



Wonderful
Things
in
Your Law

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*“Open my eyes that I may see
wonderful things in your law.”*

—Psalm 119:18

Introduction

This booklet began with questions: How did Jesus fulfill the law? What does it mean for the law to be fulfilled? These were things I grasped with my heart but had never reasoned out. The need to reason them out came from objections raised by non-Christians. For instance, a Muslim woman with whom I was talking was offended that I observed the laws against adultery and murder but disregarded the prohibition against eating pork. In her mind, one couldn't pick and choose which laws to obey and which to ignore. Homosexuals raised essentially the same objection: Why are some commands, such as keeping the Sabbath, no longer kept, while laws against homosexuality remain in force?

Considering these questions left me with contradictions that I could neither explain away as unimportant nor write off as unbelieving nonsense. I took my questions to the Lord with no small amount of apprehension. Much depended on the answer.

Of course, I soon discovered that I never had any reason to fear. “Let God be true, and every

man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). The whole Bible, and not just the New Testament, contains revelation about how we are to understand the law. We do, however, need our eyes opened before we can comprehend these things. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:9, 10). Contained in these pages is the Lord’s answer to my questions about the law. I pray these answers will minister to others as well. Much more could be said about the law than what I have written here. But I have chosen to limit my discussion to the questions mentioned. I trust the true Teacher will take care of the things not addressed (1 John 2:27).

Wonderful Things in Your Law

How Should the Law Be Understood?

What does the Bible say about interpreting the law? This question must be answered first of all. How we answer not only determines the way in which we approach the law but indicates what we expect to understand from it. Let's consider the following verses:

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law (Psalm 119:18).

But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away (2 Cor. 3:14).

If we are to know what the law is saying, our eyes must be opened. If we approach the law thinking that its meaning lies in the mere letter, we are reading the old covenant with a veil over our hearts (2 Cor. 3:6). In other words, God is trying

to reveal much more to us than moral standards or proper religious practice.

“Wonderful” in the Psalm above doesn’t just describe something nifty. The Hebrew word (pahlah) refers to something completely *other, surpassing, extraordinary*. The angel of the LORD used this word when Manoah, Sampson’s father, asked his name—“Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?” (Judges 13:18). **What we are dealing with in the word “wonderful” is nothing less than God’s absolute uniqueness as contrasted with anything and everything known to us in the universe.** Moses expressed this when he worshipped the Lord following the Red Sea crossing: “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” (Exodus 15:11).

The writer of Psalm 119 evidently expected to receive much more from the law than the plain meaning of the words—“Remember the Sabbath,” “You shall not steal,” “Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material,” or “This is the offering made by fire that you are to present to the LORD” (Ex. 20: 8, 15; Lev. 19:19;

Num. 28:3). He anticipated “wonderful.” What we see in the verse from 2 Corinthians is that when our eyes are opened, when the veil is removed from our hearts, we see Christ. Jesus is “wonderful.” In Him, God’s surpassing otherness, His uniqueness, is fully expressed.

All of this means that if we approach the law as instructions to be obeyed, we approach with the wrong assumption. Instead, God would have us approach the law as a way to know and commune with Him who is “wonderful.”

Not to Abolish but to Fulfill

Let’s consider another set of verses:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [...] Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-19).

Here again we see that the plain meaning of the commands isn't a sufficient understanding of the law. If the whole significance of the law lay in grasping and obeying God's word, there would be no need for Jesus to fulfill the law. From Jesus's teaching it is clear that the law cannot be fulfilled even if we keep it without breaking any commands. The law can only be fulfilled by Him. This same idea is communicated in the exchange between Jesus and the rich young ruler. Despite the fact that he had kept all the commandments, Jesus told him he lacked one thing, and that one thing was Jesus Himself (Mark 10:17-21).

Nevertheless, these verses make it just as clear that we are never free to disregard or break God's commands. Jesus taught that the law is fulfilled in Him but He never taught that it was OK to covet or commit adultery. Nowhere in the New Testament will we find permission to treat the law as irrelevant or optional. But here we get into difficulties. For while the disciples continued to honor marriage, discourage theft, and condemn idol worship, they didn't continue the sacrifices, feasts, or temple worship that were commanded in the same law. At first glance it

seems that they—and we—have broken the law and violated Jesus's teachings about it. This apparent contradiction will be dealt with presently, but first we need to examine how Jesus fulfilled the law as an individual.

