fulfilled all *Torah* by being the incarnate *Torah*, the Word of God made flesh and the Last Adam.

Thus the answer to the question of human obligation to divine law is multifaceted, and yet simple in its essence. *All human beings are obligated to live a life defined by love – love as it exists in God and is manifest in His dealings with His creation.* And this obligation is neither arbitrary nor a matter of morality in the sense of meeting a standard of conduct. For humans to fulfill the obligation of love is for them to uphold the truth – the truth of themselves and their created purpose and the truth of the One who created them in His image. And life according to truth constitutes *righteousness*; it is the “rightness” of authenticity and integrity; it is conforming in all things to the actual truth of oneself. Such a “righteous” existence will obviously manifest conduct consistent with it, but the appearance of “righteous” conduct in itself says nothing about the person's actual “righteousness” and his conformity to God's law. A good tree will inevitably bear good fruit, but a bad tree can bear fruit that passes a casual inspection (Matthew 7:15-20).

Because obedience to God's law is a life defined by love as it exists in Him, the foundation of this obedience is *union with Christ* and sharing in His life. Authentic human love is God's love, but such love is impossible in the natural human condition. For, in their natural state, human beings are severed from God's life and live as prisoners of their own darkened minds. Self-centered and self-preoccupied, their hearts are callous and enslaved to sensuality – i.e., life defined and driven by what meets and attracts the senses (Ephesians 2:1-3, 4:17-19; cf. Matthew 6:19-32; Titus 3:1-3). People in their natural condition manifest and experience something they call “love,” but it is only another expression of their alienation and self-enslavement. Their “love” involves affection and concern for others, but always with themselves at the center. A fundamental *reciprocity* undergirds all human relationships, even if the reciprocal benefit is intangible – i.e., affirmation, vindication, allegiance, security, etc. (Matthew 5:41-48). The only way to escape this way of being human is to share in the true humanness that exists in the man Jesus. One must become an authentic image-son by sharing in the life of the true Image-Son. And having life in Him – that is, the life of God in the Spirit – a person now possesses the capacity and power to love as God loves. Thus fulfilling the “law of Christ” begins with possessing the life, mind and Spirit of Christ (cf. Galatians 3:1-4:11, 5:1-6:1; also 1 John 4:1-8).

Union with Christ is the foundational issue in a person's obedience to God's law (cf. John 3:1-6, with Acts 2:28-38; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Philippians 3:1-11), but this initial obedience continues in a life of conformity to that union and share in Christ's life. If the first act of obedience is *coming* to Christ, the life of obedience consists in *living* in Him (Colossians 2:6-7). This means that obedience to God's commandments is a matter of *christiformity* – it is the willful and perpetual practice of putting on the new man whom God has created in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:1-24; cf. Romans 13:8-14). This is reflected in the scriptural pattern of *indicative* and *imperative* in which God calls people to respond appropriately to what is true – even as He Himself does. In the case of Christians, this means being in their thoughts, attitudes and practice who they actually are (cf. Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 5:1-6:5; Ephesians 1:3-4:6; Colossians 2:6-3:17; also 1 Corinthians 3:1-23, 6:1-20).

The essence of obedience is complying with God's expressed will (His *Torah*), and His will is that humans fulfill their created identity and purpose as authentic image-sons – sons and daughters who, by sharing in the life of Jesus, the Image-Son, are animated and led by His Spirit so as to become the dwelling of God; sons and daughters whose very existence reflects and makes present in the world the glory of their Father (2 Corinthians 3:17-4:6). All people are created in God's image and likeness, so that all share this same calling, obligation and human destiny that is *christiformity*. This is why the first obligation of obedience is embracing Christ in order to find one's own life and identity in Him (Matthew 16:24-25; John 6:48-56). Then, having fulfilled that initial obligation, ongoing obedience consists in “learning Christ” and growing up in Him so as to manifest His mind, heart and fragrance in all things at all times (cf. Romans 12:1-2, 13:8-14; Galatians 5:1-6:16; Ephesians 4:1-24; Philippians 2:1-16; Colossians 3:1-17). This was how Paul understood his obedience and he ascribed his perspective to all who are mature (“complete”) in their understanding (Philippians 3:7-16).

Put most simply, obedience to God's Torah (the “law of Christ” – Torah as it is now “yes and amen” in Christ) consists in a life defined and governed by *truth* – the truth as God has revealed, explained and fulfilled it in the person of His incarnate Son. In Him we see who God really is in relation to His creation and what it means to be a human being. So also we see in Him the destiny God has appointed for all things (Ephesians 1:9-10). To be obedient, then, is to be a person *of truth* and this highlights and helps interpret one further commandment of the Decalogue, namely the prohibition against false witness (Exodus 20:16).

