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The Law and Grace

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Introduction

Generally, the evangelical community believes that our salvation comes by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, there is often confusion as to the balance between law and grace. Pastors will use the Ten Commandments and teach us not to lie or steal, yet the Ten Commandments also forbids us to make an image. Is it a sin for a Christian to make an image of say a fish or a dove? Why is it okay to break one of the Ten Commandments and not another?

A certain denomination teaches that there is a moral law that we must keep, and there is a ceremonial law that it is a sin to keep. Thus we are sinning if we keep certain Old Testament commandments. Yet it is their denomination and not the Bible that decides which commands are moral and which are sin. If we are the ones who decide which commandments to keep, are not we the final authority rather than the Bible?

Finally questions arise such as, do we need to accomplish a certain amount of works in order to be saved? If not, why did Jesus teach us that He will judge us by our works? (Rev 2:2,¹ 9, 13, 19 Rev 3:1-2,² 8, 15)

*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, **ye that work iniquity.** - Matthew 7:23*

Where does a Christian draw the line? These important questions deserve a careful answer.

The three covenants

To understand the relationship between Law and Grace we must first understand a little about three covenants God has made with mankind. Most Christians know that there are two covenants, or testaments. There is the covenant with Abraham, later confirmed it through Moses and the covenant through Jesus Christ with whosoever will believe.

The first covenant

Before these covenants God confirmed an eternal covenant with Noah, all his children (that means us) and *every living creature* that was on the Ark.

*And God spoke unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, and I, behold, **I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth.** - Genesis 9:8-10*

In Genesis chapter nine we can read about the entire covenant; however, right now we will look at one of our obligations under it.

*Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. **But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.** - Genesis 9:3-4*

¹ I know thy works, and thy labor - Revelation 2:2a

² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die: for **I have not found thy works perfect** before God.
- Revelation 3:2

After the flood, the children of Noah were permitted to eat flesh without being disobedient to God; but we are not to eat flesh with the blood.

When the elders and apostles gathered to discuss which commands the gentiles must obey. They mentioned two of the Ten Commandments; they also forbade the gentile Christians from consuming blood (Acts 15:20). It is likely that this was because this eternal covenant with the gentiles.

God made other provisions in this covenant; the most significant is that it is an everlasting covenant with all mankind.

*And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that **I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.** And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth. - Genesis 9:15-17*

As an evidence of this covenant, and a sign to us, God created the rainbow. Genesis 2:5 implies that it never rained before the flood, and therefore, it is likely that there would have been no rainbow in the sky. Since we still see a rainbow and God says this covenant is everlasting, he has not rescinded it.

The second covenant

And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words. - Exodus 24:7-8

The first five books of the Bible cover the fullness of the Mosaic covenant. For now, these are the four points that we will examine:

1. The Children of Israel were to keep God's commandments given to them by the hand of Moses.
2. God promised to bless Israel if they kept these commandments (Deuteronomy 28:1-14).
3. If Israel did not keep these commandments, God promised Israel many curses (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).
4. This covenant was an everlasting covenant.

The word **everlasting** is important. If an everlasting covenant is not everlasting, how can we believe that we have everlasting life?

*And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for **an everlasting covenant**, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. - Genesis 17:7*

AND

He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations; Even of the

*covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; And hath **confirmed the same to Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant,***
- 1 Chronicles 16:14-17

Many Christians think that when the Old Testament was broken it thus ended. Not so, when the Children of Israel broke the Lord's commandments, they left his blessings and entered into the punishment section of the contract. It is the same when a motorist *breaks* the speed limit. The laws concerning speed limits do not end; rather, when the driver is caught speeding he faces the punishment prescribed by the law.

If the Old Testament is an everlasting covenant, then the Jewish Christians kept the Mosaic Law. Acts 21:20-24 clearly states that this was so.

*And when they heard [about Paul's ministry], they [James and the elders in Jerusalem] glorified the Lord, and said unto him, **Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:** And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; **but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.** - Acts 21:20-24*

Before Peter went to visit Cornelius in Caesarea, the church was entirely Jewish. Peter even starts his sermon a little surprised.

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. - Act 10:34-35

Later Peter rehearsed what happened at Cornelius' house to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem and:

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.- Act 11:18

The fact is, in the beginning, the church was entirely Jewish and thus it was bound by the Mosaic covenant, which means it kept the entire law. Later certain Jews taught that the gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law. Then in Acts 15, Paul went up to Jerusalem to have the apostles and elders decide the issue. It is from this episode in Paul's life that Christianity has a bad taste for the circumcision or legalism. Yet Paul did not hate the circumcision, rather he mentions to the Colossians that his only helpers at that time were of the circumcision (Jewish Christians under the Law).

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and Mark, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) And

Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.
- Colossians 4:10-11

When Jesus came, it was not to do away with the Mosaic Covenant. It was because God remembered this covenant. Praising God, Zechariah the father of John the Baptist said:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. - Luke 1:68-75

Jesus came not to annul the Mosaic covenant, but to fulfill it.

