

CHAPTER 13

LAW: “DOING” or “FULFILLING”

You’ve heard it said, “I want to fulfill my hopes and dreams.” These words might come from the college football player giving his all to reach the professional ranks or the young couple looking for that special home. Some say, “I am striving to achieve my goals and ambitions.” The politician trying to please his constituents or the businessman determined to reach a higher level of success may voice those aspirations. Nevertheless, turning a hope into reality is much more than wishful thinking. Other than winning the lotto, dreams and goals are generally realized by hard work and perseverance.

Consider James’ words in James 2:21-24, which point to the end result of works and perseverance.

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? **22** You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected [matured]; **23** and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED [counted] TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. **24** You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

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As discussed in chapter 1 of the book, James addressed two types of justifications.¹ Referring, first, to a legal pronouncement in which one is declared to have a righteous standing before God *by faith*, James quotes Genesis 15:6 when “Abraham believed God” (Jam 2:23; cf. Rom 4:2-3). Second, in reference to when Abraham “offered up Isaac” as a sacrifice (Jam 2:21; Gen 22:1-2), God declared that Abraham also had a righteous standing before Him *as a result of works* (Jam 2:24). Justification by faith *is obtained* at salvation, while justification by works *can be realized and experienced* through a life lived in obedience to God. Notice that in this context, the latter justification by works is equivalent to progressive sanctification.

James’ point was that faith should not exist in isolation; rather faith is to cooperate with works, resulting in works reinforcing the believer’s faith (v 22). In connecting the two incidents of Genesis 15 and Genesis 22, which were separated by some thirty years, James indicated that Abraham’s offering of Isaac “fulfilled” the earlier event, his justification by faith (Jam 2:23). Abraham’s action in Genesis 22 revealed his growth in maturity as a result of his obedience. His works evidenced who he already was positionally before God. Consequently, Abraham “was called the friend of God” (Jam 2:23). That designation *being a friend of God* was mentioned only one other time in the entire New Testament. It was by Jesus to His disciples after they had spent years with Him and He said, “You are My friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14). Notice that friendship with God is contingent on obedience to His commands, the dos and don’ts. Abraham had *become* a friend of God because he was obedient. The same was true for the Eleven. Likewise, friendship with Christ can be a *reality* for us also through faithful obedience over time.

Fulfilling the Law

Fulfilling the Law is covered in the six New Testament texts below (italics added). In each the use of “fulfilled” is equivalent to its use in James 2:23. It refers to the *reality of presently living out the law as originally intended to be lived by God*.

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Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to *fulfill* (Matt 5:17).

[S]o that the requirement [righteous lifestyle]² of the Law might be *fulfilled* in us, who do not walk according to [with respect to] the flesh but according to [with respect to] the Spirit (Rom 8:4).

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has *fulfilled the law* (Rom 13:8).

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the *fulfillment of the law* (Rom 13:10).

For the whole Law is *fulfilled* in one word, in the *statement*, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” (Gal 5:14).

Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby *fulfill* the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).

In all six instances, living out the reality of keeping the law took center stage. The first five verses related to the Law of Moses and only the last text applied to the law of Christ. On the other hand, only the first text concerned Jesus and His ministry, with the remaining five verses referring to Christians. Notice what those responsibilities involve: walking (Rom 8:4); loving (Rom 13:8, 10; Gal 5:14); and bearing burdens (Gal 6:2). Interestingly, not only was the Law never abolished by Christ, it can be *realized* or *fulfilled* in the Christian’s daily life.

The prior statements might raise concern for some. In the previous chapter, we noted that Christians are no longer under the Mosaic Law (Rom 6:14). Yet the current chapter seems to contradict what we just said. Another author addressed this apparent dilemma, when he wrote,

Paul never taught that the law was done away with (not even in Romans 6), but rather that because we are alive in Christ we are no longer under it (6:10-14). But that is different than a statement that the law has somehow ended. Even Jesus declared that He did not come to destroy *the law* but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17-18).³

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So, how do we *become* a law fulfiller? How does that translate into *reality* in real life? Let's see if we can put all this in perspective.

