

Believers Under the Law of Christ

Synopsis

Some new-covenant theologians, dissenting from mainstream new-covenant theology, teach that believers are not under the law of Christ. In tandem with this, they also say that the Scriptures are not an integral part of Christ's law. These two points are inextricably linked. In this article, I seek to prove that these men are wrong, that their case depends on faulty exegesis of certain key texts of Scripture. Indeed, on some of these texts, they adopt, or at least favour, a translation not found in any modern major version of the Bible. Finally, I argue that the consequences of this faulty exegesis are severe.

Introduction

Todd Braye, for instance, has published two papers: 'Law of Christ' (2nd June 2015) and 'Five Reasons Why I Object to Classic NCT's Definition of the Law of Christ' (6th March 2012), in which he is explicit: believers are not under the law of Christ; the Scriptures are not part of the law of Christ; the law of Christ is entirely inward and spiritual.¹ Braye states:

We all understand that, as Christians, 'we are not under law' (Rom. 6:14). Christ died to set us free from the law in its totality (Gal. 5:1). I take Paul to mean exactly that. We are not under law, any covenantal law.

Responding to my enquiry, Braye confirmed this:

I do not think we are under the law of Christ. I do not think we are under law! I think the obedient Christian is ruled by the promised Spirit, not law. I think the Christian is a '*doulos Christou*' and obeys his word. But that is not the same as being under a new external law, however spun.

¹ Braye, of course, is not alone in this. Several members of the Facebook group, New Covenant Grace, are very much in sympathy with him on this issue.

Even so, in his articles he affirms:

We all understand and embrace the necessity of obedience to Christ. This is an inside-out obedience which is actual and verifiable. I do not advocate libertinism or moral licence. ALL Scripture is profitable for... correction, reproof, and ‘training in righteousness’. Discipleship is nothing more or less than baptising believers, and teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded. I repeat: obedience to Christ is necessary. And that means, *ipso facto*, obeying the law of Christ.

But what is the role of the Scriptures?

What then of commands written in ink on a page? I am truly happy to have them. They are gifts to us. What are [*sic*] their role? The apostle tells us that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. Could we not leave it at that?... New-covenant imperatives and commands are not the law of Christ, but simply express what is in accordance with that law, *i.e.* the indwelling Christ in/by [*sic*] his Spirit.

In expressing such views, as Braye himself admits, he is rowing against the ‘established’ tide of new-covenant theology. As he puts it, he disagrees with:

Classic new-covenant theology [which] defines the law of Christ in terms of the commandments of Christ and his apostles found in the New Testament, written on the pages of Scripture, written in ink. It’s defined, therefore, as something external, outside the believer.

So, his own conclusion is:

Where is the law of Christ?... I say: ‘The law is written on my heart. [Christ] is engraved there, because “God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Gal. 4:6), and Christ “lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). As Ezekiel of old wrote: “...I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes...” (Ezek. 36:27)’.

The law of Christ is the indwelling Christ, written upon the hearts of believers in [*sic*] his Spirit. It is not external, but internal, not in the form of code, but a person. New-covenant members are conformed to a person, not to an external code, or list of imperatives.

While there is much that I agree with in both Braye's papers, much that is heart-warmingly scriptural – the emphasis on the inward work of the Spirit, the believer's liberty in Christ, the believer's conformity to Christ, and so on – nevertheless, on these vital points – whether or not the believer is under the law of Christ as a law, and whether or not the Scriptures are an integral part of the law of Christ – I strongly disagree with him. I am convinced that his exegesis is wrong. I go further. Braye's faulty exegesis must not gain ground. If it does, the consequences will be very severe indeed. We are talking about something that is crucial, at the very heart of the new covenant, something I know that Braye is also convinced of.

The evidence is strong that those who disagree with me on this point will insist that I, and others like me, are in some way playing down the work of the Spirit in the heart of the believer in this day of the new covenant, that we are returning to something very much like the age of Moses, and that we are trying to live the spiritual life in a legal way, urging fleshly obedience to a list of rules. I must, therefore, try to make my position as plain as I can.² Although I have said such things repeatedly throughout my works, I say it again here:

The law of Christ is radically different to the law of Moses in its nature. It is not merely outward. One of the great provisions of the new covenant is that Christ writes his law, by his Spirit, in the heart of every believer. Every believer is taught by the Spirit. Christ is formed in the heart of every believer. The law of Christ is not merely a list of commands; it certainly is not an external code like the Mosaic law. The Spirit motivates and empowers the child of God to willing, not slavish, obedience to Christ,

² In fact, the criticism can get even more bizarre. Take one of the aforementioned Braye's supporters, who, when talking of the work of the Spirit and the commands of Christ, challenged those of us who take the stance I do here: 'Why will [you] persist in "tearing apart what the Lord has joined together"?' I replied: 'This is precisely what some of us see you and others doing. Admit that the Spirit and the Scriptures are in harness at the heart of the law of Christ, and this debate is over. It is you and others who "tear them apart".'

obedience to Christ out of love for him, and not from tormenting fear of punishment.

All that, and more like it, is taken for granted in this article. Taken for granted? I *glory* in it! So when I contend for the centrality of the Scriptures within the law of Christ, I do so with the absolute understanding that this is completely and utterly in harness with the Spirit in the believer's heart.

Now to go on.

I draw attention to some warning flags concerning his exegesis, flags raised by Braye himself. As he so clearly states, he disagrees with 'classic new-covenant theology', taking a view in contrast to that expressed by several named writers of weight.³ This does not necessarily mean that he is wrong, but it ought to give his readers serious pause for thought. What is more, on certain key texts (Galatians 6:2 and 1 Corinthians 9:19-21) he favours a translation which is found in none of the major Bible versions.⁴ While Braye's suggested changes to the usual translation in these key texts do not automatically rule out his conclusion, they give further ground for serious pause for thought. What is more, I fail to see how he can assert that believers have to 'obey everything Christ commanded. I repeat: obedience to Christ is necessary. And that means, *ipso facto*, obeying the law of Christ', and yet, at the same time, say that believers are not under Christ's law, and that the Scriptures are

³ I exclude myself from this encomium, though he does name me, for which I sincerely thank him.

⁴ This reminds me of Jonathan F. Bayes' defence of the citadel of his own work, *The Weakness of the Law: God's Law and the Christian in New Testament Perspective*, Paternoster Press, Cumbria, 2000, in which he propounded the covenant-theology view of the law. I refer to the way Bayes dealt with Rom. 8:1-4. He could only do this by proposing a series of changes to the text. I concluded what I said in response to Bayes on this point: 'In this sophisticated way, the plain teaching of the apostle is turned on its head. I, for my part, will stick with the almost-universally held text. Besides, both the immediate context of Rom. 5 – 8, and the analogy of faith, support the usual translation against that proposed by Bayes. And the context is always king!'

not part of that law. Braye, it seems to me, is self-contradicting at this point.

This is how I propose to go about making good my claim that Braye's exegesis is faulty, and that this inevitably leads to a wrong conclusion. I will look at the vital texts; namely, Romans 6:14, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Galatians 5:1 and 6:2, and, finally, 1 John 3:4.⁵ From these passages, I hope to show that it is perfectly right and proper to speak of the believer being under the law of Christ. This, it seems to me, is my great task in this article. For if it can be established that the believer is, indeed, under the law of Christ, then the question naturally arises: Where shall we find that law? It has to be objective. Where is it? There can only be one answer. In Scripture! Thus it is imperative for me to try to storm the citadel, as it were, and prove, from Scripture, that the believer *is* under the law of Christ. As I have said, the citadel having been gained – namely, that the believer is under the law of Christ – then the fact that the commands of Christ and the apostles⁶ are an integral part of the law of Christ, must, as a matter of course, follow. Braye's assertion that believers have to obey Scripture, it seems to me, concedes the point. Scripture is the arbiter. In other words, Scripture is the believer's rule; Scripture is the believer's law.

Before getting into the detail of individual texts, however, we should look at the big picture. That is to say, before we get involved in the minutiae of specific verses and passages,⁷ let us remember that the overwhelming majority of the first readers of those passages were not readers at all. Could they all read? In any case, none of them possessed a copy of the apostolic letters in question. They were hearers, listening, almost certainly, to one

⁵ I choose the latter partly because it is a crucial text in this debate, and partly because at least one of the advocates of Braye's view takes a view of the verse which is supported by none of the major modern versions, and, as a consequence, comes to a wrong view of the passage.

⁶ Who, of course, include the old covenant as a paradigm. See my 'The Law the Believer's Rule?'

⁷ As will be obvious, I am not dismissing detailed examination of specific texts.

man reading the one copy of an individual letter. How did they *hear* the words? What impression did they take away with them? They did not have the opportunity that we have – to take out our personal copy, pore over every nuance at our leisure, consult parallel places, and so on. What I am saying is that we must not miss the wood for the trees. What is the general impression, the overall picture, that we discover in the post-Pentecost Scriptures? Clearly, it is one of believers being called to obedience, in the power of the Spirit of God, to apostolic commands, the apostles addressing believers as responsible and accountable men and women obliged to obey the instructions they are being given in Scripture, all to the glory of God in Christ by the Spirit. In short, speaking for myself, the New Testament gives me the impression – to put it no stronger – that the believer is under Christ’s law, rule, reign, headship, lordship and governance, administered through the apostles by the Spirit in the Scriptures, the believer having had that law written in his heart by the Spirit. And this law is more penetrating than Moses’ law. Yes, it is so!⁸

Of course, I admit at once that the phrase ‘under the law of Christ’ does not appear in Scripture, but this is the merest quibble; the same could be said of not a few words and phrases which are common currency among us. And rightly so.⁹ The question is, is the principle, the concept, scriptural? I hope to prove that the passages I have mentioned, in their context, establish beyond all doubt that the believer *is* under the law of Christ.

Christ is King (Ps. 2:6; 45:6; Matt. 28:18-20; John 12:15; 18:37; Acts 2:30-31; Heb. 1:8). A king does not reign unless he issues his rule. The glory of the new covenant is that King Jesus reigns and rules his people by his word, having, by his Spirit, written his law in their heart, and moving them and enabling them to submit willingly to his ‘gentle’ (Matt. 11:28-30) reign. That great messianic psalm (it is quoted more than any psalm in the

⁸ See my ‘The Penetrating Law of Christ’. I will return to this.

⁹ ‘New covenant’ appears only three times, ‘justification by faith alone’ never, ‘the law of Christ’ once, ‘the Lord’s supper’ once, ‘the ten commandments’ twice, ‘the righteousness of Christ’ never, and so on.

New Testament) could not be plainer; Christ rules a willing people:

The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’. The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty sceptre. Rule in the midst of your enemies! Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power (Ps. 110:1-3).

