

ARE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS STILL THE LAW FOR CHRISTIANS?

Is there a difference in the law of
God between what is moral and
eternal and what is ceremonial
and temporary?

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Many Christians give a negative answer to this question. They believe that the Ten Commandments, like the ceremonial laws, were abolished at the Cross. They apply the New Testament passages that speak of the ceremonial laws being done away at the Cross to the moral law of Ten Commandments. They reason that, because Moses gave all these laws to the Jews, they were intended only for the nation Israel before the death of Jesus. Now we follow the teachings of Jesus and not the requirements that were specifically intended for Jews only.

Some dispensationalists go a step further. They reason that before the Cross salvation was by obedience to law. Since then it has been by grace alone.⁽¹⁾ We are living in the dispensation of grace, while the Jews were living in the dispensation of law. Thus God used a different means of saving humanity before the Cross than He uses for us today.⁽²⁾ If we try to live by the laws of the Old Testament, we become legalists and cannot be saved by grace.

Some interpreters take the view that, although the Ten Commandments were done away at the Cross, nine of them were reinstituted by Christ and His apostles. They think it possible to discover all the commandments restated in the New Testament except the fourth, the Sabbath command.⁽³⁾ People who reason this way reveal their true motive for arguing that the Ten Commandments were abolished at the Cross. They are not opposed to nine of those commands, but they are opposed to the Sabbath. Because they can find nine of the Ten Commandments restated in the New Testament, they have no burden to oppose them. But since they think the Sabbath command is not repeated in the New Testament, they oppose it strenuously. Their dispensationalist theology provides a very handy method of doing away with the weekly seventh-day Sabbath.

Opposition to keeping God's law is called antinomianism (*anti* = against; *nomos* = law). The idea that salvation by grace alone rules out the importance of obeying the law of God fails to recognize the principle that Christ's gift of salvation is designed to bring us into accord with God's will. Of course, it is not true that salvation is by law keeping. We receive saving grace from God when, by faith, we accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Eph. 2:8, 9). But such faith always results in conformity to the will of God as expressed in His law (verse 10). Paul wrote that Christ died "so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).⁽⁴⁾ If we are not obeying the law of God, we cannot claim that its righteousness is fulfilled in us.

Legalism is not obedience to God's law; it is the attempt to obey His law without first having received the gift of His grace. Legalism is the attempt to save oneself by law keeping, instead of allowing Christ to save by crediting His righteousness to us and bestowing His righteousness upon us by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once having received Christ's divine saving presence in the life, it is inevitable that the believer will want to follow all of Christ's commands. Grace is the means; obedience is the result. Obedience to the law of God is the sure consequence of the genuine new birth experience.

Let us turn now to the Scriptures and see what was done away at the Cross and what still applies for Christian believers today.

THE MORAL LAW OF TEN COMMANDMENTS WAS THE STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE THE CROSS

The means of righteousness and salvation has always been faith/grace. Faith is our belief and acceptance; grace is God's saving gift. Old Testament believers were saved in exactly the same way

as New Testament believers. The *standard* of righteousness was the law of God, the Ten Commandments; the *means* by which they were to arrive at the standard was grace, the power of God readily bestowed upon them because they had accepted God's call and submitted faithfully to His loving will.

The New Testament teaching that in the salvation by faith experience the law of God is written on the believer's heart is a reiteration of Old Testament teaching. The New Testament writers underlined and reemphasized the Old Testament truth. Paul's teaching that "the one who is righteous will live by faith" (Rom. 1:17) was a repetition of Habakkuk's message, "the righteous live by their faith (Hab. 2:4). In explaining righteousness by faith, Paul quotes Moses. Romans 10:6-8 quotes Deuteronomy 30:11-14. "The righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?"' (that is to bring Christ down) 'or "Who will descend into the abyss?"' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, *on your lips and in your heart*' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)" (Rom. 10:6-8, italics supplied).

In other words, Paul taught exactly the same message of righteousness by faith that Moses taught. It is not true that under the Mosaic dispensation salvation was by works of law while under the New Testament dispensation salvation is by grace. At every stage of history, God saves believers by grace. He mercifully writes His will on their hearts and lives out His righteous life through them.

The New Testament teaching of heart circumcision repeated the Old Testament teaching. The Lord's instruction through Moses was "Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer" (Deut. 10:16). "Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live" (Deut. 30:6). Centuries later, Jeremiah repeated the same instruction. "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts, O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Jer. 4:4).