Law-and-Love Connection

Three little words, *I love you*.⁴ How many times have those words glided easily off our lips? This simple expression packed with meaning has led men and women through the ages to the altar. Yet statistics tell us that nearly one in two marriages end in divorce. Believers fervently proclaiming the height, the depth, and the breadth of God's love respond with "*I love You, Lord*." Yet most of us during the week live as if those words were a lofty but distant thought. Like the rich and prosperous landowner of Luke 12, we become self-absorbed. God's evaluation of that man's foolish obsession with his possessions, while having little regard for God, applies to us as well (v 20). Yet, we say, "*I love You, Lord*," but *do we always mean it?*

God Means What He Says!

The Apostle John wrote, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).⁴ Through faith in Christ a relationship with God is established. Nevertheless God longs for us to have more than just a saving relationship with Him. He wants to enjoy close fellowship with all those who possess life everlasting (1 John 1:5-10). Knowing Him intimately, becoming more and more conformed to His likeness both in word and deed is His desire for each of us.

Intimacy and companionship with Christ is not an automatic experience simply because you are a Christian.⁵ John tells us how: "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him" (John 14:21). As a result of obeying God's Word, His love is felt more intensely and He manifests Himself in a personal way. Verse 23 elaborates on this thought. "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode [make Our home] with him." In loving fellowship Jesus discloses Himself to the believer

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(v 21), which is explained as God coming and making His home in the life and experience of one who is faithful. A picture emerges of intimacy and self-disclosure with our Lord (Gal 2:20).

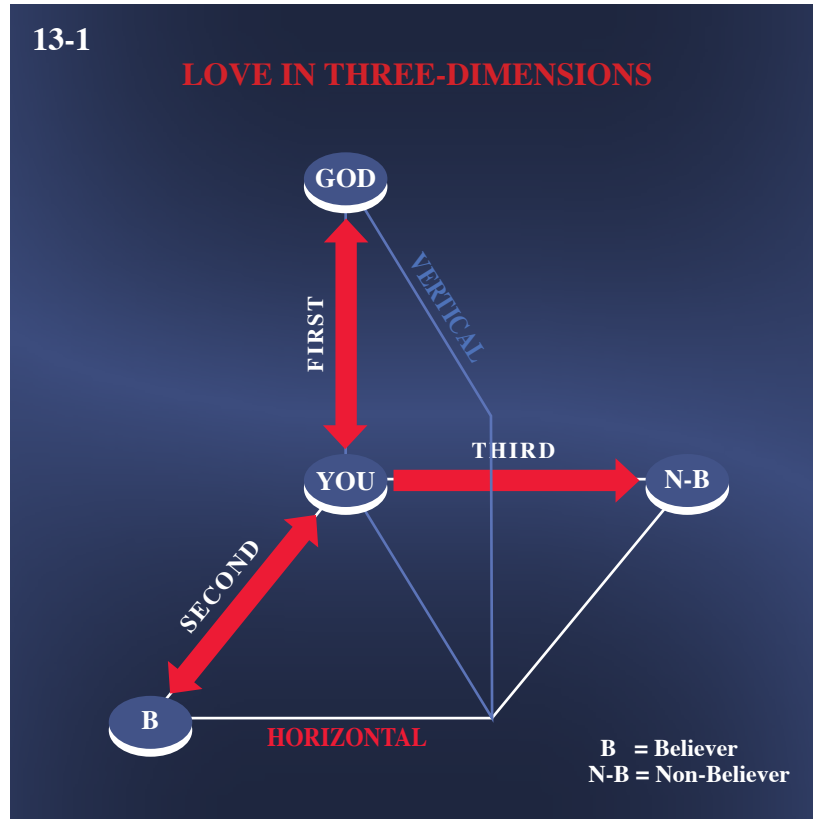
Since Christ’s pledge comes in the context of the promised Holy Spirit (John 14:16), this suggests that Jesus manifests Himself in the life of the obedient believer through the Spirit. How? Primarily by means of the indwelling Spirit’s ministries of filling (Eph 5:15-18), leading (Gal 5:16-18), and teaching (1 John 2:20, 27).⁶ When the believer allows the Spirit to teach him through God’s Word, he will know God more fully and become increasingly aligned with God’s will. There develops a deepening fellowship between God and the believer. They are at home with one another. Jesus’ lesson on the vine and branches found in John 15 pictures this same experience, referring to it as “abiding with Christ.” But, what about the wayward believer? The conclusion is sadly evident. If a believer does not honor God’s Word, but rather disregards it, then his love for Christ fades over time and so does the close companionship with Christ through the Spirit. The Spirit continually indwells each believer, but intimate, loving fellowship with Christ will disappear.