The third covenant

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: - Jeremiah 31:31

In the fullness of time, God made a third covenant. This is a better than the Mosaic Covenant for several reasons, first, nobody could keep the law as required in the second covenant. If you think that you are getting into God's Kingdom by your works you should know that God's righteousness is uncompromising.

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.
- James 2:10

The second reason is that when a person thinks he is doing a good job keeping the law, he becomes a proud person. Have you ever spent much time with a self-righteous person? It would not be much fun to spend eternity in a room full of them. Jesus shared this parable to teach humility.

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. - Luke 18:10-14

The third covenant, which we will now call the *New Testament*, is also superior, as it was Jesus himself, who atoned for our sins, not a bull or goat. Consequently, there will no bragging in the Kingdom of Heaven.

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
Not of works, lest any man should boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9*

In atoning for our sins himself, he was able to remove sin without our becoming proud.

*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins
- Hebrews 10:4*

AND

*For by one offering he [Jesus] hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.
- Hebrews 10:14*

Does the New Testament revoke the Old Testament?

*In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and
waxeth old is ready to vanish away. - Hebrews 8:13*

Does not Hebrews 8:13 teach that the Old Testament has vanished?

That the Book of Hebrews annuls the Old Testament is a common misconception among Christians. It is true only insofar as gentile Christians are not partakers of the Old Testament. For the Christian, the New Testament is far better than the Old Testament because nobody was able to keep the whole law.

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, **Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things** which are written in the book of the law to do them. - Galatians 3:10*

Since nobody has kept all things which are written in the law we have a problem, therefore God created a new covenant. Jesus said,

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
- John 15:13*

God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ so that he could die for us. In this way, God's ultimate love saves us from the punishment of sin. If we need to add the works of the law for our salvation we are saying that God's love is insufficient to save us.

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not
entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be
circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is
circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. **Christ is become of no effect unto
you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.**
- Galatians 5:1-4*

However, if we look at the council in Acts 15 we see that the apostles and elders released only the gentiles from the Law of Moses, the context of the discussion implies that the church up to that time was under the law.

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise [gentile believers], and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. [...] Wherefore my [James'] sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. - Acts 15:5-6, 19-20

If the apostles and elders were not keeping the Law, would they have had a discussion about gentiles keeping the Law? Also, immediately after this council, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:1-3) because his mother was Jewish, yet he would not allow Titus to be circumcised (Galatians 2:3-5) because Titus was a gentile. In Acts 18:18, it even appears that Paul took a Nazarite vow as he did again in Acts 21:23-24, this time to prove that he kept the Law. Should it be a surprise that Paul kept the law? (Acts 21:24)³ As an apostle of Jesus, Paul taught the same thing that Jesus taught and that was:

*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, **one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law**, till all be fulfilled. **Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments**, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:17-19*

Jesus did not say whoever shall break one of the *Ten Commandments* should be called least in the kingdom of heaven, he said, "*Whosoever therefore shall break one of these **least** commandments*".

As we read earlier, in Acts 21,⁴ the Jewish Christians were all zealous for the Mosaic Law. In the book of Galatians, Paul rebuked the gentile Church for desiring to be under the same law.

*For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, **whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace**. - Galatians 5:3-4*

It is important for us to realize that Paul did not say, "*Whosoever of you are justified by the **ceremonial law**; ye are fallen from grace*". Nor did Paul give the Galatians a 'New Testament Law' to replace the Mosaic Law.

I am often asked why I believe that the Jewish Christians were still under the law. They were in the Mosaic Covenant before they became believers and thus they could not break that covenant with God even though they had entered into a new one as well. The Mosaic Covenant is an everlasting covenant. I can make a promise (covenant) to my daughter Rebekah, and again later, I can make another promise (covenant) to her. Making the second promise, does not disannul or allow me to break my first promise.

³ And all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee [Paul], are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, **and keepest the law**. - Acts 21:24

⁴ Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law. - Acts 21:20b

*Is any man called being circumcised? [under the law] let him not become uncircumcised.
Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. [bind himself by the law]
- 1 Corinthians 7:18*

Though the Mosaic Covenant was never revoked, the gentile church never entered into that covenant therefore, the church is not bound by its statutes.

As already mentioned, the apostles gave the gentile church three commands. To sum up, abstain from idols, blood and fornication.

- **Abstain from idols:** In many pagan countries it is normal to worship many gods. The Lord will not be one of many, by giving us this command a new convert will know what is expected of him at the start.
- **Abstain from blood and things strangled:** This command comes from Noah's covenant. While the apostles did not bind the gentile church with the Mosaic Covenant, neither did they disannul Noah's covenant.
- **Abstain from fornication:** The unbelievers do not see the suffering fornication causes. Perhaps this command was also given to new believers until God opened their eyes.

