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The tracts listed below are available free upon request.

	pages
Steps to Salvation	18
The Ordinance of Baptism	16
Life Ends—What Then?	12
Wondrous Grace—	
God's Life-Saving Gift	32
The Ten Commandments	8
Which Day Is the Lord's Day?	32
Should the Seventh-day Sabbath	
Be Observed?	20
If a Man Die—Does He Still Live?	22
The Punishment of the Wicked	32
God's Treatment of Jews and Gentiles	30
Jesus Is Coming Again	4
Bible Baptism	4
World History Foretold	4
The Next World Dictator	8
Keeping Fit Spiritually	8
Faith and Repentance	4
Where Did Christ Go After His	
Ascension?	24
The Bible and Man's Food	35
The Resurrection of Christ Not on Sunday	8
The Change of the Sabbath	16
Has Time Been Lost?	16
Two Appointments You Must Meet	4
What Must I Do To Be Saved?	4
Danger of Counterfeits	12

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The End of the Law

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10:4).

Are you one of the many who have been taught that this verse means that the follower of Christ no longer needs the Ten Commandment law and that this law has been done away in Christ? If so, you are invited to reconsider what is being taught in this verse.

First, what is a "law" and why are laws in existence? We usually think of their being needed to provide restraint against violating the rights of others and to maintain order and equality in the human society. They are also needed as a basis for determining and regulating the punishment to be assessed when transgression has been committed.

Man does not naturally know what is good for him and what is not, and selfishness often controls him more than his sense of right. Laws were given in Eden, the breaking of which caused the fall of man. Moses, in recording the events which had happened in the centuries before he lived, does not mention the actual giving of laws to the people, but the actions of those people clearly show that they had received laws. Cain broke the law of sacrifice, for his sacrifice was rejected, while that of Abel was accepted. Abraham and Lot were righteous and the city of Sodom was wicked. The

difference between righteousness and unrighteousness is defined by the laws of God. This was true before the time of Moses; it was true during his time and it is yet true. The Word of God clearly states that "...sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), and "...where no law is, there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15).

It is evident that laws were known to the first parents and to the patriarchs. The flood destroyed the disobedient, but righteous Noah was saved. He worshiped God above all else, and refused to worship images. The law to honor father and mother was known as is shown in Genesis 9:22-25. Examples of the observance of most of the Ten Commandments are found before that law is recorded, and many examples of sacrifices are found, which show there were sacrificial laws.

Most families have rules which help them to get along well together. Few families have these rules written down. So it was with the laws of God. They were known but not written in a code of law until the time when Israel came to Mt. Sinai.

In the 19th and 20th chapters of Exodus we have a record of the giving of the Ten Commandments. Amid an awe-inspiring display of power, with the mountain smoking and quaking, God, Himself, spoke in tones of thunder which the people heard and understood—the words of the Ten Commandments.

"And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God... And the mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire... and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the

2

trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice" (Exodus 19:17-19). And the 20th chapter begins by stating that God spoke the words there recorded—the Ten Commandments.

This is the only record we have of God, the Creator of the universe, speaking to a large group of people. The Words He spoke were engraved upon two tables, or tablets, of stone. "And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables" (Exodus 32:16).

Even after this first set was cast down by Moses and broken, he was not permitted to copy the writing, but was commanded to bring another set of tables and God again inscribed them with that same Ten Commandment law. These tables containing the Ten Commandments were enshrined within the sacred "ark of the covenant" which was kept in the most holy place of the tabernacle and later in the temple. Take careful note that this Ten Commandment code was kept separate from the "book of the law." The Ten Commandments were placed inside the ark (Deuteronomy 10:5), and the "book of the law" was placed "in the side of the ark" (Deuteronomy 31:26).

