

What Do You Mean If You Break One Point, You Are “Guilty of All”?

Is it impossible for human beings to keep God’s Law? If we break one point of the Law, have we really broken it all? What does the apostle James mean by his enigmatic, strange statement? Does God’s Law stand and fall together?

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According to the Scriptures, God’s Law is perfect. “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:7). David goes on, “The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes . . . The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward” (Psa.19:8-11).

Such a wonderful Law should be greatly prized by mankind. In fact, David wrote, “A good understand have all those who do His commandments” (Psalm 111:10). In fact, he said, “Blessed are the undefiled [blameless] in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD” (Psalm 119:1). He also declared, “Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart” (Psalm 119:34). David also said, “I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments” (119:60).

But can any man keep God’s Law?

Jesus Christ declared, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I came not to destroy but to fulfill” (Matt.5:17). He added, “For assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will be no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (verse 18).

Clearly, Christ did not come to do away with or abolish the Law of God, but to keep it – to fulfill it. And Peter says that Christ came, “leaving us an EXAMPLE, that you [we] should follow His steps” (I Pet.2:21). John adds, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (I John 2:6).

No, there is much more to the mystery of God’s Law than many people suppose! In fact, Paul declared, “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On

the contrary, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31). But is God’s Law beyond the power of man to observe it? Would God command us to do something that is impossible?

What Do You Mean?

We read in James, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). What does this mean? Does it mean we must keep all God’s Law, perfectly, or we are sinners and condemned to hell? Can any man keep God’s Law perfectly?

Actually, although we are composed of sinful flesh, and are born carnal and fleshly, with human appetites and desires, God has given us the means to overcome sinful, wicked inclinations and desires. He sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins, to pay the penalty of sin for us, on the cross, showing His great love for us. And He promises to give us His Holy Spirit as a begetting, to give us strength and will-power to obey His Law, if and when we repent of sin, which is defined as breaking His law!

Notice! 1)) “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). And, 2)) Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). God’s Spirit then gives us the spiritual power to obey His Law and to please Him, “For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (II Tim.1:7).

God’s Spirit is the Spirit of love, and Paul wrote, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10).

The Context

Take another look at James 2:10. The context shows this is speaking about the fact that “love” is the fulfilling of God’s royal law (v.8-9). If we love our neighbor as we love ourselves, James says, we do well. But if we show partiality in how we treat others, love some but abuse or disrespect others, just because they are poor and needy, then we are transgressors of God’s Law, which is summed up in “love your neighbor.”

It is true that we are all sinners, born into sin. As David said, “I was brought forth in iniquity, in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa.51:5). He also declared, “There is none that does good, no, not one” (Psalm 53:3). The apostle Paul said, and clarified the truth, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom.3:23).

But Christ paid the penalty of our sins for us, dying for us on the tree. He wiped away our debt obligation due to sin. “And you being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the *certificate of debt* with its requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us, having nailed IT to the cross” (Col.2:13-14). The “handwriting” as some translations have it is in the Greek the “debt certificate,” or “debt

note” that we incurred due to sin – we owed God a “debt” – our very lives, because “the wages of sin is DEATH” (Rom.6:23).

But now that we are forgiven, that does not abolish God’s Law. Rather, it means we must now KEEP IT! It was not nailed to the cross – our SINS were nailed to the cross!

The point is, although we may keep all the points of God’s Law, or think we do, but if we fail to show love to a brother or stranger, then we have broken the law – we are convicted as “transgressors of the law.” We are still flesh and blood. We all make mistakes. Even when we want to do good, we often fail. But God is merciful, so long as we continue trying, striving, and seeking to obey Him. As John said, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

James goes on, explaining his point concerning the Law of God—“For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:11) – that is, of the law as a WHOLE – the whole body of God’s Law. You break one point, you have broken the whole thing. For example, if you break one link in a chain, the whole chain is broken. God’s Law all stands or falls together. It is like the human body. If I hurt my little toe, my whole body feels the pain and suffers for it.

James concludes, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (James 2:12) – that is, God’s Law which determines the rules or guidelines of liberty and freedom.

Rabbinical Exegesis

The rabbis said, in tractate 70 of Sanhedrin of the Mishnah, “But if a man do the whole, with the omission of one, he is guilty of the whole, and of every one.” Thus an adulteress, by that one crime, breaks all the ten commandments. Breaking any one may be shown to be a breach of the whole Decalogue. As Adam Clarke says in his Commentary, “The truth is, any sin is against the Divine Authority; and he who has committed one transgression is guilty of death.”

The apostle Paul wrote, “The wages of sin is death” (Rom.6:23). Ezekiel said, “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezek.18:4). By one deliberate act one dissolves, as much as he can, the connection which binds together all the sacred precepts of God’s Law. If God should be obeyed in any one instance, He should be obeyed in all. Thus to break one is to cast off obedience and to reject God, and all His commandments. The Law of God all hangs together and cannot be sundered, dissolved, or disconnected. You break one, you break them all. The rabbis consider that any one sin has the seeds of all others within it.

The Law may be compared to a seamless garment which is rent if you but rend a part. It is like a musical harmony which is spoiled if you hit one wrong, discordant note. If any part of a man be judged leprous, then the whole man is considered leprous. God requires perfect, not partial obedience.

“Partial in the Law”

Christ said, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt.5:48). God told Abraham, “Walk before Me, and be thou perfect” (Gen.17:1). “The Law of the LORD is perfect” (Psalm 19:7).

God warns all ministers who teach part of His Law is abolished, “But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. . . Therefore I have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways but have shown *partiality in the law*” (Malachi 2:8-9).

God demands total obedience – not partial obedience. Whole-hearted surrender, not partial surrender. Complete faith, not wavering, vacillating, doubtful faith. Total, impartial, genuine love – not partial, conditional, limited love.

God’s Law is a Unity – it all hangs together and is interwoven together. David H. Stern writes, in the *New Testament Jewish Commentary*, “These verses agree with the normal Jewish understanding, found in the writings of the rabbis, that if one withholds one’s willingness to accept the authority of any part of the Torah, one has abrogated the authority of the whole Torah.” Stern adds, “Ya’akov in vv.10-11 is teaching . . . as is clear from the Greek verb tenses: **If you don’t commit adultery**, that is, if you make it your ongoing practice (present tense) to obey the command not to commit adultery, **but do murder**, making it your ongoing practice and continuing mindset to disobey this command, then you **have become** (perfect tense)—you have once and for all put yourself in the category of being—a **transgressor of the Torah**.” Says Stern, “The *Tanakh* calls such rejection of the authority of the Torah ‘sinning with a high hand.’ Moreover, any society regards acceptance of some of its law and rejection of others as tantamount to rejection of the whole legal system.”

If a person has rejected any part of God’s Law, he has rejected the authority of the Law-giver, the authority of the whole law, therefore, and stands guilty as charged before the throne of Heaven. Only real repentance, coupled with faith in Yeshua the Messiah, and His sacrifice in our stead for our sins, can reconcile us to God and cause the death penalty due to sin to pass away. For further insight into this subject, which has many other facets and ramifications, write for our free articles:

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