

Since the days of John the Baptist, until now, those who believe in the great God of heaven and the earth, and His Son Jesus Christ, have willingly submitted themselves to the ritual of “water baptism.” Jesus pointed out that it was John who initiated the new era of “the kingdom of God,” saying, “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached and every man presseth into it” (Luke 16:16). Even Jesus had to submit to this important Grace-Age ritual (Matt. 3:15).

After Jesus was baptized, He fasted for forty days, “and returned in the power of the Spirit” into Galilee. He began to gather His disciples, and would baptize in one place, while John was baptizing somewhere else; giving deference unto John, and made it a point to not interfere with His ministry. By the Biblical rules of succession, Jesus could not come into the fullness of His ministry until John had finished his.

The ministry of the gospel began with Water Baptism and marked the beginning of the end of the era of the “Law of Moses.” About seven years later, when Jesus was giving His final instructions to the Apostles, He said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to ***observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:*** and, lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:18-20).

When John began baptizing, the Grace Age began; when Jesus died on the cross, the Law of Moses was annulled, although it was another three and a half years until God caused the “the sacrifice and oblation to cease” (Dan. 9:24-27). At that time, God ceased to honor the work of the Levitical Priesthood, and turned over the responsibility of the offering up of the “acceptable sacrifice” to the Apostleship (Acts 6:1-6). Then, for about another 30 years, God required even the Christian Jews to continue to offer sacrifices by the Priests in the temple.

At the crucifixion Jesus abolished “the Law of Commandments” (Eph. 2:15), and established “the Law of Faith” (Rom. 3:27). Our high priest, the High Priest of God, does not offer two goats for our atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month, as Aaron and his sons did. He took care of our atonement once and for all, on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of that historical year of His crucifixion. But we are not “free” as some ministers would like for us to believe. We are still under a law. It is just not the law from Sinai, but the law from Golgotha.

There were actually two sets of laws given to the children of Israel at Sinai. One set was a vast set of rules which covered all of the foibles of mankind. Then there was that set of “two tables of *testimony*, tables of stone, written with the finger of God” (Ex. 31:18). Moses, Jeremiah, and Paul, together make it clear that “the Ten Commandments” was God’s covenant of Marriage with Israel (Ex. 34:28; Jer. 3:6-15; Rom. 7:1-7).

God had no intentions of continuing to use the Law of Moses, even though it was “holy, and just, and good” (Romans 7:12). From its inception, it was intended to be primarily “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith,” and it prophesied of every event of His plan which would occur, at least well into the eighth millennium. But after the Law of Faith came, there was no longer a need that we be under a schoolmaster. For we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:24-25), but “being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21).

God said, “I am the Lord, I change not” (Mal. 3:6). The record also shows that to be true of the transition to the “Law of Faith.” In Jesus, we have both a High Priest and a “Messenger of the covenant.” We have been given new commandments, of which some of them are the marriage covenant, and the rest are general, and Jesus is Lord of them all.

Accordingly, Jesus gave the New Testament Church a new marriage covenant. That covenant is recorded for us as the “Fourteen Commandments” in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. Those three chapters are not simply “good advice to Christians.” Neither can they be lovingly included under the category of the eight “Beatitudes,” which, sadly, seems to be the pursuit of only a few Christians.

When the close disciples of Jesus had assembled with Him, on the mountain that day, He opened His discourse with those eight blessings. Then, in Matthew 5:13-20, He told them of the solemn responsibility which He was bestowing upon them. He concluded the admonition, saying, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill, for verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18). He was preparing them for a new covenant which would replace the two tables of stone which God gave to their forefathers, and by which they “should be married to another” (Rom. 7:1-6).

As you study those three chapters, you will notice that the first two commandments, which Jesus named, were two of the Ten Commandments, and He replaced them with a New

Testament definition. He actually made them more stringent than the O.T. In the new version you are guilty of murder for only “hating” your brother, or a man is guilty of adultery by simply “lusting” after a woman.