If we related to one another with the same love that Jesus showed while he was walking the earth amongst us, there would be no need for the law. To this, Paul concurs by saying:

*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. - Romans 6:14-15*

AND

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. - Galatians 5:18

AND

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
meekness, temperance: **against such there is no law.** - Galatians 5:22-23*

AND

*Knowing this, 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, [etc.] - 1 Timothy 1:9.*

Why would someone who was already a Christian desire to enter into the Mosaic Covenant? Is the blood of the covenant, wherewith we was sanctified, insufficient for salvation? To believe this is an insult to Jesus. If we gentiles are not under the law, does this mean we can we do anything we want? No. Paul dealt with this misunderstanding when he said:

*And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us
do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just. - Romans 3:8*

Heaven will not be similar to these present times on earth. If we do not desire to walk after spiritual things in this life, what makes you believe that we will want them in the next? If we are amused by carnal things now (and are not trying to deny our flesh), why do we expect not to be amused by them in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. - 1 John 2:15-17

If you really believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, you will be grateful. The corollary is that if you do not love Jesus it is because you do not really believe He saved you. Jesus taught the following parable when He was dining at a Pharisee's house.

*There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but **to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little**. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. - Luke 7:41-48*

The New Testament

The commandments of Jesus

***He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me:** and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. - John 14:21*

While we are not under Mosaic Law, Jesus did give commandments for those who would enter into the New Testament. If we that love Jesus keep his commandments, then do our good works save us after all? No, first, the commands of Jesus in the New Testament are different from the statutes of Moses in the Old Testament. Second and more important is that we obey his commands out of thankfulness rather than in trying to keep a law to attain self-righteousness. Jesus taught:

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses. - Matthew 18:23-35

In order for this servant (or us) to attain righteousness by good works, he would have had to pay the ten thousand talents. When his master forgave him his unpayable debt, he had a right to expect his servant to be grateful and show pity on his debtors. In the same way, if we are truly forgiven an unpayable debt, Jesus can expect obedience from us. What then are the commandments of Jesus?

The greatest commandment

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. - Matthew 22:36-37

Here is an example to help understand why the first commandment is a response to love. Imagine that you see a young mother pushing her new baby in a stroller.

As she approaches the corner, a speeding car losing control jumps the curb and just when you think that the baby is done for, a stranger dives for the stroller pushing it out of the way. He takes the impact and pays the ultimate price himself.

Now, imagine it is about a week later, you see the same mother and child in line at the supermarket. Ahead of her in line are three other women, they are so engrossed in themselves that they do not even notice her. Everybody can hear them talk, and their words are something like this.

"That idiot, he died for somebody that he didn't even know!"

"He must have been drunk."

"Did you see the look on his face when the car hit him? It was so comical!"

The mother then recognized these girls as her friends. What would you think when you saw her push her stroller forward and join in their mirth. You hear her say,

"And did you see the clothes he was wearing? He probably lived in a homeless shelter."

Wait a minute; you now realize that this cannot be the mother of the child who was saved. It only looks like her.

If she were the same mother, she would have been more likely to box the other girls' ears then join in their jokes at the expense of the man to whom she is so grateful.

In the same way, if we believe that Jesus Christ really died for us on the cross, we will be grateful to him. The commandment to love him is not like a speed limit. We may have to fight our old nature to drive under the speed limit. When we know what Jesus has done for us, it should be a pleasure to obey him. His enemies should be our enemies (even still, Jesus told us to love our enemies).

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. - Matthew 10:32-33

The second commandment

And the second [commandment] is like unto it [the first commandment], Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. - Matthew 22:39-40

AND

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. - John 15:12

When Jesus said, "*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*", he covered everything. The love that Jesus is speaking about is not some special feeling. Jesus said that no greater love has a man than he give up his life for a friend. When Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself, he is asking you to make sacrifices for your neighbor. John the Baptist gave us some everyday examples.

He [John] answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. - Luke 3:11

Jesus even went further saying:

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? - Matthew 5:41-46

Besides the two commandments to love, did Jesus command us to do anything else? Yes, there is a small list.

Jesus commanded water baptism

*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. **Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them** in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. - Matthew 28:18-20*

Jesus commanded the church to baptize their new believers. This is how we are to enter into the New Covenant. We should be careful to not underplay the importance of water baptism.

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. - Mark 16:16

In the last hundred years or so many evangelical churches have quietly replaced baptism with an alter call for new believers. The alter call as practiced today is never mentioned in the Bible. When someone became a believer, they were immediately baptized. Here are some examples showing water baptism as practiced in the first century church.

The first water baptism after Jesus' death was on the day of Pentecost. Note how, instead of the alter call, Peter said for "*every one of you*" to repent and be baptized.