And, I assert, Christ rules them, not only inwardly by his Spirit in their heart, but by his Spirit in his written word. That is to say, although I agree with Braye that the Scriptures are useful (profitable) (2 Tim. 3:16-17), nevertheless this is not the last word on the subject. For a start, the Scriptures are useful for *instruction*, and, moreover, instruction in, and including, *paideia*, ‘the whole training and education of children, employing commands and admonitions, reproof and punishment, correcting mistakes, curbing passions, including chastisement and chastening for their amendment’.¹⁰ The law of Christ does not stop at the inward work of the Spirit, leaving the Scriptures as something useful, something alongside and supportive of, but not absolutely essential to, the inward work of the Spirit. Far from it! Yet, according to Braye, the commands and imperatives of the new covenant are not part and parcel of the law of Christ. I assert the opposite: the law of Christ comprises the presence of the inward Spirit *and* the external Scriptures, the Spirit *and* the word, in harness, right at its very heart. They cannot be divorced. They must not, in any way, be divorced. Indeed, we must never teach in such a way that anybody could think there is the slightest gap between the inward and outward work of the Spirit – in the heart and in the written word. All this I see as the overall big picture of the New Testament.

And this leads me to the conclusion that it is right and proper for believers to talk of ‘law’ and ‘commands’ and ‘rule’ in the new covenant. Moreover, I will argue that it is essential for believers to think, speak and act in this way. Not to do it will, as I have said, lead to dire consequences.

¹⁰ See Thayer.

One final point. Since I want to keep this article in bounds, I will confine my remarks to the essentials.¹¹ For my full argument, the reader should consult my *Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the Law*, including the relevant extracts.¹²

Romans 6:14

Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

At first glance, these words seem to teach, as Braye asserts, that the believer is delivered from law, all covenantal law; indeed, from all law altogether. But ‘first glance’ is not the way to discover the meaning of Scripture. The context is king. And that context flatly refutes the notion that the believer is not under any covenantal law. Throughout Romans 5:12 – 7:6, the apostle is clearly speaking of the law of Moses. I submit that the context further shows that while the believer is most definitely delivered from the law of Moses, he, equally definitely, is now under Christ’s law. I summarise the leading points:

The lack of the article – ‘law’ and not ‘the law’ – makes no difference. It probably strengthens the point.¹³

Paul has already established that all men are under one law or another (Rom. 2:12-15).¹⁴

Throughout the passage, Paul is speaking of the Mosaic law.

Having spoken of justification in the earlier part of Romans, in Romans 6 the apostle has now moved on to speak of progressive sanctification.

Do not miss the eschatological ‘but now’ (or, in the context, ‘now’) which comes in this context, as it does again and again in

¹¹ Even so, on re-reading this prior to publication, I find that my remarks have been extended to an inordinate length. I apologise. It is only the seriousness of the matter that has driven me to such a length.

¹² Especially, but not exclusively, pp211-278,481-527.

¹³ See my ‘What Is the Law?’

¹⁴ See my ‘All Men Under Law’.

Romans – indeed, throughout the New Testament (Rom. 3:21; 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; 11:30; 11:31 (second ‘now’ in NIV, NASB); 16:26; see also John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:12-13; 5:8; Col. 1:26; Heb. 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10). It is the *eschatological* ‘but now’ which is at the root of the apostle’s argument from Romans 5:12 and on. We have moved out of the old age, the age of the old covenant, into the new age, the age of the new covenant. This is the basis of the apostle’s argument here.

Coming to the individual experience, having spoken of the believer’s union by faith to Christ at conversion (Rom. 6:1-13), and having made his statement – ‘Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace’ (Rom. 6:14) – the apostle immediately moves into two illustrations; slavery and marriage. The believer has a new slave master. He is no longer a slave to sin; he is now Christ’s slave (Rom. 6:15-23). The believer is no longer married to the law, the law of Moses; he is married to Jesus Christ, he belongs to him (Rom. 7:1-6). Both illustrations, in the context, speak of rule, reign, headship, lordship and governance; in short ‘law’.¹⁵ While the phrase ‘the law of Christ’ is not used in the context of Romans 6:14, whatever else is the apostle speaking about? He is speaking of Christ as the believer’s ruler, master, head, lord, governor, husband – one who exercises his rule by his law. The slavery illustration surely speaks for itself; for the husband illustration, see Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1. Nothing could be clearer: the believer is no longer under the rule, the reign, the headship, the lordship, the governance of Moses

¹⁵ And we know that marriage is a covenant (Mal. 2:14; see also Prov. 2:17). The wife is under the covenantal law of marriage to her husband. Anticipating what is to come, let me have a word about an objection I have seen raised; namely, that slaves do not have written contracts, do not consult a book of rules. With respect, this is a quibble, pushing the illustration too far. Something similar could be done with the marriage illustration – the wrong person has died! As always with illustrations we must get the main point. And the main point here is that the believer is *under* the rule of Christ. In any case, slavery-law, written slavery-law, was enshrined in the old covenant, as well as other cultures in antiquity.

and his law, but he is under the rule, the reign, the headship, the lordship, the governance of Christ; in short, he is under the law of Christ.

To be under the law, whether the Mosaic or pagan, is to be under the dominion of sin. To be under grace is to be liberated from the rule of the law, whether the Mosaic or pagan, released from the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:14; 7:6).

None of this rules out the fact that the believer is under the law of Christ. Rule it out! It establishes it! The law that Paul speaks of in Romans 6 and 7, the law that the believer is free of, is the law of Moses, the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2), and the law that has set him free from that law is ‘the law of the Spirit of life... in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8:2). Clearly the believer is under that law! When Paul says: ‘Now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code’ (Rom. 7:6), he is telling believers that they are no longer in the old age but in the new. In the old age, men served under an external code in the ‘old way’. In the new age, believers serve – yes they do ‘serve’ – in the new way, in the power, energy and life of the Spirit, under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; in short, under the law of Christ. They ‘serve’, said Paul, using *douleuō*, ‘to obey commands, to render service due, to be a slave’.¹⁶

I do not see how the apostle could have been more explicit:

Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification (Rom. 6:17-19).

‘Obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed’. Where are believers supposed to find that ‘standard of teaching’? Do they know it by the Spirit writing it in

¹⁶ See Thayer.

their heart? Do they know it by the external word? Or is it a happy combination of both? I say it is that happy combination. But I also assert that Paul was here stressing the written word, the Scriptures, especially the apostolic instruction in and through those Scriptures, even as he was contributing to them. And this, I am convinced, is all part and parcel of the law of Christ which the believer is under.

The apostle enforces all this by the what he goes on to say in Romans 8:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:1-8).

Let me pause. The man in the flesh cannot please God; he cannot submit to his law, he will not submit to it, because he hates both the lawgiver and his law. The things of God are not only foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14); they are hateful to him. But when that man is transformed from being a man 'in the flesh' into a man 'in the Spirit' – that is, when God delivers him from the realm of darkness, and transfers him into kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13), clearly, as a man who is now in the Spirit, under Christ's reign, he can please God, he will please God. How? When he was a man in the flesh he showed his hostility to God by refusing to submit to his law. Now, as a man in the Spirit, he shows his love for God by submission to it; that is, he delights in God's law, he obeys God's law. Does he do it in his own power? Not at all! The context is clear. It is the indwelling Spirit who turns this man from rebellion to submission, enabling him to 'walk... according

to the Spirit'. When he was in the flesh, the man hated God's law; now that he is in the Spirit, he echoes David's words: he loves God's law (Ps. 119:97).¹⁷

The underlying argument here, of course, is eschatological, not merely personal or individual. It is true in the personal sense, it goes without saying, gloriously true, but the basic fact remains that whereas, as a man in the flesh, he belonged to the age of the old covenant,¹⁸ now, as a man in the Spirit, he belongs to the age of the new covenant. And the effect of this transfer is shown, as Paul states here, either by rebellion or submission to God's law. As the apostle goes on to declare: 'You... are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if [since] in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him' (Rom. 8:9). But the believer, since he is a new man in the Spirit, does belong to Christ, he is married to Christ (Rom. 7:4).¹⁹ Thus the believer will submit to Christ under his law, submit as a willing slave of Christ, and joyfully submit to him as a wife to her husband (Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1).

The great question is: What is the law of God in these two ages? The law in the first age was the law of Moses. But what law does the believer, the man in the Spirit, submit to? The answer is obvious: the law of Christ. The law of God in the old covenant was the law of Moses; the law of God in the new covenant is the law of Christ.²⁰ In the context starting at Romans 5:12, the law for the believer must be, can only be, the law of Christ. The man, having died to the law of Moses, is now under Christ as his slave and his husband-head, with the result that he is under Christ's law. Paul takes this absolutely for granted here in order to lay stress on the believer's obedience to Christ's law. This is the apostle's purpose – not merely to inform the believer that he is under the law of Christ. That can be taken as given.

¹⁷ See my *Psalm 119 and the New Covenant*.

¹⁸ In eschatological terms, the unconverted still do.

¹⁹ Note how 'belong' is used in Rom. 7:4 (ESV, NIV) and Rom. 8:9 (ESV, NIV, NASB) even though translating two different Greek words. Why? Because this conveys the proper sense.

²⁰ I make this point repeatedly throughout my *Christ*. See especially pp214-219,483-487.

What the apostle is looking for is the believer's obedience to that law. Obedience is his point.

And all this, of course, explains the seeming contradiction between Romans 6:15-23 (believers are slaves) and Romans 8:15 (believers do not serve as slaves). Believers are free of the law of Moses, they do not serve Christ in the flesh under the old law, under 'the written code' (Rom. 7:6), but they are slaves of Christ, under his law, and serve him by the Spirit. And this is perfect freedom.

In short, Braye's categorical deduction that the believer is not under any covenantal law – specifically, the law of Christ – is wrong. Romans 6:14, in its context, proves that the opposite is the case. The believer, united to Christ, being a slave to Christ, and married to Christ, is under Christ's rule, reign, headship, lordship and governance; in short the believer is under the law of Christ. I know the phrase 'the law of Christ' is not used in the context, but, I ask again, what else is the apostle talking about? What else can he be talking about?

In appending some extracts from others, I do not use their words to *prove* what I say; the context does that. I start with Thomas R.Schreiner:

The phrase 'under law' (*hupo nomon*) occurs eleven times in Paul (Rom. 6:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:20 [4 times]; Gal. 3:23; 4:4-5,21; 5:18). It is immediately evident that the phrase is particularly important in Galatians since Paul uses it there most often... The phrase should be interpreted in terms of redemptive history. The old era of redemptive history refers to the time period when the Mosaic covenant was operative... To be under the law refers to the old era of salvation history, to the time period of the [Mosaic] law... Jesus Christ is the exception that proves the rule, for he was the only one who lived under the law and kept the law (Gal. 4:4-5). Consequently, through his atoning death, he was able to liberate those under the law from the power of sin. The fullness of time – the fulfilment of God's redemptive purposes in Christ – spells the end of the [Mosaic] law's reign. Indeed, Paul turned the tables on his Jewish opponents. He promised in Romans 6:14 that 'sin will have no dominion over you'. And why is it the case that sin will not rule over believers? Paul's answer on first glance is rather surprising 'since you are

not under law but under grace'. However, if the line of thought I have traced in the answer to this question has been followed, the Pauline response is actually perfectly sensible. Sin exercises control over those who live under the law [any law other than the law of Christ], and this truth is confirmed by Israel's history under the Mosaic covenant and the [Mosaic] law. Therefore, the power of sin is broken for those who are no longer under the old era of salvation history – for those who live in the new era inaugurated by Christ. It is those who are under the dominion of the [Mosaic] law who are enslaved to sin, not those who enjoy the grace of Jesus Christ. Romans 6:14-15 promises liberation from the tyranny and mastery of sin for those who live in the new era of redemptive history... [Hence] Paul's use of the phrase 'under law' should be understood in redemptive-historical terms. Those who are under the law are also under the dominion and authority of sin. The history of Israel under the Mosaic covenant confirms the truth that those who lived under the [Mosaic] law were subject to sin's mastery. Paul proclaims that believers are no longer under the [Mosaic] law. A new era of salvation history has been inaugurated... The [Mosaic] law has been abolished now that Christ has come. Believers are no longer under the [Mosaic] law.²¹

And now for Douglas J.Moo²² on Romans 6:14:

These words are to be understood of a promise that is valid for every believer at the present time: 'Sin shall certainly not be your lord – now or ever!'

