

# Did the Grace of God Cancel Biblical Commandments?

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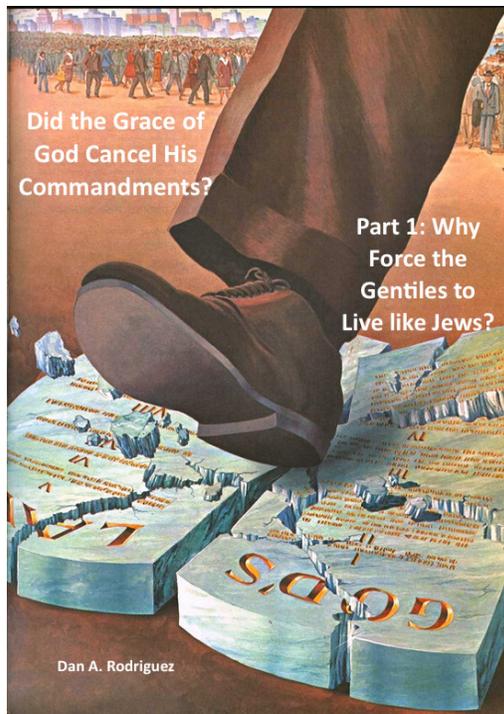
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## **Part 1: Why Force the Gentiles to Live like Jews?**

Why do we need a message like this today? Look around and note the modern teachings spreading among the churches. There are those that emphasize we should keep Sabbath days, feasts and festivals, laws concerning foods, and other ritual laws of Israel. On the other hand, there are ministers, churches, and books that insist that we are not under any law and that we should not obey Old Testament commandments. I have heard it taught that we are not subject to any of the Ten Commandments because all commandments were under the law and they are not a part of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What teachings are right? What does the Scripture say about these things? What did the apostles teach? In this series of articles, you will see what the Word says about these things and you will be able to share it effectively.

I am going to begin in the book of Galatians.

The theme of the book of Galatians was to bring correction to error spreading through certain Jewish believers among churches, specifically in the gentile world. These Jewish believers wanted to impose upon the gentiles converted to Christ the necessity of obeying laws and statues given by God to Moses for the children of Israel.

### ***Why force the gentiles to live like Jews?***

In Paul's own words to Peter and the Galatians, *"How can you try to force the gentiles to live like Jews?"* (Galatians 2:14 NET) These Jewish believers were also *"trying to force you to be circumcised"* (Galatians 6:12 NET). We can ask the same questions today of those that demand that Christians keep ritual or ceremonial laws required of national Israel. Let's bluntly ask them: "Why are you forcing gentiles to live like Jews?"

Look at other translations of Galatians 2:16:

*"How can you compel gentiles to live like Jews?"* (CSB)

*"How can you require the gentiles to live like Jews?"* (CEB)

*"So how can you insist that people who are not Jewish must live like Jews?"* (GW)

*"So why do you now try to force those who are not Jewish to live like Jews?"* (NCV)

*"Why do you make the people who are not Jews live like the Jews?"* (NLV)

*"How can you force gentiles to become Jews?"* (NTE)

In Spanish, there is one well-known version that states, *"Why do you coerce the gentiles to practice Judaism?"* (LBLA)

Paul reveals his teaching and thinking on the subject with this statement. In the apostle's doctrine there was a clear distinction between what was an necessary for the gentiles converted to Christ and what was the practice of Judaism. This will all make sense soon, but here is what I am asking: "Should Christians today be under obligation to keep Sabbath days, feasts (Pentecost, Day of Atonement, Passover, Tabernacles, etc.), use prayer shawls, phylacteries, practice circumcision, and should they maintain "kosher" in their homes by distinguishing between clean and unclean foods? In other words, should we feel under obligation to keep and obey ritual-ceremonial laws given to Israel?"

Do I have to tell you that there is much confusion on this subject in Christianity? The Body of Christ (the Church) needs a Biblical perspective and not a traditional or modern interpretation of the subject. Our opinions and doctrines are worthless in this respect. We need to see it in the Scripture and then abide by its instruction. That is my only purpose in this treatise. If you are a Jewish believer in Jesus, or if you are a Christian with no Jewish background, you really need to read these articles. They will answer many questions.

What was happening among the Galatians? Among other things, Jewish believers were insisting that male gentile converts to Christ needed to be circumcised. To

receive circumcision for a Jew indicated that he entered into the covenant of God with Abraham and his descendants, and that he was to submit to the laws given by God at Sinai exclusively for the nation of Israel.

Paul understood that no gentile convert to the Lord Jesus needed physical circumcision to enter into a relationship with God. To attempt to enter into a relationship with God via circumcision, after entering into covenant via faith in Jesus, was to deny and reject what was already received. Look at Galatians 5:1-12, 6:12-15.

Circumcision was not the only part of Israelite ceremonial-ritual laws that were not to be demanded of gentiles converted to Christ.

*But now you know the true God. Really, though, it is God who knows you. So why do you turn back to the same kind of weak and useless rules you followed before? Do you want to be slaves to those things again? It worries me that you follow teachings about special days, months, seasons, and years. I fear that my work for you has been wasted (Galatians 4:9-11 ERV).*

The Expanded Bible translates and states about these verses in Galatians 4:9-11:

*“But now you know the true God. Really, it is God who knows you. So why do [L how can] you turn back to those weak and useless [bankrupt; L poor] rules [or spiritual forces; or elementary principles/powers; v. 3] you followed before? Do you want to be slaves to those things again? You still follow teachings about [are observing/keeping] special days, months, seasons, and years [C probably Jewish Sabbaths and festivals, which Paul’s opponents claimed must be observed to be saved].”*

These Galatian gentile converts to Jesus were being influenced and then submitting to what the Jewish believers wanted to impose upon them, but Paul firmly opposed these demands. How could Christians from a gentile background turn back to these ritual-ceremonial commandments that had to do with keeping or observing special days like the Sabbath, months (new moons), seasons, and years. These words, “months, seasons and years,” were most likely referring to the feasts and festivals of Israel like the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), Tabernacles (Succoth), Passover (Pesach), Pentecost (Shavuot), New Year (Rosh Hashanah), and others. For gentiles converted to the Lord, these ceremonial-ritual commandments to observe certain rituals during these times of the year had little if any significance. Gentiles were pagan idolaters, ignorant, and completely unaccustomed to Jewish rituals or ceremonies. They were not raised in them nor taught them from an early age as was customary among the Jews. For gentiles converted to the Lord, these rituals were weak and made them slaves to a system of sacrifice and ritual meant only for Israel.

Read the previous paragraph again, and get these truths into your heart.

Paul was not sent as an apostle to the Jews, but to the gentiles (Rom. 11:13). He emphasized that Christians from a gentile background were not under obligation to ritual-ceremonial laws because they were only applicable to the nation of Israel. That is THE truth of the matter, but further explanation is necessary to avoid any misunderstandings. By the end of these articles there should be NO doubt in your thinking about this subject.

### ***The Temporary Nature of Ritual Ceremonial Laws***

The other side to this is much more important. It is the fact that with the coming and sacrifice of Jesus came an eternal fulfillment of all ritual-ceremonial laws that began at Sinai and ended with the coming of the Christ (Messiah). The ceremonial-ritual law was a temporary measure instituted by God UNTIL the manifestation and sacrifice of the Messiah. This was Paul's teaching on the subject in Galatians 3:16-25. Please read it carefully, but note what else Paul taught about it.

*So don't let anyone criticize you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating Jewish holidays and feasts or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these were only temporary rules that ended when Christ came. They were only shadows of the real thing—of Christ himself (Colossians 2:16, 16 TLV).*

I don't know how much clearer a verse could possibly be! You would need demonic deception to misunderstand this! The apostle taught that all ritual-ceremonial laws given to Moses at Sinai, those such as Jewish holidays and feasts, new moon ceremonies, or Sabbaths were **temporary rules**. That means that there would be a time coming when these would no longer be demanded. They ceased being an obligation with the coming of Jesus. These ritual ceremonies were the shadow of someone greater to come, and His Name is Jesus! These ritual-ceremonial aspects of law were the shadow of the eternal (the real) that came through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

When the Lord Jesus Christ suffered death and shed His blood for us, He fulfilled the Passover lamb sacrifice. (See 1 Cor. 5:7.) He offered one sacrifice that never needs to be repeated again. It was an eternal sacrifice and redemption! (See Hebrews 9:9-15.) There never needs to be another blood sacrifice for the atonement of sin. His sacrifice dealt with the sin problem once and for all (for those that believe in Him and receive His sacrifice). Jesus was the fulfillment of every sacrifice and burnt offering offered by the priesthood of Israel. This is the great theme of Hebrews chapters 7 through 10.

Jesus was made the eternal High Priest, not according to the order of Aaron, but according to that of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20-7:28).

Christ was the last sacrifice and spotless Lamb offered up once for us (1 Peter 1:19). Again, His sacrifice fulfilled the shadow, which was all related to the Temple, priesthood, and the sacrifices.

Now the church, the Body of Christ, and the individual believer, come to be God's Temple (1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19; Eph. 2:21).

We become a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices under Jesus the High Priest. (1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 13:15) We do not offer the blood and bodies of ritually slaughtered innocent animals for the forgiveness of sins. Today, if we sin, we have the Blood of Jesus to wipe away our sins. We acknowledge or confess our sins, receive forgiveness, and are cleansed from all unrighteousness because of the Blood of Jesus that was shed for us (1 John 1:7-10).

### ***Have you heard that we should learn more about our Hebrew roots?***

Some Christians insist that believers should observe the feasts and festivals of Israel, and especially Sabbath days, because Christ is found in all of them, and He was their fulfillment. Yes, we can all benefit from learning about feasts, festivals, and Sabbath days, and we can see the shadow of Messiah clearly expressed in them. Yes, there are important truths that can be learned by studying the Hebrew roots of Christianity in the first century. There are words and verses in the New Testament that are misunderstood and generally misinterpreted when looked at in English or from the Greek. These can ONLY be properly understood when you look at the Hebrew- Jewish background of the first century.

To give you one powerful example, take the related words *faith* and *believe*. These words came into the Greek New Testament from the Septuagint, an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture used by all the original writers of the New Testament. Neither of the words *faith* or *believe* have anything to do with "beliefs" as such. When used in reference to God they are better understood by the words trust, faithfulness, loyalty, steadfastness, firmness, obedience, and yielding to Him and His Word. To believe on Jesus is not a belief system you embrace. It means that you yield and humble yourself to who Jesus is (He becomes your **Lord**) and to what He has done for you (His sacrifice), and that you become His faithful, loyal, and steadfast follower. Much error has developed and been propagated by churches because of not understanding these very BASIC truths, easily understood when proper research is done into the background and usage of these words in Hebrew!

I recognize the importance of studying the Hebrew roots of first century Christianity, and have been a student since 1985. Here's my point: you can learn much about the Hebrew-Jewish background of Christianity without feeling obligated to observe the feasts, festivals, Sabbath days, and dietary laws (keeping kosher) as practiced in Judaism.

Another point to keep in mind, is that for the apostle Paul and the early church, there was a vast difference between ceremonial-ritual laws meant only for Israel, and **moral** laws or commandments that apply to everybody, Jew or Gentile. We will look at this in some detail in the next few articles.

**Part 2: The Effect of the Destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A. D., and How That Relates to Christians Today**



**Part 2: The Effect of the Destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A. D., and How That Relates to Christians Today**

The Second Temple and its priesthood and sacrifices existed in Jerusalem when Paul wrote his epistles. After the destruction of the Temple in A. D. 70 by the Roman legions, the priesthood disappeared from the scene together with all the blood sacrifices and offerings offered in it. What many have not properly understood about the destruction of the Temple is the fact that from 613 commandments of law, at least 343 of the ritual-ceremonial commandments, statutes, and laws were immediately made obsolete.<sup>1</sup> Commandments concerning blood sacrifices and burnt offerings in the Temple, those regulating the priesthood, those related to Sabbath days and the feasts and festivals, they all became unobservable. Follow me in all this because this answers a huge amount of questions.

Yet, today you hear Christians beating the old dead horse, “WE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW!” Many ignore or are untaught that phrases like “we are not under the law” and “works of the law” are basically outdated and invalid because they had to do with a historical context that no longer exists! We do not have to emphasize these statements today as was necessary in Paul’s day while the Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, etc. existed in Jerusalem and was the centerpiece of worship in Israel. Paul wrote all his epistles BEFORE the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> Jews know this truth better than anybody! Look at their own teaching about it: [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/541686/jewish/How-Many-of-the-Torahs-Commandments-Still-Apply.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/541686/jewish/How-Many-of-the-Torahs-Commandments-Still-Apply.htm) - accessed 8-14-17. Of the 613 commandments of Torah only 270 are considered applicable today.

Usually someone that wants to sound wise will interject right about here, “But brother Dan, Judaism continues to exist today, so we have to continue to say that we are not under the law.” As I stated, nearly 2/3 of the commandments in the Pentateuch became obsolete and passed away with the destruction of the Temple. Today **NO ONE** can fulfill or keep the ceremonial-ritual laws as given to Moses at Sinai. Period! How are we going to keep commandments, statutes, rules, and laws that depended on priesthood and blood sacrifices connected to the Temple of God in Jerusalem? If there is no more physical Temple, and there isn’t, then all the laws and regulations related to it have passed away into history.

So, how much should we emphasize that “we are not under the law” or that we should not do the “works of the law”? We shouldn’t! Those that emphasize these phrases today have reinterpreted their historical significance and given them a definition that was never intended by the original writers. I have heard bizarre and unscriptural interpretations that can be easily refuted with the clear exposition of the Word. Some boldly proclaim that “we are free from the law” means that we are not responsible or subject to any commandments because they were all “under the law,” and grace is in opposition to “keeping” commandments or rules of any kind. As we proceed in these articles, the untenable and foolish nature of those statements will become obvious not by argument but by presentation of the Scripture and some historical truths.

