

The Old and New Covenants

“One of the major deficiencies in ‘mainstream Christianity’ is its total *misunderstanding* of the Old and New Covenants.”¹ Most people believe that Christ brought a New Covenant that somehow *does away* with the Ten Commandments. Nothing could be further from the truth!

What is a “covenant”? “...a covenant, comments Webster, is a ‘mutual agreement, a legal undertaking to do or to refrain from some act; a document containing the terms of agreement.’ In biblical usage a covenant is a contract, or agreement, by which one party promises certain rewards or payments in return for certain stipulated performance by the other party.”²

At Mt. Sinai, God proposed an **agreement** (or Covenant) with the people of Israel (Ex. 19:3-6). This was the “Sinai Covenant,” often now referred to as the “Old Covenant.” The *agreement* at Sinai was that **IF** the people would obey God, then they would be a special people to God (Ex. 19:5-6). In return for their obedience, they would receive great *physical* blessings from God (Deut. 28:1-14). (There was no mention of *spiritual* blessings.) So the people's obligation in this agreement or covenant was to OBEY God (verse 5). This they agreed to do: “*All that the Lord has spoken we will do*” (verse 8). So they **accepted** that they would enter into an agreement (or covenant) with God.

God then instructed that the people be gathered together at the foot of Mt. Sinai on the third day (verses 10-18). Here God would begin to instruct the people as to WHAT they should obey. He would instruct them in the Ten Commandments (chap. 20:1-17) and in the statutes and judgments (chap. 21-23). **The Ten Commandments, along with the statutes and judgments, were all a part of the Old Covenant, and were *what* the people agreed to obey!**

So, on the third day, *God Himself* spoke the words of the Ten Commandments **directly to** the people (Deut. 5:22-26, 4; 4:10-13,33,36; 9:10; Ex. 20:22).

After they listened to God speak the words of the Ten Commandments, they became afraid and asked Moses to have God speak further **ONLY** to Moses (Deut. 5:23-25; Ex. 20:19). They said to Moses, “You go near and hear all that the Lord our God may say, and tell us all that the Lord our God says to you, and we will hear and do it” (Deut. 5:27).

Consequently, “the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was” (Ex. 20:21). Then God instructed Moses that an altar of earth or unhewn stone be made, “and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name [*‘cause My name to be remembered,’ says marginal rendering*] I will come to you, and I will bless you” (verse 24).

After this brief instruction to Moses that he should build an altar (verses 24-26), God then---in chapters 21

through 23----spoke the **statutes and judgments** to Moses. Immediately thereafter, "Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments [and statutes (Deut. 5:31)]. And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words which the Lord has said we will do'" (Ex. 24:3).

So now, after Moses had SPOKEN the statutes and judgments to the people, Moses then WROTE these statutes and judgments in a book---"**the Book of the Covenant**" (Ex. 24:4,7).

Then, early the next morning, Moses built the altar that God had instructed him to build (verse 4). Moses then sent young men to offer burnt offerings to the Lord (verse 5). "And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant [i.e., the statutes & judgments which Moses had just written down] and **READ** in the hearing of the people [AGAIN relaying to them the statutes and judgments]. And they said, 'All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient'" (verses 6-7). This was the **third** time the people had agreed to the terms of the Covenant---i.e., to obey God---to obey the Ten Commandments, the statutes and the judgments.

So then, "Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord **has made** with you according to all these words'" (verse 8). So notice, the Covenant was now complete. With the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and on the people, the Covenant (or agreement) was now sealed & made binding! It had now been **RATIFIED!** The Israelites were now contractually bound to obey the Ten Commandments, and the statutes and judgments.

"Once a covenant is signed, sealed or ratified---confirmed---it cannot be added to (Gal.3:15). Anything appearing 'beneath the signature,' so to speak, is not legally any part of the covenant." ² (See Note #1 at end of this article.)

Immediately thereafter, Moses went up into Mt. Sinai where he stayed 40 days (Ex. 24:18)---his **first** 40-day stay there. While there, he received from God these things: (1) two tablets of stone, with the Ten Commandments written on them by the finger of God (Ex. 31:18); (2) instructions on institution of the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:1-31:11); (3) instructions on a priesthood (Ex. 28:1-30:30) and their service; (4) instructions on consecration of the priests [consisting largely of ANIMAL SACRIFICES] (chap. 29).

Before giving Moses the two tablets of stone and sending him on his way, the final thing God discussed with Moses was the issue of the Sabbath as being a sign between God & His people (Ex. 31:12-18).

Moses then descended the mountain and found the people had committed a great sin, involving worship of a golden calf (chapter 32). Upon seeing this, "Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain" (verse 19). Moses then fell down before God and fasted *another* 40 days (Deut. 9:17-18). Thereafter, God punished the people for this great sin (Ex. 32:26-35).

Shortly thereafter (chap. 34), Moses went back up to Mt. Sinai for another (a second) 40 day period---in which he fasted a third 40-day fast (verse 28). Here, God once again wrote the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone (verses 1, 28). [This was to initiate the **RENEWAL** of the Sinai Covenant, since the people had already grievously **broken** that Covenant (or agreement). The Ryrie Study Bible entitles chapter 34 as "The covenant **renewed**."]]

Three TYPES of Laws in the Old Covenant

The Old Covenant agreement consisted of obedience to **three types** of laws, *each* of which came *from* God: **(1)** the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20); **(2)** the statutes, judgments and ordinances (Ex. 21-23); **(3)** the ceremonial laws (Ex. 25-40).³

The Ten Commandments form the fundamental *core* of God's laws. The first four show the basics of how to love God (Deut. 6:5), and the last six show the basics of how to love fellowman (Lev. 19:18). On these two Commandments---love to God and love to fellowman---“hang **all** the Law and the Prophets” (Matt.22:36-40).

