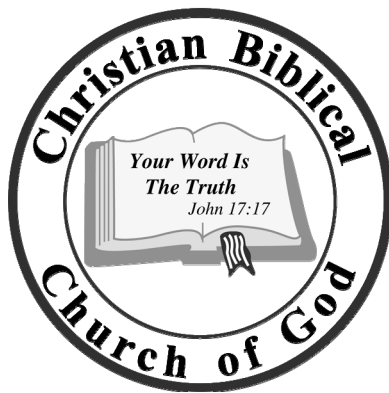


How Did Jesus Christ Fulfill the Law and the Prophets?



by
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How Did Jesus Christ Fulfill the Law and the Prophets?

The Sermon on the Mount was delivered at the beginning of Jesus Christ's ministry. After choosing twelve of His disciples to be witnesses of all the words that He spoke, Jesus taught them the basic spiritual principles that are recorded in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6. These teachings, now known as the Sermon on the Mount, were the beginning words of the New Covenant. Unlike the Old Covenant, which offered the physical blessings of health and prosperity, the New Covenant opened the way to the spiritual blessings of eternal life with everlasting power and glory.

Throughout the Bible, there is a contrast between the physical and the spiritual. The words of the apostle Paul show that the physical comes first, then the spiritual (I Cor. 15:45-47). Adam, the first man on earth, came from the earth and was physical. The second Adam, Jesus Christ, came from heaven and is spiritual. In like manner, the Old Covenant, which was physical, was established before the New Covenant, which is spiritual. On the day of Pentecost, God established the Old Covenant with the children of Israel by proclaiming the Ten Commandments from the top of Mount Sinai. The event was so terrifying to the people that they pleaded with Moses not to have God speak to them any longer: "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw, they trembled and stood afar off. And they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear. But let not God speak with us, lest we die' " (Ex. 20:18-19).

Because the children of Israel were afraid to hear God speak, Moses stood between God and the people to bring them all the words of God. Moses went up to the top of Mount Sinai to meet with God. At that time, God gave him the statutes, judgments and other laws to deliver to the children of Israel. As the intermediary who delivered the law to the people, Moses was considered a lawgiver, although he did not originate any of the laws or commandments himself (Ex. 20-23).

When Moses came down from meeting with God, he read all the words of God to the people. With one voice, the people agreed to obey all that God had commanded. Then the covenant was ratified with a blood sacrifice: "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments. And all the people an-

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swered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has said, we will do.’ And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar at the base of the mountain and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel who offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of bullocks to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put *it* in basins, and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the ears of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.’ And Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, ‘**Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you concerning all these words**’ ” (Ex. 24:3-8).

The covenant that God made with the children of Israel at Mount Sinai contained blessings and cursings. God promised to bless the children of Israel if they would obey His commands and laws; but if they disobeyed, they would reap curses in return for their sins and transgressions. In this manner, God established the Old Covenant with the twelve tribes of Israel: “**Behold, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil, in that I command you this day to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments so that you may live and multiply. And the LORD your God shall bless you in the land where you go to possess it.**

“But if your heart turn away so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I denounce to you this day that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong *your* days on the land where you pass over Jordan to go to possess it. **I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing.** Therefore, choose life, so that both you and your seed may live, that you may love the LORD your God, *and* may obey His voice, and may cleave to Him; for He is your life and the length of your days, so that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers—to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob—to give it to them” (Deut. 30:15-20).

Moses’ office as mediator and lawgiver was a physical type of the coming spiritual Lawgiver, Jesus Christ. When the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, God gave Moses this prophecy of the coming Messiah: “And the LORD said to me, ‘They have spoken well what they have spoken [that they did not

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want God to speak to them, but Moses]. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, *One* like you, and will put My words in His mouth. And He shall speak to them all that I shall command Him. And it shall come to pass, whatever man will not hearken to My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require *it* of him' ” (Deut. 18:17-19).

Jesus Christ the Spiritual Lawgiver

This prophecy of the coming Messiah reveals that every person who rejects the words of Jesus Christ will be held accountable by God on the day of judgment. During His ministry, Jesus confirmed that He was that Prophet and His words are the standard by which all will be judged: “But if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. **The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the word which I have spoken, that shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken from Myself; but the Father, Who sent Me, gave Me commandment Himself, what I should say and what I should speak**” (John 12:47-49).

The spiritual office of Jesus Christ far overshadows the physical office of Moses. Jesus Christ was God manifested in the flesh. He was the Lord God of the Old Testament Who had established the Old Covenant with the children of Israel. He came to earth to deliver them from the curses that the covenant had imposed for their sins and to redeem all mankind from the death penalty for their transgressions of God’s holy and righteous laws (Rom. 7:14; 3:9-19). His death ended the Old Covenant with the administration of death and established the New Covenant, which offers the gift of eternal life.

Unlike the Old Covenant, which required obedience to the letter of the law, the New Covenant is based on obedience from the heart—fulfilling the laws of God not only in the letter, but also in their complete spiritual intent. For this reason, Jesus Christ came as the spiritual Lawgiver to amplify and magnify the commandments and laws of God, as prophesied by Isaiah: “The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness sake; He will magnify the law and make *it* glorious” (Isa. 42:21).

As the spiritual Lawgiver, Jesus Christ revealed the full meaning of the laws of God. He received a commission from God

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the Father to preach the gospel, and proclaim the spiritual meaning of the commandments of God in order to bring the knowledge of salvation to the world. After John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus Christ began His ministry. He commanded the people to repent of their sins and believe the gospel: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, *the Son of God*....And saying, ‘The time has been fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is near at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel’ ” (Mark 1:1, 15).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus taught repentance from sin, which is clearly defined in the New Testament as the transgression of the laws of God (I John 3:4). God inspired the words of Jesus Christ to be recorded in the Gospels and “canonized” by the apostles with the other books of the New Testament. Through the ages, from Jesus’ time until now, God has divinely preserved these Scriptures for the world.

The four Gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ reveal that God requires obedience to His commandments not only in the letter of the law, but in the spirit of the law. Yet, in spite of Jesus’ teachings, which magnify the laws and commandments of God, most professing Christians have been taught that Jesus Christ came to abolish the laws of God. Jesus emphatically denounced this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled**” (Matt. 5:17-18).

How Did Jesus Christ Fulfill the Law?

When Jesus Christ fulfilled the law, He did not abolish it. Jesus’ own words in the Gospel of Matthew make this very clear. Then in what ways did He fulfill the law?

