

NOT COME TO DESTROY

Nearly one year ago, at ninety years of age, Charles Stanley went to be with the Lord. Stanley was for forty-nine years the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. His television program, *In Touch*, is broadcast on five-hundred radio stations, and three-hundred television stations, and has been translated into fifty languages. By some accounts, his ministry was very fruitful. Yet, his theology had a grave defect on the matter of the relation of faith and works. He denied the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. In his book, *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* he wrote:

The Bible clearly teaches that God's love for His people is of such magnitude that even those who walk away from the faith have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand... Salvation or justification or adoption- whatever you wish to call it-stands independently of faith. Consequently, God does not require a *constant attitude* of faith in order to be saved-only an *act* of faith... You and I are not saved because we have an enduring faith. We are saved because at a moment in time we expressed faith in our enduring Lord" (page 70, 80. Emphasis by EF)

Stanley taught that a man is saved from his sins, and receives eternal life, by a single act of faith, and that salvation is not conditioned on persevering in faith and good works. Charles Stanley's son, Andy, is, like his father, a popular preacher. He is founder and senior pastor of North Point Ministries. Seven years ago, according to *Outreach* magazine's survey of pastors in the United States, Andy Stanley was one of the ten most influential pastors in the nation. The following year, he published a book, called *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World*. In that book, Stanley argued the ancient heresy of Marcion. One reviewer explained Stanley's view this way:

For him, the old covenant is about hating enemies, the new is about loving them (107). The old covenant is filled with "misogyny" (290) where women are "commodities" (214), but under the new they are "partners" (215). In the old covenant God is "holy," but in the new covenant God is "love" (223). The old covenant God is "angry," but the new covenant God is "brokenhearted" (257). In the old covenant people relied on the Bible, but in the new covenant they just love people (234). (Michael J. Kruger, "Why We Can't Unhitch from the Old Testament, The Gospel Coalition, October 22, 2018)

After disparaging the Old Covenant, Stanley made an appeal to church leaders. He asked them, "Would you consider unhitching your teaching of what it means to follow Jesus from all things old covenant?" (page 315) Stanley asked Christians to disregard the Old Covenant, including the moral law. He wrote, "The Ten Commandments have no authority over you. None." Stanley replaced the Ten Commandments with his own single commandment: "To be clear: Thou shalt not obey the Ten Commandments." (Page 136) The church fathers rejected Marcion and his teachings, and church leaders today should reject the teachings of Andy Stanley, son of Marcion.

Concerning the Israelites in Egypt, the Scriptures say:

And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with

Isaac, and with Jacob.” (Exodus 2:23, 24) The Israelites cried out in their distress, but not to God. They did not serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. They rather served the gods of Egypt. (Joshua 24:14; Ezekiel 20:7–10) God would deliver them from their bondage, but he would do it because of His promise to the patriarchs. According to Ezekiel the prophet, God said to them:

Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt. Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. (Ezekiel 20:7–11. Compare Joshua 24:14)

God promised to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, but He told them that they would have to forsake the gods of Egypt. The Israelites would not forsake them, however, and so God would have destroyed them; but, for the sake of His honor, He brought them out of Egypt into the wilderness. He delivered them from their bondage so that they might freely serve Him. God said to Moses, “When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.” (Exodus 3:12)

Moses led Israel out of Egypt, and to Mount Sinai, and there God made a covenant with them. God told Moses to say to the people:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Exodus 19:4–6)

God by His great power delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt, and brought them to Himself so that they might worship and serve Him only. If the Israelites would obey Him, then He would be their God, and they would be His people. When Moses told the Israelites what God said, they agreed to His terms. They answered, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.” (Exodus 19:8)

So, God gave Israel His law, the Ten Commandments:

- Thou shalt have no other gods.
- Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
- Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.
- Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- Honour thy father and thy mother.
- Thou shalt not kill.
- Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- Thou shalt not steal.
- Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Thou shalt not covet.

These Ten Commandments are the moral law, the essence of the law of God. They are commandments, not recommendations or suggestions. Because God's commandments are based on His unchanging character, they are right in themselves, and right for all time. When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses asked God what he should tell Israel is the name of the God who sent Him, God replied, "I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." (Exodus 3:14) God identified Himself as *I AM*. This means that God is the God that exists in Himself. He has always existed, and He always shall. He is the Creator of all things, and so all things depend upon Him, and He depends upon nothing. Saint Paul told the philosophers of Athens, "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things," and that "in him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts 17:25, 28) Because God exists in Himself, He does not change. He said, "*I am* the LORD, I change not." (Malachi 3:6) Saint James wrote that with God there is no variableness. (James 1:17) So, there are some things God cannot do. When Israel wandered in the wilderness, Balak, King of the Moabites, told Balaam the prophet to curse the Israelites, but God told Balaam to bless them. Balaam told the king:

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. (Numbers 23:19, 20)

God said He would bless, and so He was bound to bless; God could not go back on His word. Saint Paul wrote to Saint Timothy that, before the world began, God promised eternal life to those who have faith in Him, and God cannot lie. (Titus 1:2) God made a promise to Abraham, and then confirmed it with an oath, and it is impossible for God to lie. (Hebrews 6:18) Concerning moral laws, God does not will, or stipulate, what is right. He does not at one time declare an act right, and another time wrong. A thing is right if it is consistent with His character, and wrong if it is not.

