

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 02-56

Dear Reader

The *Assembly Messenger* ends as a separate publication in deference to including it in this new magazine as a monthly column. An entire issue would be completed generally in two months. Historically, we have sent out (60) issues and over (36000) individual newsletters over 6 years, free of charge on a request-basis only. We have been very thankful for the letters and phone calls received in appreciation of this publication, and we pray you will be encouraged and built up as it continues to be published in this new format. I deeply thank Bob Costen for his support and review of each issue. He will continue to review future issues. A limited number of back issues are still available. We have been branching out from only assembly truth — the sole basis of the first 5 years — and will keep doing so. Let's now look at this month's column on *the Law*, which will be completed over two magazine issues. In Him. Roger P. Daniel

I have recently read several articles that at least imply that the Law of Moses ... or at least parts of it ... is for us to keep to please the Lord today in the Church-dispensation. Many other professed-Christian groups and individuals strive to keep the Law as a means of salvation. This confusion of Old Testament Judaism with New Testament Christianity also adds confusion to the truth concerning the Church, for if the Law is required today, then how about those Judaistic, legal *collective* practices of Tabernacle and Temple days? The giving of the Law was one of the greatest events in the world's history. It was God's great standard. However, it was given to *Israel* and to them only (Ex.19:3-8; Dt.5:1). They said they would obey all the Lord commanded them (Ex.19:8). God as it were said, OK, I'll tell you what I expect from you if you are to find favor with Me by your own merit. So God called Moses up on Mount Sinai and gave His Law to him to give *to Israel* (Ex.24:12; Dt.6:1). In fact, the Ten Commandments begin with the words, "I am the Lord *your* God who brought *you* out of the land of Egypt" (Ex.20:2, NKJV). The Children of Israel are meant, and none other. This is a very important point: no part of the Law was *ever* given to Gentiles.

Furthermore, the Law was never confined to the *Ten Commandments* (Ex.20:1-17; Dt.5:6-17) written on two tablets of stone (Ex.24:12, 31:18, 34:28), but included over 600 commandments and ordinances given to Moses before and during the 40 days he *twice* (Ex.24 and 34) was on the mount with God. These ordinances are found particularly but not exclusively in

And, indeed, many of those practices are brought into "church" doctrine and practice by the vast majority of professed-Christian groups and denominations, to varying degrees, as we saw in the last issue when we looked at going forth to Christ "outside the camp."

THE LAW OF MOSES

What Was the Law and to Whom was it Given?

Exodus 20-35 and all of Deuteronomy beginning with chapter 5. 1 Kings 2:3 tells Israel to "keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments and His testimonies *as it is written in the Law of Moses.*" Ezra 3:2 records the building of an altar "to offer burnt offerings on it, *as is written in the Law of Moses.*" The burnt offering takes us to the ordinances of Leviticus 1, not to the Ten Commandments themselves. This is another very important point because some feel today that we are obliged to keep the Ten Commandments because they are (what they call) "the moral Law." They forget the other 600 or so commandments and ordinances. All this *legalism*, this Law-keeping, was under God's Old Contract and began the reign of *Judaism*.

The Ten Commandments, however, *are* unique since they were written by the finger of God (Ex. 34:1; Dt.9:10) and not just given to Moses to write, as was the rest of the Law (Ex.24:4). They are the backbone, the framework on which all the other commandments

and ordinances are built. Therefore, when the New Testament speaks of the Law, it often appears to have

The Law was a *ministry* (Gk. *diakonia*), a rule of death and condemnation in contrast to the ministry of the Holy Spirit today, which brings *Christ* before our eyes (2 Cor.3:7-9). Angels were somehow also involved (Acts 7:53). The Law was perfect and just, but no one lived beyond a normal life span because no one kept the Law (Lev.18:5; Rom.10:5), so death reigned. One who offended in one point of the Law was guilty of all (Jas.2:10-11). One little slip in some 600 detailed ordinances and it was all over on the basis of works.

Unless fulfilled perfectly, the Law put people under a curse (Gal.3:10) — the curse of unforgiven sin. See Deuteronomy 27:26. Trying to keep the Law was a 24/7 job, as seen by the Lord's own summary, "You shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your soul, with *all* your mind, and with *all* your strength, and ... your neighbor as yourself" (Mk.12:30-31). Impossible? Yes, but righteous! Could an absolutely holy God demand less? So this summary is not something for us to strive to "keep." Rather, it shows the *impossibility* of pleasing or coming to God on the basis of the law of Moses.

