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2 Timothy 3:16-17

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God's Spirit, The Dynamic for Lawful Living

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We have seen previously that God's holy character, of which the law is the transcript, is unchanging and beyond challenge; accordingly God's holy law cannot be altered today or brought into criticism by men's traditions. We have also observed that Christ's perfect obedience, which is the model for the Christian's behavior, was rendered to every detail and facet of God's commandments; accordingly every believer who makes it his aim to imitate the Savior must be submissive to the law of God as honored by Christ. The character of God the Father and the life of God the Son both point to the law of God as morally binding for Christians today. The work of God the Spirit, therefore, cannot be viewed as in any way detracting from our obedience to God's law, or else the unity of the Triune Godhead would be dissolved and we would have three gods (with separate wills and intentions, diverse attitudes and standards) rather than one.

The truth is, as presented by Scripture, that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit "of God" (1 Cor. 2:12) and is given by the Father (John 14:16; 15:26; Acts 2:33). He is likewise designated the Spirit "of the son" (Galatians 4:6; cf. Phil. 1:19; Romans 8:9) and is sent by Christ (John 15:26; 16:7; 20:22; Acts 2:33). The Holy Spirit does not work contrary to the plans and purposes of the Father and Son but rather completes them or brings them to realization. The harmony of His workings with the Father and Son is illustrated in John 16:15, where we read that everything possessed by the Father is shared with the Son, and in turn what is possessed by the Son is disclosed by the Spirit. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work as one. They are not in tension with each other. Consequently we should not expect that the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives would run counter to the character of the Father and the example of the Son. We should not expect that this Spirit, who inspired the writing of God's holy law, would work contrary to that law by undermining its validity, replacing its function, or leading us away from obedience to it.

When we think of Biblical ethics or Christian behavior we should think of a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led life. The Holy Spirit gives new life to us (John 3:3-8), renews us (Titus 3:5-6), and enables us to make profession of faith in Christ (1 Cor. 12:3); indeed, without the work of the Spirit in a person he cannot be a Christian at all (Romans 8:9; Galatians 3:2). The Holy Spirit illumines the believer (Ephesians 1: 17), leads him (Romans 8:14), and writes God's word upon his heart (2 Cor. 3:3); by the Spirit we can understand the things freely given to us by God (1 Cor. 2:12-16), The Spirit seals the believer (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30), indwells him with inner refreshment as an ever-flowing river of living water (John 14:17; Romans 8:9; 1 Cor. 3: 16; John 7:38-39), and constitutes the downpayment from

God of our eternal inheritance (Ephesians 1:14). The "Spiritual" man—the believer as subject to such influences of God's Spirit—will show the dramatic effects or results of the Spirit's ministry in his life. By the Spirit he will put to death the sinful deeds of his body (Romans 8:13), for the Spirit produces holiness in the lives of God's people (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5: 18), the believer's life will manifest worship, joyful praise, thanksgiving, and submission to others (vv. 19-21). Christians are to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), thereby evidencing the harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (vv. 22-24). Christian living and behavior, then, can be summarized as "living by the Spirit."

This has far-reaching consequences for believers. In the first place it indicates that salvation necessitates sanctification in one's life. The believer in Christ is not only saved from his moral guilt before God, but he is also saved from the moral pollution in which he formerly lived. Christianity is not merely a matter of believing certain things and anticipating eternal comfort; it does not start and end with forgiveness for our sins because we have come to Christ as Savior. Christianity likewise requires living continually under the Lordship of Christ, eliminating indwelling sin, and walking righteously before God. The Christian is one who has been freed not only from the curse of sin, but from the bondage of sin as well. Christian experience extends beyond the moment of belief and pardon into the daily exercise of pursuing sanctification without which no one will see God (Hebrews 12:14). It entails life in the Holy Spirit, which can only mean progressive holiness in one's behavior. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)—unto a life of obedience: "we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (v. 10).

If living by the Spirit indicates that salvation must bring sanctification, then it means that salvation produces a life of glad obedience to God's law. Salvation frees one from sin's bondage so that he can walk lawfully (James 1:25; Galatians 5:13-14), which is to say lovingly (cf. 1 John 5:1-3), for the leading evidence of the Spirit's work in one's life is love (Galatians 5:22). Those who have been saved by faith must be diligent to exercise the good works of love (Titus 3:5-8; James 2:26; Galatians 5:6), and the standard of good behavior and loving conduct is found in God's revealed law (Psalm 119:68; Romans 7:12,16; 1 Timothy 1:8; John 14:15; 2 John 6). The Holy Spirit works in the believer to bring about conformity to the inspired law of God as the pattern of holiness. The "requirement of the law" is "fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4). When God puts His Spirit within a person it causes that person to walk in the Lord's

statutes and keep His ordinances (Ezekiel 11: 19-20). Therefore, since salvation requires sanctification, and since sanctification calls for obedience to the commandments of God, the New Testament teaches us that Christ "become the author of eternal salvation unto all those who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9). This does not contradict salvation by grace; it is its inevitable outworking.