Do We Mean What We Say?

In Matthew 22 Jesus was asked by a religious leader, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” (v 36). Responding Jesus pointed to two commandments summarizing the essence of the Law: to love your God (v 37) and to love your neighbor (v 39). Since those commandments continue to apply to Christians, a *law fulfiller* must direct his love vertically toward God. At the same time, his love must be aimed horizontally toward his fellowmen. In the horizontal plain the Christian’s love is focused on both other believers as well as non-believers. Consequently, law and love are three-dimensional (see chart 13-1).

While a Christian’s (“you” in chart) direction of focus is signified by the red arrows (see chart 13-1), notice that in both the first dimension and the second dimension those arrows are two-directional. In both instances, there should be a reciprocal manifestation of love, which constitutes fellowship, a sharing of things in common. While God always,

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without fail, demonstrates His love for us, the second-dimension, two-directional arrow corresponds to the mutual-love ministry that should be experienced in the Church. The one-directional arrow, in the third dimension, depicts the Christian's ministry to those who are lost.

Loving God

The vertical perspective takes us back to John 14, calling on us to love God. "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me" (v 21). The test of a person's love for Christ is obedience to His word.⁷ While love is innate to the divine character

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of God, for man love is a choice. Choices have consequences. Only believers who know and obey God’s Word can uniquely experience a fuller expression of Christ’s love and companionship. While God consistently and continually desires the best for the believer through the Spirit’s ministry, to encounter a more profound expression of God’s love depends on the believer’s openness to God’s Word, knowing it and obeying it, as the person invites Christ into each of life’s decisions.⁸

The fact of God’s love for believers is a topic of many Sunday sermons, but the flipside is often neglected—our love for Him. Never mincing words, James states with upmost clarity that for a believer to ignore God’s authority over life is folly and is in fact sin (Jam 4:13-17). He concludes with these piercing words: “Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin” (v 17). Failing to know and apply Christ’s words in our daily life not only demonstrates our lack of love for Him but also reveals our arrogance and identification with the world. On the other hand, obeying God and His Word in our priorities, our commitments, and our aspirations gives evidence of our love for Christ.

Loving Neighbors Who Are Believers

Using the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), Jesus explained that a neighbor is anyone with whom you come into contact who has a need. Meeting needs of believers was taught by Christ’s example in John 13 where Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. Appearance can be everything and washing feet was the job of a servant and could give an impression of inferiority. Not one of His disciples was willing to perform this humble task as they entered the Upper Room. Expecting the immediate coming of the kingdom on earth (Luke 19:11) and vying for their rightful place of rule (Matt 19:28), His disciples’ chief concern was who would be the greatest in the kingdom. In fact the question of who is greatest had come up twice before (Matt. 18:1; 20:17-28) and each time the disciples were competing for positions of authority. The result was strife and competition and they were still in the throws of rivalry when they entered the Upper Room (Luke 22:24-27). Seeing the contention and the undone chore, Jesus rose, laid aside His outer robe, took water and washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:4-5). Taking

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the role of “the Servant,” He gave them an example of love in action, a do-as-I-do-teaching moment (v 15).

“The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:11-12). Have we learned this lesson? This is what Paul spoke of when he wrote, ‘He [Jesus] humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross’ (Phil. 2:8). Christ, first and foremost, came to serve. Humility is not equated with inferiority, but reflects the servant heart Christ displayed in the Upper Room. Love is choosing the interest of others before one’s own. If we are seeking another’s highest good, we are truly serving them.

This was the reason Jesus said,

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **35** By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35).

Every believer should be a servant-lover. Love expressed in action is not limited to one’s spiritual gift. Time, effort, and finances may be required when a need is evident. The result is to bring praise to God (Matt 5:13-16) and find “favor” with all men (Acts 2:44-47).

Loving Neighbors Who Are Non-Believers

The believer’s ministry as an ambassador for Christ (2 Cor 5:20-21) relates to unbelievers. Christ was the *Light of the World* (John 8:12) and believers are to be *lights in the world*—reflections of Christ in what they say and do (Matt 5:14-16; Eph 5:7-11). In Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul encouraged believers to “be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us.” This appeal should again take us back to the Good Samaritan. We are to express love in giving physical and financial aid to those in need with whom we come into contact. “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people” (Gal 6:10).