*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, **Repent, and be baptized every one of you** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. [...] Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. - Acts 2:37-38,41*

A little bit later Philip shares the gospel with an Ethiopian, upon believing, the first thing Philip did was baptize him.

*And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, **here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?** And Philip said, **If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.** And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. - Acts 8:36-38*

In Peter's first experience with gentile believers, he commands them to be baptized as soon as they had received the Holy Ghost.

*And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And **he commanded them to be baptized** in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. - Acts 10:45-48*

When in prison, Paul had a chance to make believers out of the jailer and his whole household. After the jailer treated Paul for his injuries, the next thing he did was to be baptized.

*But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he [the jailer] called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And **he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.** And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. - Acts 16:28-34*

The book of Acts has other accounts where upon believing, new Christians were immediately baptized.

And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. - Acts 18:8

AND

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. - Acts 19:4-5

Paul, in describing the day he came to believe, quotes Ananias, the one who baptized him.

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. - Acts 22:16

While water baptism is important, it is also important to realize that Jesus' death on the cross is what saves us; otherwise, God's love was not sufficient to save us.

But I [Jesus] have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! - Luke 12:50

While we are baptized out of obedience, it is not the baptism, or how we are baptized that saves us. For instance, we see Jesus give the thief on the cross His word that he would be in paradise even though the thief was not water baptized. Some teach that water baptism is essential for salvation. This error leads to many others, including:

- It is essential that the baptism be performed a certain way. What if the person baptizing you does not speak the correct words? What if he should say "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost" instead of saying "In the name of Jesus Christ"? Unbelievably, some who profess to be Christian believe that a person baptized with the wrong words will not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Babies, through no fault of their own, will suffer eternal torment if they are not water baptized. Nowhere do the apostles teach infant baptism, rather, they stressed the need to believe first.

- There is much fighting between certain denominations over *sprinkling* verses *dunking*. If water baptism is what saves your soul, then you must do it properly.
- The Christian will still be lost if the pastor baptizing him turns out to be unsaved himself. Are all the people that Judas Iscariot baptized before Jesus' death also going to the place of punishment?
- Will Jesus really abandon all those who came to believe in Him while in prison, or those who for some other reason could not be baptized?
- Many denominations have replaced baptism with an alter call and then they change baptism into a rite of membership, or an act of joining their denomination. If you lose your baptismal record, you must be baptized again to remain a member of the church. This is not the same baptism practiced by the early church or taught by Jesus.

I am thankful that I serve a merciful God, and the church should have a similar reputation for mercy. Though it is important for the church to realize that salvation is not by water baptism, to purposely neglect baptism is to be in direct disobedience to Jesus.

Even so, we are all going to be baptized, the question is, are you going to be baptized in faith? In Noah's day, everyone was baptized. This baptism however, only benefited those who believed.

*[The people in Noah's day] Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. **The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us** (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: - 1 Peter 3:20-21*

The Lord also had a baptism in Moses' time. Unfortunately for them, the Egyptians were baptized without faith.

*Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and **were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;** - 1 Corinthians 10:1-2*

Baptism is a declaration. Paul describes this to the Romans and the Colossians.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: - Romans 6:3-5

AND

Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. - Colossians 2:12

In baptism, we are declaring that we are buried in the likeness of Jesus' death. Once we die, we cease from sinning. When baptized, we are to consider ourselves dead to the world, not members of a denominational church. No worldly pleasure is able to tempt a dead person.

In baptism, we go down in the likeness of Jesus' death and then we rise in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection. How will you behave after your resurrection? Coming out of the water in baptism, by faith, we consider ourselves to live, as we will in the resurrection.

We will all be baptized; we will all die and face the Judgment Day. The question is; will you be baptized in belief or unbelief?

Jesus commanded us to celebrate His last supper

As Jesus gave us baptism, He also commanded the church to celebrate His last supper in remembrance of Him. The Bible does not record Jesus saying to do it daily weekly or annually, He only said, "*This do in remembrance of me*".

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. - Luke 22:19-20

The Roman Catholic Church, and some of her offspring believe in a doctrine called transubstantiation. This is a belief that the bread and wine of the Last Supper becomes in reality the physical Jesus Christ. This is more than a ceremony, the priest actually and physically sacrifices Jesus for our sins. This doctrine has created many problems for the Christians. Obviously not everybody can turn bread and wine into the physical presence of Jesus. Therefore, with this doctrine comes a new priesthood, one that was completely alien to the New Testament Church. Jesus himself said:

*And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.
- Matthew 23:9*

With the doctrine of transubstantiation also comes the question; are you worshiping God or a piece of bread? Are those who refuse to bow down to the Eucharist (a wafer of bread) denying the Lord that died for them? On the other hand, are those who are worshiping the wafer of bread in fact practicing paganism? The Bible foreseeing this controversy says that Jesus died once and offered himself only once as a sacrifice.