Those that insist today on keeping the feasts and festivals given by God ONLY to Israel are doing it in a way that Moses never taught. Did you know that sacrifices and burnt offerings were required for all the feasts, such as Tabernacles, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement? During every Sabbath and feast, the priesthood in the Temple was to offer up certain sacrifices. Sacrifice and burnt offerings were an intimate part of the worship of God in the Temple.

Each day the Levitical priests were to offer up two one-year-old lambs, one in the morning and one at sundown (Exodus 29:38-46; Numbers 28:3). In addition to this, every year there was an elaborate ritual sacrifice to be offered up in the Temple (Numbers 28:11-15).

Notice this list of sacrifices offered during the feasts and each Sabbath day:

\*Passover- Leviticus 23:4-8

\*Pentecost- Lev. 23:9-12

\*Feast of Trumpets- Lev. 23:23-25

\*Day of Atonement- Lev. 23:26-28

\*Tabernacles- Lev. 23:33-36

\*Sabbaths- Num. 28:9-10

Each of these feasts, festivals, and Sabbath days depended on the Temple with its priesthood for their fulfillment.

As further study, look at Leviticus chapters 1 through 16, and Number chapters 28 through 30. In these chapters, you will also see sacrifices and burnt offerings to be offered relating to the healing of lepers, atonement for sins committed, blood flows, and more.

If there are no more sacrifices or burnt offerings being offered by the priesthood in the Temple, how can you possibly keep feasts, festivals, and Sabbath days today? The truth is that you cannot keep these ritual-ceremonial laws today! Any attempt to keep these ritual-ceremonial laws today can only be fragmentary.

### ***The Birth of a New Jewish Interpretation of the Ritual-Ceremonial Laws Given to Moses at Sinai***

People today practice the feasts and Sabbath based on a rabbinic Jewish interpretation that only fulfills certain segments of the Biblical ritual commandments. Some explaining is required.

After the Second Temple's destruction, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was able to relocate the Sanhedrin to the town of Yavne, about 12 miles to the south of Jaffa in modern Israel.<sup>2</sup> At Yavne, Rabban and other recognized rabbinic authorities gave birth to rabbinic Judaism as is practiced today, in one way or another, by all religious Jews (including Messianic Jews). Truly, what these rabbis conceived was ingenious. At Yavne, the Jewish religion was essentially transformed and restructured to survive and thrive after the destruction of the Second Temple. Since that extraordinary "reformation," Judaism has been able to continue until today without Temple, sacrifices, or the Levitical priesthood. They found ways to reinterpret the ritual-ceremonial laws given to Moses at Sinai and apply them to their reality without the Temple and all associated with it.

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<sup>2</sup> Jewish commentaries on the history of Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple teach it this way. As an example see: <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/1362/forgotten-hero-of-tisha-b-av-enabled-judaism-to-survive-exile/>; also look at a historical site like the following: <http://earlyworldhistory.blogspot.com/2012/01/yohanan-ben-zakkai.html> ; and <http://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/judaism-biographies/johanan-ben-zakkai>. (All were accessed 8-14-17) For more information, see Jacob Neusner, *A Life of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai* (1960).

As I stated, Rabbinic Judaism understood that of the original 613 commandments of Torah, only 270 were left and could be fulfilled. That means that 343 ritual commandments are not relevant today for Jews! Jewish rabbis concluded that the study of Torah (the Scriptures), prayer, and doing what is just and right (Heb. *tzedakah*) would take the place of the ritual- ceremonial laws that could not be implemented or fulfilled. This was an excellent innovation, but it left much out of the laws of God given to Moses.

For the Christians, of those 270 commandments that were left, more could not be imposed as an obligation. Hang in there, and don't quit reading now. It will make sense. You will have an "aha" and "oh wow" moment!

Here is an example of what I am saying, and watch how it all begins to apply to YOU and me.

Paul and the writers of the epistles NEVER emphasized the need of a gentile convert to Jesus to keep the Sabbath or fulfill dietary requirements of law concerning clean and unclean foods (*kashrut*). Romans 14 highlights that these things should not be imposed as an obligation. At the same time, Paul gives freedom to those that want to observe days and only eat certain things. Those that do or do not should not be judged negatively according to Paul. We should not judge those that *want* to keep Sabbaths and laws concerning foods, and neither should we reject as wrong or evil those that judge all foods and days the same. One is not necessarily more spiritual than the other, and each one will have to give an account of himself or herself before God. That is the glaring truth presented in Romans 14! Read the whole chapter in a few different translations, and may the Holy Spirit guide you into all the truth.

Keeping laws concerning the Sabbath was only a required commandment for national Israel, and for them alone. The gentile world, whether Christian or not, was never under compulsion or obligation to keep Sabbath days. They *could* keep them if they were so inclined, as long as they were not imposed as ritual law. In the previous article, we proved it from references like Colossians 2:16, 17 and Galatians 4:9-11. There was no obligation or imposition laid on gentile converts to keep ritual commandments given as law ONLY to national Israel.

Paul considered the imposition and obligation being laid upon Christians to keep ritual commandments as "making the gentiles live like Jews," and he was opposed to it. From our previous statements: "In Paul's own words to Peter and the Galatians, *"How can you try to force the gentiles to live like Jews?"* (Galatians 2:14 NET) These Jewish believers were also *"trying to force you to be circumcised"* (Galatians 6:12 NET). We can ask the same questions today of those that demand that Christians keep ritual or ceremonial laws required of national Israel." These verses are so clear that one has to have help to misunderstand them!

Now notice the words of God through Moses to Israel:

*So you must keep the Sabbath, for it is holy for you. Everyone who defiles it must surely be put to death; indeed, if anyone does any work on it, then that person will be cut off from among his people. Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; anyone who does work on the Sabbath day must surely be put to death. The Israelites must keep the Sabbath by observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant (Exodus 31:14-16 NET).*

Verse 16 leaves no room for doubt: ***“The Israelites must keep the Sabbath by observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.”*** God made no such perpetual covenant with the world, gentiles, or the Church of God. It was specifically given to national Israel. Though Christians become children of Abraham by faith in Jesus (Galatians 3:7, 9, 14, 29) that does not mean that ritual-ceremonial laws are to be applied and practiced by Gentile converts to Christ. We must make this distinction in our thinking.

We can say the same thing about keeping dietary laws that distinguished between clean and unclean animals consumed for food. To whom did these ceremonial-ritual commandments apply? Did they apply to the entire world?

*You must not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am about to drive out before you, because they have done all these things and I am filled with disgust against them. So I have said to you: You yourselves will possess their land and I myself will give it to you for a possession, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the Lord your God who has set you apart from the other peoples. Therefore you must distinguish between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean, and you must not make yourselves detestable by means of an animal or bird or anything that creeps on the ground - creatures I have distinguished for you as unclean. You must be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the other peoples to be mine (Lev. 20:23-26 NET).*

Here you can see how specific was this commandment. It was given to distinguish between Israel and the idolatrous, pagan world of the Gentiles. These verses demonstrate that clean and unclean animals were only applicable to the ritual purity of Israel and were not a requirement or obligation for the rest of the world.

### ***The Lack of Emphasis in the Epistles on Keeping any Ritual-Ceremonial Laws or Commandments***

We never see emphasis in the epistles that believers in Jesus are required to keep ceremonial Jewish practices. There is ZERO emphasis on keeping Sabbaths, feasts and festivals, or maintaining a kosher home. None!

Before I refer to Paul's epistles in more details, notice what the book of Revelation ignores completely in its lists of sinful acts.

*The rest of humanity, who had not been killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so that they did not stop worshiping demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk about. Furthermore, they did not repent of their murders, of their magic spells, of their sexual immorality, or of their stealing (Rev. 9:20, 21 NET).*

*But to the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death (Revelation 21:8 NTV).*

This last list reveals those that will have a part in the second death, the lake of fire. Absent from the list are the Sabbath breakers, those that do not keep feasts-festivals, physical circumcision, or any other ritual-ceremonial commandments. These lists only refer to violations of biblical moral commandments. This is an extremely important observation.

There are a number of lists of sins in the epistles and the book of Revelation, and in none of them were included those that violate ritual-ceremonial laws.<sup>3</sup> All of them include only violations of what can be correctly called *moral commandments*. I am approaching these lists, at first, by what they don't include, because I have come across entire groups that believe that Christians are in sin if they do not observe Sabbaths, dietary laws, and the feast and festivals of Israel. Some think they are *more* spiritual because they use a prayer shawl or use phylacteries. Some feel that you are unspiritual if you don't light Sabbath candles. Here is the truth: there is no emphasis in the entire New Testament that Christians, or the Church at large, are obligated to keep ceremonial-ritual laws.

Jesus brings strong correction to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, yet He never brings any rebuke for not keeping Sabbaths or any other ritual-ceremonial commandment of law. There was no rebuke for not wearing phylacteries, prayer shawls, or not placing mezuzah<sup>4</sup> on the doorposts. His strong rebuke and correction was reserved for those that were violating ***MORAL*** commandments such as those against idolatry, eating that sacrificed to idols, and sexual immorality. Did you notice this? Not one word in two full chapters was about ritual-ceremonial laws, and not one mention about physical circumcision!

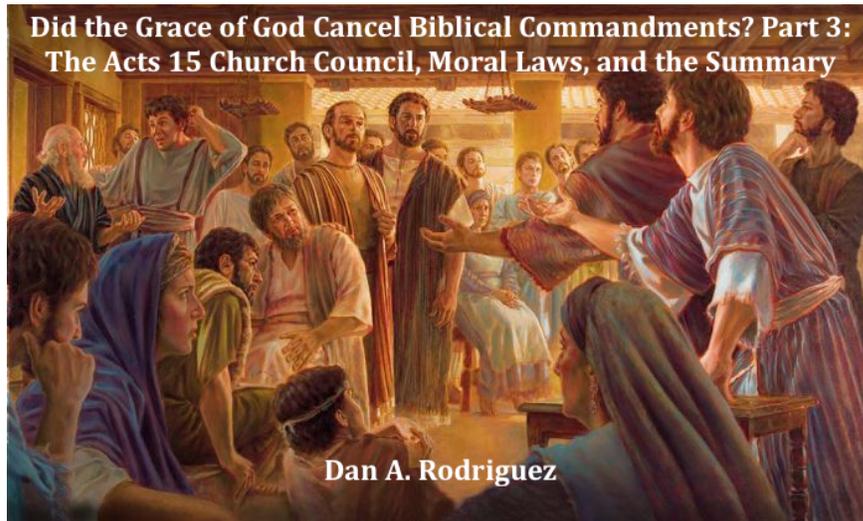
In the next articles, you will see that Jesus's rebuke and correction to the churches was precisely according to the ***moral*** requirements sent to the Gentile churches by

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<sup>3</sup> Look at what scholars call the vice-lists, but they are simply catalogs of what is sin or sinful: Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5, 6; 1 Timothy 1:9, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Small decorated box that contains a handwritten scroll with certain Biblical verses that is attached to the doorpost at the entrance of a house.

direction of the Holy Spirit in Acts 15. Jesus, the Head of the church was in complete agreement.



### **Part 3: The Acts 15 Church Council, Moral Laws, and the Summary**

#### ***The Acts 15 Church Council***

The Church at Jerusalem concluded that they should not demand the fulfillment or observance of ceremonial-ritual commandments, and they published this decision by a letter that was to be distributed among all the gentile churches.

Acts 15 informs us of this historical fact. There was a general assembly of the elders and leaders (which were Jewish believers) and the messianic Pharisees. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss if the gentile believers in Christ were to be commanded to observe the Law of Moses. These Jewish followers of Jesus from the sect of the Pharisees insisted that male gentile converts had to be circumcised, and that they should be required to keep the ritual laws commanded by God through Moses.

*But some from the religious party of the Pharisees who had believed stood up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles and to order them to observe the Law of Moses." (Acts 15:5 NET).*

We must remember that the Temple in Jerusalem was functioning during this historic period. The priesthood was still functioning and the sacrifices were offered daily. The meeting of the church leadership at Jerusalem in Acts 15, may have taken place as many as 20 years after the resurrection of Jesus. Since the destruction of the

Temple was not until 70 A. D., it means that Temple worship was still in full operation.

The insistence of the believing Pharisees had ritual-ceremonial implications in their day that does not exist since the destruction of the Temple. Did you get that? Their demand for compliance with the Law of Moses and circumcision implied that Gentile converts to God and the Lord Jesus were required (according to them) to participate in the rituals and sacrifices of the Temple; ceremonial laws only commanded to Israel. These ceremonial-ritual laws could only be required as long as the Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices were in operation. Once they ceased to function after the Temple's destruction, these mandates could no longer be imposed.

After a very contentious meeting (Acts 15:2, 7), the Jerusalem leaders concluded that ritual-ceremonial requirements and laws given to Moses for Israel would not be imposed upon the Gentile believers.

*"Therefore I conclude that we should not cause extra difficulty for those among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we should write them a letter telling them to abstain from things defiled by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:19, 20 NET).*

Even though these demands written to the churches in Gentile lands were of a moral nature, they had their basis in Old Testament Scripture. Look at Leviticus 3:17, 7:26, 17:10-12; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16, 23, and Genesis 9:4. They didn't invent them nor were they new! They were thousands of years old. The last reference in Genesis 9:4 brings up the point that *moral* commandments existed BEFORE God gave the commandments to Moses at Sinai. That will shake the religious tree to its roots, but it is the truth. It will be discussed later.

Many think that "love" as a commandment was the invention of Jesus in the Gospels. No, it was commanded from the very beginning of the creation of God. What you read in the words of Jesus is a "new" emphasis on the love commandment, but it existed from the beginning. I can hear the wheels turning in many heads as they read this. Hang in there.