In order to recognize how He fulfilled the law, we must understand the meaning of the word “fulfill.” The English word “fulfill” is translated from the Greek verb *πληρωω pleeroo*, which means: “ ‘to make full, to fill full, to fulfill.’ ” In Mt. 5:17, depending on how one prefers to interpret the context, *πληρωω pleeroo* is understood as either *fulfill* = do, carry out, *bring to full expression* = show forth in its true spiritual meaning, or *fill up* = complete” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

As the spiritual Lawgiver, Jesus Christ fulfilled the law of

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God by bringing it to its full expression, revealing its complete spiritual meaning and intent. He “filled the law to the full” by teaching obedience in the spirit of the law. To fulfill the Law of God by amplifying its meaning and application is the exact opposite of abolishing the law. If Jesus had come to abolish the laws of God, He would not have magnified and expanded their meaning, making them even more binding. If the laws of God were not binding today, there could be no sin, because “sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4). And if there were no sinners, there would be no need of a Savior. But the Scriptures of both the Old Testament and the New Testament testify that Jesus Christ came to save mankind from sin. Instead of abolishing or “doing away with the law,” Jesus came to take upon Himself the penalty for our sins and transgressions of the laws of God and to show us the way to eternal life through spiritual obedience from the heart. That is how He magnified the laws and commandments of God and made them honorable.

The Spiritual Meaning of the Commandments Revealed in the Sermon on the Mount

As the spiritual Lawgiver, Jesus Christ taught His disciples the spiritual meaning and application of every one of God’s laws and commandments. He magnified the Sixth Commandment in the Sermon on the Mount as follows: “You have heard that it was said to those *in ancient times*, ‘You shall not commit murder; but whoever commits murder shall be subject to judgment.’ But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be subject to judgment. Now *you have heard it said*, ‘Whoever shall say to his brother, “Raca,” shall be subject to *the judgment of the council*.’ But *I say to you*, whoever shall say, ‘*You fool*,’ shall be subject to the fire of Gehenna” (Matt. 5:21-22).

Jesus made it clear that murder begins in the heart and is rooted in hatred and anger. The spiritual amplification of the Sixth Commandment, as taught by Jesus Christ, extends far beyond the letter of the law, which judges only physical acts of violence. Under the New Covenant, obedience is no longer restricted to the letter of the law and the actual committing of murder. By the new spiritual standard for obedience, hatred in one’s heart is judged as murder. This spiritual standard also applies to hatred for an enemy: “**You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you** [as the spiritual Lawgiver],

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love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, so that you yourselves may be *the* children of your Father Who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *on the* good, and sends rain on *the* just and *on the* unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*? And if you salute your brethren only, what have you done *that is* extraordinary? Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*? Therefore, you shall be perfect, even as your Father Who *is* in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:43-48).

When Jesus was dying on the cross, He set the perfect example of loving His enemies and praying for those who spitefully used Him. Luke recorded Jesus’ prayer for them as He suffered agony and ignominy at their hands: “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ ” (Luke 23:34).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also taught the spiritual meaning and application of the Seventh Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery.” Jesus magnified this commandment when He taught: “You have heard that it was said to those *in ancient times*, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ **But I say to you** [as the spiritual Lawgiver], **everyone who looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**” (Matt. 5:27-28).

Jesus made the Seventh Commandment far more binding than the letter of the law. From the time that Jesus Christ taught the spiritual meaning of this commandment, every individual has been held accountable for his or her thoughts of adultery, whether or not the physical act was committed. An examination of the following teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew 5-7, will show that Jesus revealed the full spiritual meaning of all the laws and commandments of God.

Applying the Spirit of the Law Does Not Nullify the Letter

More than thirty years after Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, the apostle James wrote an epistle in which he expounded on the spiritual meaning of the commandments of God. In his epistle, James shows that Jesus’ teachings concerning the spirit of the law did not eliminate the need to obey the letter of the law.

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James explains that Jesus' command to "love your neighbor as yourself" requires us to live in obedience to the commandments of God. James specifically refers to the Sixth and Seventh Commandments and makes it very clear that to break any of God's commandments is sin: **"If you are truly keeping *the* Royal Law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you have respect of persons, you are practicing sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors; for *if* anyone keeps the whole law, but sins in one *aspect*, he becomes guilty of all.** For He Who said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' also said, 'You shall not commit murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you commit murder, you have become a transgressor of *the* law. In this manner speak and in this manner behave: as those who are about to be judged by *the* law of freedom" (James 2:8-12).

There is no question that the apostles in the New Testament taught the full, spiritual meaning of the laws and commandments of God exactly as Jesus did. Never at any time did they write or teach that Jesus Christ came to abolish the laws of God. James wrote, "... if anyone keeps the whole law, but sins in one *aspect*, he becomes guilty of all." There is nothing in the apostle James' statement that remotely hints that the laws of God were abolished when Jesus died on the cross. In writing these words many years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, James confirms that Jesus did not "do away with" the laws of God. Instead, James makes it explicitly clear that Christians are obligated to keep the commandments of God.

The apostle John, who outlived all the other apostles, also taught obedience to the laws and commandments of God. In the last decade of the first century, John wrote his Gospel, three epistles and the book of Revelation. In his first epistle, he wrote most emphatically that obedience to the commandments of God is the standard that separates the true followers of Jesus Christ from those who merely profess His name: **"And by this *standard* we know that we know Him: if we keep His commandments. And the one who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.** On the other hand, *if* anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected [*made complete*]. By this *means* we know that we are in Him. Anyone who claims to dwell in Him is obligating himself also to walk even as He Himself walked" (I John 2:3-6).

John makes it very clear that those who truly believe in Jesus Christ will be walking as Jesus walked. They will be keeping the

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commandments of God as Jesus did and taught others to do (John 15:10, Matt. 19:17-19). Anyone who professes to believe in Jesus Christ but does not keep the commandments of God is a liar, according to the New Testament scriptures. For a minister or teacher to claim that the laws and commandments of God have been abolished is a blatant denial of the true teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles, which are preserved in the New Testament. True Christians need to be on guard against such “workers of lawlessness,” who preach against the laws of God and condemn commandment keeping.

As the apostle John shows, those who keep God’s commandments are not under condemnation but can approach God with confidence, knowing that He will hear and answer their prayers: “Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, *then* we have confidence toward God. And whatever we may ask we receive from Him **because we keep His commandments and practice those things that are pleasing in His sight**” (I John 3:21-22).

The New Testament does not support the widely accepted teaching that commandment keeping is contrary to faith. Rather, the words of John show that keeping the commandments of God is a sign of true faith and the love that God imparts through the indwelling of His Spirit: “And this is His commandment: that we **believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ**, and that we **love one another** [fulfilling the Royal Law by keeping God’s commandments], exactly as He gave commandment to us. And **the one who keeps His commandments is dwelling in Him, and He in him; and by this we know that He is dwelling in us: by the Spirit which He has given to us**” (verses 23-24).

Mainstream Christianity ignores these God-breathed New Testament scriptures and teaches that loving God and one another eliminates the need to keep God’s commandments. John exposes the error in this theology when he points out that obedience to God’s commandments is the very standard by which love for God and His children is measured: “**By this *standard* we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome**” (I John 5:2-3).

The scriptural truth is this: If we love Jesus Christ and God the Father, we will be motivated to keep the commandments of God. We will desire to keep His commandments in the spirit of the law as an outward manifestation of our love for Him. Those who profess to

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love God, but refuse to keep His commandments, do not understand the love of God. They are being led by their own human emotions and not by the love that God imparts to His children through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Feelings cannot be substituted for keeping the commandments of God. Those who claim to love God, but are practicing lawlessness, are deceiving themselves.

