

LAW AND GRACE

By Barry C. Hodson
www.bibletruthrestored.org

CHAPTER ONE THE NEED FOR LAW

“**F**or the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17).

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

These verses, and many others, clearly draw a contrast between “law” and “grace.” It is constantly taught in the New Testament that salvation comes through grace not law, and that God’s people are “not under law.”

What does this mean? Does it mean that God’s people no longer have to obey laws and have no commandments to keep? Can they do as they please without fear of repercussion? If not, then what laws should they be keeping? And if there are laws that they must keep, what does Scripture mean when it says we “are not under law, but under grace?” What is meant by “law?” Why was it given in the first place? What is “grace?” What is its principle of operation in Christ? These are some of the questions that the following study shall consider and attempt to answer.

WHAT IS LAW?

“**L**aw” involves rules or regulations which have to be observed and obeyed. Law entails commandments - directives - injunctions - statutes imposed upon a community for the purpose of influencing and controlling attitudes and behaviour in order to maintain some sort of standard of conduct and order. Law consists of binding injunctions which regulate relations between men, and between men and God.

WHY THE NEED FOR LAW?

The answer to this question is given in Gal. 3:19: “Because of transgressions.” In other words: law became necessary because of SIN! Because sin entered the world, injunctions had to be imposed. The sinfulness of men had to be restrained and controlled.

As a result of our first parents’ sin, “sin entered into the world.” Putting it simply: as a result of our first parents’ choice to rebel, a propensity towards that choice became implanted in the human spirit. All inherited a strong will against the things of God. This strong will is called “sin in the flesh” in Rom. 7, and refers to the strong bias in man’s flesh which has a natural inclination towards the things forbidden by God.

Left by himself and to himself in his own natural flesh condition, without any rules or regulations governing conduct, the sinful impulses or lusts of the flesh would have free reign to express themselves as they pleased, producing countless evils such as “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lust, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, revellings and such like” (Gal. 5:19-21).

Such evils are the natural outworking of sinful flesh, and those whose lives are controlled by them offend God and are alienated from Him. Hence, in order that man might please God and have fellowship with Him, He had to reveal the standard of conduct He desired, and impose laws enforcing such conduct. And a quick glance at the divine standards soon shows how opposite they are to what the flesh wants to do. They are contrary to the disposition of man’s spirit.

Because of the rebelliousness of man’s nature and the unwillingness of the flesh to conform to divine standards, God’s law had to be accompanied with an inducement to render obedience. The inducement was a promise to punish those who disobeyed and reward those who obeyed. Thus, failure or refusal to obey resulted in judgement and condemnation. The law brought a curse to all who failed to live by it and meet its demands. The threatened curse to all law-breakers was a strong restraining and correcting influence in a man’s life, acting as a deterrent against rebellion and disobedience.

The prospect of judgement and condemnation discouraged a man from yielding to the sinful impulses of the flesh and induced him to keep them under control.

So then, the law was a restraining influence in a man’s life, directing his life to a level that conformed to divine standards (the Spirit) instead of human (the flesh). Had the law never been imposed, man would never have become aware of the sinfulness of his own nature, or the transgressions produced by that nature which offend God, resulting in alienation, judgement and condemnation.

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CHAPTER TWO

LAW EXISTED FROM ADAM TO MOSES

When Paul said that the law was added because of transgressions, he was, strictly speaking, referring to the law given by God to the nation of Israel through Moses. This law was given to Israel about 400 years after Abraham received the promises from God. Paul is referring to this fact when he speaks of the law being “added.” It was an “additional”

thing, added several centuries after the promises were given to Abraham.

However, it would be wrong for us to conclude from this that no laws of God existed prior to Moses. In actual fact it is evident from Scripture that a recognized code of conduct existed from Adam through to Moses, and was observed and obeyed by all who feared God. This code or law, like the law of Moses, was also clearly “added because of transgressions” i.e. added because of the injection of sin into the world through Adam’s transgression. Prior to Adam’s sin there was no need for a code of conduct. Such a code was “added” because of the introduction of sin.

Law, therefore, in whatever dispensation, only became necessary because of sin. Had Adam never sinned, laws governing conduct would never have been necessary.

Some may ask what is meant by Rom. 5:13: “For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.” If law began when given at Sinai, what law, if any, were the patriarchs and other godly persons under who lived prior to Sinai? In answer, we would say that since the apostle Paul positively states that sin was in the world from Adam to Moses, and also that sin is not imputed when there is no law, it naturally follows that the sins committed were not transgression of the law given at Sinai. The people could not transgress a law not in existence. But since they did sin it also follows that they were under some other law, for sin is “transgression of law.”

In actual fact, our first parents were given a law to obey soon after they were created. God said “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you must not eat; for in the day that you eat from it, dying you shall die.”

This law was clearly not added “because of transgression,” for sin at that stage had not entered the world. It was in fact, impossible for Adam and Eve to sin prior to the introduction of a law, because, as already pointed out, sin is “transgression of law.” The law concerning the trees was simply given by God as a test by which Adam and Eve could exercise their free will and make a choice for or against God. They chose to go against God by eating the forbidden fruit, which constitutes sin, the wages of which is death.

ADAM’S SIN HAD MANY IMPLICATIONS

Law then, of some sort, has been in existence from the very beginning. Eating forbidden fruit may seem to be a simple and harmless act, not warranting the severe penalty that was imposed, but in actual fact this one act of sin violated a number of basic divine principles which later formed part of the basis of the law given through Moses.

In eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve dishonoured their Father,

and thereby violated the commandment which the Mosaic law later stated in these words: "Honour thy father ..." In coveting something that did not belong to them they violated the commandment: "Thou shalt not covet ..." In taking the fruit they stole something that was not theirs and therefore violated the commandment: "Thou shalt not steal." When questioned by God after their sin, Adam and Eve were dishonest and really lied or gave false witness, thus violating the commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness." Their one act of sin brought misery and death to the whole human race, making them, in a sense, murderers. By adopting the serpent's philosophy they injected poison into their posterity which has proved to be as lethal and deadly, thus violating the commandment: "Thou shalt not kill." And it could be said that embracing the serpent's philosophy constituted adultery in a spiritual sense, reminding us of the commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Adam and Eve's one act of rebellion had a deep and profound effect on the human spirit. It twisted and turned the will or desire of man into a stream of countless evils, causing the sub-conscious to have a strong bias towards sin. Every member of the human race has experienced the dark forces of sin in the flesh which are continually on the move like powerful monsters deep within, seeking to induce us to do things that are inconvenient and harmful. For this reason a code of conduct has been necessary from the very beginning when sin first entered the world.

It is obvious that certain commandments must have been known to Cain and Abel, for Cain's offering of the fruits of the ground was not acceptable whilst that of Abel, "the firstfruits of the flock," was the correct offering. It was "by faith" that "Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. 11:4). Seeing that faith comes by hearing the Word of God, it is clearly implied that God must have given specific commandments concerning sacrifice. Abel, by faith, was obedient to the Word of command, and Cain was disobedient. "His own works were evil" (1 Jn. 3:12). He went his own way doing his own thing, styled "the way of Cain" in Jude verse 11.

It is possible that when God clothed Adam and Eve with the skins of animals that He explained to them the spiritual significance that without the shedding of blood there can be no covering for sin. The animals whose blood had been shed in order that their skins might be used as a covering, foreshadowed the sacrificial offering of Christ by which sins are covered. Adam and Eve were probably commanded by God to periodically sacrifice animals as a reminder of this ultimate purpose. They in turn would pass the instruction down to their sons, Cain and Abel. Abel believed and acted accordingly, being obedient to the commandment, "by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, for God acknowledged his gifts" (Heb. 11:4). "But unto Cain and to his offering God had not

respect” (Gen. 4:5).

As one reads through the book of Genesis it becomes more and more obvious that there were laws given by God suited to the times and purposes of His will before Sinai. Just exactly what all these laws were is not stated, but many of them can be picked out here and there. The fact that the faithful from Abel through to Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob etc offered up sacrifices indicates that there were accepted laws regulating divine worship. See Gen. 8:20-. 12:8. 13:18.

NOAH

Gen. 6:12 says “God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth.” This statement reveals that there was a “way” of God in those days. The word “way,” when used in this context, signifies “manner of life” or “conduct” required by God. It is clear from this that from the earliest times God required a certain standard of conduct, and failure to rise to it brought severe retribution. References are made in the same chapter to the kind of conduct God required. Gen. 6:2 reveals that it was wrong for those who go God’s way to marry those who are of the world. Verse 5 reveals that those who go God’s way control and discipline their thought-life, not allowing the thoughts of their heart to be evil. And verses 11 and 13 reveal that those who walk with God are not given to violence. Noah fitted into this category. He was “a just man and blameless in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). That is: Noah kept God’s way; he believed and observed the commandments of God.

Specific commandments were given to Noah after the flood also. In Gen. 9:3 we read: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants (vegetables and fruit trees), I give you everything.” From this it is generally concluded that it was not till after the flood that animal food was permitted for human consumption. Prior to then, it seems that man was a vegetarian. This permission may have been granted in connection with Noah’s sacrifice, and it may be that here is the origin of the sacrificial “feast” of which the worshipper himself partook. One thing is certain: all vegetation was destroyed by the flood and considerable time would be required for new vegetation to grow. Unless there was plenty of food left over in the ark, Noah and his family would have nothing to eat from the earth. Permission to eat meat would therefore be very timely!

Gen. 9:4-7 also records specific divine stipulations. A prohibition against eating blood is given in verse 4, and a prohibition against the taking of human life is given in verses 5-6. Verse 7 constitutes a command to “be fruitful and multiply ...” And in verses 20-25 it is implied that it

was contrary to the way of God to expose one's nakedness. The fact that Noah did this as a result of over-indulgence of wine also strongly suggests that drunkenness was contrary to the way of God, producing as it did unseemly incidents.

In view of these examples it should be evident that it is wrong to conclude that law did not come until Moses, and that up until that time, grace alone was the way that God dealt with mankind. Recognized laws and codes of conduct existed right from the beginning, and those who violated them were severely punished by God. The flood of Noah's day and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are particularly good examples of this. Also the intervention of God to stop the building of the tower of Babel! Man's motivation behind the building of this tower was that he might "make a name" for himself (Gen. 11:4). It was inevitable that such fleshly pride should be dealt with and the whole operation be brought to a halt.

ABRAHAM

However, while it is true that laws were in force prior to Moses, so also was grace. Noah for instance, "found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8). Although Noah "walked with God" by keeping His commandments, it was in the final analysis by grace that he was saved.

"What about Abraham?" someone might say. "Wasn't he under grace and not under law? Wasn't he justified by faith and not by keeping law?" Yes, Abraham was certainly a man of faith and was justified as a result by God's grace. It is clearly taught in the New Testament that Abraham did not receive the promises on the basis of works (human effort). That is, he did not earn them. But this does not mean that he did not have to obey God or that he had no laws or commandments to keep!

Had Abraham never obeyed God he would never have received the blessings and promises from God. This is clearly taught in Gen. 22:18 where, after giving him certain promised blessings, God says: "because you have obeyed My voice." The same applies in Gen. 26:5: "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

Abraham observed a certain code of conduct and lived up to a certain standard of morality and integrity. He received commandments from God and obeyed them. When God told him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and come into the promised land, he "obeyed and went out, not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8). As he travelled through the land of promise he erected altars and offered up animal sacrifices as did Abel many centuries before. Gen. 15 records how God commanded Abraham to arrange a special covenant sacrifice after being told to circumcise himself and every male child. God instituted the rite of circumcision as a law

which had to be observed by all of Abraham's posterity (Gen. 17). Those who refused to comply were to be "cut off" - excommunicated or put to death.

It is interesting to note that prior to instituting circumcision as a sign of the covenant, God said to Abraham: "Walk before Me and be blameless, and I will establish My covenant between Me and you ..." (Gen. 17:1-2). Once again it can be seen from this that, although God's promises operate on the basis of faith and grace, they do not by any stretch of the imagination eliminate the need for a careful walk before God, observing His commandments. God's commandment to "walk before Me" means "keep My way" as Noah did of whom it is testified that he "walked with God." But Noah's contemporaries "corrupted God's way" as we have seen, and were destroyed as a result.

Hence, we read in Gen. 18 that the Lord shared His intimate counsel with Abraham because "he will command his children and his household after him, to keep THE WAY of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has promised." This passage plainly implies that had Abraham not kept the way of the Lord - had he refused to obey the commandments of the Lord, he would have failed to receive the promised blessings. Moreover, it further teaches that the Lord is only willing to share His intimate counsel with those who keep His way! Those who are slack in their walk before God, casual and indifferent towards His commandments and standards, cannot become intimate friends of the Lord.

Abraham, like all of us, had his faults, and they are recorded for all to read. In time of famine he sought relief in Egypt instead of trusting God. Through fear for his own life he asked his wife to pretend that he was not her husband. Through lack of patience he sought to fulfil God's promise through Hagar a bondmaid, and ended up with Ishmael, "a wild ass of a man." When the time came for God to fulfil the promise by giving Sarah a son, Abraham preferred to settle for second best saying: "O that Ishmael might live before thee." (Gen. 17:18). Yet, in spite of these momentary relapses, Abraham's life for the most part was characterized by obedience - a desire and willingness to obey; and for that reason God overlooked his faults and forgave him, and assured him that the law of sin and death would not have the final say in his life. He was promised eternal life in spite of his shortcomings. On what basis? The answer is GRACE.

When God commanded Abraham to take his only son Isaac whom he loved, and offer him up as a sacrifice, he instantly obeyed without murmur or complaint. Heb. 11:17 tells us he did this "by faith," knowing that God was able to bring Isaac back to life again. "Faith," of course, demonstrates itself in action - "works." It certainly did in Abraham's case when he took Isaac to the place of sacrifice and showed himself willing to plunge the

knife into his heart. Thus, Jam. 2:21 tells us that “Abraham was justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar.” James then says: “You can see how faith was active with his works, and by works made perfect” i.e. complete - mature. It was after this episode that special promises were given to Abraham “because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:18).

When the time came for Isaac to get a wife, Abraham refused to violate the way of the Lord like those in Noah’s day by allowing his son to marry outside the faith. He made his trusted servant swear that he would not take a wife for Isaac from the worldly idolatrous inhabitants of the land. Why would Abraham give such strict instruction unless he was under specific command from the Lord to do so? All of these episodes make it abundantly clear that there were recognized commandments and laws of the Lord prior to Moses, which the Lord’s people were under an obligation to keep.

“LAW” IN PAUL’S WRITINGS MOSTLY REFERS TO THE LAW GIVEN AT SINAI

When Scripture refers to Abraham not being under the law, or to the law not existing prior to Moses, it refers to the law given through Moses. In Paul’s writings, the “law” is a term used almost exclusively for the law given at Sinai. For instance, speaking of the promise made to Abraham, Paul refers to the “law” which was 430 years after, (Gal. 3:17). Paul’s statement that the law came centuries after Abraham must be taken as an inspired declaration that The law as given to Israel through Moses did not exist prior to Sinai! Abraham and the other patriarchs were not under the same law as that given later through Moses.

Many make the mistake of assuming that just because various commandments in the law of Moses are the same as commandments kept by the patriarchs and those before them, (e.g. animal sacrifice, laws regarding murder, adultery etc), that the laws must have been the same in every other respect also. In other words, it is sometimes assumed that the code given through Moses was virtually identical to the one that operated from Adam to Moses. Scripture however will not allow this conclusion, and this should become more evident during the course of this study. If Abraham was under the same code that was later given through Moses, Paul’s statement about the law coming 430 years after Abraham is immediately negated. The point that Paul is making is that Abraham was not under the law of Moses when he received God’s promises. Yet, in actual fact, he really would have been under that law had the code of his time been the same as that given through Moses!

So then, the “law” as given through Moses did not exist until Sinai,

but there were nevertheless clearly recognized laws of God operating from Adam to Moses. If not, sin would have been impossible. Yet, the words “sin” and “sinners” occur throughout the book of Genesis, which covers the Adam to Moses period. The fact that the word “sin” occurs in this book reveals in itself that there were clearly defined laws of God which had to be obeyed. Failure to obey is disobedience - transgression of law which the Bible defines as “sin.” There can be no “sin” where there is no “law.”

Gen. 18:20 refers to Sodom and Gomorrah whose “sin is very grievous.” Gen. 13:13 says “the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.” From this we infer that God’s law at the time spoke against homosexuality. Those in Sodom and Gomorrah violated this law which constituted “sin.” They were therefore overthrown and destroyed.

In Gen. 20 we read that as a result of Abraham denying that Sarah was his wife, Abimilech king of Gerar took her to be his own wife. God intervened before adultery took place and He reprimanded Abimilech. Abimilech proclaimed his innocence and put the blame on Abraham’s lie and deceit. And God answered Abimilech saying: “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against Me.” From this we learn that God’s law at that time legislated against adultery, and those who violated it could expect divine judgement. Joseph pointed this out to his master’s wife saying: “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God.” (Gen. 39:9).

Laws of God then, clearly existed from Adam to Moses. There were both moral and ceremonial laws. That is, there were clearly defined precepts concerning the wrongness of killing, stealing, committing adultery etc, as well as ceremonial precepts involving rituals such as the offering of animal sacrifices, circumcision etc. But although these precepts and others later formed part of the law of Moses, the two codes were quite separate and distinct in many other respects. The law of Moses consisted of many commandments and injunctions and rituals to which no reference is made during the period from Adam to Moses. Prior to Moses, although there is a clear recognition of certain laws of God, there is no record of God formally and officially establishing them by putting them into an organized statement of faith. This did not take place until the time of Moses, and it included a very elaborate system of ceremony and ritual such as had never been seen or observed before. But, although there is no record of a formal, official, divine code being produced prior to Moses, sin was still in the world, and death reigned (Rom. 5:13-14).

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CHAPTER THREE “THE LAW GIVEN THROUGH MOSES”

Jn. 1:17 says “the law was given through Moses.” For this reason it is customary to talk of the law, as indeed Scripture itself so often does, (Jn. 7:19 etc) as “the law of Moses.” This designation, while apt, is nevertheless inadequate, and could be misleading. In actual truth the law was “ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19), that mediator being Moses.

When Moses spoke as law-giver he did so, like all the “holy men of God” who succeeded him in the prophetic office, as he was “moved by the Holy Spirit.” Reviewing his 40 years’ ministry he could declare: “I have taught you statutes and judgements even as the Lord my God commanded me” (Deut. 4:5). He could well have said, like Paul, “I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received.”

Thus, in reality the term “law of Moses” simply means that Moses was the channel (mediator) through which the Lord communicated His law to Israel. The law given through Moses constituted “the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel,” and is therefore frequently referred to in Scripture as “the law of the Lord.” Hence, the law given to Israel is sometimes referred to as the law of Moses and other times as the law of the Lord. Both designations refer to one and the same law. One designation refers to the source of the law (the Lord), and the other designation refers to the channel of communication (Moses). More about this later!

In the meantime, it is important to understand that “the law of Moses” was God’s law and not something privately and personally conjured up by Moses himself.

MORAL AND CEREMONIAL ASPECTS

The law given through Moses contained both moral and ceremonial commandments. They are not treated separately or put into different columns, but are interwoven throughout the whole book of the law, and are treated as one undivided whole. The double aspect of moral and ceremonial commandments never meant that there were two separate or distinct laws involved. Both aspects had to be combined together to constitute the full and complete law of God given to Israel through Moses. If one of those aspects, or one part of one of those aspects had been ignored or removed, the divine legal constitution would have immediately

been violated being rendered incomplete.

“Moral commandments” involve commandments which are concerned with, and affect the character, disposition, heart or spirit of man. Moral commandments pertain to a person’s conduct, and are concerned with the rightness or wrongness of thoughts and actions. Moral commandments relate to heart attitude and behaviour which affects relationship with God and man.

The following are some of the basic moral commandments in the law of God given through Moses:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart ...”

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

“Honour your mother and father.”

“You shall not kill.”

“You shall not commit adultery.”

“You shall not steal.”

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.”

“You shall not covet ...”

“Ceremonial commandments” relate to those which involve ceremony or ritual. The law given through Moses contained a very involved and elaborate system of ceremonies and outward religious rites - formalities proper to all sorts of occasions. Specific animal sacrifices had to be offered at specified times during the year at a specific place by specific men. Certain holy days had to be observed each week, month and year, and various rituals had to be performed on those formal occasions. Trumpets had to be blown to announce certain of these holy days, and they were made from a certain horn, and had to be blown in a certain way by certain men.

Abstinence from certain foods and drinks was required by the law, and long lists of meat that could and could not be eaten are given. At a certain time in the year, total abstinence (a fast) was required.

All male children had to be circumcised on the 8th day. When a woman gave birth to a child she had to undergo strict purification rites, involving “washings” and other outward ordinances and rituals.

Only those who could trace their physical genealogy back through a particular line could become priests, and the induction to priesthood involved much outward, formal and physical ceremony and ritual.

The work of those who became priests under the law revolved around, and was inseparably connected with a physical, man-made building - first a tabernacle and later a temple situated at Jerusalem. Jerusalem was THE “place” where the Lord placed His name and where the altar had to stand. All animal sacrifices had to be offered on this altar at Jerusalem and nowhere else. Sacrifices offered on other altars would not be accepted. Annual pilgrimages had to be made by the Israelites to

Jerusalem to keep certain feasts which were accompanied by much outward ceremony and ritual.

The ceremonial laws, being outward physical ordinances, had no effect on the moral or heart condition of man. They did not deal with the heart or spirit or conscience. They simply involved physical, mechanical action of the flesh and are therefore referred to as “carnal commandments” or “carnal ordinances” in Heb. 7:16 and 9:10 and more will be said about this later.

ALL OR NOTHING

In the meantime may it suffice to understand that the law given through Moses contained both moral and ceremonial commandments, and those who were placed under the law had to observe and keep both. They could not pick or choose. It was either all or nothing. To ignore one little aspect was to violate the lot. The moment a person committed himself to keeping just one little aspect of the law, he was immediately obliged to keep the lot, otherwise the little he kept would not be recognized. In fact, it would condemn him, because it would show that he believed the law should be kept, whereas he was only keeping part of it and neglecting most of it, which, in the terms of the law was “sin” which must be punished with death.

So then, the law consisted of moral and ceremonial commandments which are inseparably woven together, and which together constitute the whole and undivided law of God given to Israel through Moses. The moral commandments in the law served as a constant reminder of God’s claims upon Israel as His covenant people. God required a certain standard of conduct of His people towards Himself and towards each other, and this standard is set out in the moral laws given to them. Such laws, as pointed out earlier, governed and restrained the sinful impulses or lusts of the flesh, which, if allowed to go unchecked, produce countless evils which alienate a man from God and incur His displeasure.

The moral laws were clearly designed to reveal and restrain sin. However, the ceremonial laws with all their outward ordinances and rituals were designed to reveal God’s ultimate method of dealing with sin. The ceremonial ordinances taught by type and symbol the principles of atonement that God would ultimately manifest in His son’s atoning work. They foreshadowed greater things to come! Hence, although these ordinances were “carnal,” they were nevertheless “good” because the purpose they served was good. They were a temporary or transitional arrangement - a means to an end, and when that end came and the purpose they served was complete, they became obsolete and passed away.

Rom. 10:4 puts it like this: “Christ is the end (i.e. purpose, aim,

objective) of the law.” But, as shall be pointed out later: this does not mean that Christians are under no law. Scripture plainly declares that we are under “the law of Christ” and this “law” clearly re-affirms the major moral commandments that were in the law of Moses and the law that operated from Adam to Moses. The ceremonial laws are obviously not reaffirmed in the law of Christ because they were simply types of greater things to come. In a later section this will be dealt with in more detail.

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CHAPTER FOUR THE LAW SERVED GOOD PURPOSES

The point has already been made that the law was “good,” in spite of the fact that it contained some “carnal ordinances.” These ordinances had a good purpose in view and taught by type some profound truths and principles relating to Christ. The moral commandments were certainly “good” and are as relevant and needful today as ever they were. They constitute eternal verities, never outdated or superseded by the passing of time.

Scripture pays a very high regard to the law given through Moses:

Deut. 4:5-9: “Behold I have taught you statutes and judgements, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do so in the land

whither you go to possess it. Observe therefore and practise them, for this will manifest your wisdom and understanding to the nations who shall hear all these statutes and say: Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there which has a God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him. And what great nation is there, that has statutes and judgements so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"

Here it is stated that the law consisted of righteous statutes and judgements. The New Testament agrees with this saying: "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12).

The law was "holy" because a holy God gave it, and because it was separate and distinct from all others, designed to make the children of Israel separate and distinct (holy) from all other nations. Ps. 147:19-20 puts it like this: "He declares His Word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgements unto Israel. He has not dealt so with any other nation; and as for His ordinances, other nations have not known them."

The law was "righteous" in that its decrees were fair and just, designed to make men fair and just in their dealings with one another.

The law was "good" in that it had beneficial effects and was given for good purposes. It was as Paul says, "ordained unto life" (Rom. 7:10). The man who obeyed it could gain life by it (Rom. 10:5). Or, as Mal. 2:5 puts it: "The purpose of these laws was to give him life and peace, to be a means of showing his respect and awe for Me, by keeping them" (Living Bible). Again, Paul wrote: "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. 3:21).

It is often overlooked that life could be gained by keeping the law. The man who obeyed it could gain life by it. Jesus, in fact, earned his salvation this way! By keeping the law in its entirety and never sinning once, he fulfilled its requirements and gained life as a result. However, he was the only man in history who was spiritually and morally strong enough to do so. All others were too weak, and therefore the law was powerless to save them and give them life. Except for Jesus, no other man could gain life through the law.

It is also stated in 1 Tim. 1:8 that "the law is good," after which it is said "if a man use it lawfully;" i.e. when used as God intended. Paul even says that the law "was glorious" (2 Cor. 3:7-11), by which he means it came with glory and splendour as seen in the brightness of Moses' shining face. However, the brightness gradually faded away and finally disappeared.

Finally, Ps. 19:7-8: "The law of the lord is perfect, converting the soul. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

Scripture unquestionably pays a high regard to the law given by God through Moses. It was not, by any means, as many suppose, a dreadful, diabolical, cursed thing that should never have been given. Paul's reference to "the curse of the law" is often wrongly interpreted to mean this. However, the phrase "curse OF the law" simply means the curse which results from breaking the law. The law itself was not a curse. The "curse of the law" was the death penalty imposed upon all who failed to keep it (Gal. 3:10). In redeeming us from death, Christ took the curse away.

THE LAW SERVED SEVERAL VITAL PURPOSES

Two basic purposes were served by the law, and they are both mentioned in Galatians chapter 3. Verse 19 refers to the first purpose: "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions." The second purpose arises out of the first and is referred to in verse 24: "Wherefore the law was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."

In a nutshell then, the law was given to reveal and restrain sin, and to direct attention to Christ.

Seeing that "sin" is "transgression of the law," there can obviously be no sin where there is no law. Without law - without a specific code of conduct to keep, man would not be aware or conscious of the sinful lusts or desires in his flesh. He would do what comes naturally, being totally controlled by his own natural and carnal impulses, lusting, coveting, envying, hating, fornicating, murdering etc, without a bad conscience or fear of God. Such would be the outcome if laws of God had never been imposed. And this results in alienation from God, which means living a life without any hope other than death.

The moment law is introduced - the moment a code of conduct is presented which demands a standard of living that a person has not been living, he immediately becomes aware or conscious of the evil desires in his flesh which have been ruling his life. That is, he becomes aware of an enemy in his nature ("sin in the flesh") which has been directing him along a path contrary to God's way, causing him to do sinful things which alienate him from God and produce death.

Law then, brings a consciousness of sin. It causes a man to see what a wretched creature he is in his natural state, and how far he has fallen from divine standards and holiness.

Paul therefore penned these words: "Well then, am I suggesting that these laws of God are evil? Of course not! No, the law is not sinful but it was the law that showed me my sin. I would not have known the sin in my heart - the evil desires that are hidden there - if law had not said, You must not have evil desires (covet) in your heart."

Again Paul wrote: “Now all the words of the law are addressed, as we know, to those who are within the pale of the law, so that no one may have anything to say in self-defence, but the whole world may be exposed to the judgement of God. For (again from Scripture) no human being can be justified in the sight of God for having kept the law: law brings only the consciousness of sin.” (New English Bible).

“The sting of death is sin, and sin gains its power from the law”(1 Cor. 15:56).

So then, the law brought a consciousness of sin in the flesh, and made people realize what a fallen creature they were in God’s sight.

Rom. 5:20 in the Authorised Version says: “The law entered, that the offence might abound.” That is, the law was given so that all could see the extent of the fall of man - the extent of his failure to maintain divine standards.

Or, the Jerusalem Bible puts it like this: “When Law came, it was to multiply the opportunities of falling.” That is, the more laws that are required to be kept, the more opportunities there are of falling. And the law given through Moses certainly contained a great host of regulations that had to be observed!

LIFE THROUGH LAW REQUIRED TOTAL OBEDIENCE

The point has already been made that the law was “ordained unto life.” However, gaining life through the law required one hundred percent conformity to its requirements; i.e. total obedience. Paul teaches this in his writings: “For Moses wrote that if a person could be perfectly good and hold out against temptation all his life and never sin once, only then could he be pardoned and saved” (Lev. 18:5. Rom. 10:5 Living Bible). “Yes, and those who depend on the Jewish laws to save them are under God’s curse, for the Scriptures point out very clearly, Cursed is everyone who at any time breaks a single one of these laws that are written in God’s book of the law” (Deu. 27:26. Gal. 3:10-12 Living Bible).

The demands of the law were exceedingly strict and severe. It had to be kept in its entirety in order to gain life through it. One slip was fatal. Failure to observe just one little point in the law constituted sin, which brought the penalty of death in spite of the fact that every other point might have been kept perfectly. The law, like the law of gravity, was unyielding and unsympathetic to one who made a mistake and fell. It was like a man climbing a mountain, who after spending days of work and effort slipped and fell after almost reaching the top. The law of gravity ignores all that effort and is unsympathetic towards it, and allows him to crash to his death. Yes, one slip is fatal, and so it was under the law.

To allow sin to inject just one drop of its poison into one’s life when living under the law, was like injecting one drop of black dye into a glass

of pure water. It immediately discolours and pollutes all that is in the glass making it unfit for consumption, resulting in it being thrown out.

So then, as far as the law was concerned, it was all or nothing. Unless it was all kept to the last jot and tittle, nothing could be gained. It was futile to observe some of its commandments and not the rest. Paul often uses the example of circumcision to illustrate this point. “Once again, you can take it from me that every man who receives circumcision is under obligation to keep the entire law” (Gal. 5:3). “Circumcision has value, provided you keep (the rest of) the law; but if you break (other parts of) the law, then your circumcision is as if it had never been” (Rom. 2:25). Paul could have used other aspects of the law to illustrate the same point, but found the aspect of circumcision the most convenient and effective to use.

Thus, James writes: “If a man keeps the whole law apart from one single point, he is guilty of breaking it all” (Jam. 2:10).

From this it is evident that it is futile to pick out aspects of the law of Moses for observance such as circumcision or the Sabbath while leaving other aspects unobserved. If it be insisted that one particular detail be observed, then every other little detail must be observed also.

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CHAPTER FIVE

ETERNAL LIFE WAS IMPOSSIBLE THROUGH LAW

When it is realised that one hundred percent obedience was required to gain life under the law, it becomes immediately evident how impossible it was for man to gain life through that means. No man, except Jesus, was able to keep the law in its entirety. Sooner or later the sinful impulses in the flesh would assert themselves against God's law, and induce a man to act contrary to it, which is SIN, and which brings the curse of death. Hence, Paul says in Rom. 8:3 that "the law could not" confer life, due to the fact that it "was weak through the flesh." That is, the law was powerless to give life due to the inherent weakness of man. It is important to note that Paul does not say the law was weak. No! It was man who was too weak to keep the law! Man was, as we read in Rom. 5:6 "without strength." Man was not morally or spiritually strong enough to render total obedience to the law. In this sense, the law was a "yoke" that man "was not able to bear" (Acts 15:10-11. Gal. 5:1). It was, as Paul says, "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us" (Col. 2:14). It is referred to as "the enmity, even the law of commandments with its ordinances" (Eph. 2:15-16). Law kills! 2 Cor. 3:6.

It is clear that the law was against man, not because there was anything wrong with it, but because of man's inability to totally obey it. Paul clearly teaches that the law was not against the promises of God: "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if a man could have become right with God through law he would have done so through that law" (Gal. 3:21).

Many Scriptures stress the impossibility of man keeping the law and his inability to gain salvation and life through that means:

"Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keep the law?" (Jn. 7:19).

"But the Jews, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping His laws, never succeeded. Why not? Because they were trying to be saved by

keeping the law and being good instead of by depending on faith” (Rom. 9:31-).

“For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, through which we draw near to God” (Heb. 7:19).

“But the fact of the matter is this: when we try to gain God’s blessing and salvation by keeping His laws we always end up under His anger, for we always fail to keep them” (Rom. 4:15).

“We know that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we who have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16).

“Yes, and those who seek salvation by the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who at any time breaks a single one of these laws that are written in God’s Book of the law.’” Consequently, it is clear that no one can ever win God’s favour by trying to keep the Jewish laws, because God has said that the only way we can be right in His sight is by faith. As the prophet Habbakuk puts it: “The man who finds life will find it through faith in God.” How different from this way of faith is the way of law which says that a man is saved by obeying every law of God, without one slip” (Gal. 3:10-12).

It should be clear from all these testimonies that the law could not deliver a man from sin and give him eternal life. Quite the opposite; it made him conscious of sin and made him deeply aware of how much a prisoner he was to sin and death. The law revealed how strong sin is and how hopelessly enslaved man is to it (1 Cor. 15:56).

Instead of dealing with sin, the law aggravated it. Rom. 7:5 says that sinful passions are aroused by the law. In verse 9 he further says that the introduction of commandments (law) caused sin to spring to life. Law agitates and arouses the sinful passions of the flesh because it is in opposition to them and condemns them. Being rebellious by nature, sinful passions won’t take “no” and assert themselves against God’s commandments.

Human nature, because of sin, is affected in a negative way by law. A law against a given desire intensifies that desire. Psychologists who are not even concerned with religious aspects have noticed the tendency in man to do the opposite of what he is commanded to do. We call it the “law of reverse psychology.” Often, if you want someone to do something, tell him to do the opposite! Most parents have figured this out before their children get very old. It is an unfortunate fact about law, that the very memory of the commandment inevitably brings up the associated thought of the desire. Law is therefore no cure for sin, but rather both reveals its existence and intensifies its desires. This all tends to make the law look bad, but it is important to realize that the law isn’t the real problem. The

sinful passions or “sin in the flesh” that gets stirred up by the law is the real problem. It is this which constitutes man’s real enemy. The purpose of the law was to reveal this enemy and point to the way in which it would ultimately be destroyed. Up until Christ this enemy “reigned unto death.”

THE LAW COULD ONLY CURSE

Those who depend on the Jewish laws to save them are under God’s curse, for the Scriptures point out very clearly: “Cursed is everyone who at any time breaks a single one of these laws that are written in God’s book of the law.” (Gal. 3:10-11).

“The fact of the matter is this: When we try to gain God’s blessing and salvation by keeping His laws, we always end up under His anger, for we always fail to keep them” (Rom. 4:14-15).

The law condemned and cursed and consigned to death all who failed to keep it. Thus, because all those under the law failed to keep it, they were cursed and condemned. The law could therefore only bring judgement and retribution. Those who sought life and peace through it came under fear and death instead. Instead of reconciling them to God it alienated, thus creating an intolerable burden upon their life.