The promise is confirmed by the assurance that 'you are not under law but under grace' [Rom. 6:14 linked to Rom. 3:19-21,27-28; 4:13-15; 5:13-14,20 and, especially Rom. 5:20 and 7:1-6].

As in all these references, *nomos* here must be the Mosaic law, the *torah*.

²¹ Thomas R.Schreiner: *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, Kregel, 2010, pp73-75.

²² I am glad to quote Moo since he is a thoroughly competent witness, an acclaimed witness, one who is highly respected. But at certain key points he is too cautious, even weak, as I will indicate. The truth is, his very reticence in those areas gives added weight to my use of him.

Paul [makes] release from the law [of Moses] a reason for the Christian's freedom from the power of sin: as he has repeatedly stated, the Mosaic law has had a definite sin-producing and sin-intensifying function; it brought 'knowledge of sin' (Rom. 3:20), 'wrath' (Rom. 4:15), 'transgression' (Rom. 5:13-14), and an increase in the severity of sin (Rom. 5:20). The law, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 15:56, is 'the power of sin'. This means, however, that there can be no final liberation from the power of sin without a corresponding liberation from the power and lordship of the law [of Moses]. To be 'under law' is to be subject to the constraining and sin-strengthening regime of the old age; to be 'under grace' is to be subject to the new age in which freedom from the power of sin is available.

[Of course:] We cannot conclude from this verse that the believer has no obligation to any of the individual commandments... Still less... that Christians are no longer subject to 'law' or 'commandments' at all – for *nomos* here means *Mosaic law*, not 'law' as such.²³

Moo on Romans 6:17-19:

Paul wants to make [it] clear that becoming a Christian means being placed under the authority of Christian 'teaching', that expression of God's will for New Testament believers... Paul would then imply that Christians, while no longer 'under the Mosaic law', are nevertheless bound by an authoritative code of teaching.²⁴

Moo's use of 'imply' is too weak. Paul statement is categorical. As I said before, I do not see how the apostle could have been more explicit:

Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin,

²³ Douglas J.Moo: *The Epistle to the Romans*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1996, pp387-390; 'The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ', *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, John S.Feinberg (editor), Crossway Books, Westchester, 1988, pp210-211, emphasis his.

²⁴ Moo: *Romans* pp401-402.

have become slaves of righteousness... so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification (Rom. 6:17-19).

Moo on Romans 7:

The main topic... is the Mosaic law. [Rom. 7:1-6] contains the main point that Paul wants to make in this chapter... It is almost certain... that Paul here refers to the Mosaic law.

Paul argues that a person's bondage to the law [of Moses] *must* be severed in order that he or she may be put into a new relationship with Christ... Death severs relationship to the law... But... not only... does Paul... illustrate the general principle that 'a death frees one from the law'... he also sets up the theological application... in which severance from the law [here, of Moses] enables one to enter a new relationship.²⁵

Moo, commenting on Romans 7:4, spoke of the apostle's preceding argument which, Moo (too weakly) said, suggests:

...that, as in Romans 6:14, Paul in Romans 7:4 is viewing the law as a 'power' of the 'old age' to which the person apart from Christ is bound. The underlying conception is again salvation-historical, as is suggested by the 'letter'/'Spirit' contrast in Rom. 7:6. Just as, then, the believer 'dies to sin' in order to 'live for God' (Rom. 6), so he or she is 'put to death to the law' in order to be joined to Christ. Both images depict the transfer of the believer from the old realm to the new. As long as sin 'reigns', God and righteousness cannot; and neither, as long as law 'reigns', can Christ and the Spirit.²⁶

Moo, writing later in Romans:

Against those who might object that the abandonment of the law [of Moses] as a code of conduct (Rom. 6:14; 7:1-6) leads to licence, Paul argues that the gospel itself provides sufficient ethical guidance for Christians. Through the renewal of the mind that the gospel makes possible, Christians can know and do the will of God (Rom. 12:2), and by following the dictates of love,

²⁵ Moo: *Romans* pp409-414.

²⁶ Moo: *Romans* pp414-416. See my 'The Law Written'; 'The Law on the Believer's Heart'.

they can accomplish all that the law [of Moses] itself demands of them (Rom. 13:8-10).²⁷

Yes, but yet again, Moo is weak. The Spirit *accomplishes* all this; he does more than make it ‘possible’. This is one of the great glories of the new covenant; the Spirit really does motivate and enable the believer to be obedient. Further, we need to be clear: the gospel does provide guidance for the believer, yes. But how can we know what this gospel is? Directly by the Spirit or by the Spirit interpreting and applying Scripture? The very fact that the apostle is teaching this, and teaching it through writing, would seem to suggest, to put it no stronger, that it must be the latter; it can only be the latter. And, finally, this instruction is not merely ‘guidance’, ‘advice’, ‘suggestion’, only ‘good’ or ‘valuable’. It is Christ’s *law*, and the believer must obey it.

In short, on Romans 6:14, I submit, Braye is wrong. The believer *is* under the law of Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all [men], that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19-23, ESV).

Let me quote the pertinent words in other versions:

I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law (NIV).
Not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ (NASB).
Under the law to Christ (AV).

²⁷ Moo: *Romans* p746. Note his reference to James D.G.Dunn’s ‘the kind of life expected’ of believers.

I have quoted the entire paragraph because it is essential to get the context. The real issue of the passage is evangelism. The passage is not primarily a discourse on law, but on how to reach sinners with the gospel. So whatever we deduce from the passage, we need to bear in mind that Paul was not setting out to make a definitive statement on ‘law’. That being said, clearly ‘law’ plays a vital part in this paragraph. But why did Paul raise – not merely mention – ‘law’, when he was really talking about his approach to sinners? Why raise such an abstruse topic at this point?

Because he knows that all men are under law,²⁸ in one form or another, as he so clearly stated in Romans 2:12-15; that is, because he knows that all men are slaves to one master or another, subject to their master’s law. Slavery is the fundamental issue here. All men, I say again, are slaves. In Christ, that slavery is perfect freedom (Rom. 8:21; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1,13); outside of Christ that slavery is utter bondage (2 Pet. 2:19), and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:6-11). And the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of Christ (1 Cor. 2:2; 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:5), leading to conversion, is designed by God to deliver sinners from all forms of bondage, and bring them into glorious freedom in Christ (Luke 4:18; John 8:31-36). So that is why Paul raised the question of ‘law’ here. ‘Law’ leading to slavery is at the root of the problem.²⁹

‘Am I not free?’ thundered the apostle, right at the start of the chapter. Of course he is! But... he is willing to become a slave in order to³⁰ reach men with the gospel: ‘Though I am free from all,

²⁸ God always deals with men under law. All men are under law. God has ensured it thus by creation (Rom. 2), then with the Jews at Sinai, then with believers in Christ. As before, see my ‘All Men Under Law’.

²⁹ There is a close parallel in Rom. 7:1-6. See my ‘Who’s Your Husband?’ Similarly, see Heb. 12:18-24. In opening a sermon on this passage, I asked the question: ‘Which mountain are you living on?’ This was especially apposite since I was preaching in a relatively flat area of the UK. I was, of course, speaking spiritually. Here the question is: ‘What law are you under? Who’s your bond-master?’ See my ‘Three Questions in One’.

³⁰ Do not miss the repeated *hina*, ‘in order that’, seven times in verses 19-23, taking the form (though not the content) of a chiasm, a writing style that uses a repetitive pattern for clarification and/or emphasis.

I have made myself a servant to all [men]’. Actually, it is stronger than this: Paul was willing to become a slave, *edoulōsa*, to enter into slavery, bondage (see NIV, NASB), in order to reach men with the gospel.

The apostle was defending his ministry, especially the seeming inconsistency of his behaviour, in face of the abuse he received for it (1 Cor. 9:3). As he explained, he was willing to do all he could to reach all men with the gospel, even to the extent of putting himself into slavery, although this made him appear inconsistent to others. Men are divided into two: Jews and Gentiles. The Jews have the law of Moses; they are under the law of Moses. The Gentiles do not have the law of Moses; they are not under the law of Moses, but they are under their own law. Very well. As the apostle explained, in order to reach the Jews, ‘those under the law [of Moses], I became as one under the law [of Moses]’, even though he himself was not under the law of Moses. To reach the Gentiles, ‘those outside the law [of Moses], I became as one outside the law [of Moses]’, even though he himself was *not* outside the law of God. In all this, contrary to appearances, Paul was acting consistently.

Do not miss the word play.³¹ When he was trying to reach Gentiles, Paul was willing to become *anomos*. But this did not make him *anomos*! What? No, indeed! The apostle was willing to become *anomos* (literally, here, act as one not under law; that is, not under Jewish law, the law of Moses), but this did not make him *anomos* (literally here, either lawless or law-less; that is, he was still under law, still obliged to keep the law that he was under).³² Throughout the passage he was talking about legal obligation, slavery. Even though he was acting as if he were free of law, treating law with cavalier abandon, playing fast and loose with law, he was, in truth, under law all the time. So much so, he

³¹ Scripture is full of word play (see Mic. 1:8-16; Matt. 16:18; Rom. 3:27; 8:2-4; 9:6; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 11:3-16; Gal. 3:24 with 5:18; Gal. 6:2,16; Phil. 3:3; 2 Thess. 3:11 (NIV); Philem. 10-11, and so on).

³² See below on 1 John 3:4, where *anomos* will play a vital part yet again.

immediately went on to explain what law it was that he was under throughout.³³

Though I have kept to the past tense – as did the apostle – the fact is we must read it in the present tense.³⁴ This is the apostle’s settled position in the new covenant. That is what he is saying. And, clearly, in the new covenant, the apostle is not under the law of Moses, but, even so, he is still in a law relationship with God. Indeed he is under law to God. As all the major versions express it, he is under the law of Christ. The law of God in the new covenant is the law of Christ.³⁵ And Paul is under it. And all this applies to every believer today.

