

THE “LAW OF CHRIST” IN PAULINE THEOLOGY AND NEW TESTAMENT ETHICS

by
Paul Hartog¹

Todd Wilson declares that the expression “law of Christ” continues to “bedevil interpreters.”² The phrase “introduces serious cognitive dissonance and disrupts perceived theological patterns.”³ As pronounced in a previous *DBSJ* article, “The secondary literature on ‘the law of Christ’ is immense.”⁴ Summarizing the major alternatives, Charles Talbert explains that the “law of Christ” has been interpreted as (1) Christ’s ethical teachings, (2) the love commandment, (3) Christ’s example of burden-bearing and/or self-sacrificial surrender, (4) the Mosaic Law as determined or transformed and then fulfilled by Christ, (5) Christ’s power within believers enabling the fulfillment of the law, and (6) some combination of the above.⁵ Other interpretations of the “the law of Christ” have included the Torah of the New Covenant (or the “Zion Torah”), the eschatological law of the Messiah (or the “messianic law”), the person of Christ himself, and the “prescriptive

¹Dr. Hartog is Professor of Theology at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary in Ankeny, IA.

²Todd A. Wilson, “The Law of Christ and the Law of Moses: Reflections on a Recent Trend in Interpretation,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 5 (2006): 123. Wilson takes an entire paragraph to amass descriptions of the expression (“law of Christ”) in secondary literature: “a rare appellation,” “most remarkable,” “arresting,” “strange,” “very curious,” “striking,” “extremely baffling,” “doubly astonishing,” a “breathtaking paradox,” a “much-puzzled-over term,” an “astonishing oxymoron,” “a phrase more likely to mislead than to instruct” (“Law of Christ,” 123–24).

³*Ibid.*, 124.

⁴Paul Hartog, “The Integrative Role of the Spirit in the Ethics of Galatians,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 16 (2011): 29, n. 61; cf. Thomas Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 101; John M. G. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 125–35; Frank Thielman, *Paul & the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994), 140–44.

⁵See Charles H. Talbert, “Freedom and Law in Galatians,” *Ex Auditu* 11 (1995): 24. Talbert himself concludes that “some combination of these suggestions is the most probable explanation” for Paul’s use of “the law of Christ” and “the law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus” (“Freedom and Law,” 24). Cf. Hartog, “Integrative Role of the Spirit,” 29, n. 61; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 261.

principles stemming from the heart of the gospel.”⁶ Broad explanations of the expression include “the way Christ exercises his lordship” through his Spirit, “the revelation made in Christ as a way of life,” “the new way of life given by Jesus,” and “the will of Christ for believers today.”⁷ More precise identifications of the “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2) include the economic support of others (cf. Gal 6:6–10) and the restoration of erring brethren (cf. Gal 6:1).⁸

This essay will develop the “law of Christ” as the self-giving and burden-bearing “love of neighbor” as taught by Christ, as exemplified by Christ (chiefly in his Gospel sacrifice), as empowered by the Spirit of Christ, and as communally observed within the Body of Christ.⁹ This comprehensive, Christocentric definition develops rather than contradicts the brief definition of Myron Houghton, who linked the “law of Christ” in Gal 6:2 with Jesus’s command to love others.¹⁰ I will develop this fuller understanding of the “law of Christ” by examining

⁶Femi Adeyemi, *The New Covenant Torah in Jeremiah and the Law of Christ in Paul*, Studies in Biblical Literature 94 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 16, 18; Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1997), 15; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 275–76.

⁷See Michael Winger, “The Law of Christ,” *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000): 544; Enda McDonagh, “Towards a Christian Theology of Morality: Morality and Christian Theology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 37 (1970): 187; James P. Ware, *Paul’s Theology in Context: Creation, Incarnation, Covenant, and Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 185, 196. Cf. the summary of Lewis Sperry Chafer’s views in Adeyemi, *New Covenant Torah*, 115.

⁸John Strelan argues that the “burden-bearing” of Gal 6:2 is most likely economic, and that the “law of Christ” is the dominical saying reflected in Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7; 1 Cor 9:14; 1 Tim 5:18; *Did.* 13.2, and probably Gal 6:6. See John G. Strelan, “Burden-Bearing and the Law of Christ: A Re-Examination of Galatians 6:2,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 267–70, 273, 276; see also Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 419–20. For a critique of Strelan’s financial/economic interpretation of Gal 6:2, see Edward M. Young, “Fulfill the Law of Christ’: An Examination of Galatians 6:2,” *Studia biblica et theologica* 7 (Oct 1977): 36–37. Restoring an erring brother finds a Synoptic parallel in Matt 18:15–20 (see C. H. Dodd, “Ἐννομεῖς Χριστοῦ,” in *More New Testament Studies* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 146–47; Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001], 153).

⁹Jesus Christ is normative in interpreting how humans ought to behave (McDonagh, “Towards a Christian Theology of Morality,” 196). The Messiah has superseded the Torah (Brian Wintle, “Paul’s Conception of the Law of Christ and Its Relation to the Law of Moses,” *Reformed Theological Review* 38 [1979]: 45).

¹⁰“Christ’s command for believers to love one another (Gal. 6:2)” (Myron Houghton, *Law & Grace* [Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2011], 90, 116, 135). This present essay is also appearing in a Festschrift honoring Dr. Myron Houghton: *Law, Grace, and Justification: Essays Exploring the Theology of Romans*, ed. Douglas Brown and Ken Rathbun (Ankeny, IA: Faith Publications). I thank the editors of this Festschrift and *DBSJ* for allowing the essay to be published in two places concurrently.

the Apostle Paul’s rich and robust theology delivered in Galatians 5–6, 1 Corinthians 9:21, and elsewhere.¹¹ Yet I will also fit this interpretation within a broader framework of NT theological ethics, including materials from the Gospels and the General Epistles. The article thus moves from exegetical work in the Pauline epistles to the broader issue of the coherence of NT ethics. In such a developed clarification of the “law of Christ,” we find “the key to Pauline ethics, and perhaps also to Christian ethics as a whole.”¹² Finally, I will demonstrate how this full-orbed understanding of the “law of Christ” illumines multiple passages in the book of Romans not commonly associated with the concept.

Background: Paul and the “Law”

Biblical texts employ the term “law” (Greek: νόμος) with multiple, divergent references.¹³ Within the Pauline writings in particular, the use of νόμος is indeed complex and multi-faceted. As Houghton notes, “Another reason that this discussion is so difficult is because Biblical passages seem to say contradictory things about the believer’s relationship to law—even when ‘law’ is being used in the same way.”¹⁴ Houghton specifically contrasts Romans 6:14 and 13:8–10.¹⁵ Romans 6:14 succinctly declares, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace”.¹⁶ Later in the same epistle, Romans 13:8–10 exhorts, “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

¹¹Cf. Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 101–4.

¹²James D. G. Dunn, “‘The Law of Faith,’ ‘the Law of the Spirit’ and ‘the Law of Christ,’” in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 82.