*It has pleased the Holy Spirit that you should not have a heavy ·load [burden] to carry, and we agree. You need to do only these things: Stay away from any food that has been ·offered [sacrificed] to idols, eating any animals that have been strangled, and blood, and any kind of sexual sin. If you stay away from these things, you will do well (Acts 15:28-29 EXB).*

In Acts 15:19, 20, 28 and 29 we read that it was resolved that only laws or rules of a MORAL nature should be required of the Gentile converts. Nothing more! This is such an astronomically important issue for our understanding as believers that it must be stressed. Ignorance of this truth has led many down the wrong path, thinking that NO rules apply to Christians.

Ceremonial-ritual laws connected to the Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices were not to be observed by Christians. For believers, the sacrifice of Jesus takes the place and is greater than all laws regarding offerings, sacrifices, and burnt offerings for sin. Though this is absolutely the truth, when the Temple was destroyed, sacrifices ceased, and the priesthood disappeared, the ceremonial-ritual laws passed away into history. *In no way did these events cancel our responsibility to observe and obey moral commandments.*

Grace, the sacrifice of Jesus, and the “New” Testament did not annul, discard, or replace moral commandments. To the contrary, they were firmly established and taught in the Gospels, epistles, and the book of Revelation. We will be harping on this truth from many verses because it has often been disregarded, despised, and rejected.

Let me address this commandment of not eating blood or strangled animals. These had mainly to do with the Gentile practice of strangulation and eating or drinking animal blood in honor of their false gods. Paul had much to say about meats and foods offered as sacrifices to idols, and that believers should not eat them so they don’t have communion at the table of demons (1 Cor. 10:14-22). First Corinthians chapter 8 is dedicated to the subject of rejecting foods sacrificed to idols.

The above paragraph addresses only one side of this issue. Here is the other side. It is (and was) contrary to Biblical morality and ethics to strangle an animal for food because it prolonged the death of an animal. It subjected the animal to a cruel death. The Scripture taught that when an animal was sacrificed for food that the blood was to be allowed to drain from its body, and that the blood was never to be eaten.

Israelites developed a traditional method passed from generation to generation. They believed these traditions concerning how to kill an animal for food (Heb. *shehitah*) were handed down by word of mouth from the time of Moses. The Babylonian Talmud has a detailed tractate named Hulin that teaches the correct and most effective method to kill a permitted animal for food. An extremely sharp and special knife was used to make a quick and deep incision that would cut the trachea and principal blood vessels. That action would cause an animal to bleed out quickly, leading to unconsciousness in a few seconds. The animal would be spared from much suffering by using this method.

In my own Puerto Rican heritage, it’s common to strangle certain animals for food, and to eat spicy blood sausages. According to Acts 15 these are forbidden! My fellow ‘Boricuas’ in Christ, forget the ‘morcillas’ (blood sausages)! Puerto Rican cuisine is not alone in consuming blood sausages. Blood sausage or blood pudding, in one way or another, are a part of the traditional foods of many countries. It’s found in the Caribbean, United States, Russia, Europe, South and Central America, Asia, and Africa. In other words, eating blood is found all over the world. Needless to say, this

is a practice with deep roots in idolatry and paganism. Christian should not eat blood according to Acts 15, but the prohibition is found as early as Genesis 9:4, and that ban has never been rescinded.

### ***The Necessity of Obeying MORAL Commandments in the New Testament***

Let's remember that the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD made obsolete between 350 and 400 ritual-ceremonial commandments of the 613 in law. Only moral commandments of law were left (also those of a civic and judicial nature), and those are emphasized in many places in the New Testament. Paul, Peter, James, and John liberally applied and emphasized in their writings moral commandments found in the Older Covenant, the Hebrew Old Testament.

Now, think about this: no apostle that wrote an epistle(s) considered as necessary Jewish (Israelite) feasts, festivals, food laws, Temple worship, circumcision, or the Sabbath. If these were of importance for the Gentile churches, then they would have consistently emphasized ceremonial-ritual laws in their writings. Yet, they NEVER did! If in doubt, read Paul's letters, and then read to the end of the New Testament. Notice the complete lack of emphasis on keeping ritual laws. These ceremonial-ritual laws were not given as commandments to the Gentile world. They were exclusively given to NATIONAL Israel.

The conclusions the church leadership at Jerusalem came to in Acts 15 should have given us a clue. The apostles agreed to reject the necessity of imposing Jewish (Israelite) ritual-ceremonial laws on the Gentiles converted to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*What we see emphasized repeatedly, and emphatically, was that the Gentile Churches and the Jewish believers in Jesus were to keep and observe (obey) MORAL commandments.* We see this prominently in every epistle, all the way to the end of the book of Revelation.

In Romans 2, it seems that Paul put some meat on the bare bones of the decision reached by the Jerusalem Church council in Acts 15. Look in Romans 2:21-23 that Paul clearly signals that he was referring to the moral aspects of law such as those commandments against stealing, adultery, and idolatry. At no point does he refer to ceremonial commandments observed for the Temple. There is no mention of the feasts, festivals, priesthood, sacrifices, and so on, and he rejects the notion that Gentiles that are already keeping God's moral commandments are required to be circumcised.

Paul discusses in detail that if Gentiles keep moral commandments without physical circumcision, why demand that they get ritually circumcised? There was no reason to demand physical circumcision from those that demonstrated they were circumcised in their hearts (in spirit) by obeying God's moral commands. If someone received physical circumcision, but lived contrary to moral commandments, then

the physical act of circumcision was as though they never received it. By the way, Paul accused some of his Jewish brethren of doing just that, making their circumcision invalid through disobedience to moral commandments making them just like uncircumcised pagans.

Read the entire chapter and pay close attention to Paul's argument in this eye-opening chapter. It doesn't take a PhD, genius IQ, and you don't have to be a spiritual giant to see what is obvious.

One more thing on Romans chapter 2 is the fact that it should never have been separated from Romans chapter 1:18-32. In those passages, again, there is no mention of ritual commandments but of violations of moral commandments such as:

1. Idolatry 1:23, 25
2. Impurity and dishonoring the body 1:24
3. Dishonorable passions- under this category are included lesbians and homosexuals 1:26, 27
4. Depravity of mind 1:28

From 1:29-31:

5. Unrighteousness
6. Wickedness
7. Covetousness
8. Malice
9. Envy
10. Murder
11. Strife
12. Deceit
13. Hostility

...And the list goes on! Each one of these transgressions was one against some moral commandment found in Scripture.

Chapter 2:1-3 continues on the same thread of teaching. I have heard this pulled from its context to teach that we should not ever judge people that sin. This passage expounds on God's judgment on sin, and the fact that one had better not judge another person in sin if they are practicing the same sin! (Vs. 1, 3) That fact is mentioned twice when the apostle writes: *"you who judge practice the same things"*, and *"when you judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself."* Paul had in mind the hypocritical that practice evil things and yet judges others that practice the same evil they are doing. Judging others for their sin, while doing the same sin, does not excuse one from God's judgment (3b).

Consider this: If Paul, Peter, John, James, and John would have thought that not obeying ritual-ceremonial commandments was sin or unrighteousness for believers in Christ, don't you think they would have emphasized that at least once? Don't you think Paul would have said something about ritual law in these verses if keeping the Sabbath was necessary for Gentile converts to Jesus? That emphasis simply does not exist! Not one time do any of them say something like, "Woe to those who do not keep Sabbath days and the festivals of Israel." Never do any of them demand compliance with any ritual law. Not one time does Paul declare, "I feel so sorry for you uncircumcised Christians because you are under condemnation and going to hell." Not one time are the churches rebuked for not keeping ritual-ceremonial commandments concerning prayer shawls (*tallitot*), phylacteries (*tefillin* or *totafot*), or of not affixing *mezuzot*<sup>5</sup> to their doorposts.

Much is taught in the epistles concerning sins and transgressions against MORAL commandments. The so-called vice lists (lists of prohibitions,<sup>6</sup> and many other verses in the New Testament, taught that idolatry, adultery, sexual immorality, robbery, murder, hatred, jealousy, envy, and other similar things were (and are) sins and transgressions and that believers should flee from these things.

For me it's obvious that the apostles understood that that moral laws imposed by the Jerusalem church council in Acts 15 as necessary on Gentile converts, that these were a *summary* of all the moral laws of God in the Biblical text. In the epistles, the apostles teach and expand on these necessary things for Gentile converts to observe and obey. This will be clear as we continue.

In Acts 15, the Gentile converts were told to stay away from sexual immorality, but Paul includes a large number of other sins in that category, such as homosexuality, incest, and other sexual sins.

*Finally then, brothers, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus, that as you have received from us how you must walk and please God — as you are doing — do so even more. For you know what commands we gave you through the Lord Jesus (1st Thessalonians 4:1-2 NET).*

Paul was teaching about the **commands** (not the suggestions) they gave to these believers. They needed to obey these commands in order to walk or live in a way that was pleasing to God. These commandments were in line with the ones agreed to

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<sup>5</sup> *Mezuzot* is the plural form of *mezuzah*. It incorporates a piece of handwritten parchment with certain Hebrew verses from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and the scroll is placed inside a decorative case and affixed to the doorpost.

<sup>6</sup> As I wrote previously, Romans 1:24-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-5, Colossians 3:5, 6, and 1 Timothy 1:9, 10 are the main lists of sins (vice lists) in the epistles, but there are many other individual verses that address these transgressions in the New Testament.

in Acts 15 and from the Old Testament. Notice how Paul expanded on the theme of sexual immorality.

*For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality, so that each of you knows how to control his own body in sanctification and honor, not with lustful desires, like the Gentiles who don't know God. This means one must not transgress against and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you. For God has not called us to impurity but to sanctification. Therefore, the person who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who also gives you His Holy Spirit (1st Thessalonians 4:3-9 NET).*

This passage mentions defrauding or transgressing against a brother in Christ in this area of sexual immorality, and would include numerous transgressions such as incest or adultery. The vice lists all include adultery as one of the sins prohibited for all Christians. *The Lord is the avenger of all these sexual offenses.* If you don't believe that then you haven't read Revelation 2 and about how the Lord Jesus cast into a place of sickness and death the false prophetess Jezebel and her followers for committing sexual immorality and adultery (2:20-23). He gave them time to repent, and when they refused, He was the avenger!

Sexual sins of all types are detailed in Leviticus chapters 18, 19, and 20. They included adultery, incest, bestiality, prostitution, homosexuality, and ritual sexual intercourse committed in pagan idol worship. The moral commandment against committing adultery is also found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14), and in many other references.

According to Paul, anybody that rejects these commandments against sexual immorality is rejecting God!

*Run from sexual immorality! "Every sin a person can commit is outside the body." On the contrary, the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body (1 Cor. 6:18 HCSB).*

Incestuous relationships of all kinds were prohibited in Leviticus chapter 18. Paul taught against this sin in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 about the man that was having sexual relations with his father's wife. He commanded that such a person be turned over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

Though Paul never emphasized keeping Sabbath days as was found in the Ten Commandments, he did teach the moral commandments found in them (Exodus 20:1-17). Here's another moral law from the Ten Commandments that Paul stressed:

*Children, obey your parents as you would the Lord, because this is right. **Honor your father and mother**, which is the first commandment with a promise, **so that it may***

***go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land*** (Ephesians 6:1-3 HCSB).

Insisting that gentiles converted to God separate themselves from all forms of idolatry was one of the Ten Commandments. Committing idolatry was often called *adultery* in the Bible. Commandments against adultery have always been of a moral nature and not a part of ceremonial-ritual laws. Look at Exodus 20:3-6 and Deuteronomy 5:7-10. The book of Deuteronomy frequently mentions the sin of idolatry, and Paul taught the same thing.

*So then, my dear friends, flee from idolatry* (1 Cor. 10:14).

The verses I quoted from 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:1-9, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:18 and 10:14, together with Ephesians 6:1-3, prove the fact that Paul based himself on the moral parts of the Ten Commandments and on the Biblical text in general. There are many other passages in Paul's writings that bear this out.

In the same way that we see Paul and the rest of the apostolic writers stressing the importance of obeying moral commandments, we also see these prohibitions in many verses from the New Testament. Keeping Sabbaths, feast and festivals, and any other ritual-ceremonial commandments of law are completely ignored by all these writers, and all these writers were basing themselves on the Old Testament moral commandments. They didn't invent any of them!

### ***The Summary of ALL Moral Commandments in Scripture***

Look at other commandments he orders the Gentile churches to keep, like those against robbery, murder, covetousness, the practice of idolatry, and so on.

*The commandments: Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet; and whatever other commandment — all are summed up by this: Love your neighbor as yourself* Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:9, 10 HCSB).

*Loving your neighbor as yourself* summarized only moral and ethical commandments. Not one of the commandments mentioned in verse 9 as summarized by loving your neighbor as yourself is a ritual-ceremonial type commandment. Did you notice that?

Again, the commandment to *love your neighbor as yourself* is a SUMMARY of the moral commandments. *Love your neighbor as yourself* is not a new or improved New Testament commandment. Paul is quoting Leviticus 19:18.

Have you ever read the summary of a book? At no time does a summary change the original story. For the summary to be a faithful representation of the book, it cannot change any of the facts or characters. A summary simply produces a shorter form of

the larger body of the work. The summary never alters, rejects, or changes the original story line, that is, if it is a faithful summary.

In the same way, the summary of all moral and ethical commandments of law is “love your neighbor as yourself.” Within the “four walls” of this summary are found all the moral and ethical commandments of the Bible. Do not covet, murder, steal, or any other moral commandment is included within “love your neighbor as yourself.” *Love your neighbor as yourself* is not a replacement, change, rejection, or even a more “positive” alternative to the moral commandments of God. No! It summarizes the moral commandments, because if you love, you will not murder, rob, covet, or commit adultery with your neighbor’s wife! If you love, you will not serve or worship other gods! (See Romans 13:10.) Walking in love fulfills the moral law for this very reason. It’s impossible to walk in love and at the same time be living in direct violation of any moral or ethical commandment of God. Said another way, one has to stop walking in *love your neighbor as yourself* in order to violate the moral and ethical commandments of the Bible.

