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The Life: Under Commandments of God

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The Life: Under Commandments of God

The crux of “the Life”—obedience. “The Life” as we have seen is the Lord Jesus, and the thing emphasized in that Life is obedience; and that obedience contemplated by the gospel is obedience to the commandments of God: the keynote of which is expressed by God the Father when he said: “We will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:25). That declaration presents the whole case. It was restated by the inspired writer of Ecclesiastes when he said: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of men” (Eccl. 12:13). All that follows can only be by way of illustration and commentary. But for the purpose of making this central truth of “the Life” impressive, let us contemplate it through illustrations.

To Adam this law made its first appearance when God said to him and his spouse, and blessed them, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over . . . every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). This, from that time on, became the commandment of God to ~~him~~ **Adam**, and through him to the race, since only through those who were born of him, following in the same commandment and responsibility, could this commandment be carried out.

The next development of the duty of man by receiving commandments from God was the edict against eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A commandment with a penalty attached “Thou shalt not eat of it: [for] in the day [that] thou eatest thereof thou

With respect to this chapter, Roberts commented: “These references to the scriptures may be greatly multiplied. All four books of the scripture—Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price—Book of Moses and Book of Abraham passim, on the various subdivisions given in the analysis of this lesson.”

shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). The circumstance of man’s transgression of this law with its developments has already been considered, and it is not necessary to reiterate or amplify what was then said.

The institution of sacrifices—the symbol of the Life. Then came the commandment of the Lord through Adam to his posterity, that “they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord” (Moses 5:5). This sacrifice was to be a perfect lamb, without spot or blemish. It was to be slain and offered upon an alter as a burnt offering unto the Lord: “And Adam was obedient unto the commandments [of the Lord]. And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me” (Moses 5:5–6). The commandment was given as an arbitrary direction, no explanation made, no reason given for such a sacrifice at that time; or the purpose of it; but Adam, having received the commandment from God obeyed it, and taught his children to make the sacrifices. From this arises a very effective and beautiful lesson in obedience. “Blind obedience,” some would call it; but Adam’s obedience was not blind. He doubtless perceived by reflection that to follow God’s commandment would be following the highest wisdom which arose from perfect knowledge, and therefore his obedience was intelligent obedience, and an act of trust in the knowledge and wisdom of God.

The sacrifice expounded. The visiting angel now offered the following explanation: “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth. Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:7–8). This was now the law of God unto Adam, and obedience to it became the measure of his duty. With this came also the law of baptism by water and baptism of the Holy Ghost, and continued adherence to laws of righteousness as they were developed by continuous revelations from God, whose commandments were always in all ages the moral and spiritual law unto those who came into allegiance, though faith, with God. In this patriarchal period, in which all the patriarchs wrought from Adam to Enoch and Noah and Shem and Abraham, it was so; and this period, as we have already seen, was characterized by the continuation of the revelations of God unfolding the duties of men.

The testing of Abraham. Abraham’s experience with reference to offering up his son Isaac gives an important lesson on this principle of

obedience. He received a commandment to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice unto God upon an altar, and since the commandment was of God, Abraham prepared himself and his son to make such a sacrifice, notwithstanding it seemed to wreck all the hopes that the Patriarch had regarded as being centered in this son of promise, and as the one through whom he and all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. But Abraham was one of those spirits who stood amid the hosts of spirits who were characterized as being “great” and “noble” and “good”; one, who before the creation of the world was to illustrate the great testing process on which loyalty to God is founded—and “we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:25). And so the offering was prepared and would have been consummated, but when the Patriarch had demonstrated his faith and implicit trust in God, and his integrity to God, he was relieved of the burden of slaying his son as a sacrifice. A substitute was found in the ram in the thicket, which was offered instead of Isaac.

Moses and the law. So, too, with Moses, who came to Israel first with a dispensation of the same gospel which was had among the patriarchs, both in antediluvian and postdiluvian times, but the people, brutalized by their bondage of four hundred years of captivity in Egypt, were not equal to fulfilling its requirements, and so a lesser law, the law of “carnal” commandments was given to them with a labored ritual of types and symbols which should be followed by the reality which would finally come in the Atonement and sacrifice of the Son of God with its influx of spiritual forces and powers.