Nevertheless, the one greatest need is for men to place their faith in Jesus for eternal life. That is why Paul wrote,

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5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders [non-believers], making the most of the opportunity. **6** Let your speech always be with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person (Col 4:5-6).

What is “wisdom toward outsiders”? It is skillfully applying the Word of God in each situation, taking any and all opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ. Notice it isn’t only what we do but what we say and how we say it that matters. Speaking polite, timely words—words that bring understanding and with understanding the appropriate response.

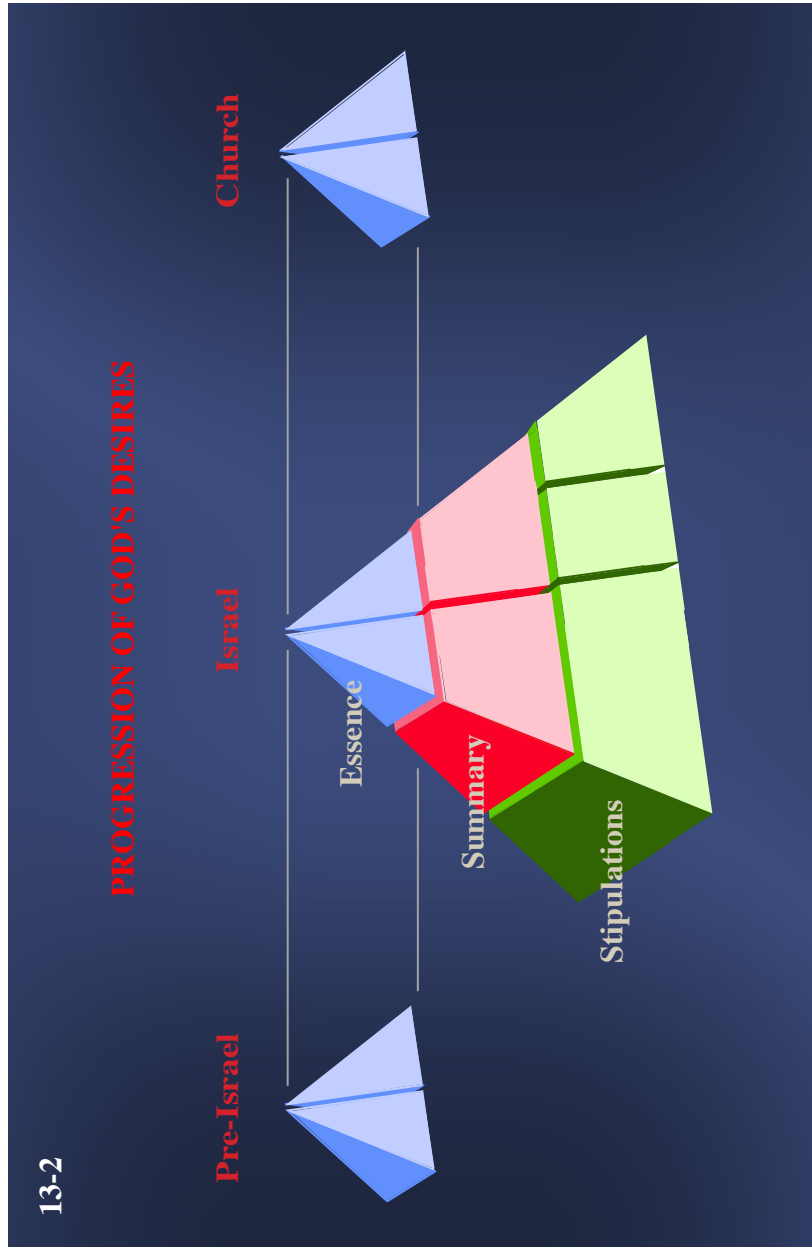
Law-and-Time Connection

I suggest that God’s heart desire, at least the essence of it, has never altered. What has changed is its actual means of expression, as portrayed in chart 13-2, *Progression of God’s Desires*. Even without a written code prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law, believers were to love God and love their fellowman. From Matthew 22, we have already discussed Jesus’ teaching that the *essence* of the Mosaic Law hinged on two commands: to love God and to love neighbors. While Paul explained in both Romans and Galatians that the Mosaic Law is no longer valid for believers, he appealed to Christians to fulfill the law as they served one another (Rom 13:8, 10; Gal 5:14), referring to the law of Christ (Gal 6:2; cf. Jam 1:25) that is embodied in the commands in the New Testament. God’s desire for His own to “love God” and “love others” transcends time (see chart 13-2).

