

# WHY WE KEEP THE LAW

***"But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).***

Some read a couple of scriptures, and then draw conclusions without considering what many other scriptures say about the same subject. Then, based on these faulty assumptions, they condemn others who practice things different from themselves. Let's look at a couple of scriptures that are commonly misunderstood and misapplied:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, *for by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (Romans 3:20).

Many read the first parts of these verses, but do not take note of what is written in the latter parts. They simply think, "Well, since it is only by grace and faith, and since one cannot be justified by keeping the law, there is no reason to keep it."

Such people are suffering spiritual blindness because they do not consider the whole truth of God's Word. If they did, then they would see ample reasons for striving to keep every single one of God's laws as they apply to us.

## **Which Law?**

Before going very far, we need to distinguish what law we are talking about. The second verse above shows that it is a law that defines sin. Another verse gives us more information about this particular law:

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: *for sin is the transgression of the law*" (1 John 3:4, King James Version).

Notice that "sin" is defined as "the transgression of the law." To find out what law is in view here, consider the following scriptures:

"*All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death*" (1 John 5:17).

"Then it will be *righteousness* for us, if we are careful to observe all these *commandments* before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us" (Deuteronomy 6:25).

"My tongue shall speak of Your word, *for all Your commandments are righteousness* (Psalm 119:172).

These passages are speaking of the Ten Commandments, which define both sin and righteousness. Sin is unrighteousness, or law-breaking. Righteousness is just the opposite; it is equated with *keeping the commandments*.

## **Four Reasons for Keeping the Commandments**

The first reason to keep them is because God's Word tells us to do so. God tells us that He is holy, and He wants us to be holy as well.

"[B]ut as He who called you is *holy*, you also *be holy* in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16).

"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God" (3 John 1:11).

"[D]o not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12).

There simply is no excuse for anyone who reads God's Word to reason around the essential truth that we must strive to obey God's commandments to the best of our ability, and with God's help.

Now, let us go a little further in our under-

standing. If simply keeping God's law will not justify or save us, why does God want us to keep it?

God gave us His law because it teaches about conduct that will destroy our lives and bring about death.

*"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself"* (Ezekiel 18:20).

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

Not only will unrepented and unforgiven sin bring physical and eternal death; it brings terrible consequences in this life as well.

**The second reason** to keep God's laws is so we will not be enslaved to evil, which ultimately will totally corrupt us and separate us from God.

*"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"* (Romans 6:16).

If we follow the ways of sin, or transgressing God laws, we become obedient to Satan. Eventually, we will not even desire God's forgiveness and mercy, for we would become totally corrupted and twisted like Satan.

*"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Romans 8:5-8).

*"[The servant of God should correct] those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having*

*been taken captive by him to do his will"* (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

**The third reason** to keep God's laws is that we are commanded to become like Jesus Christ. This is simply impossible if we do not try our best to keep God's laws.

*"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 2:5).

*"[God wishes to bring us all] to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:13).

*"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth'"* (1 Peter 2:21-22).

*"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"* (John 15:10).

For us to become like Jesus Christ we must learn to keep God's laws in spirit and letter as He gave us example. Sure, we will not be perfect as long as we are human beings; but, if our spirit has been united with His, we will want to be perfect, and will humbly and contritely ask for forgiveness when we fall short.

*"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked"* (1 John 2:1-6).

**The fourth reason** for keeping all of God's laws is that if we break one we will be lead to breaking others, and the curses from breaking

them will continually build until they totally destroy our lives and bring death.

“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

This scripture tells us that we must be vigilant in keeping God’s laws, for breaking even one makes one a law-breaker and leads to breaking others. It is like a child who takes things that do not belong to him. If this behavior is not stopped early, when he grows older he will probably commit petty theft, and eventually he may commit grand larceny.

So we should understand that the keeping of God’s laws is not optional for the true Christian.

#### **An Important Key for Law-Keepers**

Now here is a key concerning keeping the laws of God: We should keep them as Jesus did. Christ’s example and teachings show us how to properly understand and obey God’s Ten Commandments. Many people try to tell others just what laws should be kept and how one should keep them. But we must look to the Scriptures and study the example and teachings of Jesus, and let God’s Spirit lead us to a deeper understanding of God’s will.