What about the statutes and judgments? The statutes and judgments show how to *apply* the Ten Commandments in specific situations.³ They are *based on* the Ten Commandments, and spell out in *detail* how to keep God's spiritual Law. They, like the Ten Commandments, are based on the principle of love toward God and fellowman.²

God gave the **statutes** for the general well-being of the people.⁴ “These statutes are expressions of the Great Lawmaker, usually commanding or forbidding certain matters of lesser significance than the ten great commandments. Thus the statutes and other laws of God actually *magnify*, or reveal specific *applications of*, the Ten Commandments. [*Examples of these statutes will be given later.*]

“Along with the statutes, God also gave the patriarchs His **judgments** for the protection of everyone's legal rights. The judgments are *binding decisions* based on God's previously revealed law. These decisions are used to settle similar future disputes and to render a sentence or verdict.”² (For *additional* judgments given by God **after** Sinai, see Num.27: 6-11, for example---as well as Deut. 12:1 and the chapters that follow.⁴)

Many of the principles of the statutes and judgments “can be found in the civil laws of nations around the world *today* (see Exodus 21)... These laws are a *blessing*---even in a civil society---*not* a ‘curse.’”³

Finally, the *third* type of law given by God---the **ceremonial laws**. “The ceremonial laws are a different matter altogether....[The ceremonial] laws concerning sacrifices and offerings were *not originally part of* the Old Covenant (Jeremiah 7:21-23). These laws were *added later* ‘because of transgressions [of the spiritual law] (Gal. 3:19).’”³

More about the ceremonial laws later.

Preeminence of the Ten Commandments

(1) The Ten Commandments were the very **core** of the Old Covenant! Accordingly, they were even referred to as “His covenant”----“So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments...” (Deut. 4:13; also see Ex. 34:28).

(2) The Ten Commandments were placed **inside** the Ark of the Covenant (Heb. 9:4), whereas the Statutes and Judgments (the “Book of the Covenant”) was placed *beside* (“in the side of” KJV) the ark (Deut. 31:26).

(3) The Ten Commandments were *written* **directly by God Himself** (Ex. 31:18), whereas the Statutes and Judgments were written by Moses, after God had spoken them to Moses (Ex. 24:3-7).

(4) The Ten Commandments were *spoken* **directly by God Himself** to all the Israelites gathered at Sinai (Deut. 5:22-26), whereas the Statutes and Judgments were spoken by Moses, after God had spoken them to Moses (Deut. 5:31). (Although it may very well be that God would likewise have spoken the Statutes and Judgments to the people---if they had not become afraid---the fact remains that God saw to it that the Ten Commandments---the very core of the Old Covenant---were, in fact, spoken *directly* by Him to the people.)

(5) The Ten Commandments is the **spiritual law** of God (Rom. 7:14, 7), whereas the Statutes and Judgments were part of the **civil law** that God gave to Old Testament Israel . (See Herman Hoeh’s discussion just **prior** to the subheading “Additional Comments Concerning Sacrifices.”) Notice that *immediately* when God finished speaking the words of the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, we read this: “These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly...and He added **no more**” (Deut. 5:22). The Ten Commandments is a **complete** law---the spiritual law of God. “He added no more---to THAT LAW! Any other laws are different, separate laws---NO PART OF THAT SPIRITUAL LAW! It is complete in itself!” (Herbert W. Armstrong, booklet *Which day is the Christian Sabbath?*, 1976, p.43).

(6) Although God’s *Statutes and Judgments* were in existence *prior* to the time of Mt. Sinai (Gen. 26:5; Ex. 18:16), **the Ten Commandments have always been in effect!** Furthermore, they *always will* be in effect, because the Ten Commandments are a summary statement of God’s **way** of life---the way of love. Yes, they are an expression of God’s basic **nature**, and the nature of God does *not* change! (Mal. 3:6).

(“Then why did God have to *reveal* his law to the children of Israel when establishing his covenant with them? Simply because the people had strayed so far from the truth by the time of Moses that God had to reveal his laws and statutes *anew* to the Israelites. Ancient Israel had lost much, if not most, of the knowledge of God’s ways while in Egyptian bondage.”¹ Additionally, although God’s spiritual law was in *effect* prior to Sinai---just as the law of gravity was in *effect*---only a select few, prior to Sinai, knew *very much about* God’s laws, statutes and judgments. “God’s law was known by only a *special few* in ancient times. Those whom the Eternal individually called to perform a special work in His service---the patriarchs and prophets of old--- *knew* and kept God’s Ten Commandments, statutes and other Laws [Gen 26:5]”²)

(7) The supreme importance of the Ten Commandments is clearly shown by Jesus Christ in the **New** Testament. When asked, “What good thing shall I do that I may **have** eternal life,” Christ replied, “if you will enter into life, **keep** the commandments.” Christ then showed **which** commandments He was speaking of, by naming at least half of the Ten Commandments (Matt. 19:16-19). Regarding the ones He *didn’t* name, Christ showed elsewhere that they are even *more* important! (Matt. 22:36-40). (Also see Rev. 22:14.)