Now, although all the major versions use ‘under the law of Christ’ or its equivalent, Paul did not actually use *hupo nomon*, ‘under law’, but *ennomos*, ‘in law’. So why do all the major translations, without exception, use ‘*under* law’? Because that is precisely what Paul is saying! I have already touched on the apostle’s love of word play. Is it possible that Paul is engaging in more of it here – between *ennomos*, ‘in law’ and ‘in Christ’? I think it very likely. In fact, I am sure of it. And to be ‘in Christ’, as I explained from Romans 6, is to be united to Christ. And part of this union with Christ is to be united to him as slave-master and husband, to be under Christ’s rule, reign, headship, lordship and governance; in short, to be under the law of Christ. Therefore it is perfectly correct – indeed, necessary – to speak of the believer being ‘under the law of Christ’ in 1 Corinthians 9. The major versions all agree. This is precisely what Paul is saying in the context.

Paul had already told the Corinthians that believers are slaves of Christ: ‘For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is

³³ Incidentally, given the lawless behaviour of the believers at Corinth, it is not difficult to see why Paul is stressing this point so vehemently here.

³⁴ Actually, ‘made myself a slave’ (verse 19) and ‘became’ (verse 20) are in the aorist –one act with lasting result. See Gordon D.Fee: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1991, pp427-428.

³⁵ See my *Psalm 119*. “‘The Law’ in “the Law of Christ””.

a bondservant of Christ' (1 Cor. 7:22). The apostle used *doulos*, the very word he used in Romans 6. The Corinthians would have got the point, even as they listened to the apostle's words (1 Cor. 9:19-23) being read to them. Slavery is the underlying theme of the paragraph in question. Believers are slaves of Christ. This can only mean that they are under his rule, governance and law.

C.K.Barrett translated 1 Corinthians 9:21 thus:

I became as if I were outside the law (though I am not free of legal obligation to God but under legal obligation to Christ)...

He commented:

This is one of the most difficult sentences in the [letter], and also one of the most important, for in it Paul shows how the new relation to God which he has in Christ expresses his debt of obedience to God... He is not free of legal obligation to God (*anomos theou*) but under legal obligation to Christ (*ennomos Christou*).

Barrett then spoke of 'the difficulty in which Paul found himself':

He must direct the Corinthians' obedience in the way of Christ, but he must do this without permitting Christianity to become a new law... He does not say that he is 'under the law of the Messiah' (*hupo ton nomon tou Christou*). Yet he is not 'God's lawless one' (*anomos theou*)... He is 'Christ's law-abiding one' (*ennomos Christou*)... He is not related to God by legal observance, but by grace and faith, and in Christ, only; but precisely in this non-legal relationship he is Christ's slave, who owes absolute obedience not to a code (though on occasion [too weak, DG], and with due caution, he can give precepts to his followers), but to Christ as a person, and to the absolute principle of universal love, which Christ both taught and exemplified.³⁶

I have just hinted at the Corinthians having to hear these words. For that is the fact of the matter. We should bear in mind that the Corinthians would have heard these words read aloud to them in

³⁶ C.K.Barrett: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (second edition), A&C Black, London, 1971, pp212-214. The law of Christ is not a list of rules but, as Barrett agrees (but too weakly, alas), the believer is under Christ's commands by the apostles through the Spirit in Scripture.

the first instance. What would they have taken away from that hearing? We don't have to guess! Read the passage aloud and see. Men are under law, both Jew and Gentile. All men are. The issue is, what is the law in question? The believer is not under the old law, the law of Moses. But neither is he outside or removed from law, free from all law. He is not law-less. The question is, what law is the believer under? That is the question. He is under law, but what law? The law of Christ. The believer's law is the law of Christ. As Femi Adeyemi put it:

Christou is [a] genitive of source, which indicates that this law comes from Christ. In verses 20-21 Paul drew a clear distinction between the Mosaic law and what he called 'the law from Christ'.³⁷

In looking first at the big picture, I am not suggesting we should ignore the minutiae of the words. Far from it. Indeed, I am now about to look at the exact words of the apostle.

It might be that *ennomos* has a nuance very slightly different to *hupo nomon*, but it is only a shade of a difference. In any case, the concept of being subject to law, keeping within the law, closely related to the Lord by law, is strengthened by the nuance. It is a far more intimate relationship than merely being 'under' the law of Christ. As Gordon D. Fee translated it, it speaks of being 'subject to law'.³⁸ I see the nuance reflecting the marriage aspect of the believer's union with Christ, rather than its slavery aspect. Believers are not only under Christ's law; they are in-lawed to Christ. Let me explain.

According to Joseph Henry Thayer, *ennomos* means 'bound to the law, bound by the law', while *en*, in this context, speaks 'of a person to whom another is wholly joined, and to whose power and influence he is subject... So used in the writings of Paul and of John particularly of intimate relationship with God or with

³⁷ Femi Adeyemi: 'The New Covenant Law And The Law Of Christ' in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Oct.-Dec. 2006) pp440-441. See Daniel B. Wallace: *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996, p113.

³⁸ Fee p430.

Christ, and for the most part involving contextually the idea of power and blessing resulting from that union’.

According to W.E.Vine, *ennomos* means “lawful, legal”, literally “in-law”, or, strictly, “what is within the range of law”, [and] is translated “lawful” (Acts 19:39) of the legal tribunals in Ephesus. Or “under law” in relation to Christ (1 Cor. 9:21)... not merely the condition of being under “law”, but the intimacy of a relation established in the loyalty of a will devoted to his Master’.

In addition, take *teleō*, ‘to do just as commanded, to accomplish, fulfil’ (Thayer), including : ‘It is accomplished’ (John 19:30). Compare that with *enteleō*, ‘to order, command to be done, enjoin’ (Thayer). I say the same applies to *ennomos*.

What is more, look at Romans 2:12-15. Literally: ‘For as many as without law (*anomōs*)... without law (*anomōs*)... and as many as in law (*en nomō*)...’.³⁹ Do not miss the *en nomō*. Not a million miles away from *ennomos*, is it? And in the context of Romans 2:12-15, when Paul spoke of those *en nomō* he was referring to Jews, those under the Mosaic law.⁴⁰ Jews were *en nomō* (the law of Moses); believers are *ennomō* (the law of Christ). Yet again, take Romans 3:19: ‘Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law’; literally, ‘to those in the law’, *tois en tō nomō*.⁴¹

So, yet again, I disagree with Braye – this time when he says that “under” is not correct [but] the idea conveyed here is in-ness, not “under”.⁴² He is making a dichotomy and a distinction where none exists. Having done that, he goes on to build far too much on it, and ends up with an unbiblical conclusion; namely, that the believer is not under the law of Christ, when the opposite is the case. The believer, by reason of his union with Christ,

³⁹ *anomōs* is an adverb, though not always translated as such.

⁴⁰ Of course, those under any law who break that law will be judged by that law. But the point I am making is that *en nomō* means under law, in law, governed by law, ruled by law, subject to law. I say the same applies to *ennomos*.

⁴¹ And so it goes on: *ek nomou*, literally ‘out of law’ (Rom. 4:14), or *ek tou nomou*, literally ‘out of the law’ (Rom. 4:16); that is, speaking of those who ‘live by the law’, ‘adhere to the law’.

⁴² ‘Five Reasons’.

being ‘in Christ’, is in-lawed to Christ. And this means that he is under the law of Christ, intimately bound to Christ as his loving slave-master. The believer yields a willing obedience to his Saviour’s law. But he most definitely is under it.⁴³

And there is something else we should bear in mind. This is the only place in the entire Bible where the word *ennomos* is used in this form. As a consequence, it would not be wise to build a massive case on this single use, especially if it ends up flying in the face of the context (and parallel passages) – where the slavery involved in being ‘under law’ is clearly the main thrust of the apostle’s argument. Indeed, slavery is stronger than merely being ‘under law’.

Moo:

The Christian is no longer bound to the Mosaic law; Christ has brought its fulfilment. But the Christian *is* bound to ‘God’s law’ (1 Cor. 9:20-21; cf. ‘God’s commands’ in 1 Cor. 7:19 and 1 John *passim*). ‘God’s law’ is not [now], however, the Mosaic law, but ‘Christ’s law’ (1 Cor. 9:20-21; Gal. 6:2), because it is to Christ, the fulfiller, the *telos* of the law (Rom. 10:4), that the Christian is bound... Failure to observe this distinction [between the law of Moses and the law of God] has resulted in considerable confusion and misunderstanding.⁴⁴

On 1 Corinthians 9:20-21, Moo:

Paul’s point... is that he as a Christian is not subject to the rule and authority of the Mosaic law, but he willingly gives up that freedom, and conforms to that law when evangelising Jews... Paul wants to guard against any idea that he has no more obligations to the law of God. Indeed, while not being ‘under the law’, he recognises a continuing obligation to ‘God’s law’, in the form of ‘Christ’s law’ (the Greek is *ennomos Christou*). The conceptualisation of this text provides as neat a summary of my view [Moo’s, and mine – DG] of the law as the New Testament

⁴³ I am convinced that those I oppose here make a mountain out of the molehill of the absent *hupo*. As I have said, in 1 Cor. 9 Paul is speaking of the believer under the law of Christ but avoiding the pitfall of likening that law to the law of Moses. But, as I say, he is not really arguing about the law in 1 Cor. 9, but talking about evangelism.

⁴⁴ Moo: ‘The Law’ pp217-218, emphasis his.

affords. It suggests that ‘God’s law’ comes to his people in two forms: to Israel in the form of ‘law’, *torah*, and to Christians in the form of ‘Christ’s law’. Here we find the ‘new-covenant theology’ emphasis on two contrasting covenants worked out in terms of two different ‘laws’. But the key question remains: How different are they?

To answer this question, [Moo said], we return to Galatians [in particular, to Gal. 5:13 – 6:2]. To recapitulate: ...The teaching of the New Testament on the matter of the law of God is neatly summarised in the distinctions that Paul draws in 1 Corinthians 9:20-21: the law of Moses, the *torah* (‘law’ simply), was given to the people of Israel to govern them until the coming of the Messiah; since his coming, the people of God are governed by the ‘law of Christ’. Biblical law, in other words, is firmly attached to the temporal two-covenant structure that is the hallmark of ‘new-covenant theology’.⁴⁵

In short, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 teaches that the believer *is* under the law of Christ.

Galatians 5:1

The context is king. In the allegory of Sarah and Hagar (Gal. 4:21-31), we are expressly told that the law on Mount Sinai was a covenant of bondage, in contrast to another covenant (Gal. 4:21,24-27); namely, the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled in the new. The covenant represented by Hagar is the law, the Mosaic covenant. Writing to those who desired ‘to be under the law’ – that is, the Mosaic law – Paul directed his argument against the Judaisers who wanted believers to go under that covenant. That covenant, being a covenant of bondage, he would have none of it:

For freedom Christ has made us free; stand fast therefore, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage (Gal. 5:1, footnote).

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (NASB).

The opening note of Galatians 5 is vital. Freedom! Liberty! LIBERTY! But what is this freedom? Freedom from sin, death

⁴⁵ Moo: ‘Galatians’ pp20,27.

and the law; in particular, here, the law, the law of Moses, not excluding the possibility of pagan law (Gal. 4:8-11; Col. 2:6-23).