"The Law prophesied until John" (the Baptist — Mt.11:13). "The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (Jn.1:17). This verse gives a clear contrast, showing something new came through Jesus. Do we today have to do with Jesus or with Moses? The answer to that question decides whether we are under Law or grace. It's one or the other: it can't be both!

Since Scripture has confined all under sin (Gal.3:22; Rom.3:23), man obviously needed to be justified ... by faith (Gal.3:11). In fact, whether in Old Testament times or any time since, anyone justified before God, was justified by faith alone (Rom.3:24-26). The Law was a bondage (Gal.4:24) which made nothing perfect (Heb.7:19). The Law demanded *righteousness* (being absolutely right before God), but gave no power to do good, so failure constantly occurred. The flesh, our old sinful nature, couldn't keep it (Rom.8:3-4). The only hope was in God sending His Son to do a God-satisfying work *on our behalf*. Instead of Law, which was only a shadow of the good things to come

this divine summary primarily in view, without ignoring the rest of the Mosaic Law.

The Law Was Until Christ

For Israel, the Law was *added* because of their sin *until Christ came* (Gal.3:19). It was a guardian or schoolmaster or tutor *until Christ* (Gal.3:23-26) — until He came. Notice in verse 24 the words "to bring us" are in italics in many translations: they were added by the translators who didn't understand the sense of the verse. The Jews needed something to help keep them out of trouble, to discipline them, to keep them thinking about God, so God added the Law until Christ came. The tutor in the Jewish home cared for and disciplined the children. That is what the Law did for Israel. But *now*, as verses 25-26 go on to tell us, even Hebrew (Jewish) Christians are no longer under a guardian. We Christians, whether of Jewish or Gentile background, are seen as grown sons in the place of highest privilege, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. See Galatians 4:1-7 and Romans 8:17.

The Change Came with Jesus

(Heb.10:1), mankind needed a *propitiation* — an effective God-satisfying sacrifice for our sins!

Fortunately, Christ *has* come. "For what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the *likeness* of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom.8:3-4). "The law [controlling, governing principle] of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law [controlling, governing principle] of sin and death" (Rom.8:2). He *is* the "propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn.2:2). He bore our *sins* (the *fruit*) in His own body on the cross, and also condemned *sin* (the *root*) in the flesh and died unto *sin* once (1 Pet.2:24; Rom.8:3; 6:10). He "has redeemed us [Jews] from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal.3:13) "that the blessings of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus ... through faith" (Gal.3:14). We Christians are free from the Law's bondage (Gal.4:21-31). Christ did the work so we wouldn't be

confronted with a work we couldn't fulfil. He answered both the *sin* and *sins* questions: He took care of At best, under Law, one could only seek to establish his own righteousness (Rom.10:4; Phil. 3:9), which proved to be impossible. But "Christ is the end of the Law *for righteousness*, to everyone who believes" (Rom.10:4). "Now the righteousness of God, *apart from the Law*, is revealed ... even the righteousness of God which is *through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe*" (Rom.3:21-22). For one who tried by works to be righteous and knew he constantly failed, what a blessing to have God *reckon* (count, impute, put to his account) him to be righteous *apart from works* (Rom.4:6). We have become the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor.5:21; Phil.3:9) and it has nothing to do with the Law! It is pure grace! If we foolishly attempt to be justified by law, we have fallen away from grace — let grace slip away from us (Gal.5:4).

The Present Purpose of the Law

Without question, the Law was and is perfect and fully righteous (Rom.7:12): *God* was its Author. So, does this perfect Law have a purpose today? Yes! Without We are justified by faith *apart from the Law* (Acts 13:39; Rom.3:20-28; 4:13-16; Gal.2:16). That's a good thing because Romans 3:19 makes it plain all the world was guilty before God: no one had perfectly kept God's Law! "If there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the Law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin that the promise by *faith in Jesus Christ* might be given to those who believe" (Gal.3:21-22). We are not under law but under grace (Rom.6:14-15).