THE LAW LEFT NO ROOM FOR BOASTING

Keeping the law of Moses involved a great deal of work and effort, what with its endless and elaborate system of ritual and ceremony. Being the only nation to whom this law was given, the Jews took great pride in it. In fact, they allowed it to develop in them a superiority complex and a strong spirit of self-righteousness. In their conceit they imagined that possession of the law made them better than their neighbour. In reality it revealed that sin was as deep-rooted in their flesh as in any other nation.

The Jews entered into all the ritual and ceremony of the law with great pride and enthusiasm, imagining that the mere physical action of doing so put them in a good place with God. They took much pride in their own human effort, imagining that such effort was earning and establishing God’s righteousness for themselves. Paul refers to this in Rom. 10:2-3 where he refers to the Jews’ “zeal for God, but not according to knowledge; for they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law and brings righteousness to everyone who believes .”

In Plp. 3:9 Paul talks about the importance of being in Christ, “not having my own righteousness, which is of the law ...” Here, as elsewhere,

“the law” signifies “my own righteousness;” i.e. seeking to be right with God through my own effort in keeping the law. Such righteousness is, as Isa. 64:6 says: “as filthy rags.” Why? Because the best human effort still falls short of the law’s requirement and is spotted with sin. Only a sinless life could earn a pure and clean white robe of righteousness, and it took the very son of God himself to achieve this.

For the most part, the Jews were deceived by their own pride and conceit into thinking that by going through the motions of the law they could earn themselves a good place with God. They completely overlooked the fact that their best effort and most meticulous observances still failed to keep the law in its entirety, and that they therefore came under its curse.

Therefore, those who lived under the law had no ground for boasting. Quite the opposite; they should have felt very inadequate and humble. For those who were honest, it would have been a very humbling experience to live under the law of Moses, for they would be painfully aware of the fact that their best effort was never good enough. Perfection was impossible due to the weakness of the flesh. Failure to render total obedience was a constant reminder of how weak and sinful the flesh is, and this should have produced humility and a feeling of unworthiness, resulting in self-abasement. This in fact was one of the main purposes of the law - to completely divest the flesh of pride and boasting and self-accomplishment, making a man of a humble and contrite spirit, causing him to look to the Lord and trust in Him. Such is the essential prerequisite to fellowship with God: “To this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my Word” (Isa. 66:2).

The Father wants His children to be dependent on Him - to look to, and trust Him, and have confidence in His love. He doesn’t want His children to be independent, thinking they can make it alone through their own effort without any help from Him. He wants His children to need Him and be under obligation to Him. More than anything else, His desire and purpose has always been that His own son be the Saviour of mankind and the centre of glory. This would be impossible if man could work for his own salvation and earn it himself by keeping the law.

DESPERATE NEED FOR A SOLUTION - A SAVIOUR

Man’s inability to keep the law and conquer sin should have caused him to look beyond law for some other solution. It should have convinced him of the desperate need for a Saviour - some principle of

salvation that went beyond the works of the law.

The law clearly stood as a barrier between man and God, for the power of sin was in the law. Someone had to break this barrier, and the only way in which this could be done was by conquering sin. And the only way in which sin could be conquered was by rendering total obedience to the law; in other words: living a sinless life.

The breaking of sin's rule over man obviously required a special sort of man - a man who, although being a partaker of "sinful flesh," was able to condemn and destroy "sin in the flesh" by conquering and crucifying the sinful impulses of the flesh and never once yielding to them. By this means, sin's fortress would be breached and the barrier of the law in which sin depended for its power, would fall like the walls of Jericho, opening up the way for many others to pass through into victory.

The special man required to accomplish this is of course Jesus Christ the son of God. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God has done by sending His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, who, in his sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). Hence, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1-2).

Jesus clearly conquered sin. He lived a perfectly sinless life. Being born of a woman he inherited the same flesh nature as his brethren which contained the same impulses and propensities towards sin, but he refused to yield to them and got complete victory over them. He never once succumbed to the will of the flesh but succumbed to the will of his Father instead saying: "Not my will, but Thine be done." He carried the cross daily, denying self at all times. Finally, once and for all, he crucified the flesh on the cross, and by so doing "condemned sin in the flesh," or, as Heb. 2:14 puts it: "destroyed him who has the power of death, that is the devil."

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CHAPTER SIX THE LAW POINTED TO CHRIST

The law was clearly designed to direct people to Christ. In fact, all the sacrifices and offerings, ceremonies and ritual contained in the ceremonial commandments of the law were purely designed to teach by type and symbol the principles of salvation that would later be manifested by the Saviour. The whole elaborate ritual system symbolically foreshadowed Messiah's redemptive work and kingdom. Once Messiah

arrived, the types were withdrawn because the solid reality to which they pointed had arrived. This is constantly taught in the New Testament.

“The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:24).

“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect” (Heb. 10:1).

“Those priests (under the law) served what was only an example and shadow of heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5).

“Which was a figure (i.e. parable - symbol) for the time then present. According to this arrangement both gifts and sacrifices were offered that could not perfect the conscience of the worshipper, as they consisted only of foods and drinks and various washings - carnal ordinances imposed until the time of reformation” (Heb. 9:9-10).

Jesus has “cancelled the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, having taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. Therefore, don’t let anyone criticise or condemn you for not observing rules concerning foods and drinks, annual festivals, new moons or the weekly Sabbath. These things were only a shadow of things to come; but the solid reality is Christ’s” (Col. 2:14-17).

In Rom. 2:20 we read that the law was only a “form of the knowledge and truth.” That is, it was only a semblance of the true. The law was a “shadow” but Jesus was the “true” - “the Way, the truth and the life.”

Rom. 3:21 says the law “witnessed” to the means of becoming right with God,” even though it could not make a man right. For this reason the tabernacle is referred to as “the tabernacle of witness” in Acts 7:44. By type and symbol, it witnessed to many truths concerning Christ and the church.

Even the experiences of those living under the law were for “our example” and constituted “types” (1 Cor. 10:1-11).

The law was clearly a means to an end and not an end in itself. “For Christ is the end (purpose, aim, objective) of the law, and brings righteousness to all who believe” (Rom. 10:4).

It is emphasized in Scripture that the law was only intended to be in force “until” Christ came. The word “until” defines a limit to the operation of the law. It reveals that the law was a temporary, transitional arrangement. Consider the following verses where this is taught:

“For what purpose was the law given? It was added because of transgressions till the seed (Jesus) should come ...” (Gal. 3:19).

The law was a “tutor and governor until the time appointed by the Father.” And when the fullness of time arrived, God sent forth His son,

made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:1-5).

The law was “imposed until the time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10).

SALVATION IS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Man then, is totally incapable of providing his own covering for sin through the works of the law, or any other works. All attempts to do so will prove to be as inadequate, futile and flimsy as the fig-leaves with which our first parents tried to cover their sin.

Consider the following Scriptures in which these principles are taught: “For by grace you are saved through faith; it is not your own doing: it is the gift of God and not a reward for work done. There is nothing for anyone to boast of” (Eph. 2:8-10).

“What room then is left for human pride (boasting)? It is excluded. And on what principle? The keeping of the law (i.e. “works”) would not exclude it, but faith does. For our argument is that a man is justified by faith in Christ’s work and not by the works of the law” (Rom. 3:27).

“Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What were his experiences concerning this question of being saved by faith? Was it because of his good works that God accepted him? If so, then he would have something to boast about. But from God’s point of view Abraham had no basis at all for pride. For the Scriptures tell us Abraham believed God, and that is why God cancelled his sins and declared him not guilty” (Rom. 4:1-2).

The simple truth that emerges from all this is that salvation - eternal life - is a free gift given by God’s grace through faith in Christ’s work. It cannot be earned or deserved through any effort of our own, either through the works of the law or any other. Thus, constantly throughout the New Testament a contrast is drawn between the “works of the law” and “faith” in Christ’s work:

“Now if a man does some work, his wages are not regarded as a favour (i.e. grace-gift); they are paid as a debt (they are owing to him - they are his rightful due and the one who owes is under obligation to pay). But if without any work to his credit he simply believes (puts his faith) in him who justifies the guilty, then he is regarded by God as being righteous by faith” (Rom. 4:2-5). The Living Bible puts this well: “For being saved is a gift; if a person could earn it by being good, then it wouldn’t be free - but it is! It is given to those who do not work for it. For God declares sinners to be good in His sight if they have faith in Christ to save them from God’s wrath.”

“But the Jews, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping His laws, never succeeded. Why not? Because they tried to do it through the

works of the law instead of by faith” (Rom. 9:31-32).

“And if it is by God’s grace then it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would cease to be grace (i.e. the free gift would no longer be free).

“We know that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ ...” (Gal. 2:16).

“Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing (having faith) in the gospel message?” (Gal. 3:2,5). “For by grace you are saved through faith. It is not your own doing: It is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man boast ...” (Eph. 2:7-9).

“Who has saved us ... not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace ...” (2 Tim. 1:9).

“... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us ... justified by grace” (Tit. 3:4-7).

Before moving on, may it be stressed at this stage that while it is true that salvation cannot be earned by human effort or works, this does not mean therefore, that no effort or works are required. It does not mean that we do not have to apply ourselves in any way. We will later see that the people of God do have to apply themselves in various ways and that they will come under the displeasure of God if they don’t. However, although there are certain “works” that they are required to do, the fact still remains that the best effort in the world will still be incapable of earning salvation. Salvation, in spite of the best Christian effort in the service of God, still remains a gift given by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY

The law of God given to Israel through Moses was “good” as far as law goes. It was “ordained unto life.” It revealed sin by its moral commandments and pointed to the way in which sin would be dealt with by its ceremonial and ritual commandments. Without the law there would have been no consciousness of sin, because “sin” by definition, is “transgression of the law.” Without the law, man would go blindly through life, governed by his sinful lusts and propensities, being ignorant of the fact that he was walking in a way contrary to divine principles and unaware of the fact that he was alienated from God, having no hope.

The law made man deeply aware of an enemy in his nature - dark forces in his sub-conscious, which the New Testament styles “sin in the flesh” or “devil.” And the law made man painfully aware of how strong this enemy is, and how weak the flesh is. Try as he might, no man was able to render total obedience to the law and keep it in its entirety. Sooner or later sin would assert itself, gain mastery and prevail over him, causing him to transgress the law, which is sin. Thus, as Scripture declares: “sin

reigned unto death” over all men.

This was one of the chief aims of the law: to make man conscious of sin and his powerlessness to obtain life through his own effort or righteousness. Left to himself, all man could earn was judgement, cursing and condemnation to death. And this stripped a man of all pride and boasting. The law gave him no occasion for pride. Although the law was a good one and something to be proud of as far as law goes, man’s inability to keep it and meet its requirements should have made him humble. This in fact was its purpose; for the Lord only looks to those who are of a humble and contrite heart, and who tremble at His Word.

It is a fundamental fact that Jesus conquered sin. He rendered total obedience to the law and lived a one hundred percent sinless life. Because of this it was impossible for the grave to hold him. His victory over sin and death was manifest in his resurrection to eternal life on the third day. He now lives forevermore, being seated at his Father’s right hand in heaven until it is time for him to return to earth to set up his kingdom.

It is not difficult to see that Jesus gained eternal life by keeping the law and living a sinless life, being made immortal by his own good works.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GRACE

How then can Christ’s good works affect others? On what basis can others be saved through what he has done? On what basis can the Father give others eternal life through Christ? The answer to these questions is as already emphasised - GRACE! “For by GRACE you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

The Greek word for grace is “charas.” It is the root word from which “character” is derived. And it is certainly evident from Scripture that grace is a prominent charas or characteristic of God. Grace is, in fact, as we shall see, love in action, and God is love. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son so that those who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life. Jesus was therefore the very epitome and embodiment of the Father’s love - a manifestation of the Father’s character. This is taught in Heb. 1:3 where the words “express image” come from the Greek word “charakter:” - “who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person.”

The word “grace” carries with it several ideas. The dominant idea in the New Testament is “favour,” “sheer generosity.” It refers to unearned and undeserved favour. It is an unmerited gift and is therefore opposed to debt. Grace is something not worked for and therefore something not owing or legally due to us. It is a free gift as pointed out earlier. It is therefore contrasted with law: “For the law was given through Moses, but

grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17).

What does this all mean? Simply this: If we are prepared to believe in Christ’s victory over sin and identify with him, the Father is prepared to let us share that victory with him. The Father, by grace, is prepared to use His son’s victory and success as a basis for saving others. This is the good news of the gospel: Even though we are too weak to conquer sin ourselves, and therefore cannot earn salvation, the Father is prepared to give it to us as a free gift if we believe in, and identify with His son. Although we cannot work for or earn salvation, and therefore it is not owing to us, the Father will let us have it anyway on the basis of His son’s work. It is therefore by GRACE - the love and sheer generosity of God that salvation operates.

UNIVERSAL EFFECTS OF ONE MAN’S VICTORY

In the divine scheme of things it only required one man to break through sin’s barrier for others to be saved, and the Father, in His love, provided that man - His only begotten son! Being a holy and righteous God, it was impossible for the Father to release eternal life without His righteousness firstly being upheld. His law had to be honoured and obeyed and sin completely conquered by one man in order that sin’s reign might be terminated. Jesus terminated that reign and now reigns as king himself, able to save all who come to him and submit to his lordship.

There is a similar principle of operation recognized and accepted among men, where one man’s victory and success is regarded as a victory for the whole human race which he represents, and of which he forms a part. An illustration of this can be seen in the first successful attempt to place man on the moon. That man’s first words were: “One small step for man - one giant leap for mankind.” The success of that one man was regarded as a success for the whole of mankind. And those who believed it and watched it on television, in view of the unity and common interest of the species, benefited from the achievement of one of its members and rejoiced with him in it. Those, however, who were sceptical and refused to believe it really happened, regarding it all as a hoax, got no joy out of it.

The same principle applied to Hillary’s conquest of Everest and Bannister’s four minute mile. Each of these events were remarkable break-throughs and were heralded as a victory, not merely for one man, but for mankind. In a sense, Christ’s victory over sin had similar (obviously not identical) effects.

God’s plan of salvation operates on what we might call “federal principles.” Scripture refers to two federal heads: Adam and Christ - the “first” and “second” Adam. The effects of the first Adam’s sin were

immediately imputed to his posterity by reason of the natural, physical, organic unity that existed between them. Likewise, the effects of the second Adam's righteousness are imputed to all who are prepared to enter into spiritual union with him. In both cases, the action of one man has widespread effects, affecting an innumerable company of people. Thus, "By a man came death, and by one man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so shall all in Christ be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

Paul further expounds this federal principle in Rom. 5 which I shall quote from the Living Bible: "What a contrast between Adam and Christ who was yet to come. And what a difference between man's sin and God's forgiveness (grace). For this one man, Adam, brought death to many through his sin. But this one man, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness to many through God's mercy. Adam's one sin brought the penalty of death to many, while Christ freely takes away many sins and gives glorious life instead. The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to be king over all, but all who will take God's gift of forgiveness and acquittal are kings of life because of this one man, Jesus Christ. Yes, Adam's sin brought punishment to all, but Christ's righteousness makes men right with God, so that they can live. Adam caused many to be sinners because he disobeyed God, and Christ caused many to be made acceptable to God because he obeyed."

The principle of salvation in Christ by grace is beautifully illustrated in the David-Goliath episode. Goliath was Israel's enemy and too strong for any man to conquer. He was too big for any man to handle and all trembled in fear before him because he spelt out death. In this respect he represented sin which was too big and strong for man to conquer. However, in the case of Goliath, it only required one man to conquer and destroy him and the rest could go free. David, of course, was that conqueror and, through the Spirit of God, he knocked the giant to the ground with a single stone. David was clearly a type of Christ. In fact, the Hebrew word for "David" means "beloved" which is one of Messiah's titles (see Eph. 1:6). David, in defeating Goliath with a stone, foreshadowed Jesus, the true "stone of Israel" who, through his one sacrifice on Calvary, defeated sin and set the captives free.

Now, when David defeated Goliath, did the Israelites refuse to enter into, and enjoy the victory? Did they conclude that because they were too weak to conquer Goliath themselves, and David had to do it alone while they helplessly stood by, that it was not right for them to share in it, and benefit by it? By no means! Did David mind others benefiting from his work? Not at all! He did it for them! Why? Because they were his brethren.

In the same way we must not conclude that just because we can't

conquer sin, that it is wrong or impossible for us to share in Christ's victory. He certainly has no objection to us benefiting from his work. He chiefly did it for our sakes! To turn it down and refuse to receive it would be like rejecting a gift offered to you by a close friend.

Christ's victory over sin could be likened to a company of soldiers down in a trench with a machine gunner firing down at them from a hill up ahead. Many soldiers have hopped out of the trench to rush the enemy, but none of them were successful in breaking through. The enemy inflicted death upon them all. Finally, the captain himself arrives and hops down into the trench with them. He then jumps out and rushes the enemy with amazing skill, ducking and dodging and successfully avoiding the fiery darts of the machine gun, and kills the gunner. He then turns around, and with the onward signal of the hand calls out to his men in the trench saying: "Come, follow me to victory." Who could imagine those soldiers concluding that because they were incapable of getting the victory themselves they should remain in the trench and not follow their captain?

Jesus Christ is the captain of our salvation. He hopped into the ditch with us, partaking as he did of the same "sinful flesh." But during his life he avoided the fiery darts of sin in the flesh, never allowing them to strike or lodge in his heart. Instead, he gained mastery over them and put them to death with the result that he lives on - forever, and invites us to follow him.

Another example can be illustrated in baseball. One by one the members in a team either miss hitting the ball or are caught out before making home base. All except the captain fall short of the goal. Finally the captain comes to strike the ball and hits it outside the park, and makes a solo home run, resulting in his team getting the victory. Although all the other members fell short and failed, they all share in the victory because they belong to the captain's team! Being in the captain's team is the key! But the captain would not be pleased if, as a result of his victory, all the other members of the team adopted a slack attitude and never made an effort to do as well as they could in their competitions.

Another example of this principle can be seen in the story of a king's son who made friends with some people from the poor and common class of society. Under normal circumstances these people would not have been given access to the palace. But the king's son took them to the palace. He entered the gate and they were following behind him. As they approached, the guard at the gate stopped them and was going to refuse to let them enter. But the king's son turned around and said: "They are with me." And so, because they were with him, they were given access to the royal palace! Being with the king's son is the key! As the saying goes: "It's not what you know, but who you know that opens doors." For all who know and love the Lord and are His friends, the door is open and eternal life is

assured. In Jesus' own words: "This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn. 17:3).

Grace then, relates to the gift of eternal life which comes to us through the favour and sheer generosity of God. It is given on the basis of Christ's redemptive work and our faith in that work resulting in being his "brethren," members of his team. In Scripture grace is therefore contrasted with debt (Rom. 4:4, 16); works (Rom. 11:6); and law (Jn. 1:17. Rom. 6:14-15. Gal. 5:3-4).

It is absolutely impossible to work for, or earn salvation. To do so would require a sinless life - total obedience to the law. Man's position is described in Rom. 3:23: "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." And the result is DEATH because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

So then, as far as human effort is concerned, the only thing that we can earn is death. It is impossible to earn life. Therefore, the only way of gaining life is by it becoming a free gift: "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). And this clearly necessitates the overlooking and forgiveness of sins. Grace, therefore, spells FORGIVENESS.

GRACE TRIUMPHS OVER LAW

Jesus never used the word "charas" (grace) but the idea was very prominent in his teaching (especially his parables), and in his ministry (action speaks louder than words!)

The contrast between law and grace, and the forgiveness that grace provides is beautifully illustrated in Jn. 8:1-11. The Scribes and Pharisees (who were totally bound by a legalistic spirit) brought a woman to Jesus who had been caught in the very act of adultery. And they said to Jesus: "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us to stone such a person, but what do you say?"

The law was inflexible in its decrees and judgements and pronounced judgement and death on all offenders. It made no provision for forgiveness because it did not operate on the basis of grace. However, although the law came through Moses, grace came through Jesus Christ, and he demonstrated this in the episode before us. He replied to the question with these words: "He who is without sin among you, let him be first to cast the stone at her." Being convicted by their own conscience, realizing that they also, like everyone else, were guilty of sin, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, without any further quibble. Jesus then said to the woman: "Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No, Lord." and Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you: Go and SIN NO MORE."

This episode reveals the forgiving effect of grace, and is contrasted with the condemnation of the law. Truly, “There is now therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

But, notice very carefully that Jesus warned the woman to “sin no more.” God’s grace is not so liberal as to continually forgive habitual sinners. If one continually reverts to sin he becomes a servant of it, and loses the lordship of Christ, resulting in death. Jesus then, condemned the sin, but not the sinner, and warned that the sinner herself would come under condemnation if she persisted in her sin.

This episode in Jn. 8 demonstrates the principle enunciated in Jam. 2:13 that “mercy rejoices (triumphs) over judgement.” “Mercy” is a product of grace, and “judgement” is a product of law. And so grace triumphs over law. It most certainly did in the case of the woman caught in adultery.

Under the terms of the law she deserved death. She did not deserve or earn life. But Jesus granted her life as a free gift through the sheer generosity provided by God’s grace in him.

GOD’S GRACE IS GLORY

The episode in Jn. 8 was a true manifestation of “the glory of God.” We tend to think of God’s glory as a physical blaze of shining splendour - a manifestation of miraculous power in acts of healing. However, while it is true that such acts demonstrate the glory of God, the greatest demonstration is seen in the forgiveness of sin and granting of reconciliation and eternal life. A careful reading of Jn. 1:4 reveals that “glory” is equated with “grace:” “And the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Here, “glory” relates to character (from “charas”). It relates to inner quality - attitude - disposition. When we encounter the love and forgiveness of God we see His glory - His real character as a God of love and mercy, without which no man could be saved.

Hence, when Moses said to the Lord “Show me Thy glory” the Lord responded by proclaiming His name (character) which is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin ...” (Ex. 33:34).

Therefore, because Jesus came in the name of his Father, he manifested the Father’s character and displayed grace and mercy and forgiveness.

Before forgiveness can take effect, confession of sin and repentance has to be made (Acts 5:31. 1 Jn. 1:8-9.) We then by faith believe and

receive forgiveness and salvation (Jn. 1:12. Heb. 6:1. Rom. 10:9).

Grace involves many subjects such as repentance, forgiveness, salvation, regeneration, love, mercy etc. These are all “grace words” which do not contain the word “grace.” These principles are well illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15) and the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:23-35. Lk. 7:37-48).

Grace is that quality that does not call to mind the faults and offences of a person and use them as an excuse for not helping, assisting, and showing love and favour. Grace is “moved with compassion” and puts no restriction on forgiveness, being prepared, if necessary to forgive “seventy times seven.” Grace doesn’t say: “If he does that again I will wipe my hands clean of him.” Grace does not say: “I will forgive but I won’t forget.” Such attitudes are harsh and legalistic, and characteristic of those who live by the principles of law.

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy” means we only receive mercy from God in proportion to how we exercise it towards our neighbour. “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” means we receive forgiveness from God in proportion to how we forgive others. Thus, “judge not that you be not judged” means don’t be critical and condemnatory of the faults of others otherwise the Lord will not extend grace towards you but criticize and condemn you as you criticize and condemn others.

GRACE IS LOVE IN ACTION

Grace in a nutshell is love in action, and the qualities of true divine love are spelt out loud and clear in 1 Cor. 13. God’s grace is motivated by love (Rom. 5:8. Jn. 3:16). The English word “charm” comes close to expressing the Greek word “charas” (grace). It is something sweet and charming - kind and condescending. It is that quality or virtue which enables one to minister to another when they don’t deserve or earn it. As such it is the antithesis of legalism.

The principle of grace is constantly manifested by parents towards their children. Parents give gifts to their children and minister to their needs even though they cannot earn, and often don’t deserve it. Why? Because they love them!

Let us not mistake the favour of God for the golden guinea cast from the rich man’s coach to the beggar in the roadside dust. God’s grace involves genuine love and innermost feelings - it involves stopping the coach and kneeling down in the dust to help. It involves the agonies of Gethsemane. Remember the parable of the good Samaritan. Grace is the smile of a heavenly king, looking down upon His people.

God’s grace comes to us in countless practical ways each day of this

present life. God is constantly doing things and giving us things we don't deserve both in the natural and spiritual realm. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and FIND GRACE to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). The Apostolic injunction to all Christians is "GROW IN GRACE" (2 Pet. 3:18).

One of the greatest examples of grace can be seen in Paul's experience. He was a blasphemer and persecutor, yet he obtained mercy by the grace of God because he "did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:12-16). He therefore said "By the grace of God I am what I am." And so say all of us!

LAW NEEDED TO SEE THE NEED FOR CHRIST

From what has been advanced concerning law and grace, it should be evident that if the law had never been given, it would have been impossible to see the need for Christ, and impossible to appreciate God's gift of grace.

Imagine if the law had never been given. Suppose Jesus arrived on the scene and announced that he was the solution to the world's problem - that he had come to die for the world's sins. If the law had not been given first, there would be no consciousness of sin, and people would have said "What's the problem? We don't have any problem. Our conscience doesn't trouble us."

It was therefore imperative that the law be given first to reveal sin and provide a standard or yardstick against which lives could be compared and measured. Failure to measure up forces a person to admit they have a problem. Hence, when Jesus arrives and proclaims to be the solution to our problem, people look at the law and their lives and say: "Yes, I sure need a solution!"

The law can be compared with pain. Were it not for pain, we would be in trouble physically. The most insignificant injury could end up being fatal if we didn't have pain to signal its severity to us.

Man is born into this world with a tremendous injury. Sin in the flesh is like a cancer whose tentacles spread out into every part of his being, gradually throttling him to death. Were it not for the "pain" of the law jabbing into the sinful passions and arousing them, man would have gone merrily on his way to death saying: "Problem, what problem?"

The law was clearly given to provoke man's nature to sin more. This will be difficult for some to receive, but it is taught in Scripture. Paul said, as quoted earlier: "The law came in order that transgression might increase" (Rom. 5:20). God wanted the people to get so loaded with sin so that there was no way they could fail to see how utterly sinful sin is, and how desperately they needed a Saviour. It might seem that God was

working against Himself to get the people to sin more, but this was His way of bringing them to total despair of self-effort, and lead them to Christ.

The law was designed to bring a man to an end of himself - to the place described by Paul in Rom. 7 where, through sheer frustration in not being able to conquer the passions of sin aroused by the law, he exclaims: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

And, had it not been for the harrowing experience of living under the law, continually facing condemnation and a curse, God's grace would never have been appreciated. The law caused grace to stand out in bold relief. The law caused the love and mercy of God to be magnified. In other words, the name and true character of the Lord would never have been properly understood or appreciated had man never been placed under the law. Indeed, "All things work together for good in the purposes of God!

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CHAPTER EIGHT

GRACE DOESN'T MEAN THERE ARE NO COMMANDMENTS

When Scripture says: "We are no longer under law but grace;" does this mean that Christians do not have to keep any laws or commandments? When we read that "We are saved by grace and not works" does this mean that we have no work to do - no effort - no application?

In Paul's day some were twisting and distorting his teaching on grace to mean this. They slanderously reported Paul as teaching: "Let us do evil that good may come" (Rom. 3:8). In other words, they falsely interpreted Paul's teaching to mean that the more we sin the more God's grace benefits. They argued that, according to Paul's philosophy, we should "continue in sin that grace may abound" (Rom. 6:1). That is, the more we sin, the more God will have to keep on extending grace to forgive us, causing His grace to increase and be magnified. "The damnation of those who say such things is just" says Paul (Rom. 3:6). Why? Because, as we read in Jude v4, it "turns the grace of God into lust, resulting in denying our Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." It is fatal to the Christian profession

to believe that we can do as we please, and live a life controlled by fleshly lust without fear of God's punishment. Such a philosophy denies the Lord Jesus Christ and all he stood for, and strikes at the very root of the cross which was a repudiation and crucifixion of the flesh and its lusts. Those who identify themselves with Christ and the cross make a commitment to deny self - to deny the flesh and all of its carnal lusts, and to live a life controlled by the Spirit, emulating the example set by Jesus.

In reply to the question: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" Paul goes on to say: "God forbid. How can we who have renounced sin still live in it? Have you forgotten that those of us who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him by baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also SHOULD WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE ... Knowing this, that our old man (sinful flesh) is crucified with him so that our sinful flesh might be destroyed that we should no longer serve sin" (Rom. 6:2-6). "So you also must consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord. You must not surrender any part of yourselves to sin to be used for wicked purposes. Instead, give yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life, and surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Surely you know that when you surrender yourselves as slaves to obey someone, you are in fact the slaves of the master you obey - either of sin, which results in death, or of obedience, which results in being right with God" (Rom. 6:11-16).

It is important to understand these principles. Grace is not an open cheque allowing us to spend as much on the pursuits of the flesh as we like. Those who do so will reap according to the flesh and end up in destruction and corruption - morally and spiritually bankrupt.

Note the following warnings: "But there were false prophets too, in those days, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly tell their lies about God, turning against even their Master who bought them; but theirs will be a swift and terrible end. Many will follow their evil teaching that there is nothing wrong with sexual sin. And because of them Christ and his way will be scoffed at" (2 Pet. 2:1-2 Living Bible).

Writing to the church at Pergamos, Jesus said: "And yet I have a few things against you. You tolerate some among you who do as Balaam did when he taught Balak how to ruin the people of Israel by involving them in sexual sin and encouraging them to go to idol feasts" (Rev. 2:14 Living Bible).

And to the church at Thyatira Jesus said: “Yet I have this against you: You are permitting that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach my servants that sex sin is not a serious matter; she urges them to practise immorality and to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20 Living Bible).

The rise of various Christian cults during these last days which advocate and encourage free and open sex and other forms of immorality such as homosexuality is very significant in the light of the verses just quoted. There should be no doubt or question as to where a true Christian stands with regard to such practises. May it be clearly understood, therefore, that the grace of God is not a free passport to the fulfilling of the lusts of the flesh. Such activities constitute “sin” and those whose lives are controlled by them become “servants of sin” which pays out the wages of death.

VERY DEFINITE COMMANDMENTS TO KEEP

It should be evident, and will become more evident as we proceed, that references in Scripture to Christians not being under the law do not mean that they have no commandments to keep. The fact of the matter is, contradictory as it might seem, that grace does not in reality do away with law! Is it not true that there is a law against committing adultery, murder, crime, stealing, rape, lying etc? If not, we would be living in a world where everything goes. Nothing could be wrong. There would be no definition of right from wrong. Every man could do as he pleased and get away with it, regardless of how it affected other people.

For this reason every country has its national laws - motor vehicle laws etc. Such laws are made for the well-being of the public and to maintain order. Without traffic laws, for instance, city streets would be a scene of sheer chaos. Without penal laws and criminal statutes, crime would go unpunished. The lawless would be free to exploit and ravage society, without fear of punishment. Men’s laws are intended to GUARANTEE LIBERTY.

This same principle applies to the Christian community. There are certain divine laws which God has instituted for our good which must be observed to gain true liberty and freedom from fear.

There are certain eternal, immutable spiritual laws in motion today, binding on every Christian - laws which regulate man’s relationship with God, and with his fellow man. Just like the physical laws which God created to control the universe, the spiritual laws created for man’s happiness are always binding. You break them, and they break you. You

may ignore them, but they never ignore you. They are always present; whenever broken, they exact a penalty commensurate with the offence. But they were created for our GOOD.

What is wrong, for instance, with a spiritual commandment which tells us to love the Lord God with our whole heart? What's wrong with a commandment that tells us we should love our neighbour as ourself? What's wrong with laws that forbid us to commit murder, adultery, steal, lie etc? Are such laws wrong? Are they bad for us?

If there was no law - no rules to keep, "sin" would be impossible, because "sin" is "transgression of the law." And if there was no sin there could be no punishment. God would not be able to punish sinners since sin would not exist. No one could be guilty in His sight, no matter what crime they committed. And if there is no sin, then there can be no such thing as a sinner, no need for repentance, no need for forgiveness, no need for mercy or pardon - NO NEED FOR GRACE! If we follow the reasoning of the no-law philosophy through to its limits, this is where we are finally left. The New Testament would have no place for such words as "obedience" and "disobedience."

A careful reading of the whole New Testament and not just a few isolated passages soon reveals that references to Christians not being under law and of the law being "done away," "abolished," "blotted out" etc do not mean that there are no commandments to keep.

Jesus and his apostles re-affirmed the great moral commandments of the Old Testament and made it clear that they are still binding on Christians. They warned that refusal to observe such commandments would result in failure to gain eternal life and failure to enter the kingdom. Consider the following in the next chapter:

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CHAPTER NINE LOVE FULFILLS LAW

Jesus said: “The first of all commandments is, Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: 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. And the second is similar, namely this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There are no other commandments greater than these” (Mk. 12:29-31). “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:40). In other words, “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” “He who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery,’ ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ ‘Thou shalt not steal,’ ‘Thou shalt not bear false witness,’ ‘Thou shalt not covet,’ and if there be any other commandment, are summed up in this saying, namely, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’ Love does no wrong to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:8-10).

To love our neighbour as ourself means not doing or saying things to him that we wouldn't like him to do or say to us. When this rule or principle is obeyed and applied, all the great moral laws of God are fulfilled naturally as a matter of course. Seeing that we wouldn't want our neighbour to kill us, steal from us, bear false witness against us, commit adultery with our marriage partner etc, then we won't want to do the same to him if the golden rule of love rules in our heart. Thus love is the answer to law - God's love as manifested through Jesus Christ. Through love, God's spiritual laws are fulfilled, and it was by this means that Jesus accomplished this. The more that we yield to the divine love which the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in each willing heart in the name of Jesus, the more we become conquerors of sin and obedient to God's commandments.

This “love,” in a nutshell, constitutes “the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). It is referred to as “the royal law” in Jam. 2:8: “If you fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,’ you do well.” Such was the teaching of Jesus: “Always treat

others as you would like them to treat you, for this is what the law and prophets are all about” (Matt. 7:12).

Therefore, Christians whose hearts are full of the love of Christ don’t need lists of laws to remind them what they should and shouldn’t do. The love of Christ within them constrains them, causing them to automatically fulfil God’s commandments.

The following story illustrates the principle of love. There was a woman who was married to a very harsh and legalistic husband. He was very demanding and domineering, and he drew up a list of all the things he expected her to do. Most of the items on the list were reasonable in themselves - things that any wife who loved her husband would want to do anyway. But, because she did not love her husband, she continually failed to do all of those things. Eventually the husband died and his wife re-married. Her second husband was very loving and kind and she was deeply in love with him. After several years of marriage she came across the old list of rules made out by her first husband which she had found so difficult to keep. After reading through it she realized that they were all being fulfilled in her second marriage automatically because true love was in her heart, without having to read them each day!

So it is with the Christian. Christ, by the Spirit, ministers love to those who yield. “Not written with ink; not in tables of stone; but in fleshly tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3).

So, “The purpose of the commandment is LOVE out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). “And this commandment (law) have we from Him (God), that he who loves God should love his brother also” (1 Jn. 4:21).

Jesus didn’t come to destroy the law but to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17). He who loves his neighbour as himself “has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:3). Such a man, having his heart full of love, will not only not want to kill his brother, but will not even want to call him a fool (Matt. 5:21-24). He will not only refuse to commit adultery with his neighbour’s wife, but will not even allow his heart to lust after her (Matt. 5:27-28).

Grace then performs a much deeper work in a man’s life than the law. The law only required outward action; grace gets deep down into the heart from which all action springs. Grace brings a much deeper commitment to God and obedience to His commandments than what law could. In this sense, the righteousness of the Christian exceeds that of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). The Pharisees went through the motions of the law and put on a great outward show, but in their heart they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity. They “made clean the outside of the cup and plate, but within were full of extortion and excess.” They were like “whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.” “For a pretence” they made “long prayer.”