Do not miss the word play on 'yoke'. 'The yoke of bondage' or 'slavery' is the Mosaic law (Acts 15:10; Gal. 4:24) (or, pagan law, of course), and this is contrasted to Christ's 'easy' yoke and 'light' burden (Matt. 11:28-30), Christ's law.⁴⁶ The royal law of liberty (Jas. 1:25; 2:8), the law of Christ, is no 'yoke of bondage'!

Paul is teaching that believers cannot possibly be progressively sanctified by the law of Moses. But this is no problem. After all, believers are not under the law of Moses. His point is that they should never entertain the suggestion that they should go back to it (or to pagan law). Believers, united to Christ, are released from the law of Moses, the law of bondage, having died to it. They no longer live in the age of law, but in the age of the Spirit and grace. So don't go back to the law of Moses, that yoke of bondage!

Clearly, none of this has a word to say against the claim that the believer is under the law of Christ. Braye's categorical deduction that the believer is not under the law of Christ is wrong. Galatians 5:1 has nothing to say on that score. Nothing at all!

But we can go further. While there are risks in arguing from silence, nevertheless the fact that Paul does not rule out submitting to the law of Christ at this point is, in itself, not without significance. 'Don't go to the law of Moses', he said. 'You are free'. Now if he knew that believers are under no law whatsoever, freed from all law, why did he not go directly for the root of the tooth, and not merely content himself with the crown? What I mean is, if he had said: 'Don't listen to these Judaisers and go to the law of Moses. After all, you are free from all law. So, when I come to talk about the law of Christ in a short while, remember you are not even under that law. You are free from all law, under no law, not even the law of Christ. Consequently, don't go back to any law'. How simple, how unequivocal that

⁴⁶ Incidentally, do not miss the parallel with 1 John 5:3: 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome'. I will return to 1 John.

would have been! But he did not say anything of the sort! I don't build anything on this silence, but I notice it.

In any case, as I have shown, Paul is blunt: believers are not under Moses' law, the law of bondage, and must never listen to teachers who urge them to go under it. But that has nothing to say about the believer and the law of Christ.

Now glance at the way the apostle proceeds in Galatians 5 and 6. Having dealt with justification by faith and not by the law (Gal. 5:2-12), Paul moves on :

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law [of Moses] is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'... But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh... But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law [of Moses]. Now the works of the flesh are evident... But the fruit of the Spirit is... And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If [since] we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit... Fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 5:13 – 6:2).

The contrast, the argument, could not be clearer: the believer is no longer under the Mosaic law, but in the Spirit, and by 'walking in the Spirit', 'keeping in step with the Spirit', he must and will fulfil the law of Christ.⁴⁷ As John G.Reisinger put it: 'What does it mean to "walk in the Spirit"? Walking in the Spirit is nothing less than walking in obedience to the revealed will of God in Scripture'.⁴⁸ And that is the law of Christ. 'A natural consequence of walking in the Spirit [is that it] fulfils the law of Christ'.⁴⁹

In light of Galatians 4:21 – 5:1, the link between 'the believer' and 'the law of Christ' is highly charged, to say the least. The Galatians would have got the point! We know the sort of thing the Judaisers were telling them about the law of Moses: '*It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law*

⁴⁷ Gal. 6:2 could be a statement or a command, but this is immaterial to the question in hand. See below.

⁴⁸ John G.Reisinger: *Studies in Galatians*, New Covenant Media, Frederick, 2010, pp408-409.

⁴⁹ Reisinger p432.

of Moses' (Acts 15:5). The Galatians would have recognised what Paul was telling them: 'It is necessary... to keep the law of Christ'.

The word 'fulfil' (Gal. 6:2) is vital here. But before I move on to that verse, let me quote Moo with reference to what we have seen thus far:

'Under law' designates the status antithetical to the status of the believer. To be 'under grace', free children of God, 'led by the Spirit', means to be living in the new age of redemption, and no longer in the old age that was characterised by, and dominated by, the law... Life in the Spirit is put forward by Paul as the ground of Christian ethics, in contrast to life 'under law'.⁵⁰

'Under law' here, in the context, clearly means 'under the Mosaic law'. The believer is not under Moses' law. But this certainly does not signify that life in the Spirit rules out being under the law of Christ! The apostle has not even mentioned the law of Christ at this stage. Moo went on:

[But] if Christians are no longer 'under the law',⁵¹ what will guide and empower their conduct? Paul answers in terms of the Spirit and (surprisingly, perhaps) the law [of Moses]. Christians enjoy the indwelling presence of the Spirit. By 'walking' by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and 'keeping in step with the Spirit' (Gal. 5:25), believers will develop those character traits that should mark God's people... In Galatians 5:14, [the apostle] proclaims that 'the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself"'. How does the love command of Leviticus 19:18 'fulfil' the law? It may mean simply that [love] is so central to the law that one is not really obeying the law if love is not present. Paul highlights love, not to displace the law in any sense, but to point to its true meaning and essence. But the language of 'fulfil' suggests [it does more than suggest!] that Paul means something [far] more radical than this. Vital to understanding Paul's perspective on the law is to recognise a principal distinction in his writings between 'doing' and 'fulfilling' the law [of Moses]. Nowhere does Paul say that Christians are to 'do' the law, and nowhere does he suggest that

⁵⁰ Moo: 'The Law' p215.

⁵¹ Note Moo's view, as mine, 'the law', 'the law of Moses'.

any but Christians can ‘fulfil’ the law [of Moses].⁵² ‘Doing’ the law refers to that daily obedience to all the commandments that was required of the Israelites. ‘Fulfilling’ the law, on the other hand, denotes that complete satisfaction of the law’s demands that comes only through our identification with Christ (Rom. 8:4) and our submission to that commandment which Christ put at the heart of his new-covenant teaching: love. It is the love of others, first made possible by Christ (hence the ‘new’ commandment, John 13:34), that completely satisfies the demand of the law. The other reference to ‘law’ in this concluding section of Galatians comes in Galatians 6:2.⁵³

Exactly! And ‘that other reference to “law”’ is, of course, in utter contrast to the law of Moses; it is the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2

If [since] we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit... and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 5:25 – 6:2).

The Judaisers were pressing the Galatian believers to keep the law of Moses, to go *under* it, and the Galatians were hankering after it. Paul, arguing his case resolutely, tells his readers that they are released from the law of Moses (along with pagan law), and must on no account go back to it. Does that leave them lawless? Not a bit of it! As he tells them, they are not under the law of Moses but must fulfil the law of Christ; in other words, that they are under the law of Christ.⁵⁴

Let me explain. By ‘fulfilling the law of Christ’, the apostle is, in fact, speaking of believers obeying that law. In truth, it is

⁵² We may go further. In every believer, by Christ’s work, by ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’, ‘the righteous requirement of the law [of Moses] [is] fulfilled’ (Rom. 8:2-4).

⁵³ Moo: ‘Galatians’ pp20-21.

⁵⁴ In what follows, as I have said, it does not matter whether we should read Gal. 6:2 as a command or a statement; on the issue in hand, it amounts to the same thing: believers are under the law of Christ. To avoid cluttering the text of my article, I will stick to ‘command’. If any reader prefers it in the statement form, he can make the necessary adjustment in the article. In any case, ‘let us keep in step with the Spirit’ is a command. ‘Let us’ is not a suggestion!

stronger than that, much stronger. Paul does not use *plēroō*, ‘to fulfil’, as did Matthew concerning Christ (Matt. 5:17), as he might well have done, since it would have been more than enough to make the point. Why would *plēroō* have done? Because Christ came to fulfil the law of Moses: ‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish [them] but to fulfil (*plērōsai*) [them]’ (Matt. 5:17), he declared. And to do that, he had to come *under* the law of Moses: ‘God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born *under* the law (*hupo nomon*)’ (Gal. 4:4); in other words, Christ was under the law to submit to it, and obey and keep it. ‘Fulfilling the law’ inevitably involves ‘being under the law’. Thus the believer is under the law of Christ and has to fulfil it; because he has to fulfil it, he must be under it.⁵⁵ In other words, *plēroō* would have been perfectly adequate for Paul’s purpose.

But, in fact, he uses *anaplēroō*, ‘to fill to the brim, to fully satisfy, to observe perfectly’.⁵⁶ The case could not be more strongly made. The believer is most definitely under the law of Christ, and he has to carry it out to the full, keep it thoroughly. He has to fulfil it entirely. He is obligated to obey that law. He is to copy his Master, Christ. As Christ, filled with the Spirit (Matt. 12:18; Luke 4:18; John 3:34; Acts 10:38), came under the law of Moses in order to fulfil it, so the believer has the Spirit and is under Christ’s law in order to fulfil it by walking in the Spirit. ‘Just as Christ’ is a powerful new-covenant argument (John 13:15,34; 15:12; 17:18; Eph. 5:2,25, and so on). It underlies Galatians 5:25 – 6:2.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ In Rom. 8:1-4, Paul is dealing with justification leading to progressive sanctification. But that passage does not undermine the point I have made concerning Gal. 6:2. In fact, it strengthens the claim that the law of Christ involves both the inward work of the Spirit and the Scriptures.

⁵⁶ Thayer.

⁵⁷ Christ, of course, completely fulfilled the law; believers, in their progressive sanctification, do not. Nevertheless, they must aim for perfection, full maturity, complete likeness to Christ (Matt. 5:48; 2 Cor. 13:9,11; Eph. 3:19; 4:13,21-24; Phil. 3:12-16; Col. 1:28; 4:12; Heb. 13:21; Jas. 1:4; 2 Pet. 3:18).

Now for the obvious but frequently ignored fact: Galatians 6 is the climax of the letter. In light of this, the juxtaposition of ‘the law of Christ’ and ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:2,16), carries great weight. The old Israel was under the old law of Moses; the new Israel is under the new law of Christ.⁵⁸

None of this, of course, in any way diminishes the absolute necessity of the inward working of the Spirit. As I say, according to the apostle, this fulfilling of the law of Christ is only possible to those who keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:25 – 6:2 captures the believer’s experience of the law of Christ in a nutshell. The believer, obeying Scripture (here, an apostolic command), walking in the Spirit, fulfils Christ’s law. In other words, the law of Christ is not reduced to a list of external commands, with those commands having to be kept by believers in their own power! The believer’s obedience is only possible by the inward work of the Spirit. Therefore, I agree with Braye, but with one important change, when he states:

The new law differs in its very essence and nature [from the old law]. The new law is not a list of words – commands, imperatives, statutes, or instructions – expressed externally on tablets of stone (or on a page).

Here is the way I would put it:

The new law differs in its very essence and nature [from the old law]. The new law is not *merely* a list of words – commands, imperatives, statutes, or instructions – expressed externally on tablets of stone (or on a page).

But I would go on to make sure that people got the full picture:

But neither is it the inward work of the Spirit *without* those external commands, imperatives, statutes and instructions, or with them *tacked on the outside of* Christ’s law.

