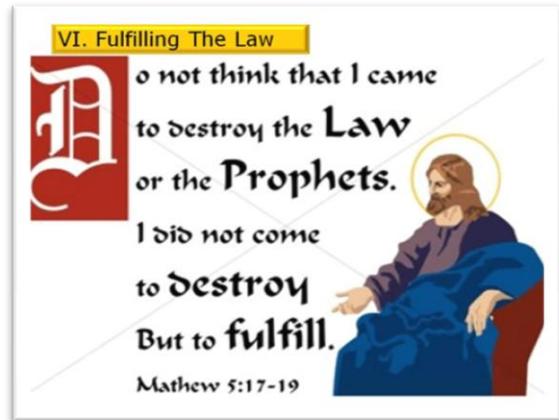


CHAPTER VI: FULFILLING THE LAW

The Old Testament law sets forth God's moral code which is encapsulated in the ten commandments—*thou shalt not*. stealing, killing, worshipping other gods, committing adultery and coveting are just some of the things God prohibits and whenever these commands are broken then whoever breaks them is guilty of sin, as the apostle John tells us, "*Sin is transgression of the law.*" The Lord Jesus goes even further than this however in teaching that it is not enough simply to refrain from committing adultery or killing or stealing but that even the thought life itself can cause a man to be guilty of breaking the law, therefore guilty of sin—*I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her in his heart already.*" Thus showing that the law cannot be kept and fulfilled merely by outwardly observing all of its precepts and regulations because we are sinful by nature and unable to keep it even if we wanted to with all our hearts, and that even if we could keep it outwardly we still could not help breaking it inwardly. Of course God knew this when he gave the law and his purpose in giving us the law is not for us to perfectly keep it and thereby attain

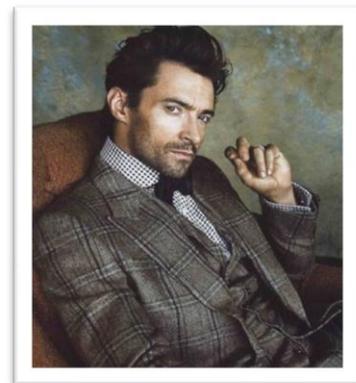


The law is God's ideal for humanity. Ideally, we should never be angry without cause because the result of that anger is to kill. Ideally, we should never look with lust upon our neighbor's spouse for that is to commit adultery in our hearts if not in very deed. However, in reality we are sinful and cannot always be perfect. God's law thus reveals to us our imperfections. It is by the light of God's demands in the law that we come to have a sin consciousness that in our natural state of being "dead in trespasses and sins," we do not normally have. In this way the law brings us to Christ; that is, it brings us to an awareness of our sinfulness and to see our need for a savior and that savior is Christ. Yet even though the law was not given as a set of rules for us to keep and so earn our salvation, the Old Testament command is unmistakably clear—God wants us to fulfill the law. In other words, God's intentions for how we are to behave toward him and toward each other are revealed in the law.



salvation, but rather to show us by our own experience how greatly we fail to keep it so we will despair of our own works and throw ourselves wholly upon the mercy of Christ to save us through faith alone. As

Luther puts it in his famous treatise on Christian liberty, "*For the commands only show us what we ought to do, but do not give us the power of doing it.*"



This is confusing for it means on the one hand that God does not expect us to keep the law and on the other hand, that God still demands that we fulfill the law. This is the paradox-God commands that we fulfill the law and at the same time, he knows perfectly well that we cannot fulfill the law. He saves us not by our fulfilling the law but by our trusting in Jesus Christ. So



what about his clear command to fulfill the law? Surely it is not completely null and void? Most Christians just assume that the command to keep the law is only meant for people in Old Testament times and in the normal sense of keeping the law, they are right. Namely, that we as Christians are not under the law but under grace and this means, **we are no longer under the requirement of literally keeping the law.** *"For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law but under grace."* (Romans 6:14)

However, it is also true that the Bible recognizes two ways of keeping the law. So even though we are not bound to literally or outwardly keep the law, God still intends that we keep the law in a sense-not literally, or trying to keep the letter of the law, but trying to keep spirit, or intent of the law.