We will say more about it later in this study.



## **Part 4: Moral Commandments and Inheritance in the Kingdom of God and Christ**

### ***Inheritance in the Kingdom of God and Christ***

To reiterate, Paul never states that those that refuse to practice ritual-ceremonial commandments of law will not inherit the kingdom of God or of Christ. He makes the declaration of not inheriting the kingdom of God and Christ only concerning those practicing violations to God's MORAL commandments.

*The wrong things the sinful self does [works of the flesh/sinful nature] are clear [evident; obvious]: being sexually unfaithful [sexual immorality], not being pure [impurity], taking part in sexual sins [depravity; promiscuity], worshiping gods [idolatry], doing witchcraft [sorcery], hating [hostility; antagonism], making trouble [discord; strife], being jealous, being angry [rage], being selfish [rivalries], making people angry with each other [dissensions], causing divisions among people [factions], feeling envy, being drunk, having wild and wasteful parties [carousings; orgies], and doing other things like these. I warn you now as I warned you before: Those who do these things will not inherit God's kingdom (Galatians 5:19-21 EXB).*

The NET translation of the same verses:

*Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God! (Galatians 5:19-21 NET)*

These kinds of lists in the New Testament prohibit evil activities. The NET version picked up the Greek nuance that Paul was referring to those that *practice* these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Those that practice these things are the unrepentant that blatantly live contrary to God's moral imperatives.

If a Christian, a follower of Jesus, a born again believer, for some reason yields to one of these areas of sin, he or she does have a remedy in Christ. They do not immediately lose their inheritance in the kingdom of God, UNLESS they refuse to repent, and IF continue to practice that transgression. I know many would and do disagree with me on this point. Many believe that it is impossible for a Christian to lose their inheritance in Christ, but Paul taught otherwise. I'll prove this before we end this article with Scriptures. Thank God, believers can repent and apply the following truth:

*But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:7-9 NET)*

The Blood of Jesus (His eternal sacrifice) never loses its power to deliver, forgive, and to cleanse. Glory to God for His great grace in Christ Jesus!

For good measure, here is one more translation of Galatians 5:19-21 from the New Living Translation:

*When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

Paul was referring to "anyone living that sort of life." Those that will have no inheritance in the kingdom of God are those that have developed a lifestyle of transgression. Also, note that there are more violations of moral commandments than what are mentioned. Paul says, "and other sins like these."

So many are deceived into thinking that "will not inherit the kingdom of God" means that we will only miss out on having blessings in this life, though we remain "saved" and continue in possession of eternal life.

Think about it.

If we practice these evil things without repentance, what is the significance of "will not inherit the kingdom of God"? That phrase refers to one that will NOT have God's rule and kingship in their life. Is that only applicable to this physical life, or does it

have implications for eternity, in Heaven? If one is excluded from having God's rule and reign in their lives, will they hear, *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* as Jesus said? Will those excluded from inheritance in God's rule and reign hear, "Welcome to heaven?" I don't believe they will. Personally, I believe many are deceived into believing a lie in this area. *"Anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God,"* sounds clear to me. I know this flies contrary to a lot of denominational and modern church teaching, but the truth is unmistakable. One has to twist and turn many verses to make them conform to the "once-saved-always-saved" theology that permeates evangelical thinking. These teach, and others imply, that once you are saved, you are saved forever regardless of any sinful lifestyle you may choose to live after your conversion. A huge amount of Scripture in the Biblical text (in both Testaments) has to be ignored to come to that foolish conclusion.

It's amazing to me. Those that teach "once-saved-always-saved" are actually telling you that you can chose Jesus one time, and after that you become a Christian; you lose your free will! Just like people can chose Him, they can un-choose Him with an ungodly lifestyle. Read 2 Peter 2:20-22 and note apostolic teaching on the subject. It's quoted below.

### ***How did Paul form these lists of things prohibited for all believers?***

Did he invent these lists out of thin air, by special revelation, or was there a pattern available? Paul would have been very knowledgeable of the Old Testament, the ONLY Bible he knew about in his day. He was a graduate of Gamaliel's rabbinic school in Jerusalem. Rabbinical students didn't just learn about the Bible; they memorized the Hebrew Old Testament text. Paul knew that many verses in the Bible prohibited immoral activities. There was no guesswork involved with figuring out what was a moral transgression. It was all laid out in Scripture.

If you study the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and Leviticus chapters 18, 19, 20, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Jeremiah, you will find the vast majority of the references Paul used to produce these so-called "vice lists" like Galatians 5:19-21. Each sin he mentions is a direct violation of moral commandments in the Word of God. These are not just "vices" people get into, but the product of disobedience to God's moral laws, rules, and regulations.

Here's your homework: look for verses that prohibit the evil activities in the list in Galatians 5:19-21, as for example: sexual immorality, idolatry, witchcraft, hating others, strife, jealousy, rage, and the rest. Do a word study and find verses that prohibit these activities.

*But among you there must not be either sexual immorality, impurity of any kind, or greed, as these are not fitting for the saints. Neither should there be vulgar speech, foolish talk, or coarse jesting - all of which are out of character - but rather thanksgiving. For you can be confident of this one thing: that no person who is*

*immoral, impure, or greedy (such a person is an idolater) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:3-5 NET).*

If practicing these sins stops one from having any inheritance, then fulfilling moral commandments is *a part of* having any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Obedience to God's moral commandments is an essential part of living in our inheritance in Christ, just as is faith and perseverance (Hebrews 6:12 NET). They are intimately connected, but today many want to separate them, and others insist that Christians are under no commandments whatsoever because that would be law and not grace. Foolishness!

Does obeying moral commandments matter to God and the Lord Jesus? What did Paul say about it?

*Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Instead, keeping God's commandments is what counts (1 Corinthians 7:19 NET).*

Yes, that's in the New Testament, in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth. Those that reject the notion that Christians *must* keep moral commandments are simply deceived. Is that rhetoric, or did Paul's say the same thing?

### ***The Righteous and the Unrighteous***

*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 NET).*

The verses above mention passive and practicing homosexuals. The differences had to do with the homosexual sexual acts: one that passively received the sexual act, and one that actively did the sexual act. This is disgusting to even mention it, but it is necessary as believers to understand what Paul was saying. The NET Bible points out in their notes the differences in the Greek text between these terms.

Here is another important point: 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 separates *adultery* from *sexual immorality*. We know that *adultery* was used to denote an illicit sexual encounter between a married woman and a man that was not her husband. In the Bible, it was often used of the spiritual adultery committed by Israel as they turned away from God and worshipped idols.

The word translated *sexual immorality* includes all sexual perversions. *Porneia* and its related words *porneuo*,  *pornos*, *porne*, are often translated *fornication* in older translations and *sexual immorality* in newer ones. The second is a better translation. Look at "*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*" with the Strong's Concordance numbers #4202, 4203, 4204, 4205. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9  *pornos* is used, and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:13 it uses *porneia*. These words include all sexual

perversions: adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, incest, and so on.

### ***Inclusion or Exclusion from the Kingdom of Christ or God***

Paul said in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-10, “*Don’t be deceived! Practicing acts of unrighteousness without repentance from sin will exclude people from inheriting the kingdom of God.*”

I can hear the objections now, “Brother Dan, Jesus made me righteous when I came to Him, received His salvation, and I was born again.” I truly believe that without question (Romans 3:22-26, 10:9-10, 1 Peter 1:21, 22, etc.). The problem is thinking that righteousness is automatically sustainable even though one practices the sins mentioned in the verses above because one was declared righteous when initially saved. That supposition is incorrect. The correct understanding is receiving His righteousness when we come to Him, and then *living* in righteousness with perseverance. If we get out of righteousness, we repent and are cleansed from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). If you are cleansed from unrighteousness, that means you were in unrighteousness. Right? How did you get there? First John 1: 7-8, 10, and 2:1-2 should have made it clear. We got to unrighteousness by committing sin.

Am I just making this up? Is this all smoke and nonsense, or is it the absolute truth? You decide based on the following verses:

*If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him... Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous (1 John 2:29, 3:7 NASB).*

If you are born of God, you **MUST** practice righteousness! Remember that John was writing to believers. He was not writing to the world. Yet, he states that the BELIEVER that practices righteousness is righteous. So, if we step out of the light (righteousness) and practice darkness (unrighteousness), then we will be considered unrighteous. Why?

*...The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning... (1 John 3:8a)*

That would be a terrible place for a believer, to go back and practice sin, because the practitioner of sin no longer belongs to God, but to the devil. Is it possible for a believer to become an unbeliever? Can the righteous go back into unrighteousness?

*For if after they have escaped the filthy things of the world through the rich knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they again get entangled in them and succumb to them, their last state has become worse for them than their first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, having*

*known it, to turn back from the holy commandment that had been delivered to them. They are illustrations of this true proverb: "A dog returns to its own vomit," and "A sow, after washing herself, wallows in the mire" (2 Peter 2:20-22 NET).*

Instead of wallowing around in the mire or returning to the vomit of this world, repentance is the way to go! The only remedy is repentance, confession of sin, receiving forgiveness, and being cleansed based on the Blood of Jesus.

This is not new teaching, but it is "left-out" of the preaching of many modern churches. Ezekiel discussed at length the righteous and the unrighteous in chapter 18:1-32. Please take the time to read it s-l-o-w-l-y. God has never changed.

### ***A Little Yeast Affects the Whole Batch***

Why have I spent so much space writing about these unpleasant subjects? Frankly, I know this is not a "hallelujah" and "praise the Lord" message, but it is needed today more than ever. Sexual perversions have infiltrated families, churches, governments, schools, places of employment, TV, Internet, social media, and movies, and many today see these ungodly behaviors as "normal." Nothing could be further from the truth. Sexual perversions are not normal but an aberration that is contrary to God and His Word.

Some "modernized" denominations have become tolerant of sexual perversions in their pulpits and in their pews.

*Don't you know that a little yeast affects the whole batch of dough? (1 Cor. 5:6)*

Paul wrote this in relation to the Corinthian church that tolerated an incestuous relationship (1 Cor. 5:1-5). When sexual perversion of any kind is permitted and tolerated in a church, it will cause damage to the entire congregation if left without correction and repentance. It's like the yeast in dough. A little bit affects the whole batch. Believe it because it was what Paul taught.

I have seen it over the years at some churches. Some sin like adultery, fornication, or homosexuality is permitted and tolerated in the church, and in the process of time, it will spread like a bad virus.

I've seen it with erroneous teaching. I am talking about heretical teachings that violate Scriptural foundations on many points. It begins in secret in some back room, but in time, it infiltrates the entire church.

As an example, the pastor is perverted by some sexual sin, and that perversion spreads into the church. One pastor practiced an adulterous affair for a few years, and before long, adultery spread like a deadly fire to the pew. Another pastor was involved with a homosexual for some time, and darkness spread into that church on many levels.

Anyone that has been a Christian for some years may have had the bad experience of witnessing the terrible consequences of practicing sin in the church, whether in the pulpit or the pew.

Here's a Bible example of what I am writing about.

At the church in Thyatira, the false prophetess Jezebel refused to repent for her evil teachings, idolatry, and sexual immorality. Jesus had some tough words for her and her followers. He was against that ungodly mess and said it directly.

*But I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and by her teaching deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent, but she is not willing to repent of her sexual immorality. Look! I am throwing her onto a bed of violent illness, and those who commit adultery with her into terrible suffering, unless they repent of her deeds. Furthermore, I will strike her followers with a deadly disease, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts. I will repay each one of you what your deeds deserve (Revelation 2:20-23 NET).*

Jesus said, "You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and by her teaching deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols." She was allowed to continue, and even some of God's servants were being sucked in to her perversions. Jezebel infected that church with her false teachings and sexual perversions because the leadership accepted it, and gave her a voice at their church. They did not take authority over the situation, shut her down, and get her out.

At one church where those leading worship were caught in adultery, the pastor said to those in leadership, "We must love them. Just love them, and say nothing about what they are doing wrong." Not only were these adulterers allowed to continue singing; no correction was ever brought to the situation. They tolerated sin, and sin spread into the church through their acceptance, tolerance, and because they refused to judge the situation, and remove those people from leadership.

The Lord gave Jezebel and those that followed her time to repent, but they refused. Finally, the hammer of divine judgment fell on them, and they were subjected to sickness and death.

Jesus said, "Furthermore, I will strike her followers with a deadly disease, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts. I will repay each one of you what your deeds deserve." That flies against much church theology today, but Jesus will see to it that the unrepentant are repaid according to what their evil deeds deserve! I didn't say or write that from my own thinking. I am repeating the words of our Lord and Master. I don't know about you, but to me that spells, R-E-P-E-N-T, and don't let it go all day! Be quick to admit the smallest wrongs against His moral commandments, repent, and receive His forgiveness and cleansing!

It is time that judgment begins in the house of God, the Church (1 Peter 4:17). If perverted people practicing these abominations refuse to repent, then they should be turned over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh according to Paul's instruction (1 Cor. 5:1-10). If we want to see the glory of God in our midst, then we must purge our churches of these abominations. That is the first step! It is not all that is involved in receiving a manifestation of His glory, but it is a foundational piece often ignored.

### ***Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins***

I quoted the following passage above, but now I add verses 6 and 7.

*Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do (Ephesians 5:3-7 NLT).*

Look closely at the two points made in verse 6: *“Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him.”*

First, when ministers and some churches try to justify, tolerate, or accept sexual immorality, homosexuality, sorcery, idolatry, or any other sin, it is time to separate from them because they are promoting doctrines of demons, and are deceiving and being deceived (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

*Therefore “come out from their midst, and be separate,” says the Lord, “and touch no unclean thing, and I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,” says the All-Powerful Lord (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18 NET).*

Secondly, the phrase *“for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him”*, reveals something that should be obvious, that practicing any of the sins in the list were (and are) considered DISOBEDIENCE to God. He gave moral commandments, and refusal to do them is disobeying Him.

