

To live under the law is to live under the judgment of the law. It is to be a slave to the law. God does not want us to be under the law. He wants us to be free, under his grace. This is why he sent his Son into the flesh to put himself under the law for our sake. St. Paul writes in Galatians 4 that at the fullness of time God sent forth his Son to be born of a woman, born under the law in order to redeem those who are under the law. He did this so that we may receive the adoption as sons. A son is not under the law. He is the heir of the kingdom. He lives under God's grace, giving thanks and glory to the Father for all his benefits. He isn't filled with dread over whether he has met up to the law's standards. Instead, he is filled with joy. This is because he is filled with the very love of God. He has the Holy Spirit. He rests in the assurance that Christ, with his righteousness, covers him. His conscience is not weighed down by the terror of being punished. Instead, his conscience is freed from guilt. He does his duty toward God and his neighbor, not worried about whether he is doing enough, but rejoicing in knowing that God has made him his own.

St. Paul says that if you are led by the Spirit then you are not under the law. How does the Spirit lead you? He leads you with the grace and mercy of God. He leads you with the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. He declares to you the forgiveness of all your sins, won for you by the bitter suffering and death of Christ. He delivers salvation to you through this preaching of his gospel. Through the promise of your baptism, he sets you apart from this dying world, preserving you in the true faith and a good conscience by the very body and blood of Jesus, which he gives for you to eat and to drink. Jesus says, "He will take of what is mine and declare it to you." This includes everything the Father has. The Holy Spirit gives you the kingdom of God and his righteousness. He gives you eternal life, teaching you to know your God aright as you call him Father with delight. Through all of this, the Holy Spirit leads you. And as he leads you, he teaches you that you are not under the law.

But doesn't the Holy Spirit teach you the law? Of course! He teaches you what it is to love God and your neighbor. He teaches you to honor your parents, to defend your neighbor's body, life, reputation, and possessions, and to be faithful to your spouse and your children. He teaches you to honor all people in their stations in life, to love your fellow Christians with brotherly affection, to honor those in authority, and to fear God. He teaches you all of this. He teaches you the law. But all the while, the Holy Spirit does not put you under the law. That is to say, he doesn't teach you the law so that you would frantically busy yourself with whether you are doing enough.

And yet, we all feel this frantic busy-ness within us, don't we? When I was a teenager, my older brother, Christian, told me to read the Proverbs. He said they would teach me wisdom. Of course, I wanted to be wise. I knew I was immature, and it bothered me. I looked up to Christian and my other older brothers, my parents, and others in my life whom I considered to be wise. I didn't want to remain the punk kid who doesn't say enough insightful things, doesn't pay close enough attention, asks too many stupid questions, doesn't get good enough grades, and doesn't get enough done. So I read the Proverbs, hoping that in them I would find wisdom. But after reading the Proverbs I concluded that I sleep too much, I don't work hard enough, I talk too much, and I'm a fool.

This is what the law does. It reveals that you have failed. It reveals that your sinful, dying nature is under the law and God's condemnation. And it increases that frantic, busy, restless conscience, which is driven by guilt, regret, and shame. Or as St. Paul says, the law stirs up the sinful passions in us, which only produce fruits for death (Rom 7). In our Epistle Lesson from Galatians 5, St. Paul calls these the works of the flesh. They manifest themselves in all sorts of terrible things, like adultery, false worship,

and envy. Driven by the self-seeking desire to be good in your own eyes, the sinful flesh tries to be righteous. Yet all it accomplishes is more sin. It's like an employee trying to prove to his employer and fellow workers that he's good at his job. But his attempt to prove this is driven by his own desire to prove himself right. He then becomes jealous of his fellow workers, unkind to those who are weak, creating rivalries and divisions in his company, as he gets angry that people don't notice him for what he does.

Or it's like a man whose own sin has ruined his life. He has lost friends, perhaps family and loved ones. He is suffering the consequences of his own actions. But instead of being led by the Spirit to trust in the gospel, taking refuge in the love of God in Christ, he is driven by his shame and damaged pride as he tries to get back what was lost. He only sinks deeper into his own misery as he attempts to prove at least to himself that he is good enough. Yet, this only increases the desires that got him into this mess in the first place, whether it was to commit adultery, to hurt his brother's life or reputation, or even to commit murder, either toward someone else or against himself.