Jesus Christ specifically instructs those who love Him to keep His commandments: **“If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments....The one who has My commandments and is keeping them, that is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him....If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word that you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s, Who sent Me”** (John 14:15, 21-24).

Jesus Christ left no room for doubt or misinterpretation. If you love Him, you will keep His commandments. If you do not keep His words, you do not love Him. Unless you are keeping His commandments, mere profession of faith and love toward Jesus Christ and God the Father is empty and vain.

Jesus Christ set the perfect example of true godly love by keeping all the commandments of God in the full spirit of the law. Before His death, He delivered a new command to His disciples—that they follow His example by practicing the same love that He had manifested during His life with them on earth: **“A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another in the same way that I have loved you, that *is how* you are to love one another. By this shall everyone know that you are My disciples—if you love one another....As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; live in My love. If you keep My commandments, you shall live in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and live in His love. These things I have spoken to you, in order that My joy may dwell in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment: that you love one another, as I have loved you”** (John 13:34-35; 15:9-12).

Jesus Christ taught His followers to obey all the commandments of God in the full spirit of the law as He did. Jesus magnified the laws of God by revealing their full spiritual meaning. Jesus Christ as the spiritual Lawgiver made the laws and commandments

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of God far more binding by setting a higher, spiritual standard of obedience for Christians under the New Covenant.

Jesus Brought the Physical Rituals of the Law to Completion

The second meaning of the Greek word *πληροω* *pleeroo*, translated “to fulfill” in Matthew 5:17, is “to complete,” or “bring to completion.” Jesus Christ came to bring the animal sacrifices and other temple rituals and laws for the Aaronic priesthood to completion. Through His death, He ended the Old Covenant, which had imposed the physical requirements of these laws. In its place, He established the New Covenant, replacing the old requirements of the law with a higher spiritual application.

The laws concerning the animal sacrifices were brought to completion through the superior sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The sacrifice of Himself as the Lamb of God, “Who takes away the sin of the world,” superseded and replaced all the animal sacrifices and other physical rituals and ceremonies that were performed at the temple of God in Jerusalem. The apostle Paul confirms the completion of the animal sacrifices and the temple rituals through the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ: “For this reason, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but You have prepared a body for Me. You did not delight in burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin. Then said I, ‘Lo, I come (*as it is written of Me in the scroll of the book*) to do Your will, O God.’ ’ In the saying above, *He said, ‘Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin (which are offered according to the law) You did not desire nor delight in’; then He said, ‘Lo, I come to do Your will, O God.’* He takes away the first *covenant*, in order that He may establish the second *covenant*; by Whose will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. **Now every high priest [of the order of Aaron] stands ministering day by day, offering the same sacrifices repeatedly, which are never able to remove sins; but He, after offering one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God**” (Heb. 10:5-12).

The spiritual priesthood of Jesus Christ was effective immediately after He ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. Although His death had completed the animal sacrifices and temple rituals that were required under the Old Covenant, the priesthood continued to carry out these functions until the temple was destroyed. With the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, the priesthood

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of Aaron and the Levites came to an end. There was no need for a physical priesthood on earth because Jesus Christ was serving as High Priest in heaven above, making intercession for sin before God the Father. The spiritual priesthood of Jesus Christ superseded the priesthood of Aaron. The New Covenant has a greater High Priest—the resurrected Jesus Christ—to make intercession for the people of God and to propitiate their sins before God the Father (Isa. 2:2-1).

In the same way, the spiritual temple in heaven has superseded the physical temple that was on earth. Under the New Covenant, true believers have direct access through prayer to the throne of God the Father above. Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God the Father, where He carries out His spiritual work as High Priest: “**This is the covenant that I will establish with them after those days, says the Lord: I will give My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds** [far from abolishing His laws]; and their sins and lawlessness I will not remember ever again.’ **Now where remission of these is, it is no longer necessary to offer sacrifices for sin.** Therefore, brethren, having confidence to enter into the *true* holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He consecrated for us through the veil (that is, His flesh), and *having* a great High Priest over the house of God, let us approach *God* with a true heart, with full conviction of faith, our hearts having been purified from a wicked conscience, and our bodies having been washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:16-22).

True worshipers of God need no priesthood to intercede for them in an earthly temple because they have direct access to the throne of God the Father in His heavenly temple, where Jesus Christ intercedes as High Priest. As the apostle Paul shows, God is now building a spiritual temple within fleshly human beings through the indwelling of His Spirit: “**Don’t you understand that you are God’s temple, and that the Spirit of God is dwelling in you?** If anyone defiles the temple of God, God shall destroy him because **the temple of God is holy, which temple you are**” (I Cor. 3:16-17).

Isaiah prophesied of the spiritual temple that God is building: “For thus says the high and lofty One [God the Father] Who inhabits eternity; Whose name *is* Holy; ‘I dwell in the high and holy place [the holy of holies in heaven], even with the one who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15).

In addition, each one who receives the Holy Spirit in his or her mind as a begetting from God the Father becomes part of the tem-

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ple of God. This spiritual temple is composed of all true believers, both Jews and Gentiles: “For through Him we both have *direct* access by one Spirit to the Father. So then, you are no longer aliens and foreigners, but ***you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of the household of God. You are being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone in Whom all the building, being conjointly fitted together, is increasing into a holy temple in the Lord; in Whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit***” (Eph. 2:18-22).

The need for the earthly temple in Jerusalem was fulfilled and brought to completion by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which ended the Old Covenant and the need for a physical priesthood. Under the New Covenant, the spiritual temple of God in heaven, where Jesus Christ is High Priest, has superseded the physical temple of God on earth. Through the intercession of Jesus Christ, each believer becomes a temple for God’s Holy Spirit, and the collective body of believers is built up as a holy temple in the Lord.

Jesus Brought the Circumcision of the Flesh to Completion

When Jesus brought the Old Covenant to an end, the requirement for circumcision of the flesh was superseded by spiritual circumcision of the heart. The apostle Paul makes this very clear: “For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, neither *is* that circumcision which *is* external in *the* flesh; rather, he *is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly, and circumcision *is* of *the* heart, in *the* spirit *and* not in *the* letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God” (Rom. 2:28-29).

Under the New Covenant, God does not require physical circumcision. Rather, the spiritual circumcision of the heart has superseded the circumcision of the flesh. Spiritual circumcision brings conversion of the mind and heart, which physical circumcision in the flesh could never accomplish. To be circumcised in the heart, a person must repent of his or her sins and be baptized by full immersion in water. The act of baptism is a type of circumcision because the sins of the flesh are removed. Then, through the laying on of hands, the believer receives the Holy Spirit, converting the heart and mind. The apostle Paul describes the spiritual circumcision that takes place at baptism: “For in Him [Jesus Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, Who is the Head of all principality and power in Whom **you have also been circum-**

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cised with *the* circumcision not made by hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, by which you have also been raised with *Him* through the inner working of God, Who raised Him from the dead. For you, who were *once* dead in *your* sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has *now* made alive with Him, having forgiven all your trespasses” (Col. 2:9-13).

