

Letter and Spirit.  
E. J. Waggoner.  
p. 1, Para. 1, [LETTER].

"But now we are delivered from the law, being dead to that wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Rom. 7:6, margin. p. 1, Para. 2, [LETTER].

Let our first question be, What is the thing in which we were held, and to which we are now dead? Let us see. The seventh chapter of Romans is but an expansion of the sixth chapter, where we read that we are "dead to sin" (verse 2), and that "he that is dead is freed from sin" (verse 7). "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Verse 11. p. 1, Para. 3, [LETTER].

We are dead unto the sin which held us, because sin also is dead by Christ. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Verse 6. And so "we are delivered from the law." It had been transgressed, and therefore it demanded our death; "for the wages of sin is death." Verse 23. But now that we are dead, it pursues us no further; it has executed the penalty on us, in Christ. "The law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth." When he is dead, there is nothing more that it can do to him. p. 1, Para. 4, [LETTER].

"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Gal. 2:20. That is a good reason why the vengeance of the law no longer pursues us. The man who committed the sin is dead, and the man who now lives is a "new man," walking "in newness of life." The old life was a life of sin; the "new man" is after God "created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. 4:22-24. Since the "new man" has not transgressed the law, he is as a matter of course free. p. 1, Para. 5, [LETTER].

Who Are Not Under the Law. p. 1, Para. 6, [LETTER].

But the law is not dead. It is as much alive as it ever was. The new man is free from it simply because he is walking in harmony with it. The new man is under as much obligation to keep the law as the old man was; the

difference between them is that the new man does his duty, while the old man did not, and could not. The old man was "not subject to the law of God," being opposed to the Holy Spirit. The new man is alive through Christ, who died "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Rom. 8:4. p. 1, Para. 7, [LETTER].

"If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Gal. 5:18. But the verse last quoted from Romans tells us that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in those who walk after the Spirit. Therefore we are taught most plainly that the only ones who are "not under the law" are those in whom the righteousness of the law is fulfilled. The transgressors of the law are the only ones who are "under the law." Those who are "delivered from the law" are the ones who are keeping it "in spirit and in truth." p. 1, Para. 8, [LETTER].

This is shown in the statement that we are delivered from the law, in order "that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." We still serve, but as free men, and not as slaves. It is a spiritual service, that is, a real service; for only that which is spiritual service is real. p. 1, Para. 9, [LETTER].

"For we know that the law is spiritual." Rom. 7:14. It follows, therefore, that when we were serving in oldness of the letter, we were not really keeping the law; for since the law is spiritual, it necessarily requires spiritual service. So it is only when we are delivered from the law that we keep it. p. 2, Para. 1, [LETTER].

Unlike Human Law. p. 2, Para. 2, [LETTER].

The common opinion in regard to the letter and the spirit of the law, is most erroneous. The error arises from supposing that the law of God is similar to human laws. It is quite common to speak of the spirit of a law made by man, when all that is meant is the intent of the law. Thus: No human law is perfect; its framers can not possibly foresee all the circumstances that may arise to be judged by it. Then, too, the language of the law may be obscure. So the judge often finds it necessary to decide what was the intent of the lawmakers. A man might be technically or literally a violator of a law, while still acting fully in

harmony with the intent of its framers. This is what is meant by the mistaken use of the term "letter and spirit," as applied to human laws. p. 2, Para. 3, [LETTER].

Now the great difference between the nature of human laws and the divine law is that there is no spirit to the former, while the latter is wholly spiritual. Spirit is life; but there is no life in human laws. They can not give life. No man can get anything more out of a human law than he puts into it. If men ignore any human law, then it is said to be "a dead letter." But it has no more life in itself when it is obeyed than when it is disregarded; the life is in the people, who make their acts conform to the words of the law. p. 2, Para. 4, [LETTER].

