

COVENANTS

Early Covenants

A covenant is similar to an agreement between two parties. In the case of God's covenants with people, He determined what they would contain. People who were a party to the covenant could choose whether to abide under the covenant made by God. From God's perspective, He is a covenant making and covenant keeping God and He is always true and faithful to His side of the covenant.

2Chronicles6vs14 and he said: " Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven or on earth like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts."

Deuteronomy7vs9 " Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 10 and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face."

Over a period of about 1600 years after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, people neglected their relationship with God and distanced themselves from Him, choosing instead to follow their own will, creating other gods and generally pursuing their own desires and passions. The terrible result of Satan's influence on people over this considerable period of time is seen by the words that describe the state of people in Noah's time. Their thoughts were so evil that God said that he was sorry he created people.

Genesis6vs5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the Lord said, " I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. " 8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

When disobedience to God's will was widespread across the inhabited earth, God recognized Noah as the only person who was faithful to Him. God therefore entered into a covenant with Noah providing the means for Noah, through faith and action, to escape the impending destruction of sinners that God planned to bring upon the earth. When all other people, are destroyed through the flood, Noah and his family survive.

Over approximately the next 500 years people were once again drawn away from God in the way they were before the flood. Eventually, God chose a man named Abram, who would later be called Abraham (father of a multitude). The first test of obedience for Abraham was God asking him to leave his homeland, which he obeyed. Speaking to Abraham, God says (Genesis 12v3) ... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Through Abraham, God intended to establish a pattern of people who would individually be acceptable to Him through faith in Him but before this could happen, God tested Abraham's faith.

Abraham and his wife Sarah had waited for many years wanting to have a child but

were not blessed with one. Long before, God had given Abraham a promise telling him that his descendants would be in number like the stars of the sky but now in their old age not even the initial means of that being fulfilled had happened. Eventually after human hope had gone, in Abraham's and Sarah's old age, God gave them a child and they named him Isaac. He was their only son and they loved Isaac with all their heart. Isaac was the hope for the future and the fulfillment of a promise of God. However, God had an ultimate test for Abraham and it was to see if Abraham truly would trust Him and put Him first in his life. God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to Him.

Abraham in astounding faith and obedience undertakes to do this and leaves for a trip with Isaac with this intent. It is a difficult walk for Abraham knowing that his only son must now die but he is convinced that this must happen out of his love for God and obedience to Him. In Abraham we see a person whose will is totally surrendered to God so that God's will is done in his life even if the doing results in great personal pain and loss.

When they eventually reach the site of the sacrifice, Isaac who had not been told what was going to happen, is told that he is the sacrifice and Abraham lays him down on the altar. Out of his love for his father and for God he is obediently then tied to the altar. When Abraham lifts his hand to strike Isaac with his knife, an angel of God intervenes and stops him. God provides a lamb that is caught in a nearby bush for Abraham to place on the altar of sacrifice and Isaac is saved. God provides a lamb as a substitute for Isaac's life. As we will fully appreciate in a later chapter, the parallel between God sending His Son Jesus as a sacrifice for us and the story of Abraham and Isaac in the Old Testament is remarkable but in God's case, His Son was sacrificed.

Abraham demonstrated the great love, faith, trust and obedience that a human being can have for his creator and God, and by passing the test, God states that his obedience resulted in the future fulfillment of a promise for all nations of the earth to be blessed by his seed.

Genesis 22:18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.

Abraham's blessing flowed onto the future generations because of his faith and obedience to God. Abraham blessed Isaac and God later confirmed His promise to Isaac.

Genesis 26:3 I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. 4 And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 5 because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws. "

Isaac eventually had two sons and of these two, Jacob received his blessing and the promises of God were handed down from Isaac to Jacob. God planned for the blessing that was upon Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and eventually his twelve sons (the twelve tribes of Israel), to eventually spread to all other nations in the world (i.e. the non-Jews,

known as the Gentiles). God's plan was for His holy nation to include people from all nations of the world.

Old Covenant

About 600 years after Abraham was chosen, God chose Moses to deliver the twelve tribes of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Moses had been saved from certain death and had been adopted by the Egyptian royal household. As a prince of Egypt he received 40 years of the best teaching that was available and great wealth but God had other plans for his life. Circumstances forced Moses into the wilderness to take him away from distractions and enable him to come to know himself and God and develop his spiritual life. Like another great spiritual leader who would be appointed, King David, Moses was trained by God for his massive task by being a shepherd. For any person who has lived in the world without God, spiritual growth and restoration is slow and for Moses this period of time was a further 40 years.

