

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 68 – AN APPEAL TO THE NEW NATURE]

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

- ◆ Last time we focused on the first of two points we need to bear in mind when Paul speaks about commandments and the law in the age of the New Covenant.
- ◆ These points are 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 which reflect the nature and character of their heavenly Father.
- ◆ New Covenant believers are the building blocks of the spiritual temple God the Father is going to inhabit and as He is going to share fellowship with them they have been given the resources through the Holy Spirit to develop the same godly characteristics of the godhead itself within the framework of grace.
- ◆ To summarize what we covered last time, 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 centered 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.
- ◆ 2) The instructions of holiness of the New Covenant are directed at those led by the Spirit, endowed with the new nature and have the mind of Christ.
- ◆ We saw back in 1 Tim 1:9-10 how the old law was directed at those with the fallen nature.
- ◆ ***1 Timothy 1:9-10 We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,¹⁰ for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.***
- ◆ You will remember the law was introduced to reveal and magnify the vast contrast between a holy God and sinful mankind with the aim of bringing us to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:20).
- ◆ In contrast to the Torah, what we see with the New Covenant is what we have termed "instructions in holiness" are directed at those with the new nature to guide them into the good works God has prepared for them (Ephesians 2:10).
- ◆ The death and resurrection of Jesus along with the coming of the Holy Spirit has brought about a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), with a brand new nature under the control of the "Spirit" rather than the "flesh" (Romans 8:5-17).
- ◆ As mentioned earlier, the motivation to think and act as God's holy people with the new nature comes from a deep gratitude for what God has done for us rather than one of dutiful obedience.
- ◆ Instead of "fear" to motivate us, now through the Holy Spirit, the "love of Christ" compels us.
- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.***
- ◆ But notice the dramatic change of orientation in the nature that takes place in a new creation believer who has crucified the flesh.

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- ◆ **V.15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.**
 - ◆ No longer are we to live individualistic, self-centred lives according to the “flesh.” Instead we are being transformed so we no longer live for ourselves, but for the One who died and rose for us.
- So under the New Covenant we are dealing with “Spirit” oriented believers with a totally new nature.**
- ◆ As such, there is a dramatic shift in the way the “instructions in holiness” of the New Covenant are presented in contrast with the way the “commands of Torah” are presented.
 - ◆ There is a decided shift in both the tone and language, and the expectations.
 - ◆ No longer are the commands presented in the negative, “Thou shalt not” tone designed for the fallen nature, but rather as an appeal to the new nature to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ We touched on this briefly last time when we asked the question, “Do the Ten Commandments or the list of the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5 better represent the nature and character of God?”
 - ◆ We saw the Ten Commandments reveals sinful human behavior while the Fruits of the Spirit reveal God’s divine characteristics.
 - ◆ The same characteristics God wants His new children to learn via the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ This change of tone is clearly evident in both the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the authors of the New Testament.
 - ◆ Jesus’ sermon on the mount is a good example of this change as Jesus outlines godly qualities that will soon be available to those led by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 5:1-11).
 - ◆ We should take note of the change in tone and language in comparison to the Ten Commandments.
 - ◆ His parables on the Good Samaritan and the prodigal son are prime examples in which He contrasts the response of those living under the Torah and how one living with the mind of Christ would respond.
 - ◆ In the case of the Samaritan, the priest and Levite put the temple regulations of the law ahead of human need.
 - ◆ In the story of the prodigal, the older brother was more concerned with his entitlements than the redemption of his brother.
 - ◆ Jesus’ response to the handling of the woman caught in adultery contrasts the response of those living under the “law” who wanted to “condemn” and “stone” her with one living under “grace” and “forgiveness.”
 - ◆ In effect He is saying, “You are reflecting my nature when you act like the Good Samaritan, the prodigal father, when you forgive others, when you are poor in spirit, when you mourn, when you’re meek, when you’re merciful, etc.”
 - ◆ These are blessed events because they are divine qualities.
 - ◆ It is only God living in us that can bring about such a dramatic change in our lives.
- Another change we notice with the New Covenant “instructions in holiness” is the consideration of one’s individual actions on the greater church community and the world.**
- ◆ The Holy Spirit is the spirit of love, fellowship and community, which means He is in the business of bringing people together.
 - ◆ Emphasis once again is on preserving relationships.
 - ◆ And just as Jesus became a sacrifice for us in order to restore the relationship between a holy God and sinful mankind, so at times He will ask those who are more spiritually mature to “bear with those who are weak” for the purpose of promoting unity in the community.
 - ◆ Notice this example from 1 Corinthians 8 where Paul is addressing the subject of meat offered to idols.
 - ◆ **1 Corinthians 8:9-11 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹²When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.**
 - ◆ Certain behaviors may be lawful under the New Covenant, but if it has a negative impact on the greater community the loving thing to do may be to sacrifice your individual right, eating meat offered to idols, for the greater good of not offending the weaker brother in the community.

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- ◆ In other words, as in this case, unity of the body is more important than exercising one's individual freedom.
- ◆ Again we see those issues related to the nature and character of God, in this case not putting a stumbling block in the way of a believing brother are "essential" under the New Covenant.

Not only is there a change in the tone and language, but also in the expectation of the development of spiritual maturity in God's holy people.

- ◆ The expectation of the development of God's holiness in His people is not left to one's discretion (1 Corinthians 7:19).
- ◆ Paul said that the aim of his ministry was to bring about the "obedience that comes from faith" (Romans 1:5; Romans 16:26).
- ◆ The apostle John too, speaks about the need for believers to grow in spiritual maturity.
- ◆ ***1 John 2:3-6 We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.***
- ◆ The expectation of both Jesus and the New Testament authors is for believers to develop spiritual maturity and to replicate the qualities of their heavenly Father in their lives.
- ◆ The whole purpose of the New Covenant is to produce a holy people within whom God can come and dwell.
- ◆ And God has provided us with the means to achieve this goal.
- ◆ Christ through His incarnation and atonement has made us His holy people, but the granting of the Holy Spirit produces in His people the holiness Torah could not.
- ◆ These internal changes brought about by the gift of the Spirit are to be our guide in spiritual matters under the New Covenant now that it has superseded the Old Covenant.
- ◆ The life-giving Spirit applies the redemptive work of Christ to us as well as transforms us from within so that our actions now match who we are in Christ.
- ◆ ***Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.***
- ◆ Something remarkable happens to our old way of thinking when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and mind.
- ◆ It's interesting to compare the expectations of those living under Torah with those living under the New Covenant.
- ◆ The best one could achieve under Torah and the fallen nature according to the book of Proverbs was "human wisdom."
- ◆ By trial and error, by observation, and the dubious reliance on human discipline, one might possibly avoid some of the painful pitfalls of this life.
- ◆ But now under the New Covenant, with the new nature under the guidance of Christ, whom Paul calls, "***the power of God and the wisdom of God***" (1 Corinthians 1:24) we see wonderful new possibilities not available under the Old, namely the characteristics of God Himself.
- ◆ ***Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.***
- ◆ This is also why the "faith, hope and love" of 1 Corinthians 13 is presented as part of the New Covenant.
- ◆ The Holy Spirit as God, brings to our lives the very nature and character of the godhead.
- ◆ God does not need a law to direct His actions. His actions flow from His being. It is this same nature in us through the Holy Spirit that now directs our thoughts and actions.

This is why Jesus in addressing His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion gives us His new commandment to go along with the introduction of the New Covenant.

- ◆ ***John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."***
- ◆ We will look at this new command next time.