¹³Houghton, *Law & Grace*, 89–90. See also Femi Adeyemi, “The New Covenant Law and the Law of Christ,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (2006): 440; Wayne G. Strickland, “The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View,” *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 246–48. On νόμος sometimes being used “only metaphorically or rhetorically” as something akin to “rule” or “principle” (Rom 3:27; 8:2), see Adeyemi, *New Covenant Torah*, 11; Strickland, “Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 247; David W. Hay, “The Law of Christ and ‘Our Deepest Difference,’” in *The Church in the Modern World*, ed. George Johnston and Wolfgang Roth (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967), 73–74. Contrast Dunn, “‘Law of Faith,’” 65, 72.

¹⁴Houghton, *Law & Grace*, 90.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶All Scripture quotations are from the ESV, unless noted otherwise. The diatribe material that immediately follows is telling: “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” (Rom 6:15). With its explicit contrast between being “under law” and being “under grace,” this text “clearly presents a contrast between law and grace” (Strickland, “Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 263).

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” According to these texts, believers are not under the “law,” yet the one who loves others has “fulfilled the law,” because the command to love one’s neighbor sums up the law.

Houghton earlier weaves Romans 13:8–10 into a passage surveying broader NT ethics:¹⁷

Spirit-controlled believers are motivated to fulfill the righteous standard of the law (Rom. 8:1–4), not as an obligation inspired by terror of God (1 John 4:17–19), but as an opportunity for obedient children prompted by respectful reverence (1 Pet. 1:14–19).... In Romans 8:4, these demands are described as “the righteous requirement of the law.”... All of the following must be taken into consideration. *First*, the primary purpose of the law is to show sinners that they really are sinners and guilty before God.... *Second*, believers are not under the law as a guide for Christian living. *Third*, while believers today are not under the law as a guide for Christian living, they are *under* grace. This means grace does make demands upon believers. *Fourth*, these grace principles for Christian living may properly be described as “the righteous requirement of the law.” So in Romans 13:8, Paul can instruct the believers in Rome, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.” It is in this sense that God’s law does have a relationship to believers today.¹⁸

Within this passage we have a fuller synthesis of Paul’s framework. Loving one another fulfills the “law” in that it fulfills the demands of the “grace principles for Christian living” which reflect “the righteous requirement of the law,” and Spirit-controlled believers are thus motivated to fulfill this “righteous standard of the law.”¹⁹ In this manner, the apostle distinguishes “between the law itself and the righteous standard it upholds.”²⁰ I wish to add to this discussion by particularly focusing upon the Pauline understanding of the “law of Christ,” a greatly debated phrase.²¹

¹⁷The quoted passage appears in a wider context of Houghton’s discussion of “grace principles” (Houghton, *Law & Grace*, 12–19).

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 15. The scriptural material within the quotation comes from the NKJV. On grace making demands, see F. F. Bruce, “The Grace of God and the Law of Christ: A Study in Pauline Ethics,” in *God and the Good*, ed. Clifton J. Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 25–26; cf. Titus 2:11–14. Houghton underscores how differing constructions of the relationship between law and grace distinguish branches of Christianity. See also Hay, “Law of Christ,” 68–85.

¹⁹On “fulfillment” as abolition and/or fruition, see Ellen T. Charry, “The Grace of God and the Law of Christ,” *Interpretation* 57 (2003): 35.

²⁰Houghton, *Law & Grace*, 119; cf. Rom 2:14–15, 26–28.

²¹Some have translated the “law of Christ” as the “Torah of the Messiah” (Jacques Goldstain, “The Law of Christ,” *SIDIC* 19 [1986]: 15; cf. Ellen T. Charry, “The Law of Christ All the Way Down,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 [2005]: 164; Charry, “Grace of God,” 36).

Pauline References to the “Law of Christ”

There are two key Pauline verses using language directly related to “the law of Christ,” although many others seem to be affiliated conceptually.²² These two verses are 1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2, which employ the phrases ἔννομος Χριστοῦ and τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, respectively.²³

1 Corinthians 9:19–21 declares:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, 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 [ἀνόμοις], I became as one outside the law [ἄνομος] (not being outside the law [ἄνομος] of God but under the law of Christ [ἔννομος Χριστοῦ]) that I might win those outside the law [ἀνόμους].”

C. H. Dodd noted that the concept of the “law of Christ” is “implied” in this passage from First Corinthians—the expression ἔννομος Χριστοῦ “implies the existence of a νόμος Χριστοῦ.”²⁴ Believers are “under the law of Christ” (ἔννομος Χριστοῦ), which is a blessing rather than a burden. Therefore, Helmut Thielicke has labeled the phrase “under the law of Christ” as “the most felicitous and precise designation imaginable.”²⁵

The only “explicit” use of the exact phrase “law of Christ” appears in Galatians 6:2.²⁶ “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ [τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ].”²⁷ Ernst Bammel considered the phrase to be “coined in an almost playful manner.”²⁸ Graham Stanton calls this text “one of the most interesting and difficult verses in Paul’s most terse and profound letter.”²⁹ While some have interpreted the

²²Ernst Bammel, “Νόμος Χριστοῦ,” *Studia Evangelica* 3, ed. F. L. Cross, Texte und Untersuchungen 88 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), 127.

²³William Lillie finds the 1 Cor 9 passage to be “much more suggestive” (*The Law of Christ: The Christian Ethic and Modern Problems* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1956], 19).

²⁴Dodd, “ἔννομος Χριστοῦ,” 137. See also Thielman, *Paul & the Law*, 141.

²⁵Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 1: *Foundations*, ed. William H. Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 137.

²⁶Dodd, “ἔννομος Χριστοῦ,” 137.

²⁷See John Charles Guldin, “A Study of the Pauline Concept of the ‘Law of Christ’ in Galatians 6:2” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary), 1978.

²⁸Bammel, “Νόμος Χριστοῦ,” 128. Bammel adds, “But it was in no way destined to cover the whole problem of Pauline ethics.” He downplays, however, parallel conceptual material in Romans.

²⁹Graham N. Stanton, “What is the Law of Christ?,” *Ex Auditu* 17 (2001): 47.

“law of Christ” as the sum total of Jesus Christ’s moral teachings, the Apostle Paul rarely cites such dominical material directly.³⁰ In this specific verse, fulfillment of the “law of Christ” results from bearing the burdens of others.³¹ Gustáv Bölskei reasons, “Taking on each others’ burdens means that we allow Christ’s intentions to become reality in our lives.”³² This burden-bearing is an embodiment of serving others in love (Gal 5:13–14), following the norm of Christ’s own self-donation (Gal 1:4; 2:20; 3:13; 4:4–5).³³ As James Ware insists, “*the cross is the foundation of the command to love.*”³⁴

Christ, through his “paradigmatic self-giving,” becomes the “normative pattern” and “life pattern” of self-surrender and self-donation.³⁵ The action of bearing one another’s burdens forms a “communal practice of loving mutual service” that serves as “a particular example of loving the neighbor.”³⁶ As a particular instantiation, burden-bearing does not exhaust “the full content” of the law of Christ.³⁷ It is simply one example of the “mutual caring of the kind exemplified in Christ’s death.”³⁸

³⁰Stanton, “What is the Law of Christ?,” 52; Winger, “Law of Christ,” 538. When explicitly delineated, the Johannine “commandments” seem to entail believing in (and abiding in) Christ and loving one another. See Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Johannine Commandments: 1 John and the Struggle for the Johannine Tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1990).