THE LETTER VS. THE SPIRIT

In order to understand the relation of the Christian to the Old Testament Law of Moses it is necessary to understand the distinction between the letter and the spirit. The scriptures recognize that there are two ways of keeping the law.

The first one, that of perfectly observing all of its precepts and minute regulations is not possible due to our sin nature. However, there is a second way of keeping the law. The apostle Paul introduces the distinction between letter and the spirit of the God's law in Romans 2:25-29 when he tells the Jews that being circumcised can only help if they then go on to keep the law perfectly but since they can't and don't do that the outward circumcision of the flesh does nothing for them. He goes on to say that: *"He is not etc."*

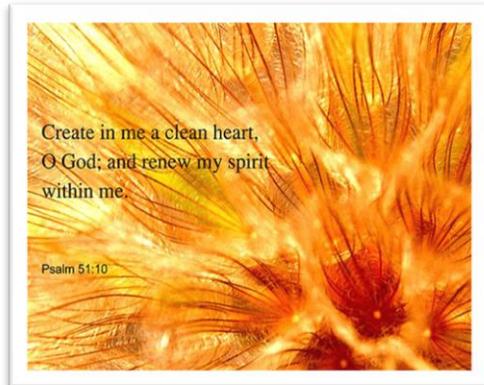


In other words it is not the outward act of circumcision that makes one a Jew but that inward circumcision of the heart that only comes when one trusts in Jesus and receives the Holy Spirit and has God's law written on his heart rather than on his garments like the Old Testament Jews had. As Paul says in Romans 7:6, *"But now we are etc."*

There again we see the distinction of letter and spirit. Nevertheless, let us look at some examples contrasting a literal interpretation of the law with a spiritual. In Leviticus 19:14 we find a prohibition concerning the blind and the deaf.

"Quote Leviticus 19:14 here"

One of the greatest Bible scholars of all time was the eighteenth century English country pastor Matthew Henry, makes the point in his excellent commentary that the rabbis did not quite know how to interpret this verse because they had trouble imagining anyone cruel enough to go around tripping blind people or cursing deaf people.



They felt that there must be more to it than a merely literal interpretation for it is so obviously wrong to trip the blind and make them fall or curse the deaf that it seems almost needless to have such a prohibition. Of course, there is more than just a literal interpretation. That verse is not just referring to people who are literally blind or deaf but to those who can't see or hear you. In other words, do not put an obstacle in the way of someone behind their back, *when they can't see you*.

Don't go to their employer and tell something bad about them that would cause them to not get their promotion

for example. On the other hand, do not curse the deaf. Why? The deaf can't hear you anyway.

This means that we should not talk bad about people when they aren't around to hear us.

Malicious gossip about someone is the moral equivalent of cursing the deaf. So we can see that this scripture has not only a literal and obvious meaning but is actually more about gossip and doing things behind other people's backs than about not tripping the blind or cursing the deaf; it is about what kind of a Christian you are when no one is looking. This is similar to Paul's own interpretation of Deuteronomy 25:4. In 1 Corinthians 9:9 he shows us the true spiritual interpretation of this verse when he says, *"For it is written etc."*

Do you see that he interprets not only the outward prohibition but makes a spiritual application of it? Not the letter of the law only but the spirit! Therefore, the literal meaning is correct but enlightened by the Holy Spirit we can penetrate to the spiritual meaning as well.

The letter and spirit distinction was even the subject of one of Shakespeare's plays. In the Merchant of Venice, the moneylender Shylock, who was a Jew, agrees to loan the Christian, Antonio, a sum of money for a prescribed length of time. If the money is not paid on time however, Antonio must give up a full pound of his own flesh! The merchant's ships do not arrive in time and Antonio is unable to meet the deadline and the moneylender demands he pay his forfeit. This is impossible and Antonio offers to pay a penalty but the moneylender stubbornly and maliciously insists upon the letter of the law being fulfilled. He will take nothing less than a pound of the merchant's flesh. The case goes to the court and the judge rightly cuts to the heart of the matter and decides that Shylock simply must be merciful and take money instead of the pound of flesh, but the moneylender still insists upon what is written in the contract and will be satisfied only by the court taking a pound of the poor merchant's flesh. The wise judge has no choice but to judge the case according to the letter of the law and not the spirit but since Shylock insisted upon the letter of the law, as he is about to cut into the breast of the merchant the judge surprises him by telling him, *"Tarry a little; there is something else. This bond doth here give thee no jot of blood: The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh.' Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;*