Circumcision of the heart was then and still is the same spiritual experience that Jesus illustrated by new birth (John 3). "Real circumcision is a matter of the heart -- it is spiritual and not literal" (Rom. 2:29). "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:10, 11). This is exactly the spiritual transformation that Jesus invited Nicodemus to receive when He said to him, "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above'" (John 3:6, 7).

In the centuries before the Cross, salvation was always by faith/grace, and the standard of righteousness was always God's law of Ten Commandments. The experience of salvation by grace produced in the heart of Old Testament believers the desire and the power to obey God's law. Abraham is presented in the New Testament as the great example of the life of faith (Romans 4; Galatians 3). Yet, in his own day, the Lord praised Abraham because he "obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:5).

In the preface to the Ten Commandments, the Lord instructed Moses to tell the people, "Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples (Exod. 19:5). And through Solomon the Lord presented to Israel His unchanging standard of righteousness: "Therefore devote yourselves completely to the Lord our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day" (1 Kings 8:61). This was not legalism! To argue so is to accuse God of imposing a legalistic system upon His people and then punishing them for not doing the impossible, for not obeying His law in their own strength. Quite

the contrary, God offered to save them by coming into their hearts. Once that relationship was established, the Lord expected them to obey His law. Then they had the right motivation and the power. Grace came first; obedience followed as an inseparable result.

The dispensationalist idea that between Sinai and the Cross humans were saved by works of law is unscriptural. The dispensationalist author, Charles F. Baker, admits that and proceeds to explain what dispensationalists really believe.

"We agree perfectly with Dr. Buswell and other reformed theologians that no man ever attained or could ever attain eternal life by legal obedience, but we do contend that the Bible states that perfect legal obedience would be rewarded by justification. The point that Buswell and others do not seem to understand about the dispensational view is that dispensationalists do not contend that God ordained the law dispensation to the end that Israelites might be saved by legal obedience, but rather to prove once and for all the impossibility of sinful flesh ever being able to do anything to please God. The law-flesh-works combination, having been proved a failure, God introduces His method, the grace-faith-spirit combination, which fulfills all of the righteous requirements of His holy law. Just as Israel had to go through Egypt and the wilderness to learn many valuable lessons, so they had to go through the dispensation of law before they inherited the promises."⁽⁵⁾

In Baker's view, the law-flesh-works dispensation existed until the time of the apostle Paul. "This law system was imposed upon Israel during the dispensation of Law, which was in force from Moses until the revelation given to Paul"⁽⁶⁾ So from the giving of the law at Sinai until the salvation by grace dispensation began with Paul, Israel and the world were bound to a system of law under which no one could be saved. The logic of Baker's position is as follows: (1) No one can ever attain eternal life by legal obedience; (2) Israel and the world were bound to a system of legal obedience from Sinai to the time of Paul. Conclusion: Therefore no one could be saved from Sinai until the time of Paul.

Quite the contrary, both Old and New Testaments teach that, in every age before the time of Jesus, salvation was by faith/grace alone. Obedience to God's law of Ten Commandments was and still is the result of that experience.

THE MORAL LAW OF TEN COMMANDMENTS REMAINS THE STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE CHRISTIAN

There is no contradiction between the Old Testament and the New on the question of obedience to the law resulting from salvation by faith. In fact, as we have already seen, the New Testament writers referred to and quoted the Old Testament prophets in defense of their teaching regarding the law.

The moral law of Ten Commandments remains the standard of righteousness. The additional factor introduced in the New Testament is that the life of Jesus, which was a perfect exemplification of God's law, is a more effective demonstration of the divine standard than the written commandments. The method of arriving at the standard, of emulating Jesus' life of obedience, is the faith/grace relationship with the Lord.

The experience of salvation by faith does not obviate God's requirement that we obey His law. Quite the contrary, the New Testament explains that faith results in the law being established in the heart of the believer. Paul wrote to the Romans, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom. 3:31). Because the law is the standard (although not the means) of righteousness it points out our sin. Paul exclaimed, "If it had not been for the law,

I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (Rom. 7:7). Paul saw the law as holy, just, good, and spiritual (verses 12, 14). There is no suggestion that he rejected the law because it was nailed to the Cross.

