

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 67 – PAUL AND THE LAW]

We have been looking at the subject of the law in relation to the development of spiritual maturity in God's holy people.

- ◆ The last three sessions have focused on six reasons why the New Covenant instituted with Christ's blood is so much more effective in producing the character and nature of God in His people than the Mosaic Covenant or Torah.
- ◆ The last of these six points introduced the concept of "instructions in holiness" to distinguish them from the Torah.
- ◆ This was to show that New Covenant believers were expected to develop spiritual maturity in order to imitate their Savior Jesus Christ.
- ◆ These six points were to address the seeming confusion and conflict regarding the law in the age of the New Covenant.
- ◆ This confusion was magnified in those areas where there was a mixture of both Jew and Gentile converts in the congregation.
- ◆ The apostle Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, was the one who had to manage the transition from the Old to the New Covenant.
- ◆ However, there are times where Paul himself speaks positively about the law and times when he speaks negatively about it.

So when we read Paul's seemingly conflicting views about commandments and the law, we need to bear the following two points in mind.

- ◆ 1) When Paul speaks about the commandments of God, he is not trying to slide the old law in through the back door. Rather he is focusing on the need for believers to develop those characteristics that reflect the nature and character of their heavenly Father.
- ◆ To understand this principle better, we need to go back to the Torah.
- ◆ To start with, as we have mentioned before, we need to make an important distinction between the various aspects of the law that make up the Torah.
- ◆ There were the sacrificial and worship laws associated with the tabernacle. There were identity rituals like circumcision and food laws. And there were laws to guide the ethical and moral behaviour of the people like the Ten Commandments.
- ◆ As we saw earlier, many of the aspects of the Mosaic Covenant were future oriented as they pointed forward to the coming Messiah.
- ◆ So when the Messiah arrived, many of the aspects of the old law became redundant simply because they were fulfilled by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44).
- ◆ For instance, the sacrifices were no longer necessary as they were replaced by the one sacrifice that really mattered, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God (Hebrews 10:1-18).
- ◆ Like the sacrifices, temple worship was transferred from a physical location to Jesus Christ.
- ◆ ***John 2:19-21 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body.***
- ◆ The Aaronic priesthood was replaced by the high priesthood after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:11-28).
- ◆ The weekly, annual and festival celebrations too were made redundant when Christ came and Tabernacled with us became our Passover Lamb, our Unleavened Bread, our Atonement and our spiritual Sabbath Rest.
- ◆ ***Colossians 2:16-17 These aspects of the Law were simply shadows and pointed to the reality, Jesus Christ. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.***
- ◆ The focus shifted from worshipping the shadows, sacrifices, rituals, holy days, to worshipping the reality, Jesus Christ.
- ◆ As we learned earlier, those aspects of the law, such as those relating to rituals such as circumcision, dietary and clothing laws that were to identify God's people were replaced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9,14).

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 67 – PAUL AND THE LAW]

So it's not as though the intent behind these laws are done away with, instead the spotlight and the object of our worship is shifted so that they rightly focus on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for their saving work.

- ◆ To use the Sabbath as an example, the focus has shifted from a physical day of rest (the shadow) to Jesus (the reality) who provides us with spiritual rest.
- ◆ So New Covenant believers are still Sabbath worshipers in that they now focus on Jesus Christ rather than a 24-hour "shadow" which as we just read was to point to the One who would give us true spiritual rest.
- ◆ New Covenant believers no longer needed a weekly reminder as to the source of their salvation as they would be reminded daily by the indwelling Holy Spirit of Jesus' saving work.
- ◆ Hard-hearted Israelites did not have this divine luxury; they only had a "shadow," a weekly reminder and didn't even know of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ The emphasis has moved from being Sabbath "keepers" to Sabbath "worshipers" as we worship the One who has provided us with spiritual rest, and this is something we should do every day.
- ◆ Emphasis is moved from "Remember the Sabbath day," to "Do this in remembrance of ME."
- ◆ It's important to emphasise the central aspect of Christianity is the worship of Jesus Christ, not the law.

However, there were aspects of the Mosaic Covenant that were a reflection of the nature and character of God.

- ◆ Of course these characteristics of God are eternal and to render them obsolete would be sacrilegious.
- ◆ So when we consider the Mosaic Covenant, we need to make a distinction between those laws that were futuristic and ritualistic and those that are eternal and reflect the nature and character of God.
- ◆ It is this distinction we need to take into consideration when we read Paul's statements regarding the law such as 1 Corinthians 7:19.
- ◆ ***1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.***
- ◆ Notice the distinction Paul makes between rituals and those commands that reflect the nature and character of God.
- ◆ External rituals like circumcision, dietary rules, holy locations, sacrifices and worship days served their intended purpose to constantly remind the Israelites with a fallen nature they were God's holy people.
- ◆ However now with the introduction of the New Covenant where God literally inhabits His people through the Holy Spirit, these external rituals are no longer necessary (***worship in spirit and in truth***, John 4:21-24).
- ◆ However, the commands revolving around God's nature and character that are eternal in nature remain.
- ◆ Paul's support of those aspects of the law which reflect the nature and character of God is unwavering as reflected in the second part of his statement in 1 Corinthians 7:19.
- ◆ However, it's a totally different matter when it comes to the ritualistic aspects of the Mosaic Covenant in the age of the New Covenant.
- ◆ There is no question where he stands on these matters as reflected in the book of Galatians, where he openly condemns the apostle Peter for separating himself from the Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14), and wishing those Jews who insist on circumcising the Gentiles that they go ahead and emasculate themselves (Galatians 5:12).
- ◆ What we see here is a clear distinction between those aspects of the law where there is a continuation, and those that are discontinued in the age of the New Covenant.
- ◆ It is simply those matters that relate to the nature and character of God which are continued while the rest are discontinued.
- ◆ ***Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***
- ◆ This chapter in Romans clearly distinguishes between those matters which are "essential" (matters that relate to God's eternal nature and character, ***"righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"***) and those that are "nonessential," (***"eating and drinking"***) rituals and temporal laws that pointed to the futuristic aspects of the New Covenant.
- ◆ To go back to 1 Corinthians 7:9 where Paul says, ***"Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing"*** you can continue to practice circumcision if you want, but don't attach any religious significance to it, nor try to impose it on others.

