

ALIVE TO GOD: CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

Study Eleven

YOU HAVE DIED: TO THE LAW

Having seen what it means to have died to self, sin, and the flesh, we now look at what it means to have died to the law.

I DIED TO THE LAW

We have already observed that central to Paul's understanding of having been crucified with Christ was a death in connection with the law of God:¹

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:19).

This is in the context of a discussion about how we are justified:

we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law . . . if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing (Gal. 2:16, 21).

When Paul was met by Christ, the realisation came that the law of God, that he thought he was keeping so well ('as to righteousness under the law, blameless', Phil. 3:6), actually condemned him to death as the 'blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence' that he was in relation to God's Messiah Jesus—as indeed 'the foremost' of sinners (1 Tim. 1:13, 16). With this conviction came, at the same time, the revelation that Christ had died that death for him—'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20)—and that Christ had somehow taken Paul with him down into that death—'I have been crucified with Christ' (Gal. 2:19)—and so had brought Paul into justification for, as we have seen:

whoever has died is freed [justified] from sin (Rom. 6:7).

Paul in Romans 7 applies this also to his hearers:

you have died to the law through the body of Christ (Rom. 7:4).

We note again that this is not just to free us from the deathly state we were in under the law's condemnation, but with a view to newness of life in Christ:

you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God (Rom. 7:4).

¹ See study 1.

Even so, what does it mean for Paul to say, ‘I died to the law’, or when he says to us, ‘you have died to the law’?

FREE FROM REGULATION?

The self-centred libertine spirit of this age readily takes it to mean that we are no longer subject to law of any kind, but are free-spirited. Some may take what Paul goes on to say in this sense:

we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit (Rom. 7:6).

Some may claim that any written code that seeks to regulate human behaviour is deadening, over against those who move in freedom of spirit, and may take Paul’s words accordingly:

the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:6).

This may be used as a cover or excuse for irresponsibility or licentiousness. While some on this basis may be genuinely seeking to apply ‘the spirit of the law’ in a way that is appropriate rather than hidebound or legalistic, that is not the point that Paul is making here.

Such a view must come up against Jesus’ words:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17–20).

This sees the keeping of the law of God, as upheld and expounded in the prophetic writings, as very much part of the kingdom that Jesus is bringing. Paul spoke of this being applied to us through what God has done in Jesus on the cross and by the coming of the Spirit:

so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4).

It is evident that ‘the just requirement of the law’ is not just its penal provisions, but the whole body of righteous living in relationship with God and each other that submission to the law entails. Paul goes on to say that ‘the mind that is set on the flesh . . . does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot’ (Rom. 8:7). The implication is that the mind that is set on the Spirit can, and does. When Paul lists ‘the fruit of the Spirit’—‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control’—he goes on to say: ‘There is no law against such things’ (Gal. 5:22–23), which is to say, these things are the fulfilling of the law. Elsewhere he says that the law is to be fulfilled by loving:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 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, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8–10).²

² Compare James 2:8: ‘You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”’.

While this has been taken as a basis for ‘situation ethics’—do whatever is the most loving thing in any particular situation, without being bound by a set of rules—Paul does refer here to specific commandments. Paul never saw himself free from law in this sense:

I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law (1 Cor. 9:21).

Paul is still able to say: ‘the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good’ (Rom. 7:12); and the apostle John still defined sin with reference to the law of God: ‘Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness’ (1 John 3:4).

This should be sufficient to establish that the apostles did not see salvation in Christ and the coming of the Spirit as ‘freeing’ us from any obligation to be regulated by the law of God. We did not die to the law in that sense. Rather the opposite: Paul is now able to say, ‘I delight in the law of God in my inmost self’ (Rom. 7:22). This accords with the promises in the Old Testament concerning the new covenant, which brings the forgiveness of sins:

I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances (Ezek. 36:27).

this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . they shall all know me . . . says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:33–34).