James agreed with Paul by teaching that disobedience to any one of the Ten Commandments is tantamount to rejection of the total law of God. James clarifies which law he is speaking of. "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' also said, 'You shall not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:10-12). Hence, the Ten Commandments are a law of liberty, not a burden.

This is exactly what John wrote: "For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Conquering the world is obeying God's commandments, and the one who has this conquering power is the born-again believer.

Jesus left us in no doubt about His standard of righteousness. We are not even to think that He came to abolish the law. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). Anyone who dares to teach that one of God's established commandments is not binding will be rejected by heaven (verse 19). We know what set of laws Jesus meant because he quoted the Ten Commandments (verses 21, 27).

Some have argued that Jesus' interpretation amounted to an abolition of the Ten, because He emphasized the importance of the spirit of the law rather than the letter. The fact is that Jesus gave a more strict interpretation of the law than was generally accepted. The spirit of the law does not exclude the letter; it goes beyond it to show what the commandments really mean. The command that says, "You shall not murder" means that Christians are not to lose their tempers with their neighbors or cherish hatred in their hearts (Matt. 5:21, 22). The command, "You shall not commit adultery" means that impure thoughts must not be cherished. Jesus exalted the standard far above what many of His contemporaries thought necessary. He did not abolish the Ten Commandments; He established them permanently as God's standard of righteousness.

The New Testament teaching regarding the new covenant experience is based firmly on the Old Testament. Hebrews 8:10-12 quotes Jeremiah 31:31-33. The good news is that under the new covenant the law of God is written on believers' hearts. There can be no doubt that the reference is to the Ten Commandment law, for this was the standard of righteousness accepted by Jeremiah (see Jer. 11:1-8).

The New Testament like the old promotes righteousness and salvation by faith in Christ. It is God's grace that saves and grace alone, but grace received is never alone. God's grace includes His gift of spiritual power (1 Cor. 1:4-9). It always results in obedience to the Ten Commandments. God's law is not merely ten suggestions that may be lightly set aside. It is an established, immutable standard of righteousness, obedience to which is made possible by the free gift of His grace.

THE CEREMONIAL LAW CEASED AT THE CROSS

By the ceremonial law we mean the ministry associated with the ancient Israelite earthly sanctuary or temple. In the wilderness during the exodus, God gave through Moses instructions regarding the sanctuary and its services. These were carried out at that time, and later on an even greater scale in

the temple built by Solomon. In the time of Jesus, the animal sacrifices and services of the temple were still being regularly performed. This ceremonial system was the Gospel before the Cross.. It comprised a series of ceremonies that pointed forward to the death and ministry of Jesus Christ. Once He had died on the cross and ascended to heaven, it was no longer necessary to have such a set of earthly ceremonies. Now type had met its antitype, the shadow was transcended by the substance, the example was replaced by the reality. The ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary replaced the ministry of priests in the earthly sanctuary.

When Jesus expired on the cross, the veil of the Jerusalem temple was torn from top to bottom by a divine hand (Matt. 27:50, 51). The significance of the earthly ministry had come to an end. Jesus' death fulfilled the type or analogy that daily for centuries had been enacted in the temple. Every animal sacrifice pointed forward to "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Every temple service typified some aspect of Jesus' ministry for sinful humanity. Every item of sanctuary furniture represented an aspect of Jesus' work for us. When Jesus died on the cross the penalty for sin was paid (Isa. 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). When He ascended to the heavenly sanctuary, the ministry began to which the service of the earthly priests had pointed (Heb. 9:11-14).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote that the Gentile believers who once had no hope of salvation now have equal hope with Jews who believe in Christ (Eph. 2:11-13). "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (verse 14). What was that dividing wall? The next verse explains: ". . . having abolished the law of commandments in ordinances, so that he might create the two in himself into one new man making peace" (Eph. 2:15).⁽⁷⁾ What was "the law of commandments in ordinances" that Christ abolished? If Paul had been suggesting that the Ten Commandments were abolished by Christ, he would have been contradicting what he had written to the Roman Christians (Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 8:3, 4). The Ten Commandments still functioned for Paul and, in his inspired understanding, will be the standard on the basis of which all humanity ultimately will be judged (Rom. 2:13). In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul was referring to the ceremonial laws that were a barrier separating Jew and Gentile. Once Christ had died on the cross, this barrier was abolished. Now Gentiles could join Jews in worshipping Christ without the hindrance of having to enter into a set of ceremonial observances.

