

United Church of God, *an International Association*



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The Covenants of God

Doctrinal Study Paper

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voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you””” (Jeremiah 7:21-23).

It was Jeremiah alone who, having seen the sin of Judah figuratively engraved on their hearts (17:1), was inspired to utter the landmark prophecy of a new covenant:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

We note here that Jeremiah says nothing about the law of God being abolished. On the contrary, he prophesies of its locus being changed, from engraving on tablets of stone to engraving on the heart and mind, from where it will directly affect human behavior.

We also note that this New Covenant is to be different from the Old Covenant, which Israel broke, in that the New is without human mediation, and provides personal knowledge of God to each participant, as well as complete forgiveness of the participants’ sins and iniquities. In the context of this prophecy, the New Covenant is to be made with the two houses of Israel and Judah, at some time in the distant future.

The New Covenant

The Israelites broke the Sinai covenant through their disobedience. And as the New Testament age unfolds, the temple and sacrificial system had become, instead of a means to an end, an end in itself in the minds of some of the leaders of Judaism. The covenant at Mount Sinai had been distorted by the majority of the Jewish religious leaders and came to wrongly define what was righteousness—and thus established a wrong relationship with God.

But God’s designs and purposes would not be foiled by the disobedience and the distortions of His covenant at Sinai. He would now send His Son, instead of the prophets, with the message of establishing the true and proper covenantal relationship with Him. If the Jewish nation as a whole rejected Him, God would choose another way of carrying out His plan of salvation—with those who would have the faith and obedience that Abraham had shown. Jesus warned the Jewish leaders, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43).

The people were not following the example of Abraham’s faith and obedience, upon which the covenant was based. Jesus told them, “‘I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My

Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.’ They answered and said to Him, ‘*Abraham* is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were *Abraham*’s children, you would do the *works* of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this’” (John 8:37-40).

Jesus said about the Jewish leaders: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matthew 23:2-4).

He showed how these leaders had set up a false system of laws and traditions that were counteracting God’s Commandments. He said, “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.... All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:7-9).

Paul adds: “What shall we say then? That Gentiles [who have come into the Church], who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law” (Romans 9:30-32). There was an urgent need to change the course of teaching about God’s covenant.

Christ Inaugurates the New Covenant

Christ would now show how the law should be carried out. In this new and reformed covenant, there would now be access to other provisions not previously available to carry out this purpose. In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasized, so no one would misinterpret His mission, what His intention was toward the Old Testament law: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

Some argue that the Greek word *pleroo*, translated “fulfill” in the above scripture, should be interpreted as signifying that Jesus came in fulfillment of the prophetic portions of the Law and of the Prophets, so that they have passed into history. While it is true that the word *pleroo* often means to fulfill in the prophetic sense, the context here indicates otherwise. Verse 18 tells us that neither one jot (*yod*, the smallest of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet), nor one tittle (a small stroke or hook used to distinguish otherwise similar Hebrew letters) shall pass from the law till heaven and earth pass away. Further, verse 19 makes reference to the importance of keeping and teaching the commandments. And verses 21 through 48 constitute a discourse on the importance of going beyond the letter of the commandments or the accepted standard of the

Jewish community of the time—and, rather, keeping the commandments in the spirit and intent in which they were given.

The well-known New Testament scholar John R.W. Stott makes some telling comments on this passage. He says:

He [Jesus] begins by telling them not for one moment to imagine that he had come *to abolish the law and the prophets*, i.e. the whole Old Testament or any part of it. The way in which Jesus phrases this negative statement suggests that some had indeed been thinking the very thought which he now contradicts...people are still asking today, though in different ways, about the relation between Jesus and Moses, the New Testament and the Old. Since Jesus grasped the nettle and declared himself plainly on the issue, we should not be shy of following suit. He had come (notice in passing his awareness that he had come into the world on a mission) neither to *abolish* the law and the prophets, setting them aside or abrogating them, nor even just to endorse them in a dead and literalistic way, but to *fulfill* them.

