

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMANDMENTS

In the New Testament

Amazing as it may seem, many teach that the commandments God wrote in stone with His own finger have been done away with in Christ. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Galatians 3:13, KJV). It has also been argued that the law has been totally abrogated by grace and we have been set free from the law and its demands. But is this really true, and is that what the Bible truly reveals?

It is true and quite obvious that *we can't be saved by law keeping*. "For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16, KJV), the primary reason being that no person except the Lord Jesus has ever kept or ever could keep all the law perfectly. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law; and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10, KJV).

While it is clear we are not under the law, the law does reveal the holiness of God, especially the Ten Commandments that we are concerned with in this article. Nevertheless, while we may not be under the "law of Moses," we are under the "law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

In John 13:34, Jesus said, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." To love others was not a new commandment, but to love others as Christ loved others is revolutionary. This was not the only commandment Jesus gave to us; He gave many other specific commands teaching us how to respond and express His kind of love. We are now to love others based on Jesus' sacrificial love for us. Christ's love will bring unbelievers to Him and it will also keep believers strong and united in a world hostile to God. We must follow Jesus' example. "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15, KJV).

The sacrificial-ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law, of course, are no longer necessary for us since Christ's death and resurrection. The animal sacrifices, the officiating priesthood, and all such ritualistic ceremonies, meaningful as they were at the time, are not now needed. "For by one offering [Christ] hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14, KJV).

However, it is very significant that as far as the Ten Commandments are concerned, every one of them has been repeated in the New Testament expressing God's

will for Christian believers, not as conditions of salvation but as genuine character traits of a Christian, and a new way of life.

Repeat of the Ten Commandments

It is impossible for true Christian believers to live a Christian life without keeping the Ten Commandments, and here are the reasons why.

Exodus 20:1 2: "And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:1 2, KJV).

First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (verse 3).

New Testament Command: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30, KJV).

When Jesus stated the First Commandment in the New Testament He made it clear that we are to put God first in everything and to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. While Satan may be satisfied with only a piece of your heart, God our Father wants our whole heart, not just a part of it.

Notice the extreme to which the apostle Paul went expressing what godly love (charity) really is in 1 Corinthians 13. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8).

The society we live in today confuses love and lust. Unlike lust, God's kind of love is directed outward toward others, not inward toward ourselves. God's love is not selfish. God's love is not natural to us. It is possible only if God helps us set aside our own desires and instincts, so we can give love while expecting nothing in return.

Second Commandment: "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or in the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD

your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:4-6).

New Testament Commandment: The apostle Paul made it clear about what we as New Testament Christians should not do. "Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.' We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel" (1 Corinthians 10:7-10).

Especially in Paul's letters, idolatry is used of a person's commitment to any value other than to Jesus Christ as Lord. In Romans 1:18-32, it is evident that the ultimate idolatry for Paul is putting love of self before honoring and serving God. "You cannot serve God and Mammon," (Matthew 6:24).

Third Commandment: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name" (Exodus 20:7).

New Testament Commandment: In regards to this Third Commandment Jesus said, "But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black" (Matthew 5:34-36).

In the present world truthfulness is so rare that people think they need to back up their word with oaths, promises, profanity, and sometimes taking God's name in vain. It is expected of Christians that they will tell the truth. Therefore, they should not find it necessary to make an oath or promise.

James wrote, "Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No,' no, or you will be condemned" (James 5:12). By avoiding lies, half-truths, and omissions of the truth, we will become known as a trustworthy people.

Fourth Commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens

and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Verses 8-11).

New Testament Commandment: According to Jesus the Sabbath was made for all mankind, not just the Jews. "Then He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:27-28).

For the Pharisees, Sabbath laws had become more important than Sabbath rest. Jesus understood that the intent of God's Law is to promote love for God and others, making the Sabbath a delight.

In Hebrews 4:8-11, Paul writes, "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about an other day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."

Jesus has provided for our rest through faith. We do not have to labor for it. This is not the struggle of good works to obtain salvation. It refers to making every effort to obtain what God has provided. It is not to be taken for granted. It requires decision and commitment to appropriate the rest God offers. If we are to enter God's rest we must believe that God has this relationship in mind for us. We must trust in Jesus to bring us God's rest, and determine to follow Him in obedience.

In the New Testament, to the surprise of many, Jesus and the apostles not only kept the seventh-day Sabbath but also all of God's holy days, which are considered Sabbath days also. The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them; These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies" (Leviticus 23:1-2).

The following scriptures from the New Testament (all from the NIV, emphasis added) reveal clearly that Jesus and His apostles kept all of God's holy feast days:

Luke 2:41-42: "Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the *Feast of the Passover*. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the *feast* according to the custom. After the *feast* was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it."

John 7:2: "But when the Jewish *Feast of Tabernacles* was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do.'"

John 7:37: "On the last and greatest day of the *Feast*, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If a man is thirsty,

let him come to me and drink.”

Acts 12:3: “When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*.”

Act 20:6: “But we sailed from Philippi after the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*.”

Acts 20:16: “Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of *Pentecost*.”