*For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: **Nor yet that he should offer himself often**, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: **but now once in the end of the world** hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. - Hebrews 9:24-28*

AND

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies

*be made his footstool. For **by one offering** he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. - Hebrews 10:11-14*

The writer of Hebrews could not have been clearer, Jesus offered Himself once and He asked us to remember this sacrifice by celebrating His last supper. Our choice is to believe the word of God or to follow the tradition of men.

Jesus said, "*This do in remembrance of me*". This implies we are to remember him. If Jesus were actually sacrificing Himself again, would we do it in remembrance of Him?

Because Jesus said, "*I am that bread of life*", many believe therefore that the bread literally becomes His body. Yet, Jesus also said that He is the door (John 10:9)⁵, He is the corner stone (Acts 4:11)⁶ and He is the vine (John 15:1)⁷.

When we partake of the bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus, we are not to take it lightly. Paul warned the Corinthians saying,

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. - 1 Corinthians 11:23-31

In celebrating the last supper of our Lord, we acknowledge our own sins. Jesus died to pay the price for our sins, and we should be thankful. We should reflect on the price Jesus paid for our sins, His life. We should be humble as we acknowledge in keeping this command that we do not get into heaven by our own works.

Jesus commanded us repent from our sins

Some Christians believe that once you come to the altar and say the sinner's prayer, you have eternal life no matter what you do. At the risk of sounding like salvation by works, Jesus said:

⁵ I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture - John 10:9

⁶ This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. - Acts 4:11

⁷ I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. - John 15:1

For I [Jesus] say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.
- Matthew 5:20

Some teachers, taking this verse out of context⁸, explain how we do not have our own righteousness rather Jesus is our righteousness. Therefore, no matter what your behavior, your *righteousness* will exceed that of the Pharisees. However, even if you believe this, if your behavior is no better than the *scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*. This is because **the command to repent is the gospel** of Jesus Christ.

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. - Matthew 4:17

Again, Jesus said:

*I came not to call the righteous, but **sinner**s to repentance.* - Luke 5:32

A while back an elder of the local Baptist church and I were discussing the doctrine of eternal security. In trying to make his point, he quoted a backslidden pastor saying,

"Even if I was in a bar, with a drink in front of me, and though I had two floozies, one under each arm, I still know where I am going."

If the implication was that even though he were a drunken fornicator, he would still make it into the Kingdom of Heaven. Either he or the apostle Paul is mistaken, for Paul clearly said:

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; **adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, **drunkenness**, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that **they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.***** - Galatians 5:19-21

If we love Jesus, we will want to keep His command to repent from our sins. If you are still unsure of the need to repent, get out a concordance and look at the scripture passages in the New Testament that have the words *repent* or *righteousness* in them.

Jesus commanded us to forgive our debtors

In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus commanded us to forgive our debtors. Jesus taught that forgiving our debtors is essential if we wanted Him forgive or save us.

*[In praying we are to say] **forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: **But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.***
- Matthew 6:12-15

⁸ The verse before it talked about breaking the least commandment.

Jesus repeatedly taught the necessity of forgiving others, in the parable we read earlier:

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

[...]

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses. - Matthew 18:23-35

The command to forgive is not optional. Yet as I mentioned earlier, this is not salvation by works. For salvation by his works the servant would have had to pay the ten-thousand talent debt, not forgive a hundred pence debt.

For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. - James 2:13

Some more thoughts on the New Testament

A Pure Christian Religion

If Mosaic Law does not bind the gentile Christians and there is no New Testament Law, what does it mean to be a Christian? What are our guidelines?

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. - James 1:27

The rituals of the Christian faith are simple.

- Do good, - "*visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,*"
- Stop doing evil, - "*keep himself unspotted from the world*"

The Church has added many rules, commandments and traditions, including some pagan ones, to the gospel. In some cases it takes only a few minutes of conversation to recognize which denomination a Christian belongs to; often, all you need to do is to recognize their extra biblical rules.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. - Colossians 2:8

Love not the world

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. - 1 John 2:15-17

How do we keep ourselves from the world?

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. - Matthew 6:24-33

Before Constantine's time, the Christians met in their individual homes. In trying to convert the pagans, Constantine tried to make Christianity look more attractive by building magnificent places of worship. Unfortunately, since Constantine the church has tried to evangelize by making the unsaved more comfortable in church. Pastors often exhort their congregation to invite unbelievers to church so that they can be saved. We use potlucks and concerts. I do not mean to sound judgmental, but are we bringing people out of the world, or are we bringing the world into the church?

*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.
- John 15:19*

Christians are to spread the Gospel not our culture

We saw in Acts chapter 21 that the Jewish Christians were distinctly Jewish and "*they [were] all zealous of the law*", and that the gentile church was distinctly gentile and the apostles and elders at Jerusalem "*concluded that they observe no such thing*".

This does not mean that they were two separate churches. Paul expected both the Jews and the Gentile Christians to love one another and fellowship together. One time when they started to segregate themselves Paul quickly rebuked them.