When the right time came, God told Moses of his role which would be to separate His chosen people, the nation of Israel, from the land of Egypt and take them to the Promised Land. As Moses obediently followed God's leading, the 12 tribes of Israel were released by supernatural means from slavery in Egypt. Moses and the tribes were then led by God towards the land given to them, called Canaan. As a result of lack of faith in God, and their difficulties in following and obeying God, what was a short journey took 40 years. They quickly forgot the mighty acts of deliverance that God had performed to release them from Egypt when they were faced with everyday problems and difficulties in the wilderness. Time and time again the people revealed their inability to live for God and trust Him.

During this time, God made a covenant with the nation of Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai giving them His law so that the people could come to learn His revealed will and live a life of obedience to it. God provided His law to the nation of Israel to know and obey by yielding to His will and doing it by their own strength. If they could keep this covenant, then they could be a kingdom of priests having direct access to God and a holy nation, set apart from sin.

*Exodus 19vs5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.
6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*

The covenant that God made through Moses required both parties to keep their end of the agreement. God's law was written on stone tablets for people to learn but they were not spiritually alive to God and their heart was not able to be spiritually touched and changed by God. It was a covenant based on being set apart for God through following practices and external acts of obedience. This obedience was dependant on each person's own will, strength and ability, through their human nature. It was a covenant where people had to physically obey what was taught to them by other people with the hope that the knowledge they had in their mind and the obedient application of their will would gradually internally change them. Because the hard, impure and wicked heart remained, the people were unable to renew their darkened minds and live for God. Time and again the people were unable to know and obey God and keep the covenant. Therefore due to their inability to be obedient and keep

their side of the covenant, the tribes of Israel could not benefit from the restoration and blessing that God had for them. They could also not take God's blessing to the other nations.

In Galatians Paul tells us that the covenant, made many years earlier between God and Abraham promising the coming of Christ Jesus, was not annulled by the later covenant that God made through Moses (Galatians 3 vs 16-18). In making the Old Covenant with Israel, God still held in His heart the knowledge that the Seed (Jesus), as promised to Abraham, would come to reconcile people to Himself and enable them to regain the spiritual life that was lost.

The covenant with Moses (Old Covenant) and the law of God that was provided was necessary due to the people's sins. The Old Covenant prepared people for the coming of the New Covenant because it enabled people to come to know God's will and recognize sin, see their own sinfulness and come to terms with the fact that God required people to pay a penalty for sin. It also clearly showed that God wanted to create a group of people for Himself who could fulfil the original plan He had for people to love Him, commit to Him with all their heart, and live their life for Him.

There was no Holy Spirit within the people of Israel to spiritually teach them but God still wanted to draw near to these people to instruct them in His ways, if they were willing to turn to Him and be obedient to Him. Though God sought to draw near to them, the nation of Israel found it too difficult to draw near to Him. Therefore the nation of Israel knew God from afar and even though God's presence was within the tabernacle that had been specially prepared, only the high priest could enter there and draw near to God's presence once a year going behind the veil into the holy of holies. The heavy veil hung between the people and their God. They were unable to take hold of God's offer to become a kingdom of priests and all draw near to His presence.

The people of Israel in coming to know sin and seeing themselves as sinful people came to understand how God viewed them and what He expected of them. They could start to see the holiness of God and also see their inability to obey Him and be holy like He was. They came to understand God's justice and the requirement for punishment for sin. They also came to understand their total inability to save themselves and came to understand why God had promised a Seed who would be their only hope of salvation.

Although this covenant trained people giving them some knowledge of God and His will, it could not spiritually restore them and make them spiritually alive to God. A more perfect covenant built on better promises was needed and the people of Israel looked to God to provide it.

Hebrews 8 vs 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that the New Covenant made the old one provided to Moses at Mount Sinai obsolete (*Hebrews 8 vs 13*). Now there were not only the two groups of Jew and Gentile but a third group which was made up of believers from both these groups. This new group of believers would find favour from God when they accepted and were obedient to the New Covenant.

New Covenant

Over a period of about 650 years after Moses and the exodus from Egypt, the nation of Israel generally neglected their relationship with God and were influenced by the corrupt nations around them. Instead of relying on God and being obedient to Him, they most often relied upon themselves and their idolatrous neighbouring nations. In disobedience, they generally lost sight of God's plan for them to become a holy nation and people who were set apart from all others for Him. During this time, shortly after the reign of King David and King Solomon, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms, the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah. God, in accordance with His promise to Abraham, revealed this promise to prophets. He spoke through the prophet Jeremiah of the New Covenant that He would make with the people of Israel and Judah.