Since the law of God is the outward expression of who God is in Himself and in relationship with us and with others,³ then coming into relationship with God means coming into a fulfilled, proper and intimate relationship with the law of God.

Questions for Reflection

- *What have we seen of the libertine spirit in the community, in the church, and in ourselves?*
- *If we uphold a relationship with the law after coming to faith in Christ, what can keep us from a reversion to legalism?*

REDEEMED FROM THE CURSE AND CONDEMNATION OF THE LAW

What then does it mean to say that we have died to the law?⁴ First of all, it means that we are no longer subject to the condemnation that the law imposes on all who do not keep the law of God. Paul quotes from the law given by God through Moses when he says:

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law’ (Gal. 3:10).

³ See Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Sweeter than Honey, More Precious than Gold* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1995) and *The Law of Eternal Delight* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2001).

⁴ The relationship of Paul to the law of God is an area fraught with controversy, brought into sharper focus in recent years by the vast body of scholarship that has been called the ‘new perspective’ on Paul. While aware of that approach, we do not seek to engage directly with it here. I am grateful to Colin G. Kruse in *Paul, the Law and Justification* (Apollos, Leicester, 1996) for his examination of the letters of the Pauline corpus, which seeks to interpret them as a consistent whole, and particularly for his summary on pp. 278–99.

The quotation is from a series of curses in a ceremony for affirming the law in Deuteronomy 27:

Then the Levites shall declare in a loud voice to all the Israelites: . . . ‘Cursed be anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by observing them.’ All the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ (Deut. 27:14, 26).

This leaves everyone who has not kept the law of God, in a dire situation. There is no relative merit in this regard. No amount of keeping the law compensates for any breaking of it:

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘You shall not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (James 2:10–11).

Nor are there ‘little’ sins and ‘big’ sins. Any breach of the law of God is an affront and an offence against God Himself, and is as large as the whole of God’s holiness.

The testimony of Scripture is that the whole human race, with the one exception of Christ himself, has broken God’s law. We all sinned in the primal man (see Gen. 3:6; Rom. 5:12), and ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23). This means that all are under the condemnation of the curse that is specifically pronounced by the law of God given through Moses.

For this reason Paul refers to the law of God as ‘the law of sin and of death’ (Rom. 8:2) as far as unforgiven sinners are concerned, and to the giving of the law as ‘the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets’, since ‘the letter kills’ (2 Cor. 3:7, 6).

It is from this that Jesus Christ has come to release us, by taking upon himself, in his death on the cross, the curse pronounced by God in His law:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ (Gal. 3:13).

The reference there applies to one hung up as a criminal:

When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night upon the tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse (Deut. 21:22–23).

Elsewhere this is spoken of in these terms:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24).

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

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 to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:3–4).

Note again that this is not just with a view to the removal of sin and condemnation. The curse is removed in order to make way for the blessing—of justification/righteousness:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:13–14).

Questions for Reflection

- *What has been our experience of attempting to keep the law of God as a compensation for breaking it?*
- *What difference has it made to be released from the condemnation of the law?*

DISCHARGED FROM THE LAW AS THAT WHICH GIVES RISE TO SIN

Paul also understood that when the law of God comes upon a sinner, whose heart is dead set against God, far from the law delivering that person from sin, it has the effect of provoking sin into direct and explicit action. This is the corrosive dynamic that Paul is referring to when he says:

through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).

By ‘knowledge of sin’ here Paul does not mean just information about what sin is; he means actual and bitter experience of sin. He later gives an example from his own experience:

What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me (Rom. 7:7–11).

As a sinner, Paul already had it in his heart to covet. The explicit prohibition from God brought this covetousness out into open defiant action. Through the commandment of God, sin had its way in Paul. This is part of God’s intentional action to expose the actual and deadly nature of the sin that is in us, in all its horrible ugliness:

Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure (Rom. 7:13).

This is with a view to the coming of grace:

law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 5:20–21).

It is being discharged from the corrosive and deadly dynamic of sin under law, to be released into new and fruitful life in the Spirit of God, that Paul is referring to when he says that we have ‘died to the law’:

you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit (Rom. 7:4–6).