Sacrificial Laws Added LATER

At Mt. Sinai, God entered into an agreement with the people of Israel. The people agreed to obey God's Ten Commandments and also His Statutes and Judgments. Did God also, at that time, give them a system of *sacrificial laws and rituals*? No! "For I did **not** speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning **burnt offerings or sacrifices**. But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people...'" (Jer. 7: 22-23). The law of sacrifices and rituals was **added later**. "What purpose then does the law serve? It [the law of sacrifice and rituals] was **added** because of transgressions, till the Seed [Christ] should come" (Gal.3: 19). So it was added *because* of "transgressions." Transgressions of what? There must have *already* been a law in effect that was being transgressed----because "where there is *no* law there is *no* transgression" (Rom.4:15). The law that was already in effect and being transgressed was the *spiritual* law of God, which the people at Mt. Sinai had agreed to obey.

They were added **later**, by God----**after** the Sinai Covenant was made and ratified!! "Animal sacrifices and ceremonial laws were **not** part of the original Sinai Covenant. These were added later, after the covenant was enacted by blood (Ex. 24:8)." ⁵

God's Statutes and Judgments (Ex. 20:22 through chapter 23) were written down by Moses. He wrote them in a book, called the "Book of the Covenant" (Ex. 24:4,7). "But this book did **not**, at first, contain the laws of *burnt offerings, sacrifices and washings*. God had these **added later**---within a year---as a **separate part** of the civil statutes because the Israelites had transgressed his [spiritual] laws." ⁶

"These physical laws [of sacrifice and rituals] *foreshadowed* the sacrifice of Christ *and* were a 'reminder of sin' to teach the people the *need* of the Messiah...who would pay the penalty of human transgression for all mankind (Heb.10), at which time these sacrificial laws would **cease**." ²

"Notice that these temporary ritualistic laws did **not** *define* sin. They were *reminders* of sin. God's *spiritual* laws define sin. The laws that explain what sin is [God's spiritual Laws] are the ones we are to keep in the spirit as well as in the letter today." ⁶

In the "Book of the Covenant" there is only **ONE** sacrifice mentioned----the annual sacrifice of the Passover lamb. This Passover sacrifice had *already* been introduced by God to these people back in Exodus chapter 12, weeks *before* Sinai. It (like the Ten Commandments and Statutes and Judgments) was *not* originally instituted **by** the Sinai Covenant, but it was a *part of* the Sinai agreement.

What about *voluntary* sacrifices? "The principle of **voluntary** offering of sacrifices existed, of course, *before* Moses...Cain and Abel made voluntary offerings to God (Gen.4:3-4). But in the period from Moses to Christ, the practice of giving offerings **was commanded, made ritualistic and regulated in great detail**.

“Why?”

“Simply because the children of Israel were a physical, carnal people *without* God’s Holy Spirit. They could *not* offer themselves in obedience to God, so God gave them ritualistic washings to perform and had them offer animal sacrifices as substitutes. The Israelites needed to be [**repeatedly**] **reminded** of Jesus’ then-future sacrifice *and* of the Holy Spirit, which was pictured by the various ritualistic washings.

“These laws [the rituals and sacrifices] had *no further use* when the Lamb of God died for the sins of the world, and when the Holy Spirit became *available* for those God would call.”⁶ (These ritualistic laws ceased, **not** because they were a part of the Old Covenant, but because the *true* Sacrifice for sin, Christ, had been offered.)

Old and New Covenants: MARRIAGE Agreements!

The Old Covenant was, symbolically, a MARRIAGE AGREEMENT. In the Old Covenant, God (Jesus Christ in His pre-human existence **married** the nation of Israel. “‘Yes, I swore an oath to you and you became Mine,’ says the Lord God” (Ezek.16:8). “‘Return, O backsliding children,’ says the Lord; ‘for I am *married* to you’” (Jer. 3:14). “‘My covenant which they broke, though I was a *husband* to them,’ says the Lord” (Jer. 31:32).

Because of their blatant and continual sinning---their continual “adultery” against their Husband, Christ eventually DIVORCED the 10-tribe House of Israel, and sent them into captivity. “...for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed **adultery**, I had put her away and given her a certificate of **divorce**...” (Jer.3:8).

Although the tribe of Judah also sinned and became a self-righteous nation, God did **NOT** divorce Judah. Yet, He did eventually send them into a temporary captivity.

Christ’s *death on the cross* COMPLETELY freed Him from His marriage to all 12 tribes (both the House of Israel and the House of Judah). Therefore, **the last remnant of the Old Covenant contract ended at Christ’s crucifixion.**^{2,6}

At this point, the question could be asked: Since the Old Covenant was not *completely* abolished until Christ’s crucifixion, does that mean that Jesus Christ, while on earth, preached an Old Covenant message? No! Jesus Christ came as “the Mediator of the **new** covenant”! (Heb.12:24). Christ is “Mediator of a **better** covenant” (Heb.8:6). The **final** book of the Old Testament records a promise of the coming of “the Messenger of the covenant” (Mal.3:1). This is obviously speaking of the NEW Covenant, which had already been prophesied back in Jeremiah Chap. 31---“Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a **new** covenant ...’” (verse 31). (Also see article “Progressive Revelation and Dispensationalism,” especially its subheading “Numerous Proofs.”)

Now, *why* did God intend to make a new Covenant? “For if that first covenant had been **faultless**, then no place would have been sought for a second” (Heb.8:7) So there was a *fault* with the Old Covenant agreement. Was the fault with God’s Law? No! The fault was with the *people*! Continuing in verse 8: “Because finding fault with **them** [the people]...” The fault was not with God’s holy and perfect law (Ps.19:7; Rom.7:12,14). The fault was with the people for not *keeping* God’s law!