Paul understood very clearly that the Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised in the flesh because they had received spiritual circumcision through faith in Jesus Christ. The spiritual circumcision of the heart had superseded the physical circumcision of the flesh. Likewise, all the animal sacrifices that were required for sin were superseded by Jesus Christ’s sacrifice once for all time. The physical priesthood of Aaron was replaced by the spiritual priesthood of Jesus Christ. The temple of God in heaven has superseded the physical temple on earth, which was only a copy of the heavenly one. When Jesus Christ brought the physical rituals of the Old Covenant to completion, He did not abolish the law. Rather, the physical foretypes of the Old Covenant were superseded by the spiritual fulfillment of the New Covenant.

Other Laws That Have Been Transferred to the New Covenant

Under the Old Covenant, God gave authority to the priests and Levites, who served at the altar, to collect tithes and offerings from the children of Israel. Under the New Covenant, there is no priesthood of men but only one High Priest, Jesus Christ, Who is “a high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.” The apostle Paul explains that Melchisedec was Priest of God at Jerusalem in the days of Abraham, long before the Old Covenant was established. In describing how Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec, Paul reveals that He was the one Who later came to earth as Jesus Christ: “For on the one hand, those from among the sons of Levi who receive the priesthood are commanded by the law to collect tithes from the people—that is, *from* their brethren—even though they are *all* descended from Abraham; but on the other hand, He [Jesus Christ, Who was Melchisedec of the Old Testament] Who was not descended from them received tithes from Abraham, and blessed him who had the promises. Now it is beyond all doubt *that* the inferior *one* is blessed by the superior *one*.

“And in the first case, men who die receive tithes; but in the

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other case, *He received tithes of Whom it is* witnessed that He lives *forever*. And in one sense, Levi, who receives tithes, also gave tithes through Abraham; for he was still in his forefather's loins when Melchisedec met him. Therefore, if perfection was indeed *possible* through the Levitical priesthood—for *the law that* the people had received *was based* on it—what further need *was there for* another priest to arise according to the order of Melchisedec, and not to be named after the order of Aaron? For since the priesthood has changed, it is obligatory *that* a change of *the law* [for the priesthood and the receiving of tithes and offerings] also take place; because the one of Whom these things are said belongs to another tribe, from which no one was appointed to serve at the altar" (Heb. 7:5-13).

As Paul shows, the entire Levitical priesthood has been superseded by one immortal High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is of the order of Melchisedec. There is no longer a priesthood on earth ministering at the altar in the temple of God at Jerusalem. However, there is still a need to teach the true worship of God and to preach and publish the Word of God as a witness to the world. Those who repent and believe the gospel must be taught the way of eternal life that Jesus Christ committed to His disciples. It is for this reason that Jesus Christ sent them forth as apostles to the world, and it is for this reason that He raised up His Church. Within the Church, He has provided a ministry that is able to teach the Word of God and to preach the gospel to the world. Moreover, He has provided a way to support the work of preaching the gospel and teaching the brethren of Jesus Christ. Instead of the priests and Levites at the temple collecting tithes and offerings, the authority to receive tithes and offerings has been transferred to the ministry of Jesus Christ by the command of the Lord. The apostle Paul makes this very clear: "Don't you know that those who are laboring *in* the sacred things of the temple live *of the things* of the temple, *and* those who are ministering at the altar are partakers with the altar? **In the same way also, the Lord did command that those who preach the gospel are to live of the gospel**" (I Cor. 9:13-14).

The command of God under the Old Covenant concerning the tithes and offerings that the children of Israel were to give to the priests and Levites was brought to completion. Instead of abolishing the laws of tithes and offerings, Jesus Christ transferred the authority to receive tithes and offerings to the ministers of the gospel, who are under His authority as the High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant.

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Jesus also said that He had come to fulfill the prophets. How did Jesus fulfill the prophets? During His life in the flesh, all the Old Testament prophecies concerning His first coming were fulfilled. These prophecies included His miraculous conception and birth from the virgin Mary, the flight to Egypt to escape Herod, the return to Galilee and dwelling in Nazareth, the announcing of His ministry by John the Baptist, the healings and mighty works during His ministry, the preaching of the gospel throughout the land of Judea and Galilee, the persecution and suffering that followed, His death by crucifixion, the place of His burial, and the time of the resurrection. Most of the prophecies that were fulfilled concern His suffering and death on the Passover day. (See the book, *A Harmony of the Gospels in Modern English: The Life of Jesus Christ* by Fred R. Coulter, and read the commentary section “Twenty-eight Prophecies Fulfilled on the Crucifixion Day.”)

Although nearly two thousand years have passed since these prophecies were completed, all the prophecies about His second coming have yet to be fulfilled. There are a great number of prophecies in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that are awaiting fulfillment. Every prophecy in the Word of God will be fulfilled in its set time as determined by God the Father (Acts 1:7). Jesus Christ did not abolish or set aside a single prophecy or even a single word of the Old Testament scriptures. Jesus said concerning the Scriptures: “For truly I say to you, **until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled**” (Matt. 5:18).

Jesus gave an absolute guarantee that all the prophecies of Scripture would be fulfilled in their time: “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branches have already become tender, and it puts forth its leaves, you know that summer *is* near. In like manner also, when you see all these things [the events prophesied for the end time taking place], know that it [the second return of Jesus Christ] is near, even at *the* doors. **Truly I say to you, this [end time] generation shall in no wise pass away until all these things have taken place. The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away.** But concerning that day, and the hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt. 24:32-36).

According to the words of Jesus Christ, all the prophecies

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that are recorded in Scripture will be fulfilled at the time that God has ordained. Jesus did not come to abolish the words of the prophets, but to fulfill them. As He came in the flesh to fulfill the prophecies of a Savior, so He will return in glory to fulfill the prophecies of the coming King Who will bring the government of God to earth.

The Commandments of God Are to Be Taught and Practiced Under the New Covenant

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it absolutely clear that the commandments of God are in force under the New Covenant: **“Therefore, whoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of [from] heaven; but whoever shall practice and teach them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven”** (Matt. 5:19).

Which commandments of God are rejected and considered the least by mainstream Christianity today? The two that are considered the least are the Fourth Commandment and the Second Commandment. As strange as it may seem, many of those who reject these commandments will profess to keep the other commandments and claim that they are doing the will of God. But as the apostle James shows, breaking even one of the commandments of God is sin and brings the same condemnation as breaking them all.

Let us examine the two commandments that are considered the least by mainstream Christianity, beginning with the Fourth Commandment: **“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter; your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your livestock, nor the stranger within your gates: for in six days the LORD made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it”** (Ex. 20:8-11).