Hebrews 7:11-28 teaches that Christ's heavenly highpriesthood has replaced the ministry of earthly priests in the ancient Israelite temple. Jesus Christ belonged to the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi from which the earthly priests were drawn. But Jesus became the heavenly High Priest whose work was typified by the ministry of every earthly Levitical priest. When Jesus became our heavenly High Priest after his death, resurrection, and ascension, it was no longer necessary for the earthly priests to function. The ministry to which their ministry pointed forward had begun. Moreover, the animal sacrifices that the earthly priests regularly offered in the earthly temple no longer had any significance with the Lord. The one sacrifice of Christ to which the earthly sacrifices pointed had occurred. "Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever" (Heb. 7:27, 28).

Hebrews, chapter 8 tells us that there is a heavenly sanctuary in which the ascended Christ is the High Priest. "Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up (Heb. 8:1, 2).

Hebrews 9:1-7 describes the daily and Day of Atonement ministries conducted in the earthly sanctuary. Verse 8 explains that the way into the heavenly sanctuary was not available as long as the earthly sanctuary or temple was still functional. The services of the earthly sanctuary were a temporary symbol "until the time comes to set things right" (verses 9, 10). "But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place⁽⁸⁾ [heavenly sanctuary], not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood thus obtaining eternal redemption" (verses 11, 12). Hebrews 9:11-14 refers to two aspects of the earthly ministry that were abolished by Christ. First, the earthly animal sacrifices were replaced by the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Second, the priests' sprinkling of blood in the earthly sanctuary typified Christ's intercessory ministry for believers in the heavenly sanctuary. The result is that the conscience (or consciousness)⁽⁹⁾ of the believer is purified "from dead works to worship the living God" (verse 14). The imperfect work of the earthly sanctuary or temple is now superseded by the perfect ministry of Jesus in the heavenly temple.

Not the moral law of Ten Commandments but the temporary ceremonial law was abolished when Jesus died on Calvary.

THE "LAW OF MOSES" MAY MEAN THE CEREMONIAL LAW, OR THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, OR BOTH

This point is important because some interpreters of the Bible wish to argue that, since the Ten Commandments were part of the law of Moses, which the apostles said need not be kept any more (Acts 15), the Ten Commandments are not binding upon Christians. The simple answer is that, although the law of Moses included both the ceremonial law and the Ten Commandments because they were given by God through Moses, in some passages in the Bible the law of Moses means specifically the ceremonial aspects of the law. If I say that I am flying to Australia tomorrow, you might ask, "What part of Australia?" I would answer, "Sydney." Australia is a large country. When I say that I am planning to visit Australia, I do not mean the whole country. I mean one city to which I am traveling. Just so, when the Bible writers speak of the law of Moses, they do not necessarily mean the whole complex of laws given through Moses. They sometimes mean ceremonial laws, sometimes the Ten Commandments, and sometimes both. Sometimes they mean the civil laws given by Moses. What is meant in Acts, chapter 15? First, let us look at some Bible passages that speak of the law of Moses.

The book of the law that Moses wrote undoubtedly included the Ten Commandments (Deut 30:10; 31:26; 33:4). The law contained in that book was to be written on the people's hearts (Deut. 30:11-14). Obedience to this law was to be the basis of their prosperity (verses 15, 16). Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (Rom. 10:6-10) and uses the passage as the basis of his definition of righteousness by faith in Christ. It is, therefore, inconceivable that the "book of the law" referred to in Deuteronomy 30:10 did not include the Ten Commandments. Before he died, David instructed Solomon: "Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn" (1 Kings 2:2, 3). Faithfulness to God's commandments written in the law of Moses was to result in prosperity for ancient Israel (verse 4). The very heart of God's will for Israel and the world was contained in the Ten Commandments. Without doubt the law of Moses included the Ten Commandments.

The book of Nehemiah identifies "the law of Moses " as "the law of God." (Compare Nehemiah 8:1-3 with verse 8.) This law that was read to the people included the ceremonial law (verse 14) as well as the Ten Commandments (Neh. 9:13, 14). The law given "through your servant Moses" (verse 14) included the Sabbath command, the fourth of the Ten Commandments.

Jesus said, "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?" (John 7:19). The law of Moses included the sixth commandment of the ten. It also included the command regarding circumcision (verses 22, 23). Thus the law of Moses included both the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial laws.