³¹This stems from the καὶ οὕτως construction (Strelan, “Burden-Bearing,” 267). In context, the passage ventures into the economic support of others (Gal 6:6–10).

³²Gustáv Bölskei, “‘Bear One Another’s Burdens, and in This Way You Will Fulfill the Law of Christ’ (Gal 6.2),” *Reformed World* 47 (1997): 231. Bölskei adds, “But this only becomes a possibility for us, only becomes the joyful and liberating good news, when we know that there is someone who can carry endless burdens, who took on and coped with the sins of the world.”

³³John R. Meyer, “The Law of Christ and Experiencing God’s Love,” *Theology* 108 (2005): 116.

³⁴Ware, *Paul’s Theology in Context*, 189 (italics original); cf. 196.

³⁵Richard B. Hays, “Christology and Ethics in Galatians,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 275, 287–88. Of course, behind the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ stands a foundational “divine self-giving” (see Enda McDonagh, “The Natural Law and the Law of Christ,” in *Ius sacrum*, ed. Audomar Scheuermann and Georg May [Münich: Schöningh, 1969], 70). Grammatically, the genitive construction of the “law of Christ” can be understood as explanatory (i.e., “the law [norm] which is Christ”). See Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “The Unwritten Law of Christ Gal 6:2,” *Revue biblique* 119 (2012): 213, 220, 231; cf. Goldstain, “Law of Christ,” 15). But it seems best to interpret the genitive as source or origin (Ware, *Paul’s Theology in Context*, 183–84).

³⁶Hays, “Christology and Ethics,” 286; Dunn, “‘Law of Faith,’” 76.

³⁷Ernest DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 329–30.

³⁸R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, “Sacred Violence and ‘Works of the Law’: ‘Is Christ Then an Agent of Sin?’ (Galatians 2:17),” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 67.

The “Law of Christ” in the Context of Galatians 5–6

As noted above, the exact phrase νόμος Χριστοῦ only appears in Galatians 6:2, which states, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” NT interpreters have long disputed the exact nature of Paul’s concept of “the law of Christ,” an “extremely baffling” and “much puzzled over” term.³⁹ To approach a sound answer, we will now examine the wider context of Galatians 5–6.⁴⁰ Houghton himself unpacks Galatians 5, leading up to Galatians 6:2: “Love, as a concern for the well-being of another, is to be our motivation for service (v. 13). If we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (v. 16) or be under the law (v. 18). Against the fruit of the Spirit there is no law (v. 23), and true believers have been set free from sin’s control (v. 24) and thus are able to yield to God’s Spirit (v. 25). In this way, they fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).”⁴¹

Therefore, Galatians 6:2 appears within an extended passage that connects love with the work of the Spirit. The preceding chapter discusses eagerly waiting for the hope of righteousness by faith through the Spirit (Gal 5:5), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25), being led by the Spirit (Gal 5:18), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), and living in the Spirit (Gal 5:25).⁴² As Dodd argued, “living in the Spirit” is distinguishable from “walking in the Spirit,” in that “the former is the consequence of the latter.”⁴³ The fifth chapter of Galatians discusses “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6), serving one another through love (Gal 5:13), the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Gal 5:14), and love as the first facet of the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22).⁴⁴ In

³⁹In-Gyu Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, Journal for the Study of the NT Supplement Series 81 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 173.

⁴⁰As with many Pauline letters, the key paraenetic section of Galatians follows a more doctrinal section (Dodd, “Ἐννομος Χριστοῦ,” 138; Young, “Fulfill the Law of Christ,” 34–35). Thielman maintains that the “law of Christ” as “love for neighbor” is already implied in Gal 2:18: by refusing to eat with believing Gentiles, one proves to be a “transgressor” of the law of Christ. “It was precisely this law of love for neighbor that the men from James, Peter, Barnabas and the rest of the Jews had violated in Antioch, and it is this law that Paul would transgress if he were to build again the wall that had once divided Jew from Gentile (2:18)” (Thielman, *Paul & the Law*, 142; see also Frank Thielman, *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity* [New York: Crossroad, 1992], 19).

⁴¹Houghton, *Law & Grace*, 95–96.

⁴²While Gal 5:3 speaks of those who “keep the whole law” and Gal 5:14 refers to those in whom “the whole law is fulfilled,” the former (in context) refers to a meticulous observance while the latter refers to a full realization (see Graham Stanton, “The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ: Galatians 3:1–6:2,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 115).

⁴³Dodd, “Ἐννομος Χριστοῦ,” 139.

⁴⁴Various scholars, of course, have connected Gal 5:14 with Gal 6:2 (Rodney Reeves, “The New Moses of the Law of Christ: Paul in Galatians,” *Criswell Theological Review* 12 [2015]: 81; Stanton, “Law of Moses,” 115). “It seems most promising to identify the law of Christ with the admonition to love one another (Gal. 5:14), for

context, there seems to be a palpable connection between the “love commandment” and the “law of Christ.” As Johann Albrecht Bengel affirmed, “Lex Christi, lex amoris.”⁴⁵

Paul exhorts the Galatians, “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 5:14).⁴⁶ The perfect tense *πεπλήρωται* often signifies “an event completed in the past time with extant results.”⁴⁷ Many commentators have noted a contextual and conceptual connection between this verse and Galatians 6:2.⁴⁸ If so, the “law of Christ” seems to be associated with the command “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This single command distills the essence of the Mosaic Law’s relational directives.⁴⁹ “Following the law of Christ is always a question of love, of learning how to love as God loves.”⁵⁰ Thomas Schreiner surmises, “The heart and soul of the Pauline ethic is love.”⁵¹

Galatians 6:2 specifically affiliates the “law of Christ” with the particular act of bearing the burdens of others. To shed more light on this verse (and following the lead of Richard Hays) one may turn to material further afield in Galatians for additional elucidation.⁵² Galatians 1:4 reminds the readers that Jesus “gave himself for our sins.” Galatians 2:20 declares, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for

there is a clear link between Galatians 5:14 and 6:2” (Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 102).

⁴⁵See Strelan, “Burden-Bearing,” 266.

⁴⁶Stanton reasons that “terse or enigmatic statements in Galatians seem to be expressed more fully or more clearly in Romans” (Stanton, “Law of Moses,” 99). More specifically, he compares Galatians with the “further step” in Rom 13:8–10 (Stanton, “What Is the Law of Christ?,” 57). Thus Romans explains “more fully”—yet “indirectly”—what Paul meant by “the law of Christ” (Stanton, “Law of Moses,” 116). Rodney Reeves claims that scholars tend to “run to Romans to fill in the gaps” because the logic of Paul’s argument can be difficult to follow (Reeves, “New Moses,” 72).