Yet attending upon even this, the “lesser law,” made heavy with its burden of ceremonials, came also the great moral law which belongs to the gospel in every dispensation of it. This found expression at Mount Sinai in the “ten words” of God, or the “Ten Commandments.” Those commandments now became the law to Israel. They constituted a noble outline of Israel’s duty toward God and toward men.

I.

“I am the Lord thy God. . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

II.

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. . . .
Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.”

III.

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

IV.

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

V.

“Honour thy father and thy mother.”

VI.

“Thou shalt not kill.”

VII.

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

VIII.

“Thou shalt not steal.”

IX.

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”

X.

“Thou shalt not covet.”

These “ten commandments” (Ex. 20:2-17), while directly given to Israel, may well be taken over by all races and nations of men as fundamentals in universal righteousness, so excellent are they; and especially as expounded and modified by the Son of God, during his ministry in the meridian dispensation.

The voice from the wilderness. These “ten commandments” and performance of the ceremonials of types and symbols of “the better things to come,” constituted the obligations of Israel to God and to each other until the coming of the forerunner of the Christ, who to Israel, then a long time wandered from “the path direct,” marked off by the great law given to Moses, came with a serious message of repentance, and a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah with the greater things of the gospel, and the higher spiritual life that it had to introduce, and a somewhat new basis from which to fashion man’s attitude of mind towards God. John the Baptist’s shrill cry of repentance, which attracted the attention of Israel, and his baptism in water for the remission of sins, became then the law of the Life to the people of God:

Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. . . . *<There>* [He that] cometh after me *<one that>* is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge *<the>* [his] floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he *<shall>* [will] burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matt. 3:2, 11-12)

The teaching of the Christ. When Jesus came, he continued John’s message of repentance. And throughout his ministry he not only preached the gospel but lived its life, and unfolded the law and the gospel as no other teacher or prophet in Israel ever unfolded it.

Let us contemplate his doctrine of “the Life” in his teaching, as we have already considered it in his living.

The Christ’s restatement of God’s law.

Lawyer: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”
(This the question of the lawyers who came tempting Jesus.)

Jesus: (1) “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it,”

(2) “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”
(Matt. 22:36-40)

From negative to positive form. It is to be observed that this restatement of the commandments is a statement which is all-inclusive of what is written in the law and in the prophets, and also it reinstates all the moral and spiritual law of the patriarchal dispensations, for it must be remembered that running all through the ages there is but one law of righteousness which attaches to the one gospel, and this generalization hit off by the Christ in answer to the lawyer’s question, is a full restatement of the whole law of righteousness.

Two things should be noticed in respect of this restatement of the law as compared with the ten great words of God to Moses: namely, (1) that the Christ changes the basis of the statement from the negative to the positive form.^a Except for two commandments out of the ten, the negative form is used by Moses. The two exceptions are, first; the imperative commandment, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8); and the second is like unto it in form, “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Ex. 20:12). Undoubtedly the affirmative form of statement as given by the Christ in his summation of the law, is more impressive than the “Thou shalt not” style of the ten commandments. (2) That the Christ’s generalization is based upon “love” as the motive force in God’s law. That is to say, obedience to God’s law properly comes, and can only properly come, from love of God, not from fear of him. We

^aIn restating and epitomizing the Law, Christ uses two quotations from the Old Testament: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:5), and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev. 19:18).

note the saying of the Psalmist: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”^b (Ps. 111:10); but we also remember that the scriptures teach that “⟨the⟩ fear ⟨of⟩ the Lord ⟨is to⟩ [and] depart from evil” (Prov. 3:7).^c And “the fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov. 8:13). Martin Luther’s translation of the passage in the Psalms, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” appeals as more nearly true than the translation in our authorized version, namely, “Reverence for God, is the beginning of wisdom.” “Fear of the Lord” places the approach on the lower plane. It may not be doubted that men do many things and refrain from doing many other things from “the fear of the Lord,” but it adds something to human dignity to think of men as keeping the commandments of God because of “reverence” for him, rather than to be moved thereto by fear. Better yet, and rising to the plane on which the Christ would have us work, that men keep the divine commandments from love of God.