How Jesus Fulfilled the Law Individually

According to the law, the Old Covenant could be kept in essentially two ways. The first and most obvious way was not to break any commandments. As God promised in Exodus 19:5, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” However, no one has ever done this. Moses, author of the law and the most humble man on earth, struck the rock in defiance of the Lord’s instructions (Num. 12:3, 20:9-13). David, “a man after God’s own heart,” committed murder and adultery, among other things (Acts 13:22; 2 Sam. 12:9). If God was going to be in covenant with anyone at all, He had to provide an alternative to keeping His commands. This is where the many sacrifices came in. For those sins whose penalty was death,

the offender could offer up an animal to die in his or her place—“In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven” (Lev. 4:35). For other sins, there was still a cost—sometimes monetary, sometimes in recompensing someone for damaged possessions by giving them like items. The law contains a whole range of punitive and compensatory measures. But the basic formula under the law was, “Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deut. 19:21).

Jesus fulfilled the law in both of the aspects just mentioned. During His earthly life, He was without sin (Heb. 4:15). He never broke a single command. Nevertheless, on the cross He offered Himself “as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” and fulfilled the law’s demand’s in this way as well (1 John 4:10). In sacrificing Himself, Jesus also demonstrated divine love and fulfilled the heart of the law: “Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10).

There is yet one more way that Jesus fulfilled the law, perhaps more comprehensive than what

we have said so far. Jesus was not “plan B” to the law, a rescue mission in the event the law failed. Jesus was always the plan (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20, 21). The law was “plan B” to Him, a way for God to be in relationship with people until the time He appointed for Christ’s coming (Gal. 3:23-25). Colossians and Hebrews tell us that the whole law was a foreshadowing of Christ (Col. 2:16, 17; Heb. 10:1). Consequently, the law was never intended to be an end. God’s entire purpose in giving it was to speak of His Son and to testify of the only hope, the only means of righteousness, the only salvation (Heb. 2:3). Jesus fulfilled the law because He was the reality of it. To use an analogy: the CEO of a company wants to hire his own son, but can’t do so without going through a hiring process. When he writes the job description and details the criteria that must be met in order to be hired, he has his son in mind. He tailors it to reflect his son’s work experience and professional qualifications. When he does interviews, some applicants do not fulfill the requirements listed in the job description while others fit the criteria exactly, having had comparable professional experience to his son.

But regardless of how qualified the applicants are, none of them is his son. None of them is the one he had in mind and had chosen to fill the position from the beginning. Only Jesus can fulfill the law because God had Him alone in mind when He wrote it with His own finger on tablets of stone and delivered it to Moses (Exodus 31:18).

How Jesus fulfills the Law for Us

All of this is well and good for Jesus. But it doesn't help anyone else unless His fulfillment of the law somehow translates into the way we relate to God. And this, as was said previously, is exactly where we find ourselves in difficulties—Jesus fulfilled the law, yet we aren't free to break the law, yet there are parts we observe and parts we don't, yet God commanded all of it, yet...on and on. It is also at this point that critics (such as those mentioned in the introduction) raise quite logical objections to our faith, and where various Christian sects are able to insinuate subtle distortions of truth. By such distortions, many

sincere believers are drawn back under a yoke of enslaving legalism (Gal. 5:1).

How can we reconcile these things? Having posed the question, it is now incumbent on us to answer it. To do so, we first need to divide the law of Moses into two broad categories: 1) Ceremonial or ritual law. This category includes sacrifices, feasts, Sabbath observances, dietary laws, designs for the temple structure and furniture, priestly garments, and the like; 2) Moral law. Under this category we find commandments concerning behavior: You shall not steal, you shall not move a boundary stone, honor father and mother, and many others like these. More subcategories could probably be introduced, but we can fairly fit any law under one of these headings. Concerning Christ's fulfillment of the law, these two categories correspond to two aspects of our relationship with God in Christ: 1) Us in Christ; 2) Christ is us. Simply put, all ceremonial/ritual law is fulfilled as we live in Christ, and all moral law is fulfilled by Christ as He lives in us.

