

New Covenant Theology



How do Christians relate to the Law of Moses?

For centuries the people of God were characterized by:

- Being a part of the nation of Israel
- Keeping the Law of Moses
- and Worshiping God in the Temple at Jerusalem.

“Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place [the temple].” Acts 21:28

Paul's Puzzling Statements about the Law

“For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances...**” - Ephesians 2:14-15

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise),** “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” - Ephesians 6:1-3

So which is it? Is the Law of commandments abolished or should we honor our father and mother because it's the first commandment with a promise?

Paul's Puzzling Statements about the Law

“For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.” 1 Corinthians 7:19

If circumcision has historically been a commandment of God, how can it not count for anything?

Paul's Puzzling Statements about the Law

So how do we deal with the mixed bag of positive and negative ways that Paul speaks of the Law?

I believe the answer lies in *what role* Paul sees the Law as he is speaking of it.



How does Paul Talk about the Law?

We're going to find that there are 3 general ways that Paul talks about the Law:

- Repudiation of the Law
- Replacement of the Law
- Reappropriation of the Law



Repudiation of the Law

Paul teaches that:

- Believers are not under the Law.
- Believers have died to the Law.
- Believers have been set free from the Law.
- And that Christ has put an end to the Law.

Believers Are Not Under the Law.

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. **For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.**” - Romans 6:12-14

Believers Are Not Under the Law.

“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law **(though not being myself under the law)** that I might win those under the law.” - 1 Corinthians 9:19-20

Believers Have Died to the Law

“Likewise, my brothers, **you also have died to the law** through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”

- Romans 7:4

Believers Have Been Set Free from the Law

“But now **we are released from the law**, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” - Romans 7:6

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has **set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.**” - Romans 8:1-2

Christ Has Put a Definitive End to the Law

“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances**, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” - Ephesians 2:14-16

Christ Has Put a Definitive End to the Law

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, **by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.** This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. **Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.**” – Colossians 2:13-17

Replacement of the Law

So what then? Are we without any Law? Can Christians simply do whatever we want? That's not the case at all. In fact, several of the instances in which Paul says, “We are not under the Law” he says what we are under.

The key phrase that Paul uses twice is “the Law of Christ.” And by looking at how Paul uses this phrase, we can see more clearly what replaces the Law of Moses in the life of the Christian.

The Law of Christ

“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.

To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God **but under the law of Christ**) that I might win those outside the law.” - 1 Corinthians 9:19-21

The Law of Christ

As we've seen, in this passage Paul is talking about his evangelistic strategy. He isn't under the Law of Moses, but when he is with a Jew, he lives like a Jew so as not to create unnecessary distraction from preaching the gospel.

The opposite is true when dealing with Gentiles (i.e. "those outside the Law"). But Paul adds a clarifying comment that he isn't outside of God's Law. He is under the law of Christ. So in the context, it is clear what Paul saying Christians aren't under, but what is the Law of Christ?

The Law of Christ

One Greek-English dictionary (BDAG) translates verse 21 in a helpful way:

“I identified as one outside Mosaic jurisdiction with those outside it; not, of course, being outside God’s jurisdiction, but inside Christ’s.”

The point that Paul is making is that, while he is free from the Law, he isn’t a lawless idolater. He follows Christ as his Lord.

The Law of Christ

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, **and so fulfill the law of Christ.**” – Galatians 6:1-2

This short passage shows us how Paul uses the phrase “Law of Christ” as part of a command to believers. But what does it mean?

The Law of Christ

We could say that it refers to the moral teaching of Christ. But the problem with this is that Paul actually rarely refers to Jesus' teaching in his letters. If the Law of Christ were simply Jesus' teaching, we would expect to see Paul and other apostles frequently appealing to Christ's teaching as the basis for their instruction.

Instead, it looks like Paul is referring to the example of Christ. There is no question that Christ has given us the ultimate example of bearing our burdens.

The Law of Christ

Christ's example is used as the foundation for Paul's teaching throughout the letter:

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, **who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age**, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” – Galatians 1:3-5

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave himself for me.**” – Galatians 2:20

The Law of Christ

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” – Galatians 3:13-14

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” – Galatians 4:4-5

The Law of Christ

So perhaps what Paul is calling the Law of Christ is more like what he says in Galatians 4:18-19:

“It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth **until Christ is formed in you!**”

The Law of Christ

So based on these passages, so far I think we can summarize the Law of Christ as:

- Living under the Lordship of Christ and
- Following the example of Christ.

But I think we're still missing a critical piece from this. How do we know what specific commands to follow?

The Law of Christ

I think a couple of texts specifically helps us with this:

“If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that **the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.**” – 1 Corinthians 14:37

“Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. **For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus...Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God**, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.” – 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2,8

The Law of Christ