The Two Laws

In Exodus 20:22 we notice that in speaking of the Ten Commandments, God says, "Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven." Then going to chapter 21, the first verse reads: "Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them," and the following verses contain

3

many laws and ordinances. Notice the clear distinction between the two codes of law. God gave the Ten Commandments directly, both by voice and by writing, but He gave the other laws and ordinances to Moses and told him to give them to the people. In Deuteronomy 31:24 we learn how these other laws were preserved:

"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished...." After Moses had finished writing this "book of the law," what was done with it? "Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God...." The Hebrew translation by Leeser translates this, "put it at the side of the ark." The tables of stone were *in* the ark; the book of the law was placed *at* the side of the ark. Notice this very clear distinction in the placement of the two codes. Surely there must have been an important reason for this.

God's Law for All Nations

Before we study the reason for the distinction in the laws, let us notice to whom the laws were given and to whom they applied. In Deuteronomy, Moses sums up the dealings of God with Israel, and concerning the laws which had been given, he says: "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but... to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good" (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13). "Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charges, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, always" (Chapter 11:1). From these and similar texts it is often argued that the laws

were given only for the Hebrew nation—that God singled them out and gave them these special codes of law never intending that these laws should apply to any other nations.

In our study of the Bible we must consider all the texts which bear on a subject and see what is taught when they are harmonized. There is no question but that the laws were given to the Israelites. That was because the Israelites were the only nation at that time who worshiped God. The laws were not confined to them alone. God does not have separate codes, or laws, for different nations. The Israelites called all other nations "strangers" just as we call others "foreigners." In Numbers 9:14, 15 we read: "And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover... so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land." (See Deuteronomy 29:14, 15.)

How many peoples of the world were supposed to use God's temple? In Isaiah 56:7 we read, "... mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." Christ quoted from this verse in Matthew 21:13 to show that it applied to the temple then present. In Romans 3:29, Paul confirms this thought: "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles, also."

The Law of Moses

The commandments and ordinances which God gave to Moses and which Moses wrote in a book, which was placed at the side of the ark in the temple, are referred to throughout the Bible as the "law of Moses." (See 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Chron. 23:18; Malachi

4:4; Heb. 10:28.) We find the details of this law in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This "added" law (Galatians 3:19) has served its purpose and is no longer in effect.

It did not suddenly come to an end, but gradually as events and conditions, with which parts of it specifically dealt, came to an end or ceased to exist. Examples of this are:

1. The instructions for the building of the Tabernacle. They came to an end when the Tabernacle was completed (Exodus 40).

2. The rules for the order of the camp while Israel was in the wilderness (Numbers 2). These ended when Israel arrived in the promised land.

3. All burnt offerings and sacrifices. These pointed forward to Christ and His supreme sacrifice. They were carried out in connection with the Temple worship. When Christ died on the cross, the great veil, which divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, ripped in the center from top to bottom, signifying that the temple and all of the sacrificial system connected with it had come to an end. It had fulfilled its purpose in pointing forward to that which had now taken place.

What about the Ten Commandment law? Did it also come to an end in Christ? We have noted how the Bible makes a great distinction between these two codes of law. The Mosaic law pointed forward to Christ and thus led men to Christ. At the same time they were called upon to keep the moral law of righteous living. Could Christ bring an end to the need for moral principles? Surely not, for those principles are eternal. The Ten Commandments are the

"law of liberty," the "royal law" spoken of in James 2:8, 12. After quoting a part of this law, James says, "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty" (Chapter 2:12). The law which God wrote on tables of stone and which He spoke in tones of thunder from the mount is the great eternal, moral law which today is to be written in the hearts of all Christians (Hebrews 8:10-13). Jesus quoted it to the young man who asked the way to eternal life (Matthew 19:17). The saints are spoken of in Revelation 14:12 as those who "keep the commandments of God."

So the way that Christ became the *end of the law* was by bringing a termination to that part of God's laws which were given through Moses and which included the sacrifices which ended as Christ became the final sacrifice for sin. His death did not do away with the other laws that God had instituted, such as making and bowing down to idols, honoring parents, and committing adultery.

The fact that Christ said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law..." (Matthew 5:17) is evidence that not all law was abolished, and this includes the Ten Commandments.