The law is good. It is holy. But it doesn't make us better. It's like throwing a stone into a swamp, which looks beautiful on the outside but is filled with rotting filth, and once the stone breaks the seal on the surface, the stink comes out. The law reveals what is true. It reveals the stench of death in all of us. It cuts to the heart and the conscience in order to show how we are not driven by love for God and joy in his goodness. Instead, it makes known that we are driven by the desire to justify ourselves.

When I read the Proverbs, I was hoping it would make me wise. I would often check how many pages I had left, looking forward to fulfilling this task, as if my act of reading it would be enough to make me wise. But this is the deceitfulness of the heart, which the law exposes. It reveals that we are looking only for a quick fix to our problems. The sinful nature in all of us assumes that it can fulfill the law by completing a to-do list of various regulations. In this way, it is never at peace, never at rest, but it remains under the law, condemned by God.

The law always accuses the sinful heart. Yet, the Holy Spirit, as he guides us under his grace, still teaches us the law. He teaches us what is good and pleasing in God's sight. But when he does this, he does not put us under the law. He uses the law to condemn our sinful nature and expose the lie in our hearts. But he does not do this to lead us to despair. He calls us to our duties, despite the fact that we are unworthy of them. And he invites us again and again to find our rest in Christ. Christ alone has fulfilled the law. His obedience is our righteousness. His blood gives us peace. His washing away of our sins alone is what gives us a good conscience.

Jesus cleansed ten lepers from their leprosy. He told them to go and show themselves to the priest. This was in accordance with the law of God, which required those with leprosy to be examined by a priest after their disease had gone away. The priest was to make sure they were clean. But what was the point of this regulation? It was to teach the people that God is the one who cleanses them. It was an object lesson, so to speak, to guide them to take refuge, not in their own following of the law, but in the mercy of God who makes them holy. Ten were cleansed, but only one came back to thank God. He fell down on his face at Jesus' feet, giving glory to God. The other nine did what the law required. They followed the rules. But it was the grace of Jesus, the true Priest who was giving himself to wash away their sins, which prompted that one Samaritan to return with thanksgiving and joy. It was the voice of Jesus, which created faith in that man's heart, saving him from much more than an earthly disease.

That Samaritan who came back to thank Jesus was not under the law. He wasn't driven by the frantic desire to meet some standard of holiness. He was driven by faith, filled with the love of God, rejoicing in God's goodness, and at peace in his conscience. Such love, joy, and peace can only come from the Holy Spirit. It can only come from the gospel, the good news of salvation. Where were the other nine? They went to do what the law required of them. But following this requirement of the law didn't save them. This one foreigner was given faith, which alone fulfills the law, because faith alone clings to the righteousness of Jesus.

Jesus therefore told the Samaritan to go. Go and fulfill your duty. But go with this assurance: Your faith has saved you.

This is how the Holy Spirit leads us in our daily lives. He calls us to go and fulfill our duty. Go. Love and honor your spouse. Go. Respect your parents. Go. Give what you owe to your neighbor, to your church, and to your Lord. But go with this conviction. Your faith has saved you. You are not under the law. It is in such going that the Holy Spirit leads you, and he produces in you the love of God and your neighbor, the joy of salvation, the peace which passes all understanding, the patience to bear your cross, the kindness to bear one another's burdens, the goodness and faithfulness to stand on God's Word, the meekness to confess it with humility, and the self-control not to fall into despair when temptations seek to overwhelm you. He produces this fruit in you by his gospel, and he assures you that no matter how much the law accuses your sinful desires, it does not stand against you. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because those who are in Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh together with its passion and desires.

There is no sin you have committed that is not taken away by Jesus. There is no death you must face that is not conquered by Jesus. There is no torment in your soul that is not overcome by the love, joy, and peace of Christ. It is a free gift. So be still, and know that Jesus is God and Lord. This is what it means to be led by the Spirit. It is to be taught wisdom, which begins with the fear of the Lord as you tremble as his Word. But it is not to be pushed by self-pity under the thumb of the law, but convinced by divine mercy under the mighty hand of God that he will not turn away a broken and contrite spirit. In other words, it is to be under God's grace resting on his gracious Word. This is always how the Spirit leads us. In Jesus' name, Amen.