Acts 27:9: “Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the *Fast* [that is, the Day of Atonement].”

1 Corinthians 5:6 8: “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our *Passover lamb*, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the *Festival*, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”

1 Corinthians 16:8: “But I will stay on at Ephesus until *Pentecost*.”

It is wrong to assume that the annual feast days came to an end with the sacrifice of Christ, simply because they were connected with the sacrificial system of the Temple. The purpose of God’s feast days is not determined by their connection with the sacrificial system, but by what they point to. If the feasts had only typified the redemptive accomplishments of Christ’s first coming, then their function would have terminated at the crucifixion. However, if the feasts foreshadow also the consummation of redemption to be accomplished by Christ at His second coming, then their function continues in the Christian church, with new added meaning and manner of observance. God’s holy feast days make clear His plan of Redemption and Reconciliation from beginning to end.

Fifth Commandment: “*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you*” (Exodus 12:12).

New Testament Commandment: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1 3).

To obey means to do as one is told. To honor means to respect and love. This will happen if both parents and children put the others’ interests above their own, that is, if they “submit to one another.”

Six Commandment: “*You shall not murder*” (Exodus 12:13).

New Testament Commandment: “If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler” (1 Peter 4:15).

It is not shameful for us to suffer being a Christian, and if we do we can be assured, Jesus will be with us all the way. “[L]et your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Seventh Commandment: “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Exodus 12:14).

New Testament Commandment: “*Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral*” (Hebrews 13:4). Christians must have a great respect for their marriage vows. Love between husband and wife must be nurtured throughout life. Marriage partners must make sure that their love runs deep enough to affect their hospitality, sympathy, fidelity, and contentment.

Eighth Commandment: “*You shall not steal*” (Exodus 12:15).

New Testament Commandment: “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need” (Ephesians 4:28).

Ninth Commandment: “*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor*” (Exodus 12:16).

New Testament Commandment: “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Colossians 3:9).

If we lie to one another it will disrupt unity in private life, destroying trust, tearing down relationships, and leading to divisiveness in the church. As Christians we are in a continuous program of education. The more we know and understand about Jesus Christ and His work, the more we are being changed to be like Him. We must never cease learning and obeying Jesus or allow ourselves to just drift along. There is great incentive for finding the rich treasure of growing in Him, “the whole of eternity.”

Tenth Commandment: “*You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his man servant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor*” (Exodus 12:17).

New Testament Commandment: “For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—

such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Ephesians 5:5). Prosperity, more than poverty, can dull our spiritual vision, because it tends to make us self-sufficient and eager to acquire still more of everything, except God.

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (James 4:1-3).

Just as hatred leads to murder, so *covetousness* leads to strife and lust to adultery.

Is God’s Law Done Away?

No! Most certainly God’s laws are not done away with. It is just as Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill [magnify] them” (Matthew 5:17). Jesus magnified the law and made it honorable.

What, then, did Paul mean when he said, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13)? The law itself is not a curse; neither are God’s commands *burdensome*. For John tells us “This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

The curse of the law is the penalty of death that hangs over us. Jesus, by bearing our sin upon the tree of crucifixion, has taken away our sins and removed the penalty of death from us that we could not afford to pay. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

Conclusion

The question we must ask now is, just what was nailed to the cross (stake)?

Clearly it was Christ who was nailed to the cross (stake). It is He who bore our sins. When He shed His blood from the cross in our stead, He blotted out all our sins by paying for them in full with His own life. It is sin that was blotted out. “That your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). “Have mercy upon me,” David cried, “Blot out my transgressions. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities” (Psalm 51:1,9, KJV).

Notice this serious statement. “For we must all appear

before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10, KJV). Does the blood of Christ cover all of our bad deeds? Have the sins that stood against us been blotted out?

Turn now to Revelation 20:12, and see what happens in the final judgment. “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (KJV).

This verse strongly suggests that a record exists containing all the sins that are against us. We will be judged accordingly, unless Christ’s blood covers them, blots them out. Christ died to blot out the written record of our guilty past. The record of our past sins has figuratively been nailed to the cross, taken out of the way, and thoroughly expunged. Therefore, we can be sure that it was the ordinances and sins that were against us and contrary to us that was blotted out, and not God’s *law*, not His *commandments*.

Many first-century false teachers taught that Christians could do whatever they wanted and live their life anyway they chose without fear of God’s punishment. Jude warned against such an attitude. “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the *grace of our God into lasciviousness*, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4, KJV). *Lasciviousness* means to live your life in a deliberately willful, malicious, libertine and immoral way. They lived a licentious lifestyle because they believed God’s grace gave them the freedom to do so, therefore turning God’s wonderful *grace* into *lasciviousness*.

The New Testament plainly speaks of “Old Testament” commandments and teaches that they express God’s will for Christians. “So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good for in my inner being I delight in God’s law” (Romans 7:12,22).

Therefore, as Christians we should love and obey God’s commandments, not because doing so saves us, but because we are saved by grace through faith in God’s gift of love in Christ, who bore our sins on the tree of crucifixion. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His *life*” (Romans 5:10, KJV).