### ***Positive and negative moral commandments***

The lists we have mentioned so far in Galatians 5:19-21, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-10, and Ephesians 5:3-7 contain things prohibited. Some call the commandments that prohibit evil activities the “negative” commandments. That does not mean they are negative in the sense of something bad. No! God's moral commandments are all holy, spiritual, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12, 14). That is true, even when they tell you, DON'T DO IT! That is why they are referred to as “negative”, because they teach you what you should not do.

Other commandments are considered “positive” commandments because they instruct us in the things we should do. That does not mean they are “better” than the co-called “negative” ones. It all refers to whether they are commanding, “you will not”, or if they emphasize, “you will.”

Two good examples of lists of things found in the positive commandments are Galatians 5:23-23, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:5-11.

The first fruit of the Spirit related to a positive commandment in Galatians 5:22 is *love*. Jesus, Paul, nor the apostles invented the teaching on love!

- The classic “*you will love your neighbor as yourself*”, or the commandment of love, is found in Leviticus 19:18, but see Deuteronomy 10:19, 11:13, 19:9, 30:16, Proverbs 10:12 and 27:5. Those references are a small sample because there are Hebrew words like *chesed*- loyal love, *rechem*- mercy and compassion, and God being *chanun*- gracious, and *rachum*- compassionate, and others. These are part of the love of God in Scripture.
- *Joy* (Nehemiah 8:10; Ps. 5:11, 16:11, 20:5; Ecclesiastes 2:26, etc.);
- *Peace* (Ps. 34:14, 37:37; Isaiah 32:17; Zachariah 8:19, Malachi 2:6, etc.).

Proceed with the rest of the list in Galatians 5:22-23 and find verses related to patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control.

Look also at verses that teach forgiveness, not taking vengeance, or bearing a grudge, and avoiding strife (Lev. 18:17, 18; Pr. 6:17). We know that is taught in the New Testament, don’t we?

Then, note the dozens of verses that teach against pride (haughtiness, arrogance). To start, read the first seven chapters of Jeremiah, and then find all the references to pride in Proverbs. That may, depending on you, straighten or curl your hair!

Yes, they are ALL in the Old Testament! They have to do only with moral commandments, and nothing to do with “keeping” ritual-ceremonial commandments. All of this was taught in the Hebrew Bible long before Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, John or any other saint of God walked the earth, but they all referred to them or inferred them in the Gospels, epistles, and the book of Revelation.

### ***The Steadfast Endurance of the Saints***

*...Those who keep God’s commandments and hold to the testimony about Jesus... This requires the steadfast endurance of the saints - those who obey God’s commandments and hold to their faith in Jesus (Revelation 12:17b, 14:12 NET)*

Because of the previous study in these articles, I can say with 100% certainty that the commandments referred to in these verses are without any doubt the moral commandments of God and not any ritual-ceremonial commandments.

Note that both verses revolve around holding to faith in Jesus. That means that it is not a one-time deal. If it is, then why hold on to it? If it's now automatic regardless of your lifestyle, there is no need to hold on to it.

Holding to your faith in Jesus has the sound of perseverance and continuance as stated in Colossians 1:22-23, Hebrews 3:6, 14, 5:9, and in other references. The apostle John consistently teaches "abiding" or remaining in Christ. You are not there for a visit, and then you leave. NO! You persist and stay firm! (See 1 John 2:6, 17, 24, 28, 3:6, 24, 4:12, 2 John 1:9; and don't forget Jesus' teaching in John 15:4-10, 8:31-32).

Holding fast is a theme taught in Revelation. Why hold fast so no will take away your crown, if it was not a possibility to get it taken away through living in ungodliness? (See Rev. 3:11). What about Revelation 3:5 that says that we are to overcome, and thereby the Lord will not erase our name from the book of life? Do you mean to tell me that some may get their name *erased* from the book of life after it written in it? You tell me. These are worst-case scenarios, and I trust that few people in Christ have ever gotten to the place that they drift away so far from the Lord that they miss eternal life, but many Scripture references prove this point in the New Testament. These, I believe, are strong warnings so that we follow the Lord Jesus and never turn away from Him.

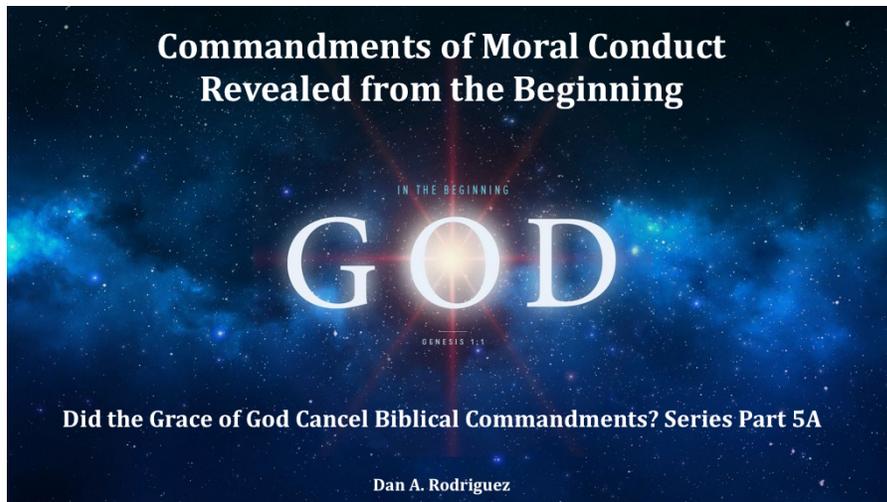
The other part of the equation in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12 is keeping or obeying the moral commandments of God. Don't separate faith in Jesus from obeying God's moral commandments or you have left out a part of the steadfast endurance of the saints. Let's state it another way. The *steadfast endurance of the saints* includes two things:

1. Keeping or obeying the moral commandments of God;
2. Holding to our testimony and faith in Jesus.

The following two passages in Revelation, once again, prove the unchanging nature of obeying moral commandments, and the fact that ceremonial-ritual commandments were and are not included.

*"The rest of humanity, who had not been killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so that they did not stop worshiping demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk about. Furthermore, they did not repent of their murders, of their magic spells, of their sexual immorality, or of their stealing... But to the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death" (Revelation 9:20-21, 21:8 NET).*

These lists only refer to sins against moral commandments. Obviously, God places a high premium on morality on this planet. It is hugely important to Him, and that is why Satan fights so hard against Scriptural morality.



## **Part 5A: Commandments of Moral Conduct Revealed from the Beginning**

### ***A short summary and a double obsolescence***

Before we continue our study, a short summary of the previous four articles is good. I strongly recommend you read them, and look up all the passages. We base what we are teaching on Scripture. If it's not in the Word, then I am going to leave it alone. Of course, in the process of study, historical facts and the usage of other texts verify and clarify what the Biblical text is telling us. Yet, for me, the core is always the Scripture itself. Can you agree with that?

As we have seen repeatedly, everyone called a Christian today is under obligation to obey the MORAL commandments of God in Scripture, but they are not commanded to keep any laws that are based in the ritual or ceremonial responsibilities of Israel.

The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A. D. made obsolete about 400 ritual-ceremonial commandments found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Those were dependent on the Temple, its priesthood, and the sacrifices offered in it. These ritual-ceremonial commandments were tied to the Temple. Without the Temple and its priesthood, Sabbaths, feasts and festivals, blood sacrifices, burnt offerings, and numerous commandments were no longer in use. They became obsolete and became relics of the past.

An unmistakable double obsolescence came to these rituals dependent on the Temple, its priesthood, and sacrifices:

- I. The shadow (Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, etc.) was replaced by the reality of Christ (Colossians 2:16, 17). What Jesus did fulfilled every Sabbath, feast and festival, and sacrifice. The reality overtook the shadow! That was the teaching of Hebrews 8 that so many misinterpret.

To explain that first obsolescence, look at the following:

*Since there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. The place where they serve is a sketch and shadow... (Hebrews 8:4b-5a NET)*

*For if that first covenant had been faultless, no one would have looked for a second one. But showing its fault, God says to them, "Look, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will complete a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. "It will not be like the covenant that I made with their fathers, on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt... Hebrews 8:7-9a*

The covenant this was referring to was not the entire Hebrew Bible as some surmise. It was specifically referring to what God commanded Israel at Sinai concerning the Temple (at first the Tabernacle), its priesthood, and sacrifices. According to Paul, ritual law was a temporary arrangement given to Israel through Moses at Sinai until the coming of Messiah and His sacrifice (Galatians 3:17, 19, 24). With His coming and sacrifice, the temporary measure became obsolete and was no longer necessary. It was fulfilled and laid aside.

This was precisely the difference between the obsolete Old Covenant and the New Covenant in Hebrews chapters 8 and 9. The first covenant that was made obsolete was not the Hebrew Bible as some ignorant folks suppose, but the covenant of Temple, priesthood, and sacrifice that God made with Israel, through Moses at Sinai. Those were temporary measures and they were a shadow of the reality, Christ Jesus and His sacrifice! Let's read it.

*8:13 When he speaks of a new covenant, he makes the first obsolete. Now what is growing obsolete and aging is about to disappear. 9:1 Now the first covenant, in fact, had regulations for worship and its earthly sanctuary. For a tent was prepared, the outer one, which contained the lampstand, the table, and the presentation of the loaves; this is called the holy place. And after the second curtain there was a tent called the holy of holies. It contained the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered entirely with gold. In this ark were the golden urn containing the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. And above the ark were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Now is not the time to speak of these things in detail. So with these things prepared like this, the priests enter continually into the outer tent as they perform their duties. But only the high priest enters once a year into the inner tent, and not without blood that he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is making clear that the way into the holy place had not yet appeared as long as the old tabernacle was standing. This was a symbol for the time then present, when gifts and sacrifices*

*were offered that could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper. They served only for matters of food and drink and various washings; they are external regulations imposed until the new order came (Hebrews 8:13-9:1-10 NET).*

It was a bad mistake for the ancient translators of the New Testament to separate chapters 8 and 9. The *first covenant* that was made obsolete was never the covenant of Abraham or the Hebrew Bible, but the covenant of Sinai that brought the Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices. *The first covenant mentioned in 9:1 was this covenant related to the earthly sanctuary.* Those regulations could only be imposed until the new order (new covenant) came into effect: Jesus, His Priesthood according to Melchizedek, and His eternal sacrifice!

Again, to confirm what part of God's law, covenant, and commandments were referred to in these verses, look at chapter 10.

*For the law possesses a shadow of the good things to come but not the reality itself, and is therefore completely unable, by the same sacrifices offered continually, year after year, to perfect those who come to worship. For otherwise would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers would have been purified once for all and so have no further consciousness of sin? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. For the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4 NET).*

Observe closely that what became obsolete, and was a shadow that passed away, was not moral commandments. Never! The ritual commandments (laws) were the ones that became obsolete and passed away. As I wrote, that obsolescence was twofold (and I gave the first above, but I repeat it below):

- I. The shadow (Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, etc.) was replaced by the reality of Christ (Colossians 2:16, 17). What Jesus did fulfilled every Sabbath, feast and festival, and sacrifice. The reality overtook the shadow! That was the teaching of Hebrews 8 that so many misinterpret.
- II. The second obsolescence that came to these rituals dependent on the Temple, its priesthood, and sacrifices, should be obvious. The destruction of Temple in 70 A. D. caused all sacrifices to cease, and the priesthood to stop functioning. All of them disappeared into history!

Today no one can carry out the ritual-ceremonial commandments as God gave them to Moses. The commandments that were of a moral and judicial nature were the only ones left. That huge difference between moral and ritual-ceremonial commandments given only to Israel must be acknowledged. Paul and the apostolic writers of the New Testament understood that difference. That was why they never emphasized that Gentiles needed to obey ritual commandments. There is no emphasis on ceremonial laws at all from Romans to the book of Revelation.

What we find often is that Paul and John emphasized moral commandments, and used moral commandments in in the Hebrew Bible to formulate the sin (or vice) lists in Romans 1:24-32, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-7, Colossians 3:5-6, 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:9-10, and Revelation 9:20-21, and 21:8.

We studied that all the apostolic writers, the church at Jerusalem in Acts 15, and the book of Revelation, never brought correction or rebuke to the Gentile churches for not keeping ritual laws. They never insisted that gentiles be forced to keep the Sabbath, feasts of Israel, kashrut laws (dietary), circumcision, use of phylacteries, prayer shawls, etc. NEVER!

### ***Paul's usage of the word law***

When Paul used the word “law” in his epistles, we must understand that he used it in different ways. I have found at least five ways he used “law” in different passages:

1. Law given to Moses at Sinai
2. First 5 books of the Bible
3. The entire Biblical text, though also referred to as “the law and the prophets”.
4. The ceremonial commandments linked to Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices. Together with these were laws regarding foods, feasts, festivals, Sabbath days, circumcision, and so on. Hebrews chapters 8 and 9 bring this out.
5. The moral commandments.<sup>7</sup>

The only way to understand what Paul is referring to in a passage will be by the context in which it is found. Many Christian circles misinterpret Paul’s usage of the word “law” and put every usage in the New Testament into the same boat. “Works of the law” is a widely misinterpreted phrase, especially in circles that think grace means “no works” at all. Many teach that grace means that we are under no commandments or we would be subject to the works of the law. To say that teaching grace like that is an aberration and a departure from the truth is an understatement. To these, law is law, and there is no division or separation. So Biblical moral

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars have discussed this to varying degrees. NET notes on Romans 2:12 states: “*This is the first occurrence of law (nomos) in Romans. Exactly what Paul means by the term has been the subject of much scholarly debate. According to J. A. Fitzmyer (Romans [AB], 131-35; 305-6) there are at least four different senses: (1) figurative, as a “principle”; (2) generic, meaning “a law”; (3) as a reference to the OT or some part of the OT; and (4) as a reference to the Mosaic law.*” Others have discussed the division of law into moral and ritual commandments in similar ways as I do.

commandments are lumped together with ceremonial ones, and the moral commandments are considered law and not the grace of God.