Nowhere in the entire Bible do we find a single scripture that changes the day of rest and worship from the seventh day of the week to Sunday, the first day of the week. Several scriptures are often used by Sunday keepers to support their belief that Christians should worship on the first day of the week. However, when those scriptures are correctly understood and interpreted, it is clear that Jesus Christ did not change the Sabbath from the seventh day of the

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week to the first day of the week.

Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made **for man ...**” (Mark 2:27). Contrary to the teachings of mainstream theologians, God did not command Sabbath keeping for the Jews only. In the beginning, God created the Sabbath day, hallowing the seventh day as the weekly day of worship, when there was not a single Jew on earth. The only humans at that time were Adam and Eve, the progenitors of all mankind. It was for all humanity that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, making it holy: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And by *the beginning of* the seventh day God finished His work which He had made. And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Gen. 2:1-3).

The seventh day was sanctified at the creation of the world. God established that day as a time for rest and worship from the beginning. He sanctified it, and blessed it, and rested on it, setting the example for mankind. Down through the ages, the record of this act of God has been preserved in the book of Genesis, one of the books of the Law. Remember what Jesus Christ declared concerning the Law: “For truly I say to you, **until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled**” (Matt. 5:18).

Since God created time, and time is measured by the movement of the earth in relationship to the heavens, time will exist as long as the heavens and the earth exist. As long as the heavens and the earth exist, the seventh-day Sabbath will not pass from the Law. Consequently, the Fourth Commandment is still in force and remains binding on all mankind.

Contrary to what mainstream Christianity may teach or what people may practice, Sunday has never been and will never be the Lord’s day. The seventh day of the week, called Saturday today, is the Lord’s Sabbath day. Jesus Christ emphatically declared that He is Lord of the Sabbath day: “And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, *and* not man for the Sabbath; therefore, the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath’ ” (Mark 2:27-28). **Jesus Himself declared that He is Lord of the Sabbath—the seventh day of the week. Therefore, the Sabbath day is the Lord’s day—not Sunday.**

Some have misconstrued Jesus’ declaration that He is Lord

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of the Sabbath as signifying that He was abolishing the Sabbath by His authority. This interpretation of Jesus' words is completely unfounded. Among the scholars who understand the true meaning of these scriptures are the writers of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Note what they have written about these critical verses: "At times Jesus is interpreted to have abrogated or suspended the sabbath commandment on the basis of the controversies brought about by sabbath healings and other acts. Careful analysis of the respective passages does not seem to give credence to this interpretation. The action of plucking the ears of grain on the sabbath by the disciples is particularly important in this matter. Jesus makes a foundational pronouncement at that time in a chiasmatically structured statement of antithetic parallelism: 'The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath' (Mark 2:27). The disciples' act of plucking the grain infringed against the rabbinic *halakhah* of minute casuistry in which it was forbidden to reap, thresh, winnow, and grind on the sabbath (*Sabb.* 7.2). Here again rabbinic sabbath *halakhah* is rejected, as in other sabbath conflicts. Jesus reforms the sabbath and restores its rightful place as designed in creation, where sabbath is made for all mankind and not specifically for Israel, as claimed by normative Judaism (*cf.* *Jub.* 2:19-20, see D.3). The subsequent logion, 'The Son of Man is Lord even of the sabbath' (Mark 2:28; Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5), indicates that man-made sabbath *halakhah* does not rule the sabbath, but that the Son of Man as Lord determines the true meaning of the sabbath. The sabbath activities of Jesus are neither hurtful provocations nor mere protests against rabbinic legal restrictions, but are part of Jesus' essential proclamation of the inbreaking of the kingdom of God in which man is taught the original meaning of the sabbath as the recurring weekly proleptic 'day of the Lord' in which God manifests his healing and saving rulership over man" (vol. 5, pp. 854-55).

As these scholars show, the Gospel accounts do not support the widespread belief that Jesus abolished the Sabbath day. Rather, as the Lord of the Sabbath, He taught the true meaning of the Sabbath day and set the example for its proper observance. His apostles continued to keep the Sabbath and to teach the early believers to keep it, as Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews clearly demonstrates. The apostle Paul wrote this epistle in 61 AD, more than thirty years after the beginning of the New Testament church. In his epistle, Paul makes it absolutely clear that the seventh-day Sabbath had not been abolished. At that time, there were false ministers who were teaching

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that Sunday, the first day of the week, had replaced the Sabbath. To counter these false teachings, Paul gave the brethren a sober warning that to reject the Sabbath and neglect to rest and worship God was sin, just as it was for the children of Israel in the wilderness:

“For He spoke in a certain place about the seventh *day* in this manner: ‘**And God rested on the seventh day from all His works**’; and again concerning this: ‘If they shall enter into My rest—’ consequently, since it remains *for* some to enter into it, and those who had previously heard the gospel did not enter in because of disobedience, again He marks out a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying in David after so long a time (exactly as it has been quoted *above*), ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken *long* afterwards of another day. **There remains, therefore, Sabbath-keeping for the people of God**” (Heb. 4:4-9). Paul did not write, “There remains Sabbath keeping for the Jews.” He clearly declared, “There remains Sabbath keeping for the people of God.” The people of God include the Gentiles as well as the Jews (I Pet. 2:10 and Eph. 2:11-19).

Many ministers and theologians have applied the opposite meaning to Hebrews 4:9. They have completely misinterpreted the King James translation of this verse, which reads, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” They teach that Christians are no longer required to observe the Sabbath because Jesus Christ has given them “rest” by “fulfilling the law” for them and thereby releasing them from commandment keeping. Such reasoning is completely false. Jesus did not fulfill the commandments of God in order to release us from the obligation to keep them, but to set the example for us (I Pet. 2:21-22, I John 3:4).

When we understand the meaning of the Greek text, there is no question that the New Testament upholds the authority of the Fourth Commandment for Christians today. The Greek word that is used in Hebrews 4:9 is **σαββατισμος** *sabbatismos*, which means “Sabbath rest, Sabbath observance” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). This definition of the Greek word *sabbatismos* is confirmed by other historical works: “The words ‘sabbath rest’ translate the GK noun *sabbatismos*, a unique word in the NT. This term appears also in Plutarch (*Superset. 3 [Moralia 166a]*) for sabbath observance, and in four post-canonical Christian writings which are not dependent on Heb. 4:9” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, p. 856).

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The Greek word **σαββατισμος** *sabbatismos* is a noun. The verb form of the word is **σαββατιζω** *sabbatizo*, which means “to keep the Sabbath” (Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). The meaning of *sabbatizo* is confirmed by its use in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament which dates from the third century BC. It is called the Septuagint, meaning “Seventy,” because the first five books were translated by seventy scholars who were Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria, Egypt. The Septuagint was used by the Jews in synagogues throughout the Roman Empire, and by the Greek-speaking Jewish and Gentile converts in the early New Testament churches.