Yes, Christ is “Mediator of a *better* covenant, which was established on **better promises**” (Heb.8:6). What are the *better* promises? The promise under the *Old* Covenant was that of great *physical and national blessings*---whereas the promises under the *New* Covenant are (1) eternal life, and (2) the promised indwelling of the Holy Spirit---which **enables** one to live by the spirit and intent of God’s spiritual Law. Therefore, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the **essential ingredient** of the New Covenant! It *enables* one to live by the spirit and intent of God’s spiritual Law.

The New Covenant does NOT do away with God’s Law! In fact, it *validates* God’s spiritual Laws, by putting them right into the minds and hearts of true Christians! “For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My **laws** in their mind and write them on their hearts...” (verse 10).

Yes, both the Old **and** New Covenants require God’s people to live by His spiritual Law!---the Law summarized by the Ten Commandments. One of the main reasons *why* God raised up the nation Israel---and entered into a covenant, or agreement, with them---was to clearly **demonstrate** that mankind NEEDS the Holy Spirit dwelling within him! God *never offered* the Holy Spirit to the people of ancient Israel---*only* to the prophets and patriarchs. Without God’s Spirit in them, the Israelites could NOT truly live God’s way. They could *not* live by the spirit and intent of the spiritual Law; and oftentimes they did a very poor job of even obeying the *letter* of the Law.

“The New Covenant in **no way** does away with, or ‘waters down,’ even the *letter* of God’s spiritual law. Rather, it empowers genuinely converted Christians, by God’s Spirit, to obey that law in the letter **and** in the spirit. It enables Jesus Christ---through the Spirit---to *live* His life in Christians.”⁵ Jesus Christ, while on earth, lived a life of *obedience* to God’s spiritual Law---and He will live that **same, obedient** life *within* us! (Heb. 13:8).

Furthermore, both the Old Covenant **AND** the New Covenant are, symbolically, MARRIAGE agreements! They are marriage agreements between Christ and the Church. In the Old Covenant, Christ married sinning, physical Israel---“the *church* in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, KJV). Christ’s death *freed* Him from that marriage, and enabled Him to be in a position where He could eventually RE-marry. This time He will marry **spiritual** Israel, a cleaned up and converted wife, as we read in the 19th chapter of Revelation: “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints...” (verses 7-9).

Right now we are the affianced bride of Christ---not yet married, but *preparing for* that marriage. We are *beginning* to have God's spiritual Laws written in our hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit, which dwells within those who *obey* God (Acts 5:32). Those who have God's Spirit are now living under the **terms and conditions** of the New Covenant, although we won't **fully** participate in the New Covenant until we are glorified as spirit-composed beings. It will be at that time---after Christ's return---that these righteous *immortals* (spiritual Israel)---will marry Christ.

What *is* the New Covenant agreement? It's the agreement we enter into *at baptism!* "At the time of baptism, a truly converted person enters into a genuine *New Covenant relationship* with God....[that person] makes a covenant with his Creator...*to stop breaking God's spiritual LAW!*....Of course, we will not keep the commandments perfectly in this physical life....[When] we fall short, we're to repent and confess our sins to God so we can continually be cleansed and forgiven (I John 1: 9-10)." ¹

"Today we're called out ahead of time, as ambassadors, as "first fruits," and we're living **under the terms and conditions of the New Covenant**, preparing to marry Christ....Yes, we've got to have the New Covenant relationship with Jesus Christ right **now!** And then we will be in that wonderful *marriage* when Christ returns and that Covenant will be *completed.*" ⁷

"Just as *Moses* was the mediator of the Old Covenant made at Mt. Sinai, so *Christ* is the mediator of the New Covenant. And just as His [Christ's] marriage with Israel at Mt. Sinai set up the *physical* kingdom of Israel, so the marriage of the Church to Christ will set up the *spiritual* Kingdom of God. Thus, the good news of that coming marriage actually is the Gospel Jesus preached---the coming Kingdom of God [Mark 1:14]! The Gospel of the Kingdom of God [which Christ preached] contains the *terms and conditions* for entering into the **New Covenant** agreement with Jesus Christ....Keeping God's spiritual law as defined in the Ten Commandments is one of the *conditions* of the **New Covenant** [the *other* condition being acceptance of Jesus Christ and His shed blood] " ²

So, after Christ's return, the New Covenant will come into **FULL** force and effect. It will come into full force and effect in two ways: (1) The "first-fruits" (the affianced bride of Christ) will **MARRY** Christ; (2) The New Covenant will begin to be proposed to **ALL** mankind.

The fact that the New Covenant has **not yet** been *fully* established, can be seen by looking at Hebrews chapter 8: 10-11. Verse 10 says that under the New Covenant, God's Laws will be put into people's hearts and minds. Yet, God's Laws are **NOT** now in people's hearts and minds! In fact, most professing Christians believe that God's Laws have been done away! Also, notice verse 11: "**None** of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for **ALL** shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." This obviously has **not** yet come to pass! All do **not** yet know the Lord, and there are many today who **still** say, "Know the Lord"!

New Covenant for GENTILES?

A common belief is that the Old Covenant was for the Israelites, whereas the New Covenant is for Gentiles.

Actually, the New Covenant will *not* be made with Gentiles. “The covenants and the promises pertain to Israel (Rom. 9:4).”² Yet, Gentiles *can become* partakers of the promises! All *true Christians are* Israelites---i.e., *spiritual Israelites*---Israelites by *grace*, not necessarily Israelites by race. It’s only through Christ that a Gentile can become a spiritually *adopted* Israelite---and thus become a seed (child) of Abraham---who was the *father* of Israel, and to whom the promises of God were made. Speaking to *Gentile-born* Christians in Galatia, Paul said, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are *Abraham’s seed*, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). “...those who are of faith [in Christ] *are sons* of Abraham” (verse 7) “...that he [Abraham] might be the *father* of all those who believe” (Rom.4:11). “Therefore remember that you, once [formerly] Gentiles in the flesh...that at that time you were without Christ, being *aliens* from the commonwealth of Israel and *strangers* from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now *in* Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been *made near* by the blood of Christ....Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” (Eph.2: 11-13, 19).