⁴⁷Adeyemi, *New Covenant Torah*, 207. Cf. the use of *πεπλήρωκεν* in Rom 13:8. The verb “fulfill” can mean “to bring to realization,” “to bring to completion,” “to sum up” (Winger, “Law of Christ,” 539–40, 544), and the lexical range even includes “to confirm” (Strickland, “Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 257).

⁴⁸Thomas Schreiner combines insights from Gal 5–6, 1 Cor 9, and Rom 13 (*40 Questions*, 101–4).

⁴⁹Gilbert Meilaender, “The Decalogue as the Law of Christ,” *Pro Ecclesia* 27 (2018): 338; Strickland, “Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 278.

⁵⁰Meyer, “Law of Christ,” 114.

⁵¹Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 105.

⁵²Hays, “Christology and Ethics,” 277. Reeves interestingly contends that just as the readers of Galatians considered the Mosaic Law to be mediated by angels, Paul saw himself as a conveyer of the law of Christ, thus implicitly comparing himself to an angelic mediator (cf. Gal 4:14). See Reeves, “New Moses,” 76–82.

me."⁵³ The believer lives out his life by faith (Gal 2:20), which may parallel a "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6).⁵⁴ And the object of this faith is Christ (the Son of God) who loved me and gave himself on my behalf. Put differently, in love he bore my burdens.⁵⁵ As Galatians 3:13–14 describes, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.⁵⁶ Therefore, within the broader context of Galatians, Paul seems to view the OT command "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" through the Christocentric focus of the Gospel—the burden-bearing Son of God is the ultimate example of love for others.⁵⁷

The Gospels

As mentioned above, Galatians 5:14 declares, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"⁵⁸ One is reminded of Jesus' interaction with the Pharisaic lawyer in Matthew 22 who asked about the greatest commandment of the law. Yet most commentators have been hesitant to connect Paul's understanding of

⁵³Paul derived ethical paraenesis from union with Christ. See Adeyemi, *New Covenant Torah*, 5; Rom 6:1–6; 1 Cor 6:15–17. Cf. Knox Chamblin, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and the New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 188–89.

⁵⁴In Phil 3:7–9, Paul contrasts "a righteousness of my own that comes from the law" and "the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

⁵⁵"All that Christ has become to the believer incurs a new kind of obligation on him. As Christ bore the burdens of others, so the believer must do the same. This is the 'law' of true Christian relationships" (Donald Guthrie, *Galatians*, New Century Bible [London: Oliphants, 1977], 143).

⁵⁶The following material (Gal 3:13–4:31) explains that the law was a παιδαγωγός that led to Christ (see Moo, "Law of Moses," 213–14). "But now that Christ has come (or, to say roughly the same thing, faith has come), believers are no longer confined under that custodian but are adopted children of God free from law, whose lives are governed by the Spirit of Christ" (Meilaender, "Decalogue as the Law of Christ," 341). See also Dunn, "Law of Faith," 81.

⁵⁷According to Raymond Collins, the "Christosalphic mystery in its entirety" grounded Paul's ethical appeals (*Christian Morality: Biblical Foundations* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 37. Adeyemi, who parallels the "law of Christ" with "the New Covenant Torah," describes the concept as "instructions that are sourced in the person and work of Christ and principles that are in line with the purpose of His atoning sacrifice given by the Spirit" (*New Covenant Torah*, 208).

⁵⁸While the Jewish tradition speaks of the "ten words" of the Decalogue, Gal 5:14 speaks of the Law being embodied in "one word" (see Young, "Fulfill the Law of Christ," 32). In Matt 5:17, Jesus declares, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." The word "fulfill" in this verse has been interpreted in various ways, ranging from "uphold" or "sum up," to "deepen" or "extend" or "find full expression," to "complete" or "bring to final realization." The context supports some type of antithetic sentiment (Moo, "Law of Moses," 204–5).

“the law of Christ” with any specific teaching of Jesus. They observe that Paul rarely interacts with specific paraenetic Jesus materials. Nevertheless, the Pauline corpus does pass on some Jesus traditions (cf. 1 Cor 7:10–11; 9:14; 11:2, 23–26; 1 Thess 4:2, 9; 1 Tim 5:18).⁵⁹ Moreover, Paul is able to differentiate between his own paraenesis and material coming from Jesus in 1 Corinthians 7:10–12.⁶⁰ James Dunn considers the Pauline emphasis upon the love of neighbor to be “a conscious echo of Jesus’ teaching.”⁶¹ Frank Thielman deduces that Paul’s love ethic “almost certainly originates in the teaching of Jesus.”⁶² And Ware similarly concludes that “the source” of Paul’s teaching on the command to love “is the teaching of Jesus.”⁶³

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus propounded the “dual love command” of loving God and loving others.⁶⁴ Matthew 22:34–40 is worth quoting in full:

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”⁶⁵

⁵⁹Cf. 1 Cor 7:25; 1 Thess 4:15; 5:2; Dodd, “Ἐννομος Χριστοῦ,” 142–43; Dunn, “Law of Faith,” 79; Burton, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 330; André Feuillet, “Loi de Dieu, Loi du Christ et Loi de L’Esprit d’après les épîtres pauliniennes,” *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980): 45–51. Echoes of Jesus’s teaching may also appear in Rom 12:14, 17; 13:7; 14:13–14, 17–19; 1 Cor 13:2; 1 Thess 5:13, 15; 2 Thess 3:2–3. See David L. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul: The Use of the Synoptic Tradition in the Regulation of Early Church Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); Nikolaus Walter, “Paul and the Early Christian Jesus-Tradition,” in *Paul and Jesus: Collected Essays*, ed. A. J. M. Wedderburn, Journal for the Study of the NT Supplement Series 37 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 51–80; James D. G. Dunn, “Jesus Tradition in Paul,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 155–78.

⁶⁰For a positive conclusion concerning whether Paul was aware of the “love-command” tradition, see David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 256–61.

⁶¹Dunn, “Law of Faith,” 76. He later explains that the Pauline “law of Christ” involved “both Jesus’ teaching on the love command and Jesus’ own example in living out the love command” (Dunn, “Law of Faith,” 77). Dunn defends his conclusion against “a large consensus that Paul knew and cared little for the teaching of Jesus and for the way Jesus lived prior to his passion” (Dunn, “Law of Faith,” 79).

⁶²Thielman, *Law and the New Testament*, 33.

⁶³Ware, *Paul’s Theology in Context*, 185.

⁶⁴Matt 22:24–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28.

