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THE LAW OF GOD

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, but its fruitage is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is an evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow men. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and therefore strengthens Christian witness.

THE LAW OF GOD

All eyes focused on the mountain. Its summit was covered with a thick cloud that, continuing to darken, swept downward until the entire mountain was engulfed in mystery. Lightning flashed from the darkness, while thunder echoed and reechoed. "Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace and the whole mountain quaked...The blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder" (Ex. 19:18,19). So powerful was this majestic revelation of God's presence that all Israel trembled.

Suddenly the thunder and trumpet ceased, leaving an awesome silence. Then God spoke out of the thick darkness that enshrouded Him as He stood on the mountain. Moved by deep love for His people, He proclaimed the Ten Commandments. Said Moses: "The Lord came from Sinai,...and He came with ten thousands of saints; from His right hand came a fiery law for them. Yes, He loves the people; all His saints are in Your hand; they sit down at Your feet; everyone receives Your words" (Deut. 33:2,3).

When He gave the law at Sinai God not only revealed Himself as the majestic supreme authority of the universe. He also portrayed Himself as the redeemer of His people (Ex. 20:2). It is because He is Saviour that He called not only Israel but all humanity (Eccl. 12:13) to obey ten brief, comprehensive, and authoritative precepts that cover the duty of human beings to God and to their fellow beings.

And God Said:

"You shall have no other gods before Me. "You shall not make for yourself any carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

"You shall not take the name of the Lord Your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work; you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

"You shall not murder.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Ex. 20:3-17).

The Nature of the Law

As a reflection of God's character the Ten Commandment law is moral, spiritual, and comprehensive, containing universal principles.

A Reflection of the Character of the Lawgiver

Scripture sees the attributes of God in His law. Like God, "the law of the Lord is perfect" and "the testimony of the Lord is pure" (Ps. 19:7,8). "The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). "Your commandments are truth. Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever" (Ps. 119:151,152). Indeed, "all Your commandments are righteousness" (Ps. 119:172).

A Moral Law

The Ten Commandments convey God's pattern of conduct for humanity. They define our relationship with our Creator and Redeemer and our duty to our fellow beings. Scripture calls the transgression of God's law sin (1 John 3:4, KJV).

A Spiritual Law

"The law is spiritual" (Rom. 7:14). Therefore, only those who are spiritual and have the fruit of the Spirit can obey it (John 15:4; Gal. 5:22,23). It is God's Spirit that empowers us to do His will (Acts 1:8; Ps. 51:10-12). By abiding in Christ, we receive the power we need to bear fruit to His glory (John 15:5).

Human laws address only overt acts. But the Ten Commandments are "exceedingly broad" (Ps. 119:96), touching our most secret thoughts, desires, and emotions such as jealousy, envy, lust, and ambition. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasized this spiritual dimension of the law, revealing that transgression begins in the heart (Matt. 5:21,22,27,28; Mark 7:21-23).

A Positive Law

The Decalogue is more than just a short series of prohibitions; it contains far-reaching principles. It extends not only to the things we should not do, but to the things we should do. We must not only refrain from evil acts and thoughts; we must learn to use our God-given talents and gifts for good. Thus every negative injunction has a positive dimension.

For example, the sixth commandment, "You shall not kill," has as its positive side "You shall promote life." "It is God's will that His followers seek to promote the well-being and happiness of everyone who comes within their sphere of influence. In a profound sense the gospel commission—the good news of salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ—rests upon the positive principle embodied in the sixth precept."

The ten-commandment law should not be seen "as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection. We behold in it the goodness of God, who by revealing to men the immutable principles of righteousness, seeks to shield them from the evils that result from transgression."

A Simple Law

The Ten Commandments are profound in their simple comprehensiveness. They are so brief that even a child can quickly memorize them, yet so far-reaching that they cover every possible sin.

"There is no mystery in the law of God. All can comprehend the great truths which it embodies. The feeblest intellect can grasp these rules; the most ignorant can regulate the life, and form the character after the divine standard."

