

A Journey into Understanding the Law of God as the Love of God
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The Lord has been leading me to pursue a better understanding of our relationship as Christians to the Old Testament Law of Moses. Important to this is a passage in 1 Corinthians 9:20 and 21 where Paul says, in the NIV,²⁰ “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law [of Moses] I became like one under the law (though I myself am *not* under the law), so as to win those under the law.²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but *am under Christ's law*), so as to win those not having the law.” This to me is an amazing claim and even a confusing one. If we are to be like Paul, the great apostle of Christianity, then we are not to consider ourselves under the Old Testament Law of Moses. However, he says we are still under God's law, or more specifically, Christ's law. What is he referring to? Are there universal behavioral restrictions Christians are to submit to? Are there lifestyle choices that God has declared to be wrong for Christians? Some of the world around us today is saying *no* to universal rules of Christian conduct. We all struggle at some time in our lives with submitting to how others tell us to live. Many people just say that what Christianity calls us to is simply love. This is my journey to find what God would say to us about this through the Scriptures?

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul was defending his freedom to choose between the lifestyle options of being paid by those to whom he ministered or not. In the process, he stated a major principle which involves the relationship of the Christian to the Old Testament law. He says that because his goal was to win as many people as possible to the Lord he became culturally like whatever group he was working among. By doing that he limited the stumbling blocks to their faith to the ultimate one of accepting the death of Christ for their sins on the cross as absolutely essential to their eternal salvation. As many missiologists agree, that approach of Paul's is the way we should all treat culture and the gospel. We must be flexible with culture but clear and firm on the gospel. However, Paul said we are still under the law of Christ; so how does that relate to a particular culture? Does Christ teach that some behaviors, regardless of culture, are unacceptable for a Christian?

What Paul seems to mean by the Old Testament law here in 1 Corinthians 9, which he says we are not under, is the specific external, cultural, lifestyle and worship, instructions given in the Pentateuch through Moses for the nation of Israel to follow as they sought to live by their covenant with the Lord, in the world of the ancient Near East. However, Paul makes it clear that by being “outside the law” Christians are not outside of God's law but are “under the law of Christ.” In the Greek, “under the law” is one word, used elsewhere in the NT only in Acts 19:39 of a “legal” assembly of citizens of a city or an assembly that is “under the law.” Therefore, he emphasizes that Christians are not lawless, unrighteous, immoral, or outside of a covenantal relationship with God. On the contrary, we have a God-established relationship with expected behavior, through Jesus Christ, to which we must be true.

In Galatians 6:2 Paul makes reference to “the law of Christ,” saying:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, ⁵ for each one should carry his own load.

The context shows that Christians are to treat one another as Christ does and help one another with spiritual issues by intervening and restoring ones who are struggling with sins. Paul implied, and elsewhere clarified, how the Christian life is not about external styles of dress or what we eat or even styles of worship. Back in 7:19 of 1 Corinthians Paul said “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.” Here the commands that do not include circumcision must involve God’s essential principles of His character, His values, and His way of salvation—the way He reveals to come to Him—all of which begin in our hearts and transcend culture. In Galatians 5:6 Paul says “the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

God’s *core values* revealed in the Old Covenant in the Law of Moses are stated in the Ten Commandments. Jesus and Paul refer to them as what God expects of His people but then summarize them with the one word *love*. Paul, in Galatians 5:13-14, says ¹³ “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” From Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 they sum up the response of—in fact the whole life of—the believer, as loving God with all that is in us and loving others as ourselves. John, in 1 John 3:23, states that God’s command is “to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ [the revelation of His character and God’s plan of salvation through Him] and to love one another.” Love toward God includes believing and receiving gratefully what He has offered us—restoration to eternal fellowship through the death and resurrection of His son. Then, the greatest love toward another person is to lay down one’s life for them. God’s love moved Him to send His only Son to die for our salvation from the death penalty for our sins, John 3:16; 1 John 4: 9, 10. To love is to be like Him, 1 John 4: 7, 8, and so to be self-sacrificing for the greatest good of others.

Paul teaches, in Galatians 6:1, when we have God’s love in us toward others we will care enough to intervene to stop a loved one from destroying his or her life with sin. Christ’s love is willing to cause pain, besides suffer pain itself, in order to accomplish eternal healing. My summary definition of God’s love as He teaches us in the Scriptures is wanting and doing what is best for another person before me. It is identifying with the heart of God, our Heavenly Father, the ideal parent. Our loving of another person should represent God’s values, priorities, purposes, and character. It is a choice, not just a feeling.

The law of Christ we are under, summed up in love, is basically lived out in applications of the Ten Commandments. Actually, the OT laws are all specific applications of the principles of the Ten Commandments for Israel in the ANE world. We are not under those ancient cultural applications but we are still to apply the principles of the commandments to our lives because God has not changed in His character and values. Both Jesus and Paul list sins that should no longer be in a believer's life, which are violations of the Ten Commandments, and thus help to define the opposite of biblical love, and some universally unacceptable behavior. In Mark 7:15 Jesus said, "Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'" And in verse 21 He went on to say, "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly." Clearly these activities violate the Ten Commandments and are the opposite of love. Paul further declares, in Galatians 5:19-21, that¹⁹ "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Again, these are opposed to the character of God and thus, to love. These are activities we can not participate in and be in harmony with God just like there are violations of a person's marriage relationship that will destroy it. True repentance leads to restoration but willfully choosing to continue these activities leads to eternal death.

I believe all such sins can be shown to be violations of the principles of the Ten Commandments. My summary of those principles as related to love is:

1. Love expresses exclusively loyalty to the LORD—as the only God and Savior and that He is *our* Savior.
2. Love does not image Him less than He has revealed Himself to be. It keeps the sense of awe for His transcendence beyond our understanding.
3. Love honors Him and seeks to be in harmony with Him in all it does and says—especially in prayer.
4. Love rests in Him, spiritually, in faith, daily, and shows its trust and appreciation of the relationship with Him through a weekly rest and other public and private expressions.
5. Love respects those who represent God and His authority, beginning with one's parents and lives a respectable life in society.
6. Love respects all human life as made in His image, and His authority over it.
7. Love respects marriage and the family and does not violate the commitment but lives a life of faithfulness and sexual purity.
8. Love respects what belongs to others and seeks their well-being.
9. Love respects the reputation of others, values justice, and speaks and lives the truth.
10. Love does not let selfishness rule it and hurt others, but deals with its heart attitudes and desires and trusts the LORD to provide what is best.

If we love God and love others with His kind of love we must act according to His character, His values, His purposes. We can *not* make up what we want love to be. He

made us and He has saved us to be in fellowship with Him for eternity. True love is eternally grateful and *embraces His Word* to us. We are always under all the principles of the law of God and it is they that define the love of God.