The truth is another. The truth is that moral commandments were always the grace of God for His creation. His commandments were never the rigid interpretation of “law” as many would view them. They were always for teaching, guidance, instruction, protection, and blessing. They were given because of His love and grace. Because we love and honor God, we are thrilled to obey them!

In fact, the word that is translated *law* from the Hebrew (*torah*) was always related to God’s teaching, direction, and instruction. It was never the rigid idea of law as is found in western jurisprudence. From the Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint translated the Hebrew word as *nomos*, a word that does not express the rich background of the Hebrew language. Much misinterpretation came into Christianity because of this translation of *torah* as *nomos*. Paul used it repeatedly because it was the standard Greek translation found in the Greek Old Testament called the Septuagint, a translation he used profusely. That is another article for another day!

### ***God’s Commandments to Adam and Eve***

*Then the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16, 17 NET).*

Why command them anything? God’s is love (1 John 4:8), and love commanded them. Think about that. He loved them and wanted them to enjoy His creation. He commanded what they could eat, and from what tree to stay away from. One would bring life and blessing, and the other would bring death and separation from God. Do you think God wanted them to die? No! His commandments were for instruction and guidance. They were that way from the beginning, and that has never changed.

King David, in Psalms 119, wrote about God’s commandments. Read these verses: 6, 10, 21, 35, 47, 48, 60, 66, 98, 115, 151, 166, and 172.

Based on those verses in Psalms 119, we see that if Adam and Eve had followed God’s commandments, the devil could not have entered this planet like he did. Here’s why:

- Adam and Eve would not have suffered the shame of their nakedness, if they had not wandered from His commandments (vs. 6, 10).
- Satan had long wandered from God’s commandments in Heaven, and he was cursed. The way he got Adam and Eve to sin was by their wandering away from God’s rules, and they came under the same curse (v. 21).
- They did not stay on His path revealed by His commandments (v.35).
- They stepped out of His love because they quit loving, delighting in, and they quit meditating on His commandments (vs. 47, 48).

- What if Adam and Eve had hurried to obey God's commandments when the tempter lied to them? (v. 60)
- What if they had not quit believing in His commandments in order to have proper discernment and knowledge concerning the serpent's temptation? (v. 66)
- If Adam and Eve had truly held fast to God's commandments, the commandments would have made them wiser than their enemies (v.98)!
- The devil lied to them and said that disobedience would make them wise. By allowing their eyes to be turned away from the commandments of God, the devil was able to keep them away from God's wisdom! (Read vs. 97-104.)
- What if they would have said to the devil, "Depart from me you evildoer?" (v. 115)
- All His commandments are truth, but Adam and Eve believed a lie! (v. 151)
- Instead they should have obeyed God's commandments and trusted in (hoped for) God's deliverance (salvation). (v.166)
- His commandments were the way of righteousness, but instead, they chose the way of unrighteousness (v. 172).

Do you remember the lists that showed us violations of God's "you will not" commandments, and the lists that were based on the "you will" type commandments that revealed the things we must do? They were like the two commandments God gave Adam and Eve, one positive (you may) and one negative (you must not). In the previous article, we saw sin lists like 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10, Galatians 5:19-21, and Ephesians 5:3-7. Then, we briefly mentioned the to do lists like the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23, and the one in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:5-11.

Here is a statement that will leave "grace only" folks scratching their heads. God gave commandments (laws, rules) from the beginning as a manifestation of His grace. He was kind and gracious to them, and therefore gave them His laws.

*Remove me from the path of deceit! Graciously give me your law! (Psalms 119:29)*

Grace has never been opposed to God's laws, commandments, rules, or regulations. Particularly, for the believer, God's moral commandments are not opposed to grace or our faith in Christ. To the contrary, faith establishes them.

*Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law (Romans 3:31 NASB).*

Two more versions:

*Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law (NLT).*

*Do we then by [this] faith make the Law of no effect, overthrow it or make it a dead letter? Certainly not! On the contrary, we confirm and establish and uphold the Law. (AMP).*

*No effect* is translated in other versions cancel, nullify, annul, undermine, abolish, destroy, make of none effect, make void, or overthrow. That will never happen to God's moral commandments!

To uphold or confirm the law is also translated establish and support.

Jesus taught about that:

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass from the law until everything takes place. So anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys them and teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).*

Since the temple and all its ritual was going to cease with its destruction in 70 A.D., and since Jesus prophesied its coming destruction (Matthew 24), was the Lord referring in the passage above to the moral commandments in the Bible when He mentioned *the law and the prophets*? I believe that is exactly what He was referring to in the passage, especially when you consider He had just taught on what are called the beatitudes in the previous verses. Not only that, but notice the rest of chapters 5, 6, 7, and their heavy emphasis on moral commandments.

Actually, if you study the Greek words Paul used in Romans 3:31, it may be that he was thinking about Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:17-19. None of Paul's teaching on faith and grace was in opposition to any of God's moral commandments. To the contrary, they were meant to establish, confirm, and uphold moral commandments.

Think about it, if you call Jesus your Lord, then you will obey His teaching, commandments, and every moral imperative in Scripture. Jesus is the truth and the Word of God (John 1:1-3, 14, 14:6, 17:17). To obey Jesus is to obey His commandments (instruction and guidance), and moral imperatives. To obey His commandments is to love Him!

*“If you love me, you will obey my commandments... The person who has my commandments and obeys them is the one who loves me... “If anyone loves me, he will obey my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and take up residence with him. The person who does not love me does not obey my words” (John 14:15, 21, 23, 24).*

*“If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commandments and remain in his love” (John 15:10).*

To stay in Jesus and in the Father, we are commanded to obey His Word and commandments. Can you stay or remain in the Lord Jesus or the Father and not obey His Word and moral commandments? It would be a violation of the Word of the Lord to think we can live a lifestyle of sin without any repentance and remain in the Father and the Lord Jesus.

The Father revealed His commandments from the beginning!

### ***Commandments of Moral Conduct Revealed from the Beginning***

That is a theme in Scripture that is almost unknown by modern Christians. God revealed His commandments for moral conduct on this planet from the beginning of creation, and that is why they are applicable to every human being.

Commandments for moral conduct were not only for Israel. They existed BEFORE God gave the ceremonial laws of Temple, priesthood, and sacrifice to Israel at Sinai.<sup>8</sup>

To the chagrin of those that believe and teach that moral commandments were a part of the law, and that they were opposed to grace, the following statement will be tough on them. *Rules of moral conduct were not an innovation introduced in the time of Moses!* They were not original at Sinai!

A good number of the laws of moral conduct that Moses received at Sinai are also found in the collection of the legal codes of the ancient Assyrians, the Hittites, and the well-known Hammurabi Code. Each of these codes is hundreds of years older than the moral commandments Moses received at Sinai. The laws given to Moses and these ancient codes have in common injunctions to regulate honor for parents, divorce, land ownership, leases, inheritance, debt, and so on. In common were also those laws against theft (robbery, fraud), divorce, illicit sex (ex. incest, adultery, bestiality, rape,), kidnapping, and murder. They also coincided in other ethical, judicial, and moral laws. There were law codes that were at least one thousand years before Moses, like the law codes of Urukagina, Ur-Nammu, and the Cuneiform

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<sup>8</sup> Read Aaron Lichtenstein, *The Seven Laws of Noah*, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn: Z. Berman Books, 1986, pgs. 12-14). He wrote about the 1948 study by Phillip Biberfeld, *The Bible and Ancient Law Codes* (pgs. 129-156) where a comparison was made between the law codes of Hammurabi, Hittites, and Assyrians, and the so-called laws of Noah. The rabbis dedicated a section of the Talmud to the moral commandments given to Noah and his descendants. (Sanhedrin 56a & ff.) They understood that there was a revelation in the earth of moral commandments given to the human race from the beginning, and after that with Noah. Another place to find information on these ancient law codes is in Pritchard, James B., editor. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., with Supplement (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).

law. The Cuneiform law was written in cuneiform script, and used among the Babylonians, Elamites, Sumerians, Hurrians, Kassites, Sumerians, and Hittites.

I'll never forget when I first read some of these very early codes from James Pritchard's book, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. I was amazed to find that these ancient law codes had similarities with many of the moral commandments Moses wrote down. It made a crater sized hole in my theology at the time (80's), but slowly my eyes opened up to the truth about the moral commandments of God being much older than the revelation at Sinai.

If I gave you no other historical evidence, the above would be enough to conclude that there was a revelation in the earth concerning God's moral commandments from time immemorial. Regardless of the fact that moral laws were often perverted, ignored, watered down, or denied by many, it is glaringly obvious that moral commandments came from the distant past before records existed.

The most well-founded and authoritative proof for any believer in Christ Jesus is the testimony of the Biblical text in the book of Genesis. It contains mostly the stories of the patriarchs that lived hundreds of years before Moses, and yet we see evidence of moral commandments being obeyed centuries and millennia before the laws at Sinai were ever given.

For that, you will have to wait for the next chapter!



## **Part 6: Commandments of Moral Conduct Revealed from the Beginning- B**

It is a HUGE mistake in theology to think that *moral* commandments were exclusively a part of the Law of Moses. Coming to that misguided conclusion has led many Christians to believe that freedom from the law means that moral commandments are not an obligation in the same way they were in the Hebrew Scripture. I ***strongly*** disagree with that misguided conclusion!

We've proven repeatedly with NEW Testament Scripture verses, that Christians are responsible to live according to God's *moral* commandments, but not the ritual commandments of law given to Israel at Sinai. For you that are reading these articles for the first time, here's a few of the many references from the New Testament we have already seen about obeying God's commandments: Matthew 5:17-19; John 14:15, 21-23, 15:10; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Ephesians 6:1-3; 1 John 2:3-5, 5:2, 3; Revelation 12:17, 14:12.

I urge you to read the previous five chapters. Much material was covered that was foundational to get this straight in you heart and mind.

### ***Christ the "end" of the law***

As we have stated, Christ was the final sacrifice and offering for sin, therefore the reality overtook the ritual and ceremonial commandments observed in the Temple, sacrifices, and the through the priesthood. In that sense, and that sense alone, was

Christ the “end” of the law.<sup>9</sup> Look at a few translations to get a better picture of the meaning of the word often translated “end” in Romans 10:4:

*For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God (NLT).*

*Christ is the goal of the Law, which leads to righteousness for all who have faith in God (CEV).*

*[For] Christ ·ended [is the end/culmination/fulfillment of] the law so that everyone who believes in him may ·be right with God [have righteousness] (EXB).*

*For the goal at which the Torah aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts (CJB).*

*For the Messiah is the culmination of the Law as far as righteousness is concerned for everyone who believes (ISV).*

*Christ has fulfilled everything the law was meant to do. So now everyone who believes can be right with God (NIRV).*

*The Messiah, you see, is the goal of the law, so that covenant membership may be available for all who believe (NTE).*

*For Messiah is the goal of the Torah as a means to righteousness for everyone who keeps trusting (TLV).*

*You see, God’s purpose for the law reaches its climax when the Anointed One arrives; now all who trust in Him can have their lives made right with God (Voice).*

*Christ is the fulfillment of Moses’ Teachings so that everyone who has faith may receive God’s approval (GW).*

Are ten versions sufficient for us to get it? What does Romans 10:4 mean?

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<sup>9</sup> As mentioned in the previously, in the New Testament we find at least five ways in which the word “law” was used: first 5 books of the Bible, law and prophets- the entire compendium of Scripture, law of Moses as given at Sinai, ceremonial-ritual law, and moral-judicial law. Scholars have discussed this to varying degrees. NET notes on Romans 2:12 states: “*This is the first occurrence of law (nomos) in Romans. Exactly what Paul means by the term has been the subject of much scholarly debate. According to J. A. Fitzmyer (Romans [AB], 131-35; 305-6) there are at least four different senses: (1) figurative, as a “principle”; (2) generic, meaning “a law”; (3) as a reference to the OT or some part of the OT; and (4) as a reference to the Mosaic law.*” Other scholars have discussed law as separated into moral and ritual commandments. This is not a new interpretation on understanding Paul’s usage of the word “law.”

With the coming of the Messiah, the goal, aim, climax, or purpose of the Torah (the Law of Moses as given at Sinai) was fulfilled. Jesus' sacrifice provided redemption and righteousness, and the need for ritual and ceremonial commandments passed away into history. They became obsolete and unnecessary!

### ***The shadow overtaken by the reality and fulfillment***

The shadow (Temple, sacrifices, priesthood and rituals) was overtaken by the reality and fulfillment, which was Christ Jesus! That is the message of Romans 10:4 and John 1:17 (NET): *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ."*

Let's remind ourselves again of verses that bring this truth to the forefront.

*So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality (Colossians 2:16, 17 NLT).*

That highlights the fact that ritual commandments such as keeping a kosher home, the festivals (feasts) of Israel, new moon celebrations, and Sabbath days were only a shadow of the reality that Jesus provided. They all pointed to Messiah. Once Messiah came, the reality overtook the shadow, and there was no more need for the shadow.

*According to Hebrews 8:5, 9:8, 10:1, the Temple and its sacrifices were a **symbol** and **shadow** of the reality brought by the eternal sacrifice of Jesus. These verses bring us additional light concerning Colossians 2:16 and 17. The temporary symbolism and the shadow cast by the Temple, feasts, Sabbaths, kosher, blood sacrifices, priesthood, etc., came to an end with the eternal sacrifice of Jesus. Messiah brought the eternal, the reality.*

Sandwiched between Hebrews 8 and 10 is this glorious statement in chapter 9:

*But now Christ has come as the high priest of the good things to come. He passed through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, and he entered once for all into the most holy place not by the blood of goats and calves but by his own blood, and so he himself secured eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow sprinkled on those who are defiled consecrated them and provided ritual purity, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our consciences from dead works to worship the living God (Hebrews 9:11-14 NET).*

This is the absolute truth, but we need to distinguish between ritual-ceremonial commandments that passed away with the coming of Messiah and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., and God's moral commandments that are still required in the

earth. The moral commandments were strongly taught and highlighted in all apostolic writings, from Romans all the way through Revelation.