The verb translated “to fulfill” (*plerosai*) means literally “to fill” and indicates, as Chrysostom expressed it, that “his (*sc.* Christ’s) sayings were no repeal of the former, but a drawing out and filling up of them.” In order to grasp the far-reaching implications of this, we need to recall that “the law and the prophets,” namely the Old Testament, contain various kinds of teaching. The relation of Jesus Christ to these differs, but the word “fulfillment” covers them all (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 70-71).

In Matthew 22:34-40, some of the Pharisees tested Him by asking Him which is the greatest commandment in the law. In reply, Jesus quoted the two great commandments, love for God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and love for one’s neighbor (Leviticus 19:18), as the foundation of all the Law and the Prophets. In doing so, He clearly upheld the Law of Moses (from which He quoted the two great laws) and confirmed the continuity of the Holy Scriptures.

In a similar vein, Matthew 23:23-24 provides another summation statement, in which Jesus indicts the Pharisees for their tithing minutiae while missing the main intent of the law: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” Again, reference is made to the law. However here, as in many other controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees, the subject is the cumbersome and burdensome body of oral law then emerging among the Jewish people. Here, Jesus’ words resemble those of the prophets of the Old Testament, who chided the people of Israel and Judah for missing the point of the law. God expects His people to be able to discern what is important for godly conduct.

Hebrews and the New Covenant

A major theme of the book of Hebrews is the transition from the Old Covenant system of administration, with its Levitical priesthood, to the New Covenant system, with the Melchizedek

priesthood of Jesus Christ replacing the priests and Levites. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were disquieted about the new system of worship to be followed. Who would function as priests? Where would they worship? Would a new temple have to be constructed? What of the ceremonies and rituals associated with their cherished temple in Jerusalem? The book of Hebrews compares and contrasts elements of the Old Covenant with elements of the New Covenant.

The author of Hebrews set out to answer these very practical questions concerning New Covenant worship. The great themes of the book of Hebrews revolve around this transition. Thus it is emphasized that Jesus is greater than Moses (chapter 3), that the Sabbath remains and should be observed, as it foreshadows the future 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ (chapter 4), that the Levitical priesthood was replaced by the Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ (chapters 5 and 7), that Christ would serve as an eternal High Priest of the New Covenant (chapter 8), that worship in the earthly sanctuary would be obviated by the heavenly sanctuary, with the blood of Christ rendering unnecessary the blood of goats and calves (chapter 9) and one eternal sacrifice serving once and for all under the New Covenant (chapter 10). God's city, the Hebrews were reminded, is not located here on earth but is in heaven and yet to come down (13:14).

The book of Hebrews reminded its audience that Jesus was the mediator of the New Covenant, and not any human priest (8:6). Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Covenant is quoted twice, once in Hebrews 8:8-12 (the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament), and again in abbreviated form in Hebrews 10:16-17. Hebrews 10:5-7 quotes Psalm 40:6-8, highlighting the temporary quality of the sacrifices and offerings, contrasted with the enduring will of God.

Hebrews 8:13 reads, "In that He says, '*A new covenant,*' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." Some feel that the phrase "ready to vanish away" indicates that the Old Covenant has not been fully replaced yet, and is still in effect at a national level for Israel and Judah. Yet we ought to note that this same verse states that the first covenant is obsolete. Additionally, there are many declarations in the prophets, especially in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, that the people broke the Old or Sinaitic covenant (Jeremiah 3:6-10; 11:1-10; 31:32; Ezekiel 16:8, 59).

In Hebrews 9:9-10, certain physical trappings of the Old Covenant are specifically listed and declared unnecessary in the New Covenant. These include meat and drink offerings and various ceremonial washings. Washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, the Christian under the New Covenant has no need of such ritual washings. This passage is probably the closest the New Testament comes to any systematic dissection of the law of Moses.

However, Hebrews clearly upholds and sustains the law in the New Covenant. By twice quoting Jeremiah 31:33 (Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16) this book makes it clear that the law is at the very center of the New Covenant, placed within the hearts and minds of the worshiper, rather than on tablets of stone. The same legal basis of the New Covenant is made plain in Hebrews 8:6: "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established [*nenomotheteitai*, from *nomotheteo*, to legislate, to have enactments enjoined, to be placed into law, to be furnished with law] on better promises."

