

This morning I want to begin with what, Lord willing, may occupy us for some while here, as the Lord may be pleased to spare us, which is: An Exposition of the Ten Commandments. We find that this part of the word of God is comprehensive, and that it contains much in a small space.

The Law of God was expounded by the prophets, by our Lord Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount, and by the apostles of our Lord Jesus. Having then such a pattern of faithful men of God expounding the Law of God, I seek to follow in the steps of these men in this pattern.

The Law of God is greatly useful to us; by it we get a knowledge of our duty, and a knowledge of our sin. Yet, it is a subject of great ignorance. Men are careless about the law, proud because they do not know the law, especially in how searching and spiritual it is, and how it overturns self-righteousness. The law is a subject of confusion and contentions; therefore it is a good thing to preach upon.

When we come to the Ten Commandments, it is hard for me to overstate the importance of the preface of the Ten Commandments, which is in *Exodus 20:1-2*,

“And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

I will seek to show you two things from the preface of the Ten Commandments:

- I. The Authority of God the Lawgiver.
- II. The Grace of God the Covenant Maker.

Two things that we learn from the preface. For Adam, in the state of innocence in that Covenant of Works, or Covenant of Life, into which God entered with him by way of condescension, these two things were one thing. For Adam, it was not God the law giver and God the covenant maker, these two things were one.

Our Confession of Faith says:

“God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it: and endued him with power and ability to keep it.”*

For Adam, in a state of innocence, the law was the covenant. Obey the law perfectly, and live; breach the law, and you shall surely die, without possibility of pardon.

Now, blessed be God, He was pleased, after Adam as our head made himself and us incapable of obtaining life by that first covenant, God was pleased to make a second covenant, which we call The Covenant of Grace. God’s administration of the Covenant of Grace spans all the way from *Genesis 3:15* into eternity! The covenant of Moses is an administration of that Covenant of Grace. We will seek to come back to that.

* Westminster Confession of Faith. Chapter 19: Of the Law of God (19:1).

Well then, I want to show you two things: The Authority of God the Lawgiver, and The Grace of God the Covenant Maker (remembering that for Adam the law was the covenant). The authority of God the lawgiver has not been disannulled, but yet, blessed be God, we need not stand under the Law as a covenant.

I. The Authority of God the Lawgiver

In the preface of the Ten Commandments God declares, "*I am the Lord.*" "I am Jehovah." This name means '*I AM.*' God in his holiness, his exaltation above the creature, the absolute majesty, weightiness, and dignity of the Divine Being is conveyed in this name. "I am Jehovah."

The circumstances that attended the giving of the Law impress this upon us. Here we have described, in chapter 20 and in chapter 19, the fearful presence of the Living God: the thick darkness that gathered around the head of Mount Sinai, blotting out the sun from the people, flashes of lightning and quakings of thunder breaking forth from the presence of the Living God, who had descended upon the mountain, surrounding it in smoke. The flashes of lightning highlighting terrified faces of the people gathered around the mountain by the command of God. Commanded to come and meet with him at Sinai, and yet having a boundary set unto them that they should not draw near and touch the mountain, lest they die. They were summoned to the footstool of God, but they could not touch the mountain, which became his footstool. For he is holy.

Men of flesh and blood trembling. Moses, the man of God, trembling. The mountain itself quakes exceedingly. The sound of a trumpet growing louder and louder. This was a preview of the day when God shall come to judge the world in righteousness.

The moral law contained and summarized in the Ten Commandments is the Law of Jehovah, the "*I AM!*" You are man, and he is God. God does not wait to consult popular opinion about how he will frame his law: He commands. He says, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" He does not finger the wind, or change with the times, but based upon his deity and his 'I AM-ness, he declares he is the potter, we are the clay. He has the absolute rights of a Lord and owner. He does not fear the quibbling and objection of man, any more than a mountain fears a piece of straw! He is God! And in his law, he commands you with his authority.

What was given there at Sinai? The Ten Commandments were given, the summary of the moral law. Let me seek to make **Three Affirmations About the Moral Law of God:**

A. The Moral Law is Distinct

That is: we can identify, on the basis of scripture, a moral law of God; distinct from ceremonies, which were also put in place through Moses. We can, on the basis of the Bible, distinguish between a moral law of God, which is perpetual and binding upon all men, Jew and Gentile, we can distinguish that from ceremonies which God commanded, indeed, and gave through Moses, but yet which were given to the Jews only, and which were temporary, and abolished with the coming of Christ.