As the believer keeps the apostolic command to fulfil the law of Christ, he will, since he lives by the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). *And it is equally true the other way round:* as he walks in the Spirit, he will obey his Master’s revealed will,

⁵⁸ See my *Christ* pp314-320,552-554.

including his commands, as recorded and issued by the apostles in Scripture. Both dovetail perfectly. It is not either/or; it is both. The believer has the Spirit *and* is under the Scriptures, the apostolic commands; he is under those commands *and* the Spirit writes those commands in his heart.

As Graeme Goldsworthy put it:

The sanctification of the Christian is... in one sense automatic. We cannot take hold of Christ by faith for our justification without the Holy Spirit. It is the same Holy Spirit that both enables the sinner to believe the gospel and also works in us the fruit of sanctification. In another sense, sanctification is not automatic in that the Spirit works through our minds and wills. All the admonition and exhortation in the Bible is God's way of involving us in the [progressive] sanctifying work of the Spirit. To be human is to be responsible. To be Christianly human is to respond with mind and will to the gospel with good works... [Take] Philippians 2:6-11... Here we see sovereignty and responsibility knit together in such a way that the outworking of salvation day by day – good works – is immediately the result of human effort, but ultimately the work of God in us... What Christ did for us has its outworking in all believers as sanctification. What we already are in Christ... begins to take shape in our experience as the Holy Spirit conforms us more and more to the reality which is in Christ. The Christian struggle is against the world, the flesh and the devil. When Paul concludes the Ephesian letter... (Eph. 6:10-18), he does not take up a new subject. The practical matters of daily life in a hostile world are the spiritual warfare against principalities and powers. In urging us to put on the full armour of God, Paul is not departing from the perspective that is constantly his; namely that, by standing firm and clinging to the truth of our justification, we live the life of sanctification.⁵⁹

And then Wayne Grudem:

The role that we play in [progressive] sanctification is both a passive one in which we depend on God to sanctify us, and an active one in which we strive to obey God and take steps that

⁵⁹ Graeme Goldsworthy: 'The Gospel in Revelation' in *The Goldsworthy Trilogy*, Paternoster, Milton Keynes, reprinted 2014, pp238-239,281-282.

will increase our sanctification... Unfortunately today, this passive role in sanctification... is sometimes so strongly emphasised that it is the only thing people are told about the path of sanctification. Sometimes the popular phrase: ‘Let go, and let God’ is given as a summary of how to live the Christian life. But this is a tragic distortion of the doctrine of sanctification... [There is the] active role which we are to play... There are many aspects to this active role that we are to play in [progressive] sanctification... It is important that we continue to grow both in our passive trust in God to sanctify us and in our active striving for holiness and greater obedience in our lives. If we neglect active striving to obey God, we become passive, lazy Christians. If we neglect the passive role of trusting God and yielding to him, we become proud and overly confident in ourselves. In either case, our [progressive] sanctification will be greatly deficient. We must maintain faith and diligence to obey at the same time. The old hymn wisely says: ‘Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey’.⁶⁰

So I say again: The believer has the Spirit *and* is under the Scriptures, the apostolic commands; he is under those commands *and* the Spirit writes those commands in his heart. If this is not so, we shall be left judging every case of right and wrong by motive and not by action. What a terrible thought! If the law of Christ has no external Scriptures at its heart, what is the objective standard by which to judge this ‘walking in the Spirit’? Have we simply to accept the rightness of any believer who retorts that the Spirit moved him to act in such and such a way? What happens to church discipline under such a system? And that is only one question.⁶¹

In order to illustrate the point, consider this recent written conversation. A man was questioned about what he had written:

⁶⁰ Wayne Grudem: *Systematic Theology...*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1994, pdf link pp655-657.

⁶¹ How will we distinguish between the Spirit and the flesh, the Spirit and Satan? After all, we know he can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). How will we decide between two professing believers who urge diametrically opposed courses of action, each claiming that they are led by the Spirit?

You said: ‘If all things are lawful to Paul, all things are permitted – even sexual immorality’. What in the world did you mean by that statement? How do you reconcile this statement with your affirmation that Christians should attempt to follow and conform to the exhortations in the New Testament?

The answer came back:

[For Paul] the ultimate arbiter is Christ in him. He does not always have time to open his Bible if he has forgotten a verse, to see what he should do! He walks by the Spirit and knows that whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Really? On this ground, if a professed believer parried a reprimand by saying the Spirit had moved him to the action in question, and that he had faith enough to believe it was right, what the proper answer would be, I am at a loss to imagine.⁶²

Furthermore, if the Spirit has inwardly given believers everything necessary, why did the Spirit ensure that they have the external, written Scriptures? Are they a luxury, or an essential? Are they merely useful, or a necessity? Are they Christ’s advice for the believer, or are they Christ’s royal law of the believer’s liberty (Jas. 1:25; 2:8)?

I am convinced that both the written word and the inward Spirit are essential, and bound together. Nowhere is my position better exemplified than in 1 John 2:

⁶² In a further response, the writer explained: ‘It depends on the definition of sin. I suggested that, for those under the law, sin is the transgression of that law. So if you can find a law that says: “Sexual immorality is a sin”, then to those under that law it is a sin, and they have *ipso facto* broken that law. However for those not under law, but who are led by the Spirit, as Paul was, what the law says is irrelevant (in that immediate context)’. There then followed a nuanced discussion on 1 Cor. 6:12,18. For my part, in this I see a failure to distinguish things indifferent and commands. I repeat a note in the Introduction; namely, in another discussion, this same writer stated: ‘The spirit has pre-eminence over the written word, or the letter’. Even if we replace ‘spirit’ with ‘Spirit’ it sounds little better! Do not miss the confusion in the unscriptural link (the virtual equivalence) between ‘the written word’ and ‘the letter’.

You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth... I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie – just as it has taught you, abide in him (1 John 2:20-27).

A superficial reading of this text could lead to the view that the Spirit is all, and there is no need of any human or external teaching. And yet that cannot be! If that were the case, John would have no need to write and tell these believers what they already knew perfectly well by the inward work of the Spirit. John's words are not merely useful; they are vital. The apostles were blessed with direct revelation. We are not. We have revelation through the apostles as recorded in Scripture.

Getting back to Galatians, as Moo said:

The interpretation of the phrase 'law of Christ' is central to my [Moo's and mine – DG] argument. Unfortunately, Paul provides little contextual information.⁶³ We have, however, already noticed that Paul uses similar language in 1 Corinthians 9:21, where, the context suggests [it makes it plain!] 'the law of Christ' is distinguished from the Mosaic law. Coupled with the claim that Christians are no longer 'under the (Mosaic) law', this makes it unlikely [this is far too weak] that the 'law of Christ' is the Mosaic law interpreted and fulfilled by Christ. Rather, the phrase is more likely [to be] Paul's answer to those who might conclude that his law-free gospel provides no standards of guidance for believers. On the contrary, Paul says, *though no*

⁶³ Is it because the early believers knew full well what the apostle was talking about? Was it obvious to them? Would they not, quite naturally, think that what the apostle was writing was an integral part of Christ's law? Certainly, he had taken great pains to establish his apostolic credentials right at the start of the letter (Gal. 1:1 – 2:21). And this is general throughout the New Testament. Witness the number of times he goes out of his way to establish and maintain his apostolic authority, and speak of the apostolic foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:19-22; 3:5, and so on). Notice the way Peter later speaks in exalted, but proper, terms of Paul's writings (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

longer directly responsible to Moses' law, Christians are bound to Christ's law.

I pause. This is the point: 'Though [they are] no longer directly responsible to Moses' law, Christians are bound to Christ's law'. In other words, they are under Christ's law. Exactly so.

Moo went on:

In what does this 'law' consist? Since... Galatians 5:14..., the demand for love [must be] a central component of the 'law of Christ'. But it is unlikely that Paul confines the law to this demand alone [certainly not!], for, as we have seen, Paul also stresses in this context the fruit-bearing ministry of the Spirit. Coupled with the centrality of the Spirit in Paul's teaching about what it means to live as a Christian, this strongly suggests [it is stronger than that!] that the directing influence of the Spirit is an important part of this law of Christ... Jeremiah 31:31-34... Ezekiel 36:26-27. It is more difficult to determine whether the law of Christ includes specific teachings and principles... I think it highly probable [it is certain!] that Paul thought of the law of Christ as including within it teachings of Jesus and the apostolic witness, based on his life and teaching.

Moo, in part, quoting Richard N. Longenecker:

The law of Christ 'stands in Paul's thought for those prescriptive principles stemming from the heart of the gospel (usually embodied in the example and teachings of Jesus), which are meant to be applied to specific situations by the direction and enablement of the Holy Spirit, being always motivated and conditioned by love'.

Does the 'law of Christ' include Mosaic commandments? Of course. We may expect that everything within the Mosaic law that reflected God's 'eternal moral will' for his people is caught up into and repeated in the 'law of Christ'.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Douglas J. Moo: 'The Covenants and the Mosaic Law: The View from Galatians', Affinity Theological Study Conference: *The End of the Law?*, February, 2009, pp20-22, emphasis mine. On the whole, a fine statement, but, as so often, Moo could have been stronger at certain points. As for Longenecker, the Mosaic commandments are frequently used by Christ and his apostles, but they are always nuanced, used as a paradigm, and never as straight rules. As before, see my 'The Law on the Believer's Heart'.

As Adeyemi put it:

The identity of *nomos* in Galatians 6:2 is shaped by the genitive qualifier, *tou Christou*. This may be a genitive of source, suggesting that this ‘law’ comes from Christ. In this sense *nomos* in Galatians 6:2 is ‘the standard set by Christ’ for believers to follow as a new standard or system of conduct... The... form of *nomos* and the genitive phrase *tou Christou* affirm the distinct nature of this ‘law’ as coming specifically from Christ.⁶⁵

Braye, I submit, is wrong. Galatians 5 and 6 confirm that the believer really *is* under the law of Christ.

1 John 3:4

I quote the entire paragraph to give the context, highlighting the critical words:

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. ***Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness (anomian); sin is lawlessness (anomia).*** You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother (1 John 3:1-10).

⁶⁵ Adeyemi pp440-441. See Wallace p113.

The relevant Greek is *ho poiōn tēn hamartian, kai tēn anomian poiei; kai hē hamartia estin anomia*; literally, ‘practices sin also lawlessness practises; and sin is lawlessness’. Here we reach the crux of the text for our purposes. Now *anomia* can mean ‘the condition of one without law – either because he is ignorant of it, or because he has a certain law and is violating it and showing contempt for it’.⁶⁶ The word bears these alternative meanings in Scripture. How can we decide? By the context, as always; always by the context.