Jeremiah 31:31 " Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house 33 of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ` Know the Lord, ' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. "

The New Covenant was similar to the Old Covenant in that it was initially promised to the people of Israel and Judah with the intention of them living under it and then spreading it throughout the entire world. However it was also very different to the Old Covenant because the work would be done internally by the Holy Spirit who would come to live within believers. The internal transformation would enable individuals to change the way they lived their daily lives, changing their thoughts, feelings, words and actions. It would be a covenant that was very different to the one provided to Moses at Mount Sinai where the commandments were written on tablets of stone by God and people had to obey them. Under the New Covenant, the laws would be put by God into people's minds and written onto their hearts through their spirit so that they could live a life of obedience. God also said that these people would be able to know Him in a way as never before and there would be forgiveness of sins. The veil that existed under the Old Covenant between people and God would be removed for those seeking to accept and live under the New Covenant. People would be able to draw near to God.

God provided further revelation on the nature of the New Covenant through the prophet Ezekiel stating that He would give people a new heart of flesh rather than stone which could be transformed. Compared to the Old Covenant which was a covenant dependant on the natural abilities of people, this New Covenant would be a spiritual covenant capable of restoring what man and woman had before they sinned and separated themselves from God. The result would be cleansing from sin and reconciliation between these people and God. The New Covenant would be one that

resulted in people living in God's spiritual kingdom under God's rule rather than focusing on the earthly realm.

Ezekiel 36:25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. 28 Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

By God's forgiveness of sin, a spiritual life for God would be lived with the Holy Spirit coming once again to be in individuals as He did when Adam and Eve were created. He would live within each person to instruct and guide them. In this way the law would no longer need to be memorized and obeyed but rather each person could be taught and helped directly by God Himself (the Holy Spirit).

Under the New Covenant, the acts of obedience, in addition to being externally obeyed, would also have to be obeyed internally through a renewed mind, redirected emotions and a changed heart. Though more demanding, God would directly help individuals to meet the conditions and requirements of His New Covenant through His presence within them. The holiness that eluded people under the Old Covenant would be more achievable.

Obedience was important under the Old Covenant and would still be important under the New Covenant. In the Garden of Eden the spiritual separation from God was due to disobedience. Through the grace (unmerited favor from God) that would come in the New Covenant, believers would be restored to live a life of obedience. This obedience would mean a recognition that under the New Covenant people should live only for God, not obeying their own desires.

The New Covenant promised by God through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel is one where God promises to act within each of us in a way that enables us to be obedient to His revealed will. The promise by God is to:

- Change the spiritual heart of people by transforming it from being a heart of stone that is unable to change from being hard, selfish, wicked and unbelieving into a heart that is fleshly and capable of changing to know God, love Him and be wholly committed and obedient to His will.
- Place a new spirit in each person. The spirit within each person which is dead to God would be made alive to God by the Holy Spirit coming to live within each person.
- Send the Holy Spirit in each person to:
 - write God's law on their spiritual heart through the person's spirit;
 - place the law intuitively in their mind; and
 - cause that person and empower them to be obedient to God.
- Forgive the person's sin and remember it no more.
- Have a relationship with the person. The intimate communion between God and people that had existed at creation would be restored.

About 650 years after the prophecies of the New Covenant were given through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God eventually sent the promised Seed to the people of Israel. Paul makes it clear that the promise of the Seed coming to save people was what the Jewish people looked forward to in faith.

Acts 26 vs 6 ... for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. 7 To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain.

1 Corinthians 10 vs 1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

The Seed was Jesus Christ and He was born into the Jewish race and clearly had a ministry only to the Jewish people. While He lived on earth, He could not minister to the Gentiles because they were outside God's Covenant. All Gentiles were excluded from the Old Covenant God made with Moses but Jesus came to enable the New Covenant to be put into place so that they also could become acceptable to God. Whereas the 12 tribes inherited the Old Covenant by ancestry from Abraham, both the Jews and the Gentiles would now inherit the New Covenant through faith and a new connection with Jesus Christ. After the resurrection of Jesus, Paul in his letter to the Galatians, speaks of God's promise to Abraham and states that Jesus Christ is the Seed and that now all nations have the ability to be blessed by God if they have faith in Him.

Jesus' birth, death and resurrection put into place the New Covenant. It replaced the Old Covenant that God made with Moses and fulfilled God's promise to Abraham regarding all nations being blessed in him. Through the death of Jesus, the Seed of spiritual life for people was sown by God. Through His resurrection the new spiritual life became available for all believers to receive and the Jewish people were then sent out to bring all nations to God.