A Law of Principles

The Ten Commandments are a summary of all right principles—they apply to all humanity at all times. Scripture says, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13).

The Decalogue—the Ten Words, or Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:28)—consists of two parts, indicated by the two tablets of stone upon which God wrote it (Deut. 4:13). The first four commandments regulate our duty to our Creator and Redeemer, and the last six regulate our duty toward people.

This twofold division derives from the two great fundamental principles of love upon which God's kingdom operates: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27; cf. Deut. 6:4,5; Lev. 19:18). Those who live these principles will

be in full harmony with the Ten Commandments, for the commandments express these principles in more detail.

The first commandment directs the exclusive worship of the one true God. The second forbids idolatry. The third prohibits irreverence and the perjury that involves the invoking of the divine name. The fourth calls for the observance of the Sabbath and identifies the true God as the Creator of heaven and earth.

The fifth commandment requires children to submit to their parents as God's appointed agents for the transmission of His revealed will to succeeding generations (see Deut. 4:6-9; 6:1-7). The sixth protects life as sacred. The seventh enjoins purity and safeguards the marital relationship. The eighth protects property. The ninth guards truth and proscribes perjury. And the tenth goes to the root of all human relationships by prohibiting the coveting of that which belongs to others.

A Unique Law

The Ten Commandments have the unique distinction of being the only words God spoke audibly to an entire nation (Deut. 5:22). Not trusting this law to the forgetful minds of humans, God then engraved the commandments with His finger on two tablets of stone that were to be preserved inside the ark of the tabernacle (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 10:2).

To help Israel apply the commandments, God gave them additional laws detailing their relationship to Him and to each other. Some of these additional laws focused on the civil affairs of Israel (civil laws), others regulated the ceremonies of the sanctuary services (ceremonial laws). God communicated these additional laws to the people through an intermediary, Moses, who wrote them down in the "book of the law," and placed them "beside the ark of the covenant" (Deut. 31:25,26)--not in the ark as he had done with God's supreme revelation, the Decalogue. These additional laws were known as "the Book of the Law of Moses" (Joshua 8:31; Neh. 8:1; 2 Chron. 25:4), or simply the "Law of Moses" (2 Kings 23:25; 2 Chron. 23:18).

A Delightful Law

God's law is an inspiration to the soul. Said the psalmist: "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." "I love Your commandments more than gold, yes than fine gold!" Even when "trouble and anguish have overtaken me," he said, "Your commandments are my delights" (Ps. 119:97, 127, 143). To those who love God, "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Transgressors are the ones who consider the law a grievous yoke, for the sinful mind "does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Rom. 8:7, NIV).

The Purpose of the Law

God gave His law to provide people with abundant blessings and to lead them into a saving relationship with Himself. Note the following specific purposes:

It Reveals God's Will for Humanity

As the expression of God's character and love, the Ten Commandments reveal His will and purpose for humanity. They demand perfect obedience, "for whoever shall keep the

whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Obedience to the law, as the rule of life, is vital to our salvation.

Christ Himself said: "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17). This obedience is possible only through the power the indwelling Holy Spirit provides.

It Is the Basis of God's Covenant

Moses wrote the Ten Commandments, with other explanatory laws, in a book called the book of the covenant (Exodus 20:1, 24:8). Later he called the Ten Commandments "the tablets of the covenant," indicating their importance as the basis of the everlasting covenant (Deut. 9:9; cf. 4:13. For more on the covenants).

It Functions as the Standard of Judgment

Like God, His "commandments are righteousness" (Ps. 119-172). The law, therefore, sets the standard of righteousness. Each of us will be judged by these righteous principles, not by our consciences. "Fear God and keep His commandments," Scripture says, "...for God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil" (Eccl. 12:13,14; cf. James 2:12).