Thus the law of God, while it condemns sin, cannot of itself deliver us from it. Rather, the coming of law serves to highlight and exacerbate sin in the sinner. Sin needs to be extirpated from the sinner’s heart, in a way that law cannot accomplish. Something needs to happen on

the inside. As Jesus said, ‘make the tree good, and its fruit good’ (Matt. 12:33). For this, Jesus brought himself into full identification with us in our deathly sin, and brought us into full identification with him in his lively righteousness:

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 to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:3–4).

Questions for Reflection

- *What have we known of the provocation to sin under the law?*
- *What change has come with the new heart in Christ?*

PURIFIED FROM LAW AS PERFORMANCE TO JUSTIFY ONESELF

Paul spoke of the law of God as that which ‘promised life’ (Rom. 7:10). More than once (see Rom. 10:5 and Gal. 3:12) he cites Leviticus 18:5:

You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the LORD.

The context is a relationship that already exists between Israel and God, who has saved them and brought them to Himself (see Exod. 19:3–6), a relationship that is expressed in the repeated words: ‘I am the LORD your God’ (Lev. 18:2, 4). The commandments are given as the way of life for those whom God has already saved. They cannot be taken in hand to somehow bring about that salvation. We have already seen that no amount of keeping the law compensates for any breaking of it.

Yet there is a propensity in sinful human beings to reject God’s salvation and to attempt to effect our own salvation, even by taking God’s law and seeking to put it into effect in ourselves, as a way of alleviating the guilt of sin and proving ourselves before God. This is a use for which the law was never intended. At the heart of the law is a love-relationship with the God who has saved us and brought us to Himself:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (Deut. 6:4–5).

This equates with what Paul later calls the relationship of ‘faith’. To seek to keep the law of God from outside this relationship, over against God, while refusing to submit to His forgiveness and salvation, is an expression of gross sin, which further compounds the offence.

Paul was drawing on his own prior experience when he said of his fellow countrymen:

I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness (Rom. 10:2–3).

Christ has come, and has put an end to this futile attempt, to establish the true relationship:

For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4),

that is, ‘the end of the law’ as a means of attempting to establish one’s own righteousness.

Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 to make it clear that the faith-relationship has always only ever been the way by which we have life with God:

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’ (Gal. 3:11; compare Rom. 1:17).

This is what Paul had been brought to in Christ, and this was now his whole desire:

that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith (Phil. 3:8–9).

We have already seen that this life of righteousness, although testified to by the law, could not be brought about by the application of the law, which rather left us more deeply in sin:

if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe (Gal. 3:21–22).

All our attempts to establish our own righteousness on the basis of our keeping the law amount to foul works of death, from which we are purified through Christ’s death on the cross, and brought into true living:

For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! (Heb. 9:13–14).

Questions for Reflection

- *In what ways have we sought to use our keeping of the law as a way of alleviating the guilt of sin and of proving ourselves before God?*
- *How has faith in Christ relieved us of this practice?*

NO LONGER SUBJECT TO THE LAW AS A TUTOR

There were some temporary aspects of the law of God given through Moses that were particular to Israel at that time, and were specifically intended to mark out Israel as belonging to God, apart from the other sinful nations. These included the provisions for circumcision, the sabbath, and clean and unclean foods. Each of these pointed towards something that God would bring about in Christ, and were abrogated and superseded by his coming.

Circumcision

Circumcision was a mark of the covenant with Abraham. Any uncircumcised male was to be ‘cut off from his people’ (see Gen. 17:9–14), and no uncircumcised man was to eat of the passover meal (see Exod. 12:48). Foreigners, like the Hivites and the Philistines, were ‘uncircumcised’ (as in Gen. 34:14; Judg. 14:3), and were regarded as ‘unclean’ (Isa. 52:1). So circumcision marked Israel as belonging to God, as distinct from the Gentile nations.