The Ten Commandments in the New Testament

As noted before, the Ten Commandments constitute the center of the Old or Sinaitic Covenant (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13). However, this observation begs the question of the status of the Ten Commandments in the New Covenant. Are they abolished, modified or carried forward without any alteration?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) utilized the laws contained in the Decalogue to teach His followers that they must go beyond the letter of that law if they are to be true Christians. Elsewhere, most of the New Testament writers quote the Ten Commandments, or refer to them, in the context of the Christian, or New Covenant, way of life.

In dealing with the rich young ruler who asked Him to define the way to eternal life (Luke 18:18), Jesus quoted five of the Ten Commandments (Mathew 19:17-19), as well as the second great commandment (verse 19; Leviticus 19:18). To infer from this exchange that Jesus did not teach one or more of the first four commandments is an unwarranted argument from silence. It is also preposterous to conclude, for example, that Christ's omission of the commandment against idolatry means that idolatry is no longer prohibited for Christians (see 1 John 5:21 and Galatians 5:20-21).

Below are listed several other New Testament passages that quote or allude to the Ten Commandments. Note that these passages were penned by most of the apostles, including Paul, James and John—both in his general epistles and the book of Revelation.

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment ["fulfilling," KJV] of the law (Romans 13:8-10).

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters (1 Corinthians 7:19; compare Galatians 5:6; 6:15).

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (James 2:10-11).

And whatever we ask we receive from Him [God, verse 21], because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight (1 John 3:22).

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:17).

Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12).

Christ, we are told, would greatly magnify the law and make it honorable (Isaiah 42:21, King James Version; Matthew 5-7). He would especially alter the provisions dealing with the sin offering. This was typified by the rending of the temple veil when He died. The ritual laws had always been intended to be temporary, but unfortunately, in Jesus' day, they had become the center of the relationship with God.

So Christ came to restore the covenantal ties and its laws to their proper place. He did not come to *abolish* God's laws, but to greatly *amplify* them. Through His sacrifice, and now with access to the Holy Spirit, God finally had a people who could fulfill "the righteous requirement of the law" (Romans 8:4).

This new and better relationship with God would be called the "New Covenant." God's laws would also be at the center of *this* covenant, as in all previous covenants, but now they could actually be kept, not only in the letter but even in the spirit (Matthew 5:21-48). There would be much better promises, including eventually receiving eternal life and entry into God's Kingdom.

This New Covenant would be extended to all of mankind who would be willing to follow its terms. As Peter proclaimed: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

No longer is physical circumcision the sign of God's people. Instead, baptism is the sign of entering the New Covenant with God (Colossians 2:11-12). Paul adds: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were *baptized* into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, *then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*" (Galatians 3:26-29).

The temporary laws dealing with the sacrifices, all meant to be reminders of the penalty of sin, are now replaced by the sacrifice of Christ. We read in Hebrews, "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13-14).

Also, certain ordinances are changed under the terms of the New Covenant. The manner in which the Passover is to be observed is changed to reflect the sacrifice of Christ and not of

animals. The way the Sabbath and the feast days are kept no longer involves animal sacrifices either. God's laws, with the Holy Spirit now dwelling in His people, can begin to be written in their hearts. The law, then, will be internalized, something intended from the beginning. This purpose is explained in Hebrews: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Hebrews 8:10).

The Conference of Acts 15

Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples to go into all the world, preach the gospel, baptize and teach all that Jesus had commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20). Proclaiming this message of salvation and restoration beyond Judea to the world at large was an exciting prospect. But the commission contained the seeds of a future problem. How would the Church deal with non-Jewish converts?

