

Red Letter Edition

What did Jesus Say?

On the Law (Part Two)



THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT:

Many Christians are under the false impression that we, are modern Christians "saved" by a new Testament and the Jews were people "saved" by an Old Testament, and that one (the New) supersedes the other (the Old). Many believe the New and Old Testaments are mutually exclusive and even claim they are at odds with each other. My own grandfather, a devout Christian, would ignore anything based on the Old Testament as impertinent and of no benefit. So why then was it

written? Where did it come from and what was its purpose? The Apostle Paul said, "It was added, because of transgressions". Added to what? **It was added to the original plan of redemption by faith. This plan has NEVER changed.** Namely, it was added to the covenant of Abraham.

Salvation by faith is not exclusive to the New Testament.

It is and always was God's plan to redeem us by grace through faith, quickened (made alive) by corresponding action (works). It started with Abraham and continues today, fulfilled and enabled by Christ.

Many years ago, the Law became something never intended -- the gateway to justification. The idea was that if one would perform all of its statutes and keep all its ordinances one would be kept of the Lord, safe from harm and danger, and thus see the fruit of one's obedience. But justification came by faith then just as it does now.

Salvation by works was always a doctrine invented by man and propagated by those who used man's "natural" propensity to pay for sin, as a way to make gain for themselves. Man has even made the load heavier than God ever intended. Jesus chided with these who "bind burdens" upon men's shoulders that they themselves cannot bear.

Why do we do this? In most cases, the law is made too heavy so that we need help to live under it. This helper needed, creates an office that man is all too willing to fill.

Man has within him a sense of retribution that is difficult to satisfy. This has caused an untold amount of trouble for him. He wants to do something "sacrificial" to atone for his sins. This deep understanding of sacrifice is the Light of Christ misunderstood and misapplied in the heart of an unregenerate man.

As Christ is received as Lord in the heart of man, this Light is then better understood and it becomes clear that Jesus' sacrifice was the one, yea the only one, God accepts. But until this is clear, man goes about trying to make his own works acceptable. This attempt often has tragic results. Power-mad leaders, legalistic doctrines that enslave communities, Churches, even whole countries with pseudo-theocratic based governments have arisen from the misunderstood and misapplied conscience God placed within us.

We see that man has this need to make retribution, or pay for his sin. There is as well a very real need to compensate, or make a physical effort to show his dedication to, and love for, God. Who is it that truly loves anyone and does not want to show them that they do? The law gives us that opportunity, but we need to exercise care.

When we bypass faith and overly depend on what we do, we insult God by presuming to earn our way; we are not to presume to force God to honor our accomplishment by reward. The opposite is equally true when we forsake works altogether and depend on faith that the Bible clearly defines as dead.

We still have in us a part of our fallen ancestors that makes us want to DO something. I do not believe this feeling is altogether wrong, but it must be satisfied properly or it may lead to misguided behavior that insults the sacrifice of Christ.

There are those in the present-day "ministry" who take advantage of this instinctive feeling by suggesting that money be given to the church, or by pressuring attendance to all functions. Some even coerce prayer and fasting or visitation of prospects for building the membership of the church, or proselytizing, etc., etc., etc.

The list is seemingly endless because the strategy is extremely effective. It is effective because the innate desire to atone for one's sins is a strong one. We all have this desire in us. How do you handle yours? I submit the laws of God are a wonderful way to fulfill and satisfy this desire.

Remember that the Abrahamic covenant is the covenant under which we, as Gentiles, are placed. The way of salvation has not changed. Abraham was considered righteous because his faith was proven by his works, and so are we. He sought a city that had foundations whose builder and maker was God, and so do we. He is the father of faith.

Jesus is the author and finisher of faith.

This puts Jesus at the beginning as the author, and at the end as finisher; it shows Abraham in the middle as the father of the faith family into which we have been adopted. This covenant speaks the mind of God, as does His Law.

I want to know the mind of God. In His law He speaks of everything from the length of a honeymoon, how to lend money and pay it back, to whether or not you should get a tattoo. He mentions holidays (they were called Holy Days then) that we should keep and exactly when we should do so. He talks of how to farm, what to cook, animals to avoid eating, and how to tell if certain sores in the flesh are contagious. Even a cursory glance at the old laws will show the reader that at one time (when God was in command) many things were different than they are now.

Can we assume that God was pleased when men did what He said to do?

Of course He was pleased.

In the book of Numbers and chapter 24 the story of Baalam shows God's pleasure and pride when He finds those short-lived moments of obedience. Baalam went up to the mountain to pronounce his blessing. The Scriptures say that he went into a trance. I believe that for a moment he saw Israel as God sees them. He was given a vicarious opening or understanding of the love God feels toward those of His people who are obedient.

In the following song or blessing, you will hear His pride and love and promises of provision and protection. Remember too, that these folks just went through a time of rebellion and murmuring for which they paid the dear price of sickness and even death. And immediately after this they were heading into idolatry, but for right now they were obedient and God was pleased.

Numbers 24:5-9, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee."

These disobedient people were looked upon as if they never did wrong. Their past sin was not held against them nor was their future idolatry.

God is pleased when we DO what He says.

What's wrong with living under the law of God? Nothing - as long as you are not under the law. By this I mean that you should not expect to be justified by the Law. Only Christ can do that by His blood and sacrificial death, because we know to err in only one point of the Law condemns us as if we had broken all of the commandments. *However, if we know that a certain action is frowned upon by God, (in some cases forbidden) are we to claim grace and forgiveness and do it anyway? God forbid.*

- Are you willing to live by the law?
- Will you do whatever you find there?
- How do we know what is valid for us to follow?

- What has been fulfilled and what is yet in force?
- One would readily agree that "Thou shalt not kill" is still in force,
- But what about "Thou shalt not covet"? You may say, "We can't help coveting".

Are we to decide which is still important to God by whether or not we can accomplish it? By this notion the Catholic Church decided that the first commandment needed editing and the second needed REMOVAL!

There are Protestants who are appalled at the audacity of anyone who dares to remove a commandment, yet they do not obey the commandments they protect. They defend the words and deny the Word. They abhor the changing the words that were spoken while they disobey the message that they clearly convey. *(One would almost have to admire the Catholic's respect of the commandments; that they would remove the second commandment rather than break it. It's convoluted logic, to be sure, but still somehow strangely honorable.)*

To be continued...

*Friendly,
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