Jesus said to them: “ You outwardly appear righteous before men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23). Such was their “righteousness.” No wonder it must be exceeded by the Christian!

It was to the Pharisees that Jesus said: “You have omitted the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith” (Matt. 23:23). Mic. 6:8 puts it like this: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

The rule and principle of love then, is “the law of Christ” which all Christians come under. It is referred to as the “perfect law of liberty” in Jam. 1:25 because when true love operates in the heart, a person is freed from all the rottenness and bondages of the flesh such as malice, envy, jealousy, hatred, bitterness, resentment etc. Such things are real bondages, causing a person to be mean, unhappy and depressed. (Reference is again made to the “law of liberty” in Jam. 2:12 in connection with the “royal law” v8).

Gal. 6:2 also refers to “the law of Christ: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” The bearing of one another’s burdens is the sharing of one another’s troubles. In other words: doing to others what you would like them to do to you, which is the rule of love.

JESUS REAFFIRMED MORAL LAWS

The rule of love then, covers all the great moral commandments of the law. However, Jesus and his apostles on various occasions made specific reference to each of the great moral commandments of the law, and made it clear that Christians must obey them.

It is recorded in Matt. 19:16-19 and Lk. 18:18-20 that a certain man approached Jesus saying: “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied: “If you wish to enter into life, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS.” The man answered, “Which commandments?” “Jesus said, Thou shalt not murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

On another occasion Jesus said: “Take heed and beware of covetousness” (Lk. 12:15). This was just another way of saying, “Thou shalt not covet,” which Paul quoted from the law in Rom. 13:9. He elsewhere taught that covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5. Eph. 5:5). And Paul practised what he preached! He said on one occasion: “I have coveted no man’s silver or gold” (Acts 20:33).

In Mk. 7:21-23 we read that Jesus regarded evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, deceit, lust, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride foolishness etc, as evils which come from within a man

and which defile him.

“But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Neither filthiness, nor silly talking, nor jesting, which are not fitting ... for this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words, for on account of this loose living the wrath of God will come upon the children of disobedience. Be not partakers therefore with them. For you were once in darkness, but now you are light ...” (Eph. 5:3-8).

“I wrote to you telling you not to keep company with fornicators - or with the covetous, or an idolater, or a slanderer - or drunkard or swindler - don’t keep company with any brother who is like this - you should not even eat with him” (1 Cor. 5:9-).

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6). “Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Let your life be without covetousness ...” (Heb. 13:5).

“Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin; that he should no longer live the rest of his life in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. You had time enough in the past to do all the things the Gentiles do, when you walked in sex sin, lust, getting drunk, wild parties, drinking bouts, and abominable idolatries” (1 Pet. 4:1-3).

“These men are as useless as dried up springs of water, promising much and delivering little; they are as unstable as clouds driven by the storm winds. They are doomed to the eternal pit of darkness. They proudly boast about their sins and conquests, and, using lust as their bait, they lure back into sin those who have just escaped from such wicked living. ‘You aren’t saved by being good,’ they say, ‘so you might as well be bad. Do what you like, be free.’ But these very teachers who offer this “freedom” from law are themselves slaves to sin and destruction. For a man is a slave to whatever controls him” (2 Pet. 2:17-22 Living Bible).

“For the love of money is the root of all evil, which, some having coveted after, have erred from the faith” (1 Tim. 6:10).

“This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men will be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, inhuman, truce breakers, false accusers, no self control, fierce, despisers of those who are good, traitors, reckless, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers

of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power: from such people turn away” (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

“Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have access to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city. For outside are dogs, sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters, and liars” (Rev. 22:14-15).

In the light of these New Testament statements which so clearly speak of specific moral issues, a person would have to be exceedingly blind, ignorant and foolish to imagine that living under grace means there are no commandments to keep and no moral standard to live up to for Christians. These statements make it clear that those who have a slack and indifferent attitude towards God’s spiritual laws, and do not obey them, will fail to enter His kingdom.

Being saved by grace doesn’t mean we sit back and relax and do as we please. Listen to Tit. 2:11-12: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

Heb. 12:15 says we must be “looking diligently LEST WE FAIL TO OBTAIN THE GRACE OF GOD.” “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation” (Heb. 10:26-).

“For if, after they had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome by them, the last state is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

So then, being saved by grace does not mean we can live as we please and still expect to find favour with God and be in His kingdom. If we do not live according to the Spirit and are indifferent towards divine standards, we will “fail to obtain the grace of God.”

Col. 1:22-23 makes it clear that we can only be presented blameless and unaccused in the sight of God “if we continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, never moving away from the hope of the gospel.”

Rom. 2:7 tells us that it is by “patient continuance in well doing” that we gain eternal life.

It is quite clear that the principle of grace is not “once saved always saved in spite of how we live.” We have to do our part, and are required to diligently apply ourselves in the Spirit and not live a life controlled by the flesh. Salvation can be lost through negligence and indifference! Many Scriptures teach this.

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CHAPTER TEN EMPHASIS ON “COMMANDMENTS” AND “OBEDIENCE” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are some strange ideas abroad these days about the principle and function of grace. Some imagine that grace and commandments are incompatible. It is sometimes thought that where there is grace there are no commandments. Some Christians who are hung-up on this idea accuse and condemn other Christians as being “under the law” - “legalistic” - “under bondage” etc when they talk about the commandments of God and draw attention to the importance of keeping them. The way these people talk, one would imagine that the word “command” or “commandments” is a dirty word which never appears in the New Testament and should never be part of a Christian’s vocabulary. However, a superficial reading of the New Testament soon disproves such a view. Consider:

Jn. 15:12-14: “This is my commandment, that you love one

another ... You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.”

Jn. 15:17: “These things I command you, that you love one another.” (Such command constitutes the “law of Christ” as pointed out before).

Matt. 5:19: “Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.” (From this we learn that it is a very serious matter to teach people that it does not matter if we break the commandments of Christ!).

Acts 10:33: “Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.” In v42 Peter says God “commanded us to preach,” and in v48 Peter “commanded them to be baptized.”

Acts 17:30: “God now commands all men everywhere to repent.”

1 Cor. 7:19: “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing: but what does matter is the keeping of the commandments of God.”

1 Cor. 14:34: “... women are commanded to be under obedience, as also says the law.” Paul then says in v37: “If anyone regards himself as a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are the commandments of God.”

1 Thes. 4:1- “You know what commandments we gave you in the name of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication - lust of concupiscence ...”

1 Thes. 1:11: “Study to be quiet, do your own business, work with your own hands as we commanded you.”

2 Thes. 3:4: “We are confident you will do the things we command you.”

2 Thes. 3:6: “... we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly, not according to the teaching he received from us.”

2 Thes. 3:10: “... this we commanded you, that if you would not work, neither should you eat.”

2 Thes. 3:12: “We command and exhort - don’t sponge - earn your own living.”

1 Tim. 4:11: “These things command and teach.”

1 Tim. 6:13-14: “I give thee charge in the sight of God ...”

2 Pet. 2:20-21: “Better to have not known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, turning from the holy commandments.”

2 Pet. 3:2: “Be mindful of the words of the holy prophets and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour.”

1 Jn. 2:3-4: “By this do we know that we know him, IF we keep His commandments” (Also see 3:22-24. 5:2-6. 2 Jn. v6).

Rev. 12:17: The woman's seed are those who keep the commandments of God and bear witness for Jesus Christ.

Rev. 14:12: "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

Rev. 22:14: "Blessed are they that do His commandments."

OBEDIENCE

If being "under grace" means there are no commandments to keep, or that it doesn't matter whether we keep them or not, we would expect to find no emphasis in the New Testament on "obedience." That such is not the case soon becomes evident to anyone who carefully reads the New Testament.

Jn. 14:21-23: "He who has my commandments and keeps (obeys) them is he who loves me ... If a man love me he will keep my words."

Rom. 2:8: "Those who are quarrelsome and do not obey the truth, shall come under indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish."

Rom. 6:17: "But God be thanked, that you were servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that standard of teaching which was delivered to you."

Rom. 16:26 says the gospel was revealed and made known to all nations "for the obedience of faith."

2 Cor. 10:5: "We bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

2 Thes. 1:8: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire inflicting vengeance on those who know not God, and those who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Thes. 3:14: "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him that he might be ashamed."

Tit. 1:16: "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

In Heb. 2:1-3 we are reminded that those who transgressed the law and disobeyed it, were severely punished. The conclusion is then drawn that Christians must therefore "give more earnest attention" to the truths they have heard lest they drift away from them. Verse 3 says that we shall not escape punishment if we are indifferent and negligent towards our great salvation which was announced by the Lord Jesus himself. In other words, because the grace that comes through Jesus transcends the law spoken by angels through Moses, those under grace have a greater responsibility to be obedient.

Even our Saviour himself "learned obedience" (Heb. 5:8). He therefore became the "author of eternal salvation to all who obey

him” (Heb. 5:9).

Heb. 10:28-31: “He who despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. How much more terrible the punishment will be for those who have trampled underfoot the son of God and treated his cleansing blood as though it were common and unhallowed, and insulted and outraged the spirit of grace.” From this we learn that grace can be insulted and outraged. Those who are guilty of this are those referred to in v26 who “sin wilfully after they have received the knowledge of the truth.” This completely blows apart the philosophy that when we are under grace it doesn’t matter how much we sin.

Heb. 12:25: “See that you do not refuse him who speaks for if they (Israel under the law) did not escape when they disobeyed him when he spoke on earth (at Sinai), we are less likely to escape if we disobey Him who speaks from heaven.”

1 Pet. 1:13-16: “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and set your hope on the grace that is to be brought to you when Jesus is revealed, as obedient children, not slipping back into your old ways to the old lusts which you used to do in your ignorance.” (Notice again how obedience is linked with grace!)

1 Pet. 4:17: “For the time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin with us, what shall the end be of those who obey not the gospel of God?”

OBEDIENCE IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

“**A**nd Samuel said, Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as wickedness and idol worship. Because you have rejected the Word of the Lord, He has also rejected you” (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

Humble, sincere, conscientious obedience to the will of God is more pleasing and acceptable than ceremonial acts and ritual. A careful conformity to moral precepts recommends us more to God than all ceremonial observances. See Jer. 7:22. Mic. 6:1-8. Hos. 6:6. Ps. 50:7-. 51:17-. Isa. 1:11-. Isa. 58. Isa. 66:1-3. Matt. 23:23-24. 9:13. 12:7.

It is much easier to bring a lamb or bullock to God than to bring every high thought into obedience to God. It is much easier to cut a lamb’s throat than crucify the lusts of the flesh. It is much easier to pour out a drink offering than pour out our heart in love to God and our neighbour. It is much easier to blow a trumpet than blow away the human ego and pride. It is much easier to support a church fair, take children to Sunday school, sing choruses, play the piano, organ or guitar, put a coin in

the bag, take the bread and wine etc, than it is to subject our inner will to God's will, loving and obeying Him with all our heart. An outward form of godliness is not difficult to present, going through all the motions of ritual and ceremony and physical action, but a true obedient heart is the real "power" of true religion. Having a "form of godliness but denying the power" is a sign of nominal Christianity (2 Tim. 3:5).

There are many "sacrifices" that can be made in Christian service: donations to missions, and a whole host of charitable institutions. But unless all these charitable acts arise out of an obedient heart to Christ, they are vain sacrifices. Obedience involves faith, repentance, humility, baptism, worship in spirit and truth, fellowship with the saints, witnessing, diligent observance of all the commandments of Christ.

Sincerity and good works are no substitute for commitment and obedience to the law of Christ. The best social worker in the world without Christ is without salvation.

Cain was no doubt sincere when he offered the fruit and vegetables to the Lord, and they were no doubt very attractively arranged on the altar. But the offering was contrary to what God had commanded. Cain was disobedient and therefore rejected by God. His sincerity and zeal were not accepted as a substitute for obedience.

Uzzah was no doubt one hundred per cent sincere when he put out his hand to steady the ark of the covenant as it threatened to fall off the cart. But God had clearly commanded that the ark must not be touched and He struck Uzzah down dead. Uzzah, although meaning well, was disobedient.

Cornelius was "a devout man, one who feared God with all his house, gave much in the way of donations to the people and prayed to God constantly" (Acts 10:2). One would have thought that this was enough to put him right with God. It wasn't. He was told to send for Peter: "He shall tell you what you ought to do" (v6). And Peter preached Christ to him, resulting in him believing and being baptized.

Coming back to 1 Sam. 15:23, we see that disobedience is "rebellion" and is placed in the same category as "witchcraft" (i.e. sorcery - spiritualism). Disobedience, we are told, is "stubbornness," and is as bad as "idolatry." Nothing is so provoking to God as setting up our wills and standards in competition to His. To live in disobedience is as bad as setting up other gods. Saul, to whom the message in 1 Sam. 15:23 was addressed, worshipped his self-will, which is IDOLATRY, for it competed with his professed worship of God.

Jesus gave the true example, saying: "I come to do thy will O God." He "learned obedience" as we have seen. He refused to allow the will of the flesh to assert itself against God's will. He humbled himself and obeyed all of his Father's commandments, being obedient even unto the cruel death of the cross (Plp. 2). Although he experienced a strong desire

in his flesh for the cup of suffering to pass from him, he refused to succumb to that desire.

PEACE AND HARMONY IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT OBEDIENCE

Pace and harmony is indeed impossible where obedience is lacking. Our first parents in fact lost their peace with each other and God through disobedience. It is impossible for peace and harmony to reign in a church, marriage, school, business, club, society etc unless certain basic standards and principles of conduct are accepted, observed and obeyed. The smooth running and success of all relationships depends on each person's willingness to keep to the rules. Without standards and principles to guide relationships, the flesh takes over and produces disorder and chaos.

It is clear from Scripture that although God is a God of grace, He nevertheless won't be messed about with. The New Testament church learnt this very early in its history in the example of Ananias and Sapphira. They lied to the Holy Spirit and were slain by God as a result (Acts 5). God is clearly not indifferent towards slackness!

Simon the sorcerer was warned that he would perish if he didn't repent for thinking the gift of God could be bought with money (Act. 8:17-).

The Lord smote Herod and caused him to be consumed by worms because he failed to give God the glory for his oratory skills (Acts 12:21-23).

The hand of the Lord fell upon Elymas the sorcerer making him blind, because he opposed the preaching of the gospel (Acts 13:8-11).

In 1 Cor. 11:27-32 we read that certain Christians were "weak and sickly and some slept" (died) because of unworthy conduct towards fellow Christians. They were "judged and chastened by the Lord" as a corrective measure.

Indeed "God is love" but Scripture equally declares He is "a consuming fire." He is capable of "goodness and severity" (Rom. 11:22).

FEAR OF GOD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

It is interesting to note the effect that the death of Ananias and Sapphira had on the people: "Great fear came upon all the church and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:5, 11). We read in Acts 9:31 that the churches "walked in the fear of the Lord." "And fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (Acts 19:17).

"Fear is the beginning of wisdom" (Pr. 1:7 etc). But if God never

cared whether we obeyed Him or not and never punished disobedience and rebellion, there would be no ground for fear. If God never dealt with disobedience there would not be the same incentive or inducement to obey. Fear of the consequences of disobedience becomes a strong motivating factor in obedience. (Love for God is an even stronger motivating force, but it does not rule out the fear aspect). “The fear of God” usually means fear of punishment for sin Cp. Gen. 20:11.

To a degree, wise parents work on this principle of fear in order to discipline and inculcate obedience and respect into their children. And Scripture encourages them to do so. They punish their children for rebellion, teaching them that it hurts and is painful to be disobedient and rebellious. If this is done in a properly balanced way at the right age, being mixed with and motivated by love, the spirit of rebellion in the flesh will receive an early death and cause little trouble during the rest of life.

Many intellectuals and modern philosophers reject such principles, regarding them as primitive and crude. They think it is old fashioned to punish and discipline. They say: “No, let a child express himself - let him give full vent to his natural feelings and desires - let him go his own way and do his own thing. It’s healthy and productive. Don’t suppress or stifle him - don’t discipline or chastise him; you will only hold him back- you will impede his progress and only create deep psychological scars and hang-ups in his mind.”

No wonder there are so many spoilt, irresponsible, undisciplined delinquents in society today, having been brought up under such a philosophy. The principles of respect, self-restraint and obedience have never been taught or firmly inculcated. Society today is suffering the consequences of the philosophy which advocates free expression of the flesh with a minimum of restraint and correction. No wonder, when those brought up this way become interested in Christianity, they have all sorts of hang-ups about obeying rules and commandments!

But God knows best and His Word is final in all matters. His Word declares that “foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Prov. 22:15). That cute looking little piece of soft pinky flesh which you cuddle in your arms hasn’t got one ounce of wisdom or obedience in it! The wisdom it receives and the respect and obedience it learns will be in direct proportion to what its parents teach it. Each child is born with “sin in the flesh” - strong natural propensities which, if not suppressed and directed, will steer it in a direction totally against God, resulting in a bad character full of anger, malice, hatred, jealousy etc.

Scripture says: “It is not in man to direct his steps.” Scripture refers to us as being “by nature, children of disobedience.” No one is born with a natural inherent desire for the things of God. If so, the child brought up by

wolves would have been found in a wholesome spiritual condition. Instead, he was as animal and carnal as the wolves themselves.

Prov. 19:24 says: “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to chasten him,” from which we get the expression, “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” It is also because God loves us that He chastens. He does not want us to be rebellious and disobedient.

Too often these days, instead of getting a smack on the backside for wilful and serious disobedience, many children just get a “tut tut” and a pat on the head. Such children often leave the room with a smile of victory on their face. The result is that they grow up with little respect for their parents and no remorse for acts of disobedience. This often results in growing up to despise all adults and authority.

Lack of discipline results in no effective restraint in a child’s life to discourage disobedience. When it doesn’t hurt or cost something to be disobedient, disobedience easily becomes a life style. And this results in them finding it hard to take a knock or growl or correction from the teacher at school or boss at work. They simply toss in the sponge in a huff and walk out. They are undisciplined and irresponsible. Their attitude is: “Nobody is going to tell me what to do or how to do it.” Why? Usually because their parents never enforced obedience. It is all a product of home training.

Of course, parents can overdo smacking. Too much smacking can be counterproductive and produce as many problems as not smacking at all. Smacking is not always a quick easy cure. All children respond differently and wise parents will be sensitive as to what disciplinary measures are best for each child. Christian parents have a tremendous advantage here, because they can ask their heavenly Father for wisdom and guidance and ask Him to help the child by His Spirit.

Obedience then, is vital in all departments of life. It starts in the home, and the family principles of home are patterned by the principles applied by our Father in heaven.

Obedience is the foundation and mainstay of a stable society. From the very beginning God required obedience. He expects us to obey Him and our children to obey us and Him. In fact, according to His law, long life in the natural depends on honouring, obeying and respecting our earthly father and mother (Eph. 6:1-3). Long life in the supernatural depends on honouring and obeying our heavenly Father.

Under the law, a son who persisted in rebellion and stubbornly refused to come under the authority of his parents was stoned to death. Death is also the penalty inflicted by our heavenly Father upon any son who persistently rebels against Him.

Jesus therefore said: “Fear Him who has the power to kill body and soul in hell fire” (Matt. 10:28). It is often overlooked these days that

Jesus' preaching often included warnings about hell fire. He said: "I will forewarn you who you should fear: fear Him (God) who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yea, I tell you, fear him" (Lk. 12:5). We read in Heb. 5:7 that Jesus himself "feared" God; i.e. respected and revered Him.

Cornelius and all his house "feared God" (Acts 10:2, 22).

Those in all nations who fear God are accepted by Him (Acts 10:35).

The Word of salvation is only effective in those who fear God (Acts 13:26).

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, living in the wholesome fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). "Be subject to one another in the fear of God" (Eph. 5:21). "... in singleness of heart, fearing God" (Col. 3:22). "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others may also fear" (1 Tim. 5:20).

"Let us therefore fear ..." (Heb. 4:1). "Serve God with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28). "Pass our time of sojourning in fear" (1 Pet. 1:17). "Fear God" (1 Pet. 2:17). The ungodly are those "without fear" (Jude v12). God shall reward those who fear His name (Rev. 11:18). "Fear God, and give glory to Him" (Rev. 14:7. 15:4. 19:5).

"If we sin wilfully after receiving the truth ... we have a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation" (Heb. 10:27).

Ps. 33:8: "Let all the earth fear the Lord: Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe at Him." "To this man will I look - to him who has a contrite heart and who trembles at my word" (Isa. 66:2). In relation to "trembling," see Deu. 5:23-29. Ez. 9:4. 10:3, 9.

To tremble in awe of God and His Word is the opposite to being casual, flippant, disrespectful, irreverent. The flesh is so bold and confident and arrogant when the presence of God is not seen or felt. But the flesh soon melts and prostrates itself and trembles when it encounters God!

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CHAPTER ELEVEN DILIGENCE REQUIRED NOT SLACKNESS

A wrong understanding of the principle of grace can lead to a casual, careless and indifferent attitude towards God, the commandments of God, and towards the church and fellowship. Being under grace does not mean we can sit back with our feet up and not conscientiously seek the

Lord with fervent hearts and diligently apply ourselves to divine principles and standards. While it is true that none of us can earn salvation by works because none of us can live a completely sinless life, this is no excuse for doing nothing at all. Scripture leaves us in no doubt that God expects us to fully apply ourselves and do the very best we can in conforming to His principles, even though our best effort falls short of perfection. In so doing we show our love towards Him, and show our appreciation of what His grace has done for us. Failure to serve the Lord with our whole heart, and unwillingness to wholly apply ourselves to His commandments, reveals lack of appreciation for what we have received from Him. It is really a selfish trading and exploiting of His grace. It would be like a child, who, after receiving an expensive gift from his parents which he could never possibly earn, refusing to obey them simply because he knows that even his best behaviour could not earn the gift. The parents, of course, know he could never earn the gift, but still expect him to show greater love and obedience towards them as an appreciation for what they have done.

God's grace-gift of eternal life through Jesus should likewise fill us with such love and appreciation, that we manifest even greater love and obedience than those under the law! Grace, instead of eliminating obedience and conformity to God's commandments, calls forth even greater love and dedication. If it doesn't, then we need to seriously question whether we understand grace at all!

The following Scriptures plainly declare that God expects His people to be wide awake to spiritual requirements, earnest, vigilant, diligent, labouring fervently in divine service:

Christians are "labourers:" they "work" for God. This is emphasized many times in the New Testament:

Matt. 9:37-38: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send labourers ..."

The parable of the labourers in Matt. 20 who were sent out into the vineyard to work relates to Christian service. Prior to being sent, they were "standing idle" in the market place.

Rom. 16:6, 12 refers to Christians who "laboured much in the Lord.

1 Cor. 3:8 says that each Christian will be rewarded according to his own labour. Verse 9 refers to them being "labourers together with God."

1 Cor. 15:10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace that was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." (This verse confirms what was said earlier about the grace of God calling forth greater dedication and service than the law).

1 Cor. 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that

your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

1 Cor. 16:15 refers to “the house of Stephanas” which “addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints ... and laboured.”

2 Cor. 5:9: “Therefore we labour ... that we may be accepted by Him. For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ ...”

2 Cor. 11:23: “In labours more abundant ...”

Gal. 4:11: “I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain.”

Plp. 1:22: “Remaining alive means fruitful labour for me.”

Plp. 2:25: “Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour.”

Plp. 4:3 “Help those women who laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life.”

Col. 1:29: “I labour, striving according to His working ...”

1 Thes. 1:3: “Never forgetting your work of faith and labour of love.”

1 Thes. 2:9: “Brethren, remember our labour and travail. We laboured night and day, because we would not be a burden to you while we preached the gospel.”

1 Thes. 5:12: “And we beseech you brethren, to acknowledge those who labour among you, and are your leaders in the Lord.”

2 Thes. 3:8: “We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it; we laboured hard day and night for the money we needed to live on, in order that we would not be a burden to any of you.” In verse 7 Paul reminds them that they never saw him idle or loafing at any stage. He was no lazy sponger!

1 Tim. 4:10: “We both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in God.”

1 Tim. 5:17: “Let the elders who do their work well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the Word and teaching.”

Rev. 2:2: “I know your works, and your labour ...”

Rev. 2:3: “For my name’s sake you have laboured and have not lost heart.”

Rev. 14:13: “Blessed are the dead ... that they may rest from their labours.”

DILIGENCE

Pr. 10:4 teaches a vital spiritual principle: “He who deals with a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”

In this verse diligence is contrasted with slackness. They are opposites. A diligent person prospers and becomes successful. A slothful person fails to prosper. “Diligent” means “make an effort,” “mentally alert, awake, keen, eager, determined, hard working, steady in application

thorough, particular.” And there are many Scriptures which exhort the people of God to be diligent in God’s service; i.e. keen, eager, hard working, particular etc in the fulfilment of their duties before God.

Ex. 15:26: “If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and will do that which is right in His sight, and will give ear to His commandments ... I will put none of these diseases upon you ...”

Deu. 11:13: “And it shall come to pass, if you shall diligently hearken to my commandments ... and serve the Lord with all your heart, I will give you ...”

Deu. 11:22: “If you shall diligently keep all these commandments ... and love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave to Him, then ...”

Deu. 6:7: “And you shall teach them diligently to your children ...”

Deu. 28:1: “If you hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments ... He will set you on high ...”

Josh. 22:5: “But take diligent heed to do the commandment ...”

Ps. 119:4: “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently”

Pr. 4:23: “Guard your heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.”

We will now look at some Scriptures in the New Testament which plainly teach that failure to be diligent in our walk and service before God will result in failure to gain grace:

Heb. 12:15: “Looking diligently lest you fail to obtain the grace of God.”

2 Pet. 1:10: “Therefore, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” (In other words: our calling and election is not “sure” if we are not diligent. We will fail to gain grace).

2 Pet. 3:14: “Be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

2 Tim. 2:15: “Give diligence to show yourself approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed.”

From these verses we learn that diligence is required to obtain the grace of God, to be sure of our calling and election, to be in peace with God, and to be approved. Being under grace clearly does not mean sitting back supinely leaving everything for God to do. We clearly have to apply ourselves with our whole heart and put our best possible effort into the service of our Lord.

Acts 18:25: Apollos was “an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord.” He was therefore “fervent in spirit, and taught diligently the things of the Lord.”

2 Cor. 8:7: “Therefore, as you abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see

that you abound in this grace also.”

2 Cor. 8:22: “And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, and how much more diligent ...”

Heb. 6:11: “And we desire that everyone of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end, that you be not slothful.”

Heb. 11:6: “Those who come to God must believe that ... He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

BE NOT SLACK OR SLOTHFUL

Slackness is the antithesis of diligence. This is evident from Pr. 10:4 which was quoted before: “He who deals with a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”

A “slack” person is one who is lazy, careless, slothful, idle, negligent, loose. The Word of God is intolerant of such slackness, both in the natural and spiritual departments of life. Consider the following:

Ecc. 10:18: “By much slothfulness the building decays; and through idleness of the hands the house rots away.” That is: through laziness and neglect the roof will continue to leak, resulting in the rafters rotting, ultimately causing the house to collapse.

This same principle applies spiritually. The church is the “house of God.” Through laziness and neglect (slackness or slothfulness), a fellowship will crumble away. For a fellowship to remain sound and solid, requires diligence on the part of all members. If one little part becomes slack and slothful, and lets the rot in, it will gradually spread and affect others. (The word “slothful” comes from “sloth” which is a South American animal which is sluggish in nature, capable of only very slow movement on the ground. It is painfully slow and sleepy in all of its movements).

Pr. 18:9: “He who is slothful in his work is brother to him who is a great waster.” That is, “a lazy person is as bad as someone who is destructive” (Good News Bible).

This soon becomes evident when the principles of slackness are applied to the running of a business, or sport, or club. If some Christians organized and conducted their Christian life and responsibilities as efficiently and with as much fervour and dedication as they do their business, sport, hobbies etc, the world would soon be turned upside down!

There will unfortunately be a class of Christians to whom Jesus will say when he returns: “Thou wicked and slothful servant” (Matt. 25:26). The apostle Paul therefore exhorts the Christians to “be not slothful” (Rom. 12:11). “Be not slothful, but imitators of those who

through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12).

Heb. 2:3 warns that Christians will not escape punishment if they “neglect” the great salvation in Christ. The word “neglect” means “become careless of,” “make light of,” “be negligent towards.” So Paul exhorts Christians to “neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1 Tim. 4:14). That is: exercise it to the fullest; apply it with your whole heart. As priests of the new covenant, the spirit of the words of 2 Chr. 29:11 apply: “My sons, be not now negligent, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him, and that you should minister to Him.”

Josh. 18:3: “How long are you slack to go to possess ...” (Judg. 18:9).

Zeph. 3:16-17: “Let your hands not be slack - the Lord is with you.”

Hab. 1:4: “The law is slacked and justice never goes forth.”

Isa. 56:10: God’s watchmen are blind - dumb dogs - loving to slumber.

Matt. 25:5: “While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.” (n.b. of the 10 virgins, 5 proved to be foolish and failed to enter the kingdom. This represents a 50 percent drop out! A sobering thought indeed!).

Matt. 13:25: “But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.” (Slothfulness results in false teaching taking root in the church).

TIME TO WAKE OUT OF SLEEP

Rom. 13:11: “You know what hour it is, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep (slackness and slothfulness): for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”

1 Thes. 5:4-6: “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch (be alert) and be sober.”

Eph. 5:14: “Awake those of you who sleep ...”

Mk. 13:35-37: “Watch therefore: for you know not when the master of the house comes ... lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.”

Scripture frequently exhorts us to be “vigilant.” This word comes from the same Greek word elsewhere translated “watch.” it means being cautious, watchful, constantly being on the lookout.

1 Pet. 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant.” The same word is rendered “watch” in Matt. 24:42-43. Mk. 13:34-. Lk. 12:37-. Acts 20:31. 1 Cor. 16:13. Rev. 3:2-3. 16:15.

A true Christian then, is one who is awake to what is going on - up with the play! He is careful and cautious about his spiritual state and condition, making sure he is in top form giving the maximum output.

Tit. 3:8: "This is a faithful saying, and these things I desire you to insist on, that those who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men."

Heb. 12:16: "Don't become careless about God as Esau did and lost the birthright."

2 Cor. 7:11: "What carefulness it produced in you."

2 Cor. 8:16: "Put the same earnest care into the heart." Also see 1 Cor. 12:25. 2 Cor. 11:28. Plp. 2:20.

Eph. 5:15: "See that you walk circumspectly."

1 Cor. 7:32-34 makes the point that the unmarried Christian has this advantage, that he or she can care for the things of God with less distraction, showing that it is a good thing to have such care.

Jn. 10:13: "The hireling careth not for the sheep." This can be linked with Pr. 27:23: "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks."

Other passages in the Old Testament relating to this subject are: Deu. 15:5. Judg. 18:7. Isa. 32:11. 47:8. Ezk. 30:9. 39:6. Zeph. 2:15.

"FOOD FELLOWSHIP AND FUN"

The word of God knows nothing about slack, casual Christianity which wants no organization, discipline, authority or order. Scripture is adamant that all things must be done decently and in order, with the utmost diligence and soberness.

The following episode is an example of what happens where there is no organization - no leadership or authority. There was a certain fellowship that consisted of a number of slack layabout Christians who never liked things to be organized - who objected to leaders giving direction to meetings. Their philosophy was that meetings should be left to go their own way without anyone planning anything. Well, one evening when the fellowship had arranged to get together, the brother who usually directed it into a time of singing, reading and prayer, decided to not do a thing. He just left it to see what course it would take. The evening ended up with no singing, reading or prayer at all. Instead, someone turned the T.V. on and everyone watched a carnal film.

The truth of the matter was, according to a comment made on one occasion by one of the members, that they "were tired of the same old routine of singing, praying and reading." Anyone with a little common-sense realizes that if you take away the singing of praise and worship, prayer, and the reading of the Word of God, you have nothing left that is even remotely like the original Christianity of the New Testament. In every respect, such an attitude is totally carnal, and is severely rebuked by countless verses in the New Testament - some of which we have looked at in this study.

Zec. 7:6 records how God once had to severely reprimand His people because when they came together, the only kind of fellowship they were really seeking was “food and fun.” “And even now in your holy feasts to God, you don’t think of me, but only of the food and fellowship and fun” (Living Bible). Verse 12 reveals that “they hardened their hearts like flint, afraid to hear the words that God, the Lord of hosts, commanded them - the laws He had revealed to them by His Spirit.”

It is sad but true that there are many Christians today who are not very interested in the Word of God and who couldn’t care less whether they understand it and grow in it or not. They are basically not concerned about real, deep spiritual growth. You never see them at the Bible classes or study sessions. But, where there is a picnic, or barbecue, or film evening, or social evening, they never miss! They don’t want to hear about or know God’s commandments. The moment you start speaking about such things they quickly fob it off by saying: “I’m not under law, brother, but under grace.” They are basically ignorant, undisciplined, irresponsible, anti-authority - carnal. They have never really been converted.

Listen to Mal. 3:16: “Then those who feared and loved the Lord SPOKE OFTEN OF HIM TO EACH OTHER. And He had a book of remembrance drawn up in which He recorded the names of those who feared Him and loved to think about Him.”

A love and desire to talk about the Lord and discuss His Word is a mark of a true Christian. Where there is no desire to do this, but to have food, fun, picnics and entertainment instead, there is next to no true Christianity at all.

SELF DISCIPLINE REQUIRED

Zec. 6:15 states that nothing will happen - no progress will be made in the building of God’s house “unless you carefully obey the commandments of the Lord your God.” “Watch out that no one becomes involved in sexual sin or becomes careless about God as Esau did: he traded his birthright for a piece of flesh” (Heb. 12:16).

Realizing the weakness and deceitfulness of the flesh, Paul wrote: “I severely discipline my body and make it know its master, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” Paul was under no delusion about “once saved always saved.” He realised that although he was under grace, he was still required to rigidly apply self-discipline. Refusal or failure to do this would result in being cast away by the Lord.

Paul’s reference to disciplining his body is made in the context of an athlete: “In a race, everyone runs but only one person gets the first prize.

So run your race to win. To win the contest an athlete must deny himself many things that would prevent him from doing his very best. He goes to all this trouble just to win a wreath that withers, but we do it for something that will never wither. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I'm not shadow-boxing or playing around. Like an athlete, I severely discipline my body and make it know its master ..." (1 Cor. 9).

Here, the apostle Paul clearly teaches that a Christian should put in the same kind of effort, application and dedication to his Christianity as what an athlete puts into athletics. Paul says: "Be a winner - go all out for Christ." There is no room for slackness or slothfulness in Christ! The athlete who is lazy, casual and indifferent towards training will be left behind and will fail to qualify. And so will the spiritual athlete who is casual and indifferent towards spiritual training.

"So run that you might obtain" (1 Cor. 9:24-26). "Let us run with patience the race (Grk "fight") before us" (Heb. 12:1). "Shine as lights in the world; holding fast the Word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain" (Plp. 2:16). "You ran well at first; who hindered you?" (Gal. 5:7).

Christianity then, is not some casual stroll, dragging our feet and aimlessly drifting about. It is a "race" in which we "run." It involves effort and "exercise." It is not for lazy, half-hearted people!