*But, in the cutting of it, if thou dost shed
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
Are by the laws of Venice, confiscate
Unto the state of Venice."*

At this the moneylender is more amenable to reason and gives up his claim, agreeing to take the money instead but it is too late, and he that refused to be merciful and insisted upon the letter of law now has the letter of the law applied *to him* without mercy. There is another statute on the books that the moneylender was unaware of and the judge surprises him yet again by informing him that according to the law any unbeliever convicted of conspiring to take the life of the Christian merchant and faces the choice of having his property confiscated by the state or converting to Christianity. Since he insisted on having the letter of the law applied in the case where the judge originally would have preferred to show mercy, regrettably the full rigor of the law must be applied. Other than the fact that a forced conversion is no true conversion Shakespeare here displays a pretty sound understanding of the letter and spirit distinction.

THE TRUE WAY TO FULFILL THE LAW

We as Christians are no longer under the Mosaic Law. That is, we are no longer bound to keep all of what the Bible calls, "...*carnal ordinances imposed upon them until the time etc.*" Hebrews 9:10

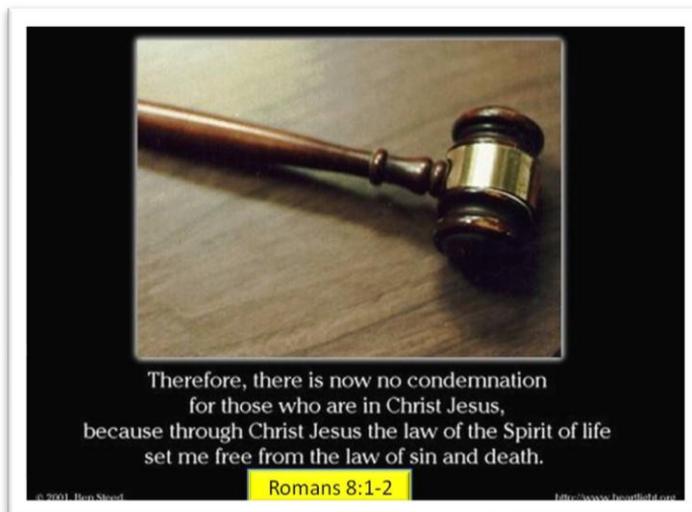
We are no longer, Paul says, under the law but under grace. Therefore we are accepted by God not because we have kept the law but because he shows mercy to those who are unable to keep the law. Yet God's promise for his people is that when he puts his spirit in them and writes his laws in their hearts they will be empowered to keep the law in a way that the Old Testament Jew, not being born again, could not.

Nevertheless, this is done not through keeping the letter of the law but by fulfilling its spirit. So since we have established that we can't keep the letter of the law, how can we keep the spirit of the law?

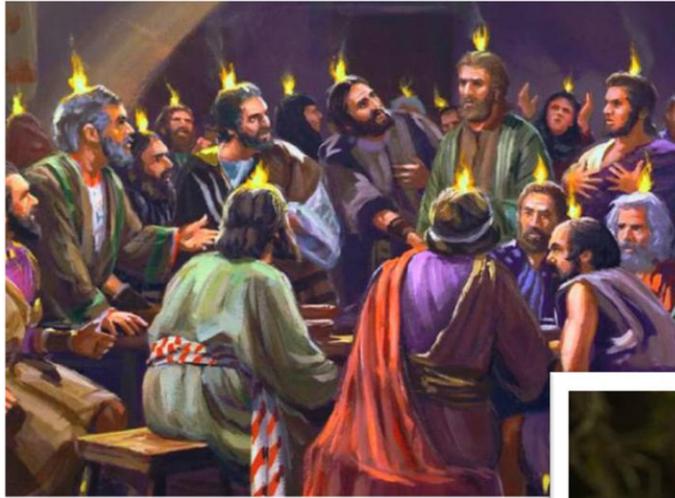
Ezekiel 36:26-27 gives a glimpse of God's ultimate plan for his people. Instead of fulfilling the law by keeping all of the detailed rules and regulations, someday God would do a new thing and change their very natures: *A New heart also will I give you, etc.*