Sadly, the church today often tones down the demands of God's law out of a misconceived desire to exalt God's grace and avoid any legalism wherein salvation is grounded in one's own law-works. Rather than finding the proper place for God's law within the plan of salvation and pursuing its function within the kingdom of Christ, the church frequently promotes an easy believism which does not proclaim the need for heartfelt repentance, clearly manifest the sinner's utter guilt and need of the Savior, or follow up conversion with exhortation and discipline in righteous living. Of course without the law of God which displays the unchanging will of God for man's attitudes and actions in all areas of life there is a corresponding de-emphasis on concrete sin for which men must repent, genuine guilt which drives men to Christ, and specific guidelines for righteous behavior in the believer. Taking Paul out of context, some churches and teachers would make their message "we are not under law but grace." They would present evangelism and Christian nurture as though mutually exclusive of concern for God's righteous standards as found in his commandments. They would focus on the extraordinary work of the Spirit in a supposed second blessing and the charismatic gifts. The whole of the Biblical message and Christian life would be cast into a distorted, truncated, or modified form in the interests of a religion of pure grace. However God's word warns us against turning the grace of God into an occasion or cause of licentious living (Jude 4); it insists that faith does not nullify God's law (Romans 3:31). One has to be deceived, Paul says, to think that the unrighteous could possibly inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Those who demote even the slightest requirement of God's law will themselves be demoted in the Lord's kingdom (Matthew 5:19). The answer to legalism is not easy believism, evangelism without the need for repentance, the pursuit of a mystical second blessing in the Spirit, or a Christian life devoid of righteous instruction and guidance. Legalism is countered by the Biblical understanding of true "life in the Spirit"; therein God's Spirit is the gracious author of new life, who convicts us of our sin and misery over against the violated law of God, who unites us to Christ in salvation that we might share His holy life, who enables us to understand the guidance given by God's word, and who makes us to grow by God's grace into people who better obey the Lord's commands. The precise reason that Paul asserts that we are under grace and not the condemnation or curse of the law is to explain how it is that sin does not have dominion over us--to explain, that is, why we have become slaves to obedience and now have lives characterized by conformity to God's law (Romans 6:13-18). It is God's grace that makes us Spiritual men who honor the commandments of our Lord.

The answer to legalism is not to portray the law of God as contrary to His promise (Galatians 3:21) but to realize that, just as the Christian life began by the Spirit, it must be nurtured and perfected in the power of the

Spirit as well (Galatians 3:3). The dynamic for righteous living is found, not in the believer's own moral strength, but in the enabling might of the Spirit of God. We are naturally the slaves of sin who live under its power (Romans 6:16-20; 7:23); indeed, Paul declares that we are dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1). However, if we are united to Christ in virtue of His death and resurrection we have become dead to sin (Romans 6:3-4) and thus no longer live in it (v.2). Just as Christ was raised to newness of life by the Spirit (1 Timothy 3: 16; 1 Peter 3: 18; Romans 1:4; 6:4, 9), so also we who have His resurrection power indwelling us by the life-giving Spirit (Ephesians 1:19-20; Philippians 3:10; Romans 8:11) have the power to live new lives which are freed from sin (Romans 6:4-11). The result of the Spirit freeing us from sin is sanctification (v. 22). The gracious power of the new and righteous life of the Christian is the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit. Here is the antidote to legalism.

We must observe in this regard that the Holy Spirit does not replace the law of God in the Christian's life, nor does He oppose the law of God in our behavior. The gracious Spirit who empowers our sanctification does not speak for Himself, giving a new pattern for Christian behavior (John 16: 13). Rather He witnesses to the word of the Son (John 14: 23-26; 15:26; 16: 14). The Spirit is not an independent source of direction or guidance in the Christian life, for His ministry is carried out in conjunction with the already given word of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:12-16). In terms of our sanctification this means that the Spirit enables us to understand and obey the objective standard of God's revealed law. It does not mean that Christians who are indwelt by the Spirit become a law unto themselves, spinning out from within themselves the standards by which they live. What the Spirit does is to supply what was lacking in the law itself--the power to enforce compliance. "What the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3-4). God's law is still the blueprint for sanctified behavior--this is completely unaffected by the Spirit's ethical ministry in the believer. The Holy Spirit does not oppose that law in the slightest degree but, instead, empowers obedience to it. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:27). Whereas the letter of the law brought death to man because he was unable of himself to comply with it, the Spirit of God enlivens men so that they can conform to God's standards (2 Cor. 3:6). Therefore the sure test of whether someone has the Spirit abiding in him or not is found in asking if he keeps the commandments of God (1 John 3:24). A Biblical view of the work of the Holy Spirit reinforces the validity of God's law for the Christian, showing how the law (as pattern) and the Spirit (as power) are both indispensable to sanctification.

(For further reading along these lines see *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. Craig Press, 1977, esp. chap. 7. The book may be ordered from me for \$10.50 at 1219 Pineview Drive, Clinton, MS 39056; include check and address.)

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