Paul says to every Christian: "exercise yourself in godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7). The Greek word for "exercise" is "gumnazo" from which the English word "gym," "gymnast" etc is derived. A gymnasium is the place where athletic sports take place. So, in using the word "exercise," Paul is again using the example of the athlete. Becoming spiritual does not happen naturally. It requires much exercise - reading the Word of God and prayer etc. The contrast to this is provided in 2 Pet. 2:14.

"Strong meat belongs to those who are mature; those who through application and practise have their senses exercised (gumnazo) ..."

"Gird up the loins of your mind and be sober" (1 Pet. 1:13). This is a command to bind up the loose flowing robes of the mind. It is a summons to strenuous thinking to understand the deeper things of God. As Jesus put it: "The kingdom of heaven has been taken by storm and eager men are forcing their way into it" (Matt. 11:12).

MANY ACTION WORDS

There are so many action words used in relation to the Christian in Scripture, that it is difficult to understand how anyone could imagine that being under grace means no work or effort is required.

Jesus said to "strive to enter ..." (Lk. 13:24). The Greek word translated "strive" is "agonizomai" and literally means to "struggle," "to

compete for the prize,” to “contend,” “fight,” “labour fervently,” “agonize.” It is the word from which the English “agony” is derived. It is translated “fight” in 1 Tim. 6:12, and “fought” in 2 Tim. 4:7. It is translated “labouring fervently” in Col. 4:12, and “striveth” in 1 Cor. 9:25 in relation to the athlete.

The word “striveth” also occurs in Col. 1:29 and the important point is made that the striving is “according to His (God’s) working;” i.e. through Christ who strengthens us by the Spirit. It is “not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit.”

“Agon” is also translated “conflict” in Plp. 1:30 and Col. 2:1, and relates to agonizing in prayer and Christian service. It is also translated “contention” in 1 Thes. 2:2, and refers to the effort and fight exercised by Paul in the preaching of the gospel. The same word is translated “fight” in 1 Tim. 6:12 and 2 Tim. 4:7: “Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life ...” “I have fought a good fight ...”

In Rom. 15:20 Paul says “I strived to preach the gospel.” Heb. 4:11 says “Let us labour ...” i.e. make an effort; use speed; be prompt, energetic, earnest.

In a number of places in the New Testament the church is likened to an army. Christians are likened to soldiers enlisted to do warfare. And anyone familiar with the requirements of a soldier and the discipline he has to come under, will immediately realize that a Christian must be disciplined and one hundred percent loyal in order to be a “soldier.”

“No soldier on active service who wants to please his commanding officer gets mixed up in the affairs of civilian life” (2 Tim. 2:4). A soldier is dedicated, disciplined and diligent to the cause of defeating the enemy. He is detached from worldly affairs, and gives single, whole-hearted devotion to his commanding officer, fulfilling the purpose and pledge of his enlistment. The Christian soldier is expected to render the same kind of devotion to his commanding officer - Jesus. His calling is to “war a good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18). He is required to “endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3).

Christians then, are “fellow-soldiers” (Plp. 2:25. Phm. v2). Their warfare of course, is not carnal, therefore “the weapons of their warfare are not carnal” (2 Cor. 10:4). Their spiritual armour and weapons are referred to in Eph. 6:13-18.

Christians are soldiers who fight to “overcome.” There is tremendous emphasis on the word “overcome” in Scripture in relation to the Christian’s calling and mission. And one thing is certain: one does not become an “overcomer” through slackness and slothfulness!

The Christian calling is indeed a “high calling” (Plp. 3:14). It involves a high standard and makes heavy demands. The Christian must “press on towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in

Christ Jesus.” A Christian is one who is willing to extend himself, and channel all his energy and resources into serving Christ. He is one who seeks to rise to the example set by Christ and not try to drag Christ down to his own level. They are not their own; they have been bought with a price - the shed blood of their Saviour, so they must totally dedicate themselves to him. Confessing Jesus as “Lord” means this.

Jesus wants his followers to be “on fire” for him. He is intolerant of lukewarmness: “I would that you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:16). There is no place for “fence sitters” or those who “halt between two opinions.” It must be all or nothing. “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (Jam. 1:8). “Meditate upon these things, and give yourself wholly to them, that your progress might appear to all” (1 Tim. 4:15). “No man can serve two masters for either he will hate the one, and love the other ... you cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added” (Matt. 6:33). “Choose you this day who you will serve ... As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15).

Jesus is the supreme example. We must look to him as the standard and not man. He was not casual or slack in his walk before God. He was totally committed - on fire - full of enthusiasm and zeal. Scripture testifies that he had zeal for God’s house (Jn. 2:17). He was consumed - “eaten up” through this zeal. “Zeal” is “burning desire,” “great eagerness and activity,” “enthusiasm,” “fervour,” “heartly and persistent endeavour.”

Belonging to Jesus therefore, requires being zealous. See Tit. 2:14: “Jesus gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a peculiar people, zealous for good works.”

Rev. 3:19: “Be zealous therefore, and repent;” i.e. “Turn from your indifference and become enthusiastic about the things of God” (Living Bible). “I will search with lanterns in Jerusalem’s darkest corners to find and punish those who sit contented in their sins, indifferent to God, thinking He will let them alone” (Zeph. 1:12 Living Bible).

1 Cor. 12:31: “Covet earnestly the best gifts.” 1 Cor. 14:12: ...“zealous for spiritual gifts.” Jude v3: “...contend earnestly for the faith.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

GREAT EMPHASIS ON THE NEED FOR WORKS

Jesus was a “worker” and so are those who follow in his footsteps. He said: “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (Jn. 5:17). A Christian is “a workman who needs not to be ashamed” (2 Tim. 2:15). To every one “who worketh good” there will be “glory and honour” (Rom. 2:10). Christians are therefore called “workfellows” (Rom. 16:21. Col.

4:11).

While it is true that it is “not by works” that we are saved, the fact still remains that we work anyway as an appreciation of our salvation. There is tremendous emphasis on this in the New Testament:

Matt. 21:28: “Go work today in my vineyard.” Also Mk. 13:34.

Jn. 9:4: “I must work the works of Him who sent me.” Also Jn. 17:4.

Acts 13:2: “The Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Acts 15:38: Paul turned Mark down because he “went not ... to the work.”

1 Cor. 3:13: “Every man’s work shall be made manifest.”

1 Cor. 15:58: Christians should be “abounding in the work of the Lord.”

2 Cor. 9:8: “God is able to make you abound in every good work” by making His “grace abound toward you.” (Here again “grace” produces “good work”).

Plp. 2:12: “Work out your own salvation with trembling and fear.”

Col. 1:10: “Being fruitful in every good work.”

1 Tim. 5:10: “... diligently followed every good work.”

2 Tim. 2:15: “Work hard so God can say to you: Well done.”

2 Tim. 2:21: “Be useful for the Master’s use and prepared for every good work.”

Heb. 6:10: God won’t “forget your work and labour of love.”

Heb. 13:21: May God “make you perfect in every good work.”

1 Pet. 1:17: The Father judges according to every man’s work.

Rev. 22:12: “Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

2 Pet. 1:5-: “But to obtain these gifts, you need more than faith; you must also work hard to be good, and even that is not enough. For then you must learn to know God better and discover what He wants you to do. Next, learn to put aside your own desires so that you will become patient and godly, gladly letting God have His own way with you. This will make possible the next step, which is for you to enjoy other people and to like them, and finally you will grow to love them deeply. The more you go on this way, the more you will grow strong spiritually and become fruitful and useful to our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Thes. 5:13: “Acknowledge those who labour among you and esteem them highly for their work’s sake.”

Matt. 5:16: “Let your light shine - that men may see your good works.”

Matt. 16:27: “... reward you according to your works.”

Jn. 14:12: “The works that I do, you shall do also.”

Acts 9:36: Dorcas was full of good works and acts of love.

Acts 26:20: "... and do works meet for repentance."

1 Tim. 5:25: "The good works of some are manifest beforehand ..."

2 Tim. 3:17: "... that the man of God may be equipped for all good works."

2 Tim. 4:14: "Alexander ... the Lord reward him according to his works." (Bad works).

Tit. 1:16: "Some profess they know God but in works deny Him."

Tit. 2:7: "In all things showing yourself an example of good works."

Tit. 2:14: "A peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Tit. 3:8, 14: "This is a faithful saying and I insist on it - maintain good works."

Heb. 10:24: Provoke unto love good works.

Jam. 2:14-26: stresses that faith without works is dead.

Jam. 3:13: "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him manifest by his good behaviour his works with meekness and wisdom."

1 Pet. 2:12: "... That they may, by your good works, glorify God."

Rev. 2:2, 9, 13, 19. 3:1, 8, 15: "I know thy works and labour of love."

Rev. 2:5: "Repent, and do the first works."

Rev. 2:23: "I will give to every one of you according to your works."

Rev. 2:26: "He who overcomes and keeps my works to the end shall ..."

Rev. 3:2: "I have not found your works perfect."

Rev. 20:12-13: "... were judged, every man according to his works."

"WORKS" ARE A NATURAL PRODUCT OF LOVE AND FAITH

Eph. 2:8-9 is often quoted as proof that works are not necessary for Christians: "For by grace you are saved through faith; it is not your own doing: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man boast." However, it is often overlooked that the very next verse says this: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

The simple truth of the matter is that we can never earn salvation by good works, because our best effort is never good enough. Try as we might, to live a life of sinless perfection, we constantly fall short, making it impossible to earn salvation by our own effort. This should keep us humble and take away all boasting. Salvation is clearly a gift of God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Through faith on our part in that atoning work, God, by His grace, imputes His son's victory and righteousness to all who believe.

But, “faith without works is dead” (Jam. 2). True faith demonstrates itself in action. Faith is not an idle thing; it is active and productive. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? We see how his faith was active with his works, and by works his faith was made perfect” (Jam. 2:21-22). Thus, Jesus said: “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham” (Jn. 8:39).

From Abraham’s example we learn that faith produces good works, and good works prove and perfect faith.

True faith so inevitably produces works that Scripture puts the two together like this: “Your work of faith” (1 Thes. 1:3. 2 Thes. 1:11). Faith and works are thus inseparably linked together. One without the other is incomplete. And so Jesus said: “This is the work of God that you believe on him whom the Father has sent” (Jn. 6:28-29). Faith in Christ is not a dead, passive, inactive thing. It is impossible to believe in Jesus and identify with him without doing something about it. The love and example of Christ becomes such a constraining force within the spirit, that it induces action. Because he so loved us, laying down his life for us, we should want to do all we can to please him and promote his name. His example should stir us to the very depths of our soul, and inspire us to apply ourselves to be like him. It would be a very poor and miserable spirit that sat back and did nothing, reasoning that it was pointless doing anything seeing that salvation cannot be earned. Such an attitude would be inspired by pride which would prefer to be able to boast about human accomplishment. God’s grace rules out all pride.

So then, it is true that we are not saved by works, but it is equally true that we cannot be saved without works. The gift of salvation produces works. We have been “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” In appreciation for the sheer generosity of God’s gift of eternal life, we become doers of good works. Heb. 10:24 in the Living Bible puts it like this: “In response to all he has done for us, let us outdo each other in being helpful and kind to each other and in doing good,” Our “good works” are in response to God’s grace, showing our love and appreciation for all he has done. They are not an attempt to pay for, or earn our salvation!

Refusal to respond to God’s grace by doing good works reveals gross lack of love and appreciation, and the Father is intolerant of such a mean, ungrateful attitude. As already pointed out, when the effects of grace are not shown in a person’s life, they have received the Grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1 etc). They “profess to know God but in works deny Him” (Tit. 1:16). “By this do we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 Jn. 2:3-).

Therefore, “Look diligently lest anyone fail to obtain the grace of God” (Heb. 12:15). “Give diligence to make your calling and election

sure: for if you do all these things, you shall never fall” (2 Pet. 1:10). “You need to keep on patiently doing God’s will if you want Him to do for you all that he has promised” (Heb. 10:36 Living Bible).

The Christian is clearly called to humble servitude. He is called to serve his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, and to be active in His service. No matter how much he does, or how well he does it, his work and effort will never earn salvation. He will still remain in debt to his Lord, and should therefore continually manifest a debt of gratitude by willing and active service. The true attitude that we should manifest after putting our best effort forward for our Master was revealed by the Master himself when he said: “When you have done everything you have been commanded to do, you should say: ‘We are servants and deserve no credit or praise, for we have simply done that which was our duty to do’” (Lk. 17:10).

So then, it is true, as Tit. 3:4-7 says, that “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.” But if we read a little further on to v8 of the same chapter we also read that “What I am about to say is true and I want you to insist on it, that those who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” Tit. 2:7 also says: “In all things showing yourself an example of good works.”

The same applies in 2 Tim. 1:9 where we read that God “has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted to us in Christ Jesus.” However, the point is also made further on in chapter 3:17 that men of God should be “equipped for all good works.”

THE PEOPLE SHOUTED “GRACE, GRACE.”

These Scriptures do not contradict each other when we understand the true principles of grace and works. A particularly good example of these principles can be seen in Hag. 2:4. and Zech. 4:6-9.

The Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem from Babylon to build the temple of the Lord. Haggai the prophet encouraged them with the Word of the Lord saying: “Be strong all you people of the land, says the Lord, and work: for I am with you says the Lord of hosts.” However, when the work was finished, and the headstone was placed in its position, the people shouted out “grace, grace unto it.”

Even though the Jews worked hard to build the temple, the predominant thought that was in their mind when the work was finished was “GRACE.” Why? Simply because they were all deeply aware of the fact that had God not delivered them from Babylon and brought them back to Jerusalem, and blessed them during the building operations, the

temple would never have been built. During the building operations the Jews received tremendous opposition from the neighbouring enemy who made all sorts of attempts to frustrate and stop the work. Had God not protected His people and rebuked the enemy, the whole effort would have been doomed to failure. All sorts of mountains of difficulty obstructed their path of progress, but the Lord, by His Spirit, removed them and granted success to His people's work. The work was therefore a success, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord." It was all the Lord's doing, therefore "grace," and not human achievement, was the predominant thought in the people's minds when the work was finished. However, the fact nevertheless remains, that enormous effort was put forward by the people. God expected and commanded it by saying: "Be strong and work." And it is no different today for Christians. The same principle applies. We are builders together with God, but all our effort without His grace can produce nothing. There is no room for pride!

Neh. 4:6-9 also provides a good illustration of the interplay between faith and works. Prayer was made to God for protection against the enemy, but this did not stop the people doing what they could: they posted guards! There was no contradiction in this. The people knew that God expected them to put their best effort forward and do what they could, but they also knew that without His help and presence, the best human endeavour is never good enough.

During a time of famine, Isaac was told to remain in the land and God would bless him (Gen. 26:3). Did Isaac interpret this to mean that he could sit back with his feet up and wait for God to produce crops? By no means! "Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him" (Gen. 26:12). Isaac believed that although there was no rain, and famine prevailed, the Lord would cause his seed to grow anyway if he planted it. So his faith manifested itself in action and he was blessed as a result. Had his faith been inactive - had he not been prepared to "work," he would not have been blessed. You see then, how faith without works is dead. It is also evident that all of Isaac's work, without the Lord's blessing, would have produced nothing. It was therefore by "grace" that his crops grew and produced food to sustain life.

"The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous (those who live by faith) to go hungry ... but he who deals with a slack hand (those who do no work) becomes poor: but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (Pr. 10:3 -).

One more example: 2 Sam. 15:31-34: "And David said to the Lord, O Lord, I pray Thee, frustrate the counsel of Ahithophel and turn it into foolishness." David then asked Hushai to return to Jerusalem in order that he might "defeat the counsel of Ahithophel." In one breath David is asking the Lord to deal with the situation and in the next breath seems to

indicate that he will deal with it by himself. Once again there is no contradiction here. It is simply a matter of faith manifesting itself in works. David was well aware that his best possible plan was doomed to failure unless the Lord blessed and directed it. He was aware that the Lord expected him to do what he could and use initiative. But, in the final analysis, the success of the venture rested entirely in the Lord's hands. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build. Unless the Lord watch over the city, the watchmen watch in vain." Therefore, before David made any move at all, he sought the Lord's blessing on his endeavour.

"THE LAW OF WORKS" AND "THE WORKS OF THE LAW"

Reference is made in Scripture to us not being under "the law of works" and not being under "the works of the law." The phrase "law of works" is all embracing and means that no kind of effort in any department of activity can earn salvation. The phrase "works of the law" refers to a specific area of effort and activity.

The phrase "law of works" occurs in Rom. 3:27: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? No, but by the law of faith."

In this verse, the word "law" signifies "principle" (as in Rom. 7:21). The "principle of works" is that salvation is sought by human effort. When it is sought on this basis it produces pride and boasting. As we have seen, it is impossible to earn salvation by the principle of works because our best effort falls short of the standard required. All references in the New Testament to us not being saved by "works" refer to effort of any kind in any area of activity (Rom. 4:2, 6. 9:11. 11:6. Eph. 2:9. 2 Tim. 1:9. Tit. 3:5).

However, reference to salvation not being possible by "the works of the law" refers to a specific area of effort and activity. The phrase "works of the law" occurs in Rom. 9:32, Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10. A careful look at this phrase in its context, (especially in Galatians), reveals that it relates to a specific department of the law of Moses, namely: the ceremonial and ritual ordinances such as circumcision and the observance of holy days etc.

The point has already been made that the law of Moses contained both moral and ceremonial commandments. "Moral" commandments are those which affect morals; they are commandments which relate to, and affect the character, heart, disposition or "spirit" of a man. Moral commandments pertain to a person's conduct, and are concerned with the rightness and wrongness of thoughts and actions towards others. Moral commandments relate to heart attitude and behaviour which affects relationship with others.

As pointed out earlier in this study, some of the basic moral commandments in the law given through Moses are:

“Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart ...”

“Thou shalt love your neighbour as yourself.”

“Honour your father and mother.”

“Thou shalt not kill.”

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

“Thou shalt not steal.”

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbour.”

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s ...”

Because these moral commandments affect a man’s spirit and spirituality, they are referred to as “spiritual” in Rom. 7:14: “The law is spiritual.” And it is clear from the context of this statement that Paul is referring to the moral aspect of the law. The statement is made in the context of the commandment “thou shalt not covet” (v7), and v3 relates to the commandment “thou shalt not commit adultery.” Man’s spiritual character and heart condition is determined by his response to such commandments. They are therefore eternal verities. They never become outdated or obsolete through the passing of time. For this reason, Jesus reaffirmed them during his ministry.

The ceremonial aspects of the law, however, did not have the same affect on man’s heart or spirit, and were merely included in the law as a temporary measure, teaching by ritual, and foreshadowing by symbol greater things to come.

As we have seen, “ceremonial” commandments relate to those which involve ceremony or ritual. The law given through Moses involved an elaborate system of ceremonial observances and outward religious rites - formalities proper to all sorts of occasions. Countless animal sacrifices had to be offered at specific times for specific occasions; certain holy days had to be observed every week, month and year, and various rituals had to be performed on those formal occasions. Certain foods and drinks were not allowed to be consumed, and total abstinence was required on certain occasions. Ceremonial washings had to take place. Every male child had to be circumcised on the 8th day. Only those who could trace their physical genealogy through a particular line could become priests, and induction to priesthood involved much ceremony and ritual, and elaborate garments with various trimmings had to be worn. All priestly service and ritual revolved around, and was inseparably connected with a physical, man-made building - first a tabernacle and then a temple at Jerusalem. All sacrifices had to be offered on the altar at Jerusalem and annual pilgrimages had to be made there by the people to keep certain feasts and ceremonies.

The ceremonial laws, with their constant round of sacrifices, holy

days, pilgrimages, washings, etc involved considerable “work,” and is referred to as the “works of the law” in the New Testament. The animal sacrifices and accompanying rituals was one endless round of activity, involving physical effort and labour.

Because the ceremonial aspects of the law were purely outward physical rituals, consisting of “meats and drinks and various washings,” not to mention animal sacrifices, circumcision, observance of holy days etc, Scripture refers to them as “carnal observances” (Heb. 7:16; 9:10). In this respect, they are contrasted with the moral aspects of the law which are called “spiritual.”

The ceremonial aspects of the law are called “carnal observances” because, as Heb. 9:13 points out: they only involve and affect “the flesh.” They do not affect the “spirit” or conscience of man. The Living Bible puts it like this: “For under the old system, gifts and sacrifices were offered, but these failed to cleanse the hearts of the people who brought them. For the old system dealt only with certain rituals - what food to eat and drink, rules for washing themselves, and rules about this and that. The people had to keep these rules to tide them over until Christ came with God’s new and better way” (Heb. 9:9-10).

So then, the ceremonial aspects of the law are styled “carnal commandments.” They are called “carnal” because they could not make a man spiritual - they did not affect his “spirit” or heart. They were mere outward physical rituals which only affected the flesh or body.

Cutting off the foreskin of the flesh - not allowing certain foods or drinks to pass into the stomach - ceremonial washings of the flesh - putting blood on the flesh - sprinkling water on the flesh - observing this day and that day etc were all mere outward observances which could be mechanically performed without affecting the heart or spirit ... and are therefore referred to as “carnal commandments.”

JESUS PLACED LITTLE VALUE ON RITUAL

An example of this can be seen in Matt. 15. During the time of Christ the Jews were very strict about the way they washed themselves prior to eating food, and about the kinds of food they ate. They accused the disciples of Jesus of not keeping to such rules. Jesus replied by saying: “Not that which goes into the mouth defiles a man, but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man. That which enters the mouth passes through the stomach and is discharged into the sewer. But that which comes out of the mouth comes from the heart and it is that which defiles a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands does not (morally) defile a

man.” And Mk. 7:19 adds the point that, in saying this, Jesus “purged all meats;” i.e. “declared all foods clean.”

Jesus placed little value on ritual - outward observances. Such observances do not affect the heart or spirit of man. They are “carnal observances.” Notice however, the value placed by Jesus on commandments relating to murder, adultery, theft, false witness. These things relate to the moral commandments of the law - the “spiritual” part of the law!

The distinction between the moral and ceremonial aspects of the law can also be seen in 1 Cor. 7:19 where Paul says: “Circumcision is nothing ... what really matters is the keeping of God’s commandments.” “Circumcision” represents the “carnal commandments” - the ceremonial and ritual aspects of the law which no longer count for anything. “God’s commandments” relate to the great moral commandments - the “spiritual” part of the law which was reaffirmed by Christ. See 1 Cor. 6:9-11.

When Scripture says we no longer have to obey the “works of the law” it clearly does not mean that we no longer have fundamental moral laws to obey. What’s wrong with a law which tells us to love God and our fellow man? What’s wrong with a law that forbids us to murder, steal, commit adultery etc? Is such law wrong? Is it a curse and too difficult to tolerate? No! 1 Jn. 5:3 says God’s commandments “are not grievous.” They are not burdensome (Matt. 11:30). Such commandments are sound and reasonable, and will be honoured and respected by all who have any love or decency.

The laws governing priestly service and ceremony, being outward physical ordinances, had no effect on the moral condition or conscience of man, and are therefore referred to as “carnal ordinances” in Heb. 7:16. They were, like all the other ritual aspects of the law, purely a temporary arrangement, imposed until the time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10). The whole elaborate system functioned as a type or foreshadow of the atoning work and kingdom of Christ. Such “works of the law” are not obligatory on Christians. All is fulfilled and completed in Christ. In this sense, the law has been “done away” and we are no longer under it. But the basic moral laws remain.

It is clearly in the context of the ceremonial aspects of the law that Heb. 10:1 refers to “the law having a shadow of good things to come.” The building in which the priests under the law ministered is referred to as “a worldly sanctuary” in Heb. 9:1, and refers to the fact that it was made on the earth, out of earthly materials by earth-born men. As such, it was merely a “figure for the time then present” “until the time of reformation” (v10), like all the ritual associated with it. All was “carnal” compared to the real thing which it foreshadowed; an “example and shadow of heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5).

The word “carnal,” in Scripture, relates to that which belongs to the natural realm - that which is physical and material. (See Rom. 15:27. 1 Cor. 9:11. 2 Cor. 10:4). All the ceremonial laws certainly involved much physical action and material things! Such action and effort involved in the elaborate system constituted the “works of the law” by which it was impossible to gain salvation.

In 1 Cor. 3:1-4 the word “carnal” is used as the opposite of spiritual maturity. “Carnal” is the state of “babes.” The ceremonial observances of the law were “carnal” in a similar sense; they were basic elementary teaching - rudimentary training designed to teach and lead on to deeper principles.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN THE LAW WAS A SCHOOLMASTER

The whole system of ritual and ceremony was like counting blocks to children in the primmers at school. In fact, Paul says “the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ” (Gal. 3:24).

The word “schoolmaster” comes from the Greek word “paidagogos” which means “child leader,” from which the English word “pedagogue”

comes. Paul is likening the law to a trusted tutor-slave in ancient families of the better class whose duty was to look after them between the ages of 7 and 17. He conducted the children to and from school and guarded them from evil society and immoral influences. The tutor-slave had charge of these children and the children had to obey even though they were heirs of the household, and would one day be in a position to command the Pedagogue.

This was a wonderful symbol for the law. It was a master, a slave-owner, in charge of God's children of Israel. Its function was to conduct Israel to Christ to receive the true teaching and instruction, and to receive redemption which carries with it full sonship. When Israel came of age - when the fullness of time arrived and God sent forth His son, they should have dispensed with the Pedagogue and accepted the liberty that was theirs. Unfortunately they did not do this. Instead of accepting liberty in Christ Jesus, they preferred to remain under domination and the burden of the Law. In other words: they preferred to cling to the carnal things and not move on to the spiritual reality in Christ, much in the same way that children are often reluctant to put aside their counting blocks and beads and move on to deeper principles.

Paul's theme in which he likens the law to a tutor-slave continues in Gal. 4. In verse 1 he alludes to the custom in ancient families which caused a son to be treated like a slave even though he was heir to his father's property and really owned everything. Verse 2 points out that while he is young, he "is under tutors and governors until the time appointed by his father." In other words; he has to do what the tutor-slave tells him to do until he reaches whatever age his father has set.

Paul then explains what he is driving at: "So it is with us. We too, although children (heirs), were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the right time set by the Father finally came, He sent forth His son, made of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons ... Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God" (Gal. 4:3-7).

God thus invited the Jews to a higher place - a higher relationship - from the house of servants to the house of sons. (Also see Jn. 1:12. Rom. 8:14-17. 1 Jn. 3:1). In Gal. 4:21-31 the law covenant given at Sinai is represented by Hagar the bondswoman who bears children to bondage, and the new covenant is represented by Sarah the freewoman who bears children to freedom. "So then brethren, we are not children of the bondswoman, but of the free."

JEREMIAH PREDICTED THE TERMINATION OF THE LAW

Long before the law covenant came to an end the Lord predicted its termination. Jeremiah wrote of the making of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). The apostle Paul points out in Heb. 8 that by referring to a new covenant, the Lord implied He would terminate the old. If we talk of buying a new pair of shoes, we imply the pair we last bought have become old and are ready to throw out. So it was with the law covenant in Jeremiah's day. It was only a question of time before the new one would be brought in and the old one with all its ritual and ceremony "vanish away."

Had the law given through Moses remained in force, Jesus could never have become High Priest of Israel. The law given through Moses only allowed members of the tribe of Levi to become priests, whereas Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. Therefore, the fact that way back in David's day, God promised to send "a priest after the order of Melchizedec" (Ps. 110), reveals that: (1) The Levitical priesthood under the law was imperfect otherwise there would have been no need to speak of another: (2) The law on which the Levitical priesthood was based would have to be changed, for it made no provision for a member of the tribe of Judah to be priest.

A change of priesthood necessitated a change of law. This is a simple deduction and is expounded in Heb. 7. The "carnal commandments" by which men became priests under the law, and therefore the "carnal ordinances" which they administered (i.e. the Mosaic ritual and ceremony) were "disannulled because they were weak and useless" (Heb. 7:16-19).

It is a principle of law that once one part is changed or altered, other parts are affected and undergo change. So then, "when the priesthood is changed, there also has to be a change in the law" (Heb. 7:12). It was pointed out earlier in this study that to offend the law in one point is to offend it in all. Therefore, to change the priesthood involved a change of the whole ceremonial and ritual system around which the priesthood revolved. It would be too silly for words to accept that the demand of the law that only men from the tribe of Levi can become priests has been changed, and accept Jesus as the new High Priest, while still trying to maintain that all the ceremony and ritual pertaining to the old priesthood remained. The departure of one point means departure of all. The whole of the old system has been done away and has been replaced by an entirely different one. A new patch cannot be sewn to an old garment! Jesus didn't come to patch up an old system. He came to totally replace it with a new and better system.

CAN'T PICK AND CHOOSE

It should be evident that to pick out any part of the old ceremonial law that pertained to the Levitical priesthood, whether animal sacrifices, observance of holy days, blowing of trumpets, circumcision etc, demands the keeping of every other aspect also, for they were all part and parcel of the same law, and were intricately interwoven. To observe some things and not the others was totally unacceptable under the terms of the law. It was all or nothing. To offend in one point was to offend in all.

Nowhere in Scripture are we authorized to pick out parts of the Mosaic ritual that appeal to us and that we would like to keep, and leave other parts undone. The keeping of holy days and feasts etc according to the terms of the law, necessitated the presence and ministration of Levitical priests, the offering of animal sacrifices and an altar at Jerusalem. All formed part of the same law and one part could not be excluded from the other. If it was, it rendered all the rest unacceptable to God.

It could be likened to the man who picked out parts of the Road Code that appealed to him and conveniently ignored the rest. Keeping left appealed to him but observing the speed limit didn't. The traffic officer who caught him speeding didn't exonerate him because he was keeping left! Yes, to break the law only requires breaking one point. Such is the principle of law.

If we insist on keeping one part of the ceremonial law according to the terms of the law, we are forced by necessity to keep the whole law, with its Levitical priesthood and "carnal ordinances." To do so immediately eliminates Jesus Christ as High Priest.

The law obviously had to be set aside before Jesus could become priest.

When Jesus died on the cross he said: "It is finished!" And the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom, showing it was the work of God and not men, otherwise the rending would have been from the bottom upwards. In rending the veil and exposing the sacred place to public view, God showed in a most impressive manner that the law and its ministry were finished and done away, for it was vital for that veil to remain in its position for the law to be fulfilled. Its removal signified the removal of the law. The tearing of the veil was really the tearing of the old contract; the disannulling of the "carnal ordinances."

THE ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD

Paul's reference to being "in bondage under the elements of the world" in Gal. 4:3 is interesting. He again refers to the same thing in terms of "weak and beggarly elements" in v9. What does he mean? What is he referring to? Well, let's have a look at the statements in their context.

After expressing amazement at the Galatians turning to the weak and beggarly elements, he indicates what he means by saying: “You observe days, and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you lest I have laboured for you in vain” (Gal. 4:9-10).

The observance of days etc relates of course, to the outward ceremonial aspects of the law. In Paul’s estimation, such observances constituted “weak and beggarly elements.” That is, they were merely a temporary provision, designed to teach by type some elementary and rudimentary principles pertaining to Christ. Such things were “weak” because they were powerless to save, and they were “beggarly” because they were powerless to enrich spiritually. (“Beggarly” means “poor” - “poverty-stricken”).

Throughout the book of Galatians, Paul is labouring to stress the futility of reverting to the ceremonial observances of the law. To insist on keeping just one point of that law made a man a debtor to keep the whole lot (Gal. 5:3), for the law did not recognize anyone who only kept a part of it. Anyone who insisted on keeping the holy days and feasts of the law immediately became debtor to being circumcised etc, and anyone who insisted on being circumcised became debtor to keeping the holy days and feasts etc. It was all or nothing for those who wanted to revert to the law.

In Gal. 2:16, 3:2, 5, 10 Paul refers to the ceremonial observances of the law as the “works” of the law. Many ceremonial observances and rituals were involved in the “works of the law” but Paul only specifically mentions a few, such as the observance of days, months, times and years, and circumcision. In actual fact, Paul only needed to establish one ritual as being obsolete in order to prove that the whole ceremonial system of the law was obsolete. More often than not he chose the rite of circumcision to do this. As pointed out, his argument was that if a man is circumcised, he is a debtor to do the whole law - he is under obligation to perform all the other ceremonial and ritual works of the law, because they were all inseparably interwoven, and together, formed part and parcel of the same law. One could not pick and choose. Failure to keep the whole law made the keeping of a part of it a waste of time.

Therefore, if it could be proved that one part was no longer binding, (like circumcision), this automatically implied that none of the other “works of the law” were binding either. In other words, the whole elaborate system of ceremonial works and ritualistic activity had become obsolete. To pick out just one of those “works” and insist on observing it was fatal, because such observance was not acceptable to God under the terms of the law unless all the other “works” were observed with it. And to observe all those works was to revert to something “weak and beggarly” and “carnal.”

False teachers were pressuring the Galatian Christians into keeping

the works of the law. The Christians were being compelled to live like the Jews under the law. And the Galatians were sufficiently “foolish” as to be “bewitched” into doing so. Paul reminds them that they originally received the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ when they were not doing the works of the law (Gal. 3:2). This is a very strong point! Paul then continues by saying: “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?” (v3).

The words “made perfect” relate to becoming stronger, more complete and mature Christians. And “the flesh” by which they were attempting to become more mature, refers to “the works of the law” in the previous verse. As pointed out before: the works of the law were mere outward physical ordinances, and are therefore elsewhere called “carnal ordinances.”

The Galatians had “begun in the Spirit” but were later deceived into thinking that they could become more complete and mature by keeping the works of the law. They started supplementing Christ with ceremony and ritual, thereby implying that Christ himself without Mosaic ritual, was not sufficient in himself to complete and mature them.

Paul is emphatic that Christians are brought to completion in Christ without the works of the law being necessary. Writing to the Colossians he says: “you are complete in him” (Col. 2:10). The context of this statement is significant. In v8 he issues the warning to beware “lest any man spoil (strip) you through philosophy (human reasoning) and vain deceit, based on the tradition of men, according to the rudiments (elements) of the world, and not according to Christ.”

In this passage we again come across the phrase: “elements of the world.” Paul says these “elements of the world” can “spoil” us; i.e. strip or rob us of our freedom and completeness in Christ. Earlier on it was pointed out from Galatians that the phrase “elements of the world” related to elementary, rudimentary principles contained in the ceremonial and ritual system of the law, which were purely a temporary provision designed to foreshadow greater things to come. And we also saw how Paul specifically referred to the observance of days etc and circumcision in the context of the “elements of the world.”

Well, the same also applies in Colossians. After referring to the elements of the world in Col. 2:8, Paul goes on in the following verses to talk about circumcision and holy days, revealing that such ordinances fitted into the category of “the elements of the world,” elsewhere described as being “weak and beggarly” and “carnal.”

In Col. 2:11 Paul explains how the literal physical circumcision as under the law has been replaced by a spiritual circumcision in Christ. Circumcision is now “in the spirit” and not “in the letter” (Rom. 2:29). The “letter of the law” is the literal physical application of the law’s

ceremonial and ritual ordinances. To literally apply such ordinances is “carnal” because they all pointed to spiritual truths in Christ and are applied in a spiritual manner. This is how God seeks to be served and worshipped - “in spirit and truth,” and not according to the letter of the law. “We should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6). God has “made us able ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6).

The “elements of the world” referred to in Col. 2:8 are said to be based on “the tradition of men.” Or, as v22 says: “the commandments and doctrines of men” i.e. “man-made rules” (Good News Bible). Originally, they were divine institutions under the law of Moses for Israel, but they served their purpose and were done away. To still insist on observing them is not God’s will but man’s will. Hence, they become “man-made rules” - “commandments and doctrines of men” because God no longer requires them.