### ***Paul's use of the word commandments***

We saw that Paul used the word *law* in different ways (see note #1), but he also used the word *commandments* in at least four ways. Just as the word *law* has been generalized in much of Christianity, the same has been done with the word *commandment*. Note the different ways *commandments* was used in these verses:

1. **Moral commandments:** Mat. 5:17-19; 1<sup>st</sup> 7:19; Rom. 7:7-13, 13:9; Mark 10:19; Eph. 6:2. These passages refer only to moral commandments based on their context.
2. **Commandments as ordinances, or the ritual commandments:** Eph. 2:19-21, Heb. 7:18, 9:19. What divided Israel permanently from the Gentile world were not moral and judicial commandments, because numerous similar ones were found in the ancient near-eastern law codes that preceded Moses and Sinai by hundreds of years. What truly separated the Gentiles from Israel was their worship of God according ritual-ceremonial commandments to be carried out in the Temple with its blood sacrifices, and its priesthood. Those were the commandments in ordinances, the wall of separation between Israel and the Gentiles. Jesus removed it!
3. **Commandments of men:** Titus 1:14, Mark 7:8, 9. Religious traditions taught as commandments that took the place of God's commandments and made them of none effect.
4. **Apostolic commandments that came from the Lord:** 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 14:37; Col. 4:10; 1<sup>st</sup> Thes. 4:2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:2.

The fact is that when the children of Israel came out of Egypt, moral commandments were reemphasized and clarified for all future generations. God did not introduce moral commandments at Sinai. That's a shocker for many Christians. We began seeing that in the previous study. Moral commandments were God's revelation to human beings from the beginning, but let's prove it.

Again, what we see at Sinai was the reemphasizing and amplification of God's moral commandments, not the introduction of them for the first time.

### ***A covenant addendum***

What was a completely new revelation at Sinai? God introduces for the first time a covenant addendum that only the physical seed of Israel would have the responsibility to carry it out. These were the ritual-ceremonial commandments, ordinances, and statutes.

Hebrews 9:19-22 taught us about that covenant addendum of priesthood, Temple, blood sacrifices, and so on:

*“For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.” And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry with the blood. And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*

The question is; why did God add covenantal provisions to Abraham’s promises and covenant? Galatians 3:19 said that these ritual laws were added because of the transgressions of Israel. Israel was a rebellious mess after they came out of Egypt. The evil ways of the Egyptians had permeated their ideas and practices.

Israel rebelled at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:10-12), Marah (Ex. 15:22-24), with the manna and meat (Exodus 16:1-21), during the first Sabbath observance commanded Israel (Ex. 16:22-30), at Massah and Meribah (Ex. 17:1-7), with the golden calf (Exodus 32), and transgressions were breaching God’s covenant and promises. (See Psalms 116:23-26 (NKJV).

Read Psalms 78:8-53 and the straightforward commentary of Israel’s rebellious ways:

*And not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart and whose spirit was not faithful to God (v.8) ...How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert! Again and again they tempted God, and pained the Holy One of Israel (vs. 40-41 NASB).*

Israel was to be a nation of priests and a holy nation to God (Ex. 19:6). Israel was commanded cultic rituals that were exclusively to be carried out by a God designated priesthood, offering sacrificial offerings, at specifically ordained times, in a God designated place- first in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple. Together with these ritual ceremonies were the food laws, Sabbath days, and the feasts and festivals of Israel that were intimately connected with God’s order of worship given to Israel at Sinai.

Why all these rituals, ordinances, and ceremonies? *They had to be introduced and implemented to protect the covenant from a permanent breach.* Rituals of forgiveness and cleansing with the blood of innocent animals were installed. The animals were killed in the place of, as substitutes for, people that sinned. This protected the covenant and the people from complete annihilation. Even with all these covenant protections in place, the covenant was stretched to the max often and its complete destruction was barely averted. See Jeremiah 11:10, 31:31, 32; Ezekiel 44:5-13; Hosea 8:1; Deuteronomy 31:16, 20; etc.

*They did not keep the covenant of God, and refused to walk in His law (Psalms 78:10 NASB).*

*For their heart was not steadfast toward Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant (Psalms 78:37 NKJV).*

The Messiah was to come through these descendants of Abraham. If the covenant could not be protected, and if the Israelite nation would be destroyed because of their sin, then Messiah could not come. Think about that! Once Messiah Jesus came, died as the final and perfect sacrifice, and was raised from the dead, the provisional parts of the covenant with Israel were rescinded and laid aside. See again Galatians 3:19-24!

### ***The Book of Genesis- Beginnings***

Our minds need to be renewed to the fact that moral commandments existed from the beginning of God's creation. They were not only as part of what God gave to Moses at Sinai.

In the book of Genesis, we see moral commandments observed and sometimes disobeyed. Those occasions took place centuries (and many were millennia) before the giving of the law at Sinai.

If I gave you no other verse but the following, it would be enough to prove the point. Notice WHO is doing the speaking in this verse. It wasn't Moses or one of the patriarchs, but God was speaking personally to Isaac about his father Abraham and how he lived.

*"All this will come to pass because Abraham obeyed me and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:5).*

That Scripture verse was about Abraham's covenant life many generations before God spoke to Moses on Sinai. This verse alone proves that commandments, statutes, and laws of God (specifically moral and judicial commandments) existed in the earth and were the revelation of God from the beginning.

If you read the commentaries on this verse you will see scholars sputter and get flaky out over it. They don't know what to do about it! Some dare to suggest that Moses added in retrospect these "out of time and place" references to commandments, statutes, and laws. If Moses did add these, then he added to the Word of God and was a false prophet. Why should we believe anything he said? It would mean that Moses injected his own thinking and lied when he was quoting what God said. Be very careful. Don't make the same mistake a whole slew of folks by accusing Moses of transmitting his own ideas and not the Word of God in Genesis 26:5! NO! Genesis 26:5 is a revelation from God of the truth of

commandments, statutes, and laws existing from the beginning. Abraham was aware of them long before Moses was born!

An interesting side note is that the Jews understood what this verse meant the *torah* was revealed from the beginning. In the ancient Mishnah of Judaism there is found an interpretation (midrash) on Genesis 26:5:

*And it is also said of our father Abraham, And Abraham was old... And the Lord blessed Abraham with everything (Genesis 24:1). We find that Abraham our father observed the whole Torah before it was given, for it is said, Because Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws (Genesis 26:5) (M. Kiddushin 4:14).*

When it says *the whole torah* or teaching and instruction of God (not “law” in the sense of western jurisprudence), arguably, it cannot refer to ritual commandments of temple, priesthood, sacrifice, and feasts and festivals. That part of the law had not yet been enacted. It cannot refer to the entire spectrum of law or there would be big issues with that interpretation, issues that I will not get into here. It can only refer to those moral and judicial commandments revealed from the beginning of time.

We see obedience and disobedience to moral commandments in the stories of Cain, the generation of Noah, Joseph, and others.

When Cain did evil with his offering, God warned him of sin.

*“If you do what is right, won’t you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:7a).*

If God warned Cain of sin crouching at the door, then there were commandments meant to restrain evil! There must have been a revelation on the earth from the beginning. Cain is about as close to the beginning of the human race as you can get! Any closer and you have to talk about Adam, Eve, and Eden.

How could Cain’s evil action be called a sin?

*Everyone who commits (practices) sin is guilty of lawlessness; for [that is what] sin is, lawlessness (the breaking, violating of God’s law by transgression or neglect—being unrestrained and unregulated by His commands and His will) (1 John 3:4 AMPC).*

God could warn Cain of sin ONLY if there was a moral law already established forbidding jealousy, covetousness, and murder. If not, on what basis did God warn Cain of sin? Why were these sins? Based on what could God judge him? If there were no moral commandments, there would be no basis to call anything a sin. This points to the fact that moral commandments existed as far back as Eden. We know God gave commandments to Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:16, 17).

God has to be righteous in His dealing with human beings as the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25). Abram said that about God in connection with His intended destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is the righteous Judge that never perverts justice in His dealings with human beings (Job 34:12, 17; Romans 1:32, 2:2). The reason for His judgments has always been based on His moral commandments.

Sodom and Gomorrah could be judged based on an obvious revelation against sexual immorality that existed on the earth. Those two cities rebelled and perverted the moral laws of God to such a degree that judgment fell on them, and they were destroyed with fire and brimstone (Gen. 19).

What about the world and its inhabitants as they were during the days of Noah?

*The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Gen. 6:5) ...the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth (Gen 6:11-13).*

God saw that evil, violence, and corruption filled all the earth, He judged it, and the flood was unleashed. How could God judge the earth for its evil, violence, and the corruption that had spread to every human being (except Noah), if there existed no moral commandments that were violated without the possibility of repair?

What about the stories of Pharaoh and Abimelech in Genesis chapters 12, 20, and 26? These pagan kings knew it was a sin to commit adultery. How could they possibly know that adultery was a sin unless there was already a revelation in the earth of God's moral commandments long before Moses received moral laws at Sinai?

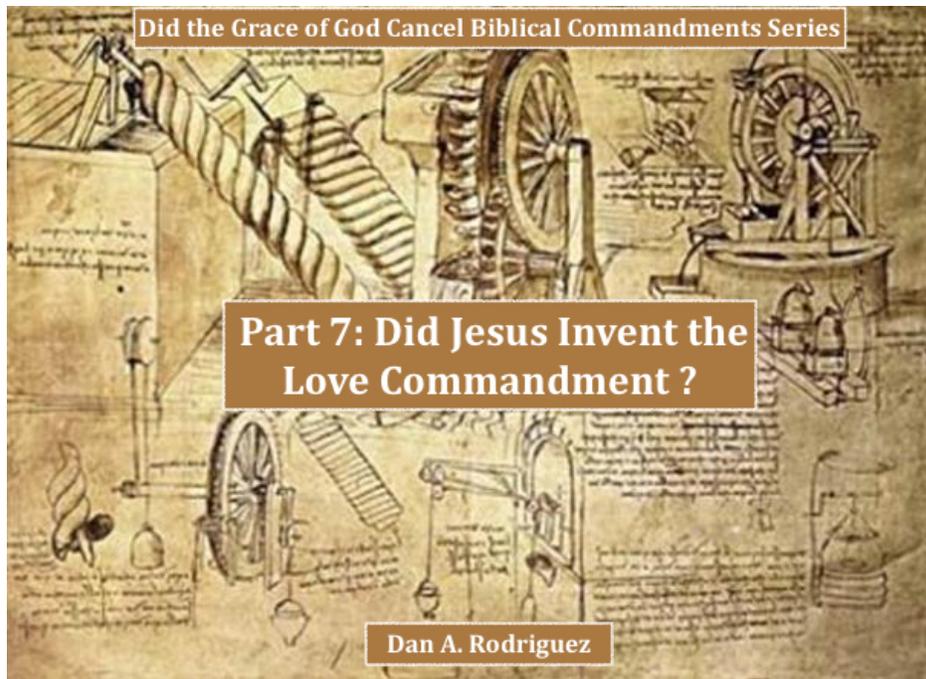
Joseph rejected the invitation of Potiphar's wife to commit adultery. Joseph knew that having sexual relations with the wife of another man was a sin against God (Gen. 39:9). How did Joseph know that committing adultery was a sin against God unless there was already a commandment in place that forbade it?

Come on! Think about this.

In 2015, I wrote the 260-page book, ***A CALL TO RETURN: Restoring the Roots of Our Relationship with Jesus***. There is more explanation of these pre-existing moral commandments in chapter 6: *The Preexistence of God's Commandments*. Get it today!

Link: <http://asambleavencedores.podbean.com/p/published-books/>. If you haven't read this book, you do not know what you are missing in this day where permissiveness and many perversions are popping up in churches and ministries. This book, in essence, is a call back to holiness in Christian conduct according to

God's moral commandments. Here are some powerful passages in this regard:  
1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:14-16, and 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:1-10.



## Part 7: Did Jesus Invent the Love Commandment?

Are you ready for this final chapter on this important subject? It's a one-two knockout punch to what has become a religious sacred cow. Read it all and don't give up just because it hurts our religiously ingrained thinking. There is help, light, and understanding from God's Word in the following sentences.

### *A new commandment?*

Here it is: *Jesus did not invent the love commandment!* Ouch! It hurt, I know, especially if you have heard it preached and taught like that for years. Many are taught and believe that LOVE is the THE only commandment of the Church. Here's the verse generally used to prove it.

*I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another* (John 13:34 NET, and similar in John 15:12, 17).

Here is the problem with the consensus of the meaning of this verse. Love was not a New Testament innovation! It was not new with Jesus. Jesus strongly emphasized the love commandment, but it was stated in the Hebrew Bible long before He became flesh and dwelt among us. The love commandment was not new in the sense of it never existed before. So, in what sense was love new? When Jesus said that his disciples are to love "just as I have loved you," He was stressing the truth that He was the highest and best example of love. What was new was that they were to love

according to the example Jesus gave them. That was the highest standard possible! Jesus emphasized love and brought it into focus, but He also brought light about loving one another with His personal example in a human body. That was something never seen in the earth before. That was new. “God in the flesh”, Jesus, demonstrated love. (See John 1:1-4, 14.)

Love, as a commandment, was written by Moses in Leviticus 19:18, the famous “*you must love your neighbor as yourself.*” (See NET.) Isn’t that interesting? Many refuse to accept that moral commandments are *required* of Christians because “commandments” were of the Law of Moses, and yet love as a commandment first appears in writing in the Law of Moses!

The love commandment as written in Leviticus 19:18 was quoted by Jesus, Paul, and James in Matthew 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; and James 2:8. There is no difference between *loving your neighbor* and *loving one another* as Jesus demonstrated before the disciples. Paul proved these phrases are equal in meaning in Romans 13:8, 9. Both phrases are used in reference to this love commandment found in Leviticus 19:18 (quoted by Paul in v. 9).

