

## The Law of the New Covenant

Happy Sabbath to all.

As we partake in the blessing of this sanctified day, I am reminded that Christians who are receiving the benefits of obedience to our Father's will for us, even at a nominal level, are in the distinct minority.

As I understand it, the problem with teaching the importance of obedience is not truly a doctrinal one, although doctrine certainly plays into it a great deal. The real problem is a heart-condition that results from a misunderstanding of our Father and His desires toward us.

For Bible believers, it should be very obvious that we are obligated to respect "some" law, for the New Testament Scriptures tell us very clearly, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal 6:2) And again, "we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." (1Tim 1:8)

We are also told, however, that "the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers." (1Tim 1:9)

It is said in a number of places that those who are under grace, or in Christ, are not "under the law." We are told that those who desire to be under the law are cursed, and are cursed for no useful purpose, because mankind is justified by faith anyway.

So how do we deal with the apparent contradiction? Well, what many miss is that although we are justified by faith, and not "under the law," none of the apostles, not in any place, have ever once said, "In Christ, you may disobey the law." Never is it written, "Because you are under grace, you are free to violate the law."

The apostles cautioned Christians from the belief that mere obedience to the law means that they are born again, and truly converted. After all, merely mimicking a Christian, and joining the Church, does not lead to everlasting life. There was a very real danger in the early days, with so many converts coming from the dead formalism of Judaism, that grace would be understood as merely, "The thing you receive when you begin to do the works. The permission you obtain to get into Heaven."

Instead, grace must be understood as that which allows us to be truly in harmony with Yahweh, and to do those things that please Him because it is our (new) nature, not because we are attempting to become something we are not. In fact, Paul (who wrote the most extensively about justification by faith, and grace above the requirements of the law) said, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." (Rom 6:14, 15)

Remembering the only Biblical definition of sin – which is rebellion against the law (1John 3:4) – it is clear that because sin does not have any dominion over us, lawlessness has no dominion over us either. Therefore, our behavior is in perfect accord with what the Law requires.

Perhaps the most "tricky" aspect of this issue is that even those who will admit that the New Testament speaks of a law for Christians will say, "That is the Law of Christ," not the "Law of Moses," or the "Law of the Father." They may have concluded that the Law of Moses was fulfilled by sacrifices, the Law of

the Father was fulfilled by obedience to the 10 commandments, but the Law of Christ is fulfilled by loving the Father and Son, and our neighbors as ourselves.

While this may sound reasonable at first, at least on the surface, what this is actually doing is making a difference between different “kinds” of Law, even though their source and intent is the same: from the loving heart of the Father Himself, and for the best good of His people. All three of the Laws listed above are fulfilled by love. It is made more obvious after Yahshua’s example, but sacrifice is offered by love if it is genuine. Obedience is also offered by love if it comes from a right heart. In fact, true obedience is unforced; remember that “force” has no part in true religion; therefore, those who truly obey the Law are doing so because they desire to do so, and not because they are being compelled.

The common argument goes, “Since Christ’s sacrifice, we are no longer under the law, and therefore no longer under the 10 Commandments.” But the question might then be, “What does it mean to be ‘under’ the 10 Commandments?” This question is never really asked, but it is assumed to be the case for all who do obey. According to the apostles, those who have the love of Christ in them do not find the commandments burdensome. (1John 5:3) We, as representatives of Christ, therefore should feel we have a duty to thoroughly understand this matter, so we can know it for ourselves, and explain it to others.

As with many things, we can go very deeply into the theology and come out with the answer, showing from context, properly translated wording, etc. that the Law is everlasting. We can provide verses showing that Christians kept the Sabbath (the single most disputed article of the Decalogue) after Christ’s death (Luke 23:56) and we have many historical records showing that the early Church consisted of Sabbath-keeping New Testament believers.

