

Jesus Christ—Spiritual Lawgiver

How Jesus revealed the deeper, spiritual intent of the commandments of God.

The “Sermon on the Mount” was delivered at the beginning of Jesus Christ’s ministry. After choosing twelve of His disciples to be witnesses of all the words that He spoke, Jesus taught them the basic spiritual principles that are recorded in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6. These teachings, now known as the “Sermon on the Mount,” were the beginning words of the New Covenant. Unlike the Old Covenant, which offered the physical blessings of health and prosperity, the New Covenant opened the way to the spiritual blessings of eternal life with everlasting power and glory.

Throughout the Bible, there is a contrast between the physical and the spiritual. The words of the apostle Paul show that the physical comes first, then the spiritual (I Cor. 15:45-47). Adam, the first man on earth, came from the earth and was physical. The second Adam, Jesus Christ, came from heaven and is spiritual. In like manner, the Old Covenant, which was physical, was established before the New Covenant, which is spiritual.

Moses’ office as mediator and lawgiver was a physical type of the coming spiritual Lawgiver, Jesus Christ. When the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, God gave Moses this prophecy of the coming Messiah: “And the LORD said to me, ‘They have spoken well what they have spoken [that they did not want God to speak to them, but Moses]. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, *one* like you, and will put My words in His mouth. And He shall speak to them all that I shall command Him. And it shall come to pass, whatever man will not hearken to My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require *it* of him’ ” (Deut. 18:17-19).

Unlike the Old Covenant, which required obedience to the letter of the law, the New Covenant is based on obedience from the heart—fulfilling the laws of God not only in the letter, but also in their complete spiritual intent. For this reason, Jesus Christ came as the spiritual Lawgiver to amplify and magnify the commandments and laws of God, as prophesied by Isaiah: “The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness sake; He will magnify the Law and make *it* glorious” (Isa. 42:21).

As the spiritual Lawgiver, Jesus Christ revealed the full meaning of the laws of God. He received a commission from God the Father to preach the gospel and proclaim the spiritual meaning of the commandments of God, in order to bring the knowledge of salvation to the world. Throughout His ministry, Jesus taught repentance from sin, which is clearly defined in the New Testament as the transgression of the laws of God (I John 3:4).

The Gospel accounts reveal that God now requires obedience to His commandments not only in the letter of the law but in the spirit of the law. But in spite of Jesus’ teachings, which magnify the laws and commandments of God, most professing Christians have been taught that Jesus Christ came to abolish the laws of God. Jesus emphatically denounced this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.** For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18).

How Did Jesus Christ Fulfill the Law? As the spiritual Lawgiver, Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law of God by bringing it to its full expression, revealing its complete spiritual meaning and intent. He “filled the law to the full” by teaching obedience in the spirit of the law. To fulfill the Law of God by amplifying its meaning and application is the exact opposite of abolishing the law.

If Jesus had come to abolish the laws of God, He would not have magnified and expanded their meaning, making them even more binding. If the laws of God were not binding to-

day, there could be no sin, because “sin is lawlessness” (I John 3:4). And if there were no sinners, there would be no need of a Savior. But the Scriptures of both the Old Testament and the New Testament testify that Jesus Christ came to save mankind from sin. Instead of abolishing or “doing away with the law,” Jesus came to take upon Himself the penalty for our sins and transgressions of the laws of God, and to show us the way to eternal life through repentance and spiritual obedience from the heart. That is how He magnified the laws and commandments of God and made them honorable.

The Spiritual Meaning of the Commandments: As spiritual Lawgiver, Christ taught His disciples the spiritual meaning and application of every one of God’s laws and commandments. Let us examine how He magnified the Sixth Commandment in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said to those *in ancient times*, ‘You shall not commit murder; but whoever commits murder shall be subject to judgment.’ But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be subject to judgment. Now *you have heard it said*, ‘Whoever shall say to his brother, ‘Raca,’ shall be subject to *the judgment of the council*.’ But *I say to you*, whoever shall say, ‘*You fool*,’ shall be subject to the fire of Gehenna” (Matt. 5:21-22).

