

Is OBEDIENCE to God Required for Salvation?

Can a Christian DISOBEY God and still be saved?

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THIS IS a *lawless* age! Everywhere, it seems, the spirit of disobedience and rebellion is sweeping society. Even from the pulpits you hear preached that Jesus Christ abolished His Father's LAW — that it is not necessary to OBEY God any longer!

It is time we looked into the Bible to see what it really says.

One famous passage often quoted — or MISquoted — is found in II Corinthians 3. From this chapter people carelessly assume that Paul taught that the Ten Commandments were abolished — that we can go ahead and disobey them and still be saved — that if we obey them we are cursed.

Open your Bible to this important chapter — II Corinthians 3.

The Administration of Death — What Was It?

Almost no one really understands the meaning of "the ministration of death written and engraven in stones" (II Cor. 3:7). Let's study it.

What is this ministration — administering or executing — of the death penalty — which was engraved on stones?

Was Paul referring to the Ten Commandments? Were the Ten Commandments engraven in *whole* stones?

No! The Ten Commandments were written on two tables *of stone*, but *not* on whole stones.

Then what was written in whole stones? Notice Deuteronomy 27:1-6. Moses commanded the children of Israel to set up great whole stones, and plaster them with plaster, *and write upon them all the words of THE CIVIL LAW* — the statutes and judgments — which he had just repeated to them. These statutes and judgments, based upon the Ten Commandments, are

"righteous" (Psalm 119:7, 8). It is SIN to break them!

Included in the civil code was THE ADMINISTRATION of the death penalty for breaking THESE LAWS. THE ADMINISTRATION EMBODIED THE "EYE FOR EYE, TOOTH FOR TOOTH" PRINCIPLE (Deut. 19:21). Whenever any of these major laws were broken, the judges and Levites saw to it that the PENALTY of the law — death — was carried out. They were responsible for the ADMINISTRATION OF DEATH.

This was what Paul spoke of — not the Ten Commandments or the spiritual statutes and judgments which the people were to obey! Paul is writing about the ADMINISTRATION — or "ministration," to use the Old English word — of the DEATH PENALTY for breaking the law. The Scripture in II Corinthians 3 is not doing away with the laws which *define sin*, but with the *ministration of the penalty* of death by human judges.

The Ten Commandments are entirely separate and distinct from this administration. The Ten Commandments are *spiritual laws* which last forever (Psalm 111:7, 8).

Because the *principles* of the Ten Commandments formed the basis of the civil statutes and judgments, a violation of these principles was punished *by civil authority*.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF DEATH WAS THE CIVIL EXECUTION OF PUNISHMENTS FOR VIOLATION OF THIS CIVIL LAW CODE WHICH MOSES SPOKE TO THE PEOPLE.

The administration of the civil government in ancient Israel reveals God's method of dealing directly with *unconverted, fleshly, sinning* people.

The government of Israel had church and state combined. It was a physical,

flesh-born church or congregation. The administration of civil and religious statutes and ordinances was combined in ancient Israel.

Bear in mind that ancient Israel was not promised salvation at that time. All the promises under the Old Covenant were material, for this life (Lev. 26:3-12). Since those Israelites were not converted and did not have the Holy Spirit, they could not understand spiritual things. They were like most people today. God dealt with them in a *purely physical manner*, punishing them for their crimes.

Perhaps some of these punishments seem rather harsh to us. But a careful study will reveal the all-wise purpose behind them. Such things as murder, kidnapping, and adultery were punishable by DEATH.

How well calculated these judgments are. They show evildoers the enormity of sin and crime!

Taking the life of one reprobate often *saved* the lives of many decent people. People today take sin — crime — lightly, but God wants us to FEAR to do wrong!

Remember that "the *fear* of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10). We must first learn to reverence and fear our Creator and His laws. Then, when we come to know God as our Father, *love* will cast out that kind of fear which would separate us from God.

God gave Israel these penalties to teach them the *awfulness* of sin, and to show them that they must reap what they sowed. *The judges were to administer DEATH — not life*. It was a purely physical matter. Those Israelites did not understand spiritual things — and there was *no opportunity* of eternal life for them *at that time*.