On what basis do we make this distinction? We look back to creation. There were creation ordinances such as Marriage and Procreation, and that of Labor and Sabbath. These creation ordinances, which man knew, and was created with a nature in conformity with them (God made

man upright), these creation ordinances are the same things governed explicitly in the giving of the law: such as the Sabbath, and the sanctity of marriage in the seventh commandment.

We find Cain and Abel; Cain murdered his brother, and he knew that it was wrong. He avoided the inquiries of God: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”[†] He had an evil conscience about murdering his brother. Why was that? He had the law of God written upon his heart.

The moral law of God was written upon man’s heart in the creation. Whereas the ceremonies, like the priestly garb, the cleansing of lepers, and what furniture to put in the tabernacle- these things man does not have written on his heart, they needed to be revealed to him. So we look back to creation.

1. The Moral Law Was Distinct in the Way In Which It Was Published

God himself formed the voice which sounded from heaven to declare immediately in the ears of the people these Ten Commandments. We find that after the Ten Commandments are declared, the people beg, that instead of God speaking directly to them, that Moses would speak to them. It was the Ten Commandments, only, which were spoken immediately by the voice of God out of heaven in the hearing of all the people.

The ceremonies, even in the later part of *Exodus 20*, such as how to make an altar and so on, these things were said unto Moses (*vs. 22*), and brought by Moses to the people. So in the way that it was published, the moral law was distinguished from the ceremonies.

2. The Moral Law Was Distinct in the Way That It Was Preserved

The moral law was distinguished from the ceremonies. *Deuteronomy 10*: the Lord tells Moses, after the first two tables, the stone tables, had been destroyed, that Moses should take two new tables, and that God would write upon them what? The Ten Commandments. So the Ten Commandments (that is a Bible phrase, a scripture phrase, from *Deuteronomy 10*), that God would write on stone these Ten Commandments, and they were to be put into the Ark of the Testimony, the center of Israel’s worship, the summary of the moral law of God. Permanent; written upon stone.

Likewise, in both Old and New Testaments, there is a distinction between that which is ceremonial, and that which is moral. Such as in *Psalms 40:6*, “*Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire...*” How could this be said? Did not God command sacrifice and offering? Indeed, he did. But the recognition is that sacrifice and offering, in and of themselves, were typical, they pointed off from themselves to something else. And there we have the words of the Savior himself, as interpreted in *Hebrews 10:5*, “*Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not...*”

These ceremonies were temporary. They were types and pictures. They were scaffolding that would be torn down. But the same one who speaks and says, “*Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire...*” (*Psalms 40:6*), says, “*thy law is within my heart.*” (*Psalms 40:8*). How can that be? Either that is a contradiction, or it is a distinction. And it is a distinction that we need to make between ceremonies and morals. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world as the one who delighted in the law of God, and who delighted in that perfect standard of moral righteousness which is revealed in the moral law, and who perfectly performed the same in his life.

^{††} Genesis 4:9

There is a distinction between morals and ceremonies that the Bible itself makes. In *Ephesians 2:15*, in the context of speaking about a dividing wall between Jew and Gentile being abolished, Paul says of Christ, “*Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances....*” So these ceremonial ordinances commanded by God, but given specifically to the Jews, and distinguishing them from the Gentiles, which is the context of *Ephesians 2*, concerning these ceremonies, Christ has done what? He has abolished them!

Well, so we have had our thinking caps on, and there is a reason. We are seeking, then, to come before the God of the Bible, who came in the awesome splendor and majesty described, down upon Mount Sinai. And we want to learn from his own Word that there is a distinction that he would have us to understand between permanent moral law and temporary ceremonial law.

Understanding this distinction will enable us to see through **two errors**. The first error is

1). The whole Old Testament is gone. “It is all wiped out. The authority of the lawgiver is gone. We don’t have the law anymore.” And then, they would improperly apply, for instance, *Ephesians 2:15*, “Why Christ abolished all the commands!” Well no, as we have seen, God wants us to make a distinction. So it helps us cut through that error. The other error it helps us cut through is that of:

2). Boasting in ceremonies, which Peter, in *Acts 15*, calls the ceremonies an unbearable yoke. So, ironically, you will have it in Galatians, people are insisting on circumcision, and you know what goes along with insisting on following the ceremonies: spiritual pride! It is utterly ironic, or sad, or whatever the term would be, but what was the purpose of the ceremonies? The purpose of the ceremonies was to show how sinful sin was by saying all these sorts of things like leprosy, they are unclean, and to show us how pervading sin is. And then, on the other hand, to show us Jesus Christ through the sacrifices!

