

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 69 – A NEW COMMAND]

We have been looking at two points to bear in mind when we read Paul's seemingly conflicting views about commandments and the law.

- ◆ 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 summarize what we have covered so far, 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 Timothy 1:9-10 how the old law was directed at those with the fallen nature.
- ◆ 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).

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.
- ◆ Something remarkable happens to our old way of thinking when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and mind.
- ◆ 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, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.***
- ◆ 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. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."***
- ◆ This new commandment of Jesus was to reflect the dramatic change in mankind's circumstances brought about by Christ's saving work and the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ What was new about this command is that it went further than the two great commandments of the Torah, love for God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and love for neighbour (Leviticus 19:18).
- ◆ Love is still at the centre of the command, but the degree of the depth of that love is what has changed.
- ◆ Whereas the old was to "love your neighbour as yourself," a somewhat selfish motive, under this new command we are to love "as I have loved you."
- ◆ It is in effect saying, we move from a limited "self" love that comes from the human heart to a "divine" love that comes from the heart of God.
- ◆ Now to try to live up to the old command was bad enough, but to give this new command to one still governed by the fleshly fallen nature was to condemn them to a life of sheer hopelessness and despair.

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- ◆ The question is, “Are we Christians with the new nature going to be any more successful than them in fulfilling this new command?”
 - ◆ And the obvious answer to this question is “no” as no one is going to match the vast love Jesus has for His children.
 - ◆ However, it is also in Jesus that we are able to obey this impossible command.
 - ◆ Remember it is Jesus who has died for us (Romans 5:8); It is Jesus’ living a perfect life so His righteousness could be attributed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21); we no longer live, but Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20); it is by His faith that we live (Galatians 2:20); who sits at the Father’s right hand and intercedes for us as our heavenly representative (Romans 8:34).
 - ◆ Just as our imperfect faith, prayers, worship go through the interceding hands of Jesus before they are presented to the Father, so does our imperfect obedience where they are wrapped in Jesus’ perfect obedience.
 - ◆ This is the blessing of living under the “grace” of the New Covenant.
 - ◆ Jesus didn’t return to heaven because He needed a break after the ordeal of the cross. He is very active interceding for us.
 - ◆ Mustard seed faith is okay! Moaning, unintelligible prayers are okay! Out of tune worship is okay! Imperfect obedience to this new command is okay! Muddling along is okay. Jesus will, and already has, taken care of it!
 - ◆ This is the reason the law of sin and death has lost its power to condemn us.
 - ◆ **Romans 8:34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.**
 - ◆ We don’t have to worry and beat ourselves up unnecessarily when we fall short or are condemned by others or by the “accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12:10).
 - ◆ The power to accuse or condemn has been taken away because we now live under grace rather than the law.
 - ◆ Unlike the law, which required perfection, no quantitative measure of perfection is placed on a Christian as Jesus has already achieved perfection on our behalf.
 - ◆ That frees us from the pressure to be perfect.
 - ◆ **Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**
 - ◆ That “yoke of slavery” was the uncompromising demands of the law.
- Having said that, we should not underestimate what we can achieve and has been achieved down through the centuries by Christians with the new nature willing to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit.**
- ◆ We may not be an Augustine, a Martin Luther, a John Calvin, a Billy Graham or Mother Teresa, but we can and should do something.
 - ◆ These servants of God were successful not because they necessarily prayed or studied more than we do, but because they received incredible spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit and yielded to His leading.
 - ◆ Under the empowering guidance of the Holy Spirit all sorts of wonderful opportunities become possible.
 - ◆ 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 law.
 - ◆ But this guiding of the Spirit needs to work hand in hand with the other guiding aspect of the gospel, the Word.
 - ◆ The Word of course is Jesus Christ, which takes us back to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, or as we have labeled them, “instructions in holiness.”
 - ◆ The Holy Spirit and the Word are the two guiding arms of the gospel.
 - ◆ As these two arms are always in agreement it guards against the selfish tendency to mistake the leading of our own interests with that of the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ We grow in spiritual maturity by studying God’s Word and listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ This is what leads to the development of a holy conscience in God’s people (Hebrews 9:14).
- However, with all this talk about instructions in holiness, don’t for a moment think this contributes in any way to our salvation.**
- ◆ Our salvation has been achieved solely on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, not on any contribution on our part, before or after our conversion (Galatians 2:15-16).
 - ◆ So a Christian is free from the law as a way of securing our salvation (Romans 6:14; 7:4,6; 1 Corinthians 9:20).