*But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For **before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles**: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? - Galatians 2:11-14*

Today Churches in America send missionaries to all parts of the world. Often our missionary workers bring in *leaven* along with *the bread of life*. They spread many rules and cultural values that Jesus did not command. We should be thankful for missionaries, and it cannot be helped that they will bring some of their culture with them. However, their mission is not to change the culture of the people to whom they are witnessing. The Great Commission is to turn the world from paganism and idol worship to the one true God.

Today, it is politically correct to desegregate our society. The Christian church, which does not following this lead, may be the most culturally segregated institution in America. This is okay because unlike our secular culture the church is able to transcend our cultural differences, thus I can enter into any Christian church and we truly love and worship together. If we forced the church to desegregate, we would need some form of legalism to do it.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.
- John 13:35

AND

Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. - Romans 13:8

Works of the law vs. good works

Today the evangelical church often overlooks the importance of good works. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that many works are necessary for salvation. Martin Luther swung the pendulum the other way, denouncing works of any kind. We have already seen how it is essential that we repent from our sinful behavior. We have also seen that we must forgive those who have trespassed against us.

What about other good works? Must Christians do anything else to inherit eternal life? Before answering this, let us look at a bit of history. To fight off heretics and to keep her doctrine pure, early church leaders decided that they needed creeds. Most of us are familiar with the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

You will notice that other than believing this creed, this creed expected very little from the saints. Compare these words to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), a very brief summary includes:

Practice humility and meekness, become peacemakers, being merciful and having a hunger for righteousness. Jesus discussed doing good works that would cause God to be glorified. He talked about keeping and teaching the Law of Moses and He went on in this sermon to teach us how to give alms, pray and fast. He warned us not to pursue worldliness, rather to seek after the kingdom of God. He also warned about judging others and said that only those who did his Father's bidding would make it into the kingdom of heaven. Finally, he closes his sermon with a blessing and a curse.

*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, **and doeth them**, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock.*

*And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, **and doeth them not**, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. - Matthew 7:24-27*

When you look at the Sermon on the Mount, from beginning to end, you will see that Jesus is talking about works. Some teachers explain these good works away with a passage from John that says.

Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. - John 6:29

However, John did not write his gospel to undo the teachings of Matthew's gospel. Believing on Jesus is essential to do good works. Everything Jesus taught in Matthew is the Word of God. Other Scripture passages that teach the importance of good works include:

*For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward **every man according to his works**. - Matthew 16:27*

AND

*For **whosoever shall do** the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother. - Mark 3:35*

AND

*And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, **neither did according to his will**, shall be beaten with many stripes. - Luke 12:47*

AND

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. - John 7:17

AND

*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded; nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; **That they do good, that they be rich in good works**, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, **that they may lay hold on eternal life**. - 1 Timothy 6:17-19*

AND

*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and **unto every good work reprobate**. - Titus 1:16*

AND

*Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, **zealous of good works**. - Titus 2:14*

If your church is not zealous of good works, but instead, plays them down, it may be time to find a new church.

***And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:**
- Hebrews 10:24*

AND

*This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, **that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works**. These things are good and profitable unto men. - Titus 3:8*

AND

***Make you perfect in every good work to do his will**, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. - Hebrews 13:21*

In this next passage, James describes how good works do not contradict faith; rather they are an essential part of faith. For James to spend so much time on this one subject may imply that there were as many who spoke against good works and salvation in his day as there is in ours.

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of

*you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so **faith, if it hath not works, is dead**, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.*

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. [...]

*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without works is dead** also.
- James 2:14-24, 26*

The apostle John spoke about salvation by faith as much as any apostle, yet in the book of Revelation, while taking dictation from Jesus, he says to every one of the seven churches, *I know thy works*.

***To Ephesus: I know thy works**, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: [...] Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, **and do the first works**; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. - Revelation 2:2,5*

***To Smyrna: I know thy works**, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. - Revelation 2:9*

***To Pergamos: I know thy works**, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.
- Revelation 2:13*

***To Thyatira: I know thy works**, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. [...] And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: **and I will give unto every one of you according to your works**. [...] And **he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end**, to him will I give power over the nations. - Revelation 2:19,23,26*

***To Sardis: And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works**, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die: for **I have not found thy works perfect before God**.
- Revelation 3:1-2*

To Philadelphia: I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. - Revelation 3:8

To Laodicea: I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. [...] He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. - Revelation 3:15,22

Revelation continues:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them. - Revelation 14:13

AND

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.
- Revelation 20:12-13

Some sermons teach that Christians are saved by faith and have eternal security; therefore, there are two judgment days. Jesus himself said that He would gather all nations and separate the people as a shepherd does his sheep and goats. In this next passage He makes it clear that He will separate them based on what they did and did not do.

