

JESUS' ENABLING GRACE TO OBEY GOD'S MORAL LAW

According to the Bible, the moral Ten Commandment Law of God is eternal and unchangeable. We are required to obey that law, but we can only do so through the Enabling Grace of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This Bible study can change your life!

I - DOES GOD HAVE A GOVERNMENT?

Psalm 103:19—"The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all."

Our heavenly Father is the king and ruler of the universe (Jeremiah 10:6-7). The Father shares the rulership of the whole creation with Christ, His Son. Christ, the Word, is called "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:11-16). Jesus is the active agent in all divine-human relations (1 Corinthians 8:6).

2 - CAN THERE BE ANY GOVERNMENT WITHOUT LAW?

Intelligent human beings cannot live together in peace without mutually accepted law. Belief in, and united, practice of good laws are the foundation of human society, the warp and woof of a happy and orderly society. If every man did as he pleased without respect to law, what would happen to peace, to morality, to public safety, and decency?

3 - HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE LAWS OF GOD'S GOVERNMENT?

Psalm 89:14—"Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before Thy face."

Since the law is an expression of God's loving character, we would expect the Bible to describe the law in similar language. Here is Paul's New Testament appraisal of the Ten Commandments:

Romans 7:12—"The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good."

Romans 7:14—"For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin."

The book of Revelation gives us a picture of the redeemed saints praising God. Here are their words: "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints" (Revelation 15:3). Those who understand the character of God can testify that He is just and true in all His ways.

Since God is still "the governor among the nations" as well as of the unfallen universe, His laws are still binding upon all rational creatures. He it is who issues these laws (Isaiah 33:22). These laws are laws of love. And they are just. The law of God is for the happiness and well-being of His creatures. Those who really love God desire to keep His laws (1 John 5:3).

4 - WHAT IS THE FUNDAMENTAL LAW OF GOD'S GOVERNMENT?

1. The law of Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17) is the unchanging, eternal, and moral law of God.

Dwight L. Moody wrote in his book:

"Now men may cavil as much as they like about other parts of the Bible, but I have never met an honest man that found fault with the Ten Commandments. Infidels may mock the Lawgiver and reject Him who has delivered us from the curse of the law, but they can't help admitting that the commandments are right . . . The people must be made to understand that the Ten Commandments are still binding, and that there is a penalty attached to their violation" (Weighed and Wanted, pp. 11, 16).

2. God's law is eternal in its nature.

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Psalm 111:7-8—"The works of His hands are verity and judgment; all His commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness."

Concerning the fundamental law of the Ten Commandments, church leaders have said:

"The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments" (Presbyterian Confession of Faith, "Shorter Catechism," question 41).

"The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof" (In the Westminster Confession, chapter 19, article 5).

John Calvin: "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" (Commentaries on the Gospels, Vol. 1, p. 277).

"We believe that the law of God is the eternal and unchangeable rule of His moral government" (Baptist Manual, article 12).

3. The moral law was written on two tables of stone.

On the first were the first four commandments, showing our duty to God. On the second were the last six commandments, showing our duty to our fellowman. Spurgeon said: "If you love God with all your heart, you must keep the first table; and if you love your neighbor as yourself, you must keep the second table" (The Perpetuity of the Law, p. 5).

5 - ARE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR ALL MEN IN ALL AGES?

1. The law was for man, from Adam to Christ.

The Ten Commandments were in force from Adam's time down through the millenniums of time. This can be proved by the New Testament.

Sin existed from the time of the fall of man, and sin is described by John as "the transgression of the law." Said the apostle:

1 John 3:4—"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."

Now there must have been law at the time of the Fall, because there was sin at the Fall. Says Paul, "Where no law is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15).

Adam could not have sinned if he had no knowledge of the moral law. Yet Adam did sin; for, as Paul said, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Not only did Adam sin by breaking the law but Cain, his son, sinned too.

Genesis 4:6-7—"And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

Abraham, long before Moses, knew God's law. Moses himself wrote:

Genesis 26:5—"Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

In Moses' time, the law of God was written by the Lord Himself upon two tables of stone and delivered to Moses, who gave them to Israel (Deuteronomy 5:22; 10:4-5).

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To this day, the Ten Commandment law is held in sacred regard by Jews and Christians alike. The 119th psalm is a great song of praise to God for the law of love. "O how love I Thy law!" said the psalmist; "It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

Isaiah regarded the law as basic in testing all religious teaching. "To the law and to the testimony," he said, "if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them (Isaiah 8:20).

Solomon knew that it was not possible to please God while despising the law, so He wrote:

Proverbs 28:9—"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."

2. It was for Jesus, as the Son of man, and for men of His generation.

Isaiah the gospel prophet declared that, when Christ came into the world, He would honor the law of God. Here are his words: "He will magnify the law, and make it honourable" (Isaiah 42:21).