Hebrews 10:28, 29 warns of the danger of violating the law of Moses: "Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy 'on the testimony of two or three witnesses.' How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?" In ancient Israel, the death penalty was to be meted out for rebellious violation of one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 21:12, 15-17; 31:14, 15; Lev. 20:2, 9, 10, 13). The covenant referred to in Hebrews 10:29 is the everlasting covenant which involves the Ten Commandments written on believers' hearts (Heb. 10:16, 17). Violating the law of Moses was, and still is, tantamount to violating our covenant relationship with Christ.

The law of Moses spoken of in Scripture often includes the moral law of Ten Commandments. But it sometimes refers exclusively to the ceremonial law. Joseph and Mary obeyed the ceremonial requirements of the law of Moses by presenting baby Jesus at the temple. "When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons'" (Luke 2:22-24). The law of Moses was the law of the Lord and, in this context, the reference is exclusively to its ceremonial stipulations.

Jesus instructed a leper whom He had healed to present himself to the priest "and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them" (Luke 5:14; compare John 7:23).

In Acts 15 the problem was not the Ten Commandments. The problem was that legalistic Jews were demanding that Gentiles who became Christians should be circumcised and observe the ceremonial aspects of the law of Moses (Acts 15:1, 5, 24). The apostles' answer to the problem proves that the Ten Commandments were not under discussion. "'For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.'" (Acts 15:28, 29). Are we, therefore, to assume that it was quite acceptable for these Gentile Christians to lie, to dishonor their parents, to steal, etc? Of course not! The Ten Commandments were not the issue. The apostles were not instructing the new Gentile believers to ignore the Ten Commandments. They were telling them that they did not need to observe the ceremonial laws that had significance before the death of Christ. The apostles mentioned fornication because it was a special problem among the Gentiles. The law of Moses, as referred to in Acts 15, means specifically the ceremonial law, not the moral law of Ten Commandments.

It is not correct to contrast the law of Moses and the law of God, applying the former to the ceremonial law and the latter to the Ten Commandments. Nor is it true that the law of Moses, as spoken of in Scripture, always includes the Ten Commandments. Sometimes the law of Moses refers specifically to the ceremonial aspects of the laws given by God through Moses. This is the

meaning of "the law of Moses" as it is used in Acts 15.

THE WEEKLY SABBATH IS PART OF GOD'S UNCHANGING MORAL LAW

When the New Testament writers exalt the Ten Commandments as the standard of righteousness for Christians, they never exclude the Sabbath command. They never say that nine of these commandments must be kept, but not the Sabbath. In fact, we have very good evidence from the New Testament documents that the Sabbath, like the rest of the Ten Commandments, is to be observed by Christians.

The fourth commandment of the ten is just as binding upon Christians as the rest. Jesus said, "Therefore, whoever 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 does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19). Yet there are millions of Christians who are breaking the fourth commandment, and many are telling people that it need not be kept. There is no Bible warrant for that. The spiritual and eternal danger to which these Christians are exposing themselves is very great indeed.

Jesus urged His disciples to pray that, when Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by enemy armies, they would not have to flee on the Sabbath day (Matt. 24:20). Why did Jesus urge this if He did not intend His followers to keep the Sabbath? Matthew 24:20 is not referring merely to the events just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. Those events were types or examples of the events immediately preceding Jesus' second coming. In our era, just before Jesus returns, He commands us to keep holy His Sabbath day. His moral law of Ten Commandments, of which the Sabbath command is the very center, is still to be obeyed, because we love Him and He has saved us from sin (John 14:15; 15:10). Years after the Cross, when Luke wrote concerning the Sabbath day, he gave no indication that it had been abolished or replaced by Sunday observance. The day of Jesus' crucifixion, the preparation day, was followed immediately by the Sabbath (Luke 23:54). "On the sabbath," the followers of Jesus, "rested according to the commandment" (verse 56). In other words, they kept the weekly seventh-day Sabbath in obedience to the fourth commandment of the decalogue. The next day, the first day of the week, later known as Sunday, was the day of Jesus' resurrection (Luke 24:1-5). Writing years after the crucifixion weekend, Luke made no comment to the effect that now the Sabbath command had been done away or that the weekly day of worship should now be Sunday. We can only assume that the Sabbath "according to the commandment" observed by Jesus' followers immediately after His death was the Sabbath honored by Luke and Jesus' apostles years later.

