

## **Are You Fulfilling God's Law?**

*by David Ord*

A great many Christians believe that the law has been "done away." All that God requires today, they tell us, is that we show love. But what is love?

Would it be love, for instance, for a counselor to leap into bed with his client in order to demonstrate genuine acceptance of a woman who feels rejected?

Love can be very subjective. What one person considers an expression of love may seem like gross immorality to another.

Because of the risk of whitewashing sin by labeling it "love," one branch of the church insists on varying degrees of obedience to moral law. Not only the ten commandments, but other moral "ought-to's" concerning Christian dress, smoking, worldliness, and so on. This sector of the church reminds us, as one put it, that *"love is to fulfill the law."*

One thing is sure: Paul was no advocate of sin. Whatever he taught with regard to the law, it was not to encourage license.

*"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"*

We are all agreed that sin is a "no-no," but are we agreed on what is sin?

I noticed years ago that Christians rarely come out with a clear biblical definition of sin. To one it is card-playing, drinking, dancing; to another these things are fine, but wearing a bikini swimming suit, or dress that is more than an inch above the knees, or smoking a cigarette would constitute sin. It seems that sin is usually defined according to the particular church tradition you have been exposed to.

Since sin is a biblical term, we might expect to find it defined in the pages of the Bible. And though it isn't often quoted, the apostle John does clearly state that *"sin is lawlessness."* Not, as the King James version inaccurately renders it, *"sin is the transgression of the law"*; but as more modern translations rightly put it, *"sin is lawlessness."*

What law are we talking about here? Few of us would argue that John had in mind the law of Moses. We recognize that we are dead to that law. If a person wishes to take up with the law of Moses, he ought to make sure that he performs it in its entirety, because the rule-of-thumb for law-keepers is, *"Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them."*

And yet — many of us still want to retain *something* of law in our Christian lives. We are not prepared to capitulate to the total subjectivity of "love." We have heard of the terrible abuses of the "love" way, and it seems to be a very dangerous doctrine. So we find ourselves hovering between the moral "ought to" of the law, and the complete freedom of the "love" concept. What is the answer?

When a young ruler asked Jesus how he might inherit the kingdom he was proclaiming, Jesus pointed to the commandments. Of course, the young man felt he had kept these from his

earliest days. He was technically righteous by the law's standard. However, Jesus went on to illustrate the much more stringent standard that was required for entrance into the heavenly kingdom and eternal life. By this standard, it would have been easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the young man to enter the kingdom.

So difficult did Jesus make the "ought to" seem that He provoked consternation in His disciples:

*"And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, 'Then who can be saved?' And looking upon them Jesus said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'."*

Jesus had explained that the gate into life was extremely narrow and difficult to find; few had so far entered. Out of the millions who had lived from Adam until His coming, just a handful of Old Testament characters had really come to know God and enjoy an intimate relationship with Him. Men such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and the prophets were few and far between.

The "ought to" route is a hard way indeed! No wonder it seemed to the disciples that no one would ever make it into the kingdom! But the impossible for man becomes the possible for God, and so for those who were tired of striving to please God and constantly failing, Jesus' announcement of "good news" was like a breath of fresh air. The narrow, difficult way was about to be opened into a broad highway:

*"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and My load is light."*

What did Jesus mean by "*learn from Me*"? Why did He point to the fact that He was "gentle" and "*humble in heart*"?

Though Jesus was the Son of God, He freely confessed: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself ... I can do nothing on My own initiative.*" He was humble in heart because He recognized that no human being can accomplish the will of God. God Himself must indwell a person and perform His will through the person as a vessel. It was the Father in Him who did the mighty works, and that is how it must be with us if we are ever to please Him. We must "learn of Him" – be indwelt as He was indwelt.

