

# "The Law"

**By Mike Burnham**

Why should we study the "law" when we are no longer under the law? Aren't we now under grace? Didn't Christ do away with the law when he died? Isn't following the law putting us under that heavy yoke of bondage which none has ever been able to bear? Isn't the law at variance with Christian liberty?

It is true that we are not under the law as a covenant of works nor as a ministration of condemnation, but we are under it as a rule of life and a means of sanctification. Romans 3:31.

Exodus 20:18,19...when God delivered the ten commandments, so affected were the people that they entreated Moses to act as a mediator between God and them. This teaches us that when the law is delivered to us directly by God it is the ministration of condemnation and death because the law is an extension of his holiness. But as it is delivered to us by the mediator, Christ Jesus, we may hear and observe it (Gal. 3:19; 6:2; 1Co. 9:21).

Exodus 31:18...Moses went up onto the mount and received the law, inscribed by God's own finger upon two tables of stone, which signified that our hearts are naturally so hard that none but the finger of God can make any impression of his law upon them.

God separates the ten laws and puts them on two tables of stone. The first table is our obligations toward God and the second is our obligations toward mankind. An interesting question arises, did the command to "Honour thy father and thy mother" end the first table or began the second? Personally I believe it ended the first. Parents stand to us in the place of God while we are young; parents are never regarded as "neighbors"; and each of the first five commandments contain the phrase "the Lord thy God," which is not found in any of the remaining five.

Romans 7:14...the law is spiritual, not only because it proceeds from God,

who is spirit, but because it demands something more than the mere obedience of external conduct, namely, the internal obedience of the heart to its uttermost extent, Psalm 51:6. God prohibits the smallest deviation from holiness even in our imaginations. It demands the holy regulation of our mind, affections, and will, and requires all our obedience to proceed from love. No other law ever professed to govern the spirit of man, but he who searches the heart claims nothing less. This high spirituality of the law was indicated by Christ when he insisted that an unchaste (lustful) look was adultery and that we are to love our enemies, Mat. 5:27,28; 43-45.

The first use of the moral law is to reveal the only righteousness which is acceptable to God, and at the same time to discover to us our own unrighteousness, Gal. 3:27; Rom. 7:7. The second use is to restrain the wicked, who though they have no concern for God's glory and no thought of pleasing him, yet refrain from many outward acts of sin through fear of its terrible penalty, whether through God or man. Though it doesn't bring people to God, it is a benefit in the community in which they live. The third use is the law is the believer's rule of life, to direct him, and to keep him dependent upon divine grace.

Psalms 119:96 says; "Thy commandment is exceeding broad." So comprehensive is the moral law that its authority extends to all the moral actions of our lives. The rest of the scriptures could be considered a commentary on the ten commandments, either exciting us to obedience by arguments, alluring us by promises, restraining us from sin by threatenings, or spurring us on or restraining us by examples recorded in the Old Testament. The precepts of the New Testament are but amplifications, and applications of the Ten Commandments. Whatever specific sin is named, all the sins of the same kind, with all the causes and provocations, are forbidden, for Christ expounded the sixth commandment as condemning not only actual murder, but also rash anger in the heart, mat. 5:21-22. Second, when any vice is forbidden, the contrary virtue is commanded or right, and when any virtue is commanded, the contrary vice is condemned. For example, in the third commandment God forbids the taking of his name in vain, so be necessary consequence the hallowing of his name is commanded. And as the eighth

commandment forbids stealing, so it requires the contrary duty--earning our living and paying for what we receive, Eph. 4:28.

### **"The First Commandment"**

**Exodus 20:1-2 (KJV) *And God spake all these words, saying, 2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.***

Exodus 20:1,2...this is the preface to the moral law. Kings and governors always prefixed their names and titles before the edicts set forth by them, to obtain more attention and respect to what they publish, and so with the great God, their maker, the kings of kings, being about to proclaim a law for his subjects, that he might affect them with a deeper reverence for his authority and make them more afraid to transgress those statutes, he puts his august name upon them. His name was to bring fear upon Israel, Deu. 28:58, for he is Jehovah, the eternal, self-existent one in whom is life, and God, their creator and their ruler and their judge.