Jesus made it clear that murder begins in the heart and is rooted in hatred and anger. The spiritual amplification of the Sixth Commandment, as taught by Jesus Christ, extends far beyond the letter of the law, which judges only physical acts of violence. Under the New Covenant, this commandment must be obeyed in the thoughts and intents of the heart. Obedience is no longer restricted to the letter of the law and the actual committing of murder. By the new spiritual standard for obedience, hatred in one’s heart is judged as murder. This spiritual standard also applies to hatred for an enemy: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you [as the spiritual Lawgiver], love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you, so that you yourselves may be the children of your Father Who is in heaven;** for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *on the* good, and sends rain on *the* just and *on the* unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*? And if you salute your brethren only, what have you done *that is* extraordinary? Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*? Therefore, you shall be perfect, even as your Father Who *is* in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:43-48).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also taught the spiritual meaning and application of the Seventh Commandment: “You shall not commit adultery.” Notice how Jesus magnified this commandment: “You have heard that it was said to those *in ancient times*, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ **But I say to you [as the spiritual Lawgiver], everyone who looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**” (Matt. 5:27-28). Jesus made the Seventh Commandment far more binding than the letter of the law.

Applying the Spirit of the Law Does Not Nullify the Letter: Approximately ten years after Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, the apostle James, the brother of the Lord, wrote an epistle in which he expounded on the spiritual meaning of the commandments of God. In his epistle, James shows that Jesus’ teachings concerning the spirit of the law did not eliminate the need to obey the letter of the law. James explains that Jesus’ command to “love your neighbor as yourself” requires us to live in obedience to the commandments of God. James specifically refers to the Sixth and Seventh Commandments, and makes it very clear that to break any of God’s commandments is sin: **“If you are truly keeping the Royal Law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you have respect of persons, you are practicing sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors; for if anyone keeps the whole law, but sins in one aspect, he becomes guilty of all.** For He Who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘You shall not commit murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you commit murder, you have become a transgressor of *the* law. In this manner

speak and in this manner behave: as those who are about to be judged by *the law of freedom*" (James 2:8-12).

The apostle John, who outlived all the other apostles, also taught obedience to the laws and commandments of God. In the last decade of the first century, John wrote his Gospel, three epistles, and the book of Revelation. In his first epistle, he wrote most emphatically that obedience to the commandments of God is the standard that separates the true followers of Jesus Christ from those who merely profess His name. Notice: "**And by this standard we know that we know Him: if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.** On the other hand, *if* anyone is keeping His word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected [*made complete*]. By this *means* we know that we are in Him. Anyone who claims to dwell in Him is obligating himself also to walk even as He Himself walked" (I John 2:3-6).

John makes it very clear that those who truly believe in Jesus Christ will be walking as Jesus walked. They will be keeping the commandments of God, as Jesus did, and as He taught others to do (John 15:10, Matt. 19:17-19). Anyone who professes to believe in Jesus Christ but does not keep the commandments of God is a liar, according to the New Testament. As the apostle shows, those who keep God's commandments are not under condemnation but can approach God with confidence, knowing that He will hear and answer their prayers: "Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, *then* we have confidence toward God. And whatever we may ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and practice those things that are pleasing in His sight" (I John 3:21-22).

The New Testament does not support the widely accepted teaching that commandment keeping is contrary to faith. Rather, the words of John show that keeping the commandments of God is a sign of true faith and the love that God imparts through the indwelling of His Spirit: "And this is His commandment: that we **believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and that we love one another** [fulfilling the Royal Law by keeping God's commandments], exactly as He gave commandment to us. And **the one who keeps His commandments is dwelling in Him, and He in him; and by this we know that He is dwelling in us: by the Spirit which He has given to us**" (verses 23-24).

Mainstream Christianity ignores these inspired New Testament scriptures and teaches that loving God and one another eliminates the need to keep God's commandments. Again John exposes the error in this theology. John points out that obedience to God's commandments is the very standard by which love for God and His children is measured: "**By this standard we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome**" (I John 5:2-3).

The truth is, if we love Jesus Christ and God the Father, we will be motivated to keep the commandments of God. We will desire to keep His commandments in the spirit of the law as an outward manifestation of our love for Him. Those who profess to love God, but refuse to keep His commandments, do not understand the love of God. They are being led by their own human emotions and not by the love that God imparts to His children through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Emotional feelings cannot be substituted for keeping the commandments of God. Those who claim to love God, but are practicing lawlessness, are deceiving themselves.