But the reality is that these arguments, sound as they may be, rarely win the heart. It is not enough to convince the head with logic and reasoning, for while it may have worked to a greater degree in the past, the world has largely lost its love for such things. We must show the blessings, the benefits, the goal of Sabbath keeping, and commandment-keeping in general, in order to give the Holy Spirit even a starting-point from which conviction may result.

There is a Law in the New Covenant, and it is fulfilled by love. This must be made clear by all who would speak for Christ in this last generation. It is a law that the Christian will obey, but because – and only because, it is fulfilled by love. The love for Yahweh, and the love for our fellow men... if the Scriptures are true that this IS the fulfilling of the law, then the obedience to any valid law must be able to be understood by a converted heart without the need for the tablets of stone.

What do I mean by that? This is, if rightly understood, an incredibly powerful point. Consider what Paul said of the Law:

“Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.” (Gal 3:19)

When I was thinking about this verse earlier in the week, it struck me how simple this really is. If the Law is added because of transgression, then it is added to tell sinners, “This is what you are doing wrong.” If there was no sin, there would be no need for the Law, and yet, all creatures would obey the will of the Father. They would not call it “obedience,” they might not even call it “righteousness.” They would simply call it living. And this only makes sense because Yahweh, who is our life, is also love. To

love is to live in harmony with Yahweh... who is the source also of the law. These three ideas should not be separated.

Now, consider what I said earlier in light of this: “if the Scriptures are true that [love] IS the fulfilling of the law, then the obedience to any valid law must be able to be understood by a converted heart without the need for the tablets of stone.”

Consider murder, theft, and the bearing of false witness. If we love our neighbor, we will not do these things. Even if no law was written saying, “Thou shalt not steal,” the converted heart would never steal from a beloved neighbor, and therefore he is not “under” any law that would restrict such behavior.

The converted heart does not covet his neighbor’s goods... not because he is “under” a law that says “Thou shalt not covet,” but because true love “envieth not.” (1Cor 13:4) The Law was added for transgressors... the converted heart knows love, and therefore the fulfilling of the law. Again, true love does not grow jealous over a neighbor’s wife, therefore adultery would never take place. True love would naturally result in the honoring of one’s parents, and no commandment spoken to Moses is required to tell us this either.

So then, what about this most disputed article of the Law? What about the Sabbath? Is this an exception, or would the converted heart keep it even if we were not told, “Remember the Sabbath day?”

This one might be a difficult question to consider, since we have grown up in a world where Sunday has been considered “the Lord’s day” for generations. Even though we, as Adventists, do not believe it, we must acknowledge that disregard of the 4th commandment is the “norm.” But what if it were not the norm?

What if ALL traditions, good and bad, were discarded? What if Constantine, and Herod, and Origen, and Augustine, had never existed? We could then remove Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, where the commandments are listed, and see what happens.

I submit that all born-again, Spirit-filled, Bible believing Christians would keep all 10 “things” (they would not be commandments) that are currently recorded in those chapters anyway.

They would love the Father supremely, never making an idol to represent Him by some earthly image. They would not take His name in vain, but speak it with reverence, knowing the infinite majesty of His divine nature. They would honor their parents (and all elders who sought to constructively guide them) and would recoil in horror from the thought of doing violence (physical, emotional, or mental) to another person.

In a world where Sunday-sacredness was not the commonplace norm, they would also be Sabbath keepers.

How do I know this? Because even if we remove the chapters in which Sabbath keeping is “commanded,” the Bible continues to show those who worship Yahweh gathering at a specific time, on a specific day, to delight in His glory... whether commanded to do so or not. It is not indicated in many of these verses that it is commanded. In fact, the word “law” does not appear at all, but we are shown that

those who believe in Yahweh honor the fact that He set aside a day and “hallowed” it (that is, He made the day holy), and merely use it for its intended, created, purpose... to rest in holiness.