In certain contexts, the words *anomia*, *anomos* and *anomōs* speak of being destitute of the law in question, whatever that law may be. Let me give three examples.⁶⁷

Take Acts 2:23. Peter, preaching Christ, told the Jewish crowd on the day of Pentecost: ‘You have taken [him] by lawless hands, have crucified [him], and put [him] to death’ (NKJV; see also ESV). The Jews were responsible for crucifying Christ but, to do the dirty work, they used Roman hands, Gentile hands, ‘lawless hands’. The NASB, translating the phrase, ‘by the hands of godless men’, has a marginal note: ‘Lawless hands, or, men without the law; that is, heathen’. The NIV correctly notes: ‘Of those not having the law (that is, Gentiles)’. Peter, steeped in Jewish thought, was using the phrase, ‘lawless men’, in the Jewish sense. The men he was talking about were ‘men without the law’. That is to say, they were law-less, outside the law of God, the law of Moses; they were Gentiles. The Jews boasted that they had the law of Moses. They were the only people to have it (Deut. 4:7-8,32-34; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:14; 3:1-2; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:20-21). All the rest were ‘law-less’. So, as Peter said, Christ was crucified by the Jews (who had the law of Moses) making use of the Gentiles (who did not have the law of Moses, the without-the-law people) to do the work. See also Matthew 20:18-19; and Galatians 2:15, where ‘Jews by nature’ are contrasted with ‘sinners of the Gentiles’ or ‘Gentile sinners’ (NIV).

⁶⁶ See Thayer.

⁶⁷ In these cases, it would be better to describe those involved as law-less and not lawless; that is (Moses’) law-less.

‘Sinners’ and ‘Gentiles’, in such a context, means those who are law-less, outside the law of Moses, beyond the pale.

As Leonard Verduin put it: The ‘lawless’ men of Acts 2:23 were not:

...lawless in the sense of ‘wicked’, but ‘lawless’ in the Jewish sense – ‘without the law’.⁶⁸ In other words, they were law-less... The Jews prided themselves on being law-havers, the only people to whom God had given his law; this put all the rest in the ‘lawless’ category... [Christ was crucified by the Jews who used] the Gentiles, the without-the-law people... [as] their tool.⁶⁹

Now for the second text, 1 Corinthians 9:21. I have already looked at it. Here are the relevant words: ‘To those outside the law (*anomois*) I became as one outside the law (*anomos*) (not being outside the law (*anomos*) of God but under the law of Christ’; literally, ‘to those without law (*anomois*) as without law (*anomos*) (not being without law (*anomos*) to God...)...’. The Gentiles did not have the law of Moses; they were, in that sense, law-less. They were outside the Jewish pale.

And then Romans 2:12: ‘For all who have sinned without the law (*anomōs*) will also perish without the law (*anomōs*)’. Clearly, the apostle is referring to the Gentiles who, though they were sinners, did not have the law of Moses. In that sense, they were law-less. They were outside the Jewish pale.

So much for the first meaning of the words in question: law-less.

But, of course, in other contexts, the words *anomia*, *anomos* and *anomōs* speak of having a certain law, but showing contempt for it, and violating, breaking or transgressing it, whatever that law may be. Here are some examples:

Then will I declare to them: ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness (*anomial*)’ (Matt. 7:23).

⁶⁸ Note Verduin’s proper use of ‘the’ law.

⁶⁹ Leonard Verduin: *The Anatomy of a Hybrid: A Study in Church-State Relationships*, The Christian Harmony Publishers, Sarasota, 1992, p71.

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers (*anomian*) (Matt. 13:41).

You are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (*anomias*) (Matt. 23:28).

He was numbered with the transgressors (*anomōn*) (Luke 22:37). Blessed are those whose lawless deeds (*anomia*) are forgiven, and whose sins are covered (Rom. 4:7).

Just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness (*anomia*) leading to more lawlessness (*anomian*), so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification (Rom. 6:19).⁷⁰

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness (*anomia*)? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

That day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness [some mss, *hamartias*, ‘of sin’; others, *anomias*, ‘of lawlessness’] is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness (*anomias*) is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one (*anomos*) will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:3-8).

The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless (*anomois*) and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is

⁷⁰ How can anybody be *more* without law than without it? *more* law-less than law-less? They can, of course, be *more* lawless; that is, *more* sinful, showing *more* contempt for, and violation of, the law they are under. Omitting the ‘more’ (literally not in the Greek, but obviously the apostle’s meaning), does not alter the case. To be law-less is to be law-less. Take a line; it is either straight or it is not. It cannot be *more* straight.

contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted (1 Tim. 1:9-11).

Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness (*anomias*) and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Tit. 2:13-14).⁷¹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness (*anomial*) (Heb. 1:9).⁷²

I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins [and their lawlessnesses (*anomiōn*)] no more (Heb. 8:12).

I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds [*anomiōn*] no more (Heb. 10:17).⁷³

Righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless (*anomois*) deeds that he saw and heard)... (2 Pet. 2:7-8).

In all the above, the issue is not which law is being referred to in any particular passage. That, at this stage, is immaterial. Rather, the issue is that the words *anomia*, *anomos* and *anomōs*, in these passages, mean breaking the law which the people in question are under; any law. Law-breaking in this context is sin, and *vice-versa*. That is what the words *anomia*, *anomos* and *anomōs* are referring to: men violating, showing contempt for, the law that they are under.

Richard Chenevix Trench:

While *anomos* is once at least in the New Testament used negatively of a person without law, or to whom a law has not been given (1 Cor. 9:21)... [and] of the greatest enemy of all law, the Man of Sin, the lawless one (2 Thess. 2:8), [nevertheless] *anomia* is never... the condition of one living without law, but always the condition or deed of one who acts contrary to law... Thus the Gentiles, not having a law (Rom. 2:14) might be charged with sin, but they, sinning without law (Rom. 2:12;

⁷¹ Christ did not need to die to redeem us from any lack of law. All he had to do was issue that law, give it to us! It was our law-breaking, our sin, that made redemption essential.

⁷² If the word ought to be *adikian*, this verse plays no part in this debate.

⁷³ Note the same Greek word in Heb. 8:12 and 10:17, where it is translated 'sins' and 'lawless deeds', respectively.

3:21), could not be charged with *anomia*. It is true, indeed, that, behind that law of Moses which they never had, there is another law, the original law and revelation of the righteousness of God, written on the hearts of all (Rom. 2:14-15).⁷⁴

William Edwy Vine:

anomos ‘without law’, also denotes ‘lawless’ [see] Acts 2:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:4,8; [see] 2 Peter 2:8 where the thought is not simply that of doing what is unlawful, but of flagrant defiance of the known will of God.

anomia, akin to *anomos* is most frequently translated ‘iniquity’ (2 Thess. 2:7)... In 1 John 3:4... the real meaning of the word [is] ‘everyone that does sin (a practice, not the committal of an act) does also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness’. This definition of sin sets forth its essential character as the rejection of the law, or will, of God and the substitution of the will of self.⁷⁵

As I say, the context must determine which of the two meanings is correct in any particular passage.

So what about 1 John 3:4? The context could not be plainer; that is why I quoted it from verse 1 to verse 10. Here are the relevant words: ‘Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness (*anomia*)... sins... sin... sinning... practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous... sinning... sinning... the works of the devil... sinning... sinning... practice righteousness’. John is not talking about mere *possession* of a law, or lack of it, but the *practice* of actual sinning and actual righteousness, the doing of works, obedience or disobedience to the law in question. These people are not law-less, but lawless; they are kicking over the traces, showing contempt for the law in question, the law which they are under. They have a law, they are under that law, they are obliged to obey it, but they break it, they do not keep it. We are talking about contempt of law, violation of law, transgression of law.

⁷⁴ Richard Chenevix Trench: *Synonyms Of The New Testament*, section 66.

⁷⁵ W.E.Vine: *Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words*. Vine, ‘an English biblical scholar, theologian, and writer... traces the words of the Bible... back to their ancient *koinē* Greek root words and to the meanings of the words for that day’ (Wikipedia).

I say this not because all the major translations agree – but they do! – but because the context absolutely demands it. John is not concerned with possession of the law in question. He takes that for granted, as a given. All men are under one law or another.⁷⁶ Rather, he is concerned with a man's attitude to the law in question; in particular, his doing (or otherwise) of that law. Unrighteousness, sin, wickedness, in this connection is not a man's lack of law; it is failure to keep the law, whatever that law may be.

And as for the 'law' in question, just read the entire letter: it is full of commands and instructions and imperatives concerning Christ and his gospel. The very word 'commandment' comes seven times in the letter. It is impossible to miss the overtones of John 12:47-50; 13:1 – 16:33. John's words in 1 John 3:1-10 could almost be coming directly from the mouth of Christ himself. In the context, it is patent that John means the law of Christ – he can only mean the law of Christ. He never mentions the law of Moses once in his entire letter. And in the context of 1 John, it is clear that John is telling believers that they have to keep the law that they are under. He is urging them to obey that law, he is commanding them to keep it. I cannot read his words in any other way. As the apostle says elsewhere in his letter:

By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I know him', but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked (1 John 2:3-6).

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:1-3).

He certainly raises his doctrine to the highest possible pitch:

⁷⁶ As before, see my 'All Men Under Law'.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God (1 John 3:8-10).

Now, although the phrase is not mentioned, this can only be the law of Christ. No other law will fit the bill. As I hinted, John had remembered Christ's discourse in John 12:47-50; 13:1 – 16:33 (brought in any case to his memory by the Holy Spirit in accordance with Christ's promises – John 14:26; 16:12-15). Christ's commands, his law, are synonymous in this context, and obedience to the law of Christ (the commands of Scripture) is proof positive of the inward work of the Spirit. To claim to be led by the Spirit and yet not obey Scripture is a contradiction in terms.

In short, although the believer is not under the law of Moses, he is not law-less; he is under the law of Christ. And he is obligated to keep it. The believer really is free – in particular, set free from sin (Rom. 6:22), and free from the law of Moses (Gal. 5:1). But liberty is not licence. There is a rule for believers to live by. They are 'under law towards Christ', that 'perfect law of liberty'. They are ruled by 'the law of Christ', following 'this rule', 'walk[ing] by the same rule', having taken Christ's 'easy yoke', being taught by the Spirit 'to observe all things' which Christ commanded (Matt. 11:28-30; 28:20; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2,16; Phil. 3:16; Jas. 1:25; 2:12). Obedience to that law is essential.

If we cite the entire context of 1 John 3:4, the position could not be more explicit:

You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth... I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie – just as it has taught you, abide in him... See

what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are... Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness (1 John 2:20-27; 3:1-4).⁷⁷

The law of Christ, once again, virtually in a nutshell! In short, the believer *is* under the law of Christ, and this comprises the inward work of the Spirit *and* the external, written Scriptures.

And this passage is not unique. Consider Paul's letter to Titus. Note his opening emphasis upon his apostolic authority for issuing binding instruction, rule and command for Titus, in the first instance, then, through him, the believers in Crete, and then for all believers through this age:

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour (Tit. 1:1-3).

Having laid the foundation, the apostle proceeds to set out detailed instruction. Titus has to appoint elders in every church, every one of whom 'must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it' (Tit. 1:10). Titus himself has to 'teach what accords with sound doctrine' (Tit. 2:1), he has to 'urge' (Tit. 2:6), to 'declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you' (Tit. 2:15), 'remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient...' (Tit. 3:1), 'to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote

⁷⁷ The theme continues in 2 and 3 John. Notice how many times John speaks of 'truth'. 'Truth' is inward (2 John 2), but clearly, by his use of 'command', 'walk in obedience to commands', 'teaching of Christ', it is also objective.

themselves to good works’ (Tit. 3:8). ‘Older women... are to teach what is good, and so train the young women’ (Tit. 2:3-4). In short: ‘Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works’ (Tit. 3:14).