Although the prophet Jeremiah prophesied that the New Covenant was to be with the nations of Israel and Judah, Paul speaking to the church at Galatia, makes it clear that the New Covenant applies to all the nations. In the same way that Abraham was found righteous by believing God, those people from all nations who have faith in being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ are blessed and receive their righteousness.

Galatians 3 vs 6 just as Abraham " believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. " 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, " In you all the nations shall be blessed. " 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. ... 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The Old Covenant was an agreement between God and the nation of Israel. Under the New Covenant, the agreement is between each individual who becomes a believer and

God. Under the New Covenant, God keeps His side of the contract but each of us must enter into the New Covenant to gain the benefits of it.

At the core of both covenants is a requirement for people to come to know God's will as it has been revealed through God's law and live a life of obedience to it. God's law provided people with guidance on how to live their life in a way that pleased God in the past and it continues to guide people in living our life for God today.

God's Law

God's law was given to Moses at Mount Sinai (the first time God's law had been given to people) as he led the nation of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. The law included the Ten Commandments as well as the moral and social law, and the ritual and ceremonial law. The full moral and social law provided further detail of what the Ten Commandments meant and how they should be obeyed. These laws guided people's daily behaviour and dealt with areas such as crimes, property, family relationships, caring for the needy and disadvantaged, and general social behaviour.

With the handing down of the law of God to Moses came some understanding of God's will. The law acted as a tutor revealing God's will to the nation of Israel. This meant that the people could understand sin, turn from it and try to live a life that was according to God's will. It also meant that they would have an opportunity to know God more and He would draw closer to them.

Galatians3vs19 What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made;.....

Sin is defined as a breaking of God's law and not obeying His will. There are sins of commission and sins of omission. A sin of commission is doing something that is not in accordance with God's will. Although many of us know sin to be this, less of us realize that when we know what God's will is and don't act in accordance with it, this also is sin. It is sin by omission because we do not do something that is required by God's will, even though we know it should be done.

James4vs17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

All people, with the exception of Jesus Christ, have sinned through the sin handed down over many generations from the first people created and through sins that we commit in our lives. In this state, we are unable to meet God's requirement for acceptance and a close spiritual relationship.

Romans3vs23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

In the Psalms, David tells us that he was conceived in sin. People enter this world as sinners and because it is rooted into our heart, we all have the natural inclination to reject God and His ways.

Psalms51vs5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

Since the disobedience of Adam and Eve it has been impossible for any person to live at the standard that God originally planned for all people, which is, a life free from committing sins. Even if it were possible for any of us to be born without sin, we do not have the perfect knowledge of God's will or the ability or the natural inclination to be completely obedient to it. We see this repeatedly in the Old Testament with the people of Noah's time, Abraham's time, and with the nation of Israel. For the nation of Israel, even though God revealed His will and power to the people as they travelled to the Promised Land and then lived in it, sin was in their nature and they found it impossible to live a life free of it.

All people who have ever been born know right and wrong through our conscience and disobedience to our conscience will be one way in which people will be judged when we all appear before God. However, in his letter to the Roman church, Paul tells them that, when God gave His law to people through Moses, they became more aware than ever before of God's will and therefore when they did not obey God's will, they clearly sinned. Even though people had always sinned, the law gave us a greater awareness and accountability for it.

Romans 3vs20 ... for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Even though greater blessing was available to the nation of Israel through the handing down of the law and knowledge of it, there also came a higher requirement for obedience. Through the experience of the nation of Israel, we see that people who know God's law in their mind are totally unable to keep it in their heart and live each day according to His will. In this hopeless situation they could only look forward to God's promise to Abraham for a better covenant being provided.

Jesus made it very clear that the moral law handed down by God to Moses under the Old Covenant was not annulled by His coming and in fact people would have to obey it to a far stricter level because it would be placed in our minds and written onto our hearts by the Holy Spirit. There would be spiritual instruction and a requirement for spiritual obedience.

Matthew 5vs17 " Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 21 " You have heard that it was said to those of old, ` You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. ' 22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ` Raca! ' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ` You fool! ' shall be in danger of hell fire. "

The scribes and Pharisees were experts in the law of God and prided themselves on their ability to teach and follow it closely in their actions and words. They were the

strictest religious groups of Jesus' time but were also the ones who provided the greatest opposition to the ministry that Jesus had on earth. Although their physical acts and the words of their mouth generally made it appear that they were obedient to God and were closer to God than the many other Jews around them, John the Baptist and later Jesus perceived the state of their heart and spoke strong words of condemnation against them. Jesus said the Pharisees were not entering the kingdom of God and were preventing others from entering into it as well. Their exclusion from God's spiritual kingdom was due to their hard hearts. Their actions and words did not match the condition of their heart.