So, God's moral law is unchanging, because it is based on God's unchanging character. There is only one true God, and so men should worship and serve Him only, and none others. Because God is the Creator, and not the creature, no one may make an image of any created thing to worship as God. God's name is who He is, and so no one should misuse it. God created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh, and so man should work six days, and rest on the seventh. God the Son honors His Father, and so children should honor their fathers and their mothers. God is faithful to His people, and so a man and woman who are married ought to be faithful to each other. God gives gifts to men, and no man may take it away without God's permission. God cannot lie, and so no man may tell a lie about another. God prospers a man, and so no man may desire to take anything that belongs to another.

God made man in His own image, and He is good to mankind. The psalmist says, "The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works... The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." (Psalm 145:9, 15, 16) Concerning God's goodness to mankind, Jesus said, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45) God wants what is best for mankind, and His law is good, not only because it is based on God's good character, but because it is good for mankind. When the Israelites were ready to enter into the promised land, Moses gave them an exhortation. He said:

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you... Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons. (Deuteronomy 4:1, 2, 5–9)

God gave Israel a law, and He told them that, if they would obey His law, then they would live, and, if they would not, then they would die. Moreover, they would possess the promised land so long as they obeyed. God's laws are good and wise, and good for a nation. Israel alone were God's covenant people, and they alone had His law. If the Israelites would keep God's laws, then God would prosper them. The other nations would then see their prosperity, and so they would desire to serve the one true God, and to obey His good and wise laws. Moses told the people to take care, and to watch themselves, so that they would not forget what God had done for them, and what God had commanded them, and so His commandments leave their hearts. Not only were they to keep God's law, but they were to teach their children to do the same, and so on forever, so that all nations at all time would keep the law of God.

God gave His covenant people the Ten Commandments, and He also gave them particular applications of those laws, and punishments for breaking the laws. The Ten Commandments can never change, because they are based on God's character. The punishments, however, may change. So, when Cain murdered his brother, God banned him from the land, but protected him from vengeance. After the Flood of Noah, however, at a time when violence was great on the earth, God required the death of any man who, without God's permission, took the life of another man.

When the Son of God came into the world, He proclaimed, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) The Son of God came into the world to establish His kingdom, and, if any man would enter into that kingdom, then He must repent of his sins, and pledge obedience to Jesus. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, delivered the constitution of His kingdom. In His sermon, He said:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17–19)

Some, it seems, were under the impression that Jesus had come to abolish the Scriptures, and Jesus took pains to correct that misunderstanding. Jesus said that He did not come to do away with the law, but to fulfill it, which is

to say, He came not to do away with the law of Moses until He fulfilled it. The Scriptures are God's revelation to His people, and they include both law and prophecy. God gave the Law of Moses to His covenant people, Israel, and He expected them to keep it. Yet, not all of the Law was eternal; some of it was provisional. The Hebrew Scriptures contain the moral law, the ceremonial law, and the civil law. The ceremonial law was temporary, because it would have its fulfillment in the Christ, the Son of God. The feasts and sacrifices, in one way, or another, foreshadowed Christ. The animal sacrifices, for example, showed the people the deadly consequences of sin, and the cost of atonement. Yet, those sacrifices could not atone for sin. Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." (Hebrews 10:4) Jesus would sacrifice Himself for the sins of His people, making atonement for them. His perfect sacrifice would make the imperfect sacrifices obsolete. Jesus fulfilled, not only the ceremonies and types, but the prophecies as well. The nation of Israel was a particular people in a particular time, and not all of the civil law can be directly carried over to all nations at all times. Yet, the principles behind the laws are good and wise, and every nation does well to adopt them.

Jesus said that not the smallest part of a letter of the Scriptures could not pass away until heaven and earth pass away. Jesus, speaking in His Olivet Discourse of the destruction of Jerusalem, said, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Matthew 24:34, 35) Saint John wrote in his Revelation, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." (Revelation 21:1) When Jesus destroyed the temple of Jerusalem, forty years after the Jews crucified Him, heaven and earth, as it were, passed away, and there was begun a new creation over which Christ is king. The Old Testament has been fulfilled, yet it remains "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16) The moral law continues forever. If anyone breaks God's moral law, and teaches others to do the same, then He is the least in Christ's kingdom. Whoever keeps the moral law of God, and teaches others to do the same, is great in Christ's kingdom.

Let us understand that God's moral law is based on God's unchanging character. Let us believe that the Son of God did not come into the world to do away with God's word, but to fulfill it. Let us be diligent to keep the moral law of God, and to teach our children to do the same.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.