Appearances, Appearances

Nevertheless, these two aspects of fulfillment—us in Christ and Christ in us—manifest differently, and have different appearances, outwardly speaking. This contributes to our collective confusion about the place of the law in Christianity. Broadly speaking, all those laws whose observance seems to have ceased fall under the ceremonial/ritual category. Because they are fulfilled in Christ, they are fulfilled outside of any observable realm. Alternatively, the moral laws are fulfilled as Christ lives in us. The fulfillment of these laws takes place in our bodies and in the visible world. It appears to us that the moral laws continue and remain binding while the ceremonial/ritual laws do not. But this is a trick of the light, so to speak. For example, we no longer have to bring sacrifices because in Christ we are covered by the blood He offered to the Father (Eph. 1:7). But by the same token, if Christ lives in us, we no longer have to keep the moral commands such as “You shall not murder,” for Christ will keep them in us just as He kept them while living His earthly life.

The moral law, then, ceases every bit as much as the ceremonial/ritual law. We are responsible if we break a command because it is we, and not Christ, who sin when we live according to the sinful nature we inherited from Adam. But we are not responsible when it comes to obeying the moral law because God has put His Son in us for that purpose.

Christ in us is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy: “‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts’” (Jer. 31:33).

Consequently, keeping the moral law should never be a matter of determination, will power, or rededicating ourselves to God. Keeping the law is entirely about trusting in Jesus. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Paul said this in reference to the law (Gal. 2:15-21). His death with Christ freed him from any obligation to the law. Instead, he lived by faith in the Son of God

who lived in place of him, who also gave Himself for his sins. We too must trust Jesus to keep the law in us just as we must trust that our sins are covered in Him.

But while it is true that Jesus is able to keep the law in us just as He kept it while on earth, we are still missing something if we think that the point is to keep the moral law, whether by Christ or by our own effort. For as was said earlier, Jesus was the fulfillment of the law because it was Him the Father always had in mind, Him that the Father took great pains to depict in the temple furniture, the Year of Jubilee, the stoning of blasphemers, and the command to not covet. Jesus fulfills the law, not because He keeps any command (though He keeps them all), but because He is the Son of His Father's love (Col. 1:13). In the end, the moral law is fulfilled in us simply because the Son is in us. He is what the Father has always wanted. In Him, the Father is well pleased (Matt. 3:17).

The Ceremonial/Ritual Law

Broadly speaking, then, the law is fulfilled as we live in Christ and He lives in us. To deepen our appreciation of this point, let's consider some specific laws, starting with those in the ceremonial/ritual category.

Passover

We must start with Passover, the first law in Exodus. Of Passover, Paul says:

Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5:7, 8).

God commanded Passover as a figure of Christ, “the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). Anyone who wished to

escape the destroyer whom God sent to judge Egypt was required to kill a lamb and apply its blood to the doorframe of their house. The blood protected all who remained in the house marked by it just as Jesus's blood shields all who remain in Him (Ex. 12:23; Eph. 1:7). While judgment raged all around, those in the houses ate the lamb's roasted flesh, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs (Ex. 12:8). Jesus said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). In Him, we are spiritually nourished just as those remaining in the houses were nourished by the lamb's flesh. That the Israelites had to remove all yeast from their houses on the first day of the feast indicates another aspect of being in Christ. Yeast, as Paul understands it, represents the old nature, the nature of wickedness. In Christ, where the blood of the Lamb covers us, the death of the Lamb has purged the yeast of our old nature. As we remain in Jesus, we can live a life free from 1) the control of the sinful nature; 2) guilt, shame, and other repercussions of sinning. The Festival is kept, not by sacrificing lambs, getting rid of yeast, or

eating a ritual meal, but by living in Christ by faith.

The Sabbath

“Keep the Sabbath” is repeated often throughout the law, perhaps more than any other command. From the beginning of Exodus to the end of Deuteronomy, Sabbaths of various types are discussed at least 15 times. Besides these, a Sabbath was connected with every feast and holy day. There was a lot of rest built into the Jewish calendar year.

The Sabbath, as we know, began when God created the world. He created for six days and rested on the seventh. Genesis 2:3 says, “And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” The Sabbath, then, was to be a day in which God’s people did no regular work but entered into and experienced the rest of divine completion.

In Christ, God completed all His eternal works. He completed the work of atonement and salvation, He completed a new creation in which

righteousness dwells. As if to punctuate this, Jesus died on the sixth day of the week, His last words being, “It is finished” (John 19:30, 31). On the seventh day, the Sabbath, the Lord rested the ultimate rest in the tomb, being unable to do anything to raise Himself, being completely dependent on His Father’s working. By His own glory and power, the Father raised Jesus from the dead on the first day of the week (John 20: 1; Rom. 1:4, 6:4). The Sabbath, then, isn’t fulfilled by going to church on Saturday, or Sunday, or any other day of the week.¹ In fact, by its very nature, the Sabbath can’t be fulfilled by any work of man but only by the work of God in Christ. All we can do to enter that rest is to believe and enjoy God’s finished work in Christ (Heb. 4:3-5).