As such, circumcision also signified a heart that was humbled before God rather than stubborn, so that the physically circumcised Israelites in their stubbornness could be regarded as uncircumcised (see Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16), and as equivalent to the uncircumcised

nations (see Jer. 9:25–26). By the same token, Gentiles who are faithful to the law of God could be regarded as circumcised, since ‘real circumcision is a matter of the heart’ (see Rom. 2:25–29). As we have seen,⁵ God undertook to effect this circumcision of the heart as part of His covenant action beyond the broken covenant:

the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live (Deut. 30:6).

This is fulfilled in the forgiveness of sins brought about through the death of Christ:

In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross (Col. 2:11–14).

So now, as Paul says:

it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3).

In the light of this, physical circumcision was no longer required as a mark of belonging to the people of God or necessary for salvation (see Acts 15:1–29), though it was still practised out of love and respect in certain sensitive situations (as in Acts 16:1–5).

Sabbath

While the sabbath rest every seventh day had a wider reference to the whole of creation (see Gen. 1:31–2:3; Exod. 20:10–11), the sabbath was given specifically to Israel as those whom God had brought out of slavery in Egypt (see Deut. 5:15; Neh. 9:13–14). This also became a mark of separation between the people of Israel and ‘the peoples of the lands’ (see Neh. 10:28–31). The breaking of the sabbath served to deconstitute Israel as a nation (see Jer. 17:27).

The sabbath’s wider reference related to God bringing His creation to its goal, and bringing His people to a rest and contentment in Himself (see Heb. 3:7–4:11). This came to its fulfilment in Christ (see Matt. 11:27–30), who called himself ‘lord of the sabbath’ (Matt. 12:8), and in practice abrogated its regulatory provisions (see Mark 2:23–3:6; Matt 12:1–14).

In the church of the apostles, sabbath observance became a matter of personal choice, provided it was observed, or not observed, ‘in honor of the Lord’ (see Rom. 14:5–6).

Clean and Unclean Foods

Specific food laws were given to Israel ‘to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean’ (Lev. 11:47), and so to separate Israel from the other peoples:

you shall not bring abomination on yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine (Lev. 20:25–26).

⁵ See study 5.

Thus these laws, day by day in the life of Israel, spoke of the great cleansing necessary for sinful nations to come and belong to God. Jesus rightly identified their inner meaning as relating to the defilement that is caused not by food that goes in, but by the ‘evil things’ that come from within a person, that will need to be dealt with in a deeper way. ‘Thus he declared all foods clean’ (Mark 7:19). Christ ‘made purification for sins’ (Heb. 1:3), in a way that was effective for all the sinful nations, Israel included, to come to belong to God as holy (see Acts 26:17–18). In connection with the food laws and their relation to the uncleanness of the Gentile nations, God revealed to Peter that a cleansing had now occurred for all that obliterated the distinction: ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane’ or unclean (Acts 10:15).

In the apostolic church, Jewish food laws were no longer binding on all. Love for one another, particularly for those still weak in faith and conscience—both Jew and Gentile—was to determine what was and was not eaten in any given situation (see Rom. 14:1–4; 13–23; 1 Cor. 8; Acts 15:28–29).

The Dividing Wall Broken Down

When Paul says that Christ ‘has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances’ (Eph. 2:15), he is speaking in a context of the separation between Israel and the Gentile nations that prevailed on the basis of these stipulations in the law of Moses before Christ came, and the difference he has now made. Here the phrase ‘the law with its commandments and ordinances’ is parallel to ‘the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us’, that Christ has now ‘broken down’ (Eph. 2:14). The ‘commandments and ordinances’ referred to are those which had set up the distinction and separation between so-called clean and unclean peoples, which the great cleansing from sin on the cross, effective for all, has now wiped out.

Paul begins by enunciating the separation:

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:11–12).

We recognise here the Old Testament understanding of circumcision, sharpened by the action of Christ. Paul now spells out the thoroughgoing accomplishment of that action:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:13–18).