Human consciences vary. Some consciences are "weak," while others are "defiled," "evil," or "seared with a hot iron" (1 Cor. 8:7, 12; Titus 1:15; Heb. 10:22; 1 Tim. 4:2). Like a watch, however well they may work, they must be "set" by some accurate standard to be of value. Our consciences tell us that we must do right, but they do not tell us what is right. Only consciences set by God's great standard—His law—can keep us from straying into sin.

It Points Out Sin

Without the Ten Commandments people cannot see clearly God's holiness, their own guilt, or their need to repent.

When they do not know that they are in violation of God's law, they do not sense their lostness or their need of the atoning blood of Christ.

To help people see their true condition, the law functions like a mirror (see James 1:23-25). Those who "look" into it see their own character defects in contrast to God's righteous character. Thus the moral law demonstrates that all the world is guilty before God (Rom. 3:19), making everyone fully accountable to Him.

"Through the law we become conscious of sin" (Rom. 3:20, NIV) because "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). Indeed, Paul said, "I would not have known sin except through the law" (Rom. 7:7). Convicting sinners of their sin, it helps them realize that they are condemned under the judgment of God's wrath and that they are facing the penalty of eternal death. It brings them to a sense of their utter helplessness.

It Is an Agent in Conversion

God's law is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to bring us to conversion: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Ps. 19:7). When, after seeing our true character we realize that we are sinners, that we are on death row and without hope, we sense our need of a Saviour. Then the good news of the gospel becomes truly meaningful. Thus the law points us to Christ, the only one who can help us escape our desperate situation. It was in this light that Paul referred to both the moral law and the ceremonial law as "our schoolmaster ["tutor," NKJV] to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24).

While the law reveals our sin, it can never save us. Just as water is the means to cleanse a dirty face, so we, after having discovered our need in the mirror of God's moral law, reach for the fountain that is open "for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1) and are cleansed by "the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). We must look to Christ, "and as Christ is revealed to...[us] upon the cross of Calvary, dying beneath the weight of the sins of the whole world, the Holy Spirit shows...[us] the attitude of God to all who repent of their transgressions." Then hope fills our souls, and in faith we reach out to our Saviour, who extends to us the gift of everlasting life (John 3:16).

It Provides True Freedom

Christ said that "whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). When we transgress God's law, we have no liberty; but obedience to the Ten Commandments assures us true freedom. Living within the confines of God's law means liberty from sin. And it means freedom from that which accompanies sin—the continual worry, wounding of the conscience, and increasing guilt and remorse that wear out life's vital forces. Said the psalmist, "I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out Your precepts" (Ps. 119:45, NIV). James referred to the Decalogue as "the royal law," "the perfect law of liberty" (James 2:8; 1:25).

That we might receive this freedom, Jesus invites us to come to Him with our burdens of sin. He offers us in their stead His yoke, which is easy (Matt. 11:29,30). A yoke is an instrument of service. By dividing the load, the yoke makes it easier to perform tasks. Christ offers to be yoked together with us. The yoke itself is the law; "the great law of love revealed in Eden, proclaimed upon Sinai, and in the new covenant written in the heart, is that which binds the human worker to the will of God." When we are yoked with Christ, He bears the heavy burden and makes obedience a joy. He enables us to succeed at what was impossible before. So that the law, written on our hearts, becomes a delight and a joy. We are free because we want to do as He commands.

If the law is presented without Christ's saving power, there is no freedom from sin. But God's saving grace, which does not nullify the law, brings the power that liberates from sin, for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17).

It Restrains Evil and Brings Blessings

The increase in crime, violence, immorality, and wickedness that floods the world has resulted from disregard for the Decalogue. Where this law is accepted, it restrains sin, promotes right actions, and becomes a means of establishing righteousness. Nations

that have incorporated its principles into their laws have experienced great blessing. On the other hand, abandonment of its principles brings about a steady decline.

In Old Testament times God often blessed nations and individuals in proportion to their obedience to His law. "Righteousness exalts a nation," Scripture says, and a "throne is established by righteousness" (Prov. 14:34; 16:12). Those who refused to obey God's commandments encountered calamities (Ps. 89:31,32).