Dietary Laws

At first glance, we might think dietary laws have to do with behavior and belong to the moral category. But God told Noah, “Everything that

¹ This isn’t to say we should stop meeting once a week for corporate worship and instruction in the word. Having regular times of fellowship is practical and necessary for our encouragement and growth (Heb. 3:13, 10:25). But we should never think that going to church fulfills the Sabbath command or that God’s favor depends on meeting weekly.

lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything” (Gen. 9:3). Though both clean and unclean animals were taken on the ark, God made no distinction between them and didn’t prohibit Noah from eating any animal (Gen. 7:2). This can only mean that, in God’s mind, the cleanliness or uncleanness of different animals was never absolute. Consequently, the distinction between clean and unclean animals was introduced in the law of Moses for symbolic, ceremonial purposes (Lev. 11:4).

God had at least two reasons for making ceremonial distinctions among various animals. The first reason was to teach His people that they were to be clean through their separation to Him (Lev. 11:44, 45). Another closely related reason was that God wished His people to be culturally distinct from the heathen nations bordering them (Deut. 14:21). The separation of Israel to God meant separation from the world. In truth, a great many laws boil down to this truth of holiness, or being separate.

Jesus declared all foods clean when He pointed out that what we eat doesn’t enter our

hearts but passes through our bodies (Mark 7:18, 19). He went on to say, “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’” (Mark 7:20-23). The dietary laws, then, were really meant to show that God desired a people separated from the uncleanness in their own hearts, a people that didn’t enshrine sin in personal habits or cultural practices.

Galatians 5:24 says, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” Our cleanliness, our separation to God and from the world, is by the cross. The cross does not divide based on national boundaries, ethnic lines, or cultural customs. It penetrates into the very heart of man and separates him to God from the sexual immorality, theft, murder, and other evils within. It is a holiness based, not on externals, but on being in Christ, the One whom God divided from every uncleanness when He raised Him from the

dead (Php. 3:9). In Him, we are separated from everything that would defile us and belong to God alone. This, then, is the only way the dietary laws can be fulfilled.

Hygiene

OK, we’re going to get a bit personal in this section. Leviticus 15:19-31 discusses menstruation. During a woman’s period, anything or anyone with which she came in contact was considered unclean. A woman’s uncleanness didn’t end when menstruation ended. She could only be made clean if the priest sacrificed two doves or pigeons—one as a sin offering, the other as a burnt offering.

Many are familiar with Isaiah 64:6—“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags....” More literally translated, the last part of the verse reads, “all our righteous acts are like soiled menstrual rags.” Wow. Every good thing we do, every command we keep by our own willpower, is as valuable to God as a used tampon. If we saw things the way God does, we would throw our

own attempts to be good in the trash instead of inviting the newspaper to snap a few photos as we hand a check to our favorite charity. Beyond helping people be sanitary, then, laws about menstruation address the fact that what flows from within us—be it good, bad, or ugly—is unclean, and defiles everything we touch. We can only be clean as we cease from our own works and trust in Christ’s sacrifice.

Eating the Fellowship Offering

Leviticus 19:6 and 7 say that the fellowship offering “shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it or on the next day; anything left over until the third day must be burned up. If any of it is eaten on the third day, it is impure and will not be accepted.” This is a curious directive and one of the more obscure laws. Beyond proper food handling and the prevention of food poisoning, God had His Son in mind. The flesh of Christ’s sacrifice was not to be found on the third day for He was raised from the dead.

Circumcision

Circumcision was instituted by God in the time of Abraham and was given to be a sign of God's covenant with His people (Gen. 17:10, 11; Rom. 4:11). Paul tells us that, "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:11, 12). So it is the cross, and not flint knives, that God used to cut away man's sinful flesh (Josh. 5:2). We fulfill this command simply by believing that our sinful flesh was surgically removed in Christ.

The Moral Law

When it comes to the moral law, many of us immediately think of the Ten Commandments. For starters, let's consider a few of these commandments in light of Christ in us.

“You shall have no other gods before me”
(Deut. 5:7).