Yes, through Christ, Gentiles can be “grafted in” and become *spiritual* Israelites (Abraham’s *spiritual* seed). Romans 11: 11-25 shows that, spiritually, “Israel” today means the Church. “For I speak to you Gentiles....And if some of the branches [Old Covenant Israel] were broken off, and you [Gentiles] being a wild olive tree, were *grafted in* among them.... [it was] Because of unbelief *they* were broken off, and you stand by faith...And they also, if they do *not continue* in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again” (verses 13,17,20,23).

A Jew, even today, *can become* a converted Christian. Indeed, the *early* New Testament Church was nearly altogether Jewish! Yet, God does not have two *kinds* of Christians! “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile] for you are all **one** in Christ Jesus. And *if* you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal.3: 27-29).

Christ MAGNIFIED God’s Spiritual Law

Jesus Christ did NOT come to do away with God’s spiritual Law! He said, “Do **not** think that I came to destroy the Law”! (Matt.5:17). Rather than destroy the Law, “Our Savior **magnified** [Isa.42:21] or **enlarged** God’s Ten Commandments and made them even **more binding**.”¹ We are now to live by *not only* the letter of God’s spiritual Law, but also by its spirit and intent. For example, not only are we to refrain from committing the physical acts of adultery and murder (the *letter* of the Law), we are **also** to avoid committing them in our *thoughts*! (Matt. 5: 21-22, 27-28).

“Remember that Jesus was giving instructions, *not* for a civil government such as ancient Israel’s, but for a spiritual CHURCH.

“In verses 38-42 [of Matt. 5], Christ quoted from the Old Covenant---from Exodus 21:24. He revealed that a true Christian should be willing, if necessary, to suffer wrong done to him...Jesus was magnifying, **for the New Testament Church**, the APPLICATION of the civil laws given to ancient Israel---not

abolishing them, but *magnifying* them and making them more honorable (Isa. 42:21).

“He raised them from narrow, *national* laws---given to a carnal nation to be administered according to the strict letter---to a spiritual plane regulating, ultimately, the whole of human society. Six times Jesus said: ‘Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time...But I say unto you...’ And then He proceeded to expound the *spiritual principles* underlying the civil laws give to ancient Israel.”²

Christ “outlined the *terms and conditions of the New Covenant*” when He said that man shall **live by** “every word of God” (Luke 4:4; Deut.8:3).¹

Which of God’s Laws Are STILL in Effect?

As stated earlier, the Old Covenant agreement consisted of obedience to **three types** of laws which came from God: **(1)** the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20); **(2)** the statutes, judgments and ordinances (Ex. 21-23); **(3)** the ceremonial laws (Ex. 25-40).⁸ So now let’s now look at each type of law, to see which are still in effect today.

“God---Jesus Christ--- *never changes* His underlying spiritual laws, which reflect His basic **character**. ‘For I am the Lord, *I do not change...*’ (Mal. 3:6). And: ‘Jesus Christ is the *same* yesterday, today, and *forever*’ (Heb. 13:8)”⁵

Since God’s Ten Commandments, statutes and judgments existed **prior** to the covenant made at Sinai, they therefore were not abolished by the *cessation* of that covenant!! [Although the Sinai **Covenant** *ceased* to be in force when Christ was crucified, the Ten Commandments, statutes and judgments did *not* cease!] Termination of a covenant (or agreement) could not render void what that covenant did not bring into force!²

What about the *ceremonial rituals*? The ceremonial rituals were *added* for the purpose of teaching and instilling *the habit of obedience*---things to do repeatedly morning, noon and night. Yet, this system of rituals was only a *temporary* substitute. Once God’s **Holy Spirit** was made available (after Christ’s resurrection), these physical rituals were no longer needed (Gal.3:24).

Likewise, the system of *animal sacrifices* was only a *temporary*, physical substitute. It was a substitute for---and until---the Sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 7:27). It served to *remind* the people of their sins (Heb. 10:3), and also to remind them that the *penalty* of sin is death (Ezek. 18:4).

“The author of Hebrews describes the physical ministry of the Levitical priesthood: ‘It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience; concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed **until** the time of reformation’ (Heb. 9:9-10).

“Animal sacrifices, washings and the carnal ordinances of the Levitical priesthood were added later, as we have seen---and are **no longer** necessary for the ‘Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16), now that the sacrifice of

Christ has been made and the Holy Spirit is available to spiritually cleanse converted Christians.”⁵

...Even the Mosaic writings indicate that the ritual sacrifices and offerings did not begin *until* the Tabernacle was dedicated--a year after the Old Covenant was made at Sinai (Ex. 40: 17, 29) ...the ceremonial laws were additions to the Old Covenant, and...**These alone were terminated** at the death of Jesus.”³ [Rather than “a year after,” it seems it was actually about *nine months* after (compare Ex. 19:1 to Ex. 40:17).]

Finally, let’s look at *the statutes, judgments and ordinances*. The late Raymond F. McNair had much to say about this issue. Notice his following comments from his article “Must Christians Keep the ‘Law of Moses’ Or Only the Ten Commandments?” *Global Church News*, July-Aug. 1995:

In many... scriptures, the Apostle Paul clearly taught obedience to the law of God. However, he also taught [in Gal. 5 :3] that Christians did not need to keep the entire “law of Moses,” or the “whole law”...referring to everything in the first five books of the Old Testament...