⁶⁵It was rather commonplace to summarize the law as duty to God and fellow humans. See Thielman, *Paul & the Law*, 139; cf. Meilaender, “Decalogue as the Law

In the Fourth Gospel, the ethical focus lands upon the "new commandment" to love one another. John 13:34–35 states, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."⁶⁶ Two chapters later, John 15:12–17 explains, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.... These things I command you, so that you will love one another."⁶⁷ This latter passage fits within the tiered (laddered) approach of Johannine ethics. As the Father sent the Son, so the Son sent his disciples (John 17:18; 20:21). And as the Father loved the Son, so the Son loved the disciples, who were to love one another (John 13:34; 15:9, 12). Moreover, it is hard not to see a cruciform Christ-echo in the concept of laying down one's life for one's friends.⁶⁸ Johannine ethics are rooted in a giving Father and the self-donation of the Son.

The General Epistles

One might expect the Johannine focus upon the new commandment to be developed within the Johannine epistles. Indeed, the "new commandment" of the Gospel of John is "most forcibly expressed in the First Epistle of John," as encapsulated in 4:11: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."⁶⁹ Verse 19 reiterates, "We love because he first loved us."⁷⁰ 1 John 2:5–10 affirms:

But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.... Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is

of Christ," 343.

⁶⁶Neither John 13 nor Matt 22 are cited within Houghton, *Law & Grace*. Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Gospel and the Law of Christ* (London: Longmans/Green, 1947), 11.

⁶⁷Edward Young joins materials from the Gospel of John and 1 John with his discussion of the "law of Christ" ("Fulfill the Law of Christ," 40).

⁶⁸"Although it is expressed in general terms, it is of course a self-portrait of Jesus himself, as the model for the mutual love of the disciples" (Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, New Century Bible [London: Oliphants, 1972], 491).

⁶⁹Dodd, *Gospel and the Law of Christ*, 12. Dodd added, "In such maxims the divine charity which is the theme of the Gospel, and the charity towards men which is the 'new commandment' of the Law of Christ, are inseparable." François Bourdeau and Armand Danet quip that Christian ethics is "a morality of charity" (*Introduction to the Law of Christ* [Staten Island, NY: Society of St. Paul, 1966], 95).

⁷⁰Dodd, *Gospel and the Law of Christ*, 13.

still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.⁷¹

According to 1 John, the “new commandment” is also “an old commandment that you had from the beginning” (2:7).⁷² This duality between “old” and “new” has led to different explanations.⁷³ But what remains clear is that the “new commandment” of loving one another as found in the Gospel of John (13:34; 15:12) is also a focal point in the epistles (1 John 3:23; 2 John 5).⁷⁴ This “*agape* in human relations” is fleshed out with “downright concreteness” in the charitable giving of 1 John 3:17: “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

The Book of James parallels Jesus materials in multiple passages.⁷⁵ Scholars have noted numerous similarities between the epistle’s paraenesis and Jesus logia.⁷⁶ A clear example appears in James 5:12,

⁷¹The language of 1 John transitions from “commandments” in 2:3–6 to “commandment” in 2:7. A similar interchange of plural and singular “commandment/s” occurs in 1 John 3:22–24 and 2 John 5–6. The nature of “the commandment” and especially “the new commandment” (singular) focuses upon the particular and established directive to “love one another,” which largely encapsulates the content of “the commandments.” See the emphasis upon the commands to believe and to love in von Wahlde, *Johannine Commandments*.

⁷²“Is this commandment new or old? It is both” (John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988], 97). 2 John 5 entreats, “And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another.”

⁷³The most common explanations of the commandment being “old” revolve around the commandment already being available in the Hebrew Scriptures (Lev 19:18), or being available in Jesus’s teaching since the beginning of the Christian movement, thus being foundational in the formation of the community and/or in the readers’ Christian experience. For these emphases, respectively, see: Robert W. Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 97; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 129; Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, ed. Harold Attridge (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 49; Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 83.

⁷⁴The ethic being “new” may even carry eschatological undertones: Paul’s “claim that the love command ‘has fulfilled’ the law has an eschatological nuance” (Thielman, *Paul & the Law*, 140; Thielman, *Law and the New Testament*, 18). Adeyemi ties together the “law of Christ” and the “New Covenant” law written on the heart (“New Covenant Law,” 438–52; see also his *New Covenant Torah*). In a similar manner, some interpreters have equated the “law of Christ” with a “Zion Torah.” See Hartmut Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology*, trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 80–92; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 114–17; cf. Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 102.

⁷⁵See Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington III, *The Brother of Jesus* (London: Continuum, 2003), 147–52.

⁷⁶Dean B. Deppe, “The Saying of Jesus in the Epistle of James” (Ph.D.

which verbally matches Sermon on the Mount material: "But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation" (cf. Matt 5:34–47).

Because of these connections, one reads with interest the exhortation in James 2:8: "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well." The reference to "Scripture" harkens back to Leviticus 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."⁷⁷ In view of the established dominical echoes elsewhere in James, some commentators also connect James 2:8 with the Jesus tradition concerning the greatest commandment (in a secondary or ancillary manner).⁷⁸ Some believe the inclusion of "royal" (βασιλικόν) is possibly an allusion to Jesus's authoritative framing or "kingdom" focus.⁷⁹

Integration with Romans

We return to Romans 13:8–10: "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." In Paul's view, if one truly possesses a Christ-like self-sacrificial love for others, one will fulfill one's moral duties in interpersonal relationships.⁸⁰ One will not murder or steal or bear false witness, simply because one loves one's neighbor. One has no desire to do such harmful things. In this manner, loving others fulfills "the righteous standard of the law."⁸¹ Houghton believes we thus need to make a

dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1990). Some have equated the "law of Christ" with the teachings of Christ found in the Sermon on the Mount in particular or as reflected in Matthew as a whole (see Young, "'Fulfill the Law of Christ,'" 32; Raymond Stoll, "The Sermon on the Mount 2 the Perfect Law of Christ 5:21–48," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 104 [1941]: 301–18; Richard J. Dillon, "Law of Christ and the Church of Christ according to Saint Matthew," *Communio* 2 [1975]: 32–53). In the Matthean "Great Commission," Jesus instructs his disciples to teach others "to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19–20).

⁷⁷Therefore, because the "love command" is rooted in Lev 19:18, the "fulfillment" of the law "is accomplished through obedience to a command of the law" (Thielman, *Paul & the Law*, 140).

⁷⁸James also references "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (1:25) and "the law of liberty" (2:12).

⁷⁹Moo, "Law of Moses," 217. According to Jas 2:5, the believing poor will inherit the "kingdom" promised to those who love God (cf. Matt 5:3).

⁸⁰Cf. Gal 5:22–23.