The word for God in Hebrew is *elohim*. The root of this word has a range of meanings: *strong, in front of (as a leader), fear/object of fear or reverence, Lord*. According to this command, we shall not fear or recognize the lordship of any but God. We shall not follow after or be ruled by any other. This quickly boils down to behavior, because the one we truly fear and who truly rules us is the one we obey (Rom. 6:16). We can see why this is the first of the Ten Commandments. It is the foundation of all morality.

Jesus told the Pharisees, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing out from Himself; He can only do what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19). This relationship supremely fulfills the first commandment. As the Son, Jesus is the spit and image of His Father. He can only do what the Father does because it is “in His genes,” so to speak. For Jesus, the law wasn’t something He followed so much as it was something

expressed through Him—just as our DNA is expressed through us.

First John 3:9 says, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him.” Christ is God’s seed. Because He remains in us, God’s “genetic code” is increasingly expressed through us. Jesus always does what pleases the Father, so He will fulfill the first commandment. He will neither fear nor serve any other. Our flesh and carnal mind serve whatever appeals to them and may manifest their godlessness from time to time. But Jesus in us will always say, “Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:7, 8; Heb. 10:7).

“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”
But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord (1 Peter 3:14, 15).

“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything” (Deut. 5:8).

Christ is God’s only image (Col. 1:15). No one else can represent Him (Heb. 1:3). Because we have been created in Christ Jesus, God’s

image is in us. God wishes us to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). This doesn't mean that we are changed. God doesn't try to improve our flesh. His image is in us. God chisels away that which isn't His image in order to reveal the image within, just as a sculptor removes stone to reveal the statue. We are God's workmanship (Eph. 2:10). If we only refrain from worshipping idols, we haven't grasped the heart of this commandment. The fullness of this command is only realized if God's image—Jesus—is becoming clearer and more manifest in us by the workmanship of the Holy Spirit.

*“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”
(Deut. 5:12).*

We have already discussed the Sabbath as a ceremonial/ritual law. In this aspect, the Sabbath speaks of the fact that God finished all His eternal works in Christ's death and resurrection. This is what we might call the objective side of the Sabbath. But there is a subjective and moral aspect to the Sabbath as well, and this may be why the Sabbath is mentioned in the Ten

Commandments, all of which seem to relate to moral law.

While talking with His disciples just before His death, Jesus explained His relationship with His Father in this way: “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14:10). Jesus prayed that we would participate in the union that the Father and the Son enjoy (John 17:21). As we live in Him, we find that we are freed from the inward principle of action that characterizes the world: forced labor or slavery. The end of the fourth commandment reads, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand.... Therefore, the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (Deut. 5:15). For those outside of Christ, everything depends on their efforts. They must work—for bread, security, even salvation. For those in Christ, it is still possible to lapse into an Egyptian mentality, to take on the responsibility of being holy, of ministering to others, of providing for ourselves.

But if we live in the Person of the Sabbath by faith, He also lives in us and becomes our inward principle of motivation. We cease from our own works, and Christ does His works in us (Rom. 15:17, 18).

“You shall not murder” (Deut. 5:17).

In 1 John we are told Cain belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother (1 John 3:12). John goes on to say that “no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:15, 16). Murder is wrong, not merely because a life has been taken, but because it violates the nature of Christ. Jesus gave up His life willingly that we might live. The murderer takes another’s life against their will for selfish ends. If Jesus lives in us, then, we will not murder but will allow death to work in us that life may work in others (2 Cor. 4:12). Really, we haven’t comprehended the spirit of this law if we only refrain from murdering people and do

not fellowship in Christ's sufferings, becoming like Him in His death (Php. 3:10).

Closely related to this law is the ceremonial command against eating blood: "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood" (Lev. 17:14). Life doesn't belong to us but to God. We have been exiled from life ever since God placed Cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). But when Jesus instituted the new covenant, He invited His disciples to drink the cup of His own blood, the blood He would pour out so that all might have the life of God (Luke 22:20; John 6:54). It is at the cross where the willing Lamb of God stands in sharp relief against those who were motivated to take His life for whatever human or satanic reasons served their interests.

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Deut. 5:20).

In the book of Revelation, Jesus is called "the faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14). During His trial before Pilate, Jesus said, "for this reason

I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18:37). Being the faithful and true witness got Jesus executed. He also died for crimes He didn’t commit, based on accusations that should have fallen on us but that He took without opening His mouth to acquit Himself (John 19:10, 11). Accusing others falsely so that they are wrongly punished is not merely dishonest. It is antichrist. By contrast, the Faithful and True Witness within will continue to tell the truth, even when it benefits others and not Himself. In this way, the ninth commandment will be fulfilled for us.