In Col. 2:14 Paul further describes these “elements of the world” as “the handwriting of ordinances (Grk. dogma) that was against us, and contrary to us.” Paul explains how Christ has cancelled these carnal ordinances, and has taken them out of the way, having nailed them to his cross.

FOODS, DRINKS AND HOLY DAYS WERE ONLY A “SHADOW”

In view of this Paul says: “Therefore, let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath. These things are only a shadow of things to come, but the solid reality is Christ’s” (v16-17).

What Paul is really saying is this: “In view of the fact that all the ceremonial and ritual ordinances of the law have been cancelled, do not allow those who insist on observing those ordinances criticize and condemn you for not keeping to their rules concerning foods, drinks and holy days. Such things are only a shadow ... Christ is the solid reality and you become complete in him.” The Good News Bible puts it like this: “So let no one make rules about what you eat or drink or about holy days or the new moon festival or the Sabbath. All such things are only a shadow of things in the future; the reality is Christ.”

It should be clear from this that Paul regarded the abstinence from foods and drinks and the observance of holy days as being part of the “handwriting of ordinances,” i.e. the “elements of the world” which simply foreshadowed Christ and which Christ cancelled on the cross.

Seventh Day Adventists of course, claim that when Paul criticized the keeping of “the Sabbath days” in Col. 2:16, he was not referring to THE

SABBATH, i.e. the weekly Sabbath, but meant the other monthly and yearly Sabbaths which were kept at various times during certain feast periods.

However, the word “days” in Col. 2:16 in the Authorized Version is in italics indicating it has been inserted by the translators and does not belong to the original text. Literally it should read “THE SABBATH.” Thus, the word “Sabbath,” being given the definite article, can only properly refer to THE Sabbath which was the weekly one. That it must refer to a weekly observance is further strengthened by the fact that it is preceded by a reference to monthly and annual holy days. The word “holy day” comes from a Greek word meaning “feast” or “festival” and relates to annual events in the Jewish calendar. The same word is translated “feast” in Lk. 2:41 and 22:1 and relates to the annual Passover; in Acts 18:21 the same word relates to the annual event of Pentecost; and in Jn. 7:2 it refers to the annual event of Tabernacles.

The “new moon” (Col. 2:16) clearly relates to monthly observances under the law.

So then, “holy day, new moon and Sabbath” refer to annual, monthly and weekly observances under the law. This same systematical order is common in Scripture (Num. ch. 28. 1 Chr. 23:30-31. 2 Chr. 2:4. 8:13. Neh. 10:33. Isa. 1:13. Ezk. 45:17. Hos. 2:11).

There is no authority in Scripture for discriminating between the weekly Sabbath and the other holy days. The children of Israel were under compulsion to observe ALL the days set apart in their law. They were not told that one was more necessary to be observed than another. Failure to observe the monthly or annual holy days constituted “sin” every bit as much as if they failed to observe the weekly Sabbath.

Anyway, the keeping of monthly and annual holy days would be less of a “burden” than the keeping of a weekly holy day, because they don’t have to be kept so often. So why should the monthly and annual observances be removed and the weekly one remain!?

Also: Why is it insisted by some who profess to be Christians that the Sabbath should be kept without the accompanying animal sacrifices and ceremony that the law of the Sabbath required? Why has observance of the day been kept and the other associated ordinances dismissed? Why has both observance of the monthly and annual holy days and the accompanying ritual been dismissed by Sabbath keepers? Why not continue to observe the monthly and annual holy days without their accompanying ritual as in the case of the weekly holy day?

Nowhere in Paul’s writings does he make an exception of the weekly Sabbath. Nowhere does he teach that it only should be kept and the others dismissed. Quite the opposite! In Col. 2:16 he clearly places annual, monthly and weekly holy days into the same category as being part of the

“handwriting of ordinances” or “elements of the world” - “carnal ordinances” which merely foreshadowed things pertaining to Christ, and which have been cancelled by him.

So then, Paul says “Let no one make rules about what you eat and drink, or about annual, monthly and weekly observances.” Such instruction should once and for all put an end to all carnal and fruitless argument over what kind of bread and wine should be served at a communion service. It makes no difference! What makes the difference is what our spirit, by faith, identifies with it. There could be nothing more puerile and carnal and legalistic than hassling over the physical, material contents of the bread and wine. Such hassling is usually symptomatic of a legalistic mind - a mind more pre-occupied with the “letter” than the “spirit.” It is not a sign of spiritual strength and maturity, but of weakness and carnality.

ALL FOODS DECLARED CLEAN

Paul’s comment in Col. 2:16 about not letting anyone make rules about what we eat or drink clearly implies that Christians are not under the food and drink restrictions imposed by the law. This is confirmed elsewhere.

Earlier on in this study the words of Jesus were quoted in Mk. 7 where he taught that “nothing (i.e. food or drink) that enters a man can defile him (morally), because it does not enter his heart, but goes into his stomach and is discharged into the sewer. Thus he declared all foods clean.”

The ceremonial laws given through Moses contained certain food regulations, but Jesus knew that those laws were as good as finished, so he “declared all foods clean.” Sometimes the remark is passed: “Jesus didn’t shed his blood to cleanse pig meat.” Quite true! He declared all foods clean before he shed his blood! He said: “Wherever you go eat what is set before you.”

Heb. 9:10 refers to the “meats and drinks” regulations as “carnal ordinances, imposed until the time of reformation.” This is just another way of expressing Paul’s teaching in Col. 2:16-17 where he refers to the meats and drinks as “a shadow of things to come.”

“Some have faith enough to eat all things ... Those who eat everything eat unto the Lord since they give Him thanks ... I know and am persuaded that there is nothing unclean of itself; it is only unclean to those who regard it as such ... For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eat this and don’t eat that, drink this and don’t drink that, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. And when someone serves Christ in this way, he pleases God and is approved by others” (especially the Gentiles

who Paul was trying to convert and who were not hung up (and didn't want to be) on food and drink regulations (Rom. 14).

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Therefore don't be carried about with different and foreign doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established and strengthened with grace, and not by obeying rules about foods; those who obey these rules have not been helped by them” (Heb. 13:8-9).

1 Tim. 4:1-6: “Now the Spirit says distinctly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith ... commanding to abstain from certain foods which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. Everything that God has created is good; nothing is to be rejected, but everything is to be received with a prayer of thanks, because the Word of God and the prayer make it acceptable to God.”

When the time came to call the Gentiles, God gave Peter a vision of a vessel being lowered to the earth containing beasts, creeping things, and birds that were classified as unclean by the law. Peter was told to kill and eat them. “But Peter said: Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spoke to him a second time saying, What God has cleansed you must not call common” (Act. 10).

The significance of this is revealed in Peter's message to Cornelius and his house: “You know how it is unlawful for a Jew to keep company with, or visit (and eat with) Gentiles; well, God has shown me that I should not regard any man as common or unclean” (Acts 10:28).

So then, the unclean beasts that Peter saw in the vision represented the Gentiles whom the Father was prepared to receive on the altar of His son. And the fact that the Father was prepared to receive the Gentiles while they were not observing the Jewish food laws, and never commanded them to observe them, proves that such laws are not necessary for salvation. The fact that Peter, in his vision, had to eat the unclean beasts was no doubt intended to teach him that not only was it wrong to regard the Gentiles as being unclean, but it was also wrong to place the same judgement and stigma on the food that they ate. “What God has cleansed you must not call common” has a dual application.

That Peter took the dual application out of it is indicated by the fact that not only was he prepared to enter the house of the Gentiles and associate with them, but he also “ate with them” (Acts 11:3).

Gal. 2:12 also makes the point that Peter “ate with the Gentiles.” That this means he actually ate the same food which was disallowed by the Jewish law is indicated in v14 where it is stated that he was living like a Gentile and not like a Jew. However, when some of his Jewish friends came on the scene he became afraid and panicked, knowing how prejudiced they were against what he was doing, so he withdrew and

separated himself from the Gentile Christians, becoming guilty of hypocrisy. Paul later reprimanded him and reminded him that “a man is not justified by the works of the law” (i.e. ceremonial observances involving food etc) ... (Gal. 2:14-). It is clear from this that grace in Christ Jesus allows Christians to exercise a freedom in the choice of food, excluding the eating of blood which is specifically forbidden (Acts 15:20). Such freedom prevailed from Noah’s day to the time of Moses (Gen. 9:3). Restrictions were only imposed during the Mosaic period.

“LET NO MAN BEGUILLE YOU”

After telling the Colossians to not let anyone impose rules about foods, drinks and holy days, Paul further adds: “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (Col. 2:18).

The word “beguile” comes from the Greek ‘katarabeuo.’ ‘Kata’ means ‘against,’ and ‘brabeuo’ means ‘to act as umpire.’ In Greek the word was used of an umpire’s decision against a runner. It relates to “judge” in verse 16: “Let no man judge you in foods, drinks and holy days.”

‘Katarabeuo,’ then, means ‘disqualify,’ ‘defraud,’ ‘condemn,’ ‘deprive.’ Paul then, says: “Don’t let anyone disqualify and condemn you - deprive and rob you of your reward in a voluntary humility.”

The words “in a voluntary humility” have been translated “insisting on self - abasement” by the Revised Standard Version. The Good News Bible renders it as “insisting on false humility.” Reference is also made to this false humility in v23 and it is in the context of “ordinances” - commandments and doctrines of men concerning foods etc. It clearly relates to the rules concerning foods, drinks and holy days in v16. Yielding and submitting to ordinances that are no longer binding is a “false humility.” More about this in a moment.

Paul goes on to say that those who insist on Christians submitting to such ordinances are guilty of “intruding into those things which have not been seen, vainly puffed up by the fleshly mind.” Most modern translations give the sense of this statement in these terms: “Taking their stand on visions they claim to have received, but in reality they are vainly puffed up by their own carnal mind.” From this it can be inferred that those who were enforcing rules concerning foods, drinks, holy days etc were doing so on the basis that God had spoken to them and told them to do so. They claimed special divine revelation through vision, whereas, in actual fact, God had not spoken to them at all. It all originated, and was inspired by the human spirit - the carnal mind, and was motivated by a

subtle fleshly pride.

The human heart truly is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” It always has been, and still is a danger into which the best of us can fall, to support something we are doing for which there is no Biblical authority, by saying “God told me.” And, if we have a strong enough natural pre-disposition towards such a thing, it is the easiest thing in the world for our own spirit to convince us that God has inspired such thoughts! Most false prophets came under this kind of delusion. “Thus says the Lord God; Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing” (Ezk. 13:3). The words “have seen nothing” are similar to “hath not seen” in Col. 2:18. Both relate to the same kind of carnal delusion.

Submitting to unnecessary ordinances and becoming pre-occupied with them can be a serious business according to Paul. He says it can rob and deprive us of our “reward” (Col. 2:18). Our reward of course, is Christ and the eternal life he provides. We can only gain this by being “complete in him” (Col. 2:10). Supplementing him with carnal ordinances means “not holding the Head” (Col. 2:19). It is vital to find our all sufficiency in Christ and not become entangled in the carnal ordinances of the law which, at their best, were only a “shadow” of greater things to come in Christ.

“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world. Why are you still bound by such ordinances as not eating, tasting, or even touching certain foods? All these things become useless once they are used; they are only man-made rules and teaching” (Col. 2:20-22).

Paul’s statement that “all these things become useless once they are used” reminds us of what Jesus said concerning food not being able to defile a man because it doesn’t enter his heart, but merely enters his stomach and is discharged into the sewer, utterly useless.

Notice also that in the passage before us, Paul again refers to the “elements of the world” and says they are “ordinances” (dogma) concerning outward ritual and ceremony - human rules concerning certain foods etc.

Paul also referred to these “ordinances” earlier (Col. 2:14) where he called them “the handwriting of ordinances.” As we have seen, he was referring to the ceremonial and ritual system of the Mosaic law, involving such things as circumcision, meats, drinks, holy days etc, as the context reveals.

Eph. 2:15 also refers to these ordinances in these words: “the law of commandments and ordinances.” Paul teaches that the whole system has been abolished by Christ.

To observe such ordinances, for whatever reason, is therefore quite

unnecessary, and cannot in any way elicit special favours or blessings from God. The moment we believe that we can receive special blessings from God for keeping a system of ceremonial and ritual laws, we lay a basis on which the gospel can be easily undermined - a basis on which, in process of time, could lead to real bondage, and unnecessary alienation from Christian and non-Christian friends. The unbeliever is prejudiced enough towards the simple gospel message without adding to it unnecessary rules and regulations from the Mosaic ritual. A Christian is “peculiar” enough in Christ in the sight of the world without making himself more peculiar by incorporating ritualistic rigmarole from the old covenant.

SUPERIMPOSING JEWISH LAW ON CHRISTIANS WAS FIRST HERESY

The insistence that one must observe Mosaic ritual tends to deflect the mind from the spiritual lessons it was intended to convey. It is significant that the first heresy introduced into the early Christian communities was an attempt to superimpose the Jewish law upon the teaching of Christ. It was argued “that it was needful ... to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:6). The teaching was vigorously opposed by the apostles who instructed Gentile believers: “We have heard that certain have troubled you with words, saying, You must ... keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24).

The apostles recommended a course of action to be adopted by Gentile believers in view of this teaching, and it is most significant that nothing is said about observing the Sabbath or other Jewish holy days. And, except for not eating blood, no food or drink restrictions were laid down either. Why? Surely if such things were of vital importance they would have been mentioned.

The conviction that special blessings are available for Christians who observe ritual aspects of the law of Moses is like the thin edge of the wedge. In process of time it will cause a gap to widen more and more between oneself and Christian associates. Such conviction can easily lead to an unhealthy and unbalanced concentration of the books of the law. One can easily find oneself in the undesirable position of being more interested in, and spending more time reading about the old law covenant with its untold statutes, rather than our Lord Jesus Christ and the new covenant records.

Paul warns about this in 1 Tim. 4:7 where he refers to some in his own day who had “turned aside” from new covenant principles “into vain jangling, desiring to be teachers of the law.” He also wrote to Titus saying: “Avoid foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions, and

strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain” (Tit. 3:9). Attempts to apply aspects of the old law can easily develop into a major pre-occupation ultimately leading to bondage.

The flesh being what it is, it could be very easy for the subconscious belief to develop that the keeping of such laws give a man a better and more perfect standing in Christ. Such a conclusion would be foolish and fatal. This was the issue that Paul took up with the Galatians: “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?” (As already pointed out: “the flesh” relates to “the works of the law”).

The doing of something which others don’t do easily creates a feeling of uniqueness, exclusiveness and even superiority, which has great appeal to the flesh. Israel fell into this trap with the law as we know.

The human heart has a profound capacity for deceit and we are constantly in need of examining our motives for doing the things that we do. If we do things differently from others, and do not conform to usual practises, it is good to frankly ask ourselves why. Is it because we are absolutely certain that it is vitally necessary to do what we are doing? Or, is it because deep down underneath our flesh enjoys the “buzz” it experiences, which the exclusiveness and seeming superiority of its position generates? In other words, is it ego related?

One of the reasons for Israel violently objecting to the Gospel was because it took away their ground for pride in the law. It became a great source of pride to have law that other nations didn’t have, and to observe rituals that others didn’t observe.

Fleshly motivation is the reason attributed by Paul in Col. 2:23 to those who were insisting on keeping the ordinances of the law. He says: “These rules seem to be wise and good from an outward appearance, for such devotion requires a strong will, self-humbling, rigorous discipline of the body, but they have no real value in controlling and conquering the evil thoughts and desires of the flesh. Instead, they simply pamper the flesh and make a person proud.”

It does not automatically follow of course, that all who keep the ordinances of the law are motivated this way. But the fact that Paul attributes the keeping of such ordinances to such motivation, makes us realize the very real danger and possibility of it, and should result in very careful analysis by all who might be tempted to pursue a similar course.

“LET US THEREFORE NOT JUDGE ONE ANOTHER”

Paul then, makes it clear in Col. 2:16 to “Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of annual feasts, new moons, or the Sabbath.” Now, while it is true that it is wrong for people to judge,

criticize and condemn us because we don't conform to their rules and regulations concerning foods, drinks and holy days, it is equally true that it is wrong for us to judge them for observing these things. So long as they keep their observances to themselves and quietly keep them, not seeking to impose them upon others, and not insisting that salvation can't be obtained unless one does, then we must not judge them.

This is the teaching of Paul in Rom. 14. He points out in this chapter that some believe they can eat anything and everything, while others who are weaker cannot eat everything. Paul says: "Receive those who are weak in the faith, but not to argue with them about personal scruples." Paul stresses that one must not despise or judge the other about what he allows or disallows with regard to food consumption: "Who are you to judge the servant of someone else? It is his own master who will decide whether he succeeds or fails."

Paul then goes on to point out that "Some think that Christians should observe the Jewish holy days as special days to worship God, but others say it is wrong and foolish to go to all that trouble, for every day alike belongs to God. On questions of this kind everyone must decide for himself" (Living Bible). "Let us therefore not judge one another any more" (v13).

It is clear from this that Paul permitted Jews to continue observing certain customs of the law, but refused to allow it to be made obligatory on Gentiles. If the keeping of one particular day had been compulsory for Christians, surely Paul would have said so instead of placing observers and non-observers on a level as in v6 where, in accordance with the terms of the new covenant, the heart attitude towards the Lord is made the main factor, and (v10) the judgement seat of Christ the authority, not Moses and the law.

The Jewish Christians doubtless wished to continue observing the Sabbath as they had been taught from early youth. There was no harm in them so doing, so long as they did not try to impose the same restrictions on their Gentile brethren, or assume that their observance of the 7th day permitted them to avoid regular meetings established by the apostles (Acts 2:41-42. Heb. 10:25).

It was the idea of superimposing the Mosaic law, with its 7th day observance, on the Truth in Christ, that helped to establish the great apostasy which ultimately developed in the church. It called forth the rebuke of the apostle: "You observe days, and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4:9-10).

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN “UNTO THE JEWS I BECAME AS A JEW”

During his second missionary journey, Paul visited Ephesus and stayed there for a time. The people there wanted him to stay longer, but he wanted to move on, saying: “I must keep the forthcoming feast (Passover) in Jerusalem.” Also, during his third missionary journey, we read that Paul “determined to sail past Ephesus, ... for he was hurrying, if possible, to be at Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost” (Acts 18:21. 20:16).

The feast of Passover and Pentecost were annual feasts kept by the Jews in accordance with the law of Moses. They belonged to the “holy days” referred to by Paul in Col. 2:16 which “are a shadow of things to come,” and which are done away in Christ. Why then did Paul keep them if they have been done away? Some Christians today believe that the keeping of these feasts by Paul proves that they have not been done away, and conclude from this that we should still keep the law of Moses. What is the position then? Why did Paul keep these feasts and then write to the Colossians saying there was no need to keep them? Did Paul contradict himself?

Well, to start with, let us ask the question: “Whose feast was it that he was keeping? Was it a Jewish or Christian feast? The answer is clear enough: It was a Jewish feast. The Jews and not the Christians, gathered from all around the world to keep it. They had to assemble at Jerusalem because the altar was situated there along with the temple. In accordance with the requirements of the law of Moses, the temple and altar had to be at Jerusalem and the people had to gather there to keep the various feasts. During the feast, animal sacrifices were offered and the Levitical priests (not Christians) ministered. These feasts that Paul attended were not arranged and administered by Christians for Christians! They were Jewish

festivals and were conducted according to the strict requirements of the law, right down to animal sacrifices and Levitical priests.

If therefore Paul's attendance at such feasts must be interpreted to mean that Christians must keep the law concerning such events, then we must also conclude that all the laws concerning animal offerings and the Levitical priesthood apply too. All were part and parcel of the same law and were inseparably linked. Moreover, we would also have to conclude that we must make annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem to keep the feasts. After all, Paul did! Who are we to pick out the bits that are most convenient for ourselves, and conveniently ignore the rest? If the law must be kept, it must be kept according to the law - to every last jot and tittle! Under the law the feast had to be kept at Jerusalem and an altar had to be there upon which animal offerings were offered by Levitical priests. This is what took place when Paul attended the feasts, and if his attendance means we must do the same, then this is how it must be done.

Now, in Acts 16:3 we read that Paul circumcised Timothy. But how foolish it would be to conclude from this that Christians also must be circumcised. Paul makes it clear in his writings that circumcision is unnecessary. He makes the point in Gal. 2:3 that Titus, a Gentile Christian, was not required to be circumcised. Why then, did Paul circumcise Timothy but not Titus? The reason is given in Acts 16:3: "Because of the Jews." Titus was a full blooded Gentile and Timothy had Jewish blood for he had a Jewish mother. And, because Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him on his journeys which involved preaching and ministering to the Jews, he circumcised him to remove all occasion for prejudice, resulting in a more receptive audience.

Paul sums it all up for us in 1 Cor. 9:19-23: "Though I am no man's servant, yet have I made myself servant to all, that I might convert the more. While working with the Jews, I live like a Jew in order to win them; and even though I myself am not subject to the law of Moses, I live as though I were when working with those who are, in order to win them. In the same way, when working with Gentiles, I live like a Gentile, outside the Jewish law, in order to win Gentiles. This does not mean that I don't obey God's law; I am really under Christ's law. Among the weak in faith I become weak like one of them, in order to win them. So I become all things to all men, that I may save some of them by whatever means possible. All this I do for the gospel's sake, in order to share in its blessings." Again: "Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for God's glory. Live in such a way as to cause no trouble either to Jews or Gentiles or to the church of God. Just do as I do; I try to please everyone in all that I do, not thinking of my own good, but of the good of all, so that they might be saved" (1 Cor. 10:31-33). Rom. 14:13-21 enumerates similar principles.

From this we learn that it was Paul's policy, while working among the Jews trying to save them, to live like them. He conformed to Jewish customs and laws in order to reach those who were subject to them. For this reason he circumcised Timothy, kept feasts, cut his hair, purified himself and offered animal offerings etc (Acts 18:18. 21:17-27). N. B. It is clearly stated in Acts 21:20-21 that it was because the multitudes at the feast in Jerusalem were "zealous of the law" and had heard that Paul taught it was unnecessary to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic customs, that Paul conformed to certain customs of the law. It was purely and simply an act of expediency designed to defuse an explosive situation and thwart the evil intentions of the adversary. As in the case of circumcising Timothy, Paul conformed to certain Mosaic ritual "because of the Jews."

It would be as wrong to conclude that Christians should keep the Jewish feasts etc because Paul did, as it would be to conclude that Christians should be circumcised because Paul insisted that Timothy should. The Jewish situation dictated Paul's actions on these occasions and we need to read his instruction to the Christian church in his epistles to get a balanced view on the whole matter.

Paul wanted to keep the feasts at Jerusalem for the same reason the Lord waited for the feast of Pentecost to arrive before pouring forth the Spirit: "There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews from every nation" (Acts 2:5). During the feasts, multitudes of Jews from all around the world assembled, and such occasions provided the best possible opportunity to witness. On the day of Pentecost when the first witness was given through the Holy Spirit, 3,000 souls were won for Christ (Acts 2:41). No wonder Paul was always keen to be at Jerusalem during the feasts! It was a witnessing paradise! Paul really loved his Jewish brothers and grabbed every opportunity to save them. On one occasion he tarried at Ephesus until Pentecost "because a great door opened for effective work" (1 Cor. 16:8-9).

Jesus also made a point of attending the feasts because of the opportunity to reach many people. We read in Jn. 7 that when the feast of Tabernacles arrived, Jesus' brothers expected him to go to Jerusalem to "show thyself to the world" (i.e. Jews from all around the world who had come to the city for the feast). Jerusalem on such occasions, was a very effective platform for preaching. Therefore, half way through the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and taught. Also on the last day of the feast he called out to the people: "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." Jesus never missed the opportunity provided by the Jewish feasts to reach the Jewish people, and Paul was the same, as we read in the book of Acts. His attendance had nothing to do with wanting to obey the works of the law. Not once in his epistles does he instruct Christians to keep Jewish feasts.

SABBATHS IN THE SYNAGOGUES

Throughout his missionary journeys, it was Paul's custom to go to a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day (Acts 13:14. 17:2). On this basis it is believed by some that Paul kept the Sabbath law and that we should therefore do the same. Such a conclusion however, overlooks certain elementary facts.

Visiting a synagogue on a Sabbath day does not necessarily prove that the visitor is under the law of the Sabbath! I myself have visited a synagogue on a Sabbath day, but I am not under the Sabbath law. The reason I went was because I wanted to meet and speak to a Jewish community and the most effective way of doing this is by going to a synagogue on a Saturday.

It is stated in the book of Acts that it was Paul's custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, but it never states that it was his custom to keep the Sabbath law, and there is a difference! Elsewhere, in his writings as we have seen, he makes it clear that the Christian is not under such law. Naturally, while he was with a Jewish community, he would do as they did, as was his policy, but this cannot in any way be misconstrued to mean he was bound by the same laws. There is a difference between rendering custom to whom custom is due, and being bound by those customs.

If Christians must follow Paul's example to the last letter without exercising any discernment, then why stop at merely making the Sabbath a rest day? Why not also, as he did, visit a synagogue each Sabbath? It seems strange to quote the examples of Paul visiting a synagogue on a Sabbath day to prove the Sabbath should be kept, yet not keep it as he did by spending it in a Jewish synagogue. The fact that Paul spent the Sabbath day in a synagogue with the Jewish community, and not in a house with the Christian community, proves in itself that the Christian community did not have meetings on the Sabbath day, for we could hardly imagine Paul spending the day in the synagogue while his Christian brethren were having a meeting elsewhere!

So then, as in the case of the feasts which Paul attended, the meetings in the synagogue on the Sabbath day were also Jewish meetings, arranged by the Jews for Jews. They were not Christian meetings. The Christians met in private homes for their meetings, not in Jewish synagogues.

It should hardly be necessary to enquire as to why Paul made a practise of going to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He went for the same reason that he attended the Jewish feasts - to witness to his countrymen concerning Jesus Christ. He took the opportunity of attending the synagogue where the Jews gathered together each week, in order to

proclaim the risen Christ.

Readings were taken from the law and the prophets every Sabbath day in the synagogue (Acts 13:14-15. 27). “From old time Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath day” (Acts 15:21). Such reading provided an excellent opportunity to witness to the Lord Jesus Christ because Moses and the prophets testified concerning him. And this is what Paul did. It was for this reason that he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day: “And Paul, as his manner was, went in to the synagogue of the Jews, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening (the scrolls) and proving that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, saying Jesus whom I preach to you, is Christ.” (Acts 17:1-3). “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” (Acts 18:4). “And he went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for 3 months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). “And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the Word of God” (Acts 13:44). Also see Acts 13:14-.

It is evident from the book of Acts that as Paul travelled from city to city during his missionary journeys, to preach the Gospel and establish Christian communities, his policy was to start at the Jewish synagogue. The reason for this is indicated in Acts 3:25-26 where Peter, speaking to the Jews said: “You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham: And in your seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His son Jesus, sent him to bless you, by turning away every one of you from his sins.”

It was to the Jewish people that the oracles of God had been committed (Rom. 3:2). The Lord “declared His Word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgements to Israel. He has not dealt so with any other nation” (Ps. 147:19-21). Speaking of the Israelites, Paul says: “... to whom pertains the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and from whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came” (Rom. 9:4-5).

The Jewish people then, were the custodians of the very Word of God which promised and declared the Lord Jesus Christ. They were the people whose ancestors were given the promises concerning Christ. Their ancestors were in fact the ancestors of Christ himself according to the flesh. (Mary was a direct descendant of David and Abraham). The land of Israel constitutes the “promised land” - the land that will form the nucleus of Christ’s kingdom. Jerusalem is to become “the city of the great king.”

In view of Israel’s unique position in the divine scheme of things, it was inevitable and unavoidable that they should firstly be approached and informed about Christ when he arrived. Jesus himself, during his earthly

ministry insisted that the Jewish people should “first be filled” (Mk. 7:27). He therefore commissioned his disciples to confine their preaching activities to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and told them not to go “in the way of the Gentiles” (Matt. 10:5-6).

Even after the way for the Gentiles had been opened, Paul still made it his policy when he visited each city, to approach the Jewish community first, and give them first refusal before turning to the Gentiles in that city. It was natural for him to do this, firstly because of the natural bond that existed between himself and his brethren according to the flesh, and secondly because of the common standing they had in accepting and knowing “the law and the prophets” which witnessed to Christ. In this respect Paul had a firm foundation and strong basis to work upon in establishing that Jesus was the Messiah.

We therefore read in Acts 13:14-41 that when Paul arrived at Antioch in Pisidia he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the law and prophets, the rulers of the synagogue invited him to exhort the people. Paul accepted the invitation and preached Christ. Verse 42 then states that “when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles made an appeal for these words to be preached to them next Sabbath.” When this took place the next Sabbath and the whole city came to hear the Word of God, the Jews became envious “and spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.” “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said: It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

The same thing happened at Corinth. Paul firstly “reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.” He “testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” “And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, Paul shook his garment, and said to them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clear: From henceforth I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18). From that time forth, as far as Corinth was concerned, Paul never returned to the synagogue on the Sabbath to try and convince the Jews there.

Likewise, when Paul arrived at Ephesus “he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for the space of 3 months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:1-8). “But when some were stubborn and believed not, but spoke evil of the new way, Paul departed and separated himself and his disciples from them.” He continued his teaching and discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus and continued there for two years (v9-10).

Such then was the policy of Paul. Wherever he went, he firstly gave the Jewish community opportunity to receive the Gospel. The most

effective way of doing this was by visiting the synagogue each Sabbath day. Having done this, he would then concentrate attention on the Gentiles in the community. His attendance at a Jewish synagogue on a Sabbath day cannot in any way be used as proof that he was under the Sabbath law. His writings elsewhere make it quite clear that he was under no such law.

FIRST DAY MEETINGS

It is evident from the book of Acts that Paul used the opportunity of the seventh day rest by Jews to proclaim Christ to them. The seventh day was given over to contentious disputing with the Jews and evangelizing among the Gentiles. Saturday was the gospel outreach day. This being so, on what day did the apostles meet with their Christian brethren for communion, and to confirm and strengthen one another in the faith?

The early communities of believers met regularly for communion on a set day, but it was the first day of the week and not the seventh. Acts 20:7 states: “And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until after midnight.”

Significantly enough, many Sabbath keepers today have completely reversed the apostolic custom! The apostles used the opportunity of the seventh day rest by Jews to proclaim Christ to them, whilst on the first day they gathered with their brethren to enjoy communion together and to minister the Word. Most Sabbath keepers meet on the seventh day to confirm each other in their beliefs, and use the opportunity of the first day to proclaim their teaching to the world!

Since the Sabbath ended at sundown, it would seem from Acts 20:7 that Christians held their meeting in the evening after the Sabbath was ended. Many Christians were slaves and would not be at liberty to attend a meeting during the day. But the fact that the meetings were held on the first day suggests that the apostles avoided using the Sabbath on the one hand, and positively chose the first day as their day for assembling together.

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul repeats the instruction he had given them concerning the observance of the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:20-29). He does not mention the day of meeting, but it is evident that there was a regular time and arrangement from his words: “When you come together therefore into one place” (v20). In the same epistle, however, he has a reference to the day of meeting: “upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store” (16:2), which shows it was the practise to meet on the first day.

In connection with all of this, Jn. 20:19 should be recalled: “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were

shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst ..." We have here another example of the disciples being assembled together on the first day of the week.

The early Christians no doubt met on the first day of the week because it was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. On the first day of the creation week God said: "Let there be light, and there was light." So also on the first day of the week "the true light" came forth from the darkness of the tomb "like dew from the womb of the morning." It is a day to be much remembered by his people, because it assures them of their justification in him, and of their own resurrection to life, and of the certainty of his ruling or "judging the world in righteousness" as Yahweh's King, when they shall also reign with him as kings and priests to God.

The first day is also notable on account of the special interviews which occurred between Jesus and his disciples after his resurrection (Jn. 20:19, 26). He ascended to heaven on this day, even the 43rd from his crucifixion, and 7 days after, which was the 50th, being the day "of Pentecost," the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles, and the gospel of the kingdom was preached for the first time in his name.

Since the use of Sunday as a day of Christian worship arose from the fact that on that day Jesus rose from the dead, it came to be known as "The Lord's day." The apostle John received revelation on this day (Rev. 1:10). Eusebis (Vol. 1 P. 509) quotes Irenaeus as referring to the Lord's resurrection as "the Lord's day." Never, in Scripture, is the Sabbath referred to as "the Lord's day." Even under Moses, the Sabbath was the "seventh day" not "the Lord's day." The phrase "day of the Lord" occurs frequently throughout Scripture but refers to divine intervention and judgement and not the Sabbath. Seeing that Revelation is all about the coming divine intervention into human affairs, it is possible that reference to John being "in the spirit" on the Lord's day relates to that. It will certainly be the time of the blowing of the trumpet because it is the time of the second coming and resurrection.

It should be pointed out that the observance of the first day by Christians was not in the nature of a transfer of a Sabbath from the seventh day to a first day. There are no instructions in the epistles that there should be abstinence from work, and avoidance of the usual duties of life. Such would in fact not have been practical among the large body of slaves in the early churches. God did not command it then, and no divine command has been given since, that either the seventh or the first day should be kept as the Jews were commanded to keep their Sabbath.

CONSTANTINE'S DECREE

Some Sabbath keepers maintain that the custom of observing the first day of the week came from Constantine. They point to the law that Constantine, the emperor of Rome, established in 328 commanding that “All judges, city people and craftsmen shall rest on the venerable day of the sun.” It is sometimes thought that this command was the origin of the custom to make Sunday a day of Christian worship.

However, it has already been pointed out from the New Testament, that Christians long before Constantine met together on Sunday. The writings of the fathers of the early church clearly show that it was always the habit of Christians to assemble together on the first day of the week. Here are some extracts from early ecclesiastical writers:

Eusebius (about 324) wrote: “We do not regard circumcision, nor observe the Sabbath, because such things as these do not belong to Christians.”

Anatolius (A.D. 270) says: “The obligation of the Lord’s resurrection binds us to keep the paschal festival on the Lord’s day” (i.e. the day he rose from the dead).

Justin Martyr describes the Christian worship on Sunday as follows: “On the day called Sunday, there is made a gathering into the same place of all that live in city or country, and the memoranda of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read as long as may be. Afterwards, the reader having ceased, the president makes verbally the admonition and exhortation to the imitation of these excellent things. Then we all rise and pour forth prayers. Then the bread and wine are taken.”

Ignatius, a disciple of John writes: “Those who were concerned with old things, have come to newness of confidence, no longer keeping Sabbaths, but living according to the Lord’s day, on which our life, as risen again through him, depends.”

From these testimonies we see that the custom of meeting on the first day goes right back before Constantine, and was not something instituted by him, though he may have confirmed it.

From the day of Pentecost to the accension of Constantine as emperor of the Romans was almost a period of 300 years. During this period, the apostolic testimony for the resurrection of Christ had made such an impact upon the Roman empire, that a Roman emperor sympathizing with the Christian belief was able, at the head of a Roman army pervaded with a similar sympathy, to overthrow the pagan government at Rome that had for nearly three centuries made war against the inextinguishable Christian faith. The overthrow of paganism was so complete for the time that there arose the necessity for a new system of jurisprudence, civil and ecclesiastical. In constructing this new system, Constantine naturally sought the assistance of the heads of the new faith, which by his hand had overthrown the old. In this way the moulding of the new system, in its

ecclesiastical elements, inevitably came into the hands of the bishops; and from them Constantine received with approval the institution of Sunday as the day of Christian worship, which he promulgated as the law of the empire.