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- ◆ However, after the Spirit has brought us to conversion, there is an expectation on believers of leaving behind the crutch of the law and to submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit so that we begin to imitate the spiritual maturity of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ ***Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.***
- ◆ The law of Christ is none other than the eternal characteristics of God Himself.
- ◆ Paul distinguishes the difference between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ in 2 Corinthians 3.
- ◆ In fact, Paul refers to the Mosaic Law as a hindrance to the work of the Spirit as He reveals Jesus to us.
- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 3:15-18 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.***
- ◆ Martin Luther had an interesting way of distinguishing between life under the law and life under the Spirit.
- ◆ He said, the law focuses on "our" works, while the Spirit focuses on the core of the gospel, "Christ's" works.
- ◆ The New Covenant especially in Paul's teachings, contrasts "the law and the works of the law" with the "grace of Christ and the gospel of salvation."
- ◆ These in turn leads either to "freedom in the Spirit" or "bondage under the law" (Galatians 4:24-26).
- ◆ It is this freedom in Christ that allows us to approach God in the joy and grace of the New Covenant in contrast to the subservience of the Old Covenant.
- ◆ This is why the symbol of the Old Covenant, "Torah," is replaced with the New Covenant symbol of "Christ."
- ◆ As this verse indicates, the veil of Moses that covers our hearts, like the veil in the temple, needs to be rent asunder so we can experience the saving grace of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ What we also need to understand is, in those rare moments when we do imitate our Savior, it is not a result of our human efforts that has brought about this result, but rather the Spirit's empowering work as He lives in us.
- ◆ We are simply weak human vessels through whom God manifests His grace and power.
- ◆ So again, the credit and glory goes to God.

So hopefully through all of this we have addressed some of the conflicting statements especially by Paul concerning the role of the law in the age of the New Covenant.

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ It is simply those matters, which relate to the nature and character of God that are continued while the rest are discontinued.
- ◆ We also need to understand that under the covenant of grace we should regard those aspects of the New Testament usually labelled "commands," rather as, "instructions in holiness" given to believers with a new nature in developing the holiness of their Savior rather than "laws" designed to condemn unbelievers with the fallen nature.

When Jesus said "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17) we can now see the full implication of what He meant.

- ◆ First, He fulfilled the law in the sense He was the One, the Messiah, to whom those futuristic aspects of the law pointed, our Passover Lamb, our Atonement, our High Priest, etc.
- ◆ Second, He fulfilled them in the sense He obeyed them perfectly so His righteousness could be imputed to all mankind (Romans 4:3-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
- ◆ Third, with His revolutionary teachings and parables He identified the true intent of the law which in reality was to see past the law to the nature and character of the One behind the law, the One who describes Himself as "love."
- ◆ The law only revealed a limited picture of God. It was not until Jesus joined us in our humanity that we got to see God face to face.
- ◆ God's purpose in making us in His image is not simply to make us obedient to the law.
- ◆ Paul says he was "faultless" in obedience to the law, yet he went around persecuting the church (Philippians 3:4-6).

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- ◆ So we can be obedient for very selfish motives, like securing God's blessings or avoiding a curse (Deuteronomy 28).
- ◆ God's ultimate purpose is to teach us to love "as I have loved you" and to "live love willingly."
- ◆ ***Romans 13:8-10 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.***
- ◆ Each one of these commands mentioned here goes back to preserving relationships; ***"Love does no harm to a neighbor."***
- ◆ Allowing the Holy Spirit to develop the loving characteristics of God in us is the goal and purpose of our salvation.
- ◆ Through the saving work of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit, God has paved the way for us to love and share in the life and love of the godhead itself.