

# Keeping The Commandments

What was the purpose of the commandments of God and why were they given in the Old Testament? Are Christians to keep the Law? These questions are addressed and put into a prophetic and liberating solution for those under legalistic influence.

There are six hundred and thirteen laws given within the first five books of the Bible. Ten of these God deemed important enough to write upon stone with His own hand. How should we respond to such majestic regulation? Too often we are quick to dismiss holy oracles because such are found in the Old Testament and we live by the new. Yet God does not change. Why then should we see fit to lift ourselves above the law and assume that grace alone will keep us clean before His holy throne?

However, we must not allow ourselves to be blind-sided by good intentions or good deeds. In order to understand the true nature of keeping the commandments, we must first understand why God initiated them in the first place.

## MISREPRESENTATION AND MODIFICATION

The first commandment ever issued by God was a singular law issued to Adam in the Garden of Eden.

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Gen. 2:16 & 17

There was only one law needed in the garden because of the un-fallen nature of man at that time. Adam then passed on this single law to Eve. Now, either Adam miss-communicated the law or Eve embellished it, for she restated this law later as,

"We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, *nor shall you touch it*, lest you die.'" Gen. 3:2 & 3

Here we see the first constricting addition to the law of God. God never forbade the touching of the tree. But here we see the initial fault of man, even in a perfect world and body. If God requires "A", then living up to "A" *and* "B" must be better. Thus we have produced an ultra-righteous community by doubling our present quota of law. We then praise ourselves for our piety.

Misrepresenting the law was not sin; but sin was given a foothold that eventually led to expulsion from glory.

## LAW OF SACRIFICE

The next law was given by example. God slays an animal so that Adam and Eve can be clothed and their shame, brought on by sin, can be covered.<sup>1</sup> Their own effort to make a covering (i.e. fig leaves) was inadequate, there had to be a substitutionary death.<sup>2</sup> Cain then later disobeyed this new post-fall law. God did not condemn, but rather warned Cain that modifying or misrepresenting His law would make him vulnerable to sin.

"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, *sin lies at the door*. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." Gen. 4:7

## SOCIETAL LAW

The next law was used as a seal of a covenant between God and the offspring of Abraham.<sup>3</sup> The law of circumcision set apart the Jewish people from the heathen Gentile.

When this sanctified people found themselves in bondage to Egypt, God sent a deliverer to set them free. The climax of this God-ordained action was marked by the reinstatement of the sacrifice law known as Passover.<sup>4</sup> This would be carefully observed every year to remind them of the bitter bondage and how a messiah was sent by God to free them

Though eventually freed from the bondage of Egypt, the influence of Egyptian law and customs still permeated the society. Among these were idolatry and work oriented salvation.<sup>5</sup> To circumvent this influence, God issued a set of Ten Commandments as a societal foundation.<sup>6</sup> Before this was even completed, the people disobeyed and let their earlier influence cause them to create a golden calf as their redeemer.<sup>7</sup>

The rest of the 613 laws given by God dealt with living, worship and standards of judgment within this new society.

But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious. 1 Tim. 1:8-9

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:21

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:7

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 17:1-11

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 12:1-11

<sup>5</sup> Carved upon the walls of the tombs of the kings in Egypt are a list of good deeds; I have not oppressed the poor; I have not defrauded any man; I have not murdered or mistreated any man etc. Also carved on these cave walls is the image of a large balance. On one side of the balance is placed the heart of the deceased king; on the other— a feather. If the heart of the king is lighter than the feather, he is ushered into glory. If it is not, his entrance is refused.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus. 20

<sup>7</sup> Exodus. 32:4

## THE STRAIGHT EDGE

One of the prime requirements of the Passover lamb was that it be without spot or blemish. Since standards of perfection change from person to person and opinions tend to be relative, God laid out specific rules and guidelines for the selection process.

It is a clear fact that this lamb was to be a type or model of the coming Messiah and His substitutionary death.<sup>8</sup> He too was to be a Lamb without spot or blemish. Again we have the problem of differing standards of excellence or a relative morality. This is where the law came into play. To the Jew, the law was, and is, a standard by which to live. This standard was also a measuring line to identify the Messiah as *the* Lamb without spot or blemish.