Men will come along and say, “Well, we will do the ceremonies. We will keep the Old Testament feasts, we will circumcise, and so on. And look how righteous we are.” That is folly! The ceremonies are not only dead, but they are also deadly! So we want to make this distinction.

B. The Moral Law is Binding

The moral law is distinct, and the moral law is binding. The moral law directs and binds man. *Romans 2:15* speaks of the Gentiles who have not the law, “*Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.*” So the Gentiles who do not have the external revelation of the law, who have not been taught from the Word the Ten Commandments, have the moral law of God written upon their hearts, and their consciences within them bear testimony. Sometimes in an unwelcome manner. If man violates the moral law of God, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments, he is uneasy within. Unless, of course, he sears his conscience and drowns its voice, distracting himself, and so on.

The moral law of God binds; it must be obeyed because of the authority of God who gave it. So the moral law is binding. Perhaps you have a mortgage, and maybe, God forbid, suppose you missed some of your mortgage payments. Suppose you got a letter in the mail from the mortgage company which said, “It looks like you’re failing to pay your mortgage, therefore you are freed from any obligation to pay your mortgage. Go ahead, enjoy your house for free.” NO! Likewise, God the lawgiver has bound man his creature to obey his moral law. Lo and behold, man has

sinned, and by sinning has brought himself into a state of inability to keep the law, but he is not thereby loosed from his obligation to obey the law. You must keep the law! So now your great inquiry should be this, your inquiry should not be, “How may I loosen the obligation of the commandments?” Because that will be vain. Your inquiry should be two-fold, “How may I be freed from my guilt for breaking the law? And how may I be enabled to keep the law?” Because I must keep the law, because it is God’s law!

The moral law of God is distinct. The moral law of God is binding. You must keep the law of God. It is his commandment. And,

C. The Moral Law is Searching

The moral law of God is searching. It is spiritual. It pierces through excuses and externals, and lays bare the heart of man. It divides asunder soul and spirit. It discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart. The Law of God, especially as expounded by our Lord Jesus, reveals that adultery is not simply that committed in the flesh, but also in the heart.

Think simply of the first and the tenth commandments: The first commandment, “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*” (*Exodus 20:3*). What does this commandment require? The first commandment requires you to take the Lord for your God. It requires you to take the Lord as your portion, your delight, your master, your teacher, your all. The first commandment requires you to study God, reverence God, love God, delight in God, and seek God. To confess him before men. To love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Unless you love God with all that is in you, you are then breaking the first commandment. The first commandment requires you to love God more than your father and mother, more than your life, more than shopping, more than a weekend at the beach, or your smartphone, or anything whatsoever. And if you do not, you are breaking the very first commandment. The first commandment requires you to worship God, and pray to him. To love him, defend his name, promote his cause, and love his people.

The tenth commandment, “*Thou shalt not covet.*” (*Exodus 20:17*). The tenth commandment forbids, as a sinful, polluted, wicked thing, any desire that God’s providence would be different. If you covet your neighbor’s ox or ass, or anything that your neighbor has, the rising up of your heart that thinks, “O, I wish I had that pair of shoes.” Or, “I wish my husband were more like him.” The least grieving of your heart at the providence of God which has assigned you one thing and your neighbor another thing, the tenth commandment utterly condemns and pronounces as damnable sin the covetous desires of your heart.

Here we come before the authority of God the lawgiver. Shaking the earth with his voice, and declaring unto you this summary of his moral law, which you are obligated to obey, and which searches you, and which condemns as sinful, corrupt, and wicked all manner of things that men do every day!

I have only spoken briefly of but two of the commandments. Therefore, you have at least a two-fold problem. I am preaching on the Ten Commandments in order to help and promote the joyful glad keeping of the commandments of God. But how on earth will that happen, with God’s authority and holiness being what it is, and you being what you are? How will it ever happen? **Man has at least two problems.** The first problem that man has is:

1. A Bad Conscience. To the degree that you know anything about your own heart, and the law of God, your conscience condemns you. Your conscience, if it is functioning, will tell you that what you deserve is the fierce wrath, indignation, and curse of this almighty God, who shook the earth with his voice. The law is holy, and just, and good, but you know, if you are spiritually awake, you know that you are profane, wicked, and evil. Knowing more will not deliver you. The more that you see of God's holiness, the more you will hate God, because God in all his majesty stands against you. You know it, in your conscience, sinner, you know it!