"The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the habitation of the just" (Prov. 3:33; cf. Lev. 26; Deut. 28). The same general principle is true today.

The Perpetuity of the Law

Since the ten-commandment moral law is a reflection of God's character, its principles are not temporal or situational, but absolute, unchangeable, and of permanent validity for humanity. Christians through the centuries have firmly supported the perpetuity of God's law, strongly affirming its continuous validity.

The Law Before Sinai

The law existed long before God gave the Decalogue to Israel. If it did not, there could have been no sin before Sinai, "for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). That Lucifer and his angels sinned gives evidence of the presence of the law even before Creation (2 Peter 2:4).

When God created Adam and Eve in His image, He implanted the moral principles of the law in their minds, making it natural for them to do His will. Their transgression introduced sin into the human family (Rom. 5:12).

Later God said of Abraham that he "obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My Laws" (Gen. 26:4,5). And Moses taught God's statutes and His laws before Sinai (Exodus 16; 18:16). A study of the book of Genesis shows that the Ten Commandments were known well before Sinai. That book makes clear that people realized that, before God gave the Decalogue, the acts it forbade were wrong. This general understanding of the moral law shows that God must have provided humanity with the knowledge of the Ten Commandments.

The Law at Sinai

During the long period of bondage in Egypt, a nation that did not recognize the true God (Ex. 5:2), the Israelites lived amid idolatry and corruption. As a consequence, they lost much of their understanding of God's holiness, purity, and moral principles. Their status as slaves made it difficult for them to worship.

Responding to their desperate cry for help, God remembered His covenant with Abraham and determined to deliver His people out of this "iron furnace" (Deut. 4:20) by bringing them to a country where "they might observe His statutes and keep His laws" (Ps. 105:43-45).

After their liberation He led them to Mount Sinai to give them the moral law that is the standard of His government and the ceremonial laws that were to teach them that the

way of salvation is through the atoning sacrifice of the Saviour. At Sinai, then, God gave the law directly, in clear, simple terms, "because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19), "so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful" (Rom. 7:13). Only by having God's moral law brought into sharp focus could the Israelites become conscious of their transgressions, discover their sense of helplessness, and see their need of salvation.

The Law Before Christ's Return

The Bible reveals that God's law is the object of Satan's attack and that his war against it will reach its climax just prior to the Second Advent. Prophecy indicates that Satan will lead the vast majority of people to disobey God (Rev. 12:9). Working through the "beast" power, he will direct the attention of the world toward the beast instead of God (Rev. 13:3).

1. The law under attack.

Daniel 7 portrays this same power as a little horn. This chapter speaks of four great beasts, which, ever since the time of Christ, Bible commentators have identified as the world powers of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The ten horns of the fourth beast represent the divisions of the Roman Empire at the time of its fall (A.D. 476).

Daniel's vision centers on the little horn, a terrible and blasphemous power that arose among the ten horns, signifying the rise of an awesome power after the disintegration of the Roman Empire. This power would attempt to change God's law (Dan. 7:25) and would continue until Christ's return (see chapter 19 of this book). This attack is, in itself, evidence of the law's continuing significance in the plan of salvation. The vision ends by reassuring God's people that this power will not succeed in eliminating the law, because the judgment will destroy the little horn (Dan. 7:11, 26-28).

2. The saints defend the law.

Obedience characterizes the saints who await the Second Advent. In the final conflict they rally to uphold God's law. Scripture describes them in these terms: They "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17; 14:12) and are patiently looking forward to Christ's return.

In preparation for the Second Advent, these people proclaim the gospel, calling others to worship the Lord as Creator (Rev. 14:6,7). Those who worship God in love will obey Him; as John said: "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

3. God's judgments and the law.

God's judgment of the seven last plagues on the disobedient originates from the temple of "the tabernacle of Testimony" in heaven (Rev. 15:5). Israel was well acquainted with the phrase the tabernacle of the testimony; it designated the tabernacle that Moses built (Num. 1:50,53; 17:8; 18:2, NIV). It was called this because the tabernacle housed the "ark of the Testimony" (Ex. 26:34), which contained the "two tablets of the Testimony" (Ex. 31:18). So the Ten Commandments are the "testimony"—the witness to humanity of the divine will (Ex. 34:28,29).