Does this mean God discarded the Law when Christ came? No! As we have seen, the Law still stands as God's perfect, holy requirement for man to come to God by his own good works (which he can't do). See Matthew 5:17-18. But Christ *has* died and those who have accepted Him as Lord and Savior are seen as While admitting the above, some Christians pick on a verse such as Deuteronomy 22:5, "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man," to condemn a girl or woman for wearing anything except a dress in public. But remember where this verse is found. *It's right in the middle of hundreds of ordinances of the Mosaic Law!* Read the surrounding chapters. Are

the evil *root* and the evil *fruits* of that evil root.

the Law I would not have known sin (Rom.7:6-8; 1 Cor.15:56). The Law is good if used *lawfully* (1 Tim.1:8-10): it is for the *ungodly*, for sinners. "By the Law is the *knowledge of sin*" (Rom.3:20). The Law was given that sin might abound (Rom.5:20).

People think or hope that God grades on a curve. *But He doesn't!* He grades on an absolute scale! So, when I preach Jesus, I can use the Law to prove to people that they cannot come to God by their works. Their works only show they are sinners and thus "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom.3:23). If they want God's favor instead of His judgment, they have to come to Him by His ordained way, by them accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Jesus said, "*I* am the way, the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father *except through Me*" (Jn.14:6). "There is no other name ... by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The Faith-Way or the Law-Way for Justification and Living?

crucified with Him (Gal.2:19-21). So, we are "*dead to the Law* through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead" (Rom.7:4; Gal.2:19). *The Law never in any way applied to a dead person!* Thus we are seen beyond the reach of the Law, having died with Christ (Rom.6:6-11; 7:6). This is a very important point because so many Christians want to put us back under Old Testament Law as a way of living. It was an early false doctrine (Acts 15) that had to be strongly refuted. It didn't work then; it won't work now. Why would I want to put myself back under that bondage as a way of *Christian* living?

An Example of Putting Christians Under Law

Christians today bound by those laws? If I am, and I fail in any one of them, according to James 2:10-11, I'm a lawbreaker and have failed in all. I'm under a curse! If I bind myself by any of those ordinances, I really don't believe I'm dead to the Law because I try to make it a rule for my living! No, I'm thankful to say, I'm *not* bound by the letter of Deuteronomy 22:5

or any other such verse! If I was, I could raise questions, not just about slacks (which, incidentally, neither men nor women wore in those days), but blouses/shirts, shoes, socks and so forth. *That's what legality does for one! It binds him in a nit-picking web of uncertainty and personal opinion.*

There is, however, a *principle* behind Deuteronomy 22:5 which we *are* to maintain even under grace, which is *differentiation* — not because it's part of the Law, but because it's a concept, a principle for all times, found throughout Scripture, as is also, for a related example, the *principle* of modesty (1 Tim.2:9-10). A woman is not to *try* to look or act like a man *because she wants to eliminate the God-given female-male distinctions*, and vice versa. *God* made them male and female (Gen.1:27). Modesty is closely connected with what is or is not worn, and there certainly are many of the *principles* of the Ten commandments and of some of the other ordinances of the Law are repeated in the New Testament as the “commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor.14:37). But these *reiterations of unchanging, divine principles* are under a different and new administration. For example I might write a will and later, circumstances dictate an update. I revoke the old will and write a new one, which contains many but not all of the provisions of the old one, and some of them are stated differently or otherwise revised. When it comes time to put the will into effect, how foolish for my relatives to go to the *first one* and try to enforce before a court that which is no longer in force! Yet that is what Christians try to do with the Law as a rule for living!

The old way, under Law, was “do and live; don't do and die”! Today, under grace, it is “live (have eternal life) and then do” — quite a different thing! We now obey the Lord, not because we have to or else, but because we *want to*, because He first loved us. In fact, when we *love* we are fulfilling the *principle* of the law (Rom.13:10; Gal.5:14), but that is quite different from attempting to *keep* the Law itself for any reason.

Instead of commanding us not to have other gods or images, the Lord tells us if we don't have the Son we Murder, adultery, swearing, covetousness, etc., are just as wrong today as back in the days of Moses. Therefore, the Christian is admonished in the New Testament against such things. The penalty for failure,

tainly are more- and less-modest slacks/jeans, and the same with dresses, bathing suits and other pieces of clothing, depending on the cut and fit. These same *principles* apply to both men and women. These are matters for each *individual* to carefully consider before God.