Love of God. First, however, there stands the question, how can we love God and be obedient to him through love? There is but one way: men must learn to know him; and if men can only learn to know God, love will follow as natural consequence. And in order that we mortal men might know God, and by that means love him, he has given the sublime manifestation of himself through our Lord Jesus, our elder brother. He is God’s manifestation in the flesh. “Without controversy,” says St. Paul, “great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest ⟨“Manifested” is the suggested marginal translation, see Oxford S.S. Edition of the Bible⟩ in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). All this in plain allusion to the Christ. Again, the testimony of Paul:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb. 1:1-3)

^bRoberts’s argument, although based on Luther’s German translation instead of on the original Hebrew, is valid. The Hebrew word translated “fear” in the King James Version can have the meaning “fear of God, reverence, piety.” F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 432.

^cRoberts changed this text from a command to a description of cause and effect.

“The brightness of his ⟨God’s⟩ glory,” and the “express image of his ⟨God’s⟩ person,” is an averment that Jesus Christ was the revelation of God the Eternal Father. The scriptures are replete with iteration and reiteration of the truth: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, ⟨even⟩ the glory [as] of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). This our Lord Jesus. This God manifested in the flesh.

Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus [saith unto him], Have I been so long [time] with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words [that] I speak [un]to you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. (John 14:8-10)

In other words, Christ is the revelation of Deity. The revelation of all that can be called God, both in personality and in attributes, and therefore representatively, he is the Father as well as the Son. He is, and represents all that can be thought upon or conceived of as God. “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.” And again “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 1:19; 2:9). God, then, is manifested for us men in the flesh through Jesus Christ; and with the “Spirit of God” that proceeds forth from his presence, to fill the immensity of space and in our modern revelations called “the Light of Christ” (cf. D&C 88:6-12), he becomes truly God manifested as personage in the flesh; and by his Spirit he is also imminent in the world, by which we mean, everywhere present by his Spirit, and everywhere present with all the attributes of God, not only as creative force, **but also as world sustaining power** intelligence-inspiring power, the “light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (D&C 93:2); also the vital force—life-giving power, “in him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4); and preeminently Jesus is the love-manifested power of God in the world.

We learn God, then, through the revelation he has given of himself in Christ Jesus our Lord; and knowing him as the very Son of God, and the complete revelation of all that can be thought upon as God, who can withhold love, or refuse to obey God when God is revealed in Jesus Christ? Thus revealed it is not difficult to accept and obey the first part of the great commandment, namely, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37); for it is but a question of knowing him, **and then** love will follow as effect follows cause.

Love of man. “And the second **⟨commandment⟩** is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:39).

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Just how comprehensive is this? Who is my neighbor? In the incident of the man who fell among ~~the~~ thieves enroute from Jerusalem to Jericho and was stripped of all, and passed up by the Priest and the Levite but helped by the Samaritan—***one of the outlawed from fellowship with Israel***—as related by the Christ, the idea is conveyed that he who is helpful to us in our misfortunes is truly our neighbor, a friend in need. But that is only half the story, he who needs our help is also our neighbor; and if this interpretation be accepted, then it would go far towards bringing all men within the definition of “our neighbor”; and indeed, that is undoubtedly intended to be the law. It is not merely those who help us that fulfill the law numerically ***as neighbor***; the great principle is love of man, sympathetic interest in all men, so that the great generalization of the Christ as to the greatest commandment in both parts of it would be, love of God, and love of man, without limitation. This being true, we are confronted at first glance with a law extremely difficult to comply with—love of man, love of men—love of all men! It was pointed out in our treatment of the first part of this law, that it was easy to fulfil it, in that it only required a knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ to have love follow as a matter of course. For to know God is to love him. But when it comes to loving men—and meaning by that love of all men, the obstacles seem insuperable. How can we love all men, when so many of them are repulsive? Repulsive both in person and in the nature of them—vile, many of them, in every way; filthy in apparel and in their bodies; vicious by nature, thieves, drunkards, liars, deceitful, treacherous, riotous, boisterous, revengeful, stupid, hopeless in depravity, contemptible, without natural affection, lecherous, and if there is any other thing that makes for badness, some of them have it, and have it all! How shall we love these? Is it not unreasonable that the law of God should require us to love them? And if such characters be included in the commandments to “love men,” how can we live the law? Undoubtedly God loves them, but not their vileness, not their sin, for the scripture informs us that he “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (D&C 1:31). The scriptures represent him also as abhorring sin, and yet while condemning the sins, he may nevertheless, and does, love the soul even of the sinner. And why? And how? Because God looks into the depths, and knows while men are sinful and vile, yet they can depart from sin, they can repent, and have created in them a new heart and a new mind; they can be born again, and change their attitude in relation to the whole ***of*** life. They may be