The account of the first conversion of gentiles who were not already reckoned as Jews is given in Acts 10:1-48. The Roman centurion Cornelius was a God-fearer (verse 22)—that is, one who associated with the worship at the sanctuary but was not circumcised, and therefore not considered truly Jewish. It was because of his uncircumcised state that Peter regarded him as unclean and would have resisted having contact with him. So to break down Peter's prejudices, God revealed to him through a vision that he should not consider gentiles unclean. In that vision, a heavenly voice told Peter, "What God has cleansed you must not call common" (Acts 10:15).

When Peter entered Cornelius' home, he explained his former practice: "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). Afterward Cornelius and his group received the Holy Spirit without being circumcised—and upon miraculous confirmation of that fact in this special circumstance, Peter baptized them. The key statement in Acts 10 is found in verses 34-35, "Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.'"

In Acts 11 Peter is then accused of fellowshiping with uncircumcised men (verse 3). In response, he told the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem the vision of Acts 10, and justified his act of baptizing gentiles, pointing out that these gentiles had in fact already been granted the gift of the Holy Spirit even before baptism (verses 15-16). His conclusion is summarized in verse 17: "If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" Their assent is recorded in the next verse: "When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'"

This should have ended the issue but it did not. The issue of how gentiles can be granted salvation created such a controversy within the Church that a conference was called in Jerusalem to deal with it. The principal aspects of this conference are recorded in Acts 15. The principal point of contention is described three times in the chapter. In verse 1 we read, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." So the objection here is related to salvation being dependent on circumcision according to the custom of Moses.

However, in verse 5, the wording is slightly different; here the believing Pharisees are recorded as objecting, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” Finally, in verse 24, the post-conference decree records the complaint as “You must be circumcised and keep the law.”

The circumcision issue of Acts 15 concerned finding favor with God in order to be “saved” (Acts 15:1). The controversy centered on whether an uncircumcised gentile could be considered cleansed or purified before God, as Peter noted during their dispute:

So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they (Acts 15:8-11).

What was the yoke that they were unable to bear? Was the law of God the yoke? Is the law of God oppressive? Christ said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Paul declared in Romans 7:12, “Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” So, if the law is not the yoke, what is?

This yoke is contrasted with the “purifying” of one’s heart by “faith” (verse 9). This is the important principle which the believing Jews did not understand. Paul also explained this in Romans 3:27-31:

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Salvation comes through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf. It does not come through works which we do. Justification does not come through the law. At the same time, Paul makes it clear that the law is necessary. Faith in the sacrifice of Christ does not nullify or abolish the law. On the contrary it establishes the law. The law is not burdensome, nor is it a yoke. On the other hand, those who believed that their works would save them were in fact under a yoke. This concept was central to the religion of the Pharisees.

One can understand why many believing Jews thought that circumcision was a requirement for salvation. After all, their father Abraham was circumcised and the Old Testament gives very clear instructions regarding circumcision. For example, there are circumcision instructions related to the Passover, to the general requirement for all Israelite males and to worship in the sanctuary or temple.

And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a

native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you (Exodus 12:48-49).

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised’” (Leviticus 12:1-3).

Thus says the Lord GOD: “No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who is among the children of Israel” (Ezekiel 44:9).

These believing Jews insisted that circumcision was necessary for salvation. After all, the law required it. To them salvation could not be granted to the uncircumcised. To them one must be circumcised in order to be reconciled to God—justified (forgiven). The apostles and elders in Jerusalem rejected this assertion. They pointed to the sacrifice of Christ. It is only the sacrifice of Christ and the mercy of God that covers our sins when we repent of them. Being circumcised does not produce forgiveness, nor is it a prerequisite for forgiveness.

Paul frequently met with this teaching and warned gentiles of the consequences of being circumcised in order to be saved:

And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the *whole* law (Galatians 5:3, New King James Version, 1982).

If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, *you must obey all of the regulations in the whole law of Moses* (Galatians 5:3, New Living Translation, 1996).

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters* (1 Corinthians 7:19, New King James Version, 1982).