As another example, most of today's church-systems try to put us back under the Law, although they don't think of it in that way. The clergy with its special religious privileges, and the laity or common people with few such privileges, are in reality the principles and practices of Judaism, not of Christianity. *Legalism always takes away Christian privilege.*

Some Principles of the Ten Commandments Are Repeated in the New Testament

have nothing except wrath (Jn.3:36). We are told to keep ourselves from *all* idols (1 Jn.5:21) — all things that take the first place of Christ in our lives — not just from graven images (1 Cor.8:6; 10:20). The Christian turns *to God from* idols (1 Thes.1:9).

Instead of just not taking the Lord's name in vain, we are not to swear at all (Mt.5:33-37; Jas.5:12). Think of all those little expressions we may use — gosh, gee, cripes, etc. which are slang words for God and Christ! The command as to honoring parents is essentially taken verbatim from the ten commandments (Eph.6:1-3). The Lord expands murder to even hatred of one's brother (Mt.5:21; 1 Jn.3:15) and He expands adultery to even lusting after one of the opposite sex (Mt.5:27-28; cf. 1 Cor.6:18; Col.3:5-6; 1 Thes.4:3; Heb.13:4). So we don't commit adultery because the *Law* said, “You shall not commit adultery,” but because the New Testament tells us of the Lord's hatred of that sin and similar sexual sins. *They are not consistent with Christian living: they dishonor Christ.* Likewise we don't steal, bear false witness (lie) and covet for the same reasons. This distinction between Law and grace is *very important!*

however, is not death in the sense of eternal banishment from God (or even physical death from God's hand, generally), but the Father's *chastening* or *child-training* of His eternal, heaven-bound children

whom He loves, and also loss of millennial reward (Lk.19:11-27; 1 Cor.3:12-15; 2 Jn.8). Keeping or not keeping the Mosaic Law does not enter this picture.

On the other hand, take the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath day. That's Saturday! That was the Law's holy day: it's not ours! We who are under the administration of grace, of Christianity, have the resurrection day, the Lord's day (Rev.1:10 — Gk: *the day which belongs to the Lord*), the first day of the week, as our day specially set aside, not as a day of rest as was the Sabbath, but for special service to and for Him. Notice the Lord and the apostles were particularly active on the first day of the week! That Sabbath-day commandment of Exodus 20 is *not* repeated in the New Testament as a "commandment of the Lord." Entirely different instructions are given to us (Jn.20:19; Acts 20:7). We can't chop up the Law and say we have to keep only certain sections. The Law stands as one whole. Fortunately, none of the Law is for us as believers! So there is no scriptural authority (and a very poor choice of words) to call Sunday the *Christian's Sabbath*.

Thank God for grace! RPD

We continue to remind you we print letters to the editor on doctrinal content of the Newsletters, and that we are still happy to send the Newsletters to interested readers in North America at no cost. We will send very *limited* numbers of back issues when requested. Address Roger P. Daniel, Newsletter compiler, 22240 Morley Ave. Dearborn Michigan 48124-2127 or Dearborn Heights assembly, 24570 Ann Arbor Trail, Dearborn Heights MI 48127-1780.

Summary

In summary, the Law *never* was given to the Gentiles. It was the Jew's "guardian" in divine things until Christ came. Jesus has brought in a new order — grace — and we who have accepted Him as Lord and Savior are seen as dead with Him and a new creation on the other side of death — *dead to the Law*. We have been *declared righteous* on the basis of our faith in Christ. However, the Law has a legitimate use: to show the *unsaved* that they can't possibly get to heaven (*never* promised) or even keep on living on earth because they can't maintain God's high standard of 100% loving the Lord with *all* their heart, mind, strength, soul, and their neighbor as themselves. Therefore, the Law is neither for our justification (the means for us to get to heaven), nor a moral law for Christian living. However, many of the *principles* of the Law, as unending divine objectives for all times, are repeated in the New Testament, under grace, as God's will for His heavenly people, for ourselves. But we turn to the New Testament "commandments of the Lord," not to the Mosaic Law, to prove these objectives from Scripture!