⁸¹Believers exemplify "a life of love," yet they still "fulfill moral norms" (Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 102).

distinction between “the righteous standard of the law” and the law itself.⁸² Other interpreters have referenced “the essence of the law,” “the core of the whole law,” “the true intent of the law of Moses,” or even “the quintessence of the law.”⁸³ Although believers in Jesus “fulfill” the righteous requirement of the Mosaic law, they do not “follow” the law of Moses.⁸⁴

“The righteous requirement (δικαίωμα) of the law” appears in Romans 8:1–4, a text that is truly “foundational,” in that it affirms what “belongs to the foundations” of Pauline ethics.⁸⁵ The passage accentuates unity with Christ and the integral role of the Spirit:

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.⁸⁶

Those who walk according to the Spirit fulfill “the righteous requirement of the law” (cf. Gal 5:14; Rom 13:8–10).⁸⁷ This empowerment is contrasted with the weakness of the law, which cannot ultimately deliver from the flesh, sin, and death.⁸⁸ As Houghton asserts,

⁸²Houghton interacts with Rom 2:14–15 to do so (*Law & Grace*, 119). Even pagan Gentiles without the Mosaic law show “the work of the Law” written in their hearts. Although they do not possess the law, their consciences reflect “the righteous standard of the law.” On the relation of this “inward” law to Paul’s discussion, see Wintle, “Paul’s Conception,” 43.

⁸³See Young, “Fulfill the Law of Christ,” 35; Wintle, “Paul’s Conception,” 48; Dunn, “Law of Faith,” 77; Ware, *Paul’s Theology in Context*, 196; Bammel, “Νόμος Χριστοῦ,” 127. Jacques Goldstain refers to the *kavvanah* or “intention” of the law (Goldstain, “Law of Christ,” 14).

⁸⁴Paraphrased from Ware, *Paul’s Theology in Context*, 183. Although see Thielman, *Paul & the Law*, 139–40.

⁸⁵Leander E. Keck, “The Law and ‘the Law of Sin and Death’ (Rom 8:1–4): Reflections on the Spirit and Ethics in Paul,” in *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God’s Control of Human Events*, ed. James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel (New York: Ktav, 1980), 41. Moreover, according to Keck, “what makes our passage foundational for Paul’s ethics is what it reveals about his understanding of the doer, the moral agent” (Keck, “Law,” 54).

⁸⁶Cf. “the commandments of God” in 1 Cor 7:19; see Adeyemi, *New Covenant Torah*, 19, 161–63.

⁸⁷See Bruce, “Grace of God,” 28. Keck notes that δικαίωμα commonly referred to a “legal claim,” but in this context could mean “the rightness, the right intent of the law,” which Keck interprets as “life” itself. “The fulfillment of the intent of the Law is not the goal of Christian doing but its basis”—the internalized Spirit who is life (Keck, “Law,” 52–53).

⁸⁸Therefore, it is “the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). “The law defines sin, provides sinful people with an opportunity to rebel against God, and pronounces the

"Spirit-controlled believers are motivated to fulfill the righteous standard of the law (Rom. 8:1–4)."⁸⁹

There is clearly a connection between Romans 8 and Galatians 5, through the conceptual themes of freedom and walking in the Spirit. Romans 8:2–4 explains, "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.... 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"⁹⁰ Houghton reaffirms, "Spirit-controlled believers are free from the law of sin and death, but exhibit the righteous requirement of the law in their lives."⁹¹

Galatians 5 commences with the same theme of freedom: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1).⁹² Ernest DeWitt Burton maintains, "This sentence is, in fact, an epitome of the contention of the whole letter."⁹³ In the immediate context, Christ has set believers free from the bondage of the law (Gal 5:1–4), who are then exhorted to "walk by the Spirit" so as not to gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16). Using the irony of understatement, Paul declares in Galatians 5:22–23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." For Paul, loving others is not merely an imperative but an operation of the Spirit.⁹⁴

Christ is truly the τέλος ("end") of the νόμος ("law") (Rom 10:4).⁹⁵ Even if a connotation of "goal" is found in this text, the idea of

curse of death on those who disobey. It does not, however, provide the remedy to this situation, and so believers are released from it" (Thielman, *Law and the New Testament*, 41).

⁸⁹Houghton, *Law & Grace*, 126, 163.

⁹⁰Unlike the ESV, most other English translations connect "in Christ Jesus" with "the law of the Spirit of life" rather than with being set "free." This construction leads to further insights: This "law" is associated with both the Spirit of life and with being "in Christ" (the believer's unity with Christ) (see Thielman, *Law and the New Testament*, 27).

⁹¹Houghton, *Law & Grace*, 120. In Houghton's definition, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" refers to "the principle that God's Spirit regenerates believers because Jesus died for them and rose again" (Houghton, *Law & Grace*, 153). André Feuillet defined "the law of the Spirit" as "la loi du Christ intériorisée," adding "c'est cette intériorisation qui fait que l'homme est libéré et sanctifié" (Feuillet, "Loi de Dieu," 54).

⁹²Paul is building upon the discussion of slavery vs. freedom found in Gal 4.

⁹³Burton, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 270. Murphy-O'Connor argues that the Galatians were tempted by a return to the Mosaic Law because they were frozen in the fear of their new-found freedom. "They were frightened by freedom and paralyzed by prudence" (Murphy-O'Connor, "Unwritten Law of Christ," 231).

⁹⁴Winger, "Law of Christ," 539.

⁹⁵The English word "end" can refer to goal and/or completion (purpose and/or

“termination” is not thereby erased.⁹⁶ Other facets of Pauline teaching point to the “completion” or “conclusion” of the Law of Moses (Rom 6:14–15; 7:1–6; Gal 3:23–26; Eph 2:14–16).⁹⁷ Freedom follows in the wake of being “under grace” and not “under the law” (Rom 6:14). Yet Galatians 5:13 cautions, “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.”⁹⁸ Christian freedom is not “anarchical liberty.”⁹⁹ Not all behavior is consistent with “true freedom.”¹⁰⁰ Freedom from the Mosaic Law does not lead to moral nihilism or moral license, partially because of the structuring parameter of loving one another.¹⁰¹ The undesirable alternative to loving one another is devouring, biting, and consuming one another (Gal 5:15). Within the context of the believing community, the “law of Christ” as seen through the prism of loving others “represents the responsibilities and obligations of Christians as members of the body of Christ.”¹⁰²

This is why Paul can declare elsewhere in the context, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal 5:18).¹⁰³ The preceding verses state, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the

culmination) (Charry, “Grace of God,” 35; Moo, “Law of Moses,” 207). The Greek word τέλος can mean “goal, point, meaning, intent, purpose” (Charry, “Law of Christ,” 156), as well as “ultimate aim” (Moo, “Law of Moses,” 209). Paul Meyer comments upon τέλος/“end” as either “termination” or “abolishment,” or as “final state,” “outcome,” “goal,” and “consequence” (“Romans 10:4 and the ‘End’ of the Law,” in *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God’s Control of Human Events*, ed. James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel [New York: Ktav, 1980], 61, 64, 72); cf. Adeyemi, *New Covenant Torah*, 13.

⁹⁶Strickland, “Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 167; Ira Jolivet, “Christ the ΤΕΛΟΣ in Romans 10:4 as Both Fulfillment and Termination of the Law” *Restoration Quarterly* 51 (2009): 13–30. As an analogy, the English phrase “finish line” conveys both “goal” and “completion” (see Thielman, *Law and the New Testament*, 30). The word τέλος is associated with “passing away” in 2 Cor 3:13.