But Revelation 15:5 refers to "the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven." Moses' was merely a copy of the heavenly temple (Ex. 25:8,40; cf. Heb. 8:1-5); the great

original of the ten-commandment law is kept there. That the final judgments are intimately related to the transgression of God's law adds to the evidence for the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments.

The book of Revelation also depicts the opening of the heavenly temple, which brings into view the "ark of His covenant" (Rev. 11:19). The phrase ark of the covenant designated the ark of the earthly sanctuary, which held the tablets containing "the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments" (Ex. 34:27; cf. Num. 10:33; Deut. 9:9). The ark of the covenant in the heavenly sanctuary is the original ark containing the words of the everlasting covenant—the original Decalogue. Thus it is clear that the timing of God's final judgments on the world (Rev. 11:18), relates to the opening of this heavenly temple with its focus on the ark with the Ten Commandments—indeed, a fitting picture of the magnification of God's law as the standard of the judgment.

The Law and the Gospel

Salvation is a gift that comes by grace through faith, not by works of the law (Eph. 2:8). "No deeds of the law, no effort however commendable, and no good works—whether they be many or few, sacrificial or not—can in any way justify the sinner (Titus 3:5; Rom. 3:20)."

Throughout Scripture there is a perfect harmony between the law and the gospel, each upholding the other.

The Law and Gospel Before Sinai

When Adam and Eve sinned, they learned what guilt, fear, and need are (Gen. 3:10). God responded to their need not by nullifying the law that condemned them; but instead, by offering them the gospel that would restore them into fellowship and obedience to Him.

This gospel consisted of a promise of redemption through a Saviour, the seed of the woman, who would come someday and triumph over evil (Gen. 3:15). The system of sacrifices that God enjoined upon them taught them an important truth about the atonement: that forgiveness could be obtained only through the shedding of blood—through the death of the Saviour. Believing that the animal sacrifice symbolized the Saviour's atoning death in their behalf, they obtained forgiveness of sin. They were saved by grace.

This gospel promise was the center of God's everlasting covenant of grace offered to humanity (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:4,5; 17:1-9). It was closely related to obedience to God's law (Gen. 18:18,19; 26:4,5). The surety of God's covenant was the Son of God, who, as the focal point of the gospel, was "the lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). God's grace, then, began to operate as soon as Adam and Eve sinned. David said, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him,...to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them" (Ps. 103:17,18).

The Law and Gospel at Sinai

There is a close relationship between the Decalogue and the gospel. The preamble to the law, for instance, refers to God as the Redeemer (Ex. 20:1). And following the proclamation of the Ten Commandments, God instructed the Israelites to erect an altar and begin offering the sacrifices that were to reveal His saving grace.

It was on Mount Sinai that God gave Moses a large portion of the ceremonial law dealing with the building of the sanctuary, where God would dwell with His people and meet with them to share His blessings and forgive their sins (Ex. 24:9-31:18). This expansion of the simple system of sacrifices that had existed prior to Sinai foreshadowed Christ's mediatorial work for the redemption of sinners and the vindication of the authority and holiness of God's law.

God's dwelling place was in the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary, over the mercy seat of the ark in which were kept the Ten Commandments. Every aspect of the sanctuary services symbolized the Saviour. The bleeding sacrifices pointed to His atoning death, which would redeem the human race from the condemnation of the law.

While the Decalogue was placed inside the ark, the ceremonial laws, together with the civil regulations God gave were written down in the "Book of the Law" and placed beside the ark of the covenant as "a witness against" the people (Deut. 31:26). Whenever they sinned, this "witness" condemned their actions and provided elaborate requirements for reconciliation with God. From Sinai until Christ's death, transgressors of the Decalogue found hope, forgiveness, and cleansing by faith in the gospel portrayed by the sanctuary services of the ceremonial law.