Judges Responsible to God

The laws in ancient Israel were not to be carried out in accordance with human reason and influenced by unjustified anger. They were "of God." In II Chronicles 19:4-7, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, made the *judges* realize they were not judging for men, but *for God*. They were responsible to God alone! God promised to be "with them," guiding them in their decisions when they were executing His laws.

So we see that the decisions in Israel were NOT a matter of men judging one another according to human reason. Rather, they were determined by the laws *from God*. And in carrying them out, the judges were to be guided and inspired *by God*, were acting under His authority, and were responsible to Him alone!

These judgments were also given as an *example* to other nations of the blessings of a law-abiding society under God.

This was God's way of showing the unconverted world the perfect civil laws it needs to have. It was a witness to the heathen nations of the wisdom and justice of the God of Israel (Deut. 4:5-8).

Do you see the vast difference between this and mere human government?

How *quick* and *efficient* was the punishment of evildoers!

The *administration of death* was instituted to show Israel the result of wrong conduct. It was *part* of the law code which was "*added* because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19). Yes, this, the administration of death, as well as the sacrificial laws, were "*added*" to God's immutable, spiritual laws — of which the Ten Commandments are the basis. *But* the administration of death was only to last "till the seed [Christ] should come."

The Ten Commandments, together with the spiritual statutes and judgments which magnify them, were never "*added* because of transgressions." If these laws were not already in existence there would have been no transgression — "Where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). Abraham

obeyed them long before Moses was born (Gen. 26:5). They stand fast "forever and ever" (Psalm 111:8).

Sacrificial laws for sins committed in ignorance and this civil administration were "*added*" because carnal-minded Israel didn't understand and wasn't able to keep the spiritual principles of the Ten Commandments. Without immediate physical punishments for willful wrongdoing, crime and *anarchy* might have resulted!

These fleshly people needed physical judgments with "teeth" in them. And that's just what God gave them!

Remember that these Israelites were *unconverted* and had no promise of the Holy Spirit or of eternal life under the Old Covenant. *They could not earn salvation by works*, any more than we can today! All their promises were only *material* promises for this life. The judges administered *death*, not life, to the people. As long as the nation as a whole obeyed God, there were no long drawn-out trials, no newspaper publicity, *but* the speedy operation of JUSTICE.

Two witnesses were required to convict a man of any crime (Deut. 19:15-21). The punishment for false witnesses was made so severe as to effectively discourage that practice.

Israelites did not pay taxes to keep convicts alive in association with other hardened criminals. How much our nation could learn from the wisdom and justice set forth in these laws! Our complicated bungling system of law enforcement seems rather pitiful when we compare its actual effectiveness to that of Israel. God's laws when enforced put a *stop* to crime and made men *fear* to do wrong!

Why the Administration of the Spirit?

It was God's purpose to replace the "administration of death." It was only to last "till the seed should come." After Israel and Judah were scattered and driven into captivity, the administration of Israel's civil government was impossible. There was no organized civil government in Israel — no law-enforcement machinery. In Christ's

time, the Jews were living under a Roman governor and had no authority to administer God's civil laws.

At this time *God sent Christ to introduce a new administration* — THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT.

Why? Because the first administration gave only *death* for disobedience. Human judges could not impart eternal life; they could only minister death. What was needed was a new administration *of the same laws* — an administration which could give pardon and eternal life to those who repented and wanted to obey.

The promise of the Holy Spirit — the only hope of eternal life — was given to all believers for the FIRST TIME (Acts 2:38). Instead of administering the death penalty for sins, Christ, the Apostles, and *His ministers today teach the people the way to eternal life*. Christ's ministers "*administer*" life to mortal man.

All men are born mortal, subject to sin. We are in need of the Holy Spirit, the begetting of eternal life. We also need to quit sinning — breaking God's laws. We need the love that fulfills the law (I John 5:3; Rom. 5:5; 13:10). Unless we have that love which only the Holy Spirit can give, we sin, and the wages of sin is death — (Romans 6:23).

What Is Sin?

But what is sin? "Sin is the transgression of law" (I John 3:4). The law here spoken of is *not* the administration of death that was written *on whole stones*. The "ministration of death" functioned only as long as the civil government of Israel. This law which John mentions includes *the basic spiritual law* — *Ten Commandments* which were written *on two tables of hewn stone*.