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, **Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.***

*Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, **Depart from me, ye cursed,** into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they*

*also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, **Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.***

*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.
- Matthew 25:32-46*

If Jesus separates the nations on the Judgment Day based on their works, does that mean that works save us after all? No. Jesus will have mercy on the deserving and judgment on the undeserving. It simply means that works are a natural fruit that comes from true salvation and acceptance of Christ. Remember the parable in Matthew 18?

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? - Matthew 18:32-33

If you have no compassion on others, the Lord may find you undeserving of his grace. As I mentioned earlier, this is not salvation by works; to be saved by good works the servant needed to pay the *ten thousand talents* when his master first reckoned with him. Jesus said that those who love Him keep His commandments; those are the ones who will be found deserving on the Day of Judgment.

For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

*For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, **The Lord shall judge his people.** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. - Hebrews 10:26-31*

What about our eternal security? If you look closely at the passages used to teach eternal security, they are usually a single verse taken out of context. The [Bible Study Examining Eternal Security](#) looks at these passages, but for now it enough to understand that if you believe good works are not essential to please God, and therefore you do not do any, you may find yourself among the undeserving on the Day of Judgment.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. - Galatians 6:7

Now let us look at The Ten Commandments

If we are not under the Mosaic Law, yet good works are part of a Christian's life, do Christians have to keep the Ten Commandments? Well, sort of, gentile Christians do not need to worry about the letter of the law, they need to worry about keeping the righteousness of the Law.

Therefore if the uncircumcision [gentiles, not under the law] keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? - Romans 2:26

In this Spirit, I have made a commentary of the Ten Commandments. Please read the conclusion at the end before you judge the commentary.

The Ten Commandments

I Thou shalt have no other gods before me. - Exodus 20:3

If you, as a Christian, are filled with the Holy Spirit, this command becomes unnecessary. If you love the Lord with you whole heart, you will not desire another god.

IIa Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: - Exodus 20:4

I wish to look at the second commandment in two pieces. This first half is one of the most ignored commands, not to make a likeness of anything in heaven, earth or in the sea.

Some teachers suggest that it is okay to have images as long as we do not worship them. This is not how the commandment reads. If you are under the Ten Commandments or Mosaic Law, the command forbids you from making any image, regardless of whether you worship it or not. Much of our modern technology is for making images; the IPod, Netflix and Facebook are only a few of our most popular pastimes. Are we glorifying God with these pastimes?

Is it all right for Christians have images, internet or a television? You must pray and ask the Lord himself to lead you in your own walk with Him. If you love him and are willing to let him guide you, he will give you the right answer.

IIb Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. - Exodus 20:5-6

Image worship was Israel's downfall, from the golden calf in the wilderness,

Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin [the golden image of a calf] upon them. - Exodus 32:34

To the time God removed Judah to Babylon.

And [Judah] left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. - 2 Chronicles 24:18

In more recent centuries, the Roman Catholic Church has altogether removed the second command from the Ten Commandments (they split the tenth command into two in order to make the number come out right). Yet, because it is one of the Ten Commandments, it should not be ignored. The Word of God condemns image worship in more places than just the Ten Commandments. However, today most Americans spend hours in front of their television and hours more looking at images on the internet. At the end of the age, the whole world will worship an Image of the Beast. Those worshiping this image will receive the worst punishment mentioned in the bible.

There is a story of how Hezekiah broke one of Israel's national treasures, a brass serpent, into pieces because the children of Israel were burning incense to it. God has made it clear over and over in his word; he does not want his worship to be associated with images. If we love God, we will not bow down and worship images. Yet some Christians try to use images to worship Jesus. Are you familiar with the Shroud of Turin? If the brass serpent became an idol, is not the Shroud?

*I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, **neither my praise to graven images.** - Isaiah 42:8*

When the apostles said that the gentile church was not under Mosaic Law (Acts 15 & 21), they still gave her three commands to follow. One of these was "*that they abstain from pollutions of idols.*" In most pagan cultures, there are many gods and idols. The apostles may have had a concern that new converts might worship the Lord as one of many gods. Something similar to that happened after Constantine legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire. To get his favor unconverted pagans entered the church and brought their idols with them. Jesus will have no fellowship with pagan idols.

And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. - 2 Corinthians 6:15-18

In the first verse of John we read, "*Word was with God, and the Word was God*". While Pagans worship images, Christians worship The Word.

III *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*
- Exodus 20:7

Like the first commandment, if the Holy Spirit leads us and if we love the Lord with all our heart, this command becomes unnecessary. The names of those we love are safe in our heart.

IV *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.* - Exodus 20:8-11

The gentile church is not bound by the fourth commandment legalistically. Yet we do well not to ignore it either. First:

[Jesus] said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:
- Mark 2:27

Second, in forgetting the Sabbath or changing it to Sunday, we may have forgotten its connection to the six literal days of creation.