The law of God is wholly different. It is alive whether people regard it or not. It is alive because it is spiritual. The man who serves in "the oldness of the letter" does not really serve at all, because, no matter how good his purpose, or how strong his endeavors, to keep the law, he is simply reproducing himself, and not the law. In trying to do what the law tells him to do, he is merely doing what his own nature allows him to do. While in a carnal state, he is "not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. 8:7. p. 2, Para. 5, [LETTER].

"The Law is Life." p. 2, Para. 6, [LETTER].

But "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2) gives freedom from this bondage, so that "the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us." The real law is the life of God in Christ, and that gives life. What is termed "the letter" of the law of God is the verbal statement of the law. This is not the law itself, but only the form of it, as the apostle said the Jews had "the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law." Rom. 2:20. The verbal statement of the law bears the same relation to the law itself that the photograph of a man has to the man himself. It is but the shadow. p. 2, Para. 7, [LETTER].

A shadow is the exact image of the substance. The words of the divine law, being "the form of knowledge and of the truth," might be compared to a state, rather than to a photograph. It has the form and features, and differs from the reality only in having no life. So when we speak of the spirit of God's law, we mean the law itself, and not merely the intent of the law. The intent of the law may be learned

from the words, since God is not subject to human limitations, but knows what is needed, and can say just what He means. p. 2, Para. 8, [LETTER].

From the words of the law of God we may know exactly what we should do, for it is a perfect form. But it is only in Christ that we find the living substance. The law in Christ is not only living, but it gives life. It performs itself in those who submit to it, because it is God's own life. It is not less than the letter; it is not something different from the letter; but it is simply the living thing which the letter perfectly describes. p. 3, Para. 1, [LETTER].

Editorial Notes. p. 3, Para. 2, [LETTER].

We are glad to be able to put before our readers this timely paper by Elder E. J. Waggoner, editor of Present Truth, London, England. It clearly and concisely exposes a prevalent error, held even by good men. It shows from the Word the spiritual nature of God's law. p. 3, Para. 3, [LETTER].

Not only is God's law spiritual, it is eternal and unchangeable. As it expresses in itself the character of God, it could not be otherwise. It is not a law that sprang into existence because of necessity. It did not arise to meet an exigency. It has existed from the beginning; it must exist as long as God exists; for it is the expression of His character in the words of men. Yet in these words there is the life, the power of God. p. 3, Para. 4, [LETTER].

That the principles of God's law have not been always in operation is no proof of the non-existence of the law. For instance, it is said that the fifth commandment and the seventh commandment of the Decalogue show that the law was made after there were fathers and mothers, husbands and wives. But, on the contrary, these commandments were in the law from the beginning, dormant, so to speak, but as soon as the conditions came into existence which demanded such a law, the law was present. In short, in the beginning before a created being existed, God's law existed in His wisdom and righteousness, broad enough to govern the universe, wise enough to meet all emergencies which might arise, all conditions which sin might bring into existence. p. 3, Para. 5, [LETTER].

This is the wisdom of the perfect plan of God's government. It can not be surprised. No power can arise able to overthrow it. No opposition conspiracy, or rebellion can compel or necessitate change on the part of the Lawgiver. His law, His government, is eternally complete -- complete in the past, present, and future -- eternally adapted to meet all conditions, all emergencies. "The law of the Lord is perfect." p. 3, Para. 6, [LETTER].

The Gospel in Jesus Christ is the law worked out. The righteousness which God gives through Christ is the righteousness which He wrought out by obedience to His Father's law; for it is by His obedience that many are made righteous. Rom. 5:19. In Him it is "the Law of the Spirit of Life" (Rom. 8:2), the very thing for which it was first ordained (Rom. 7:10). It became the law of death only because perverted by sin. In Jesus Christ it is seen in all its normal beauty; and he who accepts Christ, accepts the law, and says with the apostle John: "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3. p. 3, Para. 7, [LETTER].

The last number (36) in this series was "The True Church; How We May Know It." The next issue (No. 38) is entitled "Who Are the Saints? Their Character." Send stamp for full catalog to Pacific Press, Oakland, Cal. p. 4, Para. 1, [LETTER].