And yet, with all that, the apostle, in the same letter, can declare:

The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

Once again, we have the combination of the inward work of God’s grace, this grace teaching believers from within, coupled with the outward apostolic command which has to be enforced by local elders in the *ekklēsia*, with believers mutually instructing and edifying one another, all the while taking responsibility for their own personal obedience, and all of it set out in the compass of the Scriptures.

Conclusion

Nothing that I have said in this article should be taken as casting any personal reflection on the integrity or practice of those who hold the view I have been trying to refute. I say this, not for the men in question – they know me too well to suspect any such thing – but for those who are observing this, as it were, from a distance. It is their exegesis, not the men themselves, that I have criticised. For the reasons I have given, I say their exegesis is faulty. Naturally, bad exegesis leads to a wrong conclusion. And a wrong conclusion inevitably leads to serious consequences. And, in this case, the consequences, I fear, are severe indeed. I have been conscience-driven to speak about what I see as the tendency, the appearance, the seeming-ness of their view, and where, if not checked, it might lead in the years to come. I wish I

had not needed to write this article. Yet I have felt compelled to do it.

I am thinking of the rising generations – yes, plural – and about the effect, the likely effect, as I see it, of these views on them. It is not merely what is said (or, often more important, what is not said), but the big picture, the overall impression. How is this novel teaching likely to be heard and used by those not sufficiently sophisticated to grasp all its technical nuances? And I include myself in saying that; this new view is too subtle for me, I am afraid.⁷⁸ My main concern is that those who, in years to come, not grasping – or not bothering with – all the nuances, will eagerly latch onto the notion of ‘no law’, ‘no rule’, ‘no commandment’ in the law of Christ, and run with it. And run where?

Consequently, while we preach our liberty in Christ, while we stress the inward power of the Spirit, let us not forget to stress our obligation and responsibility to obey our Master, and our accountability to him for every thought, word and deed (Matt. 12:36-37; Rom. 2:16; 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10, and so on). Let us make sure we give due weight to such warning passages as Hebrews 2:1-3; 6:4-12; 10:19-39. Let us not forget Christ’s solemn words of warning (John 15:1-8) lying, as they do, right at the heart of his extended discourse in John 12:47-50; 13:1 – 16:33. Let us not forget that the majority (if not all) the warnings given by Christ, in his lifetime, were to professing believers. This is a vital part of the big picture of the New Testament. Unless we are crystal-clear in what we say on such issues, there is a real danger of unbridled talk of liberty degenerating into licence. Similarly, an excessive unbalanced emphasis on the inevitability of the Spirit’s inward work in the believer might well lead to antinomianism or the

⁷⁸ As one example of the sort of thing I mean, take the very recent article, ‘The Law of Christ’ (christmycovenant.com), by John Dunn. He opens: ‘Whatever may be said about the law of Christ, it must be acknowledged that it does not mean that the saints are now under the tutelage/enslavement of a new body of covenanted legal regulations sprinkled with blood, as was the old-covenant community, with blessings/cursing contingent upon their conditional obedience’.

notion of perfectionism.⁷⁹ These disgraceful aberrations have occurred, even in apostolic days. We should fear Jude 4 worse than the plague: ‘For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ’.

Since the view I have been addressing has, to me at least, all the appearance of driving a wedge between the Spirit and the word in the law of Christ, I have spoken of the centrality and necessity of Scripture to the law of Christ. But just because I have stressed the written word, this must not be taken as an indication of any weakening of my commitment to the inward work of the Spirit. It is not the Spirit *or* the word; it is both at one and the same time. But in this article I have had to stress the place of Scripture.

Then again, the law of Christ, I am convinced, speaks of who Christ is, of what Christ approves. But how can we know what that is? By the Spirit directly, or by the Spirit through the written word? Surely we only know Christ, who he is, and what he approves, by what he has established through his apostles by the Spirit in the Scriptures. Consequently, we dare not suggest anything which might even hint at a divorce between Christ and the written word. On the contrary, we must jealously guard, at all costs, the indissoluble link between the two, right at the heart of the new-covenant law of Christ.

I also want to lay emphasis on the fact that the believer’s obedience to the commands of Scripture takes the form of a duty, an obligation, a definite act of intention, will and obedience on the believer’s part. True, this obedience is only possible by the power of the Spirit, but the believer does not live a life of obedience to Scripture as some sort of reflex or subconscious response to the Spirit. The believer’s progressive sanctification is not monergistic.⁸⁰ This does not in any way imply walking in the

⁷⁹ Will it end up with the Orwellian “‘Law” bad; “Spirit” good’ and so encourage believers to adopt Situation Ethics?

⁸⁰ Monergistic sanctification states that the believer’s progressive sanctification is the work of God through the Holy Spirit alone, as

power of the flesh. I am talking precisely in the terms which the apostle himself uses:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

I know the advocates of the view I am criticising will protest that they do emphasise obedience to written Scripture. I fully acknowledge the fact. But this is so vital a matter, I must stress my concern yet again. It is the *tendency* of words which is so important here. We all know that it is not what people are told or read; it is what they think they are hearing or reading. True, in the end, the responsibility lies with the hearer and reader, but the publisher, the writer or the preacher has to do all he can to make sure his hearers and readers do not get the wrong end of the stick. I take my own medicine, I hasten to add.

But I go further; there is no smoke without fire. Whatever their protests, these writers do give the very definite impression, at least to me, that they are driving a wedge between the internal Spirit and the external word. Unless they are prepared to use words such as ‘command’ and ‘law’ and ‘rule’ when talking about the law of Christ, despite their protests to the contrary, they are giving the impression, to put it no stronger, that they regard such conformity as a tack on, an ‘alongside’, and not something absolutely integral to the law of Christ.⁸¹

opposed to synergistic sanctification, which argues that the human will cooperates with the Spirit.

⁸¹ In correspondence with one who disagrees with me on this issue, this is what he wrote: ‘All of Scripture serves to teach us and to provide guidance and instruction on what living as those who are united to Christ is supposed to look like because we are yet imperfect. This does not mean we must not obey what Christ commands us. But our drive to obey comes from within’. I agree – *except* – I would strengthen it by bringing in the sense of obedience under the law of Christ. After all, however occasional the phrase may be in Scripture, ‘the law of Christ’ is a scriptural phrase! So I would re-word my correspondent’s statement: ‘All of Scripture serves to teach us and to provide guidance and

I also think that they, while rightly emphasising the discontinuity of the covenants, are failing to stress sufficiently the continuity of Scripture. The contrast that is drawn in the New Testament between the letter and the Spirit is primarily eschatological. Whereas the law of Moses was written on stone, the law of Christ is written on the heart. Yes, but the Scriptures remain a constant throughout. How often Christ quoted them to the Jews who also would have seen no gap between them and the stone tablets. In the new covenant, we must not divorce the inward work of the Spirit from the external written Scriptures.

Yet again, I think I can hear the howls of disbelief and protest. Yes, I grant that they do speak of the necessity of obedience to Scripture, but, as I keep saying, I am thinking of the tendency down the line. And that, I am afraid, compels me to say that their doctrine is dangerous; dangerous because it flows from a wrong exegesis.

In what follows, I am not, I hasten to add, trying to taint anybody by association. Perish the thought! But there is nothing new under the sun. In writing this article, I have been reminded of the Anabaptist controversy between the mainstream and the Spiritualists, who stressed the inward Spirit to the detriment of the external word.

And not only the Anabaptists. I feel I have been engaging in something like a re-run of the antinomian controversy in the UK in the 1640s,⁸² during which, in 1647, Thomas Collier published the second edition of his *The Exaltation of Christ in the Days of the Gospel*. He dealt with those who argued that since ‘Christ has promised to write his laws in the hearts of his people, and that they shall be all taught of God, and that he would send his Spirit which would teach them all things, [then] for those thus taught of God, it is too legal for them to walk by Scripture’. Collier replied.

instruction (*and governance and rule as an integral part of Christ’s law*) on what living as those who are united to Christ is supposed to look like because we are yet imperfect. This does not mean we must not obey what Christ commands us. But our drive to obey comes from within’. *This is no splitting of hairs!*

⁸² I am speaking historically here when I talk about the antinomian controversy.

He agreed ‘that God makes this promise good, [and] he writes his law in the heart where he once comes in a way of grace’. Yes, but it was his opponents’ conclusion that he did not like. So he wrote against it: ‘God... puts his Spirit in [his people], makes them fully willing to walk according to the rule of Scripture, for the Spirit and the word do answer [correspond with] each other’. Collier talked much of ‘the rules of Christ... the rule of Scripture... this rule... the rules of Scripture... Those whom Christ teaches, he teaches to walk according to the rules that he prescribes [for] them’. Collier went on to say that such men as he was writing against can fail to ‘rightly divide between law and gospel, between legal rules and gospel rules... the rules of Christ’, and between the two covenants.⁸³ I fear I am reading something very like this today. And that is why I have written.

And then there is the old Keswick concept of sanctification: ‘Let go, and let God’. Once again, while my opponents might well protest that, since they state that Scripture must be obeyed, there should be no danger of such an aberration, alas, I am not so sanguine.

In summary, then, as I have shown, the view that I have been contesting leans on translations which, on more than one occasion, and on key texts, go against the mainstream translators. Those who are minded to adopt this new view should, at the very least, be aware of the fact. If I adopted a minority translation, a translation adopted by no major translation, I would be prepared to do so, prepared to take the full consequences of my action, *but I would give a very serious health warning to all who might follow me*. I also repeat that the view in question stems from faulty exegesis, and leads to a conclusion that is strikingly at variance with the overall impression given to us when we look at the big picture of Scripture.

I hope nobody thinks me too big for my boots when I say that I have written out of love for my brothers with whom I disagree. I have also written out of love for the watching, wondering and bewildered saints, both in the New Covenant Grace group and the

⁸³ Collier pp88,91-93. I am grateful to Chris Hanna for giving me a pdf of Collier’s book, and drawing my attention to the relevant section.

wider public. Furthermore, I have written out of love for sinners, unbelievers. But above all, I have written out of love for Christ and his truth. I believe I can say all this with a sincere heart. Please forgive the inordinate length of this article. It is the seriousness of the matter that has moved me to make my position as clear as I can.

Finally, I close with David's words, nuanced, of course, by the new covenant:

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way (Ps. 119:97-104).⁸⁴

Nothing would please me more than the thought that all of us who advance new-covenant theology could join our hands, our hearts and our voices, and echo David's words, and do it with as much vehemence as we extol our liberty in Christ by the inward working of his Spirit. I pray that my article may further this end. I have written for it. I have certainly *not* written to stoke the fire of controversy which is already burning too fiercely.

⁸⁴ See my *Psalm 119*.