The heart of the man with a bad conscience secretly curses God. A man with a bad conscience wishes that God were not so holy. And this man is still obligated to love God. How can this man love God, who has a bad conscience? He cannot! He cannot love God, or keep the commandments of God in any true sense with a bad conscience. Let me tell you what he needs; let me tell you what you need.

Before you would do anything whatsoever that would be a true and acceptable performance of the duties of the law there is something you desperately need. It is described in *Hebrews 9:14*, "*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*" The living God: God in his holiness, with all his attributes fully alive, who shook Mount Sinai!

How can you serve the living God? Only by having your conscience cleansed through the blood of Christ. O, look to the blood of Christ! If you are not persuaded that the gospel is true you will never, never, never keep the law to any true degree, because your conscience will look upon this holy God and shrink from him as Adam did. By one sin, Adam was made completely unfit for the service of God. He fled from God; he hid himself because he had a bad conscience. Look unto the blood of Christ! O, look to the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and persuade yourself that there is free acceptance for sinners only through the shed blood of Christ! And then, and only then will you be enabled to draw near unto God to serve him. Do not labor 'for' acceptance, but labor 'from' acceptance.

Man's first problem is a bad conscience; go to Calvary to get your conscience sprinkled clean. "*...though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*" (*Isaiah 1:18*). Go to Calvary, and then, and then you will be enabled to come unto God to serve him in grateful obedience. The first problem is man's bad conscience. The second problem is:

2. Man's Desperately Wicked Heart. In *Galatians 3:19*, we read that the law was "*added because of transgressions.*" And lest there be any mistake, we have it in *Romans 5:20*, "*Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound...*" So man's heart apart from Christ is in such a state, that to be informed of what the will of God is will only stir up more sin and rebellion in his heart. Because the man in his natural state is in such a depth of wickedness and incapacity for any spiritual good, that to be informed of anything concerning the will of God, he just chafes under it and hates it, and rebels more. And, if you would serve God acceptably, you must have this natural heart taken away and a good, new heart given unto you.

You cannot serve God acceptably and truly without being born again. *Psalms 119:36*, "*Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.*" Give my heart a bent, an inclination, a frame that it does not have by nature, but it only obtains by grace through Jesus Christ. The frame and heart that is needed in order to obey God is found in Christ, and treasured

up in Christ, and is drawn forth from Christ by faith. *John 1:16-17*, “*And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*” His fullness, and our receiving of his fullness which is by faith. And then there is this statement, what is this statement? Is it a radical contrast, speaking ill of the law? “...*the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*” “How ungracious Moses was, certainly not an administration of the covenant of grace.” Radical difference? And speaking evil of the law? I would say, No, but rather a statement of supremacy: the second thing far exceeds the first thing. The fulness that is in Christ Jesus, the grace and truth that are treasured up in him are answerable to what the law requires. How may you ever keep the law except by drawing on that fullness that is in Christ Jesus treasured up for sinners. By his death Christ brought out his people from under all the claims of sin, and by his resurrection, he took possession of spiritual resurrection life, and he has poured it out upon his people through the Holy Spirit.

I find myself always wanting to get my stock into my own hand, and get my ability into my own hand, but God has so arranged it in the physical realm that you need to drink every day; you need to go to the well and draw forth water. And so in the spiritual realm. To do anything that pleases God you must go to the well of salvation, which is Christ Jesus, and draw forth by faith of his fullness.

Now, before you do anything, you will take stock of whether or not you have the ability to do it. So, for instance, I dare say that none of us here are going to be running a marathon tomorrow, maybe I am mistaken about you. I do not think any of us are fit for running a marathon tomorrow. You do not have the ability to do it, so you will not undertake it. On the other hand perhaps, well, to begin to exercise a little bit, and maybe work up towards a 5k walk/run sometime in October. Yes, you could do it, and if you think to yourself, “I can do this, I have the ability to do it,” then you will be encouraged in applying yourself to it.

And here is the thing about obeying the law of God: There are some men who think they have the ability in themselves, and who are quite proud actually. And they think, “Apart from Christ Jesus, well, I have a pretty good heart, and I can keep the law.” They are entirely too proud. And on the other hand, here is the Christian who often does not realize the ability that he does have. We have a saying of the apostle in *Romans 8:9*, “*But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you....*” So there are only two options: either the Spirit of God is dwelling in you, and therefore you are fully equipped for every good work by the Spirit of God; or, the Spirit of God is not dwelling in you. In which case you are dead and incapable of holiness.