The vital question in Acts 15:1 is about circumcision as it *relates* to the law of Moses, not about the law of Moses per se. Perhaps there was more, but the Bible does not clearly spell out what other aspects of the controversy there may have been. Perhaps the Judaizers were teaching that converted gentiles must not only be circumcised, but in addition obey other imperatives—perhaps some other ritualistic or purification aspects of either the written law of Moses (aspects which were superseded by the sacrifice of Christ) or the oral law, which was not commanded by God, though the Jews ascribed the oral law to Moses. The Bible is not clear on this matter. But what is clear is that the fundamental issue was circumcision “according to the custom of Moses.” In verse 5 we have the argument stated again:

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”

Had the discussion broadened to include the entire law of Moses? Or was it the same argument that was brought up in Antioch? The argument had not changed between Antioch and Jerusalem. The discussion was whether gentiles were required to be circumcised in order to be saved.

The word “and” in verse 5 is translated from the Greek word *te*. It means: “in addition or connected to.” The Pharisees insisted the gentiles be circumcised and *thereby keep* the law of Moses. Circumcision was keeping the law.

In the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT) by Kittel the definition of *te* is given as “1. not only...but also; 2. both...and; 3. as...so.”

Thayer in his *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* has much to say about this little word *te*. In the Greek New Testament the most common word translated into the English “and” is *kai*. This Greek word is a conjunction and is used for adding. The word *kai* is found 5,212 times, but the word *te* is found only 192 times. Thayer refers to *te* as an “adjunctive.” The idea is to connect two things which are united as one. Thayer has this to say about the two words:

kai introduces something new under the same aspect yet as an external addition, whereas *te* marks it as having an inner connection with what precedes; hence *kai* is the more general particle, *te* the more special and precise; *kai* may often stand for *te* but not *te* for *kai*.... [under meaning of *te*] things are thus connected which are akin, or which are united to each other by some inner bond, whether logical or real...parts of one and the same sentence (which is completed by a single finite verb).¹

By using the Greek word *te* in verse 5 we have a consistency with verse 1. The problem was circumcision “according” to the law of Moses, not circumcision *and* the law of Moses. To be consistent with the first statement in verse 1, we see the evidence in verse 5 that the argument was “being circumcised in order to keep the law of Moses” or “to be circumcised so as to keep the law of Moses.” A paraphrase of Acts 15:5 could read: “It is necessary to circumcise them, to instruct and to keep the law of Moses.” In other words, circumcision was one facet of the law of Moses. The discussion has not broadened to the entire law of Moses, but remains with the issue of circumcision.

As noted above, it is conceivable that there may have been more to the Judaizers’ demands than solely the act of circumcision. But we simply don’t know. The Bible is not clear on whether there was more to their demands than circumcision, or what the additional requirements may have been. It seems almost impossible to believe that the Judaizers were insisting that every last aspect of the law of Moses (including all sacrifices and temple-related ordinances) was now to be incumbent on gentile converts, since they lived far from Jerusalem and the temple and, therefore, would not have been able to perform them. What is clear is that the Judaizers were insisting on circumcision for gentile converts in order for them to be justified

¹Thayer, Joseph H., *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA) 1999.

and saved. This assertion the apostles and elders were inspired to completely reject, pointing instead to the sacrifice of Christ and faith in it.

The third reference to the law in this chapter is found in verse 24:

Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law”—to whom we gave no such commandment....

In this verse we do find the Greek word *kai* translated “and.” But to be consistent we must go back and look at the argument as laid out in verse 1—being circumcised in order to be saved. The discussion has not been expanded to the entire “law of Moses.” There is no discussion on any other aspect of the law.

The Greek word *kai* is a very general term and can be translated as “*and so*.” Here is a quote from Thayer’s under the Greek word *kai*.

...it annexes what follows from something said before, so to be equiv. to *and so*.²

For example, consider how *kai* is used in 2 Corinthians 11:9. “And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, *and so* [Greek *kai*] I will keep myself.”

When Acts 15:24 is read with this translation we have a consistency with verse 1:

Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised *and so* [*kai*] keep the law.”

This is now consistent in all three examples where the law is referenced. The issue for discussion was circumcision, which is keeping the law. The discussion was not about the “law of Moses” as a subject, but it was about a requirement for circumcision.