The apostle Paul quotes exclusively from the Septuagint in his epistle to the Hebrews. When Paul used the Greek word **σαββατισμος** *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9, he knew that the meaning of this word was well known to the Greek-speaking believers of that day. The verb form **σαββατιζω** *sabbatizo* was used in the Septuagint, which was as familiar to the believers of New Testament times as the King James Bible is to Christians today.

The *Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint* defines **σαββατιζω** *sabbatizo* as “to keep sabbath, to rest” (Lust, Eynikel, Hauspie). The use of the verb *sabbatizo* in Leviticus 23:32 in the Septuagint leaves no room to mistake its meaning. Here is the English translation of this verse in the Septuagint: “It [the Day of Atonement] shall be a holy sabbath [literally, “a Sabbath of Sabbaths”] to you; and ye shall humble your souls, from the ninth day of the month: from evening to evening **shall ye keep your sabbaths**” (*The Septuagint With the Apocrypha*, Brenton).

The clause “shall ye keep your sabbaths” is translated from the Greek words **σαββατιετε τα σαββατα** *sabbatieite ta sabbata*, which literally mean, “You shall **sabbathize** the Sabbaths.” The Greek verb **σαββατιετε** *sabbatieite*, which means “ye shall keep,” is the second person plural form of the verb **σαββατιζω** *sabbatizo*. Since the verb *sabbatizo* means “to keep the Sabbath,” this verb applies not only to the weekly Sabbath and the annual Sabbaths of God, but also to God’s command for the seventh-year rest from farming the land. Throughout the Septuagint, the verb **σαββατιζω** *sabbatizo* is used in relation to Sabbath keeping and Sabbath rest only.

In accord with this definition, the KJV translates **σαββατιετε** *sabbatieite* in Leviticus 23:32 as “shall ye celebrate your sabbath.” There is no question that this form of the Greek verb *sabbatizo* is

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specifically referring to Sabbath observance. This meaning applies equally to the noun form **σαββατισμος** *sabbatismos* which we find in Paul's epistle to the Hebrews. The fact that Paul uses the Septuagint translation in this epistle confirms that the meaning of the word **σαββατισμος** *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9 is in complete accord with the meaning of *sabbatiete* in Leviticus 23:32. Paul is clearly upholding the observance of the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week.

The use of the Greek word *sabbatismos* in Hebrews 4:9 contradicts the teaching that the Fourth Commandment has been abolished. As the context of this verse shows, the observance of the seventh day as a day of rest and worship is as binding for the people of God today as it was for Israel of old. In addition to the weekly Sabbath, the annual holy days that God commanded, which are also called Sabbaths, are included in the Fourth Commandment. In the same manner as true believers are commanded to keep the seventh-day Sabbath, they are also commanded to observe the annual holy days of God. The early New Testament churches kept the holy days of God, as determined by the calculated Hebrew Calendar. The apostle Paul kept the holy days and commanded Gentile converts to keep them (I Cor. 5:7-8). None of the apostles or the early converts to Christianity observed the pagan holidays that are now called Christmas and Easter. These holidays, which originated in sun worship, were later adopted into Christianity through the influence of the Roman church. They became false substitutes for the annual holy days that are commanded by God, just as Sunday has become a false substitute for the weekly Sabbath. (If the reader desires to know more about the Sabbath and the holy days of God, please write to the publisher at the address in the front of the book. Also, request *Rome's Challenge to the Protestants*.)

As the Roman church succeeded in subverting the observance of the Fourth Commandment by Christians, so it succeeded in subverting the observance of the Second Commandment, which prohibits the use of idols and images in worship. There is no ambiguity in the wording of this command of God: **"You shall not make for yourselves any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them, for I, the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those***

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who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Ex. 20:4-6).

Because this commandment is so clear in its condemnation of idols and images, the Roman church has removed it from their listing of the Ten Commandments in all their catechisms. In order to make up for the missing commandment, they have split the Tenth Commandment into two commandments. Although they have officially removed the Second Commandment from their catechisms because they cannot justify their unlawful use of idols and images, the full text of the Second Commandment remains in their approved Bibles as a testimony against their idolatry.

The Second Commandment makes it absolutely clear that God abhors the use of idols and images of any kind by His people. Yet the churches of professing Christianity are filled with idols, images and pictures. No church can justify the use of idols and images in its worship when God has strictly forbidden this practice. God the Father and Jesus Christ cannot be worshiped through idols or images. Nor will God tolerate the use of images to worship and venerate other persons or beings. The worship of Mary and the veneration of the apostles and other saints has no place in true Christianity. All such worship is strictly forbidden by the Second Commandment. It is blatant idolatry to venerate any person or being in addition to or in place of God. The apostle Paul warned the believers of his day that those who took part in idolatry would suffer the judgment of God, as did the Israelites of old who committed this sin: **“Neither be idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.’ Neither should we commit sexual immorality, as some of them committed, and twenty-three thousand were destroyed in one day. Neither should we tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted *Him*, and were killed by serpents.... Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry”** (I Cor. 10:7-9, 14).

Paul’s warning to the Corinthians makes it clear that the Second Commandment is still in force. It is even more binding under the New Covenant than it was under the Old because Jesus has magnified it by His example and His teaching. The worship of God in spirit and in truth requires loving God with the whole heart and mind. The true worship of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ leaves no room in the heart and mind to worship others. As the Scriptures show, idolatry begins in the mind and heart. In the book of Ezekiel it is written: “And some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the Word of the LORD came to me, saying,

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‘Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I at all be inquired of by them? Therefore speak to them, and say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Every man of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him according to the multitude of his idols; shall I take the house of Israel in their own heart because they have deserted Me for their idols—all of them.’”

“ ‘Therefore say to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord GOD, **“Repent and turn yourselves from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations.** For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger who lives in Israel, who **separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart,** and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to a prophet to ask of him concerning Me; I the LORD will answer him Myself. And I will set My face against that man, and I will make him for a sign and for a proverb. And I will cut him off from the midst of My people; and you shall know that *I am* the LORD” ’ ” (Ezek. 14:1-8).

Like Israel of old, the believers in the New Testament churches were drawn away from the true worship of God and led into idol worship. Images of pagan deities were introduced into the churches and palmed off as representations of Jesus’ mother and His apostles. More and more images were added, each said to represent a chosen saint of God. But the apostle Paul reveals the true origin of these idols: “What then am I saying? That an idol is anything, or that which is sacrificed to an idol is anything? But **that which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not wish you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink *the cup of the Lord,* and *the cup of demons.* You cannot partake of *the table of the Lord,* and *the table of demons*” (I Cor. 10:19-21).**

The apostle John understood the pagan origin of the images that were brought into the early churches, drawing many believers into a false worship. Toward the close of the first century, John wrote three different epistles to admonish the believers to remain faithful to the true worship of God. At the end of his first epistle, he commanded, “Little children, **keep yourselves from idols**” (I John 5:21).