Pre-Mosaic Law Period

Choosing to walk obediently before God was the biblical pattern for Old Testament saints even prior to God giving the Mosaic Law. Above we addressed Abraham’s walk in obedience that led to being called “the friend of God” (Jam 2:21-24). Abraham was pronounced righteous first by faith, establishing a saving relationship with God, and then secondly over time by works, after developing a friendship with God. Enoch (Gen 5:22) and Noah (6:9) are additional illustrations of

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men who faithfully “walked with God.” In each case, they did what God requested of them. All three are mentioned in Hebrews 11 as heroes of the faith, those who looked forward to fulfillment of God’s future promise.⁹

Even though “loving our fellowman” was not specifically addressed in Genesis, John reaches back to Genesis to find support for this very principle in the story of Cain and Able (Gen 4:2-15). John wrote,

11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; **12** not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous (1 John 3:11-12).

The account of Able’s death at the hands of Cain was used by John to illustrate what love does not do. “The failure to love one’s brother is nothing less than an infraction of the Savior’s command to *love one another*.”¹⁰ The “message which [they had] heard *from the beginning*” (v 11, italics added) certainly referred to Jesus’ instruction to the Eleven in the Upper Room (John 13:34), which had been passed down (cf. 1 John 2:7).¹¹ In actuality when Christ said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another” (John 13:34), His “new” commandment was “not new in the sense of complete originality.”¹² Rather, Christ gave “love a new standard”—to love one another “as I loved you.”¹³ Previously in the Old Testament, God had instructed His people to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18). That was the very text Christ referred to in response to the two commandments that summarize the Mosaic Law (Matt 22:36-40). Consequently, we should conclude this love principle was an integral part of God’s will “from the beginning.” Particularly this is the case since the Son of God at His first coming specified that it was God’s desire for His people.

Interestingly, John set forth the proposition that love for God and love for another go hand in hand (1 John 4:19-21; 5:2-3). They are not isolated. In fact, the former leads to the latter. Obviously, the relationship between the two is not confined to the New Testament or to after the giving of the Mosaic Law. John also tells us the link between love and a life pleasing to God: “And this is love, that we walk according to His

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commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it" (2 John 6). Abraham's life showed love in action (Jam 2:21-24), while Cain's failed to do so.

Mosaic Law Period

The Law was the written code of conduct for redeemed Israel. The overriding essence was to love God and to love one's neighbor as summarized in the Ten Commandments and further elaborated in 613 commands or stipulations.

Under the Law the people of God were responsible and accountable for their lives before Him. A small sample of Old Testament texts offers perspective.

Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to *walk in His ways* and to fear Him (Deut 8:6, italics added).

I command you today to love the Lord your God, to *walk in His ways* and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it (Deut 30:16, italics added).

Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God and *walk in all His ways* and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul (Josh 22:5, italics added).

But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will *walk in all the way* which I command you, that it may be well with you' (Jer 7:23, italics added).

They came in and took possession of it, but they *did not* obey Your voice or *walk in Your law*; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do; therefore You have made all this calamity come upon them (Jer 32:23, italics added).

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These texts clarify what conduct is necessary to experience God’s blessings or, on the other hand, curses for disobedience (cf. Deut 28). While a relationship with God (possessing eternal life) was established through faith (e.g., Gen 15:6), intimacy in fellowship (experiencing godly living) was experienced by obedience. Walking in love toward God and one’s fellowman was not the means to everlasting life. Remember the Mosaic Law addressed fellowship. The following Old Testament texts give insight.

So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man *may live* if he does them; I am the Lord (Lev 18:5, italics added).

I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes [does] them, he *will live* (Ezek 20:11, italics added).

Keeping the Law enabled a rich experience of life and intimacy with God. Notice: the form of the words in both *may live* and *will live* are potential and futuristic. “Really living” is contingent on “actually doing.” When the mind-set of God’s people was inline with His, intimacy was experienced. Again Hebrews 11 is full of examples of Old Testament saints who walked with God.