**Exodus 20:3 (KJV) *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.***

Exodus 20:3...first note the singular number: "thou" not "ye". It is addressed to each person separately, because we are personally responsible. "Thou shalt have no other Gods" has the force of, thou shalt own, possess, seek, desire, love, or worship none other. "No other Gods"; they are called such not because they are so, either by nature or by office (Psalms 82:6), but because the corrupt hearts of men make and esteem them such--as in "whose God is their belly" (Phil. 3:19). "Before me" means to conduct thyself in the realization that thou art ever in my presence, that my eye is continually upon thee. We are usually contented if we approve ourselves before men and maintain a fair show of Godliness outwardly; but God searches our innermost being and we cannot conceal from him any secret lust or hidden idol.

Next let's consider the positive aspects of this commandment. Positively, I am to choose, worship and serve Jehovah as my God, and him only. He will have no rival and none can compete with him. I am to have a love for him stronger than all other affections, that is, I am to love the Lord my God with all my heart, and with all

my soul, and with all my mind, and with all my strength, Mark 12:30.

"Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." that is, thou shalt not give unto anyone or anything in heaven or on earth that inward love, reverence and dependence that is due only to the true God for no man can serve two masters, Mat. 6:24.

### **"The Second Commandment"**

***Exodus 20:4-6 (KJV) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; 6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.***

Exodus 20:4-6...this commandment reveals God's nature and how he is to be honored. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them." this strikes against a desire, which is deeply rooted in the human heart, namely, to bring in some aids to the worship of God, beyond those which he has appointed--material aids, things which can be perceived by the senses. The reason for this commandment is that God is incorporeal, invisible, and can be realized only by a spiritual principle, and since that principle is dead in fallen man, he naturally seeks that which accords with his carnality, Romans 1:21-25. No one who truly knows God as a living reality needs any images to aid his devotions, like pictures, statues or so-called holy things, for he conceives of him by faith and not by imagination. God is a spiritual, invisible, holy and omnipotent being, to represent him as being of a material and limited form is a falsehood and an insult to his majesty. Also see Lev. 4:14-19,23,24.

This commandment is enforced by three reasons. First by his power. The Hebrew word for God in "thy God" means the strong one, able to vindicate his honor. He is a "jealous God" indicates that making and bowing down to false Gods is

considered unfaithfulness as in a marriage, Deut. 32:16-21. Secondly, a terrible judgment is threatened: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." "Visiting" is a figurative expression, which signifies that after a space of time, in which God appears to have taken no notice or to have forgotten, he then shows by his providences that he has observed the evil ways and doings of men. This threatening evidently was designed to keep them from idolatry by an appeal to their natural affections. Thirdly, there is an encouragement to obedience, "Showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."

The Catholics contend that their use of images is with the object of promoting love, by keeping a visible image before them as an aid; but God says it is because they "hate" him.

### **"The Third Commandment"**

***Exodus 20:7 (KJV) Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.***

Exodus 20:7...his name is to be sacred to us. It is to be held in awe and reverence and fear, for it is "holy", Deut. 28:58. By the "name" of the Lord our God is signified God himself as he is made known to us, including everything through which he has been pleased to reveal himself: his word, his titles, his attributes, his commandments and his works. The name of God stands for his very nature and being. To "take his name" means to employ or make use of the same, as the object of our thoughts or the subject of our speech, or the manner of our walk. When we use his name as a swear word or phrase, we are not just putting God's name in the gutter but God himself. Negatively, this commandment prohibits all dishonoring thoughts of God, all needless, flippant, or blasphemous mention of him, any irreverent use of his word, any murmurings against his providence, any abuse of anything by which he has made himself known, which includes the way his people live, Eze. 36:20,22,23. I can think of only two reasons to have the name of God on my lips, for his glory and for the edification of ourselves and others. God is jealous of his good name, Eze. 39:25; 43:8.