Think of the law as a straight edge or ruler. Imagine now every good person throughout history trying to draw a perfect straight line; but when the ruler is placed next to it, we see how imperfect the line is.<sup>9</sup> It may start out straight, curve a little bit, then straighten out toward the end. But still, the result is imperfection— the spot or blemish you might say. The harder we try to draw the line straight, the more crooked it seems to look next to the ruler.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus came along and drew a perfectly straight line; the ruler (the law) was placed next to His line and it paralleled *exactly*. This ruler was the measuring tool, or plumb line, to identify the Messiah when He arrived.

...we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.  
Hebrews 4:15

Jesus made reference to the law as a prophecy and how He would meet its requirements.

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17

This is very important to understand. The law was given to be fulfilled as a prophecy. It is indeed an excellent base on which to build a society; however, that does not mean that God is requiring it of us today; especially in regard to salvation. If we need to keep laws or commandments to be saved, we are (in effect) trying to buy our way into heaven.

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit... Titus 3:4-5

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<sup>8</sup> Ref. John 1:29 & Hebrew 9:24-26

<sup>9</sup> Romans. 3:23

<sup>10</sup> Romans. 3:19-20

## POST-FULFILLMENT LAW

Since Jesus fulfilled the law, does that mean that the law (or the ruler) is now no longer valid? No, it is still in effect; *but only to those who are unsaved and alive to this world alone*. Because of the lack of regeneration of the Holy Spirit, the law is necessary to keep the worldly nature in check.

If we were allowed to live our lives as we please, we would have what is called a "relative morality". In other words, what ever *I* think is right is right and whatever *I* think is wrong is wrong. My worldly flesh thrives on a relative morality; *I* can do whatever *I* please.

*I* was alive once without the law... Romans 7:9a

But, when the law comes to my attention, it reveals that I am a sinner; or, as mentioned earlier, my line is not perfectly straight.

*I* would not have known sin except through the law... Romans 7:7

After admitting that my life is not perfectly straight, then I would confess the need for a savior and give my life to Him. When I accept Jesus, He erases the imperfect line and *He* redraws a perfect one.

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:13-14

By accepting Jesus into my life, I die to my old life (which is symbolized in my baptism) and am raised in a new life in Jesus. If my life is dead, then the law has no more dominion over me. It would be like digging up the grave of Lee Harvey Oswald and arresting him for the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The idea is ludicrous— he's dead! The laws of our country have no more dominion over a dead man. He is dead!

Or do you not know, brethren, that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. Romans 7:1 & 6

## **NEW MAN LAWS**

As I have earlier stated, there are 613 laws given by the Father to the children of Israel as a societal base and a standard by which to identify the Messiah. (the "straight ruler"). After the arrival of the Messiah (fulfilling the "ruler" prophecies) a new set of commandments were given to those within the Church. Jesus said,

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments (The Law) and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*" John 15:10-12

So now we see that the only fundamental law given by the Messiah that we need to adhere and obey is to love one another.

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8

The arrival of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross traded in the 613 Hebrew laws and replaced them with only one. I do not know why God had done this; it may be that our new nature has regenerated in us, internally, the living conditions present in the garden of Eden. If you recall, there was only one law there as well.

For as by [Adam's] disobedience many were made sinners, so also by [Jesus'] obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5:19-21

## **LIVING UNDER THE LAW**

If you wish to continue living by the law, then God will judge you according *to* the law without the protection of the cross. As Paul stated earlier, the law has no jurisdiction over a dead man. If you wish to live under the law, you will be, in effect, trying to redraw your line perfectly straight with your own good effort. The New Testament writers stated over and over, that the more you try to draw that straight line, the more crooked it looks next to the perfect ruler. Peter stated this clearly when he spoke concerning Jews wishing to put the Church under the law:

Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke (the law) on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they. Acts 15:10-11

You have a choice; live under Old Testament law and be judged according to your own works and good deeds, or die to your own desires and efforts and be raised up in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you choose to live under your own efforts, you will be judged according to those efforts. If you choose to die to yourself, then the law does not apply to you.

If you choose to live according to your works of the law, remember that there are two sets of books present at the final judgment...