The psalmist had predicted that Christ's attitude toward the law would be one of honor, love, and respect.

Psalm 40:7-8—"Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart" (Hebrews 10:7).

Openly Christ declared to the people, "I have kept My Father's commandments" (John 15:10). And He said, "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15:10). Knowing that He was under suspicion as a teacher of new doctrines, Christ declared in His Sermon on the Mount, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law" (Matthew 5:17-19). Christ made it plain that He did not come to abolish the Ten Commandments, but to teach men how to keep them.

3. It was for men in the time of the apostles.

We have already referred to Paul's appraisal of the law. It is holy, just, and good, he said. Moreover, Paul declared that faith established the law. It did not abolish it. The following text deals a deathblow to the doctrine of antinomianism (the doctrine that no moral law is necessary). It also shows that faith establishes the law.

Romans 3:31—"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

The New Testament writers understood that the law was to be the standard in the judgment. Said James:

James 2:10-12—"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."

John was even more emphatic than James. He said:

1 John 2:4—"He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Many sincere Christians are opposed to the law because they say that it frustrates the grace of God. They refer to Paul in order to support their views. But Peter said that Paul wrote "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

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Paul had no more right than any other human being to change or abolish the law of the living God. He testified publicly, in court, that he believed "all things which are written in the law" (Acts 24:14). "We establish the law," said the apostle (Romans 3:31). That doesn't sound like destroying the law, does it? Paul was a great theologian. Only those who misunderstand him misrepresent and misinterpret his words.

4. It is for God's remnant people of the last days.

Nothing is more clearly revealed in all the pages of Holy Writ than the solemn truth that God will have a people on earth, just before the second coming of Christ, who will uphold and obey His holy law. In spite of persecution and difficulties, they will stand in defense of God's truth.

Revelation 12:17—"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

These people not only believe in the practice of the law of love, which is the law of Ten Commandments, but they also believe the gospel and have the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 14:12—"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (verses 13-15).

The question for each of us to ask is, Am I one of God's remnant people? If not, why not?

6 - WHY IS THERE GENERAL REBELLION AGAINST GOD'S HOLY LAW?

Romans 8:7—"The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

Only by the new birth can the carnal mind and heart of man be changed. According to the new covenant promise (Ezekiel 36:26-27), God will write His law in our hearts (Hebrews 8:10). But we must be willing. Are we?

Society today lives in rebellion against God's law. Everyone acknowledges that it is a good law, but few people want to obey it. In America, thousands of homes break up every year in the divorce courts. Crime costs billions of dollars annually. Hundreds of murders take place every month. And many of these dastardly crimes are committed by youth. According to a committee of prominent jurists and statesmen, crime will carry the nation on to anarchy unless it is checked soon.

Some ministers and professed Christians oppose the law of God. If they fight the Ten Commandments, what can we expect of the people? Jesus said that if a man broke one of God's commandments and then taught others to do the same, he would be called least in the kingdom (Matthew 5:19). It is serious enough to disobey God, but nothing is more displeasing to the Lawgiver than leading others into rebellion. The false doctrine that men are not obligated to obey the Ten Commandments has weakened the forces of morality in the world and opened the floodgates of vice and crime. When rebellion reaches its limit, God will intervene.

Psalms 119:126—"It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void Thy law."

Those who have despised God's law have miscalculated His character. They will discover, in the final day of judgment, that He is a God of justice as well as mercy. Here are the words that He speaks to the despisers of His kingdom and His law:

Matthew 7:21-23—"Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy

name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

7 - WHAT PROMISE IS HELD OUT TO THOSE WHO ARE OBEDIENT?

Psalm 119:165—"Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

The Christian who has a correct knowledge of God will love Him and His law. He will find peace in loving obedience. Isaiah declares that this peace and righteousness that all obedient followers of Jehovah enjoy is like "the waves of the sea."

Isaiah 48:18—"O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

The test of discipleship is in obedience. The greatest honor and tribute we can pay to Christ is to willingly consent to the writing of His law of love upon the fleshly tablets of our hearts. Will you consent to this work of grace? Remember, Christ saves us from sin, and "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Salvation then means deliverance from lawbreaking and the restoration of the human heart to the moral likeness of God. Jesus will do this for you if you consent. Will you not say with Christ, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8)?

Now, let us see how grace makes possible obedience to God's commandments. It is a source of great encouragement. In it we will see the power of the grace of Christ and what it can do for our lives.

8 - WHAT ARE THE THREE TYPES OF LAWS IN THE BIBLE?

1. The civil laws of the Jewish nation.

The civil laws regulated a multitude of matters in connection with the operation of the nation of Israel. God gave these laws to meet the situation in their day. They covered such problems as health, sanitation, disease, crime, court procedure, etc. In their details they are not binding as civil obligations today, though many wise and fundamental principles are revealed therein, which would still be applicable.