We are individually responsible to insure that what we learn and practice truly comes from God. We cannot pass this responsibility on to others and simply follow them without question. We must learn God’s Word and use it to verify what we are told by others. Read and reread the following scriptures:

John 17:17: “Sanctify them by Your *truth*. Your *word* is *truth*.”

John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the *way*, the *truth*, and the *life*. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

John 1:14: “And the *Word* became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and *truth*.”

John 4:23–24: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship

the Father in *spirit* and *truth*; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ‘God is *Spirit*, and those who worship Him must worship in *spirit* and *truth*.’”

John 16:13: “However, when He, the *Spirit* of *truth*, has come, He will guide you into all *truth*; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

2 Timothy 2:15: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the *word* of *truth*.”

1 John 2:27: “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone *teach* you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”

1 Corinthians 11:1: “*Imitate* me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.”

#### **The Ten Commandments**

Let us briefly run through the Ten Commandments. I will be brief to illustrate how much we need to study each one so we can remove many subtle errors that may be causing us a lot of grief in which we do not understand the cause.

Basically, the first four tell us how to properly worship God and show Him honor and respect. The last six deal with our relationship with others here on earth. Every act that we do relates directly or indirectly with these commandments. Remember, they were given for our benefit. Violating them will bring curses upon others and us. This is automatic, and unless God intervenes they will come as surely as we breathe. Even if we repent and ask for forgiveness, and even if God forgives us, we still may suffer the consequences physically for breaking them.

So, it is not just a simple, “Sorry, God, for breaking that law; forgive me,” and now everything is just fine. WRONG! In most cases there will be problems even if we do not have to bear

them spiritually and face the death sentence that extinguishes our life for all eternity. That is why we must strive to constantly obey God, keeping every single one of His commandments just like Jesus did.

Let's turn to the listing of God's Ten Commandments and spend just a few minutes hitting some highlights to jog our memory to their importance in our lives. First, notice Exodus 20:

"And God spoke all these words, saying: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'" (verses 1-2).

Before going on, let us drop down to verses 18 through 20:

"Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.' And Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear; for *God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.*'"

This is God directly telling His people what sin is. No need for man to make up a list: No dancing, card playing, movie going, drinking, etc. Unless one can tie the misuse of some activity to one of these ten laws it simply is not sin, regardless what some religious traditions have taught in the past.

### ***Worship reserved for God alone***

Now, let's go back and take up where we left off. In Exodus 20:3, God says, "You shall have no other gods before Me." This is the First Commandment of the Decalogue.

To put anything ahead of God is to break this commandment. God, and God alone, is to be worshipped. We may love, honor, and deeply respect our brothers and sisters, but our worship belongs to God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, there are some self-styled reli-

gious experts debating whether Jesus Christ was a created being or truly God, and, consequently, whether He is worthy of our worship. How foolish can one become? Read the Word; study it; meditate on it. Using it with God's Spirit, we can know the truth and be set free of the ignorance that enslaves man to false ideas and reasoning.

Notice what John's Gospel says about the preincarnate Word:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.... He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 10, 14).

Clearly, the One who became Jesus Christ was *with* God the Father, and *was* Himself God. He could not have been a created being, for the passage above plainly states that He participated in the making of *all* created things.

Remember, what appears to be "intellectual" and "scholarly" may be completely foolish in God's eyes. Paul spoke of those who claimed "to be wise" but "became fools" (Romans 1:22). He cautioned the Corinthians about the deception of false wisdom:

"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For *the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.* For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'; and again, 'The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile'" (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).

### ***God to be worshipped in spirit and truth***

The Second Commandment reads, "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the*

water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:4-6).

Every religion of man has some kind of image that it identifies itself with. However, in the true religion of God, we are instructed not to have any kind of image integral to our religious worship of Him. That means crosses, pictures of Christ, statues of Mary, and so on, violate this commandment. People try to split hairs and say they do not worship these things, but God simply says, "Do not use any kind of representation of anything as a device to facilitate your worship of Me." God wants to be in our inward parts, our very mind and spirit, not in some kind of physical object we can see.