What did Paul mean when he spoke of the “whole law” (Gal. 5:3)? Clearly, in context, he was referring to the whole law of Moses, which did **include** the Ten Commandments, God’s statutes and judgments--and also the animal sacrifices, meat and drink offerings, carnal washings, rituals and numerous ordinances pertaining to the flesh [Heb. 9:10] **which were added by God, later, to the covenant He had already ratified with Israel (Ex. 24) after the Israelites had sinned by making an idolatrous golden calf (Ex. 32)...**

He [Paul] taught that Christians need not keep the whole law (meaning the whole law of Moses). But that did not annul *every other portion* of God’s law. Even today, if a court annuls or abrogates or supersedes some specific part of a state’s legal code, does that court’s action throw out *the entire penal code*? Certainly not! Our primary Christian focus should still be on the SPIRITUAL LAW of God as summarized by the Ten Commandments. But **even they [the Ten Commandments] are not the ONLY part of the Mosaic law Christians are still required to observe.**

...the apostles’ letter to the Gentile converts [Acts 15] listed **four prohibitions**: 1) things offered to idols... 2) blood... 3) things strangled... 4) sexual immorality---all of which are specifically prohibited in the five books written by Moses---Genesis through Deuteronomy!

...Those prohibitions were specifically mentioned because devotees of the Gentile religions **often** utilized temple prostitutes, offered unclean animals to their idols, ate or drank blood, especially by eating the flesh of strangled animals from which blood was not drained. Notice that **these prohibitions were part of the divine statutes** which clearly defined **how** you were to live by the Ten Commandments...Clearly, **these four specific prohibitions and even numerous other laws besides the Ten Commands are still binding on all Christians today! ...**

Many so-called “Christians” think we only need to keep those OT laws reiterated in the NT. They have it completely BACKWARDS! In reality, **we must keep ALL laws revealed in the Old Testament unless** they are specifically, or in spiritual principle, **abrogated** in the NT.

...The sacrifices and washings were imposed on God’s people “**UNTIL** *the time of reformation.*” ...[The time of reformation was] when Jesus Christ offered Himself as the Lamb of God and then ascended to heaven to serve as High Priest for the people of God. [Notice Heb. 9: 8-12: “...the first tabernacle...with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed **until** the time of reformation. But Christ came as High

Priest...with greater and more perfect tabernacle...not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood...”]....

We have seen that the Jerusalem Church Council (c. 50 A.D.) enjoined on Gentile Christians **four** prohibitions found in the law of Moses. But how can one know **which other** laws, statutes and judgments of the law of Moses are to be kept, today? Should individual Christians or churches each pick and choose which laws, statutes, ordinances or testimonies of God they will keep? Or, should they let the New Testament Scriptures show them which laws, statutes and judgments in the law of Moses are still binding on true Christians today?

There are literally **scores** of laws, statutes or judgments in the law of Moses which any honest Christian would have to freely admit are still obligatory for the followers of Jesus Christ to keep in the modern world.

God used His statutes and ordinances as practical applications of the spiritual principles of the Ten Commandments. Can you figure out which of the spiritual principles of the Ten Commandments apply to the following examples? 1) Would any Christian say that "witchcraft" or sorcery is now permitted, while it was strictly forbidden (Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18) in the law of Moses? 2) How about God's statute forbidding kidnapping (Ex. 21:16)? Is it still binding on Christians? 3) Should Christians keep the law of Moses that requires one to honor the elderly (Lev. 19:32)? 4) Are the Mosaic laws prohibiting bestiality (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 18:23) still binding on Christians? 5) Is homosexual conduct forbidden to Christians (Lev. 18:22; 1 Cor. 6:9)? 6) Are those laws which prohibit oppressing or afflicting widows and orphans (Ex. 22:22-24) still to be kept by Christians? 7) Are Christians allowed to "revile God...[or] curse a ruler" of their people (v. 28)? 8) Is the law against being a talebearer or gossip (Lev. 19:16) still to be observed by all true Christians? 9) Can Christians ignore God's statute which says an employer must never defraud his employee (Lev. 19:13)? 10) Would Christians deny that one must be diligent to maintain just and equal weights and measures (Lev. 19:35-36)?

These are just a few of the examples of ethical standards which God expects His people to keep. There are many other laws, statutes and judgments in the law of Moses which true Christians must still obey!

Again, how can one really know what is still binding on Christ's followers and what is not? One must diligently study the entire NT to see **what Christ and His apostles believed and practiced!** As an example, Jesus and His apostles kept God's Sabbaths (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14-15; 17:1-4; 18:4). They also observed the annual Holy Days of God (Lev. 23; John 7; Acts 2; 12:1-4). Even Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, kept God's Holy Days (Acts 20:6, 16; 1 Cor. 5:6-8; 16:8).

....There is absolutely nothing in the NT which abolishes those so-called **dietary** laws ["unclean" foods of Lev. 11; Deut. 14]!

....We can only know which OT laws, statutes, ordinances and testimonies are still binding on Christians *by carefully studying the words and practices of Christ and His apostles* as mentioned in the NT Scriptures.

....After Jesus Christ's resurrection, He revealed to His apostles that though they were to keep God's spiritual law, it was not now necessary for them to keep the whole law, which in NT times was known as the law of Moses.

