



Daily Verse and Comment

Galatians 5:18

(18) But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

King James Version

Verse 18 appears as a summary statement in light of all that Paul wrote previous to this. It needs a bit of defining. According to what the apostle wrote earlier, to be "[under the law](#)" includes three areas:

1. Most obviously, it means to be under the law's penalty because we have sinned. [Jesus](#) died so that we can be freed from that penalty.
2. It means to be striving to achieve justification through lawkeeping, which is what the main body of this epistle covers.
3. The third meaning is also covered but less thoroughly: that a person is trying to earn God's election and salvation by becoming a member of the Old Covenant. Chapter 5 covers that to a very small extent.

Paul's statement, then, must be seen in context of all that has been written before. Notice what Kenneth Wuest writes in *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, Volume 1, page 156. This is a typical Protestant statement regarding verse 18.

The exhortation is therefore, to be led by the Spirit. The assurance is given those who do so, that they will not be living their lives on the principle of legalism. The Spirit and the law are here contrasted, and are shown to be methods of living a Christian life that are diametrically opposed to one another. *The law is not only no safeguard against the flesh, but rather provokes it to more [sin](#).*

Therefore, the believer who would renounce the flesh, must renounce the law also. Thus, the flesh and the law are closely allied, whereas the flesh and the Spirit are diametrically opposed to one another. (Author's emphasis.)

To understand this truthfully, all he needs to do is reread what Paul wrote. What the apostle contrasts is Spirit with flesh, and Spirit with those *under* the law—not the law per se. But this commentator made no attempt to define what Paul means by "under the law," as Paul himself uses it in the epistle. Also, there was no attempt to define what the author of the commentary means by "legalism."

We have already seen what Paul means by "under the law." To these people, *legalism* is "the belief that one is obligated to obey the law." The key word in that definition is "obligated." They hate it ([Romans 8:7](#)), and therefore lawkeeping is seen as a burden, a yoke of bondage, despite the undeniable fact that [God](#) (through James) says it is a "law of liberty" ([James 1:25](#); [2:12](#)).

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Covenants, Grace, and Law \(Part Twenty-Eight\)](#)



Related Topics:

[Battle of Flesh and Spirit](#)

[Justification](#)

[Justification by Law-keeping](#)

[Law of Liberty](#)

[Led by the Spirit](#)

[Legalism](#)

[Obligation to Keep the Law](#)

[Old Covenant](#)

[Penalty of Sin](#)
[Under the Law](#)

Commentary copyright © 1992-2025 [Church of the Great God](#)