The great thing that every man needs to see is either his utter inability so that he might flee to Christ, or the ability that he does have in Christ Jesus. The true Christian should never be saying, “I can’t.” Now, you have physical limitations, right? We recognize that, but if you have the Spirit of God, you are able. So suppose you say, “I want to be less greedy and earthly-minded, and more heavenly focused. I want to be more regular and faithful in personal daily prayer. In my conversation I want to be less vain and trifling, and more solid, edifying, and circumspect. I want to be less sharp, hasty, and passionate, and more cheerful and content.” Do you have the ability to do that? If you are in Christ, yes, you do! Yes, you do! “*Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God...*” (*Romans 6:11*).

The first thing you do is think, “What are my resources? Do I have the Spirit of the risen Christ? Then what can stand in my way?” And, yes, our practice of that in this life is not perfect, but the resources in principle are perfect!

Well, may God help us with these thoughts as we go along. Here is what I have sought to bring before you: As we look at the Ten Commandments, as we look in the preface of the Ten Commandments, and we consider the circumstances of the giving of the Law, here is the first thing that comes across, the awesome Authority of God the Lawgiver. We sought to avoid an error which would either sweep away the whole Old Testament, or which would lead us to boast in the ceremonies or think that the externality of the ceremonies were the thing to aim at. So we have set our focus upon the moral law of God, and we acknowledge that the moral law of God is binding, because it is the commandment of a God who is eternal and does not change, and has written his law upon our hearts. And we have seen that this moral law of God is searching, that it divides the very thoughts and intents of man’s heart. And so we come before God the lawgiver and we are brought to face two things: an evil conscience, and a wicked heart. And if we would do anything in the direction of a true, and acceptable to God, performing of the duties of the law, not just for the eye of man, but in the sight of God, if we would do anything, we need to get our conscience cleansed by the blood of Christ, and our wicked heart renovated by the Spirit of Christ. And once we have gone to Christ for these things, then we are free, and are able to obey God in accordance with his law. In fact, we should glory in Christ Jesus, in his fullness and sufficiency to equip us and enable us unto every good work. And we should be boasting in him! Boasting in him for justification, that he is my robe of righteousness, and also boasting in him that he equips my hands for war, he teaches my fingers to battle, and by him I can overleap a wall! Boasting in Christ Jesus as our strength, being strong in the Lord, and in his mighty strength!

Well, so this first thing then is that we see The Authority of God the Lawgiver. There is a second thing, however, that we must see, which is:

II. The Grace of God the Covenant Maker

To consider the Authority of God the Lawgiver, we went this far, “*I am the Lord....*” “I am Jehovah;” “I am the I AM!” There we see God’s deity, majesty, and transcendence. But we need to keep going, and as we keep going, we will see a second thing, “*I am the Lord thy God.*”[‡] The Lord condescends to be the God of his people. Yes, his naturally sinful people.

Within the structure of the Ten Commandments, before God tells us what we must ‘do,’ he tells us what we must ‘believe;’ notice that it is in that order. Now, I spoke first of God the Lawgiver, and his authority; maybe I should have inverted the order. In any case, we do want to see this: The Grace of God the Covenant Maker.

Notice that he puts this forth as a promise and word to be believed, and that he does so before we have done the works of the law. What is the ground that you have to believe that the Lord will be your God? His word! He says that he will be your God. Notice that it is not structured after this manner: “Perform the works of the law acceptably or to a certain degree; then I will

[‡] Exodus 20:1

condescend to be your God.” No. First he says, “*I am the Lord your God,*” and then he says, “*have no other gods before me.*”[§] He does not say, “Perform the works of the law acceptably, and then you will have some basis to believe in me, and embrace me as your God.” He also does not say, “Believe in me, and embrace me as your God, and then do nothing; believe, and then be lawless.” Because to embrace the Lord as our God through faith will always bear fruit.

There is a connection between the preface and the first commandment in a particular way. “*I am the Lord thy God,*” embrace me as your God by faith, and “*have no other gods before me.*” “Believe me; take me; embrace me as your God, and do so exclusively; to the exclusion of any other god.” So, embracing the Lord by faith naturally implies obeying him; in the first commandment, and, indeed, in all ten of these commandments; which follow the one upon the other.

There are three things that show forth The Grace of God the Covenant Maker. Believing these things will be a help to the Christian’s sanctification; indeed, it is hard to understand how anyone could make progress in holiness without believing these things. Three things:

A. The Lord’s Sovereign Initiative

“*I am the Lord thy God.*” I emphasized before the transcendence of the God who declares his law to us. He does not wait to consult anyone about how to frame his laws. The same is true as to his taking a people to be his own; He does not wait to consult man about that. He says, “*I am the Lord thy God.*” “*I am;*” the “*I AM*” saying to his people, “By sovereign initiative I am thy God.”