Notice now the following enlightening comments by Herman Hoeh in his article "Which Laws in the Old Testament Have Authority Today?" from *The Good News* magazine, Oct.-Nov. 1983:

The **law of Moses** comprises civil statutes and judgments that God gave him to

communicate to the people....When Moses first delivered the statutes and judgments, the law of Moses had no sacrifices connected with it. Jeremiah said so (Jer. 7:22). The law of Moses was *originally* the **civil law**, based on the principles of the Ten Commandments.**Some** of these civil laws were *included in the covenant* made at Sinai (Ex. 21-24) and others were promulgated at **later** times (Deut. 12:1 and following chapters, for example).

After the ratification of the Sinaitic Covenant [Ex. 24:3-8], the Levitical *priesthood* was established [Ex.28, 29] and the laws *regulating offerings* were *added to* the law of Moses...(Before this time offerings were *voluntary* and young men were priests---Ex. 24:5.)

Therefore the law of Moses *has more than one part!*

Notice God's definition of the **original** part of that law in Malachi 4:4, RSV: "Remember the law of my servant Moses, *the statutes and ordinances* that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel."

This law [the *original* statutes and judgments given at Mt. Sinai] we are *not* to forget. We are to *keep* it!

But **added later** to this law were *other* statutes regulating material rituals, such as sacrifices, lighting of candles, burning incense and various washings for the unclean. This almost unnoticed fact, *that the law of Moses was composed of two distinct parts---the CIVIL and the RITUALISTIC---is what causes so much difficulty in understanding.*

Jesus said the two great commandments were love to God and love to neighbor... [He quoted these] Out of the book of the law---the laws that Moses spoke to the people [Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18]...

The **civil law of Moses** [*the original statutes and judgments* given at Sinai] *expounds* the Ten Commandments by revealing how the 10 basic principles are to be applied. We are to *keep* this part of the law, *not* in the old strictness of the letter, but according to its full spirit and intent.

Then why do we read in Acts 15 that gentile converts do *not* have to observe the "law of Moses," *except for four points*? The answer is made plain in Acts 21:21.

The law of Moses, here called in question, involved "*customs*" [the ceremonial or ritualistic part of the law of Moses] ...The Jews were mistakenly accusing Paul, saying that he taught Jews living abroad "that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the **customs**" (Acts 21:21)!

The *controversy* in the early Church did **not** involve the spiritual intent of the **original** civil law of Moses [the original statutes and judgments]. It involved the *ceremonial additions* to the original civil law of Moses---**customs**---*added* ceremonies or rituals.

This fact is further proven by noticing *the four points* [of Acts 15:20]. These four points were *originally part of* the civil law of Moses. But these four points were **ALSO** included later *within the added ceremonies* [Why?] because gentiles ate their sacrifices with the blood, *often* strangled their animals, presented them to idols and commonly committed fornication in their religious ceremonies.

To prevent these pagan customs being practiced by Israel, God included the four civil points of the law *along with* the rituals (Lev. 17:7, 10, Num. 25:1-3).

Because some newly converted Christians would have *thought*, therefore, that they were abolished *along with* the temporary rituals when those ceremonies were declared no longer binding (in Acts 15), these *four points* had to be *specifically* declared still in effect. Since these four points were part of the civil law **BEFORE** the addition of the rituals, they *remained* binding *after* the need of the physical sacrifices and washings ceased.

The civil law [statutes & judgments] of Moses that *defined sin* was not called into

question in Acts 15---it was not involved. (Paul, of course, explained elsewhere that the *civil law*, formerly administered in the letter, was *now* to be observed in the spirit and full intent of its meaning---II Cor. 3.)

The many CIVIL laws regulating **tithing, clean and unclean meats and the annual Sabbaths** are *still for the New Testament Church* because they help explain what sin is. They were NOT part of the *ceremonial* law of Moses mentioned in Hebrews 9:10 and in Acts 15.

Additional Comments Concerning Sacrifices

Let's now clarify this issue of sacrifices, by reiterating and expanding upon points already made.

God entered into a covenant (or agreement) with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. At the time it was ratified and made binding (in Ex. 24:3-8), this Covenant did NOT contain the ritualized laws of animal sacrifice and other rituals. Such ritualistic laws were **added** by God---soon thereafter---as a result of the people having *grievously failed* to uphold their end of the agreement, which was to obey God's spiritual law.

“For I did **not** speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘*Obey My voice, and I will be your God...*’” (Jer. 7:22-23). “What purpose then does the law [of sacrifice and rituals] serve? It was added [later] because of transgressions [of the spiritual law], till [yes, only *until*] the Seed [Christ] should come” (Gal. 3:19).

“The book of Exodus concludes with the *erection* of the tabernacle...How was Israel to *use* the tabernacle? The instructions in Leviticus answer that question. [Yes, the laws **regulating** sacrifice and offerings were given, basically, *in the book of Leviticus.*], and [those laws] were given to Moses *during* the month and 20 days between the setting up of the tabernacle (Ex. 40:17) and the departure of the people from Sinai (Num. 10:11).”⁸

Again, the laws **regulating** sacrifices and offerings were not even given by God until **after** the Old Covenant had been ratified and made binding in Ex. 24:3-8. They were *added later*---within a year---due to *grievous* transgression of the spiritual law (Gal. 3:19). (We can see how *serious* God considered this sin, by reading the following passages: Ex. 32:6-12, 21, 27-28, 31, 35.)