⁹⁷The believer has “died to the law” and so is “released from the law” (Rom 7:1–6; cf. Gal 2:19). The law as a παιδαγωγός reflects an ending as well: “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Gal 3:25). When Jesus Christ died, he broke down the dividing wall of hostility “by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” (Eph 2:15). See Andrew T. Lincoln, “The Church and Israel in Ephesians 2,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 611–12.

⁹⁸Cf. Jas 1:25.

⁹⁹Goldstain, “Law of Christ,” 15.

¹⁰⁰Young, “Fulfill the Law of Christ,” 31.

¹⁰¹Meilaender, “Decalogue as the Law of Christ,” 348. Of course, love of God must accompany love of neighbor (Matt 22:34–40), and both must be properly understood and fully possessed. “Probably Paul considered love for God as prerequisite to a proper love for neighbors” (Strickland, “Inauguration of the Law of Christ,” 277).

¹⁰²Wintle, “Paul’s Conception,” 49.

¹⁰³A similar Spirit/Law antithesis appears in 2 Cor 3:2–11.

Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Gal 5:16–17). One notes the conceptual similarities between these sentiments and Romans 7 leading into Romans 8.

A further parallel is worth mentioning. Galatians 6:2, the one verse that explicitly cites the νόμος Χριστοῦ, directly connects the "law of Christ" with bearing the burdens of others.¹⁰⁴ This connection enables one to read Romans 15:1–3 with new insight: "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.'" We bear the burdens of others, including their scruples, because of the example of Christ.¹⁰⁵ He did not please himself but rather bore reproach. Romans 15:7 employs an ethical laddering (similar to Johannine structuring): "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."¹⁰⁶ In this manner, Romans 15:1–7 becomes another case study of the "law of Christ" in action.¹⁰⁷ The "law of Christ" becomes an inexhaustible source of moral application.¹⁰⁸

If all of these connections between Romans and Galatians hold true, as I contend here, we can now affiliate "the law of the Spirit of life" (Rom 8:2) with "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) and the command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Gal 5:13–14; Rom 13:8–10).¹⁰⁹ Above all, the "law of Christ" unsurprisingly is Christocentric in actual focus and not just in nomenclature. Enda McDonagh explains, "Christian morality, the way of life revealed in Christ, is distinguished primarily

¹⁰⁴Donald Allen Stoike, "'The Law of Christ': A Study of Paul's Use of the Expression in Galatians 6:2" (Th.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1971).

¹⁰⁵"Which presumably means that in Paul's mind 'the law of Christ' includes some reference to Jesus' own example" (Dunn, "Law of Faith," 76).

¹⁰⁶Cf. Col 3:13; Wenham, *Paul*, 260. For a comparison of the Johannine love commandment with Paul's ethical emphasis upon loving one's neighbors, see D. Moody Smith, "The Love Command: John and Paul?" in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney (Nashville: Abingdon), 207–17.

¹⁰⁷Hays, "Christology and Ethics," 287.

¹⁰⁸See Charry, "Grace of God," 44. Cf. Bernard Häring, *The Law of Christ* (Cork, Ireland: Mercier, 1963). A summary of Häring's work appears in Charles E. Curran, "The Law of Christ," *Worship* 36 (1961): 58–61.

¹⁰⁹Charry, "Grace of God," 35. James Burtchaell goes further and identifies the "law of faith" (Rom 3:27) with the "law of the Spirit" and the "law of Christ" ("A Theology of Faith and Works: The Epistle to the Galatians: A Catholic View," *Interpretation* 17 [1963]: 45). James D. G. Dunn also considers all three of these phrases to be equivalent (Dunn, "Law of Faith," 62). John Meyer affiliates the "obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:26) with the same concepts as well (Meyer, "Law of Christ," 114). He considers Rom 9:30–32 to reflect "a slightly different form" of "the law of faith" in Rom 3:27–31 (Dunn, "Law of Faith," 64).

by its structure in Christ.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, the “law of Christ” embodies a Spirit-formed response to the grace of the Gospel, what God did in Christ outside of us, within day-to-day living.¹¹¹ At its core, the “law of Christ” consists of Spirit-empowered self-donation as a way of life. Christian ethics is truly “life in the Spirit.”¹¹² And “the law of the Spirit” is “a summary way of speaking of the requirement of the law fulfilled by those who walk in accordance with the Spirit.”¹¹³

Venturing further afield, 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 underscores a life of self-donation through self-giving love, viewed through a Christocentric prism and empowerment: “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” And two chapters earlier, Paul discussed an ethic written on the heart (2 Cor 3:2–3, 7–11, 17–18).¹¹⁴ By “the impulsion of an inward power” from the Spirit (and not by mere letters on stone), believers are to do God’s will from the heart.¹¹⁵ In this manner, “the grace of God is manifested and the law of Christ fulfilled.”¹¹⁶

In Pauline theology, the “love command” does not negate other specific commands, but rather unites manifold moral obligations, including both righteous actions and virtuous qualities. For example, Colossians 3:5 commands, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Verse 8 continues, “But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.” The chapter adds, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other” (Col 3:12–13a).¹¹⁷ The impetus for such forgiveness is Christocentric: “as the Lord has forgiven you, so

¹¹⁰McDonagh, “Natural Law,” 76.

¹¹¹See Reeves, “New Moses,” 81.

¹¹²Moo, “Law of Moses,” 215. Cf. 2 Cor 3:2–6.

¹¹³Dunn, “Law of Faith,” 73. In Leander Keck’s interpretation, “the law of the Spirit” is “the Spirit itself, understood according to its ruler-function in the domain of Christ” (“Law,” 47).

¹¹⁴See also Rom 2:28–29; 7:6. Cf. Thielman, *Law and the New Testament*, 27–28; Dunn, “Law of Faith,” 70; François S. Malan, “Moral Language in the New Testament: Language and Ethics in 2 Corinthians 3,” in *Moral Language in the New Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Ruben Zimmerman, Jan G. Van der Watt, and Susanne Luther, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 2.296 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 245–54.

¹¹⁵Bruce, “Grace of God,” 26.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 34. As Thomas Erskine declared, “religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude” in the NT (see Bruce, “Grace of God,” 26).

¹¹⁷Very specific commands follow in Col 3:18–25.

you also must forgive” (Col 3:13b). Finally, an underscoring of love unites all these moral obligations: “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14).