## **"The Fourth Commandment"**

### **Exodus 20:8-10**

**Exodus 20:8-10 (KJV) *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: 10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:***

This commandment denotes that God is the sovereign Lord of our time. Six days "shalt thou" (not mayest thou) labour. The revealed will of God is that man should work, not idle away his time, an abundance of idleness causes one to sin, Eze. 16:49. There are many kinds of labour, there is labour at a job, labour keeping up a home or church building, labour in the word, etc. Whatever the labour involves it is to be for six days a week. God, himself set the example, Gen. 2:15. This statute was given a place not in the ceremonial law of Israel, which was to be done away when Christ fulfilled its types, but in the moral law, written by the finger of God himself upon tables of stone, signifying its permanent nature. The sabbath was not made just for the Jew, but for man, Mark 2:27. It was not to put a restriction on man's freedom, but a merciful provision for his good and as a foretaste of that future and better life.

Nowhere in scripture does it say "the seventh day of the "week", namely, Saturday. It simply says the "seventh day". The Jewish sabbath began Friday evening at 6:00pm and continued through Saturday until 6:00pm. Our seventh day is Sunday beginning at midnight Saturday through midnight Sunday. Thus, the Lord so worded the fourth commandment as to suit both the Jewish and the Christian dispensations. The sabbath not only commemorates the work of creation, but the yet greater work of redemption and the new creation. Sunday is the day of not only the resurrection but of a new beginning.

"In it thou shalt not do any work". Like the Jews, Christians need to prepare for the sabbath the day before. Meals should be cooked the day before as well as any house cleaning, etc. The wife needs a day of rest just as much as her husband,

more so being the weaker vessel.

Notice that it says, "keep it holy". It is not to be a day of idleness but a day of holiness. A day when we can give ourselves completely to the worship and service of our holy God, the most high. It is to be set apart in honor of him. A day of worshipping, praising, contemplating, meditating on God and his word. Three types of work are permissible on the sabbath, works of necessity (feeding cattle), which are those that could not be done on the preceding day and cannot be deferred to the next. Works of mercy, which are those that compassion requires us to perform toward others, like ministering to the sick. And works of piety, which are the worship of God in public and in private.

Look at Nehemiah 13:17,18. I wonder what would happen in most businesses if every Christian did no business on Sunday, no groceries, no going to malls, etc?

"a sabbath well spent, brings a week of content  
and strength for the toils of the morrow;  
but a sabbath profaned, whate'er may be gained  
is a certain forerunner of sorrow.

### **"The Fifth Commandment"**

#### **Exodus 20:12**

**Exodus 20:12 (KJV) *Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.***

This commandment is repeated in Ephesians 6:23 and substitutes the word earth for land showing that the commandment was not for the Jews only but for everyone, everywhere. Honour your father and mother means more than to show them respect. It also means to listen to what they have to say and take heed and obey, Eph. 6:1; Prov. 6:20-23. It means providing for them in old age, 1 Tim. 5:16. A promise is added as a motive and encouragement to obedience, Col. 3:20. It's a promise of repeated temporal blessings from God and your parents throughout your

long life.

Though Joseph was so highly exalted in Egypt, he honored his father, Gen. 48:12. Solomon honored his mother even though he was a king, 1 Kings 2:19.

## **"The Sixth Commandment"**

### **Exodus 20:13**

In the first five commandments we saw how God safeguarded his own holiness. In the second five we will see how he provides for the security and well-being of man. 1) "thou shalt not kill" for the protection of man's person; 2) "thou shalt not commit adultery" for the sanctity and good of his family; 3) "thou shalt not steal" for the safety of his estate and substance; 4) "thou shalt not covet" which is a fence around the whole law. God not only prohibits outward crimes, but inward motions of evil in our thoughts and affections.

The sixth commandment prohibits murder, which is what the devil was from the beginning, John 8:44. This corruption was quickly passed to the human race and was displayed by Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve. But this commandment is not restricted to forbidding the actual crime of murder. It also prohibits all the degrees and causes of murder, such as rash anger and hatred, slanders and revenge, and whatever else may prejudice the safety of our neighbor or tempt us to see him perish when it is in our power to relieve and rescue him.