The law of Moses of course, enjoined the observance of the seventh day: Constantine appointed the day after, or the first day of the week. Some Sabbath keepers today make this a reason for contending for the observance of the seventh and not the first day of the week. If it were a question of Moses versus Constantine, this contention would be unanswerable. But in truth it is not a question of one or the other as far as Christians are concerned. Constantine is not our lawgiver, and we are certainly “not under the law” of Moses. We are under Christ, who is “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,” and who never enjoined the observance of the Sabbath.

How was it then, that the bishops recommended to Constantine the observance of Sunday as the day of worship for Christians? The answer is, as we have already seen, that the disciples in the apostolic age, by apostolic precept and example, established the practise of “assembling themselves together” on “the first day of the week” for “the breaking of bread in remembrance of the Lord.” This practise being established during the lifetime of the apostles would naturally become the practise of believers in whatever part of the world churches were formed. As we have seen, it is testified by several of the ecclesiastical writers of the second and third centuries that such was the practise everywhere. This accounts for the transmission of the first day of the week to Constantine’s time as the day of Christian assembly.

A PROCESS OF PERVERSION

Of course, before very long, Sunday became invested with a Mosaic character. It became leavened with Judaism, as illustrated in their observance of “Easter” and other feasts of a Jewish origin, the substitution of “baptism” on the eighth day in the room of circumcision, the exaltation of the original simple “pastors and teachers” into the position of priests and Levites, the exaction of tithes for their maintenance, and the transmutation of the first day assembly for the breaking of bread, into the place of the Mosaic Sabbath. The Jewish party which, from the early apostolic times, contended strenuously for the observance of Jewish laws, concurrently with submission to the gospel, finally triumphed in the production of a totally perverted and legalistic Christianity, known throughout history as the Roman Catholic church.

Nevertheless, out of this corruption came one good result. A Sabbath rest every Sunday became a law of Europe - a result which ameliorated

the barbarism of the nations, and at the same time secured legal liberty, as at this day, for the true friends of Christ everywhere to hold that memorial assembly which is so necessary to their spiritual well being.

Any attempt to enforce the Mosaic Sabbath as a rule of individual duty for Christians in this age is in direct violation of Christ's teaching as to their relation to the Mosaic law, and the law of the Sabbath in particular, whether by himself or his apostles. He is never found in his own mouth enjoining the law of Moses on believers. He came to end it by accomplishing in himself all that it foreshadowed, plucking the sting out of it by giving himself up to its curse in suffering himself to be crucified.

There is no doubt that the Sabbath law was a beneficial institution and adapted to a need of nature; it allowed the machinery of life to work longer and more easily than if kept uninterruptedly at work. To suspend all ordinary occupations once in seven days is foreign to all human thought, and would seem a waste of time to the natural mind. There is, therefore, a self evident stamp of divinity in such an arrangement.

It is sometimes argued that the need for the flesh to rest one day in seven, and the obvious benefit that comes from such rest is proof that the Sabbath law is still in force. However, we cannot argue for the law on the basis of physical benefits that might accrue from it. It is an acknowledged fact among many medical authorities that circumcision has certain benefits and advantages, yet Paul insisted that the law of circumcision was no longer binding, and the same applies to other points of the law as well.

True, the Sabbath law also had spiritual benefits in that it provided opportunity to spend time reading the Word of God and meditating upon it. However, this can be done just as effectively on any other day of the week, and the true Christian makes a point of setting aside time every day of the week to read and pray. He regards every day as a day unto the Lord. This is the true spirit of Christianity!

Without any doubt it was an operation of providence that caused Sunday to become generally recognized as a non-working day, enabling believers to meet together for the observance of the Lord's supper and other spiritual activities as a body. The release from ordinary work on one day is beyond question a blessing physically also. But this observance is of grace and not of the bondage of the law. To this issue might be applied the words: "Stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage ... For brethren, you have been called to liberty, only don't use liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:1, 13).

In such a use of liberty for service to God, and one to another in love, the Christian uses the Sunday rest as a day for those objects that will help him in his life Godward. The break from the routine is good in every way; and the opportunity for worship and sharing with fellow believers should

be gratefully accepted. The prevailing secularization of Sunday can only be deplored by those who accept its rest as a gift from God.

In concluding this section I will quote from Page 43 of “The Law of Moses” by Robert Roberts: “The Sabbath to this day distinguishes Israel from the other nations, and separates them from the communities among whom they live. The fact is forced on attention in passing through any great European city on a Saturday. The closed shutters of many a shop tell of the Sabbath and the synagogue, and therefore of God having brought Israel from Egypt. It is one of the many Mosaic institutions which have survived in their dispersion. They offer no sacrifices; they have no high priest or temple: but next to the practise of circumcision they are to be known in all countries by their suspension of secular employment on the seventh day.

It is singular fact that in certain form, the Sabbath law has become incorporate with the religious systems of Gentile Europe and its offshoots. It is a fact suggestive of many more thoughts that can be appropriately followed out in the present connection. For one thing it is an operation of providence that has conferred some blessedness in advance upon the Japhetic (European) people. It is impossible that public or private life can come to a truly good development without a periodic cessation of secular work. It was not in Gentile sagacity (wisdom) to see this for themselves. The institution has been established among them without their sagacity. It has been established among them as the result of the establishment of “Christianity” though it is no part of “Christianity.” In this respect it is a “sign” among them that God raised Christ from the dead, just as the Mosaic Sabbath was a sign that God brought Israel out of Egypt. It is a curious situation that without the law of Moses, with which the Gentiles have nothing to do, the Gentiles, by a mistaken appropriation of the law of Moses, have come to an observance of the law of Moses through Christ, who was the end of the law of Moses for everyone believing in him. It is not difficult to see how this intricate evolution has come about, and how, out of evil, God permitted an amount of good to come that could not have been humanly foreseen.”

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN PARTIAL OBSERVANCE OF SABBATH LAW UNACCEPTABLE

A partial observance of the law of Moses clearly can do not good. If it be insisted that one part be kept, a person becomes “debtor to do the whole law.” If it be insisted that one rest on the seventh day according to the law, then every other aspect of the Sabbath law must be kept also, not to mention all the other Mosaic ordinances including circumcision, animal sacrifices etc.

If it be insisted that the Sabbath be kept because the law of Moses commanded it, then it must be kept exactly according to the terms of the law. This would mean that work of no kind could be done (Ex. 31:12-17); no sticks could be gathered (Num. 15:32-36); no fires kindled (Ex. 35:2-3); no loads carried (Jer. 17:21); no one would be allowed to leave his place: “Abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day” (Ex. 16:29). And, anyone who violated these Sabbath rules had to be put to death (Ex. 31:12-17. Num. 15:32-36). The Sabbath law also required Levitical priests to offer “two lambs of the first year without spot as the burnt offering of every Sabbath” (Num. 28:9-10). These lambs had to be offered on the altar at Jerusalem.

Are all these rules obeyed by Sabbath keepers today? If not, they are not keeping the Sabbath according to the law. They are breaking the law. To offend in one point is to negate all, for the law clearly states: “Cursed is everyone who continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

What hope is there then for Jew or Gentile of escaping the curse of the law, seeing that from the very nature of things connected with the present state of things it is impossible to observe it, except in one or two particulars? There is no altar at Jerusalem; no lambs are being offered by Levitical priests; the laws of the land prevent the death sentence being carried out on all who violate the Sabbath law, and most Sabbath keepers break it anyway without any thought concerning the death penalty.

ONLY BINDING UPON ISRAELITES

The law of the Sabbath was clearly delivered to the Israelites and not to the Gentiles. “What things soever the law saith, it says to them who are under the law”; consequently the Gentiles were not amenable to it: they were “without the law.”

The observance of the seventh day was only obligatory upon the

Israelites so long as the Mosaic code was in force. Speaking to Israel, God clearly stated: “Verily my Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and YOU” (i.e. Israel). The Sabbaths belong to the land and people of Israel, and can only be properly kept according to the law while they reside in that country. This should be clear from the fact that the law requires that “two lambs of the first year without spot” should be offered with other things “as the burnt offering of every Sabbath.” And this offering, like all the other offerings, must be offered by the Jewish priests upon an altar at Jerusalem and not in the dwelling places of Jacob. Israel must therefore not only be restored to her own land, but reinstitute the priesthood and rebuild the altar and temple at Jerusalem, before all the demands of the Sabbath law can be met.

It really is therefore quite a farce for Gentiles in Gentile countries to claim that they are keeping the Sabbath law simply because they don't do any work on Saturday!

WHEN DID THE SABBATH LAW COMMENCE?

It is sometimes claimed that the Sabbath law was in existence before the law of Moses, and was known and obeyed by all the patriarchs from the dawn of creation. But even if this were true it would not necessarily make it binding today. Both animal sacrifice and circumcision were commanded by God in patriarchal times, but are not now binding.

The Seventh Day Adventist of course argues that the Sabbath law transcends circumcision and animal sacrifice, and cannot be placed on the same level or in the same category. Their argument is stated as follows: “But the decalogue, sealed with the lip and finger of God, was lifted above all Jewish rites and ceremonies. This is evident from the fact that the Sabbath was established before man sinned, and therefore before he had any need of a Redeemer. It was not a part of the ceremonial regulations occasioned by the entrance of sin, and which were annulled by the death of Christ.”

But if the Sabbath was superior and eternal, why did an alleged “ceremonial law” - circumcision, take precedence over Sabbath observance? The law required that on the eighth day a Jewish boy should be circumcised. But sometimes the day of circumcision would fall on a Sabbath. A conflict of laws resulted - one demanding that circumcision should take place, and the other, that no work should be done. What law was to be broken that the more important should prevail? Of the two laws, the law of Moses required that the Sabbath should be broken, as being of less importance than the law of circumcision; for unless a Jew was circumcised he could not keep the law. Jesus pressed this fact home upon the Jewish people with their scrupulous observance of the seventh day,

and their accusations against him for breaking the Sabbath: “You, on the Sabbath day, circumcise a man that the law should not be broken” (Jn. 7:23).

There was an important reason why the law of circumcision took precedence over the law of the Sabbath. In the words of Jesus: ...“it originated not with Moses but with the fathers” (Jn. 7:22). Circumcision was the token of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:10-11), which was confirmed by Christ (Rom. 15:8. Gal. 3:16-17), whereas the Sabbath was the token of the Mosaic covenant - “a sign between Israel and God.” As the Abrahamic covenant, confirmed by Christ, superseded the Mosaic covenant, confirmed by Moses (Heb. 8:8), so the law showed circumcision taking precedence over the Sabbath. The Sabbath law clearly did not transcend the law of circumcision. Quite the opposite: the law of circumcision transcended the law of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was clearly not “lifted above all Jewish rites and ceremonies” as claimed by the Seventh Day Adventists.

It should be evident that if the law of circumcision transcended the Sabbath, and has been done away in Christ, the law of the Sabbath must also be done away.

A CIRCUMCISION NOT PERFORMED BY HANDS

Before leaving the subject of circumcision, there are matters of interest that help to show why it was considered of such importance. There are lessons to be learned in the days selected by the law for various events. As far as the letter of the law was concerned, circumcision involved the cutting off of the flesh on the eighth day. Being part of the law, it was a shadow of greater things to come in Christ. After spending the seventh day (Sabbath) in the tomb, resting from his work and labour on the cross, Jesus rose on the eighth day (first day of the week), having once and for all cut off sin in the body of flesh. And through his atoning work we are “circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands” (Col. 2:11).

The rite of circumcision even pointed to the ultimate result of Calvary when, on the eighth millennium, all flesh will be cut off from the earth and only the immortal saints will remain. The Bible likens “a day with the Lord as a thousand years” (2 Pet. 3:8). The seventh Sabbath pointed to the seventh millennium from creation, which will witness the one thousand year reign of rest and peace on earth by Christ. It will be a Sabbath of one thousand years during which the mortal population of the earth will be brought into subjection to the Father in heaven through Christ and his saints. It shall be followed by the eighth millennium of which circumcision was a type. This will be a period when God shall be

“all in all.” It shall witness the cutting off of all those who have proved disobedient during the one thousand year reign of Christ, and the bestowal of immortality upon those who proved to be obedient. When this takes place, all who remain on the earth will be “equal to the angels” - “ministering spirits.” All mortal, sinful flesh will have been “cut off” - circumcised!

The seventh millennial rest therefore, is purely a transitional phase - a means to an end but not an end in itself. The eighth millennium represents the ultimate in the divine plan. Circumcision therefore, which pointed to this ultimate purpose, was more important than the Sabbath, and took precedence over the Sabbath law as we have seen.

Sometimes it is argued that because the Sabbath pointed to the seventh millennial rest of Christ’s kingdom, it should be observed until the kingdom comes. But if this kind of reasoning were true, we would also have to conclude that because circumcision pointed to the eighth millennium when all flesh will be cut off, it should also be observed until that time comes. That such reasoning is incorrect is evident in many parts of the New Testament.

So then, the law of circumcision took precedence over the law of the Sabbath. The law of the Sabbath was broken in order to keep the law of circumcision.

PRIESTS PROFANED THE SABBATH

Likewise, on the “Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless” (Matt. 12:5). The priests were exempt from the law of the Sabbath. Instead of the Sabbath being a day of rest to the priests, their work was doubled (Num. 28:9-10). Their whole life was devoted to the Lord’s service, and therefore one day in seven could not be any different than the rest. The priests did not observe the Sabbath - it was not a rest day for them.

Now, the significance of this must surely be appreciated when it is recalled that Christians are “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). Even if the Sabbath law still applied today, they would be exempt. As priests they are exempt from such law, for their whole lives should be dedicated to the work of the Lord. Their Sabbath - their resting from the works of self and sin, is not limited to one day a week, but is a daily endeavour. Those who insist upon a rigid observance of the Sabbath law as laid down in the law of Moses, virtually exclude themselves from that priestly class who Christ considers his own.

The Sabbath law is expressly stated to be a sign between Israel and Yahweh: “It is a sign between me and THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL” (Ex. 31:17). This law was not given to the forebears of the

Israelites since it is stated: “The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us even us, who are all of us here alive this day” (Deu. 5:3).

When all the facts are taken into consideration, it is evident that it was impossible for the Sabbath law to be in vogue before Moses.

Prior to Moses receiving the law at Sinai, there is not a single word of instruction or description upon Sabbath keeping, but reference is clearly made to circumcision (Ex. 4:26-27, 12:44-48. Josh. 5:5. Gen. 17 etc).

SABBATH NOT IN VOGUE IN EGYPT

No account is given of any attempt being made by the nation of Israel to keep the Sabbath during the centuries they were in Egypt. It is difficult to believe that this nation, who were slaves to Pharaoh in making bricks and labouring for him in building, would be permitted to cease work on even one day of the week. Pharaoh said to Moses: “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord” (Ex. 5:2). Such a monarch was not likely to give Israel one day a week off to serve their Lord, even if it was their custom to do so.

Had it been their custom to rest every seventh day they would have come into immediate collision with the Egyptians, but nothing is said anywhere that would show there had ever been any difference or persecution on that account. Pharaoh’s negative reaction to Moses, saying: “you make them rest from their burdens,” when Moses asked for Israel to be released to hold a feast to the Lord, reveals how Pharaoh would have felt about a rest every seventh day!

Lack of rest in Egypt, in fact, is one of the reasons given for the institution of the Sabbath law (Deu. 5:14-15). In this passage, God reminded Israel that they had been servants in the land of Egypt (always working and never resting), and that He had brought them out by His power. “Therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.” For them, the Exodus was a great change from the bondage and harsh servitude. Had they been accustomed to keeping the Sabbath, there would not have been such a great change!

We come to the time of the Exodus, and several important points come under notice. Prior to the Exodus, the Lord started to instruct the people and issue some laws which were to become part of their national guide. He began by instituting the feast of Passover and the feast of unleavened bread, and reinforced circumcision (Ex. 12). No reference, however, was made to the Sabbath!

The nation left Egypt on the fourteenth day of the first month and reached a point in their wilderness journey on the fifteenth day of the second month, when provision was made for feeding them with manna

(Ex. 12:18, Ex. 16). Four Sabbaths would have intervened during this period had Sabbath keeping been observed, but there is no account of the nation halting and camping for this purpose. Such omission is very significant.

God, at that stage, had not commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath, yet He had made it clear that they must observe circumcision. Once again it can be seen that circumcision took precedence over the Sabbath. For this reason the apostle Paul in his writings when setting out to prove that Christians are not under the Sabbath law etc, emphasizes that circumcision is no longer binding. Once it is proved that circumcision is no longer binding, all the laws of lesser importance like the Sabbath immediately go with it.

THE FIRST REFERENCE TO THE SABBATH

The first direct contact with Sabbath keeping is in Ex. 16, three weeks before Israel reached Sinai. Two things were done: manna was given as a food supply, and the Sabbath was also given as a weekly day of rest. Ex. 16:5, 22 gives the first hint of the Sabbath, and it is amplified in verses 23, 29. The Sabbath was therefore given before Sinai, after departure from Egypt, and was later confirmed at Sinai and incorporated as the fourth commandment in the decalogue. The command to “remember,” attached to the fourth commandment, enjoins a continuation of that which was begun before they received the rest of the law at Sinai.

Now note especially how it came about that Israel was commanded to keep the Sabbath, as recorded in Ex. 16. It is clear that the children of Israel had not observed the Sabbath prior to receiving the manna. This is evident by their surprise when a double portion of the manna fell on the sixth day. Had they been in the habit of keeping the seventh day, they would have also been in the habit of providing more food on the sixth day to last over the Sabbath. Not only were the people of Israel surprised and perplexed, but also the rulers of the tribes. We read: “All the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses.” Then Moses explained what they were to do, for he said: “Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord.” This was new to them, and the verses of this chapter show that this was the first time the children of Israel had heard about a Sabbath rest to the Lord.

Now, at the instruction of God, Moses changed the Jewish calendar, making the departure from Egypt “the beginning ... the first month of the year” (Ex. 12:2). From this new date there commenced the Sabbath, and on this point Moses himself, required instruction - instruction that he passed on to the people: “This is that which the Lord has said, tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord” (Ex. 16:23). If this law was

so well known, and its day understood, why the need of such instruction? Was Moses so ignorant of the basic laws of God as to be told them in this fashion? The answer is that this was a new law, then set before the people for the first time. “See,” said Moses, to the people, “for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, that is why He has given you on the sixth day the bread of two days” (v29-30). That this was something new to Israel is further indicated by the fact that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather manna, but found none.

So then, God changed Israel’s calendar and brought it into line with His own. They therefore had to be informed when the seventh day of the week was: “Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath ...” This reveals that not only was the Sabbath not being kept prior to the Exodus, but that it was impossible to keep for no one knew the seventh day in the Lord’s calendar.

This is further suggested by the ignorance of Moses and Aaron as to what to do with the man caught picking up sticks on the Sabbath: “And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him” (Num. 15:34). Why would there be ignorance about the penalty for Sabbath disobedience if the law had been in force for generations before?

All these facts confirm what was said before about the Sabbath law being given to Israel alone. It did not apply to all the world. It was, as God said, “A sign between Me and the children of Israel.” Had it not been exclusively Jewish, surely the Lord would have said: “between Me and all mankind.” Deu. 5:2-3 is even more convincing. It teaches that God gave this covenant to the children of Israel at Mount Horeb after the Exodus, and that it was the first time God gave them this code of laws. Moses said: “The Lord our God made this covenant with us in Horeb,” thus definitively locating the place and time. Moses also said: “The Lord made NOT this covenant with our fathers but even with us.” So the statement of Moses is irrefutable testimony clearly fixing the time, the place and the people with whom God made the covenant. The Sabbath was “a sign” between God and Israel “throughout your generations” - not generations past, but themselves and their posterity, who would, by birth, come under the necessity of keeping the law.

Neh. 9:14 plainly declares that God made known “the holy Sabbaths” by the hand “of Moses His servant,” implying that prior to Moses, they were not known or observed. “He hath not dealt so with any other nation” (Ps. 147:19-20). God, “in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16).

There is no passage of Scripture which explicitly states that keeping of the Sabbath was binding on any, prior to God giving it to Israel.

GENESIS 2:3

T rue, we read in Gen. 2:3 “God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made,” but these words do not constitute a command for man to observe this day. It is simply a record of an act of God; man is neither spoken to nor spoken about. Adam was never commanded to remember the seventh or any day to keep it holy, and there is no record of him ever doing so.

Paul expressly states that the law “was added because of transgressions until the seed should come.” Since the law was added because of transgressions, it implies that the Sabbath law was not given in Gen. 2:3 because neither Adam nor Eve had transgressed at that stage.

It is fundamentally wrong to imagine that a law, checking sin and transgression existed before any transgression existed. Imagine a physician prescribing medicine before sickness existed. In some circles it is claimed that the ten commandments written on stone and given to Moses were really given before sin entered into the world. Yet most of these commands could not apply to Adam at that stage. He could not have worked six days from his existence because he was created on the sixth day, with only one day to go to the Sabbath. He could not honour his mother for he did not have one. He could not commit adultery with a woman for he was the only man and his wife Eve was the only woman. He could not steal from man for there was no one to steal from and the whole earth was his. He could not bear false witness against his neighbour for no neighbour existed.

When Adam was first created, sin was not in his flesh. He had no evil propensities - no bias in his nature towards evil. There was therefore no need for law to govern his life. It was not until sin entered the world that law was introduced or “added.”

When Adam was first created, the world, and especially the garden in which he was placed, was a “paradise.” There were no weeds, thistles or thorns. A minimum of work was required, and nothing like the “sweat of the brow” type toil that eventuated after the curse, which necessitated a rest every seven days. Reference therefore, to God sanctifying the seventh day in Gen. 2 cannot be regarded as a law or command like that later given to Israel.

What God required of Adam in the garden of Eden, He defined in a command which He gave him, and since the keeping of God’s commands is of the utmost importance, God Himself has always been careful to express His will in plain terms, so that man would clearly know what was required of him. In the case of Adam the record supplies one commandment concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, from which Adam was not allowed to partake (Gen. 2:16). No other command

is recorded. Surely just as clear a command would have been given concerning the Sabbath had God wanted it to be observed. The Sabbath was clearly “made for man” to provide rest in his burdened, sin-stricken state. It was a beneficial arrangement provided by God as a result of sin.

Why is it then, that the statement concerning God resting on the seventh day is made in Gen. 2? The answer is that Moses was the historian who wrote the book of Genesis, and when it is recalled that it was written for the Jewish people after the giving of the law, we can understand why he included this explanatory note. Speaking of the Sabbath God declared: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth ... and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed” (Ex. 31:17. Also Ex. 20:11).

God therefore gave Israel the same day of rest on which He rested after He finished His creative works. The Sabbath therefore became a reminder to the Jews that God was Creator of all things as well as the One who led them forth out of the bondage of Egypt. But there is no evidence of the seventh day being an obligatory rest day before God had called the Israelites out of Egypt.

NO REFERENCE TO NOAH KEEPING THE SABBATH

Up to the time of the flood there is no account of Sabbath keeping. During the 100 years that Noah built the ark and preached to the people, not one word is said about him preaching the law of the Sabbath. We are told that the generation in which he lived was sinful, but not a single hint that it was by breaking the Sabbath that they had sinned. God commanded Noah certain things (Gen. 6:22. 7:5) both before and after the flood, but there is no account of Sabbath keeping in Noah’s day nor his descendants up to the time of Abraham. As pointed out earlier in this thesis, there is evidence of certain laws of God being kept during this period, but not one reference to the keeping of the Sabbath.

Great details are given to us in Scripture concerning the life and experiences of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and reference is made to them keeping various laws of God, but never the Sabbath.

Sometimes it is claimed, on the basis of Gen. 26:5, that Abraham kept the law of the Sabbath. The text refers to Abraham keeping God’s “commandments, statutes, and laws.” But to say the law of the Sabbath was involved is to assume something that is never stated in Scripture. Abraham kept the commandments and laws which God gave to him personally, in addition to those basic moral laws that the godly observed. God’s invitation to leave Ur of the Chaldees was in the nature of a command. He was also commanded to circumcise himself and all the males in his house. He gave up Hagar and Ishmael, and obeyed the

command to offer up Isaac. He was obedient to all commandments given to him personally and obeyed the moral laws also.

That God gave to individuals at various times, purely personal commandments, is very evident from Scripture. He commanded Moses to go to Egypt and for Pharaoh to let God's people go. He also commanded that Moses should not cross the Jordan into the promised land. God also forbade Balaam to curse Israel, and commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh etc.

* * * * *

CHAPTER SIXTEEN COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

One of the earliest difficulties in apostolic times arose from an effort by Jewish believers to make the law of Moses binding upon Gentiles. They attempted to superimpose the Jewish law upon the teaching of Christ, claiming it was “needful ... to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). A council was held at Jerusalem and the teaching was vigorously refuted by the apostles who instructed the Gentile believers: “We have heard that certain have troubled you with words, saying, you must ... keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment” (v24).

The apostles recommended a course of action to be adopted by Gentile believers in view of this teaching, and it is most significant that nothing is said by them about observing the Sabbath. They decided that four restrictions should be imposed to make possible social association between Jew and Gentile, but Sabbath-keeping was not enjoined. Surely this is a significant omission! If the Sabbath were eternal and immutable one would have expected it to be stated by the apostolic council, and to be included in the decrees that were formulated as a basis of co-operation between Jewish and Gentile Christians. But it wasn't! No reference is made here, or anywhere else in the New Testament to the necessity of observing a Sabbath.

It is evident from a careful reading of Acts 15:1-5 that the Christians at Antioch originally received Christ and were filled with the Holy Spirit (v8) without having to conform to the law of Moses. Had their original acceptance of Christ necessitated conforming to the law, they would have been obeying it when the Jews arrived from Judea, making contention over the law unnecessary.

The main reason for writing to the Gentiles asking them to abstain from the polluted offerings of idols, fornication (connected with idolatry), animal flesh not properly bled, and blood, is given in verse 21: “For the law of Moses has been read for a very long time in the synagogues every Sabbath, and His words are preached in every town.”

The law of Moses prohibited the eating of blood etc by the Jewish people, and these prohibitions were deeply ingrained because they were read out and taught in the synagogue every Sabbath for generations. It was therefore expedient for the Gentile Christians to abstain from such things in order to not give unnecessary offence and create unnecessary division between themselves and their Jewish brethren.

Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 8 that an idol is nothing and that there is therefore nothing wrong with the meat offered to idols. A fully enlightened Christian is at liberty to eat meat that has been offered to

idols. However, he issues the warning that we must be careful to not allow our liberty to become a stumblingblock to others who are weak. He concludes by saying that he will never eat any food that offends his brother. In other words: He will show respect towards the scruples of others and will abstain from foods etc which cause offence in their presence. The same principle applies in Acts 15:20-21. It was necessary for the Jewish and Gentile Christians to associate and co-operate together, which involved eating together. To do this successfully required respect from the Gentiles towards deeply ingrained Jewish scruples.

Sometimes the statement: “For the law of Moses has been read for a very long time in the synagogues every Sabbath ...” is interpreted to mean that Christians are under the law of Moses and must therefore keep the Sabbath. But why pick on the Sabbath? Why not also argue from this that every other aspect of the rigmarole of ritual is also binding? After all, the whole lot was read by the Jews during their Sabbaths in the synagogue. The fact of the matter is however, that the reference is to Jewish practise and not Christian. Christians do not attend Jewish synagogues every Sabbath, neither do they spend all their time reading the law of Moses!

JESUS DIDN'T COME TO DESTROY THE LAW

The same applies to Christ's statement: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I have not come to destroy but fulfil” (Matt. 5:17). Seeing that the Sabbath was part of “the law,” this text is sometimes quoted to prove we should still keep it. But once again, why just pick out the Sabbath? It was by no means the only ordinance in the law. If Christ's statement means Christians must keep “the law,” then this would not merely involve the Sabbath, but the whole law in all of its parts! Is that what Sabbath keepers want?

So then: Jesus didn't come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. What does this mean? Well, to start with, it should be pointed out that reference to not destroying but fulfilling is not merely made with regard to the law, but also to “the prophets.” Jesus said: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but fulfil.”

If we can ascertain how Jesus fulfilled the prophets we will have the answer as to how he fulfilled the law. Jesus fulfilled the prophets by accomplishing what they predicted. Constantly, throughout his ministry, the Gospels state that he did certain things “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet” etc. (Matt. 4:12-16. 8:16-17. 12:14-21. 13:34-35. 21:1-5. 26:53-54. 27:7-10, 35 etc).

The prophets predicted many things concerning Jesus, and when he accomplished them they were “fulfilled,” but not destroyed. The prophetic records were not ripped up or burnt up simply because they were fulfilled.

They did not “pass away” into the abyss of oblivion. They remained on record as an everlasting witness and testimony to the divine purpose which was fulfilled in Christ, for all to read and study and be enlightened by. The principle can be compared with a person who “finished” a book, but doesn’t destroy it. Very few throw a book into the fire when they have finished reading it!

Reference to Jesus fulfilling the law is to be understood in the same sense as him fulfilling the prophets. This is what we read in Lk. 24:44: “And he said to them: These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me.”

How then, did Jesus fulfil the law? In several ways! He fulfilled it by meeting its demands - by keeping and obeying it. He also fulfilled it by commanding his followers to love their neighbour as themselves: “He that loveth another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8-10). Every commandment of Christ recorded in Mat. 5 is fulfilled by the application of true love. Significantly enough, none of Christ’s references to the law in Matt. 5 relate the ceremonial aspects of the law. All his references relate to moral issues which concern the heart of man.

Jesus also fulfilled the law in that he accomplished the things that the ceremonial and ritual ordinances foreshadowed. As we have seen, the ceremonial and ritual aspects of the law were a “shadow” of greater things to come in Christ. They pointed forward by type and symbol to the things concerning the death, resurrection, ascension and second coming and kingdom of Christ. Jesus came to fulfil all that foreshadowed him - to turn shadow into substance and symbol into solid reality. But in doing this he did not “destroy” the law. It forever remains on record with all of its types and shadows for the Christian to study in greater depth, relating it all to his Lord and Master. The Christian now keeps it in “spirit” and not in the “letter.” Approached from this position, the law can be a very edifying and rewarding study, and for this reason it has never “passed away.”

In Christ the types have all been withdrawn. He gave a spiritual significance to the formalism of the law. Instead of the sacrifice of animals, he presented himself as “the lamb of God” offered for the sin of the world. In place of circumcision, he set forth before men the principle of the repudiation of the flesh, a circumcision “that is of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter” (Rom. 2:28-29). Instead of Sabbath observance, he inculcated a day to day rest from self and the works of sin, and performance of the will of God. Those who enter into the true rest are those who regard every day alike as unto the Lord.

The principle of the Sabbath therefore, has a place in the life of Christ’s followers, but not as a mere seventh day observance. The letter of the law is replaced by the spirit which involves a day to day application of

the Sabbath principles. Paul expressed it thus: “We are delivered from the law, that ... we should serve in newness of the spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6).

“COME TO ME AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST”

Jesus proclaimed the significance of this spiritual observance of the Sabbath when he uttered the words: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). The original Greek word translated “rest” is “anapausis,” a word consistently used in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) for the Sabbath rest. The true rest of God in Christ is rest from sin. In Christ, sin has been vanquished and the burden of it has been rolled away from all who come to him. The yoke of bondage caused through sin and death has been removed from all who identify with the cross. They are now “seated” (resting) with Christ Jesus in heavenly places. Such is the true rest to which the Sabbath pointed in Christ.

Heb. 4:9-11 also reveals that the Sabbath was but a shadow of something to be revealed in Christ. Verse 4 makes the point that God rested on the seventh day from all His works, and v3 says that although God’s work was finished ages ago, the rest that He had from such work pointed to another divine rest into which He desired His people to enter. The Israelites who came out from the bondage of Egypt did not enter into the promised rest. Because of their hardness of heart and unbelief, God swore in His wrath saying: “They shall not enter into my rest” (Heb. 3:7-19). Neither did Joshua give them the promised rest. Heb. 4:8 shows that if Joshua had given the children of Israel the true rest to which God’s seventh day rest pointed, there would have been no need to promise the rest hundreds of years later through David who was inspired to write Ps. 95:7-11.

Thus, well after David’s time, the promised rest remained open (Heb. 4:1). “The promise remains and some get in - but not those who had the first chance, for they disobeyed God and failed to enter” (Heb. 4:6). “But He has set another day for coming in, and that day is TODAY. He announced this through David long years after man’s failure to enter, saying in the words already quoted, Today when you hear him calling, do not harden your hearts against him. If Joshua had given the people the rest that God had promised, God would not have spoken later about another day. So there is a Sabbath rest still waiting for the people of God, and whoever enters that rest foreshadowed by God’s rest will cease from his own works as God did from His. Let us therefore labour to enter into that rest, so that none of us will fail as they did because of their lack of faith” (Heb. 4:7-11). “For we who have believed do enter into that

rest” (Heb. 4:3).

From this passage it is clear that God’s rest on the seventh day after His works of creation was designed to point forward to a specific “Sabbath rest” in His son the Lord Jesus Christ, in which people by faith in him, might “cease from their own works.” The Sabbath law, given to Israel, was a constant reminder of this ultimate purpose which redemption in Christ would fulfil.

A true follower of the Lord Jesus observes the true Sabbath by daily ceasing from his own desires and works, and by wholly consecrating his life to the Lord as a “royal priest.” Each day will be holy to the Lord. Life becomes a daily pilgrimage to the kingdom of God which will be revealed in denial of the works of the flesh and service to the Father. Under such circumstances, the seventh day cannot be any more holy than the other six.

As pointed out before, the millennial reign of Christ will be the seventh millennium in human history, and as such will constitute a “Sabbath millennium.” The reign of Christ will result in nations ceasing from their own works for they will find rest in the redemptive work of Christ. Rest and peace will prevail upon the earth among all nations. Such is the ultimate blessing promised for all nations. Hence, “In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, who shall stand as an ensign of the peoples; to him shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious” (Isa. 11:10). The Hebrew word for “rest” here is the same as in Ps. 95:11, which as we have seen, relates to the work of Christ.

The millennial reign of Christ will truly be a glorious rest. Other Scriptures in which the word “rest” relates to this are: Jer. 30:8-10. Ps. 132:8. Isa. 66:1. Ps. 72. Let us indeed “labour” that we might enter that rest!

During the millennial age “it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship” before the Lord at Jerusalem (Isa. 66:23). The “all flesh” who will do this refers of course, to the mortal population over which Christ and his immortal saints will reign. Whether or not the reference to them coming “from one Sabbath to another” means the Sabbath law will be re-instituted during the kingdom age is open for question. It doesn't much matter. If so, it will not affect the immortal saints, who, like their high priest, will be Lord of the Sabbath and will minister every day as priests of the Most High God.

While we are in the book of Isaiah it should also be pointed out that the message in chapter 58:12-13 emphasizing the importance of keeping the Sabbath, is addressed to apostate Jews living under the law of Moses. However, although it was not addressed to Christians, lessons can nevertheless be drawn from it if we apply the “spirit” of the Sabbath law.

THE “SPIRIT” OF THE LAW ABIDES FOREVER

The “letter” of the law is done away. That is, the ceremonial and ritual aspects of the law no longer have to be literally and physically applied. But the “spirit” of the law remains; i.e. the spiritual principles typified by the law apply to the people of God.

Paradoxically the law concealed truth in the very process of revealing it; it both conveyed and veiled its lessons through the use it made of rite and symbol. The latter often mystify us today and occasionally their meaning eludes us altogether. We can be sure the same was true of the wilderness generation . It is not hard to imagine that many observed the ceremonial ordinances in a purely mechanical and perfunctory way, with little, if any, insight into their true meaning. The fault, notwithstanding, lay with the people, not the law. They could and should have apprehended those truths which the symbolism was, in its own peculiar way, intended to express.