The disciples of Jesus consistently observed the weekly seventh-day Sabbath years after His death. They knew of no command abolishing the Sabbath or changing the day to Sunday. Paul and his fellow workers customarily worshiped and preached on the Sabbath day (Acts 13:14, 15, 42-44; 17:1, 2; 18:1, 4, 11). If the Sabbath command had been abrogated or changed, why didn't Luke say so when writing the book of Acts years after Jesus' death and resurrection?

Some interpreters argue that Paul went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day not because he wished to observe the Sabbath but because this was his best chance of reaching the Jews with the Christian Gospel. Of course he wished to win the Jews, but the evidence indicates that he kept the Sabbath even when he did not attend the synagogue. Acts 16 records that in Philippi Paul and his associates observed the Sabbath on the banks of a river. "On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women

who had gathered there" (verse 13). The result of that open-air Sabbath meeting was that Lydia was won to Christ and was baptized (verses 14, 15).

Jesus' followers consistently observed the seventh-day Sabbath after His death and resurrection, and we have the same privilege today. There is great blessing in obeying all of the commandments of God and great misery in refusing to obey. One of the main characteristics of the last-day church is that its members observe all of God's commandments. They "keep the commandments of God" (Rev. 12:17). "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12).

A FEW PASSAGES USED BY OPPONENTS OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

There is not space in this study to deal with all the arguments against the Ten Commandments used by antinomians. The evidence for the continual significance of the Ten Commandments for Christians as presented above is sufficient to prove the point. But we will take a brief look at a few passages misused by those who reject the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath.

Romans 10:4. The Revised Standard Version, like some other versions, paraphrases Romans 10:4: "For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified." A literal translation of the Greek reads: "For Christ is the end of the Law unto (for) righteousness for all who believe."⁽¹⁰⁾ The text is not teaching that Christ is the end of the law. It is teaching that Christ is the end of *the law as a means of righteousness* to those who believe. When they believe in Him, they accept His free gift of salvation and righteousness (Rom. 1:17; 3:22-24; 6:18; 8:9, 10). For them the attempt to earn salvation by their own efforts to obey the law apart from Christ has ceased.

Colossians 2:13-17. Colossians 2:13 indicates that our sins are forgiven because of Christ's death and our acceptance of Him. "And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses." The next verse says that "the handwriting of ordinances" (KJV) was nailed to the cross. What is this handwriting of ordinances? Since the discussion is forgiveness of our sin (verse 13), we can conclude that our guilt was nailed to the cross. Jesus became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). The New Revised Standard Version translates Colossians 2:14: "erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross." There is no indication here that the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross. Our guilt demanded that we die. Jesus died in our place. When He was nailed to the cross, so was our guilt.

What then is meant by Colossians 2:16 and 17: "Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ." The reference is to the ceremonial aspects of the law which were a shadow of the ministry that Jesus would perform for us. The phrase "feasts, new moon, sabbaths" in the Old Testament refers to those special occasions when ceremonial observances of various kinds were to be offered. (See 1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:12, 13; 31:3; Neh. 10:33; Ezek. 45:17; Hosea 2:11.) As recorded in Numbers 28 and 29 the occasions on which special burnt offerings were to be offered included daily, weekly (Sabbath), monthly, and yearly occasions of worship and sacrifice. These sacrifices no longer need to be offered on these occasions because Christ has died, and no longer is His coming foreshadowed by the offering of animal sacrifices. The "food and drink" (Col. 2:16, RSV) refer to the meal and drink offerings that were presented to God along with the burnt offerings. (See Num. 28:2, 5, 7, 9, 13, 14, etc.)

In addition to the weekly Sabbath there were seven annual ceremonial sabbaths observed by the Jews. These occurred on different days of the week each year. The seven annual ceremonial sabbath days were: (1) the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:7); (2) the last day of the Feast of Unleavened bread (Lev. 23:8); (3) the Feast of Weeks (First Fruits, or Harvest; later called Pentecost), fifty days after the feast of unleavened bread (Lev. 23:21; compare Exod. 23:16; 34:22;); (4) the Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the seventh month (Lev. 23:24, 25); (5) the Day of Atonement on the 10th day of the 7th month (Lev. 23:27-32); (6) the first day of the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:35); (7) the last day of the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:36).

Paul's point in Colossians 2:16, 17 is that animal sacrifices now do not have to be offered on any of these occasions, whether daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly, because they were a shadow of Christ's sacrifice for us. Now type has met antitype, shadow has met reality, and the ceremonial law has been abolished. Two things were done away at the Cross: (1) our guilt; (2) the temporary ceremonial law.