The apostle John dedicated a significant amount of 1<sup>st</sup> John’s five chapters on the subject of loving one another, though he did not directly quote Leviticus 19:18. He alluded to Leviticus 19:18 every time he told us to love one another. (See 1 John 3:11, 23, 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 1:5.) Peter used the phrase *love one another* in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:22, and Paul used it in Romans 13:8 and 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:9.

In the following verses, we see that to *love your brother* meant the same thing as *love one another*.

*By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous (1 John 3:10-12 NASB).*

Bible interpreters generally agree on the fact that “*this is the message which you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another*” (1 John 3:11) should be interpreted according to 1 John 1:1: “*What was from the beginning, what we have heard.*” They say that “the beginning” could refer to Jesus Christ and His coming to earth when He began to preach the gospel, or when the believers John was writing to first heard of Christ.

I disagree with their conclusions based on the context of verse 11. The context clarifies immediately the correct interpretation. “*The message which you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another*” is immediately connected to “*not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother.*” The apostle John uses Cain as

an example of disobedience to the commandment to love one another. In other words, “*from the beginning*” is not used in the same sense as 1 John 1:1 but as in Genesis 1:1 or the Gospel of John 1:1-3.

The history of Cain is one of those stories that happened at the beginning. Genesis 4 was a “beginning” story that took place as close as you can get to the beginning in Genesis 1:1 and the first humans. The history of Cain was the first recorded rebellion (transgression) against God and His commandments after Adam and Eve sinned and were thrown out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23).

Did God exist from eternity? Does not John say that *God is love*? (1 John 4:8) There is no question then that the commandment to love has existed from eternity, and then of course, from the beginning of the book of Genesis.<sup>10</sup> Cain disobeyed God’s love commandment when he submitted himself to the evil one (Satan) and murdered his brother Abel.

*You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning* (John 8:44a NASB).

Cain’s “*from the beginning*” sin against God’s commandment to love one another lines up with the fact that the devil was “*a murderer from the beginning*,” as Jesus said in John 8:44. Cain was of his “*father the devil*” with his actions (*deeds*). What Cain did identified him as a child of the devil because he violated God’s pre-existing commandment to love one another.

### ***The Golden Rule- Love in Action***

That loving one another was a commandment from God, from the beginning, is indirectly attested by ancient world religions in their own writings. I know this may be shocking to my fellow Christians, but the Golden Rule is a common thread around the world. The question is where did it come from, and how did all these diverse religious philosophies get their versions of it? The obvious and only solution for the believer, often overlooked, is that God revealed it in the earth from the beginning.

*From the beginning, creation in its magnificence enlightens us to His nature. Creation itself makes His undying power and divine identity clear, even though they are invisible; and it voids the excuses and ignorant claims of these people... (Romans 1:20 VOICE).*

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<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Akiva (50–135 CE) stated that the principle of love had its foundation in Genesis chapter 1, which taught that all men are the offspring of Adam, who was made in the image of God (Sifra, *Ḳedoshim*, iv.; Yer. Ned. ix. 41c; Genesis Rabba 24). My thinking along these lines is obviously not new!

The nations on the earth incorporated the Golden Rule into their religions in one form or another. They don't all read word for word as Jesus's teaching in Matthew, but the similarities are glaring. It is recorded in ancient moral codes and wisdom texts, and then from religious writings from around the world.

Do you remember that we covered this information in article 5 under the sub-heading "*Commandments of Moral Conduct Revealed from the Beginning*"? We saw that a good number of the laws of moral conduct that Moses received at Sinai were also found in the collection of the legal codes of the ancient Assyrians, the Hittites, and the well-known Hammurabi Code. Each of these codes was hundreds of years older than the moral commandments Moses received at Sinai. The laws given to Moses and these ancient codes have in common injunctions to regulate honor for parents, divorce, land ownership, leases, inheritance, debt, and so on. In common were also those laws against theft (robbery, fraud), divorce, illicit sex (ex. incest, adultery, bestiality, rape,), kidnapping, and murder. They also coincided in other ethical, judicial, and moral laws. There were law codes that were at least one thousand years before Moses, like the law codes of Urukagina, Ur-Nammu, and the Cuneiform law. The Cuneiform law was written in cuneiform script, and used among the Babylonians, Elamites, Sumerians, Hurrians, Kassites, Sumerians, and Hittites.

Where did these many cultures and pagan societies get these moral principles? It is truly an extraordinary fact. We saw that without questions they originated with God from the beginning.

Bear with me. This lesson is important because it further reveals the truth to Christians that moral commandments preexisted before Sinai, and that the Creator brought them to the earth at the beginning. They are a revelation of His divine nature, and of His divine identity.

Following are quotes, first from Jesus, then Judaism, and finally from other religions and cultures that incorporated into their religions and "spirituality" the Golden Rule.

**The Lord Jesus Christ:** "*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*" (Matthew 7:12 NKJV)

Judaism: "*What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary.*" This saying was attributed to the great rabbinic sage Hillel in the Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 31a.) As a side note, Hillel died less than ten years after Jesus was born.

Ancient Egypt: In the story of *The Eloquent Peasant*, (2040–1650 BC): "*Now this is the command: Do to the doer to make him do.*" Another example is found in a papyrus

(664–323 BC) that states: *"That which you hate to be done to you, do not do to another."*<sup>11</sup>

Buddhism- *"Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful"* (Udana-Varga 5:18) *"...a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?"* Samyutta Nikaya

Bahá'í: *"And if your eyes be turned towards justice, choose for your neighbor that which you choose for yourself."* Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

Hinduism: *"This is the sum of Dharma [duty]: Do not unto others which would cause you pain if done to you."* Mahabharata 5:1517

Jainism: *A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated.* Suttrakritanga 1.11.33

Islam Hadith- not stated in the Qur'an but was teaching attributed to Muhammad during his lifetime: *Prophet said: "As you would have people do to you, do to them; and what you dislike to be done to you, don't do to them."* Kitab al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 146

Confucianism: *What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.* *"What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others."* Zi gong (a disciple of Confucius) asked: *"Is there any one word that could guide a person throughout life?"* The Master replied: *"How about [reciprocity]: never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself?"* Analects XV.24

Very similar sayings as these found in Confucianism can be found in Mohism and Taoism.

Zoroastrianism: *And the five accomplishments (farhang) owing to religion; one is thus, not to do unto others all that which is not well for one's self.* Shayest na-Shayest (Lit. "proper and improper") 13:29

The religion of the Incas: *"Do not do to another what you would not yourself experience."* Manco Capoc, founder of the empire of Peru. (Harry Gensler, Earl W. Spurgin, James Swindal: "Ethics: Contemporary Readings," Routledge, 2003, Page 159 to 162).

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<sup>11</sup> Most of these references can be found in the Wikipedia article: *Golden Rule*. The article has over 80 footnotes where the reference was sourced. Much information can be found by Google-ing "golden rule in ancient times." I saw articles and references to the Golden Rule in Psychology Today, Huff Post, and other secular media totally unrelated to religion. There are websites dedicated to tolerance, ethics, and humanism that espouse what they call reciprocity. Even stranger is the fact that modern paganism type religions based on Roman mythology and witchcraft use some form of it.

Native American spirituality: A Pima proverb: *“Do not wrong or hurt your neighbor, because it is not he who you wrong but yourself.”*

Get the picture? It is found all over the world, and many religions have their own versions of this great moral principle found in the words of Jesus, in the Epistles, and in Leviticus 19:17-18:

*“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”* (NKJV)

The love commandment was not a Law of Moses alone, but an eternal principle revealed by God from the beginning of creation, and promulgated on the earth long before Moses ever walked among men. It was not a new revelation!

### ***The Only Commandment for the Church is Love?***

Love isn't the only commandment of the church. I state that based on the words of Paul.

Ok. Let go of the rocks. It's a “no-stoning” day if you will let me explain before reaching for that rock. Read it:

*For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Romans 13:9 NASB).

Here is one more translation.

*The commands given to you in the Scriptures—do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not take what is not yours, do not covet—and any other command you have heard are summarized in God's instruction: “Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Romans 13:9 VOICE).

The dictionary says the following about the word *summarize* as used in the VOICE translation above:

To give a brief statement of the main points of (something)- "these results can be summarized in the following table." Synonyms: sum up, abridge, condense, encapsulate, outline, give an outline of, put in a nutshell, recapitulate, give/make a summary of, give a synopsis of, etc. "he summarized these ideas in a single phrase."

For *summary*, the dictionary states that it means, *a brief statement or account of the main points of something. Example: "a summary of Chapter Three."* It also states it is a synonym for *an abbreviated version*.

Notice that *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* is not a replacement, substitution, removal, rejection, or denial of, *"You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,"* and if there is any other commandments." NO WAY! Yet, disgustingly, that is the way many interpret this verse. No, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* was never a replacement for God's moral commands, nor did it give anyone the right to reject or change the moral commandments of God in Scripture. *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* is a SUMMARY of all moral commandments! Paul said that all moral commandments were summed up, encapsulated, were contained in (in a nutshell), and were abbreviated by *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

I gave you the definition of summary: *a brief statement or account of the main points of something. Example: "a summary of Chapter Three."* The Lord put it in my heart like that the first time He taught me about it. The example He gave me was the summary of a book.

Have you ever read the Cliffs Notes of any book? It summarizes the story in a condensed manner so one gets the gist of the story. It NEVER changes or replaces the main points with something different. It ALWAYS stays true to the story line.

This is exactly what *"You must love your neighbor as yourself"* is- a brief statement that contains within it ALL the main points of God's moral commandments. All God's moral commandments are in this container of the love of God. The main points of God's moral commandments are active and alive within the love commandment.

Biblical love never excludes God's moral commandments, but always includes them. Why? It is impossible to live in love and violate any moral commandment of God.

*Now this is love: that we walk according to his commandments* (2 John 1:6 NET).

You can't commit adultery, be a murderer, or a homosexual and walk in the love of God! Jealousy, covetousness, or robbery can never be carried out in love! These are all sins and contrary to God's holy moral commandments in the Scriptures.

The above is precisely why Paul wrote this immediately after Romans 13:9- given here in three translations:

*Love does no wrong to one's neighbor [it never hurts anybody]. Therefore love meets all the requirements and is the fulfilling of the Law* (Romans 13:10 AMPC)

*Love does not harm its neighbor. So love does everything the law requires* (v.10 NIRV)

*Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law* (v. 10 NLT).

Love will not do wrong or evil by breaking God's moral commandments. Love will do all that God's moral commandments require. Always! A step out of love is a step

away from God's moral commandments. Getting out of love is breaking God's moral code on some point.

Paul is referring to moral commandments in Romans 13:8-10, and to these alone. There is no mention of ritual or ceremonial commandments of any kind connected to Temple, priesthood, sacrifices, Sabbath days, feast and festivals, etc. We are not subject to ritual commandments of law because Jesus fulfilled them and they were meant for Israel alone, but we are still required under the love commandment to obey God's moral commandments.

As I stated, within love are all God's moral commandments. Never forget it! Love never rejects, changes, or teaches they are obsolete or passed away (see Matthew 5:17-19!). Those that teach that moral commandments are not applicable to Christians will be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven! Jesus taught that!

God's moral code is intact and will be for as long as God is God, BECAUSE He is love! Within Love are His moral commandments. They cannot be separated from love! They are a part of love and always will be!

### ***Condensing the law and the prophets into two commandments***

Don't think it strange that Paul would condense all moral commandments into one statement. Evidently, it was a practice among the Jews. Jesus used it.

*And one of them, an expert in religious law, asked him a question to test him: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:35-40).*

Jesus said that the **LAW** depended (was hung on) on these commandments to love the Lord and love your neighbor!

What?

Wait a minute!

I thought the law depended on WORKS. That has been drilled into our psyche for so long in Christianity that many think it is an established doctrine of the church. They firmly believe the law was completely based on works. Oops, and very sorry, for that theological error espoused by many!

Evidently, some things Paul stated about works and law have been severely misunderstood. *Jesus taught that the law and the prophets depended on love, NOT works.* Love was the foundation for all commandments in Scripture. That should be

obvious, IF we believe that God is love and that He was the One that gave commandments to mankind.

When the expert in religious law asked Jesus about which commandment was the greatest, he was following a Bible tradition of condensing God's requirements into a short form. Look at Psalms 15 as one beautiful example.

Following is another example:

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)*

This is exactly what Paul did in Romans 13:8-10. He worked the theme of which commandment was greatest and condensed all moral commandments into one: *love your neighbor as yourself*. He was expressing something like this: "The Psalmist condensed God's requirements into 10 or 11 (depending on how you count them), Micah into three, Jesus into two, and I (Paul) condensed it into one!"

None of them were denying the validity of moral commandments, nor were they replacing them. They were stating in short form what God requires of man.

***If you love Him, then you will obey His commandments!***

Let's end this series with verses in line with all this for your study:

*"If you love me, you will obey my commandments...The person who has my commandments and obeys them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will reveal myself to him (John 14:15, 21 NET).*

*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked (1 John 2:3-6 NKJV).*

*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:2, 3)*

*If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love (John 15:10 NKJV).*

*And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:17 NKJV).*

*Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12 NKJV).*

*For circumcision is nothing and counts for nothing, neither does uncircumcision, but [what counts is] keeping the commandments of God (1Corinthians 7:19 Amplified).*

*The Law therefore is holy, and [each] commandment is holy and just and good (Romans 7:12).*

*So anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys them and teaches others to do so will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19 NET).*

*He said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" he asked. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "I have wholeheartedly obeyed all these laws. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:17-21 NET).*

*Now this is love: that we walk according to his commandments (2 John 1:6 NET).*

A step out of love is a step out of God's holy moral commandments! To walk in love we must walk in His moral commandments.

The end, for now!