Sexual Relationships

Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” From the beginning, God determined to display His image through the union of male and female. The first man and woman also formed the first marriage—“The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman....’ For this reason a man will

leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:23, 24).

Paul shows us that sexual union in the context of marriage finds its reality in the union of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31, 32). This is the union God eternally ordained and set apart as His image. Laws concerning sexuality, then, do not spring from mere social convention, cultural taboos, or individual preference. Adultery, sex apart from marriage (fornication), homosexuality, and other sexual sins violate the image of God as displayed in Christ and the church. In fact, it could be said that sexual perversion at bottom is the setting up of a false image of God. Paul makes a direct connection between idolatry and sexual sin in Romans chapter one. After stating that mankind has “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images,” he says, “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another” (Rom. 1:22-27). But if Christ is being formed in us our sexual behavior will be

motivated and shaped according to the image of God: the Lamb and His wife (Rev. 21:9).

“But I Tell You...”

Near the beginning of this discussion, we said the purpose of the law is to reveal Christ—Him who is Wonderful—and not just moral or religious practice. The preceding examples illustrate both of these points. We see in them that the law finds its fulfillment and end in the us in Christ/Christ in us relationship (Rom. 10:4). This being the case, we also see the inadequacy of finding only moral and religious practice in the law. God’s desire in the law is to bring us into divine relationship. Outside of divine relationship, obeying the law falls as far short of God’s will as committing sin. In fact, keeping the law apart from union with God is, in one sense, worse than sinning without pretense. The law-abiding person can avoid facing their unchanged nature because they do all the right things. They can live a pious, moral life even as they refuse to live in Christ or let Him live in them. Jesus addresses this fact in His Sermon on the Mount.

Many times in that sermon, He quotes the law, then says, “But I tell you” and provides a contrast. Consider this example from Matthew:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment”
(Matt. 5:21, 22).

In otherwords, it is easy for us to justify hearts full of hatred as long as we don’t kill anyone. Similarly, Jesus says we have already committed adultery if we look on another person lustfully. Sexual immorality may be running rampant on the inside but the legalist reasons he is OK as long as he looks but doesn’t touch. But at the end of the day, God isn’t interested in whether we kept or broke His commands. He is interested in whether we were in communion with Him and were transformed by that communion. “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation” (Gal. 6:15).

Paul claimed that he was faultless according to legalistic righteousness (Php. 3:6). That's quite a feat to have accomplished. But after Christ was revealed, he described himself as the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). He didn't say this because he had broken the law. We might point to the attack he mounted against Christians as evidence of lawlessness, but persecuting Christians was actually quite lawful for Jews. Christians were seen as blasphemers, and the law commands that blasphemers be put to death (Num. 15:30; Matt. 25:65, 66; Acts 6:11). Nevertheless, in the light of Christ, Paul saw his very essence was corrupted even though he kept the law down to the smallest detail (Matt. 5:18). The solution to this problem? Knowing Christ: “What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.... I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ” (Php. 3:8, 9).

A Little Bit of Leaven...

Regarding the law, the New Testament leaves us with a pretty clear choice: keep the law or live by the us in Christ/Christ in us relationship. The former is the old covenant, the latter the new covenant, and as Hebrews says, “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear” (Heb. 8:13).

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that we cannot mix these two covenants, not even a little: “Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal. 5:4). Of course, circumcision isn’t the issue it once was. But we can fairly fill in the blank with any law we wish. For instance, Saturday, not Sunday, is the seventh day of the week and is the Sabbath day referred to in the law. Some Christians teach that we must assemble on Saturday because it is God’s Sabbath. If we do not assemble on this day then we are violating the scripture and

displeasing the Lord. But according to Paul, we cannot pick and choose which parts of the law to keep and which to disregard. To their credit, some believers who observe the Sabbath also follow the dietary laws such as not eating pork. But do they also offer burnt sacrifices twice a day?² And do they make these offerings in a temple in Jerusalem?³ Do they practice stoning?⁴ If the answer to these questions is “No” (and it most certainly is), then they are law-breakers and are violating the covenant they have chosen. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10). What is more, their choice to mix the old and new covenants may be alienating them from Christ and from the grace that is the only hope any of us has (Gal. 5:4).