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.
- Exodus 20:11

A literal six day creation is a controversy that rages in the church. Yet Jesus said,

*For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye **believe not his writings**, how shall ye believe my words?* - John 5:46-47

Another thing to consider is that the Lord never changed the Sabbath day to Sunday. While there are teachers who say that the church changed it to Sunday to honor the Lord's resurrection, the Lord himself inspired the prophet to say:

*Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as **in obeying the voice of the LORD**? Behold, **to obey is better than sacrifice**, and to hearken than the fat of rams.* - 1 Samuel 15:22b

If Jesus wanted the day of rest changed to Sunday, he would have told us to do so. Paul asking the saints to gather their offering together (1st Corinthians 16:2) does not prove that he changed the day of rest to Sunday. It actually proves the opposite, Paul would not have asked the saints to collect their

offering on the Sabbath day. In changing the day of rest to Sunday (like celebrating Easter with a ham), the church has **uncharitably** alienated the Jews from the Christian faith.

V *Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. - Exodus 20:12*

Some cults believe that Jesus replaced the fifth commandment with this new one.

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. - Luke 14:26

In Luke 14:26 Jesus was trying to make us understand, that when a person decided to become his disciple, his family might disown him. History has born this out; when we Jews, Muslims, Hindus or members of the Watchtower Society become Christian; his worst enemies are those of his own family.

Luke 14:26 does not teach that Christians are excused from honoring their parents. Those who genuinely love Jesus will try to honor their parents even after they have been rejected or excommunicated.

For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do aught for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. - Mark 7:10-13

VI *Thou shalt not kill. - Exodus 20:13*

For real Christians this command is also be unnecessary. It is covered under the command to love our neighbors. You cannot murder someone you love.

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.** - Matthew 22:37-40*

AND

*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, **Love your enemies**, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; - Matthew 5:43-44*

VII *Thou shalt not commit adultery. - Exodus 20:14*

In Acts 15:20⁹ and 21:25 the Apostles said that the gentile church was not under the law. Even so, they did give the church a couple of commands and one of these was to abstain from fornication. New believers may need this command before God opens their eyes to the pain and lives that are ruined because of fornication. If we are really loved others and see the pain fornication causes, does the church still need a command telling us not to?

VIII *Thou shalt not steal. - Exodus 20:15*

We, as professing Christians, should not need to be told; thou shalt not to steal. Respecting your neighbor's property is a natural consequence of loving your neighbor as yourself.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. - Acts 4:32

This verse is not a license to take your neighbor's possessions; it is a license to give away your own. Yet, it would be very difficult to steal from a person who did not believe *that aught of the things that he possessed was his own*.

IX *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. - Exodus 20:16*

It is interesting that in the Ten Commandments God specifies only one type of lie, bearing a false witness. Even so, we can find prohibitions against all lying in other passages of scripture.

Bearing false witness is to testify that a person said or did something that the person did not really say or do. Though it is often done in ignorance, we should understand the seriousness of taking a scripture verse out of context. In taking a passage out of context, the teacher bears false witness that the author or apostle is teaching something that on the Judgment Day he will deny he taught.

My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. - James 3:1

X *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's. - Exodus 20:17*

⁹ But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. - Acts 15:20

Politicians would not have a grip on us if we kept the tenth commandment. Whenever they say, *Tax the rich!* We should hear, covet *thy neighbor's property!* How can Christians, who are not supposed to love the things of the world, be caught up in coveting our neighbor's property?

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. - 1 John 2:17

When your neighbor has something good happen to him, do not envy him; be happy for and with him.

*That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; **or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.** - 1 Corinthians 12:25-26*

Conclusion

In looking at the Ten Commandments, I made a bigger issue of the commandments that are often played down, while playing down the commands that are esteemed important, this was to show, while not feeling bound by the Ten Commandments, that they are all important in teaching us how to love one another.

I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. - Romans 7:7b

AND

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. - Galatians 3:24-25

Let us conclude this study with a little review. There are three covenants; Noah's covenant, Moses' covenant and finally Jesus gave us the New Testament. On the day of Pentecost, the Church was entirely Jewish and therefore the Church at that time was under all three covenants, as all three are irrevocable.

Later on, the gentiles entered the Church. In doing so, we entered the New Testament and while the New Testament does not revoke the Old, gentile Christians were never bound by that covenant. In the New Covenant, we are saved by grace through faith, to enter into the Mosaic Covenant now, would imply that Jesus' finished work was not sufficient to save us.

In the New Testament, only the deserving will attain salvation. To be counted among the deserving we must repent from our sins, forgive others as they sin against us and try to keep His two greatest commandments to love. Though we are not under the Works of the Law, we are to be zealous of Good Works.

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. - James 4:17

If we desire to be religious, our rituals include, keeping ourselves unspotted from the world and helping those in need.

May God bless you as you follow His will.

Written by [Jeff Barnes](#)

Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. - Matthew 13:33

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