When the issue was resolved by the conference in Acts 15, a decree was issued. In the decree that was verbalized by the apostle James, the gentiles were asked to refrain from doing four things (Acts 15:19-20, 28-29):

1. Eating food sacrificed to idols.
2. Sexual immorality.
3. Eating the meat of strangled animals.
4. Eating blood.

² Thayer, Joseph H., *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA) 1999.

The apostles instructed the gentiles to “abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20). This concerned more than just dietary laws and sexual immorality. The common denominator shared by these four practices, apart from their prohibition in the Old Testament, is that they were part of the *ceremonial* practices in pagan *temples*. Of course all of these practices are wrong but these four items shared a role in the pagan temple ceremonies. Therefore, special attention is focused on these practices because of this role. The explanations on how to keep the rest of God’s laws, James explains in verse 21, would be given every Sabbath when Moses is read (the first five books of the Bible containing the laws of God).

Interestingly, the only time that the specific list of practices in Acts 15 is mentioned again is during the account of Paul participating in the fleshly *purification* ordinances (Acts 21:20-25). Among the Jews, Paul had a reputation for teaching against *circumcision and the related customs* (verse 21). So Paul participated in a ceremonial, *purification* ordinance, not to find favor with God, but to ease the concerns of the Jews. Notice the qualifier given in verse 25 before participating in this carnal ordinance—“But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided *that they should observe no such thing*, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.” Some view this as scriptural support for the conclusion that Acts 15 concerned not only circumcision, but also other fleshly ordinances, such as the one Paul was participating in. As noted above, the Bible is simply not clear if the Judaizers were arguing for additional requirements beyond circumcision. Leaving that question aside, what is clear is that Paul never offered this qualifier while keeping the Sabbath and other *moral* laws throughout the book of Acts.

Unfortunately, the issue still didn’t die, as we see it mentioned throughout the writings of Paul. He faced a constant battle addressing the issue of salvation by works versus salvation by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul asked the Galatian brethren in this regard:

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh [circumcision]?... And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:2-3, 8-9).

Here we see the two contrasting systems of justification, one by the works of the law and the other by faith in Christ’s sacrifice. In the Jerusalem conference, the issue was resolved by rejecting the yoke of justification by works and formally establishing the system of justification by faith.

2 Corinthians 3 and the New Covenant

In 2 Corinthians 3:6, the apostle Paul emphasizes that he and the other ministers of the Church were “ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills,

but the Spirit gives life.” The theme here is a common one in Paul’s writings: that the Old Covenant made no provision for eternal life. As noted above, all the blessings of the covenant at Sinai were physical in nature. Although God revealed to His specially called servants throughout the Old Testament the promise of a future resurrection and eternal life in God’s Kingdom (see Hebrews 11), members of the nation of Israel would have received through the Old Covenant at best no more than agricultural blessings, security from outside threats, good health and prosperity. They would have gone to their graves with no promise of eternal life after death.

The New Covenant, by contrast, includes the supreme promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of God, as enunciated by Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18; John 3:16). Since the Old Covenant included a system for administering capital punishment for numerous violations of the written legal code, Paul refers to it as “the ministry of death” (2 Corinthians 3:7) or “the ministry of condemnation” (verse 9), contrasted with “the ministry of justification” (verse 9, New Revised Standard Version), which is greater in glory (verse 10). The old administration is passing away (verse 11), Paul says, and a new administration is being ushered in, one that is veiled to those who have not turned to the Lord (verses 12-16). The new administration involves transformation into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 18).

Simply put, Paul here speaks of a change in the administration of the law, not of its abolition. The New Covenant administration is much more glorious since it provides for justification through Christ, and the promise of life, rather than the civil administration of death under the Old Covenant.

Galatians 3:19

In the New Covenant, the sacrifice of Christ is key. In the book of Galatians, Paul argues the point repeatedly and strongly that no amount of law keeping or no human effort can earn a person forgiveness of his sins and reconcile him to God. Some in the churches in Galatia were being deceived into embracing the false teaching that forgiveness and justification were possible by works rather than by faith in and acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ’s life.