We need to point out that not every killing of a man is murder. In the execution of justice, when a magistrate sentences a murderer, he is vested with lawful authority to put capital offenders to death, Gen. 9:6; Deut. 19:21. War is lawful when defending or fighting for what is right, John 18:36. Jesus implies that though carnal means were improper for advancing Christ's spiritual kingdom, yet had not his state of humiliation prevented his assuming the royal scepter, his followers might lawfully have fought to defend his title. There is one other exception, namely, accidental slaying, which is not chargeable with murder. That is, when a life is taken without any intention of so doing, Deut. 19:5. But if one is employed in



unlawful activities and it leads to the death of another, this cannot be excused from murder, Exodus 21:22-24. Those who are accessories are also guilty of murder, such as those who commission it to be done, 2 Sam. 11:15; 12:9, or consent to it (Pilate), or conceal it, Deut. 21:6,7 by implication.

Anger, it should be pointed out is not, like envy, simply, and of itself, unlawful. There is a virtuous anger, Eph. 4:26. A vicious and sinful anger, which darkens the understanding and makes one act as in a frenzy, is one which is without cause and turns to hatred, Matt. 5:21,22; Jonah 4:1.

If we have a meek and humble spirit we won't have to worry about being angered when we are slighted by someone. For all contention proceeds from pride, Prov. 13:10. When injured, put it down to ignorance or unintentional. Shun angry persons, Prov. 22:24,25.

## **"The Seventh Commandment"**

### **Exodus 20:14**

#### **Exodus 20:14 (KJV) *Thou shalt not commit adultery.***

Strictly speaking, "adultery" is a crime which none but a married person can commit--"fornication" being the name of it when done by one who is single, 1 Cor. 6:13,15,20. This prohibition is designed to guard the sanctity of the home, the family, which is the foundation of human society. It shows that God claims the body as well as the soul for his service. Though adultery is practiced in secret and may escape the judgment of man, they shall not escape the judgment of heaven, Isaiah 29:15, Psm. 94:7-11, Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 6:9,10. One of the reasons for marriage was so men and women could avoid fornication, 1 Cor. 7:2.

This law not only forbids the act, it also prohibits and condemns the imagination and contemplations of the heart. As murder begins within so does adultery and fornication, Matt. 5:28. That's why Paul said, "It is better to marry than to burn (harbor consuming passion, burn with desire), 1 Cor. 7:9.

This law also condemns anything that leads to temptation, like, immodest apparel, indelicate speech (sexual innuendos), drugs, tv, alcohol, etc. Anything and everything that excites the passions or has any tendency to induce unchastity in ourselves or others. We are to think on virtues, Phil. 4:8. Set our affection on things above, Col. 3:2. And walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, Eph. 4:1. Remembering that "the eyes of the lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Prov. 15:3.

There is also "spiritual adultery" which is when our hearts are drawn to material comforts and contentments and away from him. When the creature means more to us than the creator. When we go off after other Gods and another gospel. God is a jealous God, and nothing provokes him more than that we should prefer base things before himself.

Leave not your first love, Rev. 2:4; nor forsake him to whom you are "espoused" 2 Cor. 11:2.

## **"The Eighth Commandment"**

### **Exodus 20:15**

#### **Exodus 20:15 (KJV) *Thou shalt not steal.***

This law is ordained for our hearts as much as for our hands, in order that men may study both to protect their property and to promote the interests of others. (Calvin). This precept is to also govern our affections, by the setting of bounds to our desires after worldly things, that they may not exceed what the good providence of God has appointed to us, Prov. 30:8,9; Matt. 7:12.

Theft, in general, is an unjustly taking or keeping to ourselves what is lawfully another's. The first sin committed by humans entailed theft: Eve took of (stole) the forbidden fruit. The first sin against Israel after they entered the land of Canaan was that of theft: Achan stole from among the spoils (Josh 7:21). The first sin which defiled the early church was theft: Ananias and Sapphira "kept back part of the price" (Acts 5:2).