Before we move to the post-Mosaic period, one observation is worthy of note. In both the pre-Mosaic and Mosaic periods, God’s people were required to walk in obedience in order to experience fellowship with God. Yet, *at no time during those two periods was the Spirit the one producing or causing the obedient walk*. Each individual was responsible and accountable for his own life, whether obedient or disobedient. The consequences were the result of the decisions and actions each person made. Here we find the answer to the question I asked you to consider earlier in chapter 9 “How did the Old Testament saints obey God without the power of the Spirit?” — *They chose to obey!* The answer is identical for believers today!

Post-Mosaic Law Period

While no longer under the Mosaic Law, the law of Christ

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(Gal 6:2) defines God's direction for the Christian.¹⁴ Obviously, to love God and to love others remains the essence of His will. This is the very reason the law can be fulfilled or realized in our daily lives as the Christian demonstrates love in serving his fellowman (Rom 13:8, 10; Gal 5:14). Likewise as we previously learned from 2 John 6, the believer's love for God is shown as "he walks according to [with respect to] His commandments."

In Romans 8 and Galatians 5 we covered at length the importance of choices. There we found "that the requirement [godly living] of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to [with respect to] the flesh but according to [with respect to] the Spirit" (Rom 8:4). Notice once again the comparison between two different choices based on the Christian allowing either the world or the Spirit to influence him. The decision is his and so is the consequence. Remember choices, not power, determine enriched living or a living deadness.

Historical Perspective

Fulfilling the law refers to the *reality of living out the law through love as originally intended to be lived by God*. While the means of giving the law has changed over time, the essence remained constant and transcends every age. Keeping the law in each period was never ever kept by means of the Spirit's power!

Supplement Rejecting the Obvious

Many hold a different position regarding law, saying it is not necessary to obey the law. Their point of emphasis is the believer's "relationship" with Christ. This is the position of those who hold the "Trivializing Law-Keeping" view referred to in the previous chapter.

No Need to Obey Laws

A proponent wrote, "It is impossible for *you* to fulfill the

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law.”¹⁵ In fact, “the law was given so that people might see their own absolute inadequacy”¹⁶ since the law does not provide “the ability to fulfill its demands.”¹⁷ Automatically defaulting to the view that “only the Spirit produces obedience through the believer” as discussed in chapter 8, they claim there is no need to obey any of God’s laws since it is impossible to do so.¹⁸ “The only one who can live the Christ-life is Christ” and “He wants to live His life *through* you.”¹⁹ “He fulfilled it [the law] then [2,000 years ago], and He will do it again today when you allow Him to live His life *through* you.”²⁰ In other words, no worries God will do everything.

This line of thinking rejects the command *to love God and to love others*, which is directed to believers. Remember Galatians 5:14: “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” The law is fulfilled by the believer—You! A simple cause-and-effect relationship—*love*, the cause, *is the fulfillment of the law*, the effect (Rom 13:10, italics added). The Christian himself fulfills the law through obedience.

Rejecting the obvious biblical principles found in Romans 8 and Galatians 5, the misguided “let-go-and-let-God” position must then embrace two assumptions: keeping the Law is always self-effort and fulfilling the Law is always Spirit-effort.

Assumption One: “Keeping the Law” Is “Self-Effort”

Assumption One takes us back to Galatians 3:2-3, which we addressed in detail in chapter 6.

2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the *works of the Law*, or by hearing with *faith*? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by [with] the *Spirit*, are you now being perfected by [with] the *flesh*? (italics added).

In their perspective, *flesh* in verse 3 refers to “self-effort”

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or “human effort,” concluding that the Christian life not only begins but also is completed exclusively by the ministry of the Spirit of Christ *through* the Christian. Viewed in this manner, Christian living is not the responsibility of believers. Rather Christ continues to fulfill the law through them if only they allow Him to do so.