The law, with its ceremonial and moral aspects, clearly had a dual purpose: it taught and reinforced plain moral statutes to reveal, convince and restrain men of sin. And the ceremonial features of the law supplemented and reinforced the plain moral statutes, revealing by type and symbol how sin would ultimately be dealt with.

The food laws in particular had a teaching purpose: “I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from other people. You shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean ... and you shall be holy unto Me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that you should be mine” (Lev. 20:24-26).

This was one of the many ways in which the law impressed upon Israel the solemnity and sacredness of their calling. The distinction which it drew between clean and unclean meats has long since been annulled. Not so however, the demand for holiness on the part of God’s people which it was meant to typify and express in concrete form: that demand still abides. Certain acts of the flesh are clean and some unclean, and it is incumbent upon Christians to distinguish, and make a separation between the two. Accordingly Peter, though insisting on the inadequacy of the law as compared with the salvation in Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19), could yet with perfect consistency reiterate the claim of the law and declare it to still be binding upon Christians: “As he who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy” (v15-16).

Paul likewise, though passionately opposed to any reversion to the bondage of the letter of the law, did not hesitate to appeal to its authority

on issues of principle. “It is written in the law of Moses, thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treads out the corn.” That temporary regulation for Paul, embodied a permanent spiritual principle, that “the labourer is worthy of his hire” (1 Tim. 5:17-18), and gave ample warrant for him to affirm that those who preach the gospel are entitled to live off the gospel (1 Cor. 9:3-14). He asks the question: “Is God concerned with oxen, or did He say it for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he who plows should plow in hope ...”

In other words, Paul says that God did not issue a command to not muzzle the mouth of the oxen that treads out the corn simply because He had a soft spot for oxen. Paul says that such a commandment is not there for us to read and apply according to the letter. It is to be spiritually applied and not be literally enacted. (Although I am sure that God would have no objection to a farmer letting his ox help itself to the corn if he so desired!)

Paul also saw the same significance in the fixed rule, implicit in the law’s sacrificial regulations, that “they who wait at the altar are partakers with the altar” (1 Cor. 9:13).

Such apostolic comments show what a profoundly spiritual and practical significance was latent in the symbolism of the law. The bulk of the ordinances of the law, although “carnal,” were nevertheless a “figure for the time then present.” We can therefore see why God counselled Joshua: “This book of the law shall not depart from thy mouth, but you shall meditate therein day and night” (Josh. 1:8).

Countless treasures of knowledge and wisdom are buried beneath the surface of the law. But before they can be dug out, the veil which is put over the eyes through only looking at the letter of the law, must be removed, and the mind must turn to Christ and see him as the fulfilment - the one foreshadowed by it all. The prayer of the faithful will be: “Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps. 119:18). The “wondrous things” are those lessons and principles which teach us concerning the one who is called “wonderful ...” Our desire should be to perceive more prophetic meanings in the law in relation to redemption and kingdom principles in Christ. The allegorical character of the law comes as a challenge to our powers of spiritual discernment. In order to behold these “wondrous things” contained within it, we have to decipher and translate its symbols into plain language. To merely observe and apply the letter of the law is to miss the whole point. The letter “kills” but the spirit “gives life” for it leads directly into our Saviour who is “the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

FREQUENT APPEALS TO THE LAW

Our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles often appealed to the authority of the law on issues of principle, indicating that it has not been “destroyed.” The New Testament church did not discard the record of the law as being useless and of no value at all. The first five books of the Bible, written by Moses, are included among the “all Scripture” which Paul says “is given by inspiration and is profitable for teaching ... for instruction in righteousness” (2 Ti. 3:16).

The law testified to Christ - in plain testimony as well as in types and symbols and rituals. Philip therefore said to Nathanael: “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth” (Jn. 1:45). Jesus said: “Had you believed Moses, you would have believed me, for he wrote of me” (Jn. 5:46). “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, Jesus expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk. 24:27). “And he said to them: These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me” (Lk. 24:44). “For Moses truly said to the fathers, a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from your brethren, like unto me; him shall you hear in everything he tells you” (Acts 3:22. 7:37).

The apostle Paul always appealed to the authority of “the law” (i.e. the first five books written by Moses) when preaching Christ:

“Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue to this day, witnessing to both small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come ...” (Acts 26:22). “He expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from early morning until evening” (Acts 28:23).

When the Pharisees accused the disciples of Jesus of breaking the Sabbath because they were plucking ears of corn, Jesus defended himself and them by appealing to the authority of the law which allowed the priests to profane the Sabbath by doing work (Matt. 12). When the Saducees tried to belittle Jesus’ teaching on the resurrection, he upheld his teaching by appealing to a statement in Moses’ writings (Mk. 12:18-27). When a young man asked Jesus what must be done to inherit life, Jesus replied: “What is written in the law?” (Lk. 10:26). On another occasion he said: “It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one who bears witness of myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness of me” (Jn. 8:17-18). Again: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up” (Jn. 3:14).

Jesus clearly had a profound respect for the law. He came, not to destroy it but to fulfil it. He said: “Always treat others as you would like them to treat you, for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12). He

emphasized that the greatest commandment in the law must be kept, namely: to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ... and to love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:36-39). “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (v40). He taught that the weightier matters of the law are “judgement, mercy, and faith” and made it clear that “these ought to be done” (Matt. 23:23).

Paul makes the point in Rom. 3:21 that “the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.” That is: the law itself gave testimony to the righteousness that God would impute by faith through Christ without the works of the law. In preaching this righteousness proclaimed in the law, Paul did not “make void the law,” but rather, as he writes: “we establish the law” (Rom. 3:31). Therefore, he again writes: “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22); i.e. “in my spirit” and not according to the letter.

Other comments in Paul’s writings show what a profoundly spiritual and practical significance was latent in the symbolism of the law. This is particularly apparent in the epistle to the Hebrews where it is pointed out that the tabernacle and its furniture, along with the Levitical priesthood and its accompanying service and ritual, all pointed to Christ. Reading and studying the law with this in mind can lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Christ and his ministry as prophet, priest and king.

Paul was quick to quote the law as an authority when dealing with certain practical situations. We have seen how he referred to the commandment in the law with regard to not muzzling the mouth of the oxen that tread out the corn. He quoted it to support a spiritual principle that should operate in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 9). In 1 Cor. 7:39 he says: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives ...” (Both the law of Moses and the “law of Christ” require this; see Mk. 10:12). And, in 1 Cor. 14:34 Paul says women are not permitted to speak in the church, but are commanded to be under obedience “as also says the law.” In Rom. 10:19 Paul quotes Deu. 32:21 to show that Moses spoke about God’s call of the Gentiles provoking the Jews to jealousy. Finally, Rev. 15:3 informs us that not only will the saints sing “the song of the lamb,” but also “the song of Moses.” (See Ex. 15 and apply it spiritually to the great salvation and deliverance effected by Christ).

It should be clear from these examples that, although Jesus Christ came to “fulfil” the law, he by no means destroyed it. It remains as an eternal valid witness to the eternal purpose of the Father in His son, and can teach us, through plain statements, types, symbols and rituals, many glorious principles pertaining to the salvation and kingdom of our Saviour.

In concluding this section, it should hardly be necessary to point out that the word “law” is used with great latitude in Scripture. It has various applications and by no means always and only refers to one particular

thing.

Generally speaking, it refers to the whole law of Moses, i.e. all the moral and ceremonial commandments, embracing the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

But sometimes as we have seen in this study, the word “law” or more correctly, “the works of the law,” refers specifically to the ritual or ceremonial aspects which were a shadow of Christ, and which have been done away in him.

In Jn. 10:34 and 15:25 “the law” refers to the Psalms.

In 1 Cor. 14:21 “the law” refers to the writings of the prophet Isaiah.

In Rom. 3:27 and 7:21 “law” simply means principle, and is so translated by some modern versions. Rom. 8:2 refers to “the law of sin and death” and here again the word “law” really signifies “principle.”

So then, each time we come across the word “law” in Scripture, it is important to look at it carefully in its context in order that we might correctly discern its proper significance. Failure to do this can result in concluding that references to us not being under the law, means we no longer have to observe moral commandments such as not committing adultery, murder, theft etc.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN TABLETS OF STONE AND HANDWRITING

The Seventh Day Adventists and others believe that “the Law” which was “done away” in Christ was only that which Moses wrote (“the handwriting of ordinances,”) and not that which was written on stone by the finger of God (i.e. the decalogue, or the ten commandments). It is believed that only what Moses wrote constituted the “old covenant” which has been abolished, and that what the finger of God wrote on the tablets of stone constitutes in principle God’s eternal and immutable law. It is believed that “the handwriting of ordinances” solely consisted of ceremonial commandments, and the tablets of stone solely consisted of moral commandments. It is therefore believed that “the handwriting of ordinances” constituted “the law of Moses” which brought bondage and death, and has been done away, and that the tablets of stone constituted “the law of the Lord” which brings life and freedom, and never passes away. And, seeing that the Sabbath law is included among the commandments on the tablets of stone, it is therefore concluded that observance of the Sabbath day is still binding on the people of God. And once it is believed that observance of this holy day is still necessary, it is not difficult to conclude that other holy days should be observed also.

Now, there is no doubt that the law given to Israel consisted of both moral and ceremonial commandments, but there is no justification for treating them as two separate laws. Scripture never makes such a distinction or imposes such a division. The law, although consisting of moral and ceremonial commandments, was nevertheless ONE law - one undivided whole. Both the moral and ceremonial aspects had to be combined together to make up the full and complete law. The moment one part was taken away or separated from the other, the law became incomplete.

The Lord was the source and originator of the whole law - both moral and ceremonial aspects. The whole lot was His law. Moses was merely the channel through which it was delivered, and in this sense only, it is sometimes referred to as if it was his law.

In Scripture, the terms “law of the Lord” and “law of Moses” are used synonymously, showing that they are one and the same law. Sometimes ceremonial laws are called “the law of the Lord,” and the ten commandments are sometimes referred to as “the law of Moses.” The terms are used interchangeably. Here are some examples:

In Num. 31:21 the ordinance of “the law which THE LORD commanded Moses” is stated concerning the men who had returned from battle with the spoils of war. “The law which the Lord commanded Moses” is not, therefore, an expression used exclusively for the decalogue. The passage also indicates that “the law” cannot be divided between “ceremonial” and “moral” aspects, since the above instructions regarding war had a moral intent.

God's decree forbidding marriage with the alien is not specifically indicated in the decalogue, but it is written in the "book of the law of Moses" (Josh. 23:6, 12) and likewise contains a moral intent.

In 1 Chr. 16:40 we read about the priests offering burnt offerings to the Lord upon the altar of burnt offering continually morning and evening, "to do according to all that is written in the law of the Lord." The decalogue contains no commandments to offer animal sacrifices yet such commandments are clearly referred to here as "the law of the Lord."

In 2 Chr. 31:3 we read about Hezekiah appointing "the king's portion of his substance for the burnt offerings ... for the Sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the Lord." This passage indicates that "the law of the Lord" includes aspects from both the tablets of stone (Sabbath) and the "handwriting of ordinances" (burnt offerings and feasts). All together, constitute "the law of the Lord."

In 2 Chr. 34:21 "the words of the book" are referred to as "the Word of the Lord." And in 2 Chr. 35:12 and 26 "the book of Moses" is used interchangeably with "the law of the Lord." Ez. 7:6 refers to "the law of Moses which the Lord God of Israel had given."

Neh. 10:28-34 refers to "God's law which was given through Moses" and speaks of it as "the commandments of the Lord our God" "written in the law." From this it is clear that everything Moses wrote in the law was "God's law."

Lk. 2:22 says of Mary: "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished ..." This is clearly a reference to a ceremony, and it is said to be "according to the law of Moses." But verse 23 also refers to a ceremony "written in the law of the Lord": "They brought him (Jesus) to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord as it is written in the law of the Lord." That formal presentation of the infant Jesus to God was a ceremony equally with the purification ceremony (Lev. 12:1-8. Ex. 13:2). We must therefore conclude that the portion of the law which prescribed ceremonial observances was as much part of the "law of the Lord" as were portions relating to moral conduct. This is further confirmed by Lk. 2:39: "And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to their own city Nazareth."

Our Lord Jesus, whose knowledge and authority cannot be questioned, attributed the fifth commandment of the decalogue to Moses. He also joined with it as of equal authority the penalty, which is not contained in the fifth commandment itself: "Full well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your own tradition, for Moses said, honour thy father and thy mother, and whoever curses father and mother let him die the death." Moses said both of these things, and both

were equally the commandment of God, though one was included in the ten and one was not. To stone a man to death was a ceremonial and not a moral action. A few sentences further on, Jesus called what Moses had said “the Word of God” (Mk. 7:9-13).

The same might be said of the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments. No penalty was directly attached. But elsewhere Moses gave very explicit commands regarding the punishment of murderers, thieves and other transgressors. These penalties were as much part of God’s law as were the commands and prohibitions of the decalogue (Lev. 6:1-6. Ex. 21:12-14. 22:1-4. Num. 35. Deu. 19 etc).

It should be remembered that though God wrote the ten commandments on the two tablets of stone, He gave them to Moses to preserve. Moses was not only the lawgiver, but also the custodian of the law and the executor of it for we read that Moses judged Israel for forty years. The term “Moses’ law” is therefore a proper term designating the ten commandments and the other commandments that were written in a book (Deu. 1:3. 8:2. 29:6. Acts 7:35-36).

WHY THE TABLES OF STONE?

If all the law had equal authority, it may be asked why the ten commandments were verbally proclaimed and written on stone by God, and none of the other commandments.

To answer this it is important to recall the circumstances when God verbally proclaimed the decalogue. Deu. 5:22 says “These words (i.e. the ten commandments) the Lord spake to all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice, AND HE ADDED NO MORE. And He wrote them in two tables of stone ...”

The reason why God “added no more” is given in the following verses and is confirmed in Ex. 20:18-. The people were so terrified at hearing God’s voice that they requested to be spared from having to hear the remainder of what He had to tell them. So they asked Moses to approach the Lord and hear the rest of what He had to say and then convey it to them. **HAD THE PEOPLE NOT BEEN SO AFRAID, AND NOT ASKED GOD TO STOP SPEAKING, HE WOULD HAVE CARRIED ON AND PROCLAIMED THE WHOLE LAW.** Therefore, the statement “He added no more” means that God ceased from verbally expressing the law, but He added much more, using the voice of Moses of which the people were not afraid.

Why then, did God write only the ten commandments on the tablets of stone and not the others? There were several reasons. First - God had given the Israelites the honour of speaking to them in a voice from

heaven, so the writing of those words on stone tablets as a permanent record was in the nature of a memorial or souvenir of the wonder event. It was also a confirmation of the heavenly origin of the whole arrangement entered into with the Israelites. The commandments on the stone tablets which were placed in the ark of the covenant were no more valid or authentic or binding than those written in a book that were never placed inside the ark. The same applies to the pot of manna that was placed in the ark. It was simply there as a reminder or memorial of the wonder event of God providing food from heaven during the wilderness journey. The little bit of manna in the pot represented the whole lot that God had given over a 40 year period. The manna in the pot was no more authentic or genuine than the rest which never found its way into the ark.

Another reason for only placing the ten commandments on stone is that it would have been too cumbersome to place the whole law on tablets of stone. It was fitting and practical to place the bulk of it in a book or scroll.

The ten commandments really formed an epitome - the core of God's whole covenant with Israel. Most of the other commandments are just an amplification of these ten. Throughout the rest of the law which Moses wrote down, the ten commandments are reiterated, reinforced and amplified, showing the inseparable connection between the two.

The ten commandments were among the simplest that could be framed. From them, the people could see at a glance the basic demands required by God.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WERE PART OF THE OLD COVENANT

It should now be pointed out that Scripture makes it very clear that the ten commandments were part of the "old" covenant. They were not excluded from the covenant which God made with Israel. It is impossible to restrict the old covenant to only what Moses wrote. "The Lord said to Moses: Write these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. And He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments" (Ex 34:28). God "declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even ten commandments" (Deu. 4:13). In Deu. 5 the ten commandments are enumerated and are referred to as "the covenant" which God made with Israel. Also see 1 Kng. 8:9, 21. Deu. 9:9-15.

Heb. 9:1 refers to the "first covenant" with its "ordinances" (ceremonial). And v4 links the ten commandments with it, describing them as "the tables of the covenant." Heb. 8:7 teaches that this

covenant was not faultless, and verse 13 declares it was “ready to vanish away.” Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the Mosaic covenant included the ten commandments.

It should also be pointed out that the “handwriting of ordinances” did not by any means solely consist of ceremonial commandments. All of the moral commandments on the stone tablets are repeated and reinforced and amplified in the handwriting of ordinances. There are countless references to moral commandments in Moses’ writings. There are so many and they are so obvious that it is quite unnecessary to quote them. It would be gross ignorance that would cause anyone to assert that Moses’ writings only consisted of ceremonial commandments.

Had the ten commandments and other moral statutes not been written in a book, the generations succeeding Moses would not have been instructed in those things, for no one was allowed to approach the ark of the covenant to read them as written on the tables of stone. So the Sabbath law, although fourth among the ten on the stone tablet, is referred to in Col. 2:14-16 as being part of the “handwriting of ordinances.” Moses refers to it many times in his writings.

In actual fact, Moses wrote down the Sabbath commandment in a book even before God wrote it on a stone tablet. Consider the following sequence:

Ex. 20:1-17 records how God proclaimed the ten commandments to Israel. Ex. 20:18-20 reveals that God would have proclaimed the rest but didn’t because of the people’s request not to. Ex. 20:21-24:3 explains how Moses went up to the mount to receive the “judgements” (22:1) which included the Sabbath (23:12). Ex. 24:3-8 then tells us that Moses descended from the mount and recounted “all the words of the Lord” (i.e. the ten commandments) and all the “judgements” (i.e. the other commandments of 20:21-23:33). He then wrote them in a book (Ex. 24:4, 7) which constituted God’s “covenant” with Israel (v7-8). The ten commandments were not inscribed on stone until 40 days later (Ex. 24:9-18)!

It is significant to note that the two most comprehensive moral commandments of greatest importance were not written on the tables of stone! They are found in Deu. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” And, “thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” These commandments, which were not included among the 10, were regarded by Jesus as being the most important of all (Matt. 22:36-40).

It is rather strange to note that some groups like the Seventh Day Adventists who are quick to accept that the ceremonial laws have been done away in Christ, still insist that the law of tithing is still binding, and that to withhold the tithe is sin. But the law to tithe was not one of the ten;

it fits into the category of the “handwriting of ordinances.” As far as the law was concerned, the tithe had to be paid to the Levitical priesthood, and no one was entitled to the tithe unless they could trace their genealogy back to Levi.

NOT ALL OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WERE OF A MORAL NATURE

It should also be pointed out that it is not correct to regard all 10 of the ten commandments as being of a moral nature. The Sabbath law itself, like the monthly and annual holy days, was clearly of a more ceremonial nature. For this reason it is included with the feasts and new moons in Col. 2:16. As we have seen, the New Testament teaches that Christians are not obliged to keep these holy days which were given to the Jewish people.

The fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath is not the only one in the decalogue which is no longer binding. The third commandment concerning not taking the name of the Lord in vain is also not binding on Christians. It relates to false swearing - using the Lord’s name falsely when making an oath. This no longer applies to Christians because Jesus clearly taught us to “Swear not at all” (Matt. 5:33-37).

Attention should also be drawn to the fact that the ten commandments on the stone tablets did not bring freedom and life. The old covenant, of which the ten commandments formed a part as we have seen, lead to “bondage” as we read in Gal. 4:24.

In 2 Cor. 3:7 Paul refers to the ten commandments as “the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones.” And in v9 he refers to it as the “ministration of condemnation” which has been “done away.” From this it is evident that the commandments on stone, as well as the handwriting of ordinances brought condemnation and death.

2 Cor. 3:6 refers to the ten commandments as “the letter” which “killeth.” The word “letter” comes from the Greek word “gramma” which means “a writing” - “something written.” In other words, this teaches that the ten commandments were, as we read in v7, “written (gramma i.e. lit. “in letters”) and engraven in stones.”

The ten commandments were “written” “with ink” as well as chiselled “in tables of stone” (2 Cor. 3:3), because as we have seen, they were included in Moses’ writings. They therefore formed part of that which Scripture designates “the letter.”

(Incidentally, both the moral and ceremonial commandments were all written together eventually on stone. See Deu. 27:1-8. Josh. 8:32. Cp. Deu. 11:20).

CHRIST RE-AFFIRMED EIGHT OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Now, just because the “old covenant” has been superseded by a “new covenant,” it does not therefore necessarily follow that not one single statute from the old should be reaffirmed or be included in the new. It is quite evident, as we have seen, that the new covenant reaffirms certain commandments from the old. For instance, Christ and the New Testament writers reaffirmed 8 of the 10 commandments that were in the decalogue:

1st (Ex. 20:3): Matt. 4:10. Mk. 12:29. 1 Jn. 5:21. Eph. 4:6. 1 Cor. 8:5-6. Matt. 19:17.

2nd (Ex. 20:4-6): 1 Cor. 10:14. Rom. 1:25. 1 Jn. 5:21. Gal. 5:20. Eph. 5:5.

3rd (Ex. 20:7): No longer applicable: Matt. 5:34-35. Jam. 5:12.

4th (Ex. 20:8-11): Abolished: Col. 2:16-17. Rom. 14:5. Gal. 4:9-11. Acts 20:7.

5th (Ex. 20:12): Eph. 6:1-2. Col. 3:20.

6th (Ex. 20:13): Matt. 5:21-22. Rom. 13:9. 1 Jn. 3:15. Gal. 5:21. 1 Pet. 4:15.

7th (Ex. 20:14): Matt. 5:27-28. Heb. 13:4. 1 Cor. 6:9-10. Rom. 13:9. Gal. 5:19.

8th (Ex. 20:15): Rom. 2:21. 13:9. 1 Cor. 6:10. Eph. 4:28.

9th (Ex. 20:16): Rom. 13:9. Eph. 4:25, 31. Col. 3:9. 1 Tim. 3:8-11. 2 Tim. 3:3.

10th (Ex. 20:17): Rom. 7:7. Eph. 5:3. Col. 3:5. Rom. 13:9. Lk. 12:15.

It is clear then, that eight of the ten commandments written on the tablets of stone, have been reaffirmed and incorporated within the new covenant, which God inscribes on the fleshly tablets of the heart by His Spirit as it ministers the love of Christ. Likewise, as already pointed out, other commandments among the “handwriting of ordinances” have also been reaffirmed in the new covenant.

Very rarely, even in human legal operations, does a new covenant or constitution not contain aspects and features of the one it supersedes.

Let me give an example: Suppose a road code consisted of the following rules: (1) Keep left. (2) Give way to your right. (3) Must not exceed 80 kilometres per hour. (4) You must give your vehicle a rest every Saturday. (5) Before using your vehicle on a holiday, you must wash it thoroughly and nugget the tyres. (6) The slightest violation of any of these rules will incur the death penalty.

Now, supposing a new road code was produced with these rules: (1) Keep left. (2) Give way to the right. (3) Must not exceed 80 kilometres.

Now, just because the new code reaffirms some of the rules contained in the old code, it would be foolish to conclude that we therefore have to

keep all the other rules associated with them in the old code. The same applies to a new telephone directory. Being new, it will dismiss some old names but also incorporate old names as well as new.

So then, just because the new covenant reaffirms some of the commandments in the old covenant, this in no way gives us authority to assume that we should keep others like the Sabbath etc that are never reaffirmed.

One will search the New Testament in vain searching for a law instructing Sabbath observance. As we have seen, 8 of the 10 are clearly reaffirmed a number of times in the new Testament, but the Sabbath law is not reaffirmed on one single occasion. If it is still necessary to keep the Sabbath law, why was it not reaffirmed and others were? Such an omission is very significant indeed.

SABBATH NOT NECESSARY FOR SALVATION

In Matt. 19:16-23 we read of an interview with one who asked Jesus what was necessary to gain eternal life. One would have thought that if the seventh day Sabbath was so necessary to keep, Jesus would have mentioned it. Significantly enough, he drew attention to the moral commandments and never mentioned the Sabbath. True, he did not mention all the commandments, but doubtless he mentioned the most important. Instead of the Sabbath He referred to the commands against murder, adultery, theft, perjury, neglect of parents and lack of thought for one's neighbour, and added these words: "If thou wilt be perfect ... give to the poor." So it logically follows from this that the man could obtain perfection without keeping the Sabbath.

The New Testament clearly does not encourage the observance of holy days as under the law. It exhorts us to take up the cross "daily" and rest from our own works of the flesh, regarding every day as a day unto the Lord. Such daily dedication and manifestation of the love of Christ to our neighbour constitutes the "sign" to all nations that we are the people of God. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

So then, the removal of the old code does not mean the removal of every single item it contained. If a motorist was accused of breaking the law because he was driving a vehicle on a Saturday, he would point out that the old code had been done away and he was no longer under it. But, in saying this, he would not mean that he no longer had any rules to keep, neither would he mean that every single rule in the old code no longer applied. He would know that there are certain basic principles that never change, and that they had been reaffirmed in the new code.

The same applies to the Christian. When accused of not keeping the

Sabbath, he points out that the old covenant has passed away and he is no longer under it. But he does not mean that he no longer has any commandments to observe. He knows that certain commandments in the old covenant have been reaffirmed in the new, and that he is under an obligation to keep them.

Imagine how foolish it would be for a motorist to say to an officer who stopped him for exceeding the speed limit: "I'm not under the old code anymore." Such blatant ignorance would not prevent him from getting a heavy fine! There are many Christians today who manifest this kind of foolishness. Just because they are not under an obligation to keep the ritual and ceremonial laws in the old covenant, they imagine they have no commandments at all to keep. The Bible clearly teaches that we are under the "law of Christ," and it makes some heavy demands!

THE LAW OF CHRIST IS MORE DEMANDING THAN THE LAW OF MOSES.

In actual fact, the ceremonial laws of Moses were easier to keep than the "law of Christ." Ritual and ceremony is merely physical action which can be performed mechanically without the heart or affections or conscience being involved. Ceremony is merely outward action. Jesus showed the inadequacy of the law in his sermon on the mount. He applied a much more searching test. He said it was not good enough to merely not kill a man, but went on to show that where true love operates, there won't even be angry thoughts in the heart. Jesus' law is the principle of love - the strongest principle that exists when properly exercised and applied. The law merely dealt with outward action, but Jesus got right down to the heart. His was a higher law, for instead of seeking to "get even" for offences, he taught that the other cheek should be turned. (Also Matt. 5:21-48).

So then, while it is true that the old covenant has been done away, and we are no longer under obligation to keep its elaborate system of ritual and ceremony, the basic moral commandments that it contained have been reaffirmed in the new covenant and Christians are under an obligation to have them inscribed deeply upon the fleshly tablets of the heart.

"But," someone might say, "if these moral commandments ministered condemnation and death as 2 Cor. 3 states, why is it that they have been reaffirmed in the new covenant?" The answer is simply this: They ministered death because of the relationship in which they were placed in the Mosaic covenant. In the old Mosaic covenant they were accompanied by the words: "Cursed is everyone who does not at all times obey all things in the book of the law" (Deu. 27:26. Gal. 3:10). Seeing

that it was impossible, due to the weakness of the flesh, for anyone to render total obedience to the law, everyone sooner or later came under its death penalty. Thus, even the best commandments could only minister condemnation and death due to the strict legal context and terms in which they were placed. In this covenant therefore, there was no hope of eternal life, but only the bondage of curse, fear and death.

The terms however of the new covenant, are entirely different, resulting in the “law of Christ” being the “perfect law of liberty.” This doesn’t mean that Christians are free to do as they please, but rather that when they fall short of divine standards, they are not immediately condemned and consigned to death. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins -” (1 Jn. 2:1-2). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9). On what basis? Certainly not on the basis of the works of the law, but GRACE! When genuine repentance and confession takes place, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin and eternal life remains secure. “There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”!

So then, when we say we are not under law, we do not mean that we have no commandments to keep, but that we are under a legislation (“law of Christ”) which does not curse and condemn the moment we make a slip. It is a legislation that operates on the basis of grace - a legislation, therefore, which is not burdensome and grievous to bear. As Jesus said: “Come unto me ... for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light ... and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28-30). The believer finds his true Sabbath in a day to day walk with Jesus!

The Jew toiled to obtain favour with God by works of law and multiplied rules of tithing and fasting, various washings, and ritual observances. Such was a vain labour - a “burden” which they were not able to bear. But in Jesus Christ there is rest from such burdens for salvation is by grace.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL BUT NOT ALWAYS EXPEDIENT

In this chapter I want to focus on examples of God’s grace overruling and triumphing over law, demonstrating that He is not legalistic i.e. He does not always insist on keeping to the letter of the law.

“Legalistic” by definition is one who always demands and insists on strict literal adherence to rules and regulations, no matter how minor, trivial or inconsequential they are, and irrespective of circumstances and conditions. The legalistic spirit is more concerned about the letter of the law than the spirit of the law. That is, it is more concerned about the precise terms and minor details (the “jots and tittles”) than the good intentions of the law. A legalistic person cannot see past the law; everything is either black or white.

Law of course is good and necessary, particularly for the lawless. Without laws to control behaviour, there would be disorder and chaos. But one hundred percent focus on law and trying to please God by law, can result in a legalistic spirit, as in the case of the Pharisees who made Jesus angry.

The Pharisees were the strictest sect among the Jews. They originated in the days of the Maccabees when Greek philosophy and customs were influencing the Jews. To counter this, the Pharisees insisted on strict adherence and conformity to the law of Moses and were intolerant of deviation and compromise. There is no doubt that their intentions were good, but as the saying goes: “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” In striving for perfection, i.e. a perfect obedience of the law, they were intolerant of imperfections, yet ended up with imperfect man made traditions which Jesus said were “vain,” and which neutralized the Word of God. They became over righteous (self righteous), blind to their own faults and failings. Jesus called them “hypocrites,” because they were preoccupied with “specks” in people’s eyes and oblivious to the “beams” in their own eyes.

The quest for perfection is good and encouraged by the Word of God, but when grace is lacking, it can lead to intolerance of imperfection and a proud, self righteous critical spirit. We are warned in Ecc. 7:16 to “be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself overwise; why should you destroy yourself?” That is, you can overdo trying to always be right and appear righteous. Verse 20 goes on to say: “Truly, there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” i.e. we are all imperfect so shouldn’t despise those who are. “If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and His Word is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:10).

A LEGALISTIC ATTITUDE OPERATES LIKE THE LAW

As we have seen in this study, salvation by law required one hundred percent conformity, i.e. one hundred percent obedience. Salvation by law could only be gained by never sinning. To transgress just one commandment constituted sin which incurred death. The law disregarded ninety nine percent compliance and condemned on the basis of the one percent failure.

A legalistic attitude operates like the law. It disregards the ninety nine percent good and criticizes and condemns on the basis of the one percent failure. Untold good can be done to a legalistic person, but make one mistake or error of judgement, and they will criticize and condemn you. Like the Pharisees, a legalistic person is a perfectionist who is intolerant of weakness, mistakes, and imperfection, but blind to their own. In other words, hypocrites like the Pharisees. Friendship and fellowship is impossible unless you always do things their way and jump to their tune. They require one hundred percent conformity to their way. Their motto is “my way or the highway.” Like the law, there is no flexibility but total rigidity.

The legalistic attitude confuses flexibility with compromise. It can't make a distinction. It can't make provision or adjustments for extenuating circumstances. It is not interested or concerned about what is most expedient or beneficial. All it can see is the letter of the law. It is in a strait jacket; hide-bound by red tape. It is like blinkers on a horse.

The legalistic spirit would object to a non-Jew becoming as a Jew to win the Jews. It would see this as having double standards! It would see the actions of Paul circumcising Timothy, vowing vows, paying purification expenses, as a cowardly compromise of the Christian faith. When in Rome the legalistic spirit cannot do as the Romans do.

Some statements of faith (creeds) of some churches are legalistic. They operate like the law i.e. what the law was to legalistic Jews, the statement of faith has become to some churches. Get one clause wrong and you cannot qualify for baptism or salvation, even though the clause might be of an academic nature that does not affect the basic issues governing salvation and Christian character. There are of course, vital fundamental clauses in a statement of faith which must be believed and not compromised to qualify for salvation, and it is incumbent on a church to know the difference.

The Bible says: “All things are lawful” i.e. there are laws ordained and approved by God, governing all things. But the statement goes on to say: “But all things are not expedient: All things are lawful, but not all things edify” (1 Cor. 10:23. 6:12) i.e. it's not always beneficial to insist that the letter of the law be applied. Rigid adherence to the letter of the law does not always build up and benefit spiritually and improve morally.

Quite the opposite! Sometimes a rigid application (i.e. legalistic approach) in some situations can have a stifling, strangling and suffocating effect.

2 Cor. 3:6: “The letter (of the law) kills, but the spirit gives life” i.e. the enforcement of the letter of the law kills, but the spirit (grace) gives life. This is obvious in a general sense inasmuch as sin is transgression of the law, and the wages of sin is death. And because no one can keep the law and sins, all die. So the law kills if it is rigidly applied! But fortunately the grace of God comes to the rescue.

EXAMPLES OF LAW NOT BEING EXPEDIENT

An example of law not being expedient (beneficial) and of it killing if rigidly applied is in Esther 4:16: “I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish I perish.” Esther was a Jewess married to the king of Persia and needed to see him about a law he had signed, giving permission for her Jewish people to be killed throughout his kingdom on a certain day. But it was against the Persian law to approach the throne unless summoned or invited. So Esther went against the law and approached the king because the law in this case was not expedient. The letter of the law would have resulted in innocent people being killed. Not only that, but it was contrary to the law of the Persians to revoke or cancel a law once it was made. However, because the king loved his wife Esther, he showed grace towards her and allowed her to approach him without being summoned, and set in motion a procedure which negated the law which commanded death and saved the Jews. Grace is practical!

The king realized that it was not expedient to insist on the letter of the law being applied. Sometimes, due to extenuating circumstances, it is necessary to overrule law, but this does not necessarily make a person a law breaker. Let me give some other examples that demonstrate the principle that “all things are lawful, but not all things are expedient.”

1. Speed limits on the road are good laws but when police or traffic officers, ambulance drivers, or fire engines exceed the speed limit to save life or prevent death and destruction they cannot be accused of being law breakers! In such cases it is not expedient to keep to the law. It has to be broken to produce good. To keep to the letter of the law by driving within the speed limit would be detrimental not beneficial. They do not in fact “break” the law. They have special exemption to operate above the law. Imagine someone accusing them of breaking the law!

2. It is a good law which forbids people from shooting and killing one another. But when the police shoot and kill someone to protect and defend society, they are not regarded as murderers. Neither are the men who are recruited to be soldiers to go out and kill on the battle field.

3. When law enforcement officers break into someone's house to seize harmful drugs or dangerous goods, they are not regarded as thieves. It would not be expedient to not do it!

4. When the S.I.S. spies on someone's house or bugs it, they can't be accused of being peeping toms or violators of privacy. No! Of course not. Law enforcement agencies are able to overrule law when it is done in the interest of and for the good of society. Sometimes laws have to be broken to enforce the law and make people respect and obey it.