2. The ceremonial, or sanctuary, laws were abolished at the cross.

The ceremonial, or sanctuary, laws governed the religious services of Israel and were symbols of the Messiah to come. They were for the Jews and all converts to the faith of Israel. These civil laws were written in a book (Deuteronomy 31:24-26) by Moses and placed in the ark of the Testament. It should be remembered that the ceremonial and civil laws were not written on the tables of stone, as were the Ten Commandments. So the ceremonial laws were temporary in nature and no longer necessary after the life and death of Christ to which it pointed. Here are Paul's words:

Colossians 2:14—"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross."

Colossians 2:17—"Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

3. The moral Ten Commandment law (Exodus 20:1-17).

The law of God was proclaimed from Mount Sinai, written on tables of stone, and preserved by Israel as the universal law of mankind.

Deuteronomy 10:4—"He wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the Ten Commandments, which the Lord spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly" (Deuteronomy 5:22).

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The Ten Commandment law was then placed inside the ark.

9. WHAT DOES THE LAW DO FOR THE SINNER?

God uses the law to do for the sinner just what needs to be done. The sinner must realize that he is a sinner. The heavy hand of the law must be laid upon him, and he must be arrested in his course. Notice the following carefully:

1. It gives a knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:20—"By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 7:7).

2. It brings guilt and condemnation.

Romans 3:19—"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

3. It acts as a spiritual mirror.

James 1:23-25—"If any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 2:9-12).

Without the law, the sinner is like a man who is afflicted with a deadly disease, that he doesn't know he has. Paul said, "I had not known sin, but by the law" (Romans 7:7).

Evangelist John Brown once said:

"The human heart cannot receive the healing thread of the gospel unless it is first pierced by the needle of the law."

10 - WHAT IS THE LAW UNABLE TO DO FOR THE SINNER?

The law cannot forgive. Law does not possess the power to forgive those who transgress its precepts. Only the Lawgiver can do that. Jesus died to redeem us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). The law cannot keep the sinner from sinning because "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7).

The law only shows the sinner where he needs to change; but the law, itself, cannot change him. And so let us get three facts about the law very clear.

1. It cannot forgive or justify.

Romans 3:20—"By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight."

2. It cannot keep from sin or sanctify.

Galatians 3:21—"Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law."

3. It cannot cleanse or keep the heart clean (Romans 9:3, 7-8).

The law is limited in its ability to do all that needs to be done for the sinner. A wound cannot be sewed up with only a needle. The thread of the gospel must do that.

11 - WHAT DOES THE GRACE OF CHRIST DO FOR THE SINNER?

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When the law of God and the Spirit of God have made the sinner conscious of his sin, he will then feel his need of Christ and go to the Saviour for pardon. The publican found it so (Luke 18:13-14). The woman taken in adultery felt condemned and ashamed. She needed sympathy and forgiveness, and Christ was ready to grant these to her. Then He said, "Sin no more."

If we confess and put away sin, He will forgive (1 John 1:9). This is grace, or unmerited favor. This gracious love of Christ awakens love in the heart of the sinner, and he then desires to serve and obey God. Here are four elements of the saving grace of Christ:

1. It forgives and justifies.

Acts 13:38-39—"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Luke 18:13-14).

2. It saves from sin, or sanctifies.

Matthew 1:21—"She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."

1 Corinthians 1:30—"But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

3. It inspires faith.

Ephesians 2:8-10—"By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

4. It brings God's power.

Romans 1:16—"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

Forgiveness of sin and power over sin comes through the exercise of simple faith in God's promises and a full surrender of the heart to Him.

12 - HOW DOES A SINNER SAVED BY GRACE RELATE TO THE LAW?

1. The law becomes the standard of his life.

1 John 5:3—"This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments."

2. He permits Christ to fulfill in him the righteousness of the law.

Romans 8:3-4—"God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

3. Christ writes the law in his heart.

Hebrews 8:10—"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people" (Psalm 119:11).

To the surrendered, believing soul the law of God holds no terror. He is now free from its condemnation through Christ. In this sense he is "not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:15). He is not under the bondage of condemnation by the law.

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He is now in a position to exercise that "faith which worketh by love" and purifies the soul (Galatians 5:6). This means a transformed life in harmony with the moral law of God.

John Wesley wrote in his Sermons:

"I cannot spare [to be apart from] the law one moment, no more than I can spare Christ . . . Each is continually sending me to the other,—the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me 'above gold and precious stones' . . . This is perfect freedom; thus to keep His law, and to walk in all His commandments blameless"—The Works of John Wesley, A.M. [3d. American ed.], Vol. 1, pp. 314-315.