The Law and the Gospel After the Cross

As many Christians have observed, the Bible indicates that while Christ's death abolished the ceremonial law, it affirmed the continued validity of the moral law. Note the evidence:

1. The ceremonial law.

When Christ died, He fulfilled the prophetic symbolism of the sacrificial system. Type met antitype, and the ceremonial law came to an end. Centuries earlier Daniel had predicted that the death of the Messiah would "bring an end to sacrifice and offering" (Dan. 9:27; see chapter 4 of this book). When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was supernaturally torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51), indicating the end of the spiritual significance of the Temple services.

Although the ceremonial law filled a vital role before the death of Christ, it was deficient in many ways, being only "a shadow of the good things to come" (Heb. 10:1). It served a temporary purpose and was imposed on God's people until the coming of "the time of reformation" (Heb 9:10; cf. Gal 3:19)--until the time when Christ died as the true Lamb of God.

At the death of Christ the jurisdiction of ceremonial law came to an end. His atoning sacrifice provided forgiveness for all sins. This act "wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col. 2:14; cf. Deut. 31:26). Then it was no longer

necessary to perform the elaborate ceremonies that were not, in any case, able to take away sins or purify the conscience (Heb. 10:4; 9:9,14). No more worries about the ceremonial laws, with their complex requirements regarding food and drink offerings, celebrations of various festivals (Passover, Pentecost, etc.), new moons, or ceremonial sabbaths (Col. 2:16; cf. Heb. 9:10), which were only a "shadow of things to come" (Col. 2:17).

With Jesus' death, believers no longer had any need to deal with shadows—reflections of the reality in Christ. Now they could approach the Saviour Himself directly, for the "substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:17).

As interpreted by the Jews, the ceremonial law had become a barrier between them and other nations. It had become a great obstacle to their mission to enlighten the world with the glory of God. Christ's death abolished this "law of commandments contained in ordinances," breaking down "the middle wall of division" between Gentiles and Jews so as to create one new family of believers reconciled into "one body through the cross" (Eph. 2:14-16).

2. The Decalogue and the cross.

While Christ's death ended the authority of the ceremonial law, it established that of the Ten Commandments. Christ took away the curse of the law, thereby liberating believers from its condemnation. His doing so, however, did not mean that the law was abolished, giving us liberty to violate its principles. The abundant testimony of Scripture regarding the perpetuity of the law, refutes such a view.

Calvin aptly stated that "we must not imagine that the coming of Christ has freed us from the authority of the law; for it is the eternal rule of a devout and holy life, and must, therefore, be as unchangeable as the justice of God."

Paul described the relationship between obedience and the gospel of saving grace. Calling believers to holy living, he challenged them to present themselves "as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall have no dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:13,14). So Christians do not keep the law to obtain salvation—those who try to do so will only find a deeper enslavement to sin. "As long as a man is under law he remains also under the dominion of sin, for law cannot save one from either the condemnation or the power of sin. But those who are under grace receive not only release from condemnation (Rom. 8:1), but also power to overcome (Rom. 6:4). Thus sin no longer will have dominion over them."

"Christ," Paul added, "is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4). Everyone, then, who believes in Christ realizes that He is the end of the law as a way of obtaining righteousness. In ourselves we are sinners, but in Jesus Christ we are righteous through His imputed righteousness.

Yet being under grace does not give believers the license to "continue in sin that grace may abound" (Rom. 6:1). Rather, grace supplies the power that makes obedience and victory over sin possible. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1).

Christ's death magnified the law, upholding its universal authority. If the Decalogue could have been changed, He would not have had to die. But because this law is absolute and immutable, a death was required to pay the penalty it imposed. This requirement Christ fully satisfied by His death on the cross, making eternal life available to all who accept His magnificent sacrifice.