In Matthew 5:21 through Matthew 7:20, Jesus gave “His disciples” the fourteen commandments, His covenant with the New Testament “Church:” the foundation on which The Twelve stand (Ezekiel 43:16:17; Heb.13:10). The 1<sup>st</sup> commandment is in Matt. 5:21-26. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is in Matt. 5:27-30. The 3

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is in Matt. 6:5-18. The 9

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is in Matt. 6:19-34. The 10

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is in Matt.7:1-5. The 11 is in Matt. 7:6. The 12

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is in Matt. 7:13-14. The 14

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commandment is in Matthew 7:15-20.

We have a record of other commandments which Jesus gave to His disciples, but they are not very numerous. Remember, we are not under a law of commandments. In reading the covenant which I just enumerated, we readily see that the commandments of our redeemer are not about “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not,” but rather an encouragement to acquire, and maintain a right attitude. It is a call to love our brothers and sisters in Christ; to love the world as He did, and together with God, leave all judgment to the Son of God (John 5:22). It is the Son of God who shall determine whose name shall be in “the Book of Life of the Lamb” (Rev. 13:8).

One of the commandments which is not in the covenant, was given to Jesus' disciples in Matthew 18:15-20. He gave a formula for dealing with an unrepentant person who has offended one of the brethren. He told them that, if they followed His directions, and the offender refused to repent and make amends, the Church must cast him out, and avoid him as they would a Gentile, or a tax collector. Then He told them that, when they exercised that authority, the name of the offender would also be blotted out in heaven. Which means that when the Church would take a person's name off the rolls of the Church, it would also be taken out of the "Book of the Holy City" in Heaven (Rev. 22:18-19).

One thing is sure, no man, except for Jesus Christ, has the authority to determine whether anyone's name is to be entered in, or taken out of "The Lamb's Book of Life." This commandment shows clearly that membership in God's Church is not the, so called, "body of believers." The Church has the responsibility, and the authority to bind believers to the Church, or to loose them from the Church, as the situation requires. That authority must be restored to the Church before the glorious year of the Marriage of the Lamb shall come. Otherwise, the Wife could never be able to "Make herself ready" (Rev. 19:7).

When Paul had built up the Gentile Church in Corinth, he told them to exercise that same authority there. He commanded them to turn the fornicator over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. That is, to get the effect of the lust of the flesh out of the Body of Christ, so the Spirit of the Body could continue to function. Then he told them, "What have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:12-13). I think it is notable that, in his next epistle to them he admonished them to be merciful to the offender, and receive him back in again. It is apparent, therefore, that we have the authority to judge only whether a person is to be a part of God's Church, but no authority to say whether anyone is "saved" or not. Apparently that fornicator was still saved.

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses." On the contrary, under the "Law of Faith" commandments are given more as encouragement to help establish the believer in a life of faith, and truth, and love, and mercy toward all men.

It is necessary that some commandments be given, but those which were given in the New Testament seem to be largely some of the same ones from the Old Testament, but with love and mercy.

When James, the brother of Jesus, had heard all of the contentions about the need, or lack of it, for all believers to be circumcised, he sent messengers to the Gentile believers. He told them, “***It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things***; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well” (Acts 15:28-29).

The end result of that long and heated council was four “necessary” commandments. James, and that august Jewish council, required of them nothing about circumcision of the flesh, or keeping of the Sabbath. Yet, to this day, thousands of Sabbatarians are still arguing the point. Paul was very direct when he found some insisting on vegetarianism and Sabbatarianism in Rome. He simply said, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom. 14:1-5).

Paul told the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse to not let anyone judge them about the requirements of the ancient law, and that they should consider all of those things to be a shadow of things to come in the Grace Age. He said, “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men” (Col. 2:8-22)?

It was Jesus who brought us redemption, and it was Jesus who gave us Paul to convey unto the Gentiles the Law of Faith. The volume of it is too great for these few pages, so I will ask you to consider Paul’s words to Timothy. “Charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. ***Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned***” (1 Tim. 1:4-5).

Finally, Jesus said, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. ***This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you***” (John 15:9-12).