The fact of the matter is that important as law is, it has its limitations, even in the divine scheme of things. Because of this it is not only Persian kings and secular law enforcement officers who have overruled law, but God Himself sometimes overrules His laws due to it not being expedient to insist on adherence. To keep to the letter of the law on some occasions would have resulted in someone being killed when it was more expedient for them to remain alive. On such occasions the grace of God overruled and triumphed over law and the judgement and condemnation of law. Take the case of David for example: He committed adultery and murder. Before he repented he was inflicted with a deadly sickness and was on his death bed. But when he repented, God forgave him and he recovered. But he reaped a lot of trouble during the rest of his life as a result of his sins. Although the law demanded his death, God clearly did not regard it as expedient, so He overruled it. Grace triumphed over law. Mercy rejoiced over judgement!

In John 8, scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus caught in the act of adultery and said: "Moses in the law commanded us that such a person should be stoned, what do you say?" Even before we read Jesus' response we know from John 1:17 what it will be: "For the law came through Moses, but grace and truth through Jesus Christ." And so it was that Jesus allowed grace to triumph over law. He refused to condemn the woman but warned her to "go and sin no more." On another occasion he warned a man he had ministered grace to saying: "... sin no more lest a worse thing happen to you" (Jn. 5:14). Jesus didn't condone sin. In these examples we see the truth of John 3:17 exemplified: "For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." How? By grace which does not condemn but forgives.

Coming back to David, there was another incident in his life which illustrated the truth that "all things are lawful but all things are not expedient." It is recorded in Mark 2:23-28. As a result of Jesus' disciples plucking ears of corn in a field on the Sabbath day, the Pharisees said to Jesus: "Look, why are they doing on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful?" Jesus replied: "Have you not read what David did when he and those with him were hungry and had need of something to eat? How he

went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest and ate the bread offered to God, which is not lawful to eat except by the priests. But David ate it and even gave it to his men.” David needed food. He was in a desperate situation, so the practical grace of God overruled the law!

In the book of Ruth, God’s law required Israelites to only marry fellow Israelites who shared the same Hebrew faith. But Ruth being a Gentile did not share this faith when she married Naomi’s Jewish son in Moab. She did not make a commitment for Israel’s God to be her God and Israel’s people to be her people until later after her husband’s death.

However, although Naomi’s sons married outside the faith, Naomi still showed love toward their wives and cared for them and clearly won their affection and respect, and was instrumental in converting Ruth. Had Naomi been legalistic and refused to show grace, Ruth would not have wanted to leave her own mother and family behind in Moab and follow Naomi to Israel and embrace the Hebrew faith! A legalistic approach would have repelled Ruth and alienated her. But love and grace attracts and endears.

So in the event of a son or daughter marrying someone outside the faith, don’t treat them as a second class citizen or as an inferior. Don’t allow self righteousness to portray a “holier than thou” attitude, making them feel rejected - unloved - unwanted. “Love is the key to everything you do,” and grace is love in action, which is the “law” of Christ - the royal law.

According to the law that God gave Israel, Moabites were not allowed to enter the congregation of Israel until the tenth generation. But when Ruth accompanied Naomi back to Israel, she was received and accepted by the Israelites and married an Israelite, Boaz. Moreover she became an ancestor of David and Jesus as is evident by the reference to Boaz’ son in the holy genealogical line of Jesus in Lk. 3:32.

What an amazing overruling of law and demonstration of grace that was. God didn’t only allow His law to be overruled which forbade fellowship with a Moabite, but actually allowed a Moabite to marry an Israelite and be part of the holy ancestral line of His son Jesus.

This wasn’t the first or last time that an Israelite married a non Israelite; and in some cases the non Israelite did not embrace the Hebrew faith. For example: Joseph married an Egyptian. Moses married an Ethiopian. Rahab a Canaanite married an Israelite. Samson married a Philistine. (It was of the Lord). Esther married a pagan Persian king. (Also of the Lord).

In each of these cases God allowed it, and in some cases ordained it even though from a legalistic point of view, it was contrary to the law. And in the event of anyone being critical and judgmental about it, as did Aaron and Miriam in relation to Moses’ Ethiopian wife, God sternly

reprimanded them.

In Num. 9:9-12 we see how God's grace made allowance under the law for man's weakness. If a man could not keep the Passover in the first month due to uncleanness or being abroad in some other country, he could keep it in the second month. The law was not rigid or legalistic in this particular matter. It did not lay down the law and say: "If you don't keep the Passover in the first month you can't keep it at all." That would be typical of a harsh legalistic spirit.

GOD'S GRACE IN HEZEKIAH'S DAY

In 2 Chr. 30 we read that during the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, he arranged to celebrate the Passover in the second month due to priests not being ritually clean in the first month. He also sent an invitation to all the tribes in northern Israel who had departed from God's laws and became apostate long before, and his invitation was not conditional on passing a theological test first. Some were willing to come down to Jerusalem and keep the Passover and others mocked the messengers and ridiculed the invitation.

But those who came were ceremonially unclean which meant they would be performing the ritual improperly i.e. not according to the law. But king Hezekiah didn't say: "Tough luck folks, you can't keep the Passover with us. You may as well go back home." No! He believed in the grace of God which triumphs over law. He prayed: "O Lord, the God of our ancestors, in your goodness (grace) forgive those who are worshipping you with all their heart, even though they are not ritually clean (i.e. not conformed to the law). The Lord answered Hezekiah's prayer; He forgave the people and did not harm them." They couldn't put the Passover off until the second month. They had already done that! So, because God chose not to be legalistic and show grace, He allowed something that was contrary to His law. He allowed grace to triumph over law.

You could relate this to someone who is genuinely and sincerely seeking the Lord, who comes to a church meeting during which we have the Passover (communion). But because he comes from an apostate church and has not been ceremonially purified, i.e properly baptized, would the grace of God allow him to partake? Would Hezekiah's response be acceptable? It was to God!

Today there are people who are seeking the Lord who want to know and obey Him, but who have been misinformed and are ignorant of various issues. If they have been drawn to us and are willing to learn the right way, should they be denied the Passover and fellowship in the meantime? Jesus said: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy

laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” The Jews Jesus invited to come to him had been taught false teaching by apostate leaders. But Jesus didn’t say: “Go away and learn the truth, then come to me and have fellowship” (which is what being yoked represents). No! He said: “Come to me and have fellowship and learn.” Jesus was willing to have fellowship with people from apostate backgrounds on the condition they were willing to learn what he taught.

Hezekiah’s days were days of restoration. It was a transition period from apostasy to the truth. Much error had to be corrected and allowances had to be made. Grace was vital for it to be successful. A legalistic spirit would have been fatal - a disaster.

Imagine the reaction of those from northern Israel, having arrived at the Lord’s table in Jerusalem, being told they were not good enough to partake. The result would be that they would be offended and never come back and never come to a knowledge of the truth. Such can be the result of a legalistic handling of the truth. Truly, “all things are lawful, but not all things are expedient.” “The letter of the law (i.e. a rigid inflexible application) kills, but the spirit (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, grace) gives life.” 1 Tim. 1:8: “The law is good if a man use it lawfully” i.e. legitimately according to the rules and principles of grace.

Coming back to 2 Chr. 30: The whole assembly decided to extend the Passover celebrations for another seven days and did it with gladness and rejoicing. But you could imagine the legalistic response to this: “No! I don’t agree with this. The law says we should only keep the feast seven days not fourteen. We should stick to the law and go home.” How would we react if it was suggested one Sunday that we extend the church meeting twice as long as usual, or if it went 30 minutes longer? The clock watchers would gnash their teeth!

Clock watchers are legalistic, for law is regimental. Legalism tries to regiment everything. But you cannot regiment the Spirit. Any attempt to do so results in the Spirit flying out the window! Here is the challenge: If we find a couple of hours together at a meeting irksome, how are we going to handle eternity together?

GRACE SHOWN TOWARDS NAAMAN

In 2 Kng. 5 we read about Naaman, Captain of the army of Syria, Israel’s enemy. He was a leper and he had an Israeli servant who told him that a prophet in Israel named Elisha would be able to heal him. So he went down to Israel to see Elisha who told him to dip himself in the river Jordan seven times, which he reluctantly did and was healed. Elisha did not insist that Naaman firstly sit through some courses on the Hebrew

faith and get circumcised and make a commitment to Yahweh the God of Israel and His law before being healed. No! By his unconditional grace, God instantly and miraculously healed Naaman.

Naaman reacted by saying: “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.” Would he have reacted like this if the grace of God had refused to respond to him and heal him? Naaman also said: “May I have two mule loads of earth to take back home with me because from now on I will not offer sacrifices or burnt offerings to any god except Yahweh. So I hope Yahweh will forgive me when I accompany my king (of Syria) to the temple of Rimmon (Syrian idol), where the king (an old man) leans on me and I have to bow down with him as he worships.”

A legalistic spirit would have said: “What! Do you mean to tell me that after your encounter with Yahweh the true and only God of Israel, you are going back to Syria the enemy of Israel to live? And you have the audacity to take some of our turf with you! No, you can’t do that. If you want to worship Yahweh standing on a piece of turf from His land, then stay in His land and worship with His people. As for accompanying your heathen master into the temple of the Syrian idol and holding on to him and bowing as he bows in worship: no way! That’s not on! Strictly against the law of our God.” But, while a strict application of the law from a legalistic point of view might seem justified, it was not regarded as expedient in this case. Grace triumphed over law.

Can we relate this in a practical way today? Suppose a member of an apostate church comes to us for help and their needs are ministered to. Then they want to return to their church and take some of our booklets, bulletins or tapes and continue associating with that community. A legalistic reaction would be to discourage that and insist on disassociation from that community and only association with ours. But grace releases the person, knowing that by so doing, it could lead to the truth being extended further afield, causing those who were opposed to truth becoming better informed friends and supporters.

Regarding Naaman bending down to help his Master bow to the idol: I remember when I visited another church and joined them in the physical actions of clapping to the songs and bowing my head during prayer, a member of my own church where I worshipped at the time found out about it and condemned me for it and felt I should be excommunicated. Naaman’s action of bending the knee in front of a Syrian idol, didn’t mean he endorsed everything the Syrians believed, and God who knows the heart knew that. Likewise my action of clapping my hands and bowing my head didn’t mean I endorsed everything believed by that church. But at least they weren’t worshipping an idol! And God, who knew my heart, blessed me and made me fruitful because He is a God of grace.

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL

The apostle Paul and his co-workers visited and fellowshiped at Jewish synagogues and participated in worship with Jews. Yet the Jews were anti-Christ. They rejected Jesus as Messiah and son of God. They did not believe that he died for our sins, rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. But the church where I clapped my hands did believe all those things! So if Paul could freely visit the Jews who didn't believe, in order to share the truth, who would dare to criticize and condemn those who do a similar thing in principle today? Paul was not the rigid, inflexible advocate of policies which were regarded as right because they can be justified intellectually and legalistically. He was the passionate champion of whatever best helps men and women to attain the kingdom of God. 1 Cor. 9:19-23 records him as saying: "Though I am no man's servant, yet have I made myself servant to all, that I might gain the more. To the Jews I became a Jew, that I might gain the Jews. To those under the (Jewish) law, I became as one under the law, that I might gain those who are under the law. To the Gentiles who are not under the Jewish law, I became as one not under that law, that I might win Gentiles. (This does not mean that I am outside the pale of divine law, for I am under the law of Christ). To the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak. So I become all things to all men, that I might save some of them by whatever means are possible." Jesus put it like this: "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

BACK TO DAVID'S SIN

As was mentioned earlier, David committed adultery with Bathsheba and instigated the death of her husband which was murder. By the grace of God the death penalty required by the law was not inflicted, and David later married Bathsheba. Under the circumstances a legalistic person could imagine that under no circumstance would God want a son from this union to succeed David and sit on the throne and reign. But by the grace of God this is what happened. David had other wives and sons through them, but Solomon the son of Bathsheba was appointed by God to succeed David as king. This calls to mind 1 Cor. 1:27: "God has chosen things regarded as foolish by the world to confound those who think they are so wise ... so that nobody can boast in His presence."

There does seem to be what has been styled "the permissive will of God" and "the perfect will ..." As we have seen so far, He has permitted things which did not perfectly conform to His law. This is also evident during Solomon's reign.

OTHER EXAMPLES

We read in 1 Kng. 3:3 that “Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father, except that he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places” i.e. on altars on various hills which was contrary to God’s will. He also, contrary to God’s will married Pharaoh’s daughter (1 Kng. 3:1) and accumulated horses and chariots (1 kng. 4:26). This was not the perfect will of God, but God permitted it and blessed and prospered him. Why? Grace!

Under God’s law the raven was an unclean bird (Lev. 11:15). Contact made a person ceremonially unclean. But in 1 Kng. 17 we read that God commanded the ravens to feed Elijah when he was in isolation and in need of food. How did the ravens carry the food? In their claws or beak? Either way, the food had come in contact with them making it unclean according to the law. But in the words of Act. 10:15: “What God has cleansed do not call unclean.” If God was legalistic, He would never change His mind to accommodate human weakness or respond to intercessions and pleas to act differently from what He has declared. Legalistic people never budge. They stubbornly persist with their intentions and have no feelings or sympathy towards the desires of others. They think it is a sign of weakness to change their mind. No! It is not a sign of weakness. It is grace - kindness and compassion. This is what love is all about. It is actually a sign of weakness to always insist on having your own way and not be willing to change your mind to accommodate the desires of others. Sometimes it can be a sign of pride and selfishness.

When the Lord told Lot and his family to flee from Sodom and escape to a mountain, because all the cities in the plain of Jordan were going to be destroyed, Lot pleaded with the Lord to spare the small city of Zoar as he felt incapable of climbing the mountain. And the lord did not say: “Listen here, my Word is law. I said I’m going to destroy all the cities and I am not making exceptions or compromising. Go to the mountain and stop complaining.” No! This is not how the Lord reacted. He took into account Lot’s weakness and changed His plan to accommodate it and make provision. In other words, He showed grace.

When God became so angry with Israel’s rebelliousness He said to Moses: “Let me alone (Good News Bible “Don’t try to stop me”) to vent my anger on them, so that I may put an end to them and make a great nation spring from you” (Ex. 32:10-14). But Moses interceded and requested the Lord to not do this and the Lord relented. Grace!

When the Lord told Hezekiah to put his house in order because he was going to die, he didn’t say: “Well the Word of the Lord is law - fixed, rigid and inflexible, so I will have to resign myself to it.” No! He prayed and appealed for grace and mercy. And because the Lord is gracious and

merciful, He listened to Hezekiah's prayer and changed His mind and gave him an extension of 15 more years of life.

In Ezk. 4 we read that God told Ezekiel to enact a siege by drawing it on a clay tile, as a sign of the forthcoming siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and its effect on people. He was also told to bake barley cakes, using human dung for fuel. But Ezekiel protested and appealed against it. This didn't make the Lord angry. He didn't say: "Do as you are told and stop protesting." No! He said: "Lo (okay) I will let you have cow's dung instead of man's dung." Grace! So God granted Ezekiel's request which was contrary to His intention. He did not insist on having His own way. The decisions of the Lord are not always like the laws and decisions of the Medes and Persians which "alter not" irrespective of how extenuating the circumstances might be.

When a Gentile woman (Syrophenician) asked Jesus to heal her daughter, he declined, saying that he had been sent to minister to Israel first. But she persisted, causing him to change his mind! Not surprising, because "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE REACTIONS TO GRACE

Now, there are two different ways of responding to the examples of God's grace triumphing over law i.e. negatively and positively. The negative response is: "Let us sin that grace may abound" i.e. if God's grace is demonstrated by forgiving those who transgress His law, then the more they sin the more He will have to forgive, resulting in more grace being required. Some in New Testament times had adopted this philosophy and it was a perversion of the gospel. Paul points out that those who deliberately and blatantly sin, relying on grace to forgive, are slaves of sin, the wages of which are death.

The Bible makes it clear that God expects His people to press on to perfection, morally and spiritually, and crucify the sins of the flesh, but not get self righteous, critical and condemnatory. And we need to safeguard against using any of the examples in Scripture of God overruling law or changing His mind, as an excuse for treating His law or will lightly, and do as we please. If there are situations where the Lord regards it as expedient to overrule His law or will, it is His prerogative and His alone to do it. We need to guard against presumption, i.e. presuming that God will always and automatically overrule His law simply because we want it. Examples have been given of God allowing grace to triumph over law, but examples could also be given of law being insisted upon and enforced, resulting in judgement, condemnation and death. Also examples of God refusing to change His mind.

Yes, "God is love," but He can also be "a consuming fire." Rom.

11:22: “Behold therefore the goodness (grace) and severity of God; on those who fell (rebelled), severity; but toward you, goodness (grace), if you continue in His goodness: otherwise you also will be cut off.”

The positive response to God’s grace is expressed in Rom. 2:4: “Don’t despise or treat lightly the riches of God’s great kindness, tolerance and patience. Do you not know that God’s goodness (grace) is meant to lead you to repentance?” God’s grace should make us sorry for sin and want to stop sinning, not increasing sin, looking for loopholes to justify sin. If anyone takes advantage of God’s grace and deliberately acts contrary to His will, expecting Him to forgive and bless, they will get a rude shock, because He is intolerant of abuse and misuse of His grace and will not allow those who trade on it to be exonerated.

BACK TO JOHN 1:17

Before concluding this subject I would like to go back to the statement in Jn. 1:17 that “The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus.” Because Jesus is greater than Moses, it is implied that the grace that came through him is greater than the law that came through Moses. And because grace has to do with forgiveness it is implied that it is more important to be forgiving than rigidly holding to the letter of the law. This can be seen in the Pharisees. They were strict about the law, but intolerant of those who broke the law. They found it easier to criticize and condemn than forgive. Their focus on the law made them legalistic resulting in a lack of grace.

Now the Jews had a very high regard for Moses and an even higher regard for the law given through him. After all, it consisted of commandments from God Himself - the highest most infallible authority in the universe. The law was therefore the final word on any matter, deserving of one hundred percent respect, not to be questioned, challenged, compromised. This is what the word “law” meant to a Jew. They stood in awe of the law.

Now, a Messianic prophecy in Gen. 49:10 stated that Messiah would be a “law giver.” If so, and if he is greater than Moses, then the law he gives must surely transcend the law given through Moses, and must demand even more respect. Question: Was Jesus a law giver? Did he give commandments that transcended the commandments given through Moses? The answer is “yes.”

Jn. 13:34: “A new commandment (not an optional extra) I give unto you that you love one another.” Love of course is the source or basis of grace which is the springboard of mercy and compassion i.e grace is the expression of love. It is love in action, and mercy is the effect of grace. As we know, love is the ability to treat others as you would like to be treated,

which means forgiving people when they sin against you, and not curse and condemn and be vindictive.

Love is the key to everything we do. Where love exists you don't need laws such as "thou shalt not steal" etc. because if you don't want to have something stolen from you, you won't steal. Love is therefore referred to as the fulfilling of the law: Rom. 13:8-10. Gal. 5:14. Where the law or rule of love is applied, rules and regulations governing conduct are not necessary. It is a law seated in the heart that transcends the one written on stone.

THE LAW OF LOVE

However, love and the grace it produces is not only referred to as fulfilling the law. It is actually referred to as a law in itself - the highest and most noble of all laws. Because it is a "commandment" of Jesus to love one another, it is referred to as a "law" four times in the New Testament. In 1 Cor. 9:21 Paul says he is "under the law of Christ." Gal. 6:2: "Bear one another's burdens (which requires love and grace) and so fulfil the law of Christ." Jam. 1:25 refers to Christians who "look into (focussed upon) the perfect law of liberty." (Love sets us free from the negativities of sin in the flesh such as are stated in Gal. 5:19-21). Jam. 2:8 says: "If you fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, you do well."

Now, as pointed out, the word "law" means a fixed, immovable, inflexible commandment, requiring total one hundred percent respect; not to be questioned, challenged, or compromised. And this is how Jesus expects us to respond to his commandment (law) to love one another. No "ifs" or "buts." No excuses. No allowing of pride, resentment, grudges to get in the way. Heb. 10:28 says: "He who despised Moses' law died without mercy. Worse punishment awaits those who despise the son of God."

And so we have a contrast between two laws: the law of legalism and the law of love. The law of legalism requires one hundred percent conformity and condemns weakness and failure and is unforgiving. It loves to throw stones. But the law of love which involves grace does not despise weakness and failure and is forgiving. It does not curse or condemn. This is what is meant by the saying: "Mercy triumphs over judgement."

So the challenge is: Does love, grace and mercy triumph and get the victory in our life in our dealings with people's sins and weaknesses? Are we like Jesus who, as we read in Heb. 4:15 can be touched (sympathise) with the feeling of our weaknesses? Or are we operating on the lower level of legalism which is unsympathetic, intolerant, critical and

condemnatory? The choice is between law and grace, bondage or freedom, death or life!

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CHAPTER 19

SIN - A NECESSARY EVIL

In the preceding chapters a contrast between law and grace has been presented. Due to sin being transgression of law, there could be no sin without law. And due to grace involving the forgiveness of sin, there would be no need for grace without sin. And so, as the controversial title of this last chapter indicates: sin is a necessary evil. In order to explain this more fully, we will go back to the beginning, to the first few chapters in the book of Genesis.

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

As a result of creation, Gen. 1:31 tells us that “God saw everything that He made, and behold, it was very good.” He liked what He saw; the end product of His work was very pleasing and satisfying. To a lesser degree, we who are inferior replicas of God, being made in His image, have the same experience when we have made something that pleases us. The angels were obviously impressed with God’s work on planet earth because Job 38:7 says they “shouted for joy” when they witnessed it.

The only thing that was “not good,” was that initially man was alone. But God soon rectified that and no doubt intended to from the outset. The delay was due to spiritual factors. Adam foreshadowed Christ, and Eve foreshadowed the church which came into being as a result of Jesus being put into a “deep sleep” and his side being sliced open, which is what happened to Adam in order for Eve to be produced.

So then, everything God made was very good. This included the garden which He planted for Adam and Eve, known as “paradise.” And Gen. 2:9 says that out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant in His sight and good for food. So Adam and Eve were surrounded by God’s good creation and enjoying it. There were no weeds, thistles, thorns or blight. The ground was easy to till, not causing any sweat on the brow. There was no sin, sickness, sorrow, pain, fear or death. It was utopia.

But, although God declared His creation to be good, and in spite of Adam and Eve experiencing and enjoying so much good, we read that God placed a tree of knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden which was also pleasant to look at and “good for food,” and as a test of faith and obedience, he told them not to eat from it. And it is stated in Gen. 2:5 that if they did eat from it, their eyes would be opened and they would be as the gods (angels) knowing good and evil. This implies that prior to sinning by eating the forbidden fruit, they did not know good and evil. In spite of experiencing and enjoying all the good of God’s very good creation, they did not know good! We can understand them not knowing evil, because none existed, but good did. In view of this, one would have expected the forbidden tree to be called the tree of evil, not good and evil, because they had already experienced good, but not evil.

So how can we make sense of someone experiencing and enjoying good but not knowing it? Well, let’s start with evil and work back to good.

The evil that resulted from eating the forbidden fruit was a sinful nature, mortality and death. (Not that it was the fruit that caused this, but the act of disobedience). Because Adam and Eve chose to sin by disobeying God’s commandment, a propensity or bias towards sin became implanted in the human spirit. The Bible calls it “sin in the flesh,” and it resulted in the nature of man becoming “no good” instead of “very good” (Rom. 7:18). This sinful mortal nature of man produces countless evils such as immorality, idolatry, murder, lying, stealing, drunkenness, sickness, disease, pain, suffering, sorrow, conflict, war. As Jesus said: “Out of the heart proceeds evil ...” (Matt. 15:19). And as a result of experiencing such “evils,” the good that was experienced beforehand, could then be known or seen in a light as never before. You see, good and evil are relative conditions. One cannot be properly known and understood without the other. There are many things in life that we can

only understand through opposites, or contrasts. For example, you could not understand what “up” means if you don’t know what “down” is. The same applies to light and darkness, hot and cold, fast and slow, loud and soft, holy and unholy etc. Each can only be understood by their opposites. A person would not really know or understand and appreciate the one without experiencing or witnessing the other.

And so it is with good and evil. One who only saw and experienced good and never evil, would not know or appreciate how good the good really was and would know nothing about evil. It is the experiencing of evil that throws good into sharp relief and reveals its goodness. The prodigal son, and many other sons and daughters since, discovered this when they ran away from a good home which they took for granted, and did not appreciate, and ended up in a bad one. Prior to leaving the good home, they may have been told: “You don’t know how good your situation is and how well off you are.” In spite of experiencing a good home, they don’t know how good it is because they have not seen or experienced the opposite. The same applies to Adam leaving the garden that had no weeds and did not cause sweat to till the ground. Until he left the weedless garden and had to sweat dealing with thistles and thorns, he would not have known and appreciated how good the previous garden was.

For good to have any meaning at all, there has to be evil - at least for a while! So it is interesting to note that there was just one tree of the knowledge of both good and evil. You might have thought that God would have created two trees - one for the knowledge of evil, which would have been forbidden, and the other for the knowledge of good which Adam would be encouraged to eat from. But there was just one tree which resulted in knowing both good and evil. Why? Because one cannot know and understand and appreciate the true nature of good without evil to compare it with. If the contrast does not exist, neither can it be known. There is therefore no other way that God can teach us how good His goodness is without the existence of evil, and it only required the violation of a prohibition notice on one tree to have this effect.

According to Isa. 45:7, God not only creates light and peace but also darkness and evil. But “evil” here refers to calamities or adversities such as flood, famine, pestilence, earthquake, storms, volcanic eruption, and war which God sometimes allows usually as a punishment for sin. In Rom. 11:22 we are told to “behold (i.e. consider) the goodness and severity of God.” Here again we have a contrast between opposites: goodness and severity, each one being meaningful due to its opposite. We can develop this a little further in relation to the character of God. If we understand things in life through opposites, we can also learn about God’s character in the same way. To do this we go to Ex. 34:6-7 which lists

some of the attributes of God which He proclaimed to Moses: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity ...”

The first of God’s characteristics here is mercy and grace. Now, could it be possible to know and appreciate what grace and mercy means if sin did not exist and there was no need for mercy and forgiveness? Where is the good in a cup of cold water if you are not thirsty? To appreciate the shiny side of life’s coin, we need to see the rough side too, because it is only the contrast that gives either meaning. In order to know and understand God’s character, we must be aware of and witness evil as well as good. We could repeat these ideas for every one of the other attributes of God in Ex. 34. For example: How could God seem to be slow to anger without sin causing Him to get angry? Without sin, no basis exists for God’s mercy or judgement to be exercised.

The existence of sin is the basis on which all of God’s attributes are thrown in sharp relief and manifested. How could He be seen as a forgiving God if there is no sin to forgive? How could He be seen as a severe and judgmental God if there is no sin or sinner to be judged? Without the existence of sin, we could not “know” God’s character in the full sense of the word. And of course, coming back to our original premise, we would not be able to know good. In this light, good can come about as a result of evil! In a certain sense, evil can be sometimes good in disguise i.e. in the sense of Rom. 8:28: “All things (good and evil) work together for good.”

Following these thoughts through to their logical end, it is hard to resist the conclusion that God put a prohibition notice on the tree to make sin possible, because His goodness could never be known, i.e. properly understood and appreciated unless sin existed. There is no doubt that God created the basis on which sin was made possible. He created the tree of knowledge of good and evil and made it very attractive, and then gave the commandment to not eat from it. He also created the serpent more subtle than any other creature and gave it the ability to speak, by which it deceived Eve into sinning. But this was not a case of God tempting man because it is clearly taught in the Bible that He does not do that. However He does test, and there is a difference. According to Jam. 1:14-15 temptation involves being drawn away by one’s own lust, and this occurred when Eve voluntarily succumbed to the lust she allowed to dominate her own mind in response to the serpent’s proposition. So, God tested, the serpent deceived, and Eve was tempted.

Such a suggestion that God made sin possible will be very challenging to some and regarded as heresy of the first order to others,

because the implication is in Adam's case that God gave man a test that He knew he could (would) fail. But is this any different from giving Israel a law that He knew they couldn't and wouldn't keep in order that His grace in Christ might be manifested and abound! Rom. 5:20 actually states that God gave Israel the law so that sin might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Someone might say: "If God's grace is magnified as a result of sin, why does He find fault? Surely it is in His interest for sin to be committed."

This calls to mind what Paul says in Rom. 9, where he points out that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, causing him to sin. As a result of this, more scope was given for God's power and glory to be magnified. Paul then says that in response to this, someone will say: "Why does God then find fault, for who can resist His will?" Paul replies by pointing out that no one has any more right to question such actions of God than a piece of clay has to question the actions of a potter. It is God's prerogative to use circumstances to harden or soften into whatever form or shape He desires, in order that the riches of His mercy and glory be manifested, and it is out of order for clay material such as man to find fault with it!

In passing it should be pointed out that when Scripture says God hardened Pharaoh's heart, it does not mean that God physically manipulated his mind and emotions and overruled his will, reducing him to a robot like state. No! It was because Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let Israel go free as a result of God in His mercy withdrawing the plagues, that Scripture expresses it in terms of God hardening his heart. (See Ex. 9). God knew that by withdrawing the plagues, Pharaoh would react this way and sin, and that this would give greater scope for divine power and glory to be manifested, but Pharaoh remained a free agent and had freedom of choice as to how he would react. And as Paul points out, no one has any right to find fault with God over this.

If God wanted to give a test to Adam and Eve or a law to Israel that He knew they wouldn't fail, why not give such a test or law? In view of the untold suffering, pain and death affecting billions of people during thousands of years that has resulted through one man failing the test, is this fair if God wanted him to pass the test and could have given him one that he would have passed? Does the punishment really fit the crime or are there deeper issues involved?

Some will reply by saying: "Yes, a rebel angel used deception to sabotage God's purpose and cause sin." It is a commonly held belief that a rebel angel called Satan was cast out of heaven to earth by God, resulting in him inspiring rebellion. But according to the Bible, God is stronger than Satan who can only do what God permits him to do. So if he caused Adam and Eve to sin, God must have permitted it! However, the doctrine of a rebel angel is based on the misinterpretation and misapplication of

Scripture, and a free booklet on the subject is available on request.

But let us be clear about this: Adam had freewill and chose to sin. God did not force him to do it. God knew he would do it but did not make him do it. God's foreknowledge of actions and events does not force people against their will to accomplish them. He just knows that given a certain set of circumstances what the reactions will be, and can use these to magnify His grace and mercy and power. And 1 Cor. 10:13 makes it clear that God will not test anyone beyond their ability to overcome. But unfortunately this does not mean that everyone does overcome. Many fail when they have the ability to overcome and incur divine displeasure as a result. Such was the case with Adam and Eve. And looking at it objectively, the test wasn't really that difficult. It simply involved having to abstain from eating fruit from one particular tree, while access was granted to every other tree, and God made it very clear what punishment would result as a consequence of sinning. And, while it is true that as a result of Adam's sin God's grace has abounded, Adam did not deliberately sin for that reason. The apostle Paul makes it clear that those who abuse and misuse the grace of God by deliberately sinning, become servants of sin, and incur the death penalty.

An even greater reason for believing that the entrance of sin into the world was predictable, is because had sin never entered, there would have been no need for a Saviour from sin. In other words, Jesus would have been unnecessary. God would not have needed to send an only begotten son to show how much He loved the world. If sin and death had not eventuated and no one died, the planet would have soon been overpopulated. History would not have as its goal or grand finale, the second coming of Christ and establishment of his glorious kingdom. Paradise would not need to be restored because it would not have been lost. Under such circumstances, man would not have a hope because he would have everything he could hope for, but not know it or appreciate it.

Now, when Adam and Eve sinned, God told them in symbolic terms that a seed of the woman would eventually conquer sin and death. This promised hope is recorded in Gen. 3:15 and is the first reference in Scripture to the ultimate redemptive work of Christ. If we didn't know any better, it would be easy to conclude that this makes God's purpose in Christ just a reactionary or contingency "plan B." That is, because Adam messed up by sinning when God didn't want him to, God had to resort to "plan B" by having an only begotten son to sort things out.

But this cannot be the case. According to 1 Pet. 1:20 Jesus was "foreordained before the foundation of the world." God's redemptive plan in His son was planned long before Adam and Eve existed. This implies that God anticipated the existence of sin and evil from the very beginning of creation, long before He created the tree of knowledge of good and

evil. Had this not been so, He would not have needed to foreordain Jesus from the foundation of the world to save the world from sin and death. So then, Jesus was not a contingency “plan B.” No! He was “plan A,” and this being the case, the entrance of sin into the world was necessary and predictable. In the words of Col. 1:17, Jesus “is before all things and through him all things hold together.”

It is clear from Scripture that God’s ultimate plan was to have an only begotten son who would be heir of all things and rule over all to His glory. However, the position of power and rule was not going to be given to him as a mere easy hand-out just because he was the son of God. An earthly father might appoint his son as manager of his business and set him up over others without requiring him to start from scratch and serve an apprenticeship and prove himself, but not Father God! “Though he (Jesus) were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered. But once perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9).

Had sin not entered the world, Jesus would not have needed to learn to be obedient, because there would be no rules or laws to obey. Law was only given because of the entrance of sin, as is stated in Gal. 3:19. Obedience therefore involves refusing to obey the prompting and temptations of sin. So the obedience of Jesus which was required for him to qualify as Saviour, depended on him conquering sin, and therefore depended on the existence of sin. In other words, the existence of sin was necessary to form a basis on which Christ’s sinlessness and righteousness could be manifested. Without the existence of sin and evil, the sinlessness and righteousness of Jesus could not have been manifested. “Righteousness” means the right way, which implies there is a wrong way i.e. unrighteousness, which is sin (1 Jn. 5:17). This is another example of understanding something by opposites.

Being a person of principle, integrity and character, God could not and would not honour, glorify and exalt His son and place him over men and angels, unless they could say in all honesty, truth and conviction: “Worthy is the Lamb to receive honour and glory ...” And this they are able to do due to the fact that sin existed in the world into which he came, and he refused to be tempted by it and obey it, but obeyed God instead, even though this required dying a cruel death on a cross. “He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ...” (Plp. 2:7-10).

Without a doubt the suffering in the world is horrible, yet as painful as this can be, the presence of the evil caused by sin is necessary for the appreciation of God’s goodness, and the development of spiritual

character in God's children i.e. faith, hope, love, trust, obedience. According to Heb. 5:14, exercising spiritual discernment between good and evil is necessary to become spiritually mature in Christ. This would not be possible if evil did not exist! It was necessary for Jesus to experience evil and suffering and it is also necessary for us. The Bible is emphatic about this. However, coming back to what was said about learning through opposites: It's the bad times that make the good times so good - if not in this life, certainly in the next. The joys in our life are often intensified and made more meaningful because of our trials and sorrows, which calls to mind Heb. 12:2 which states that it was because of the joy that was set before Jesus that enabled him to endure the cross.

In our trials and afflictions, we need to remember that this present time of sin and suffering will not last forever. Isa. 35:10 says: "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Also Rev. 21:3-4: "God Himself ... will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Ps. 126:5). Were it not for sin and evil, there would be no sorrow, pain or suffering. But were it not for sorrow, pain and suffering we would not know and fully understand and appreciate the joy of living forever in the pain free environment of God's eternal kingdom. We would just simply take it for granted and think nothing of it, which obviously is not what the Lord wants. So, as was stated at the beginning: everything is relative. Evil has to co-exist with good to know and understand and appreciate the goodness of God. And in addition to that, evil has to exist to test faith and obedience. An untried faith is valueless to God. It is only the faith that passes the test of trials that is of value to Him (1 Pet. 1:7). And most tests involve making a choice between good and evil. Rom. 12:21 says: "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." It is the application of this directive that proves love and respect for God and develops godly character. Without the existence of evil to overcome, the development of godly character would not be possible. It is our response to sin and evil now that will determine whether or not we enjoy the goodness of God in the forever future!

