

LAW AND GOSPEL IN CONTRAST (IP)

Virgil Warren, PhD

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul declares that the “letter” kills, but the spirit gives life. His point appears to be that the absoluteness and inflexibility of law stifles and destroys persons in operation, especially in relation with each other. It drives people away even as the Israelites turned away from the glow on Moses’ face. The “spirit,” or purpose, of the Law corresponds with the Person who gave it. “*Cutting someone a little slack*” is a liberating experience. On this usage of “spirit,” compare John 1:17; 4:23; Romans 7:6; Galatians 3-4. Spirit appears to mean personal and interpersonal in contrast to letter.

When we say that Christianity is an interpersonal system, we say so in contrast to its being a legal one. Its watch words are “faith,” “grace,” “promise.” The Law, coming later than promise, did not annul promise; it was operative only insofar as it reinforced the purpose of the previous promise. Law is not of faith (Galatians 3). Faith does not, however, make law of no effect but establishes, or reinforces, it inasmuch as both gospel and law are concerned with the same issue: human righteousness.

Law amounts to something distinct from the lawgiver. For it to be law, it operates separately by principles natural to itself and is impersonal, or non-personal, in nature. In keeping with the legal nature of the Old Testament system, there was a priesthood that interceded whereas in the gospel age (Christ) all the members comprise a kingdom of “priests.” This system is labeled “the priesthood of all believers.”

We must keep in mind two important characteristics of law. Law does not have to conform to the nature of reality to be in force or require compliance. The connectors in legal process are authority; in interpersonal process the connectors are choices.

christir.org