Obedience to the Law

People cannot earn salvation by their good works. Obedience is the fruitage of salvation in Christ. Through His amazing grace, especially displayed at the cross, God has liberated His people from the penalty and curse of sin. Though they were sinners, Christ gave His life to provide them with the gift of eternal life. God's abundant love awakens in the repentant sinner a response that manifests itself in loving obedience through the power of the grace so abundantly bestowed. Believers who understand that Christ values the law and who understand the blessings of obedience will be strongly motivated to live Christlike lives.

Christ and the Law

Christ had the highest regard for the ten-commandment law. As the great "I AM," He Himself proclaimed the Father's moral law from Sinai (John 8:58; Ex. 3:14; see chapter 4 of this book). Part of His mission on earth was to "magnify the law and make it honorable" (Isa. 42:21). A passage from the Psalms that the New Testament applies to Christ makes clear His attitude toward the law: "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8; cf. Heb. 10:5,7).

His gospel produced a faith that firmly upheld the validity of the Decalogue. Said Paul, "Do we 'make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31).

So Christ came not only to redeem man but to vindicate the authority and holiness of the law of God, presenting its magnificence and glory before the people and giving them an example of how to relate to it. As His followers, Christians are called to magnify God's law in their lives. Having lived a life of loving obedience Himself, Christ stressed that His followers ought to be commandment keepers. When asked about the requirements for eternal life, He replied, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17). He also warned against the violation of this principle, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." Lawbreakers will be refused entrance (Matt. 7:21-23).

Christ Himself fulfilled the law, not by destroying it but through a life of obedience. "Remember," He said, "that as long as heaven and earth last, not the least point nor the smallest detail of the Law will be done away with" (Matt. 5:18, TEV). Christ strongly emphasized that the grand object of God's law must always be kept in mind: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37,38). However, He wanted His followers not to love one another as the world interprets love—selfishly or sentimentally. To explain the love He spoke of, Christ gave a "new commandment" (John 13:34). This new commandment was not to take the place of the Decalogue, but to provide believers with "an example of what true unselfish love really is, such love as had never before been witnessed on the earth. In this sense His commandment might be described as new. It charged them, not simply 'that ye love one

another,' but 'that ye love one another, as I have loved you' (John 15:12). Strictly speaking, we have here simply one more evidence of how Christ magnified His Father's laws."

Obedience reveals such love. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10). Similarly, if we love God's people we love God and "keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3).

Only through abiding in Christ can we render heartfelt obedience. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine," He said, "neither can you, unless you abide in Me....He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4,5). To abide in Christ we must be crucified with Him and experience what Paul wrote of: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). For those in this condition Christ can fulfill His new covenant promise: "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Heb. 8:10).

Blessings of Obedience

Obedience develops Christian character and produces a sense of well-being, causing the believers to grow up as "newborn babes" and to be transformed into Christ's image (see 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). This transformation from sinner to God's child witnesses effectively to Christ's power.

Scripture pronounces "blessed" all "who walk in the law of the Lord" (Ps. 119:1), whose "delight is in the law of the Lord" and who meditate "in His law...day and night" (Ps. 1:2). The blessings of obedience are many: (1) insight and wisdom (Ps. 119:98,99); (2) peace (Ps. 119:165; Isa. 48:18); (3) righteousness (Deut. 6:25; Isa. 48:18); (4) a pure and moral life (Prov. 7:1-5); (5) knowledge of the truth (John 7:17); (6) protection against disease (Ex. 15:26); (7) longevity (Prov. 3:1,2; 4:10,22); and (8) the assurance that one's prayers will be answered (1 John 3:22; cf. Ps. 66:18).

Inviting us to obedience, God promises abundant blessings (Lev. 26:3-10; Deut. 28:1-12). When we respond positively, we become His "special treasure"—a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5,6; cf. 1 Peter 2:5,9), elevated "above all nations of the earth," "the head and not the tail" (Deut. 28:1,13).