

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The ten commandments set forth in Exodus 20: 1-17 are a distinct body of truth. They are separated from the rest of the law by such words as: "**And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments**" (Ex. 34:28). See also Deu. 4:13 and 10:4. This distinction was made because these commandments were the ten terms or obligations under the covenant that God made with the people of Israel. If the terms were fulfilled the descendants of Israel would become a peculiar treasure above all peoples, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. No more advantageous agreement was ever offered to a body of people than the one proposed by God to Israel at Mount Sinai. Israel made no mistake in accepting it. The mistake came about when the people of Israel failed to keep the terms of it.

As already stated the terms of the covenant were made known in what is called in Scripture "the ten commandments." And there is no single subject in the Bible concerning which there are as many misconceptions and misunderstandings as there are concerning this decalogue. These errors in understanding arise out of a persistent tendency in Christendom to make the ten commandments, the Lord's prayer, and the twenty-third Psalm to be the three essential portions of the Word of God. Since some commands to keep, prayers to say, and psalms to sing are essential factors in all religions, many feel quite "Christian" if their commands, prayers, and psalms come from the Bible.

If men would only recognize that the ten commandments were the terms of a covenant (agreement) made between God and Israel, most misconceptions concerning the law would disappear. The truth concerning the ten commandments is almost completely ignored, in spite of the plain declaration in Deuteronomy 4:13: "**And He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even ten commandments: and He wrote them on two tables of stone.**"

Inasmuch as in this world it is generally believed that the favor and blessing God can be obtained by keeping certain laws and doing certain works, men find great

delight in such commands as **"touch not, taste not, handle not"** (Cot. 2:21). All religions seem to have two principles in common: obey the rules we lay down and do the works that we prescribe. They differ only in what rules are to be obeyed and what works are to be done.

This is where the faith that is related to Jesus Christ differs from all religions. It says, **"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath"** (Col. 2: 16). Commitment to Jesus Christ sets one free, gives liberty, and offers its greatest blessings **"to him that worketh not but believeth on Him Who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness"** (Rom. 4:5).

It is thought by the vast majority in Christendom today that the Bible is a book of ethics: that is a book of morals, given to mankind for the specific purpose of telling all men what is right and what is wrong, what to do and what not to do under all circumstances, and especially what religious rituals and ceremonies are to be performed in the worship of God. Thus they open the Bible expecting to find all these things set forth by precept and example. However, they find none of these things set forth in Genesis or the first half of Exodus. But when they reach the middle of Exodus and find a short portion where most of the passages begin with "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," they feel they have at last found what they were looking for - a rule of life, a code of ethics, a list of all things that are moral and immoral.

Since very few matters of conduct and life are touched on in the ten commandments, many have set themselves to find in them by amplification, extension, and projection a rule for every possible moral situation that one may face in a lifetime. I have seen the writings of some men who were able to see the explicit directive, "Go to church on Sunday," in the words of the fourth commandment: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."

The great Abraham Lincoln once said: "The Bible is the greatest book in the world. If it were not for the ten commandments written in it we would not know the difference between right and wrong."

With all due respect to Lincoln, he was dead wrong in the idea that our morals come solely from the ten commandments. We need to take note here, if we follow the dates given in Archbishop Ussher's chronology, the human race had been upon the earth at least 2500 years before the ten commandments were given by God to Israel. Can we logically believe that the human race lived for 100 generations without a moral code, without knowing the difference between right and wrong?

A short time before the law was given at Sinai it ,became necessary for Moses to provide out of all the people of Israel about 80,000 men who feared God, who were men of truth, and who hated covetousness. These were to be rulers over thousands, fifties, hundreds, and tens (Exo. 18:21). It is evident that Moses had no difficulty in assembling this large body of men. These were men who loved truth and hated covetousness long before God had said, "**Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor,**" and "**Thou shalt not covet**".

Consider the record of Cain. Did he know that it was wrong, that it was an act against God, when he killed his brother Abel? Of course he did. And this was over two thousand years before God said to Israel, "Thou shalt not kill," Consider also the Pharaoh of Genesis 12. He well knew that he could not have any relationship with Sarai, Abraham's wife, without sinning against God (Gen. 12: 10-20), yet this was 400 years before God said through Moses: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Abimelech, king of Gerar, also knew that he was in danger of great sin if he touched the woman he had taken, she being another man's wife (Gen. 20:4-6), even though the ten commandments were given four centuries later.

Where did these men get this knowledge of right and wrong in relationship to God? The answer is quite simple, since we are told in God's Word that man was made in the image and likeness of God. Thus a moral image of God is stamped upon man so that God's own evaluation of right and wrong becomes a part of the constitution of all human beings. Many men will strive to change this image, even to erase it, but it remains and constantly pricks at man when he does wrong. Thus it is that men who have never heard of the Bible have sufficient knowledge of what is right and what is wrong with sufficient clarity to remove every excuse from their hearts forever. As Paul declares it:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or excusing one another. Romans 2:14,15.

Just because men have become vain in their reasonings, and even though they have refused to recognize the God they know to be, even though their foolish hearts were darkened, this in no way contradicts the divine revelation that man has sufficient knowledge so that he is without excuse. (See Rom. 1:19-23). We must not look upon men whom God has given over to uncleanness (Rom. 1 :24), men whom God has given over to vile affections (Rom. 1 :25), men who did not desire to retain God in their knowledge (Rom. 1 :28), and have been by God given over to a reprobate mind to do things not befitting, then point to them in support of the false idea that they have no light or truth from God. The Bible denies this. No man has ever lived upon this

earth who did not have the knowledge that all acts for which men will be subject to the second death were wrong in God's sight. See Revelation 21:8 for a list of these sins.

The facts that we discover in God's Word from Genesis 1:1 to Exodus 19 are sufficient to show that during the 2500 years that preceded the giving of the ten commandments to Israel, men knew that such acts as murder, theft, adultery, and lying were sins against God. Many who lived in that time scrupulously refrained from all acts such as these, but others, even though they knew the judgment of God that they which do such things are worthy of death, not only did them, but found pleasure in those who also did the same; even as Paul sets it forth in Rom. 1:32.

Therefore, let it be understood, when we, as teachers of God's Word say that the law was given to Israel and to no other nation, this in no way means that we are free to commit the heinous sins that were forbidden in the law. When we insist that the present-day believer is not under law, this does not in any manner mean that we are free to practice idolatry, murder, lying, stealing, coveting. All things prohibited in the ten commandments were sinful, and they remain sinful for all men at all times. They were wicked before the law was given, and they did not suddenly become wicked when God said: "Thou shalt not." Therefore, setting aside all prejudices, preconceptions, and traditions, we need to take a fresh look at each one of these commandments, ever keeping in mind that these were the terms of a covenant or agreement that God entered into with the children of Israel. In its entirety the law was a peculiar set of regulations for a separate people. It was sufficient to regulate the conduct of an Israelite in every circumstance that might arise in the tight little world of Israel in which they lived.

We will pursue this theme in further studies.

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