This **ritualistic and regulated system** of sacrifices and offerings was given for the purpose of instilling the habit of obedience, and to remind the people of their sins (Heb. 10:3), and to remind them that the penalty of sin is death (Ezek. 18:4). It was this *regulated system* of sacrifices, given by God basically in the book of Leviticus, to which God was referring when He said, “I did **not** speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices” (Jer. 7:22). (Sacrifices were *not* originally part of the Sinai Covenant.) In His comment in Jer. 7:22, God was **not** referring to other sacrifices, such as the following:

(1) There were burnt offerings and peace offerings made *during* the ceremonial ratification of the Sinai

Covenant, in which the blood was sprinkled both on the altar and on the people to formalize the agreement (Ex. 24: 3-8).

(2) The Passover lamb sacrifice is the one and *only* sacrifice mentioned in the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 23:18; 24: 4,7). This Passover sacrifice had already been introduced by God to the Israelites back in Exodus chapter 12---weeks *before* Sinai. Although it was a *part of* the Sinai agreement, it was not originally instituted *by* that Covenant.

(3) Voluntary sacrifices: The principle of individuals *voluntarily* offering sacrifices had existed all the way back to Cain and Abel. Such a *freewill* offering is mentioned in Exodus 22:20.

(4) In Exodus chapter 29---*after* the ratification of the Sinai Covenant in chapter 24---God gave instructions in certain animal sacrifices that would be carried out once the Tabernacle was erected. These sacrifices described in chapter 29 were *not* for the sins of the people. Rather, they would be for the purpose of sanctifying the priests and the tabernacle, once the tabernacle was erected. Chapter 29 *begins* by saying, “And this is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests...” (verse 1). In the *concluding* statements of the chapter, God says, “So I will sanctify the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also sanctify both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me, as priests” (verse 44).

Finally, consider this. [Although the system of ritualized sacrifices was not begun until about 9 months after the Israelites first reached Sinai, God had given instructions for the institution of a *tabernacle and a priesthood* during Moses’ first forty days on Mt. Sinai (presumably during the *latter part* of that forty day period). Since the tabernacle and priesthood were largely instituted for the *purpose* of offering sacrifices and performing ritualistic ceremonies, it’s obvious that God had already---*during* that 40-day period---decided to establish a system of sacrificial offerings.

Yet, the **reason** that He decided to do this was because of the *grievous sin* committed by the people *while* Moses was on Mt. Sinai. And we can see how very *serious* God considered this sin, by reading the following: Ex. 32:6-12, 21, 27-28, 31, 35.)] Raymond McNair refers to “...the animal sacrifices, meat and drink offerings, carnal washings, rituals and numerous ordinances pertaining to the flesh which were added by God, later, **to** the covenant He had already ratified with Israel (Ex 24) **after** the Israelites had sinned by making an idolatrous golden calf (Ex 32)...”⁹ Yes, God added these sacrifices and rituals *after*---**and because of**--- this great sin committed by the Israelites almost immediately after they had solemnly agreed to obey God!

An Outline of Exodus (Selected Events)

Ex. 20: 1-17	Ten Commandments <i>spoken by God to the people.</i>
Ex. chap. 21 thru 23	Statutes & judgments spoken by God to Moses, who then spoke them to the people and wrote them down (Ex. 24: 3-4, 7).
Ex. 24: 3-8	Covenant ratified and made binding (including sprinkling of blood).
Ex. 24: 15 thru chap. 31	Moses' 1 st 40 days on Mt. Sinai, where he received from God the Ten Commandments written on stone (Ex.31:18) and also instructions by God on instituting a tabernacle (Ex. chap. 25 thru 31:11). In the midst of these instructions, God gave (in chap. 29) instructions on <i>consecrating</i> the future tabernacle, as well as instructions on the institution and consecration of a <i>priesthood</i> .
Ex. chap. 32	The great sin of the golden calf (which had been occurring while Moses was on Mt. Sinai). Upon returning and seeing this great sin, Moses broke the 2 tablets of stone (verse 19), and then fell down and fasted another 40 days (Deut. 9:17).
Ex. chap. 34	Moses' 2 nd 40 days on Mt. Sinai, where he again received the Ten Commandments written by God on stone (verses 1, 28).
Ex. chap. 35 thru 40	<i>Construction</i> of the tabernacle. In the <i>final</i> chapter of Exodus (chap. 40), the tabernacle was raised up (verse 17). During the month and 20 days after the raising up Of the tabernacle, God gave instructions (basically recorded <i>in Leviticus</i>) which would now regulate sacrifices & offerings.

Notes:

(1) As a technical point of consideration, it *may* be that the animal sacrifices and ceremonial laws were never technically a *part of* the Old Covenant. The Sinai (Old) Covenant was *ratified and made binding* in Ex. 24:3-8 (as discussed on page 2, above). The Apostle Paul says that **once a covenant “is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it”** (Gal. 3:15). “Once a covenant is signed, sealed or ratified---confirmed---it cannot be added to (Gal.3:15). Anything appearing ‘beneath the signature,’ so to speak, is not legally any part of the covenant.”^{2,6}

The adding of ceremonial laws to the Covenant would, in fact, be “annulling or adding to” a confirmed covenant!

Gal. 3:19 makes it plain that the ceremonial laws were, indeed, “added.” Yet, the question is whether they were added to (and became a *part of*) the Covenant itself, or whether God intended these ceremonial laws to function *along with* the Old Covenant. In either case, when these ceremonial laws were added (within a year after the Covenant was ratified) they became *binding*, and---like the Sinai Covenant---were to remain in effect *until* Christ’s crucifixion.

(Exodus chapter 34 speaks of the Sinai Covenant being “renewed.” However, that still does not answer the question posed above. Furthermore, the word “renewed” is not used *in the text* of chapter 34 ---or anywhere else in the Pentateuch---and, instead, is employed as an editorial *chapter title* in certain Bibles.)

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