This commandment specifically forbid false witness with respect to one's *neighbor*. Again, in the Israelite context, a “neighbor” was a fellow Israelite or a foreigner living among the covenant household, often as a proselyte. As it came to Israel at Sinai, the commandment concerned an answer given in response to a petition, interrogation or inquest (cf. Exodus 23:2; Micah 6:3). Moreover, the grammar points to testimony that condemns rather than vindicates; it is witness *against* one's neighbor (cf. Numbers 35:30; 2 Samuel 1:16; Isaiah 59:12; Jeremiah 14:7). The focus, then, seems to be on false testimony that could result in injustice or injury for another person. This is not to say that other forms of lying were acceptable under the Law of Moses, but the issue with this commandment is lying *answers* that work to another's detriment. In other words, the concern here – as ultimately with all Torah – was the violation of the obligation to love one's neighbor as oneself. The issue wasn't the misstatement of facts, but deceit, guile or malice in giving an answer concerning another individual.

God's Torah addressed the human obligation of love – the obligation to be children of the Father – and the commandment forbidding false witness was no different. This is crucially important, for the tendency is to conclude that God was here requiring the honesty of mere factual correctness. As long as a person states all facts truthfully, he has kept the commandment. But people can be exacting with facts and still be guilty of “false witness against a neighbor.” *Flattery* is an obvious example of this dynamic, for it uses truth about a person to achieve deceitful, self-serving ends without any real concern for the person being flattered. It's no wonder flattery is condemned throughout the Scripture (Psalm 5:8-10, 12:1-5; Proverbs 7, 26:8).

God's intent was to expose Israel's falseness, not prescribe factual correctness. The basic issue underlying this commandment is the fact that all people – including the elect “son” Israel – are liars, whether or not they are truthful in the things they speak about. At bottom, all human beings are liars because their very existence is defined and ordered by a lie: the lie of a self-perceived, self-assigned human identity that contradicts humanness as God created it to be. Whatever their honesty in their speech or outward conduct, all people in their natural state are *themselves* a lie – living contradictions of the truth who “deal falsely” in their hearts and minds (cf. Psalm 116:11; Isaiah 1:1-15, 29:13-14; Jeremiah 10:14; Matthew 15:1-20; Romans 3:1-18). They live as if they're something they're not; they live as if the truth of themselves is defined by themselves rather than by the One who created them and determined their nature and purpose.

This intrinsic falseness plagues all of Adam's offspring and it gets to the very heart of the human problem. That is why the Scripture treats it as fundamental in God's verdict of condemnation (cf. Psalm 5:5-6, 24:1-4 with Revelation 21:8, 27, 22:15). Israel, too, stood condemned as false (Isaiah 41:27-29) and thus the commandment served to show Yahweh's “son” that he would not be able to fulfill his identity and calling; how could a false image-son testify truthfully to his Father and so mediate the knowledge of Him to the world that is alienated from Him? In this respect also Israel was to become truly Israel in the Messiah – the Israelite in whom there is no guile or falsehood of any kind (cf. Isaiah 28:14-18, 52:13-53:12 with Jeremiah 23:5-6, 33:15-16; Ezekiel 34:1-24). *Jesus kept this commandment, not because He always spoke the truth, but because He was Yahweh's “Righteous One” – He embodied and lived the truth in all things and in every respect* (cf. John 1:14-18 with 4:19-26, 5:30-47, 7:11-18, 8:31-55, 14:1-11, 15:1-27, 16:13-14, 18:33-37; also Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 2:1-3; Revelation 3:7-22, 19:11-13).

Jesus fulfilled the commandment against false witness by being love incarnate – man as truly man. In this way He also transformed the commandment, bringing it to its ultimate glory as Torah. For, in all of its dimensions and directives, Torah unveils and exalts the life of love which characterizes the Father's true image-sons. Jesus, who is love incarnate, is also Torah embodied – the Word made flesh. And so, the commandment against false witness does more than demand honesty in human speech; it shines light on the true nature of false witness and summons all people to forsake their falseness by becoming truly human in the True Man. It tells them that they cannot and will not testify truthfully until their lives – in thought, attitude, word and deed – bear witness to the One who is the truth. And they bear this testimony, not by merely following His example, but by manifesting His life; by becoming people of the truth. In that way they bear truthful witness that has its goal in their neighbor's good. And thus they fulfill the commandment as *Torah*: the obligation of love which, in Jesus, has become the law of Christ; then the world comes to understand the meaning and power of Jesus' coming (John 13:34-35, 17:21-24).