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:12-15

As you can see, those who tried to merit their way to glory via works do not fare too well. Salvation is obtained by being written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Accepting Jesus Christ into your heart as your personal savior is how you get your name *written* in the Book of Life.

... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. Galatians 2:16

On the other hand, if you wish to have a fulfilled life in Christ, keep the commandments. Keep *His* commandments.

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5:13-14

## THE RICH YOUNG RULER

There may be those who use the event of the rich young ruler to contradict what I have laid out. It is a good argument, so let us look at it carefully.

Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:16-26

Let us examine this event verse by verse.

Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

Notice the repetition of the word "good". Now look at what he is asking. He is *not* asking, "Master, how can I have eternal life?" He is asking what he can *do* to merit eternal life. In other words, "...what good deeds can I perform to be saved?" We are, once again, back in Egypt and its influence of good works.

"Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

Jesus qualified the man's use of the word "good" (regarding eternal life) as perfection. This is understood since Jesus identified the words good and God as synonymous. To obtain eternal life through works, you must be perfect. That is, as "good as God".<sup>11</sup>

I also find it interesting that Jesus' use of the word life does not include the qualifier eternal. Almost as if saying, "here is how to have a fulfilling life, but not eternal life." I checked the Greek manuscripts and the word is not there as well.

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<sup>11</sup> Ref. Matthew 5:48

The end of His statement is where Jesus tells the man to keep the commandments.

He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The rich young ruler asked a good question. He knew that there were 613 laws. So he made sure that Jesus specified which of the commandments He was referring.

Jesus answered his question by quoting the second half of the Ten Commandments. These latter commandments dealt with an individual's relationship with his fellow man. But Jesus left one out... where is the commandment "You shall not covet?" Jesus is setting up the man to see his own inadequacy in earning his way to heaven via the law or good deeds.

The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

The rich young ruler still felt the emptiness that comes from being unsure of your goodly status. He wanted to know specifically what good deed he could perform so that he will be off the hook spiritually.

Jesus said, "If you want to be perfect... " Notice Jesus did not say, "If you want to be saved... " He used the word "TELEIOS" which means *perfect, mature or complete*. So Jesus actually said that good works will mature you as a person, but they will not save you.

The commandment "You shall not covet" is replaced with Jesus' commandment of Love. That is, to sell all that he has (love your neighbor as yourself) and come and follow Him (Love God with all heart, soul and mind).

The man left sorrowful for he had (like all of us) things that keep us from being good (that is, perfect) people.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The disciples understood Christ's comparison as being impossible. But the good news is that Jesus knew that after His death and resurrection, a new law will replace the old commandments. Because of God's great plan of redemption and the creation of a new man; only one law will be necessary— the law of love.

## CONCLUSION

In these last days, many churches have aligned themselves with the law as a means to keep their flock in lock step. This alignment is not based upon the grace of God, but on His impending judgment. To illustrate this imbalance, I will conclude by reprinting the following letter-to-the-editor published in the Christian newsletter, *The Berean Call*.

I had the opportunity to ask four Catholic friends, "What must I do to be saved?" They answered thusly:

1. Keep the Commandments
2. Keep the Commandments
3. Keep the Commandments... and, oh yes, be baptized.
4. Do the best you can and pray a lot

Since none of these is correct, I decided to call the local Catholic Church and ask the [priest]. He told me that everyone was saved and that Mohammed, Buddha, etc. are just other names for "Jesus"...

Recently I read an ad in the *Evansville Courier* placed there by the diocese of Evansville. The ad invited questions. I wrote to ask the same question: "What must I do to be saved." The monsignor wrote back and told me to "pray three times a day, the prayers can be long or short, but you must pray three times a day. It does not matter what the prayers are about."

The gospel is not proclaimed in Catholicism. Catholics do not know the gospel. They depend on good works to save them.

How many more denominations hold similar views as the Catholic Church? How many people, for lack of study, have been led down the same path as those quoted in the above letter?

If this study has given you pause, it is time to ask the Lord what *He* would have you to accept. Pray, and ask God to open the book of Romans up in a new and regenerative way. You will not find your answers in nine page studies. Only in the word of God will you find the key to keeping the commandments.

And now I plead with you... not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. 2 John 1:5-6