He does not say, “O people, does it please you to be taken into covenant with me; to be my people? Does it seem a wise plan to you that I should save a people from the fallen mass of humanity, and take them as my own possession?” No! He initiates; his covenant with his people precedes on the basis of his own ‘God-ness,’ his own ‘I Am-ness.’ He declares himself the ‘*I AM,*’ and says, “I am thy God!”

He declares mercy upon whom he will have mercy. ** This is the God who calls those things which be not, as though they were.†† Who says to those who were no people, ‘my people.’‡‡ The God who by speaking makes it so!

Apparently, it is popular for people to say that they think they can speak things into existence; even, apparently, Christian people are saying this: “If you want peace, then speak it into existence.” This, however well-meaning it may be, is actually polytheistic pagan madness, because you are a creature; you cannot make things by speaking! God is the one who makes things by speaking them; this ‘*I AM,*’ this independent God, who needs nothing from the creature, speaks, and brings about a relationship and bond between himself and his people; that is a glorious truth friends! Our Lord Jesus unfolds this truth to us; for instance, in *John 6:39*, “*And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.*”

[§] Exodus 20:3

** Romans 9:15

†† Romans 4:17

‡‡ Romans 9:25-26

As it were, the ‘grammar school of faith’ is to go to Calvary; to behold the work of Jesus Christ. There is a sense, we want to say it with reverence, that the ‘grammar school of faith’ is to go to Calvary; the ‘university of faith’ is to go to God’s decree of predestination. That, when we drink of Christ and all that he has accomplished at Calvary, we are drinking of the streams, those sweet and saving waters of life which have flowed forth from the broken crucified Savior; but our Savior himself speaks of something that lies behind his own work; which is the Father’s giving a people to him to be saved by him; that the will of the Father lies behind the salvation of the elect; that the will of the Father is what the Son brought to pass when in time he redeemed them through his death and his resurrection. It is very nourishing to faith, as it were, not only to drink of the streams coming all the way down unto us in the gospel, declaring Christ crucified; but, as it were, to go up the mountain side to the source of the waters, and to drink from the high stream; to behold that this one thing is the ultimate explanation for why anyone is saved at all; it is the will of God who is “*I AM.*” It is the God who says, “*I am the Lord thy God.*;” this is a knowledge that we must hold on to if we would make any progress in true holiness.

Just imagine, that we sit in the council of war with the king; the king has spread before him the map of all the lands and territories surrounding him; he has his army set up upon the map; he takes forth his scepter on a land, and he brings down the scepter and he says, “It is mine!;” now all the forces of his army are brought to bear; all the wisdom of his generals are brought to bear to make it his; he cannot fail, because he does it with omnipotent might.

The Christian should think upon the God, who from eternity, has said over his people, “They are mine, and they shall be mine!” How can God lose what is his? Or if the king should take a coin of gold and impress his own image upon it, will the king allow the coin with his image to be forever lost in the mud? Will he not seek the coin, find it, and make it shine?

Do not look for the ultimate source of strength in yourself, but look unto God and the grace of the covenant maker; who has said of his sovereign initiative, taking no council with man, “*I am the Lord thy God.*;” the one who shall surely bring all of his purposes to pass. If he has taken a people to himself when he had no obligation to do it but his own mercy and grace, then he will surely conform them to his image.

The struggle for holiness is not in vain. Believe! Believe this high and lofty truth of the sovereign initiative of God the Covenant Maker! How can we grow in holiness without believing that? A second thing to believe is:

B. The Lord’s Unfailing Promise

I am convinced that the covenant that God put in place through Moses was an administration of The Covenant of Grace. Now, I will try to be very simple.

We know that God made a covenant with Abraham; if we look at the covenant that God made with Abraham, we find that it was a covenant of promise. It is very much emphasized what God said that he would do. He said that he would make Abraham’s offspring numerous, that he would give them a land, and that through his offspring all the nations of the earth would be blessed; that his offspring would be as stars in the sky for multitude. He said to Abraham, “*I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*”^{§§} In what way did Abraham receive and embrace this covenant

^{§§} Genesis 15:1

that God made with him? It was by faith. *“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”*^{***}

A covenant of promise is what God made with Abraham; though, was the covenant of promise made with Abraham without any hint or mention of obedience? In fact, no, God says, *“I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward...Walk before me, and be thou perfect.”* I have chosen him, *that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.*^{†††} So, yes, God required Abraham, with whom he made this covenant of promise, to obey; however, the great and exceeding weight of what we find in scripture about that covenant is that it was a covenant of promise.

