

The Words of a Covenant

Part 1 - Prologue To The Law

March 22, 1998

Romans 13:8-14

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.⁹ For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

11 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. NKJV

- **Introduction**

With our minds confused by modernity, we frequently fail to think of that which has gone before and we think that what we see is all that there has been. The old things are never as good as the new things and yet, without an understanding of the old things many times it is impossible to correctly understand the new things. Such is the case with covenants in the Scriptures. We cannot understand the new covenant in which we enjoy the full revelation of grace unless we understand the covenants given earlier.

In this series although we will be studying the Law of God, we must remember that these laws, also referred to as The Words of God, are really the words of the covenant made by God through Moses with the people of Israel. Properly understood, our study of the Law will actually be a study in grace. Therefore, a misunderstanding of law will lead to a misunderstanding of grace. A low view of law will result in a low view of grace.

- **The Law as Love**

- The term "law" is used in many different ways in the Scriptures. Sometimes it refers to all of God's commands, sometimes it refers to the Ten Commandments and other times it refers to the curse of the law which brings the wrath of God. However, central to our understanding of what is being spoken of when we see or hear the word law is the understanding that the law of God can be *summarized*. This is what our Lord does and Paul reiterates in the verses above. All of the law of God may be summarized as love God and love your neighbor. Even this can be further summarized as simply love. This is important because it gives us a direct connection of the law with love that we otherwise might not observe; the law of God is love. This love is poured out by God in us through His Spirit (Romans 5:5) which is the same as saying that God has poured obedience to the law of God into our hearts.
- Next, we see that the way we love our neighbor is by "putting on Christ". Christ was not the perfect abolition of the law, rather, He was the perfect fulfillment of the law. If we are clothed with Him we fulfill the law perfectly and we love our God and we love our neighbor. The law of God is an expression of the love of God and is made perfect by the righteous fulfillment in Christ. How then do we "put on Christ"? This is done by being in Him by belief in Him through faith. Ephesians 1:13-2:9.

- **The Law as Words of a Covenant**

- When we consider the Ten Commandments give by God to Moses, we must not consider them as ten isolated moral truths but rather the terms of a covenant. These were not just words written on a tablet but rather a charter of a covenant document containing blessings and curses. This covenant is made between a sovereign God who declares His glory in the shaking of a mountain and his own special people whom He called to Himself. Exodus 19
- The second thing to consider is that the Scriptures refer to the Ten Commandments as the words of the covenant made with Moses. (Exodus 34:27-28; Deut. 5:1-5) Yet, the Lord gave Moses many more laws concerning sacrifices, cleansing, feasts, civil order and punishments such that the entire law of God occupies many chapters in the Bible. How can the Ten Commandments be then the words of the covenant? Because they are themselves a summary of the law. They are not separate and distinct from the detailed instruction given to Moses, rather they are a summary of all the detailed ordinances. Therefore, we cannot separate them in our minds and we must know that the Law of God refers to *both* the detailed commandments and the summarized list of 10.

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- **The Law as Liberty**

And God spoke all these words, saying: ²"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. NKJV

- God declares that He is *their* God. There is a valid sense in which He is the God of everything because He is the creator. But He is the God of the Elect in a special and tender way because He freed them from their bondage and, as we know today, He purchased a people for Himself by giving His own Son as an atonement securing their freedom.
- God reminds the people that He is the one who freed them from slavery. He is not the God who brought them into slavery. Remember, the context in which this covenant law was given is a context of *freedom*. This law did not bring them into slavery but instead this law was the words of a covenant of freedom from slavery and bondage. James 1:25, 2 Cor. 3:17
- This law of God liberates, yet the law of man enslaves. Every man has a master and therefore law is inescapable. When you find the source of a man's law you will find that man's God. Upon what basis does a man make moral decisions? If you identify that basis you will discover what he worships. Either we live by the words of God or we live by the words of something else. Unfortunately, even those who love God (sometimes unintentionally) demonstrate their hatred for the law of God by claiming they stand in grace and that the law no longer has application to them.
- **The Three Uses of the Law**
 - **A Tutor for the Unregenerate** - The law of God was given to make sin evident and to make us aware of our need for redemption. We would not know what the Good News was unless we knew what the bad news is. The bad news is that we have all broken all of the law and deserve death. This perfect, unswerving, unmerciful law should drive us to grace. Therefore, the law points us to Christ through faith. (Romans 3:20; 4:15; 5:13, 20; 7:7-11; Gal. 3:19-24)
 - **A Punishment for the Degenerate** - The law of God was given to provide the civil magistrate the mandate for administering fines and penalties as punishment for evil. Although the law cannot change the hearts of men the punishments of the law can restrain evil and make it possible to live in a society peacefully. (Romans 13:3-4; 1 Tim. 1:8-11)
 - **A Pattern for the Regenerate** - The law of God was given to instruct the children of God how they should act toward God and toward each other through love.