In the larger context of Pauline ethics (and NT ethics in general), the unpacking of the “law of Christ” cannot *simplistically* be reduced to the love command to the neglect of other ethical obligations.¹¹⁸ The Pauline epistles themselves relate numerous specific precepts, sometimes directly related to discussions of the obedience of Christian sanctification (cf. Rom 6:15–22; 1 Thess 4:1–8).¹¹⁹ Dodd explains, “God’s demands are in their nature as infinite as is His own love.”¹²⁰ While the love command lacks precision until focused in particular application, the breadth of its relevance is unbounded.¹²¹ For example, specific imperatives found as moral obligations that directly guide social relationships, labor relationships, family dynamics, sexual ethics, interpersonal communication, economic expenditure, and responses to the government (Rom 12:9–13:10; Gal 5:13–6:10; Eph 4:17–6:9; Col 3:5–4:6; 1 Thess 4:1–12) contextually surround key instances of the love command within Pauline paraenesis (Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Eph 5:2; Col 3:14; 1 Thess 4:9). The Spirit-produced virtue of love empowers obedience to the manifold obligations of such divine commands.¹²²

Conclusion

Those who maintain that believers today are no longer under the Mosaic Law (which functioned as a unit) have sometimes been assailed for a lawless “antinomianism.”¹²³ Yet, as Paul directly states in 1 Corinthians 9:21, believers are not ἄνομος but ἐννομος Χριστοῦ.¹²⁴ They

¹¹⁸Moo, “Law of Moses,” 209. For a fuller explanation of Moo’s views, see Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 319–76.

¹¹⁹Rom 6 refers to being “obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed” (Rom 6:17).

¹²⁰Dodd, *Gospel and the Law of Christ*, 17 (italics original).

¹²¹Moreover, the “law of Christ” is a focus of attitude and not just precept (see Young, “Fulfill the Law of Christ,” 33).

¹²²See Hermut Löhr, “The Exposition of Moral Rules and Principles in Pauline Letters: Preliminary Observations on Moral Language in Earliest Christianity,” in *Moral Language in the New Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Ruben Zimmerman, Jan G. Van der Watt, and Susanne Luther, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.296 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 197–211.

¹²³On the Mosaic Law as a unit, see Stephen Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 208; Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham’s God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 32. Gal 3:10 warns, “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’” Cf. Gal 5:3.

¹²⁴“In classical Greek ἐννομος was used of being ‘ordered by law,’ ‘keeping within

are not ἄνομος regarding the law of God, because they are under the law of Christ—they are motivated and empowered by the νόμος Χριστοῦ, which is a blessing rather than a burden.¹²⁵ The “law of Christ” can thus reflect both “gift and task (*donum et mandatum*, Gabe und Aufgabe).”¹²⁶ Believers are not left without a “regulative principle” or “structure of existence” or “pattern of action” or “shape of life.”¹²⁷ The “law of Christ,” although embodied by love of neighbor, is not just an amorphous feeling. “Paul does not understand by ‘love’ an abstract, subjective feeling, but rather defines it by the saving work of Christ.”¹²⁸ At its root, it is sacrificial and self-donating, just like Christ’s love exemplified in the Gospel.¹²⁹

This love “runs counter to natural inclination and pushes hard against natural feelings of self-protection.”¹³⁰ The NT emphasis is not upon the laxity of the law of Christ, but upon its all-encompassing nature and its internal working through Christocentric, cruciform motivation.¹³¹ Paul’s ethic even entails presenting oneself as a slave to righteousness (Rom 6:15–18)—true freedom and genuine service.¹³² For Paul, “there is no such thing as an autonomous self, but only a self in obedience to a structure of reality, of power” (Rom 6:15–23).¹³³

Charles Ryrie considered the “law of Christ” to consist of the “hundreds” of commands contained in the epistles, which “cover every area of life.”¹³⁴ He reasoned, “Not only are these teachings extensive

the law,’ being ‘lawful,’ ‘legal,’ ‘upright,’ or ‘just’” (Adeyemi, “New Covenant Law,” 441).

¹²⁵Moo connects “the law of Christ” of Gal 6:2 with being “inlawed to Christ” in 1 Cor 9:21. See Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and the New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 208; cf. Adeyemi, “New Covenant Law,” 443. Dodd regarded the “law of Christ” as equal in meaning to the “law of God” (see Bammel, “Νόμος Χριστοῦ,” 125).

¹²⁶Cf. McDonagh, “Natural Law,” 70, in context speaking of divine revelation as “an invitation demanding a response.” See also Heinz Schürmann, “‘Das Gesetz des Christus’ (Gal 6,2): Jesu Verhalten und Wort als letztgültige sittliche Norm nach Paulus,” in *Neues Testament und Kirche*, ed. Joachim Gnllka (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 1974), 282.

¹²⁷Hays, “Christology and Ethics,” 276, 286. Taking a seemingly minority position, Michael Winger counsels against connecting 1 Cor 9:21 with Gal 6:2 (Winger, “Law of Christ,” 545–46). He regards the widely accepted parallel to be “doubtful.”

¹²⁸Wintle, “Paul’s Conception,” 49.

¹²⁹“It is by dying to self in the service of the Gospel that the believer is conformed to Christ in his death and in his resurrection” (ibid., 50).

¹³⁰Charry, “Law of Christ,” 158.

¹³¹Charry, “Grace of God,” 35.

¹³²Cf. Gal 5:13.

¹³³Keck, “Law,” 49.

¹³⁴*Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 161.

but they are so definite that they may be termed a law.”¹³⁵ As this article has discussed, the NT documents do contain scores of moral imperatives delivered to believers, and these injunctions remain morally obligatory. Nevertheless, a targeted focus unites the many moral duties found within these divine commands.¹³⁶ Houghton properly focuses upon Christ’s love command.¹³⁷ This initial insight, however, can be further developed to form a full-orbed understanding of the “theologically highly-charged” phrase of the “law of Christ.”¹³⁸ Moral light flows through this focal prism, found explicitly in Galatians 6:2 alone but reflected in Paul’s wider work and especially in Romans, to illuminate the broader paraenesis of the NT.

This essay has sought to develop the refracting focus of the “law of Christ” more fully with further facets.¹³⁹ A robust understanding of the “law of Christ” entails the motivation of love, the empowering of the Spirit, the communal nature of concrete application, and the Christocentric focus of self-sacrifice in the Gospel. In sum, the “law of Christ” is the self-giving and burden-bearing “love of neighbor” as taught by Christ, as exemplified by Christ, as empowered by the Spirit of Christ, and as communally observed within the Body of Christ.¹⁴⁰ “Thus,” as Dodd rightly concludes, “the Law of Christ serves to make us more keenly aware of the depths of the Gospel.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁵Idem, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 96.

¹³⁶“Commandments do not capture the whole love or even the essence of love, but they do encapsulate a particular dimension of love” (Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 106).

¹³⁷Houghton, *Law & Grace*, 90, 116, 135.

¹³⁸Heinz Schürmann refers to “diesem theologisch hochbefrachteten Terminus” (“Gesetz des Christus,” 282).

¹³⁹This focused but developed understanding of the “law of Christ” as an entity distinct from the law of Moses yet combining the love command with the ethical teaching and example of Christ stands in continuity with similar approaches taken by other interpreters (see Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013], 376–77).

¹⁴⁰Cf. Arland J. Hultgren, “The Ethical Reorientation of Paul: From the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 46 (2019): 33. On the “primary applicability to the Christian community,” see Smith, “Love Command,” 210.

¹⁴¹Dodd, *Gospel and the Law of Christ*, 17. See also Schürmann, “Gesetz des Christus,” 300.