Now we come to Moses; this covenant that God made with his people through Moses. Here law and commandment are very prominent. Many commandments are given. Did God, then, throw aside the covenant that he made with Abraham, in order to make a different ‘kind’ of covenant through Moses that was not a covenant of promise, but was actually a covenant of works? That would be impossible! You can probably see why that is impossible. Would God, having initiated such gracious dealings with Abraham, then suddenly hold forth to his people at Sinai, and say, “Here is a way you may be instated in right standing with me: if you first keep my law, then you may gain my favor?” Would God discard everything that he had done, and that he had been building up through Abraham? Who were these people gathered around Mount Sinai but Abraham’s descendants? Where were they coming from? They were coming up out of four-hundred years in Egypt; which, the Lord had told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves for four-hundred years in a foreign land in *Genesis 15*. So, did God keep his promise or not? Did God tell Abraham, “Behold, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward; here I make with you a covenant of promise. I pledge myself to be your God; receive and embrace me by faith.” Was God untrue to Abraham by then making a different kind of covenant with Abraham’s children? That would have been falsehood on the part of God! It is a good thing that we have in the Bible the question that Paul asks in *Galatians 3:21*, *“Is the law then against the promises of God?”* And his answer, *“God forbid.”*

You may still have questions. What about some of the statements that Paul makes about the law? *“The law is not of faith: but the man that doeth them shall live in them,”* as we read in *Galatians 3:12*. Well, let us try to keep in mind two simple things: We can distinguish between the law in a narrow sense, and the law in a broad sense. We can distinguish between the Ten Commandments ‘with’ the preface, or the Ten Commandments without the preface.

When Paul says that *“the law is not of faith,”* he is speaking in that ‘narrow’ sense; because, in the Ten Commandments, God first gave his people something to believe: *“I am the Lord thy God.”* He then told them what to do. If Paul says, *“the law is not of faith,”* he means the law in the narrow sense. That is perfectly true; the law, in and of itself, what does it do? The law knows how to command and bind, that is what law does. In the narrow sense, *“the law is not of faith.”*

Also, we would want to distinguish between God’s intent, and man’s perversion of the law. There is hardly anything as abundantly clear in the New Testament, but that unbelieving men perverted the revelation given through Moses: Phariseism, and so on.

^{***} Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23

^{†††} Genesis 15:1; 17:1; 18:19

We have, I believe, every reason to be convinced that the covenant that God made with his people through Abraham was an administration of the same covenant of grace; which, the first promise of that covenant we find in *Genesis 3:15*, and its development we find in Abraham. Now, in a subordinate place to God's purposes of grace, he brings in this explicit giving of the law.

Some will say that holiness should best be promoted by keeping men wavering in doubt as to whether or not God will accept them. In fact, when we look in the Bible, we see first that God accepted Abraham not for anything in himself: he took that wandering man with no heirs, and of sheer grace made promises to him. God accepted him, and then to his offspring explicitly gave these commandments. God was in the middle of bringing these people up out of Egypt into Canaan, which is a type of heaven, and gave them this law. He was going to bring them into Canaan, into his own presence.

Be persuaded of the good favor of God set forth in the gospel, and sealed in the sacraments. Be persuaded of the good favor and free acceptance of God for all who believe in the name of His Son. Hope in God: *"And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."*^{***} It does not lessen the obligation to obey God, but it gives hope; to remember that God pledges himself to be the God of his people, and that your warrant to take God for you God is simply his promise. Take him as your God by faith, and then the works of holiness, which are required, will be promoted.

His unfailing promise is also evident in the preface of the Ten Commandments. God was keeping his promise made to Abraham. The third thing which is evident on the part of God, the gracious covenant maker is:

C. The Lord's Easy Yoke

He says, *"I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."*^{§§§} There is a contrast implied between serving God, in the keeping of these commandments, and bondage. Serve God, obey God, but not with slavish dread. Take God's yoke upon you; take his yoke; obey him; but know that it is an easy yoke.

What is it to obey the law evangelically? What is it for obedience to run in a gospel channel? This is a very important question. That is what God wants from his people! "I brought you up out of bondage, from the lash, so that you might be my people, and obey me as my people. But my yoke is easy. It is different from the Egyptian yoke."

