

The Law of Christ

1. The Law of Christ is a principled doctrine that includes commands and positive laws that are fulfilled, not merely obeyed.

- Its official name is used only once (Gal. 6:2), yet has several variations that are alluded to by Paul multiple times and pervade the doctrine of the New Testament (Romans 8:4; 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 5:14; 6:2; 1 Tim. 1:3; Jas. 1:25; 2:8, 12; 2 Pet. 3:14-18; 1 Jn. 2:7-8; 3:11, 23-24; 4:6; 2 Jn. 4-6). Paul is “in-lawed to Christ.” (1 Cor. 9:21). James refers to it as the “perfect law of liberty” (1:25), the “royal law” (Jas. 2:8), and the “implanted word” (Jas 1:21; Jer. 31; Ezek. 36).
- It can be called an ordinance, norm, system, teaching doctrine, method, order, demand, arrangement, or reign. It is a comprehensive set of principles stemming from the heart of the gospel that are meant to be applied in specific situations by the direction and enablement of the Holy Spirit, always motivated and conditioned by love.
- It is a new commandment tied to a new covenant (Ex. 24:7-22; Lk. 22:20) that is the same in essence as the Mosaic law, though different in form and part.
- It is not merely a list of external commands but is the principle of love set forth by Jesus and His teachings, along with those of the disciples and apostles.
- It includes the teachings of Jesus and those of the apostles. The apostles instructed family life (Eph. 5:22-33), the workplace (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22; 4:1), church life (1 Cor. 11:17-34; 1 Tim. 3), the way believers should conduct themselves regarding the state (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), etc. This authority of the apostle’s instruction is endorsed and supported in the New Testament (1 Tim. 4:11; 5:7; 6:2, 17; 2 Tim. 2:2, 14; 4:1-5; Tit. 2:1-15; 3:1-2, 8, 14).
- The standard of God’s law does not change, but its codification and expression may. Just as the Mosaic law was normative for the Jew, the law of Christ is binding on the Christian. In some cases, it explains the intent (spirit) of the law, which was corrupted by the interpretation of men's traditions. Other times, it may clarify or reinforce.
- In essence, the law of Christ is the principle of love toward God and man and is to be fulfilled in us (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:36-40; Mk. 12:28-31; Lk. 10:27; Jn. 13:34; Rom. 12:9-21; 13:8; 14:15 Gal. 5:14).
- In many ways, the Mosaic law is a precept, while the law of Christ is a principle.
- The Law of Christ is “new” (Lk. 22:20; Ezek. 36; Jer. 31) only in power and ability to fulfill the law, not substance, though positive laws pervade it.
- The law of Christ, in many ways, clarifies what God had intended through natural law, reinforced by the commands of the Mosaic Law.
 - Careful historical, grammatical, soteriological, and cultural exegesis must be employed to discern what precept is cultural and what principle remains.

2. The Law of Christ is not the Ten Commandments.

- While Paul was not under the law covenant (Rom. 7:19; 9:20), he was still under the law of God (9:21), which are the commandments of God, or the Law of Christ (1 Cor. 7:19; 9:21). His interaction with Gentiles and other apostles demonstrates that Paul was not Judaizing Gentiles. He navigates cultural discrepancies between Jews and Greeks.
- All Ten Commandments are either reinforced, clarified, or intensified (not in essence, but in form) in the New Testament, except the Sabbath, as it is fulfilled in Christ.
- While the believer under the New Covenant is not under the Mosaic law/covenant (including the Ten Commandments) and the essence of both the Old Covenant and New Covenant are essentially the same, the Ten Commandments cannot be separated from the civil, cultic, and cultural context of Israel under a theocracy.

How did Jesus and the apostles interact with the Ten Commandments?

A. Murder/Hatred (Ex. 20:6; Lev. 19:17; Matt. 5:21-26; 1 Jn. 3:13)

- The essence of the law has always concerned the heart. Yet, the Jews, because of their hard-heartedness, combined with various rabbinical teachings, misrepresented the law to the people (Lev. 19:17). Ultimately, all men seek to be justified by the law, whether it be what is on their conscience (natural law), or the published Mosaic law.
- Jesus does not improve, expand, or heighten the law. Instead, He reveals its intention, which is the principle of love.
- The precept of the sixth commandment is broken when there is hatred toward a brother/neighbor. God is concerned with the heart, not merely externals.
- Murder is the outflow of a heart that has allowed hatred to mature and produce fruit consistent with the fallen nature in Adam in the realm of the flesh.

B. Adultery/Lust (Gen. 39:11-12; Ex. 20:7; Matt. 5:27)

- In essence, lust is theft (8th commandment), selfishness, adultery (7th commandment), covetousness (10th commandment), and idolatry of the heart (1st and 2nd commandment) which is the seedbed of a multitude of transgressions and sins.

C. Idolatry (Ex. 20:3-4; Col. 3:5)

- Idolatry has always been more than mere “fashioning” of wood and metal in the image of false gods. Idolatry is self-obsession and wrought from the inside out.
- Paul notes that “sexual immorality, impurity, passions, evil desires, and covetousness is idolatry” (Col. 3:5).
 - Paul combines the 1st, 2nd, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th commandments under the principle (spirit) of idolatry; not external, but internal.
- When speaking of sin and the flesh, he directs us to the heart, not mere externals.

*The law is not done by us but fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4). The essence of the law is love.

3. The Law of Christ is the law of love (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:40; Rom. 13:8-10)

- The message of the Old Covenant, as a ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:7-10), is “do this and live” (Deut. 28; Lev. 18:4-5). The message of the New Covenant is, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15-31; 15:10).
- Love:
 - The will and desire to promote the highest good in its object of affection. It is often marked by self-sacrifice and self-denial.
- God has designed and prescribed “rules” about love, establishing their details in His Word. The Bible broadly defines what love is in principle; it describes the “what” of love, not “how.” Love must be allowed to discover and express itself within those parameters.

4. The Law of Christ is fulfilled as His people walk in the power of the H.S. (Gal. 5:13-24).

- Tension among the Galatians was between the idolatry of the Gentiles and the Judaizers’ insistence on reverting to the Law of Moses (Old Covenant).
- This evil age and the stain/remaining of sin can obscure the believer’s vision (Gal. 1:4; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 3:18; 2 Tim. 4:10).
- We are called to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), be led by the Spirit (5:18), live and keep in step with the Spirit (5:25), sowing the fruits of the Spirit (6:8). By the Spirit, we are to be put to death the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13). Walking by the Spirit includes willing obedience to prescribed commands and principles in love. In this way, the law is fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4).
- We are to love one another (Rom. 13:8) and serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13) as love does no wrong to its neighbor (Rom. 13:18; 14:15).