There is no question that, in the Old Testament and the New Testament, any worship of idols and images is condemned. Those

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who teach and practice the use of idols and images to worship God are in direct defiance of the Second Commandment and will be rejected by Him. God the Father and Jesus Christ will not share Their glory and honor with an idol. Any attempt to worship God through the use of an idol or physical object of any kind, including rosaries or prayer beads, is worshiping in vain. True worship requires loving God with the whole heart and mind, in spirit and in truth, leaving no room for reverence or devotion to images created by the imaginations and hands of men.

The Spirit and Intent of the Law and the Prophets

The purpose of the Law and the Prophets and all the writings of the Old Testament was to teach the people to love and worship God, and Him alone. Jesus Christ revealed the spirit and intent of the Law and the Prophets when He was asked which commandment was the greatest: “And one of them, a doctor of the law, questioned *Him*, tempting Him, and saying, ‘Master, which commandment *is the* great commandment in the Law?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘**You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.**’ This is *the* first and greatest commandment; and *the* second *one* is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:35-40).

Under the New Covenant, true worship and love toward God is made possible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which enables the believer to reverence God and obey Him from the heart. Through faith in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the believer learns to obey every command of God in the full spirit and intent of the law, as magnified by Jesus Christ. This is the manner in which every true believer will keep the laws and commandments of God, because he or she loves God the Father and Jesus Christ with all the heart, mind, soul and strength. This righteousness, which is based on faith and love, far exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said, “For I say to you, unless your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way *that* you shall enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20).

The righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, Who obeyed all of His Father’s commandments in the full spirit and intent

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of the law. Through faith, His righteousness is imputed to each believer who loves God and keeps His commandments. This imputed righteousness is a gift that the believer receives through the abundance of the Father's grace. It is called "the righteousness of faith" because only through faith in Jesus Christ is it possible to partake of this righteousness.

The Righteousness of Faith of the True Believer

When a believer is justified from past sins through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and is baptized by full immersion in water, he or she receives the gift of the Holy Spirit as a begetting from God the Father. Then the Father imputes to the believer the very righteousness of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is imputed to the believer by God the Father, far exceeds the righteousness required by the letter of the law. His spiritual obedience was so perfect, pure and wholehearted that He always did the things that pleased God the Father. This perfect righteousness was accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus received without measure from the Father.

The Scriptures reveal that when the believer is begotten with the Holy Spirit of God the Father, he or she begins to receive the very mind of Christ. With Christ's mind, the believer is strengthened to live by every word of God in the full spirit of the law. The apostle Paul describes this spiritual transformation in the mind as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Each believer begins to have the laws and commandments of God written upon his or her mind: "But He, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at *the* right hand of God. Since that time, He is waiting until His enemies are placed *as* a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has obtained eternal perfection *for* those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after He had previously said, **'This is the covenant that I will establish with them after those days, says *the* Lord: I will give My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds; and their sins and lawlessness I will not remember ever again'** " (Heb. 10:12-17).

Under the New Covenant, the laws and commandments of God are inscribed in the mind of each believer through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which gives the believer the power to bring forth the fruits of righteousness unto eternal life.

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Rejecting the Commandments of God Is Lawlessness

As previously stated, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus left no doubt that the commandments of God are to be taught and practiced not only in the letter of the law but in the spirit of the law. As He was completing the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned of false prophets who would teach that obedience to the commandments and laws of God is no longer required: “But beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, for within *they* are ravening wolves....Therefore, you shall assuredly know them by their fruits. **Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but the one who is doing the will of My Father, Who is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy through Your name? And *did we not* cast out demons through Your name? And *did we not* perform many works of power through Your name?’ And then I will confess to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness’ ” (Matt. 7:15, 20-23).**

These prophets and teachers are not of God in spite of the fact that they use Jesus’ name, and call Him their Lord, and even do wonderful works in His name. They present themselves as His ministers and preachers of truth, but in reality they are serving the god of this world, Satan the devil, who rejected the commandments of God from the beginning. Everyone who teaches disobedience to the laws and commandments of God is following in the steps of Satan who was the first lawbreaker. That is why Jesus told the Pharisees that their father was the devil. While professing to teach and practice the laws and commandments of God, they were teaching and practicing their own religious laws and traditions in place of the commandments of God.

During His ministry, Jesus condemned the religious leaders of Judaism for their traditions, which they held in higher esteem than the laws and commandments of God. He made it clear that in observing their own human traditions, they were rejecting the commandments of God: “... The Pharisees and the scribes questioned Him, *saying*, ‘Why don’t Your disciples walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’ And He answered *and* said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, “**This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me.**” But in vain do they worship Me, teaching *for* doctrine the commandments of men. For

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leaving the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men, *such as* the washing of pots and cups; and you practice many other things like *this*.’

“Then He said to them, **‘Full well do you reject the commandment of God, so that you may observe your own tradition.** For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, “The one who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.” But you say, “If a man shall say to *his* father or mother, ‘Whatever benefit you might receive from me *is* corban’ (that is, *set aside as a gift to God*), he is not obligated to help his parents.” **And you excuse him from doing anything for his father or his mother, nullifying the authority of the Word of God by your tradition which you have passed down; and you practice many traditions such as this’** ” (Mark 7:5-13).

Most of the world’s professing Christians have committed the same mistake as the Pharisaic Jews, teaching the commandments of men as doctrines and observing tradition in lieu of God’s commandments. According to Jesus’ teaching, they are workers of lawlessness.

In his first epistle, the apostle John clearly defines lawlessness: “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4, *KJV*). Although this is a correct translation, it does not convey the literal meaning of the Greek text. Here is a more precise translation of John’s words: **“Everyone who practices sin is also practicing lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.”**

To practice lawlessness is to live in a state of sin, committing sin as a habitual way of life. In other words, lawlessness is the habitual breaking of God’s laws and commandments. Religious leaders who teach and practice lawlessness appear to be righteous because they use the names of God and Jesus Christ and often quote Scripture. However, they are not true servants of God because they reject His laws and commandments.

The apostle Jude, the brother of Jesus Christ, witnessed the rise of lawlessness among the churches of his day. Jude delivered an urgent plea to the believers to reject ungodly teachers of lawlessness, who were turning the grace of God into license to sin by preaching a false gospel of faith without obedience and replacing the commandments of God with traditions that originated in ancient paganism: “Beloved, when personally exerting all *my* diligence to write to you concerning the common salvation, I was compelled to write to you,

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exhorting *you* to **fervently fight for the faith which once for all time has been delivered to the saints. For certain men have stealthily crept in**, those who long ago have been written about, condemning *them* to this judgment. ***They are ungodly men, who are perverting the grace of our God, turning it into licentiousness, and are personally denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ***" (Jude 3-4).

The apostle Peter warned of false teachers who would reject the way of obedience to God's commandments as taught and practiced by Jesus Christ: "But there were also false prophets among the people, as indeed **there will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies, personally denying the Lord who bought them** [by rejecting His teachings], **and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many people will follow as authoritative** [exalting church tradition] **their destructive ways; and because of them, the way of the truth will be blasphemed**" (II Pet. 2:1-2).