#### ***God's name to be hallowed***

Now we come to the Third Commandment: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

Have we ever used God or His name in some kind of joke? Have we ever used the name "God" or "Jesus" in expressing frustration or anger? The very name of God should be so sacred that we never use it unless we are addressing Him in prayer or speaking of Him reverently.

#### ***The Sabbath to be kept***

The Fourth Commandment states, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea,

and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11).

Even in this scripture God reveals which day He has set aside for rest and worship for true believers. Trust God's Word; do not lean on the "wisdom" of man who think they can decide how to obey God. Read Leviticus 23, for it is God's Word, and it reveals a lot more about God's Sabbaths—days that He has made special to reveal His mind and His plan to those who will obey Him and find truth rather than error.

#### ***Parents to be honored***

The Fifth Commandment is the first that concerns how we relate to one another, but it also teaches us something about our relationship with our Heavenly Father. It reads, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).

The family unit is integral to God's way of life. God is a family, and He is making sons out of human beings. He tests them, puts His Spirit in them, and will one day resurrect or transform them to a new body just like His own. Learn about things that strengthen family ties and bonds. Practice them with all your might. These things are the making of eternal life.

#### ***Life to be cherished***

The Sixth Commandment reads, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

Let us fully understand this commandment. It goes to the intent of our hearts and minds and involves our feeling toward others. Hate and bitterness have no part in one called by God to become like His Son. Even while Jesus was dying He forgave those who betrayed Him and put Him to death.

#### ***Marital commitments to be kept***

The Seventh Commandment forbids marital infidelity: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).

Satan uses adultery to destroy man's faith and the family unit. It takes a strong commitment to marry and stay married in our society. It's easy to find justification for divorce, and infidelity is often considered a minor flaw rather than a major sin.

Someone described marriage as a besieged fortress: Everyone on the inside is trying to get out and everyone on the outside is trying to get in.

Making and keeping commitments is absolutely essential to developing the kind of faith that we must have to please God.

"But without *faith* it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Having and keeping our commitments to family, friends, and relationships with others builds our ability to keep our commitment to God. Anything that breaks this down in our lives with others breaks down our commitment to God.

#### ***Others' property to be respected***

The Eighth Commandment concerns respecting others' belongings: "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

Never take anything you do not earn or cannot rightly have. Don't trust in winning the lottery to save you from your debts. Be thankful and content for whatever you have, and plan and execute the plan to prosper with the intent that it will help you to help others and not just yourself.

#### ***Truth to be esteemed***

The Ninth Commandment states, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16).

One of the base elements of Satan is that of being a liar. He is the originator of this practice of using information to deceive or create problems with others. Many friends are separated because of untruth and rumors. If you hear something bad, simply refuse to tell it to some-

one else. If you must tell someone, be absolutely sure of its authenticity, and determine why and what might happen if you share it.

"A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 16:28).

"He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends" (Proverbs 17:9).

"These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Notice that sowing discord—even if what is told is true—among brethren is committing an abominable act before God.

#### ***Desires to be managed***

All the sins described above originate with unlawful or excessive desire. The Tenth Commandment goes to the heart of the problem:

"*You shall not covet* your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17).

It is interesting that God put this commandment, which deals with the "starting point" of sinful behavior, at the very end of the list. Our wrong behavior begins in our hearts and minds. When we dwell on things that we cannot rightly gain, we lose appreciation for all the things we have. A contented heart is a powerful asset in our faithful relationship with Almighty God.

"Now godliness with *contentment* is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which

some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:6-12).

**Choose Life!**

Why do we keep the law? Only a fool would want to do otherwise. Blessings are a lot more enjoyable than curses. In keeping the commandments we are choosing the way of life rather than of death.

"See, I have set before you today life and

good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:15).

***For further reading...***

*The Ten Commandments (TNC)*

*Understanding the Commandments (UTN)*

*Which Old Testament Laws Apply Today? (OTL)*

*Are Christians Under the Law? (UNL)*



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