Jesus was also "*gentle.*" He refused to strive in His own strength. He was one with the Father, so that the *Father's* life and power coursed through Him. "*The Father is in me, and I in the Father,*" He told His critics. "*If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.*" "*My Father and I are one.*" He did not try to do the will of His Father, He simply allowed Himself to be indwelt as a vessel so that the Father could manifest His life through Him. Though great work was accomplished, it was all from a state of spiritual rest.

This was the "rest" hinted at in creation week, in Israel's weekly keeping of a Sabbath day, and in the rest of the earthly Promised Land. All of these Old Testament shadows pictured the time when Christ Jesus would come to this earth to demonstrate how God can live in human beings and fulfill His will in them without their own effort or striving.

Once we recognize that we can do nothing righteous of ourselves — that all our righteousnesses, before and after conversion, are like filthy rags — we are ready to allow Christ to live through us. “*There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God.*” Not a day, not a physical place on this earth, but a rest which comes from being yoked in union with Christ. The *fulfillment* of the Sabbath type:

“*For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His*” (Hebr. 4:10).

The external “ought to,” whether it be of the ten commandment law or of our own making according to our church tradition, shows us our inability to please God. It convicts us of failure and weakness. When we are about to drown, after we have wallowed in our own self-effort and failed miserably, we can finally cease from our own works and enter into rest in Christ.

This “rest” is not a rest of laziness. We have been set free from the law of “ought to,” but it is not a freedom to live as we please in the flesh. Rather, we have been joined — yoked — to Christ and “*the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.*” Not two, but one; just as Jesus and his Father were one, so that for Him to live was really the Father. And for us to live is Christ! When He indwells us, He lives His life of tremendous works through us. The proof of His oneness with the Father, He said, was the works that were being accomplished. If we are one with Him, He will live that same fruitful life through us today! Collectively, we will do even “greater” works than He did while on earth, because then He was limited to one human body, whereas now He lives in many.

In John 17 Jesus prayed that we might enjoy that same oneness He enjoyed with His Father. He manifested the Father, and we manifest Him. No one ever saw the Father, but in seeing Him they saw the Father; so also the world does not see Christ, but it does see Him through us.

Now, see how this *fulfills* the law, even though we do not try to keep it! The evangelical friend I quoted earlier said that love “*is to fulfill the law.*” But that is not what Paul actually wrote. He wrote that “*love therefore is the fulfillment of the law*” (Rom. 13:10). He did not say that if we do certain things, that is love; he said that if we have love, we have fulfilled the law.

What is love? A Person. “*God is love.*” Love is not doing something, it is a Person expressing Himself. When God gave the law to Israel, He gave them a set of rules, for children as it were, that embodied some of the essential traits of His nature. But you could perform all of these things and *still not love*. Striving to do these things, trying to live up to the standard, is a long way short of the One who is love indwelling you and fulfilling all that the external code pointed toward in outline, shadow form.

God does not function by a set of rules. He simply is. And He is *love*. Any code of rules can only be a shadow of the reality. Not to murder, steal, commit adultery, nor covet is wonderful. But it is a long way short of being one who by *nature* is the very opposite of all of these evils!

When you were a child, your parents and schoolteachers placed you under rules. You lived an externally regulated life. You were told when to go to bed, when to get up, how to dress, what to eat, what to study, and plenty of other instructions. That is how the law functioned:

*“Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world” (Gal. 4:1-3).*

A child learns the elementary principles of life. Getting sufficient sleep; eating a balanced diet, instead of only sweet things; washing behind his ears, and cleaning his teeth regularly; the *discipline of study and work, instead of all play. These qualities are instilled into him from outside, enforced through a system of reward and punishment.*

When we are young, we are restricted to the playpen. We learn the ABC’s, just the elementaries of living. But when we mature and come of age, we begin to function as adult sons. Though we were under orders and no better than a slave, now we become lords of all — masters of our own lives — no longer requiring the restrictions of the playpen.