Jesus told His listeners that their righteousness had to exceed that of the most religious people they knew, the scribes and the Pharisees. He also said that people under the New Covenant must follow the moral law more stringently and that there would be levels in God's kingdom with those who are obedient to God's commands being considered great while those who are disobedient considered the least in the kingdom.

Jesus stated that, with the greater spiritual revelation and spiritual assistance, we can sin in our hearts. We sin not only by not actually doing or saying what God expects of us but when we do or say what should please God yet act without pure thoughts and motives, it is still regarded by God as us sinning in our heart. Under the New Covenant our thoughts are equally important as our acts and words. Our feelings of anger, envy, jealousy, deceit, selfishness, hate, greed and lust are all recognized by God as sin and we are warned that we will be judged for the feelings and intents of our heart.

Matthew 5:27 " You have heard that it was said to those of old, ` You shall not commit adultery. ' 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

Jesus sets the benchmark higher and says that we are to be perfect just as our Father in heaven is perfect. Explaining this, Jesus said that now anger equated to murder, lust for women equated to adultery, divorce (other than for infidelity) equates to adultery. He added that we should not use oaths but mean what we say, we should turn the other cheek, love and pray for our enemies, give to those who ask, bless those who curse us and do good to those that hate us. He said that if we do not do more than any non-believer would do in a similar circumstance, we should not expect any reward from God.

Jesus Christ came to confirm and perfect the law that had been given by God to Moses. The ritual and ceremonial laws were given to Moses to teach people about sin and the need to be cleansed from it. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus not only confirmed the reasons for the original ritual and ceremonial law but He went on to perfect it by giving Himself as an atonement for sin, once and for all. Having

perfectly satisfied the reasons for the ritual and ceremonial laws, these laws no longer need to be followed.

The moral law of God does not change and it always reflects His character and His will. The relationship that God wants to have with His people and which He wants people to have with one another also has not changed. What has changed is the higher standard of obedience that has been set for people under the New Covenant.

Jesus had just over three years of ministry during which He had to prepare His disciples so that they could go out to the world with His message. The clear message Jesus gave His disciples was the need for people under the New Covenant to love God completely, love people and be obedient to God in their thoughts, words and actions. Loving God and loving people are what the Ten Commandments are based upon and Jesus made it clear that we are still to know them and obey them.

Matthew 19 vs 16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, " Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? " 17 So He said to him, " Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments. "

The Ten Commandments reflect the character of God and His will concerning how we should live on this earth. Jesus confirmed their importance in His teachings and they were given by God to guide us in our relationship with Him and to guide us in our moral behaviour towards one another. For believers, they are spiritually written onto our heart by the Holy Spirit.

The Ten Commandments can be divided into those that relate to loving God and those relating to the love of people around us. Any act, thought or word in our life can be tested by our mind and heart to determine whether it is in accordance with the total love we are meant to have for God or the love we are meant to have for all people around us.

Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 vs 3-17)

Loving God

1. *" You shall have no other gods before Me."*

2. *" You shall not make for yourself a carved image--any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."*

3. *" You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."*

4. *" Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."*

Loving People

5. " Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

6. " You shall not murder."

7. " You shall not commit adultery."

8. " You shall not steal."

9. " You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

10. " You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's. "

God hates sin and wants believers to look upon it in the same way He does. All sin needs to go for there is no such thing as "small" sins that we are allowed to commit and live with. There needs to be an increasing level of obedience to God's will in our life. James reminds us of this when he said:

James2v10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

We can therefore see that in our weakness it is impossible to be fully obedient to the commandments of God, particularly due to the requirement to not sin in our heart. However this must never stop us from realizing that God has told us what is important to Him through the Ten Commandments. God is always the same and never changes. What He told Moses, and confirmed through Jesus, He continues to tell us today through the Holy Spirit speaking into the lives of believers.

There is no spiritual benefit of knowing the will of God (which includes God's moral law) unless it is obeyed and lived through our daily lives. In fact our spiritual life will wither if we do not walk in obedience because when we are not obedient, we start to distance ourselves from God. Jesus likened the action of doing God's will in His spiritual life to physically eating food to sustain the physical body by telling His disciples that His food was to do the will of the Father.

John4vs32 But He said to them, " I have food to eat of which you do not know. " 33 Therefore the disciples said to one another, " Has anyone brought Him anything to eat? " 34 Jesus said to them, " My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."

If we do not daily feed upon the spiritual food of doing the will of God, which includes God's moral law, our spiritual life will wither and be weak.

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