Jesus Christ specifically instructs those who love Him to keep His commandments: "**If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments....** The one who has My commandments and is keeping them, that is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him.... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the

word that you hear is not Mine, but the Father's, Who sent Me" (John 14:15, 21-24).

Jesus Christ left no room for doubt or misinterpretation. If you love Him, you will keep His commandments. If you do not keep His words, you do not love Him. Unless you are keeping His commandments, any profession of faith and love toward Jesus Christ and God the Father is empty and vain.

Jesus Christ set the perfect example of true godly love by keeping all the commandments of God in the full spirit of the law. Before His death, He delivered a new command to His disciples—that they follow His example by practicing the same love that He had manifested during His life with them on earth: "A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another in the same way that I have loved you, that *is how* you are to love one another. By this shall everyone know that you are My disciples—if you love one another.... As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; live in My love. **If you keep My commandments, you shall live in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and live in His love.** These things I have spoken to you, in order that My joy may dwell in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you" (John 13:34-35; 15:9-12).

Jesus Christ taught His followers to obey all the commandments of God in the full spirit of the law, as He did. Jesus magnified the laws of God by revealing their full spiritual meaning. Jesus Christ, as the spiritual Lawgiver, made the laws and commandments of God far more binding by setting a higher, spiritual standard of obedience for Christians under the New Covenant.

The Spirit and Intent of the Law and the Prophets: The purpose of the Law and the Prophets, and all the writings of the Old Testament, was to teach the people to love and worship God, and Him alone. Jesus Christ revealed the spirit and intent of the Law and the Prophets when He was asked which commandment was the greatest: "And one of them, a doctor of the law, questioned *Him*, tempting Him, and saying, 'Master, which commandment *is the* great commandment in the law?' And Jesus said to him, '**"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is *the* first and greatest commandment; and the second *one is* like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets'" '(Matt. 22:35-40).

Under the New Covenant, true worship and love toward God is made possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which enables the believer to reverence God and obey Him from the heart. Through faith in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the believer learns to obey every command of God in the full spirit and intent of the law, as magnified by Jesus Christ. This is the manner in which every true believer will be keeping the laws and commandments of God, because he or she loves God the Father and Jesus Christ with all the heart, mind, soul and strength. This righteousness, which is based on faith and love, far exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said, "For I say to you, unless your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way *that* you shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

The righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, Who obeyed all of His Father's commandments in the full spirit and intent of the law. Through faith, His righteousness is imputed to each believer who loves God and keeps His commandments. This imputed righteousness is a gift that the believer receives through the abundance of the Father's grace. It is called "the righteousness of faith" because only through faith in Jesus Christ is it possible to partake of this righteousness.

The Righteousness of Faith of the True Believer: When a believer is justified from past sins through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and is baptized by full immersion in water, he or she receives the gift of the Holy Spirit as a begettal from God the Father. Then the Father imputes to the believer the very righteousness of Jesus Christ, that "so also might the grace *of God* reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21).

The righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to the believer by God the Father, far exceeds the righteousness required by the letter of the law. His spiritual obedience was so perfect, pure and wholehearted that He always did the things that pleased God the Father. This perfect righteousness was accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus received without measure from the Father.

By His personal example and His teachings, Jesus magnified the laws and commandments of God and revealed the fullness of their intent and meaning. He showed that the spirit of the law does not nullify the letter of the law but requires a fuller, spiritual obedience. This spiritual obedience is beyond the capacity of the natural mind and human will and can only be accomplished through Jesus Christ. The Scriptures reveal that when the believer is begotten with the Holy Spirit of God the Father, he or she begins to receive the very mind of Christ. With Christ's mind, the believer is strengthened to live by every word of God in the full spirit of the law. The apostle Paul describes this spiritual transformation in the mind as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

Each believer begins to have the laws and commandments of God written upon his or her mind: "But He, after offering one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at *the* right hand of God. Since that time, He is waiting until His enemies are placed *as* a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has obtained eternal perfection *for* those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after He had previously said, 'This *is* the covenant that I will establish with them after those days,' says *the* Lord: '**I will give My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds;** and their sins and lawlessness I will not remember ever again'" (Heb. 10:12-17).

Under the New Covenant, the laws and commandments of God are inscribed in the mind of each believer through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which gives the believer the power to bring forth the fruits of righteousness unto eternal life.