The highest form of this sin is where it is committed against God. God charged Israel with this crime: "Will a man rob God? (Mal. 3:8,9). There are other ways to steal. We rob God when we withhold from him the glory which is his due, by being unfaithful, etc.

Prov. 21:7; Jer. 17:11...God, by way of his righteous judgment, often makes one sin the punisher of another and what is gained by theft is lost by intemperance and a shortened life.

The best thing we can do is practice Heb. 13:5,6; Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:6,7.

## **"The Ninth Commandment"**

### **Exodus 20:16**

**Exodus 20:16 (KJV) *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.***

In its narrowest meaning this commandment prohibits anyone from perjury or giving false testimony in a court of law, in its wider meaning, this commandment prohibits any word of ours which would injure the reputation of our neighbor, be it uttered in public or in private. In its widest application it has to do with the regulation of our speech, namely, our tongue according to scripture. Prov. 18:21 with Matt. 12:36,37. Prov. 15:4; James 3:1,2,8,13,17-18.

The duties concerning our tongues may be summed up in two words, "true and love" Eph. 4:15. As the prior commandment provides for the security of our neighbors' property, this one is designed to preserve his good name by our speaking the truth about him in love with wisdom from above. I say wisdom because sometimes things said in truth and love can still injure a person and are best left unsaid, like talking about someone's faults when we have no call to divulge them or when we relate things about someone that others have no right or reason to know. At other times a certain amount of tact should be involved for the sake of peace and gentleness. And sometimes false witness can be given when we do not speak at all, for by not speaking we give our assent.

A lying tongue and false witness are two of the seven things that God hates, Prov. 6:16-19. These seven things take in the whole spectrum of man's sin to his neighbor. It sounds almost like what may happen in a church. Lying consists of three elements or ingredients: speaking what is not true, deliberately doing so; and doing so with an intent to deceive. Ananias and Sapphira broke this commandment too. They had all three elements in their lie to the Holy Ghost.

## **"The Tenth Commandment"**

### **Exodus 20:17**

**Exodus 20:17 (KJV) *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.***

This is what the King James Version translates "concupiscence", Rom. 7:7,8. It is the unlawful lusting after what is someone else's. In this final commandment we can see that all of the others not only included the outward act but inward thoughts and emotions too, for God here expressly imposes a law upon our souls, forbidding us to so much as lust after whatever he has forbidden us to perpetrate. The best way to keep men from committing sin in act is to keep them from desiring it in heart. Coveting is the firstborn of indwelling depravity, the first risings and expressions of our corrupt nature. Coveting is natural to the depraved soul, being destitute of divine grace and spiritual life, and so lusts after what he doesn't or can't have. It is an actual craving like drug addicts crave drugs.

Covetousness starts off very small and dim in our imaginations. If we recognize it for what it is (sin) and start praying and thinking of things above and virtues and that God knows our thoughts, we can overcome it with little difficulty. The next step is when our corrupt nature entertains the thought, and it becomes harder to eject. The next step is the assent, our judgment being blinded and carried away by the strength of corrupt and carnal affections, commends it to our minds. Normally, two witnesses appear and put in their plea to the understanding or judgment about sin: God's law and our conscience. The law condemns and the

conscience cites the law. But then the affections step in and bribe the judge with promises of pleasure or profit, thereby corrupting the judgment to give its vote and assent to sin. An illustration of this can be seen in the interaction between the serpent and eve.

The understanding or mind having approved it, the next step is the will must now resolve to commit it; and then the sin is fully formed within and lacks nothing but the opportunity to bring it forth into open action, James 1:14,15, Matt. 15:19. If it has reached this step, it is usually the point of no return. If sin proceeds to outward action, it then falls under one or more of the other commandments. Of course, any sin breaks all of the commandments because the royal law, love of God and our neighbor is absent, James 2:8,10; Romans 13:9,10.

God's authority reaches to the soul and conscience and lays an obligation upon our very thoughts and imaginations, which no human laws can do, for they cannot see into our hearts. We can see why Jesus came down so hard on the pharisees who were content with the outward conformity to God's law! 1 Thes. 4:5; we are supposed to know how to overcome coveting by keeping our thoughts under subjection.