The seven annual ceremonial sabbaths foreshadowed various aspects of Jesus' ministry. Hence, they do not have to be observed by Christians. But the weekly Sabbath remains a perpetual memorial of Creation (Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11; Matt. 24:20; Heb. 4:9) and a sign of sanctification (Exod. 31:13). Therefore, Jesus requested His followers to observe the weekly Sabbath after His death and resurrection (Matt. 24:20). Sabbath observance remains a perpetual part of the everlasting covenant experience (Heb. 8:10-12).

Galatians 3:19-25 explains the correct function of the law prior to the Cross. "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal. 3:19). The law existed from creation until Sinai (Rom. 5:13; 4:15), but not in the written form that was given there. In their slavery in Egypt, the Jews had largely forgotten God's law. At Sinai God proclaimed and wrote His Ten Commandment law "that the offense might abound" (Rom. 5:20, KJV); that is, so that the people could be made aware of the seriousness of sin (compare Rom. 7:13).

The law was given "till the seed should come" (Gal. 3:19, KJV). The Seed was Christ (verse 16). Paul was not telling the Galatians that the law was abolished at the Cross. He was explaining that Christ's perfect life is a greater demonstration of God's perfect standard of righteousness than is the law (1 Peter 2:21, 22; Phil. 2:5; 1 John 2:6). Nevertheless, the law still functions as the written standard of righteousness and a mirror of human sin (Rom. 7:7; James 2:23-25). The word "till" does not limit the duration of the law; it does not mean that the law was abolished at the Cross. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13, KJV). This did not mean that when Paul arrived Timothy was to stop studying and exhorting. Christ's perfect life points out our sin more effectively than does the written law, because He is the personification of the principles of His own law. But His coming did not abolish the law. He was the great light to whom the lesser light (the law) pointed.

The law was our "schoolmaster" (Gal. 3:24, KJV) or "disciplinarian" (NRSV) until the coming of Christ. The Greek word used in this verse is *paidagogos*. It means "*attendant (slave), custodian, guide . . . the man, usually a slave . . . whose duty it was to conduct the boy or youth . . . to and from school and to superintend his conduct generally; he was not a 'teacher' (despite the present meaning of the derivative 'pedagogue. . .)*"⁽¹¹⁾ When the boy came of age the *paidagogos* was no longer needed as his guide and protector.

We are no longer under the law in the sense that now Christ is a greater revelation of God to man than the law was before the Cross. Paul is not saying that the Ten Commandments were abolished by Christ. Before the Cross, law (moral, ceremonial, and civil) was the principal means by which

the love and character of God were revealed to humans. When Jesus came, He provided a more perfect revelation of the character of God. Moreover, the law cannot justify us; Christ can because of His death and our repentance of sin. Now we are no longer under law as the supreme means by which God is revealed to us, nor are we dependent solely upon the law to point out our sin, nor are we under the condemnation of the law. Christ has superseded the law in all these respects. But as we have seen from many other Scriptures, the law still functions as the divine written standard of righteousness for Christians.

John 1:17. "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The law given by Moses included the moral law of Ten Commandments, the ceremonial law, and the civil laws. None of these laws were designed to save humans from sin. The Ten Commandments are a standard of righteousness, but they do not provide the means of salvation (Rom. 8:3). The ceremonial law pointed forward to Christ, but animal sacrifices could not save humanity (Heb. 10:1-4). Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). His grace was the only means of salvation for Old Testament people, as it is for us today (Hab. 2:4). Salvation has always been through Christ (Gen. 3:15), never by means of law. God's law has always been the standard; Christ's grace has always been the means of reaching the standard.

As we near the end of human history, the Lord appeals to the entire world to come to Him and be saved. He has grace abundant to save the most sin-stained soul. And He has grace to enable us to obey His law. As we come to Jesus, He fills us with His Spirit, and we are empowered to obey His divine will as it is expressed in His law. Have you found Him as your Savior and Lord. Do you love Him sufficiently to keep His commandments?