These are the commandments which "stand fast *forever and ever*, and are done in truth and uprightness" (Psalm 111:8). This law will last longer than heaven and earth (Matt. 5:18).

If you are a Christian, you are being judged by this perfect and just law!

"So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:12). This is the law which

liberates us from sin; but if we break *one point* of it, we are *guilty of all* (verse 10).

Notice that Christians are to have God's spiritual law — the Ten Commandments — written *in their hearts*, not on tables of stone as under the Old Covenant! Paul shows right here that God's law is not abolished — that it is "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (II Cor. 3:3).

God's laws — His commandments, statutes and judgments — are to be in our hearts — we are to *live* them by the power of God's Spirit.

The Ten Commandments were not written on stones, nor abolished. Paul says that they were on "tables of stone," but the laws requiring the *administration of the death penalty* by civil judges were engraven *on whole stones*.

Since we by nature violate the Ten Commandments, we certainly need *pardon* — GRACE — and the supernatural power of the Spirit of God in us to *fulfill* them. Christ died to pay for our sins. He made it possible to receive the Holy Spirit from the Father. His ministers are to teach the people how to quit sinning and to gain eternal life — by administering or teaching the people how to be reconciled to the Father and receive the Holy Spirit.

Difference Between Administrations

Now do you see the difference? Ancient Israel under the Old Covenant only understood the letter of God's law. Being unconverted, most of them didn't even obey that. So God gave them civil laws which prescribed punishments.

Israel's judges punished transgressors by fines and death. Thus, it was called the "administration of death." It was necessary because Israel was a nation of unconverted people. However, it was only to last *till Christ should come*, who would introduce the spiritual administration to reconcile us to God.

Today, Christians are to *forgive* men of their trespasses (Matt. 6:14-15). We are not to avenge ourselves, but to rely on God's righteous judgment to punish those who violate His laws or harm us (Rom. 12:18-21).

Not fully knowing another's thoughts or intentions, it would be impossible to judge or condemn another (Matt. 7:1-2).

Penalty for Sin Is Still Death

The penalty of DEATH is still in effect for those who break God's law! It is time for professing Christians everywhere to wake up and realize that *God means business!*

Hebrews 10:26-31 teaches us clearly and unmistakably that a *far worse* punishment will befall those who willfully trample on God's law than that which was visited on the fleshly Israelites. That punishment is *eternal, everlasting DEATH*.

The "ministration of death" in Israel was only a lesser, physical *type* of the eternal punishment — (eternal DEATH) — for refusing to obey God's law — once the knowledge of sin has come.

Let us learn the lesson from these examples that God intended, and quit trying to use *human reason* to justify our wrong deeds. Then we will reap the blessing of keeping God's laws, and live the abundant lives that He intended (John 10:10).

"Be *not* deceived; GOD IS NOT

MOCKED: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Do YOU believe God's word?

Many of you have been trying to hide your eyes from God's law. You spend much time and effort in a vain attempt to excuse or justify breaking one of the commandments (Matt. 5:17-20).

Remember, (Matt. 5:17-20) that even the least commandment is still *very much in force!*

Have you been "postponing" obedience to God? Why?

Do you think that reason will stand up in the judgment?

God's Word says that your reward for sin is DEATH (Rom. 6:23). Yes, *in this case* the Bible teaches CAPITAL PUNISHMENT. Remember that this time *God Himself* will carry out that punishment if you don't repent!

If you haven't done so already, you'd better take Peter's advice to "*Repent, and be baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the *gift* of the *Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38).

You will have to REPENT of breaking God's law. You will need to *be baptized* as an outward symbol of your willingness to bury your old, disobedient self. *Then* God will *give* you the Holy Spirit, through which you will receive the *love* to keep His law.

God loves you. He wants to *give* you *eternal life!*

But, in His wisdom, God has decreed that you must *first* learn to live the right, the sensible, and the happy kind of life. God's eternal, spiritual laws — the Ten Commandments, together with the spiritual statutes and judgments, are the basis of that sensible way of life.