Other believers grant that we are free from ceremonial laws like the Sabbath but emphasize the moral law or the Ten Commandments. As we have said, these laws are fulfilled by Christ in us. But again, if I believe the Ten Commandments are to be fulfilled by me and not by Christ in me,

² Numbers 28:3-8.

³ Deuteronomy 12:4-6; 2 Kings 21:4.

⁴ Numbers 15:32-36.

then I must observe circumcision, the feast of trumpets, and every other Old Testament law down to the letter (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 23:23-25). For, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law” (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26). Most truly, choosing between the law and Christ is an all or nothing affair!

Beyond the law of Moses proper, believers also struggle with making the New Testament into a new set of laws. Sometimes, our Christianity is nothing other than an old covenant relationship with God based on the last 27 books of the Bible instead of the first five. Accordingly, some have made head coverings for women (mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:5) into something required to gain God’s pleasure. Others have concluded that instruments shouldn’t be played in church simply because instruments aren’t specifically mentioned in New Testament instructions about worship (i.e. 1 Cor. 14:26-40). More commonly, Christians burden themselves with Jesus’s command to disciple all nations. Daily Bible study and prayer quickly turn into a law. And holiness, which we have

shown is accomplished through the cross, is a responsibility that many believers take on themselves with an almost morbid obsessiveness.

Concerning our approach to the New Testament, we need to ask ourselves (as we did with the Old Testament) what God intends for us to understand. Is God primarily concerned with communicating correct behavior and religious practice, and are we to draw from the New Testament commands to be obeyed? If our answer to this question was no in relationship to the law of Moses, it must certainly, emphatically be no when asked about the New Testament. If the object of the law is to present Christ and help us live in divine relationship, then much more is this the prime objective of the New Testament. Certainly, New Testament authors give instruction and bring correction in light of Christ. But there is no longer any covenant, any commerce with God based on correct behavior or religious practice. We relate to God in Christ or we do not relate.

Regardless of how the law smuggles itself into our Christianity, it has no place in the church. No ends—regardless of how spiritual they may

seem—justify the law as a means of relating to God or achieving His goals. As Paul said of those wanting the Galatians to accept a mixed gospel, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal. 1:9). We are fond of quoting John 14:6 to unbelievers as a commentary about other religions: “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” Perhaps we need to quote this verse more often to ourselves as a commentary on Christian religion and the reinventions of the old covenant that supplant Christ as our preferred way to God.

Conclusions

Just before He died, Jesus prayed what was in God’s heart, and what He knew He would accomplish through the cross: “I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me” (John 17:23). Paul tells us that the law was abolished in Jesus’s flesh, and that “His purpose was to create

in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in his one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross” (Eph. 2:15, 16). Jesus didn’t pray that we would achieve moral perfection. Paul didn’t say God’s purpose was to create a people who would keep every religious observance without fail. Instead, both Jesus and Paul spoke of ONE: “one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6). This is why Jesus identified Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 as the greatest commandment: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” God is one, and His longing—since before creation—has been that we come into His oneness, into the love relationship He is, through Christ. God does not want minions to command but a people with whom He can share His glory, His throne, His very self.

Drawing His people into this relationship is what Jewish tradition says God intended at Mount Sinai. The cloud that covered the

mountain was intended as a *chuppah* or wedding canopy. But the Israelites would not enter into the wedding canopy to be joined to their God (Ex. 19:13; Deut. 5:5). Instead, they said to Moses, “Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey” (Deut. 5:27). The Lord’s response to this request was to give Moses the law. But this was an enormous concession. This was not what God wanted. This was not why He delivered them, not why He brought them up out of Egypt.

Like the Israelites, we too have been delivered by the blood of our Passover Lamb. We have come out of the world and into the church as part of a spiritual exodus. God’s purpose in delivering us was to bring us into His heavenly wedding canopy in Christ. The law—as well as the entire scripture—is intended to be a pathway into this relationship. Nevertheless, like the Israelites, we can refuse relationship, preferring just to hear and obey the dead letter, chiseled on stone. But the writer of Hebrew urges us on to something better:

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; [...] But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:18-24).

Here we are invited to believe the message about Christ—not about good behavior or religious piety—and to come boldly into the wedding canopy prepared for us. Let us not refuse Him who is speaking (Heb. 12:25)!

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...to know and preach nothing but Christ

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