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 67 – PAUL AND THE LAW]

- ◆ It's the same principle with other Old Covenant rituals including the Sabbath day. You can observe it if you like, but don't attach any religious significance to it, nor try to impose it on others.

With the coming of the New Covenant, God through the works of both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit has instituted a method that is so much more effective in developing the nature and character of God in His people than what went before.

- ◆ ***Hebrews 7:18-19 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.***
- ◆ Christians need to trust this new system which God, at great price to Himself has instituted, more than the ineffective Old Covenant.
- ◆ As mentioned, we have the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ and the writings and teaching of the New Testament to guide us so that we too can begin to reflect the nature and character of our holy God.
- ◆ This is not to negate the important lessons and instructions on God's holiness we can learn from the examples recorded for us in the Old Testament as the New Covenant is a continuation of the old in that it is the womb for the birth of the New Covenant and helps reveal God's plan of salvation for all mankind.
- ◆ Paul says as much in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
- ◆ ***2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.***
- ◆ Couple of things to notice here.
- ◆ First, the scriptures Paul was referring to were the Old Testament scriptures as the New Testament church only had a handful of letters mostly from Paul at this stage in its development.
- ◆ Second thing to notice is Paul's use of the term, "***instructions in righteousness***" or as we have termed it, "instructions in holiness."
- ◆ And what is the purpose of this "instruction"?
- ◆ ***V.17 That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.***
- ◆ As mentioned before, the development of spiritual maturity is not an option for believers; we are to develop the nature and character of our heavenly Father if we are to be effective in representing Him.

Also for those worried about the trashing of the Ten Commandments, we need to remember the instructions of the New Covenant upholds the same values that lay behind the Ten Commandment, that is, love for God and love for neighbour (Luke 10:25-27).

- ◆ Remember sin is much more damaging than simply breaking the law. It is much more than just an affront to our holy God as it threatens the whole concept of what God stands for, intimate relationships based on His love.
- ◆ Jesus does the same thing in His sermon on the mount. But notice He also goes much further and expands on those values because they reflect the nature and character of our holy God.
- ◆ ***Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.***
- ◆ Also New Covenant Jews with an Old Covenant background had a distinct advantage in matters of holiness as is evident from Paul's message to the predominantly gentile Corinthian church.
- ◆ Paul, as a converted Jew had a better handle on these matters of holiness than the pagan Corinthians.
- ◆ ***1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were.***
- ◆ A Jew under the Mosaic Covenant would have known about these issues as they are addressed in the Ten Commandments even though he may not have lived up to them very well because of his fallen nature.
- ◆ Mind you, the Jews had their own problems with the New Covenant, which Paul also had to address, namely issues such as "faith" and "grace."

So with the replacement of the Mosaic Covenant by the New Covenant we are not left without a structure or form to teach us the ways of God.

- ◆ Our new freedom in Christ is not license to live a life of self-indulgence.

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 67 – PAUL AND THE LAW]

- ◆ Central to this new structure is the source of life itself, the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ ***Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.***
 - ◆ And as prophesied in Ezekiel 36:26 this new source of ethics is one that arises not from without, that is, the law, but from within, the heart of the individual under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ And as Paul goes on to suggest in this section of Galatians, we are to renounce those anti-social behaviours of the flesh (Galatians 5:13-21) and instead replace them with the fruits of the spirit which are community-building qualities (Galatians 5:22-25).
 - ◆ And finally Paul goes on to suggest that the One we are to imitate under this new structure is the One who loved us, Jesus Christ.
 - ◆ ***Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.***
- So as far as our salvation is concerned, the Old Covenant law, mercifully, has been replaced by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:10-14), and the development of holiness in our lives is in the hands of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:4).***
- ◆ So it's important to understand that when Paul speaks about the commandments of God, he is not trying to slide the old law in through the back door.
 - ◆ Rather he is focusing on the need for believers to develop those characteristics that reflect the nature and character of their heavenly Father.
 - ◆ And frankly when we think about it, the list of the fruits of the spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22 are a much better reflection of the nature and character of God than the Ten Commandments.
 - ◆ One reveals sinful human behaviour while the other reveals divine characteristics.
 - ◆ And as we learned, one is directed at the sinful nature, the other at the new godly nature.
- To summarise, when we consider Paul's statements regarding the law or commandments, we need to make a distinction between those laws that were futuristic and ritualistic and those that are eternal and reflect the nature and character of God.***
- ◆ Whereas in the past, the focus of worship centred on shadows such as sacrifices, locations, days, foods, etc., now the emphasis is rightly focused on the One these rituals and laws pointed to, Jesus Christ.
 - ◆ In addition, a New Covenant believer will strive to emulate the nature and character of their holy God and use those sections of scripture in both the Old and New Testaments which do this as their guide to develop God's holiness in their own lives.
 - ◆ Next time we look at the second consideration we need to understand when we read Paul's seemingly contradictory statements on the law.