As we discussed earlier in chapter 6, this text correctly interpreted leads to a different position. Notice again that in Galatians 3:2 Paul asks a rhetorical question, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” Of course, they had received the Spirit and were justified by faith in Christ alone. With that settled, he then asked, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected [experiencing Christian growth] by the flesh?” (v 3). Remember the Judaizers required these Gentile Christians in Galatia to follow the Mosaic Law.²¹ With his question Paul presented a stark contrast between the Judaizers’ teaching on Christian living and his own. In both Galatians and Romans Paul taught that any form of Mosaic Law-keeping, represented by the phrase *the works of the Law* (e.g., Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10), consistently referred to *legalistic observance*. His issue was not “self-effort” or “human effort” but rather “legalistic observance.” Consequently, when Paul moves to Christian living in verse 3 and asks, “Are you now being perfected by the flesh?,” the term *flesh* is equivalent to the phrase *the works of the Law* in verse 2. These Gentile Christians did not receive justification by legalistic observance (v 2) and neither can they experience growth in their Christian lives by legalistic observance (v 3). *Legalistic observance, not human effort, is being addressed.*

Whether or not effort expended is appropriate or not, *the Christian walk always requires human effort*. Christian living is cooperative, requiring both the Spirit’s influence and Christian obedience (Gal 5:16-23; Rom 8:4-6, 12-13). The primary issue is the believer’s choice in how he lives, either in disobedience

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or obedience. Notice that no matter how life is lived, human effort is always involved.

Assumption Two: “Fulfilling Law” Is “Spirit-Effort”

As just indicated, when “human-effort” is assumed in Galatians 3:3, the obvious contrast that comes to mind is “Spirit-effort.” That is the very reason a spokesman for the trivializing law-keeping wrote, “It is impossible for *you* to fulfill the law.”²² But while impossible for the believer “[Christ] fulfilled it, and He will do it again today when you allow Him to live His life *through you*.”²³ Consequently, this position is that Christ fulfills the law through the believer by means of the Spirit’s power. Nevertheless, the biblical evidence presented in this chapter and prior chapters invalidate that view.

Confusing Relationship with Fellowship

The term *relationship* can be understood in a variety of ways depending on the context. For example, the term was used above for a cause-and-effect “relationship,” referring to one action or event being the result of another. It relates to a connection between concepts, objects, or people. In a theological setting, most have historically embraced the term *relationship* to refer to the *union* between God and the believer at salvation (see Appendix C). Thereafter, the biblical term *fellowship* (e.g., 1 John 1:5-10), which deals with the growing *communion* between the believer and God, is typically used. While relationship relates to the one-time event of “coming to Christ” through faith (cf. Rom 6:3-7; Jam 2:23; Eph 2:8), fellowship refers to “walking with Christ” over a lifetime (Rom 8:3-8; Jam 2:21-22; Eph 2:10).²⁴

Many Christian authors unfortunately do not make the distinction between relationship and fellowship. Rather they merge the two terms together, using the popular expression

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in a dating situation where a relationship between the two people is developing. To have some idea as to where they stand with one another, they have the *define-the-relationship* (DTR) conversation.²⁵ Granted that may be a valid method in psychology books, but it produces confusion in a biblical setting when discussing fellowship with God, as with Abraham in James 2. For example, a proponent of the current relationship emphasis wrote, “God’s concern with you [Christian] isn’t about rules but relationship.”²⁶ He continued, “The only thing we did *to enter* into the Christian life was *to trust* Christ. *Does God require something different now that we have become Christians?*”²⁷ He obviously assumes a “No” answer, meaning that Christians only believe. Consequently, their emphasis on *being* (relationship) as opposed to *doing* (human-effort) is based on the premise that “He can do anything that He needs done! He doesn’t want what we can do [since God accomplishes it, producing good works through the believer]—He just wants us!”²⁸ Needless to say, that position is biblically inaccurate on a number of levels. God does require Christian obedience to His will in order to experience fellowship with Him. *Coming to Christ* is free (John 3:16), only faith in Christ for eternal life is necessary. *Walking with Christ* in intimacy and fellowship is costly, demanding obedience (e.g., Rom 8:4-5; Gal 5:16-17; Luke 9:23-25).

A biblical perspective looks at fellowship with a focus on Christ and not on rules (see chapter 6). Nevertheless the law is fulfilled or realized through wise choices, with corresponding behavior. Appendix C, *Case Study: Adopting a “Relationship” Gospel*, addresses the unfortunate consequences in ministry by well-known pastors who have held this “relationship-emphasis” position.

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Loving Is Fulfilling the Law

Believers are commanded to fulfill the law, loving God and loving others. While the specific commands are given in different ways over time, they express how He expects His people to live with regard to Himself and others. Therefore, loving is “doing” the law, which in turn is “fulfilling” the law. *When obedience is a reality in one’s life, the believer is fulfilling the law!*