washed clean and stand upright in justice, in righteousness, in truth. So God loves them, not because of their sin, nor in spite of their sin, but because of what they may become. He views them in the light of their possibilities. There are values within them that are hidden from their fellowmen, hidden from themselves even; but clearly seen of God. The outside, aye, and most of the inside, may be utterly vile and repulsive, but within it all there is that which, if only it can be reached and awakened, may start a life that will work from within outward, sloughing off the vileness of both inside and outside, until it shall cleanse itself, even as rolling water by movement and sunshine and atmosphere, purifies itself; and out of the chrysalis of sinful man may at last evolve a regenerated man, a sinner born again and made a child of God. God all the while sees these possibilities, he sees his own image, his own divine nature under all that mass of accumulated unrighteousness and moral filth, and sees and loves his image even there.^d And God's task through the gospel is to call that image forth and develop it.

The end of the argument is that man, if he would keep the second part of the great commandment, and love his neighbor, he must learn to look upon his fellowman as God looks upon him; and view him in the light of his possibilities, and extend the neighborly hand that shall draw him out of his fallen state and make him realize that he is a son of God. Let those who are converted assume no pose of self-righteousness in their attitude of mind towards those who may be esteemed as fallen, and too frequently as hopeless. Rather let this be the attitude: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Remember, too, the case of the pharisee and the publican, and know that the sinner, conscious of his sins and struggling by confession to abandon them, may be more acceptable to God than the more righteous person, proudly conscious and over-conscious of his few virtues, and extolling himself into a smug self-righteousness.

Identity of principle in love of God and love for man. The same principle is at work in this second part of the Christ's summary of the law as in the first, namely: first, to love God, it is necessary to know him, and knowing him, love follows: and second, love of man—the race—will come by knowing him, and knowing him in the light of

^dRoberts seems to miss an important point in his discussion of why God loves all people. Certainly God sees the potential they have for becoming like him, but more importantly they are his children, and he loves them as any parent loves even the most wayward child. God's love extends even to Lucifer and his other children who fell from their first estate, although they have forfeited their potential to become like their Father.

his possibilities, what he may become; love will follow, accompanied, too, by a determination to do the neighbor-act; namely, to assist in his redemption, work with the Christ in the salvation of men, remembering that Christ died for sinners. And “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation ⟨of⟩ [for] our sins” (1 Jn. 4:10). And the fullness of the law is “he who loveth God loveth his brother also” (1 Jn. 4:21). That is to say, coming to know the first part of the law and living it, will lead to knowing the second part of the one law, and living that, too. For surely it would be a solecism to affect love of God, and then not love the things God loves. And so the conclusion of the whole matter is: those who would be sons of God, saints of God, must learn to go the whole distance with the law—love of God, and love of man; otherwise there would be a halting by the way. On these two commandments, united as parts of one law, hang all the law and all the prophets. Hence the scripture: “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” As St. Paul so well puts it:

Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, [Thou shalt not bear false witness], Thou shalt not covet; and if there **be** any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Rom. 13:8-10)