*“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.”*

The external has become internalized. Only instead of a set of rules, it is the spontaneous outflow of a mature life. So the adult doesn’t have to have a set bedtime; he is free to go to bed early when tired, or to stay up into the early hours of the morning, perhaps even working a night-shift and sleeping through the day. Yet he *fulfills* the external law that he was under as a child. Though free to live spontaneously, he gets enough sleep to stay healthy: and that is what the aim of the external law was.

A child can never become an adult by doing the things he is told to do. Going to bed at a fixed time, making sure he washes behind his ears, or studying when assignments are given, do not make him into an adult. But when the child matures into an adult, he will naturally fulfill all that the external regulations of childhood pointed toward, without actually performing those regulations.

In like manner, trying to be loving will never produce a loving person. Trying to please God will never fulfill His will. But when God lives through us, because He is love He will fulfill in us all that the “ought to” attempted to inculcate. Thus, *“what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did”* — and this was *“in order that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”* (Rom. 8:3-4).

We do not try to live by “ought to’s” — that is walking according to the flesh. But when we recognize that we are indwelt by Love, the inner voice of the Spirit prompts us in a thousand ways daily and we find ourselves living out the life of God, spontaneously fulfilling all that the “ought to” sought to bring about.

God is a specialist in simply *being*. He does not live by a set of rules. He just lives, spontaneously. He is the “I Am.” He is — functions as — what He is. If we live as one with Him, we will be Him in this world. We will live the resurrected life of Jesus — not a life of do’s and don’ts, but a life that is righteous because He is righteousness. *“As He is, so are we in this world.”*

We will do righteousness because we are righteous — yet *“not I, but Christ.”* John shows in his letters that it cannot be otherwise. If He indwells us, living through us, the outward manifestation in the flesh must come forth. We are known by our fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, even as a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. Though the manifestation may be a little while in coming, it must come.

This life of love is not lawless. It is not a self-pleasing life. It is not anarchistic. It is the most lawful life conceivable. It is the One who is the law — who is love — expressing Himself through the human vessel. We do not walk in the outer desires of the flesh, nor follow the whims and fancies of the material world. We walk the ascended life of the Christ, receiving His commandments in our innermost hearts and minds from moment to moment. Thus we *are* the will of God in every situation that faces us from day to day. And so the law is fulfilled in us.

Therefore cast out the “ought to,” for it cannot inherit with the freedom of this spontaneous life of Christ (Gal. 4:21-31). It was just to lead you into the box-canyon of *“I can of my own self do nothing,”* that you might come to Christ. The external “ought to” can never impart life; life is a Person. And when that Person indwells us and lives as us, in our human form, we do not “void” the law but establish it and fill it up full, living at a level far and above what the commandment could ever verbalize.

Instead of a written code we have the inner voice of the One who is our life — the constant flow of commandments that are He thinking His thoughts through us in every situation, for *“we have the mind of Christ.”* And whereas we did by nature the things of the evil one, according to the course of this world, now we do by nature the fruit of the Spirit.

So it is not the “ought to” of the external law, and neither is it the wishy-washy external concept of trying to “love” everybody. Instead, it is the living Person expressing Himself through us, living as us. And that is safe! We can count on Him.

There is just one barrier to this flow of heavenly life: *unbelief*. That is all that can stop the reality becoming manifest. We must come into *“the obedience of faith.”* If God says it, though I cannot see it, I believe it against all odds. I *“fight the good fight of faith.”* I affirm that I am the righteousness of Christ, and that He is my life. I refuse to take condemnation while I await the manifestation in action. I say that what God says is true even when my soulish feelings tell me something different. And the life comes forth!

What is sin? Lawlessness. To fail to live as God Himself lives, for He is the law personified (Rom. 3:23). But thank God, we do not have to try to keep the law, He *fulfills* it in us. So we are freed from the “ought to,” and freed from the license of just trying to “love,” in order that we might be what we are — the righteousness of God in Christ.