While the phrase ‘crucified with Christ’ is not used here, there is a sense of the whole human race—Israel and the Gentile nations together—being taken up into Christ in his death, and coming out in a newly minted condition. The outcome, in keeping with the ultimate purpose of God, far outshines the previous preparatory separation:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God (Eph. 2:19–22).

No Longer Subject to a Disciplinarian

Paul likens this training or disciplining function of the law of Moses in the life of Israel, that kept them separate for that time from the Gentile nations, to the role of a slave tutor appointed in a household to rear the children in their early years, before they come of age and enter into the privileges and responsibilities of their inheritance:

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property; but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father (Gal. 3:23–4:2).

Once the saving work of Christ has been done, to bring us into our inheritance in the fullness of the Spirit as adult children of our Father God, the law, acting as tutor and guardian to prepare us for that day, is no longer needed in that way. It has been surpassed by its fulfilment:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God (Gal. 4:4–7).

In this sense, we have 'died to the law', so far as what Colin Kruse calls 'the temporary role of the law'⁶ is concerned, to make way for something much better.

Questions for Reflection

- *What confusion have we known regarding 'the temporary role of the law'?*
- *What is the difference in experience between the temporary role and its fulfilment?*

PRINCIPLES OF THE UNIVERSE

In two of his letters, Paul makes reference to what are variously translated 'the rudiments', 'the principles', 'the elements', 'the elemental things', or 'the basic principles' of the world (Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20). It is also translated 'the elemental spirits' of the world or of the universe. While there may well be something demonic or devilish about them, this is not the meaning of the word. The Greek word is *στοιχεῖα* (*stoicheia*), which simply means 'little rows' in a straight line, or straight little measuring rods. This reflects the mindset that wants to get things right, in a straight line, and seeks to elicit certain principles, given worldwide or universal application, by which this can be achieved. One feature of this mindset is that appliers of these principles think that they thereby exercise a certain level of understanding and retain a certain measure of control, when this may not be the case.

This mindset was operating in some to whom Paul wrote. These ones had derived many of their 'principles' from the Jewish law of God, and so their application of these principles has 'an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of

⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul, the Law and Justification*, Apollos, Leicester, 1996, pp. 278–9.

the body' (Col. 2:23). But it amounts to nothing more than being 'captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition' (Col. 2:8); they boil down to 'human commands and teachings' (Col. 2:22), promoting certain observances and prohibitions of this and that, which serve only to indulge the flesh (Col. 2:23). Often it settles on the very practices which we have assigned to the temporary role of the law, garnished with versions of spirituality that are 'insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking', in ways that leave people perplexed and excluded for not measuring up (Col. 2:18). While it may look like the truth of God, it is far removed from it. Often as not it is an evasive tactic that seeks to avoid the full face-to-face confrontation and warm relationship that comes when God addresses us directly in His word. No wonder Paul calls them 'weak and beggarly' principles (Gal. 4:9) that end up enslaving us (Gal. 4:3)! They are no substitute for the real thing.

Paul says that 'with Christ you died to' these 'principles of the universe' (Col. 2:20). It is a usage of law that we are well rid of.

Questions for Reflection

- *What has been our experience of extracting and applying 'principles' as a way of keeping God and His word at arm's length?*
- *What is the difference between that and living directly by the word that comes from God?*

FREE TO KEEP THE LAW OF GOD!

Once we 'have died to the law through the body of Christ' (Rom. 7:4), we are 'not free from God's law' (1 Cor. 9:21). We are now in a new and wonderful relationship with God and His law. We are able to say: 'I delight in the law of God in my inmost self' (Rom. 7:22)—it is written on our hearts! Now 'we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit' (Rom. 7:6). God 'is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13), and so, with fear and trembling, we engage in the outworking of our salvation. We see, amazed, 'the just requirement of the law' being 'fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (Rom. 8:4). We 'bear fruit for God' (Rom. 7:4)!

Question for Reflection

- *How good is that?!*