Now remember, we are removing traditions. There was never anyone who said, “The glory of the 7th day has been transferred to the first.” Nobody ever wrote that because Christ rose on the first day of the week, this means that it has become the Lord’s day. Nobody ever said, in contradiction of Christ, that the Sabbath was for Israel, and not for all mankind. In such a world, we would still find verses such as this:

“And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.” (Gen 2:3)

“And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith Yahweh.” (Isa 66:23)

“And [Christ] said unto them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’” (Mark 2:27)

“And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.” (Acts 13:44)

In none of these verses is the 7th day Sabbath called a commandment. We can find verses where the other articles of the Decalogue are faithfully kept by individuals in the Bible, and they are not called commandments. And yet, we see that these actions are called righteous, they are called blessed. We see that they will constitute an everlasting practice in the Kingdom of Heaven, and the converted heart will be drawn naturally to such things as this. With regard to the Sabbath in particular, nothing holy is spoken of the first day, or of any other day; but the seventh is repeatedly singled out as special, and the Spirit-led mind, unpolluted by the traditions of men, would clearly understand what this means. The soul that lives in harmony with love would fulfill the will of the Father with regard to this matter as well.

We can give further evidence of this by looking at another, related, matter.

Creation Seventh Day Adventists, who are committed to accomplishing the righteousness of Yahweh on earth, also keep the New Moon as a holy day. This is not commanded – even in the Old Testament it was not commanded with the same force as the Sabbath. Nevertheless, it is shown to be a day on which sacred events take place, as in the verse from Isaiah above. It is a day for humility, reflection, self-examination, and to advance the work of sanctification in our hearts.

Because this day, like the seventh, has been reserved for holiness, that Church which teaches victory over all sin through perfect *agape* love, which the Bible calls “the bond of perfectness,” (Col 3:14) as the “Body of Christ,” (Col 2:16, 17) has come to understand this matter as a vital aspect of the Christian walk.

Similarly, the Church has taken a strong stand on a number of matters related to faith and Christian practice, despite not being a part of the 10 Commandments. The very name of our Church, “Creation Seventh Day Adventist,” certainly does not – and could not – appear in a set of instructions originally given to the Nation of Israel. Nevertheless, it has been given to those who are being prepared for the soon return of the Son of Man, and it is therefore conscientiously kept, despite opposition from those who are clearly representing the principles and mentality of the Enemy of Souls.

All these things, whether explicitly commanded or not, are equally matters of conviction for the saints; and the reason is because they do these things out of love. To deny any of these things, to transgress any known requirement, or neglect any known duty, would be to reveal a soul in need of genuine conversion. It is not that the works – that the doing of these things – makes us just, or righteous; but because Christ has declared us righteous, we have accepted Him at His word, and we therefore arise and do the works.

The expression “under the Law” has no meaning for us, because we are in harmony with the Law of the New Covenant. In other words, whether there is a law governing those acts that please our Father or not, our testimony is that “we do always those things that please our Father.” That, to us, is the expression of our love. That, to us, is the fulfilling of any and all divine law.

In summary, then... as faithful, committed followers of Christ Yahshua, we are not under the Law. Even if we throw out the “Law,” the written expression of the Law, and every verse that refers to it as such, we are still left with a Bible, a divine Word, showing us clearly what righteousness is. By precept and example, the “heroes of faith,” whose actions are recorded in those pages, show us what kind of life pleases our Father in Heaven, and that life is in perfect, joyful harmony with what the Law was recorded as saying. We may look at it this way: The Law tells us what righteousness is, righteousness is not righteousness because it is written in the law.

We who are Christ’s are justified by faith, and sanctified by a natural, unforced obedience to those things that we know receives the “seal of divine approval” from our Father and Savior. Because we love, we fulfill the law. Because our characters may be described by any verse that speaks about the nature of “agape,” we would never knowingly violate any of those things that Yahweh has written on stone... not because they are ON two blocks of hardened earth, but because each covenanted member is “the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” (2Cor 3:3)

This allows us to know what the Spirit says to us, even if it is not covered explicitly in chapter-and-verse, and is the proper way to approach all aspects of the sanctified life.

Are there any questions about tonight’s study?