How do we know if obedience runs in a gospel channel?

1. When it precedes from inward principles: *"The love of Christ constraineth us."*^{****} If we are constrained from within, chiefly, not because of an external lash over our back, that is a sign of evangelical obedience.

2. When we expect a gracious acceptance, that is a sign of evangelical obedience. We should expect acceptance, but we should expect it to come graciously. We should obey crying,

^{***} 1 John 3:3

^{§§§} Exodus 20:2

^{****} 2 Corinthians 5:14

“Abba Father.” Looking to God to accept our works through Christ. Evangelical obedience is motivated chiefly by gratitude to God, and love for God.

We have it there, do we not, in the second commandment: “*Showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*”^{****} The chief motivation of evangelical obedience is love for the God who has first loved you, and demonstrated his love in the sending, and dying, and rising of his Son. Chiefly motivated by love and gratitude.

Now, saying that, is that all there ever is to say about motivation? What about the authority of God the lawgiver? Is it a sign of slavish dread if we have an eye toward the authority of God the lawgiver? Are we no longer walking in gratitude if we think about God’s authority to command us? Illustration: Here are children, and their father loves them. He protects them. He nurtures them. He cares for them. He listens to them. He sympathizes in their griefs, and rejoices in their joys. They know that their father loves them. What attitude do those beloved children have towards the authority of their father? Does his tenderness make them disregard the authority of their father? Or, does it make them regard his authority with greater carefulness and tenderness? Plainly the latter! So the Christian motivated by love and gratitude, yes, he does think, what has God bound and commanded me to do? I love the God who commands me!

What about the promised rewards? Such as with the fifth commandment: “*...that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*”^{****} If I am looking to a promised reward and blessing that God, in mercy and condescension, has attached to obedience to his commands, am I no longer obeying out of gratitude? Is it now a different spirit than the spirit of evangelical obedience if I am thinking of what God has promised by way of reward? No! If I love God, I am encouraged to see that he has condescended to my weakness to lay forth certain blessings and rewards of his sheer grace. I will gladly be encouraged if he promises something and says obedience will be blessed.

What about the threats of the law? For instance, in the third commandment: “*The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*”^{§§§§} If I have an eye towards the just threatening and sanctions of God against the breaches of his commandments, and if I tremble at his threatening, does that then mean, necessarily, that I am no longer motivated by gratitude and love? Not necessarily; in fact, it is the believer who believes God when he pronounces a threatening in his word, and therefore, it is the believer who truly fears God.

Pharaoh really did not believe God’s threats. He hardened himself against the threats; he had only a temporary trembling. However, the child of God who loves God believes God’s word, and says, “Here I see what the breach of the third commandment deserves. Because I love God, and love all that God is. I love God, and I love his holiness; therefore, I will tremble at the threats of his word without falling into slavish fear.”

How do we know what evangelical obedience is? **3. A final thing would be that the more abundantly it labors, the less it thinks of itself.** It grows downward while growing upward. It causes the man who is obeying evangelically, to call himself the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all the saints.

**** Exodus 20:6

**** Exodus 20:12

§§§§ Exodus 20:7

Where do you stand with regard to this God? Are you careless? If you think, “It matters not to me, this whole business of the law of God.” Then you are slighting two things:

1. You are slighting God the Lawgiver. Who are you to say, “I don’t care whether or not I have obeyed the law,” when God who gave the law is as awesome as he is.

2. If you are careless, you are also slighting God the Covenant Maker. You are saying, “What does it matter to me that God would set forth such helps to bring men out of the bondage of sin, and enable them unto obedience.” If you do not care to use the remedy, you are insulting God the gracious covenant maker! It is terrible to be careless about keeping the law.

If you are proud and secure; if you are thinking, “I pretty much have this down. I pretty well keep the commandments of God, and I am able to do so. I do not need instruction, exhortation, and so on. I am a pretty good person in and of myself.” Well, you should be alarmed, because you do not yet know the first thing about what the law of God is, or your own heart is. You need to be convicted, and repent.

Are you laboring and heavy laden? Do you desire to make progress in holiness, and yet you find great difficulty and slowness in this? Laboring and heavy laden. To you, the Savior gives a word of promise, *“I will give you rest.”****** Believe his word. Believe into Christ. “I will give you rest,” he says. Look at all his gracious provisions. “I will give you rest,” and then he says, *“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”* “Believe, believe into me as the rest giver, and then, yes, take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.”

May God bless His Word to us.

***** Matthew 11:28,29