I will **cause you**, he says, to walk in my statutes and you shall keep my

judgments to do them. In other words, God promised the Old Testament Jews that someday he would give them a new heart, one that is capable of walking in his statutes and judgments, something our sinful heart is incapable of doing before we are born again. He would do this by putting his spirit within them and this would cause them to keep his law. This was begun at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all flesh, Jew, gentile, and Samaritan alike. Ezekiel 11:10, Jeremiah 31:33, 32;39, 2 Corinthians 3;3, Hebrews 9:10 Hebrews 8:10...*I will put my laws,*



However, since we have already shown that it is not possible for man to keep the law, how would he cause them to keep the law? Would he give them a supernatural



ability to perfectly observe all of the minute regulations contained in the Old Testament law? No for that would still only be outwardly fulfilling the law or keeping the letter of the law. You see there is a carnal way of keeping the law-that of trying to literally keep all of the minute regulations of the Old Testament, and there is also a spiritual

way of keeping the law, which is to fulfill the purpose or intent behind the precepts. The Christian, having God's spirit within and God's law written on his heart, will without trying, fulfill the law in spirit though not in letter. It is as inevitable as a tree bearing leaves. Oh



not perfectly and at all times but Christians fulfill the law when the spirit of God enables them to love those they would not normally be able to love. For to love is to keep the law. As the apostle says, *"he who loves has fulfilled the law."* Romans 13: 8-10

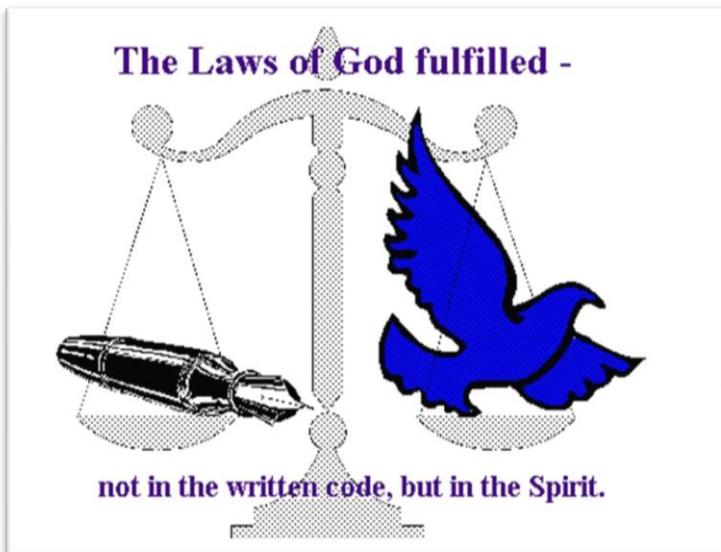
That's why forgiveness, true from the heart forgiveness, where you not only absolve the offender of all guilt but go beyond that and love them, is a miracle and can only be done by God's help through the empowerment of his Holy Spirit.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus what was the most important of all the commandments, *"Jesus said etc."*

Matthew 22:37-40

THE TWO COMMANDMENTS

We are not under the law and that includes the *Ten Commandments*, but we are under obligation to keep the spirit of the law and that puts us under the *two* commandments.



People who love God and love their neighbor don't need a command to not commit adultery. If you love God you know what he thinks of adultery and if you love your neighbor you will not lust after his wife or if you do you will repent of it quickly. People who love God and love their neighbor don't need a command to not kill, for if they love God they know the value he puts upon human life and if they love their neighbor they will not want to kill him or if they do they will repent of it quickly. The commandments, which prohibit the outward act can only be truly fulfilled by

people who are capable of loving God and loving their fellow human beings and that is only possible to those who have been born again by his spirit and given a new nature. To love perfectly and is the only way that God accepts from us is simply not possible for the unregenerate sinner.

Leviticus 19:14, deaf, 1 Corinthians 9:9, Oxen, examples of spirit differing from letter, 2 Corinthians 3:6, John 6:63, The merchant of Venice
Romans 2:27-29, 7:6, 2 Corinthians 3:6

Not under the law but under grace. No longer under the law, including ten commandments!
Contrast the law and grace

How do we fulfill the law? Through love! Romans Galatians