Those Who Reject the Commandments of God Are Judging the Law and the Lawgiver

Those who teach that the commandments of God have been abolished are presumptuously passing judgment on the laws of God. The following excerpt depicts one such teaching: "In fact, the whole law of Moses has been rendered inoperative. The New Testament message is clear for all who have 'ears to hear.' **The whole of the law of Moses has been rendered inoperative by the death of the Lord Jesus. The law, in its entirety, no longer has any immediate and forensic authority or jurisdiction whatsoever over anyone....**Christ is the complete end and fulfillment of all of the laws' 613 commandments, ending their jurisdiction over us completely" (Tardo, *Sunday Facts & Sabbath Fiction*, p. 26-27).

By nullifying the laws of God in this manner, the religious teachers of this world are usurping the authority of God as Lawgiver. The apostle James condemns this ungodly attitude, which presumes to judge the laws that God has established for all mankind: "Brethren, do not talk against one another. The one who talks against a brother, and judges his brother, **is speaking against the law, and is judging the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law; rather, you are a judge. But there is only one Lawgiver, Who has power to save and to destroy.** Who are you

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that you presume to judge another?" (James 4:11-12).

To judge the laws and commandments of God and to reject Him as Lawgiver is the epitome of lawlessness. This form of religion is rooted in human self-righteousness, not in the righteousness that Jesus Christ taught and practiced.

The book of Job holds a lasting lesson for all who exalt their own righteousness above the righteousness of God. The ancient patriarch Job viewed himself as righteous because he continually offered sacrifices to God. However, he began to exalt himself and trust in his own righteousness, rather than trusting in God. He bragged and boasted of his own righteousness so much that God brought a series of grievous trials upon him. After losing his children and all his possessions, he was smitten with boils from his head to his toes. When his trial was more than he could bear, three friends came to visit him, but they did not give him any comfort. His friends began to accuse him of evildoing and urged him to repent in order to escape further punishment from God. The more they condemned him, the more Job defended his own righteousness. He began to condemn God and accuse Him of being unjust and unrighteous in His acts. When he expressed a desire to plead his cause before God Himself, God responded by answering him in person: "And the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, 'Gird up your loins now like a man. I will demand you, and you declare unto Me. **Will you even annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me so that you may be righteous?**'" (Job 40:6-8).

As Job learned, God, and God alone, is Savior. He powerfully declared to Job that his own righteousness could never save him: "**And have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Deck yourself now with majesty and excellency, and array yourself with glory and beauty.** Cast abroad the rage of your wrath; and behold everyone who is proud, and abase him. Look on everyone *who is* proud, *and* bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together; *and* bind their faces in darkness. **Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you**" (verses 9-14).

After hearing these words of God, Job abhorred himself for his sin of self-righteousness and repented to God "in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). That is what these professing Christians who practice lawlessness need to do. They need to forsake the self-righteous traditions of men that they have been practicing and submit to the righteousness of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

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The leaders of Christianity today need to remember the words of warning that Jesus spoke to the scribes and Pharisees during His ministry. Like the self-righteous leaders of the Jews, the leaders of the Christian churches have adopted traditions and dogmas that conflict with the commandments of God. A close examination of the history of Christianity will show that the traditional doctrines and practices of the churches today are not the teachings of Jesus Christ. True Christianity, as originally taught by Jesus Christ and His apostles, was subverted from within by false teachers of lawlessness. The teachings of these “ungodly men” that Jude and Peter wrote about were passed down in the writings of the early Church Fathers and were accepted by the Roman church as authoritative traditions. Through the centuries the Roman church has grown in power, using its influence to stamp out every remaining vestige of the true teachings of Jesus Christ. After a power struggle between the bishop of Rome and the bishop of Constantinople, the church split into the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches.

As the influence of the Orthodox church dominated the East, so the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church molded the thinking of the entire Western world. The authority of Catholic doctrine and tradition was not seriously publicly challenged until the time of Martin Luther. When Martin Luther rejected the corruption and lawlessness of the Roman Catholic Church, he appeared to be seeking the truth of God. He labored diligently to translate the Scriptures into the German language so that the common people could read and learn from the Word of God. But the religion that developed as a result of Martin Luther’s teachings, known as Lutheranism, did not restore the true teachings of Jesus Christ. The reformation that Martin Luther initiated was never completed because he rejected the Second and Fourth Commandments. As a result, the new religion that he founded began to promote another form of lawlessness.

Luther taught that a person who had been saved through the grace of God could not lose salvation, regardless of the degree or intensity of the sins that might be committed. This perverse teaching is clearly expressed in a letter written by Luther: “Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your faith in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. We will commit sins while we are here, for this life is not a place where righteousness can exist....**No sin can separate us from Him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery a thousand times each day**” (Martin Luther, Saemmtliche Schriften, Letter 99, 1 August

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1521, translated by Erika Flores in *The Wittenberg Project, The Wartburg Segment*, as published in *Grace and Knowledge*, Issue 8, September 2000, Article “Ecclesiasticus: The Wisdom of Ben-Sirach,” p. 27).

The words of Martin Luther reveal the depth of the teaching of lawlessness to which many religious leaders have descended. This teaching is the epitome of the perverted “grace” that Jude condemned, which rejects the commandments of God and grants license to commit sin with no limitations. Luther’s teaching concerning murder and adultery is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Jesus Christ, Who magnified and greatly expanded the application of the Sixth and Seventh Commandments.

The promoters of lawlessness have succeeded in deceiving the vast majority of professing Christians into accepting a false grace. As the New Testament shows, this distorted view of grace does not lead to salvation. At the Judgment Day, the teachers of lawlessness, who have been honored as religious leaders and have even done noteworthy deeds in the name of Jesus Christ, will be rejected: “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy through Your name? And *did we not* cast out demons through Your name? And *did we not* perform many works of power through Your name?’ And then I will confess to them, ‘I never knew you. **Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness**’ ” (Matt. 7:22-23).

The workers of lawlessness will depart into the lake of fire to suffer the judgment of eternal death from which there is no resurrection: “But *the* cowardly, and unbelieving, and abominable, and **murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is *the* second death**” (Rev. 21:8).

During His ministry, Jesus declared that those who refused to hear His teachings would be judged by the words He had spoken: “Then Jesus called out and said, ‘The one who believes in Me does not believe in Me, but in Him Who sent Me. And the one who sees Me sees Him Who sent Me. I have come *as* a light into the world so that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness. **But if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects Me and does not receive My words has one who judges him; the word which I have spoken, that shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken from Myself; but the Father, Who sent Me, gave Me commandment Himself, what I**

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should say and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life. Therefore, whatever I speak, I speak exactly as the Father has told Me” (John 12:44-50).

The teachings of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount, carry the full authority of God the Father: **“Now it came to pass *that* when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He taught them as one Who had authority, and not as the scribes”** (Matt. 7:28-29). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught the full spiritual intent and application of the laws and commandments of God, which is the spiritual standard for the New Covenant. This is the standard by which every true believer is now being judged, and by which all mankind will ultimately be judged.

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