1. "Scofield taught that the period during which man was subjected to the law ended at the cross. . . . Hence Dispensationalism, as expounded by one of its foremost systematizers, teaches two ways of salvation: that during the era of law, obedience to it was a condition of salvation, whereas during the age of grace, salvation comes simply through faith in Christ."-- Daniel Payton Fuller, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism" (Th.D. dissertation, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957), pp. 144, 145. See Fuller's lengthy discussion of the pros and cons of this dispensationalist teaching in his dissertation, chapter V, pp. 139-189. In his more recent work, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 18-46, Fuller points out that in more recent years dispensationalists have modified the earlier position on law and grace taken by Scofield and Chafer.

2. William E. Cox, *An Examination of Dispensationalism* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 17-21.

3. "One of the Ten Commandments, that concerning the observance of the sabbath day, applied only to Israel as a distinctive feature of God's covenant with that nation: 'Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever' (Exodus 31:16, 17).

"Thus the sabbath and the ceremonial laws related only to God's will for the nation of Israel and have no application to the Gentiles or to members of the Body of Christ in this dispensation."-- Charles F Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1971), p. 262. Baker elaborates his point of view: "In the majority of passages in the New Testament the word *law* refers to the Mosaic Covenant in whole or in part. The entire legal system consisted of three parts: the commandments (moral), the judgments (social), and the

ordinances (religious). This law system was imposed upon Israel during the dispensation of Law, which was in force from Moses until the revelation given to Paul. Israel during that time was said to be under the law. Christ was born and lived under the law (Galatians 4:4). Believers in this present dispensation are specifically described as being ' . . . not under the law, but under grace.' (Romans 6:14, 15)."-- *Ibid.*, pp. 263, 264.

4. In this article, unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

5. Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensationalist Theology*, p. 267.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

7. My translation. The text does not read as in the Revised Standard Version: ". . . by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances." The Greek reads: *ton nomon ton entolon en dogmasin katapgesas*, which translates literally "having abolished the law of commandments *in* ordinances." The word "ordinances" comes from the Greek *dogma* that is used five times in the New Testament: Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; 17:7; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14. In Luke 2:1 the reference is to a decree of Caesar. Acts 16:4 speaks of the decrees of the Jerusalem Council. Acts 17:7 mentions decrees of Caesar. Colossians 2:14 refers to the death decrees against us because of our sin; that is, the decrees declaring us guilty and therefore worthy of eternal death, which were abolished when Jesus bore our guilt on the cross. Ephesians 2:15 could possibly be given the same meaning as Colossians 2:14. "The law of commandments in decrees" could refer to the guilt of both Jews and Gentiles that was handled at the cross. But since Paul is speaking of a particular "dividing wall" (verse 14) between Jews and Gentiles, it seems clear that he is referring to the ceremonial system involving circumcision, animal sacrifices, and the other services of the Israelite temple.

8. The Greek translated "Holy Place" is *ta hagia*, meaning "holy places." The reference is to the heavenly sanctuary as a whole. In the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), the singular or plural of *hagios*, *ia*, *on* often refers to the sanctuary as a whole, including both the Holy and Most Holy apartments. For example, see in the Septuagint Exod. 36:1, 3, 4; Lev. 5:15; 10:4; 27:3; Num 3:31, 32; 4:12, 16; 7:9; 18:5.

9. The Greek word translated "conscience" (Heb. 9:14, KJV and NRSV) is *suneidesin*, accusative, singular, feminine or *suneidesis*, meaning "consciousness," "moral consciousness," "conscience."

10. My translation. The Greek reads: *telos gar nomou Christos eis dikaiousunen panti to pisteuonti*. Because the word for "end" (Greek *telos*) sometimes means "goal," "outcome," "object," some interpreters explain the text to mean that Christ is the goal or object to whom the law points. This idea is obviously a truth that is elsewhere taught in the New Testament, but it is not the real meaning of this passage. *Telos* often means "end" in the sense of "termination," "cessation." Because of the context of Romans 10:4, we can conclude its meaning to be that Christ is the end, finish, termination of the law for (as a means of attaining) righteousness. Christ does not abolish the Ten Commandments. Paul has already established that in Romans 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 8:3, 4. He is not contradicting himself here. Consistently with his discussion from Romans 9:30 through to 10:10, Paul is arguing that righteousness cannot be earned by law-keeping. Righteousness is God's gift to us by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 10). Having received that gift by faith, the law is established in our hearts (Rom. 3:31). Christ brings to an end righteousness by works, when, because of our faith response, He is able to give us His righteousness. But the abolition of righteousness by works does not destroy the law. The law is to be kept by Christians as a result of their saving relationship with Christ.

11. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1957 ed., s.v. "paidagogos."