In Galatians 3:19, Paul mentions that portions of the law given at Sinai (the temporary, carnal ordinances) were given under the Old (Sinaitic) Covenant, but they only served a temporary function. They were to last only “till the Seed should come.” When Christ came and offered His life as an atoning sacrifice for sin, then the temporary portions of God’s revelation at Sinai (included as part of the Old Covenant) were no longer necessary—as explained in Appendix A.

Of course, this does not mean that the fundamental “spiritual” law of God is in any sense “done away” under the New Covenant. The writing of God’s spiritual law into a person’s character is the essence of the New Covenant. Christ intercedes as our High Priest under the New Covenant. Through the Holy Spirit, He lives within those under the New Covenant. Through this process, a person under the New Covenant becomes a “new creation.” He “puts on” Christ—the same Christ who said, “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

Again, see Appendix A for more discussion of Galatians 3:19.

A Warning About the New Covenant

Although the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant, it has an important stipulation—it would be the only opportunity a person would have for salvation. Christ's sacrifice could only be applied once. If the person draws back and rejects the covenant, there would not be another chance for salvation. Thus, the New Covenant would be limited to those expressly called to repentance by God.

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29).

So there is a far more serious penalty for abandoning the faith than in the previous covenant—now the penalty would be an eventual sentencing to the second death (Hebrews 12:18-29).

The New Covenant Now and in the Future

The history of God's covenants does not end with the Church. This is just a preliminary part of the New Covenant relationship, described as the betrothal period. Paul told the Christians at Corinth: "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have *betrothed* you to one husband, that I may present you as a *chaste virgin* to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2).

The marriage of Christ and the Church will take place when He returns to the earth. Revelation 19:6-8 describes the scene: "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for *the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready*. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

After the resurrected saints are fully incorporated into the New Covenant, it will be time to call to salvation the nations on the earth. During the Millennium, Christ's 1,000-year reign on earth, the New Covenant will be available far more freely and widely than ever before. Many people from nations around the globe will convert, and the law of God will be kept, as He always intended, through the Holy Spirit, in the letter and spirit (Isaiah 2:1-4). Man will no longer learn to steal, murder or break any of the other Commandments of God.

Christ will govern the nations, and His relationship will again be one of great closeness with man. The original covenantal laws governing the flora and fauna will be restored and all animals will live in peace. Isaiah 11:8-9 says: "The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

With the new temple established in Jerusalem by Christ, certain sacrifices will be enacted as reminders to the nations of Christ's complete sacrifice (Ezekiel 40:38-46). After the Millennium, God's covenant will be offered to those resurrected at that time (Ezekiel 37; Revelation 20:11-12).

The final stage of the New Covenant will be seen when God the Father descends upon the earth with the New Jerusalem. Only the glorified children of God will remain, and a new, intimate relationship will be established with them, based on the ultimate fulfillment of the New Covenant and the elimination of sin.

John describes this new stage of the New Covenant: "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (Revelation 21:2-3).

A new, final and glorious relationship will be instituted by God the Father. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, *I make all things new*'" (Revelation 21:4-5).

Thus, we see all of God's covenants are progressively incorporated, with the corresponding modifications, to achieve the ultimate fulfillment—man living without sin and having eternal life with God as his Father and Jesus Christ as his elder brother. The common idea that the New Covenant has no bearing with respect to the former covenants is completely false. Instead, we see that all of the covenants complement each other, and that they are truly God's wonderful and loving covenants.

Conclusions

Following this study, let's list some conclusions on the subject of the covenants:

- The New Covenant is in effect for Christians (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:4-18; Galatians 4:21-5:1; Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:1-9; 10:16).
- Both the Old Testament and the New Testament provide linking scriptures, which identify the core of the will of God, excluding regimental matters such as animal sacrifices, rituals and ceremonies.
- The New Testament nowhere provides a full, systematic dissection of the law of Moses.
- We are to look at all biblical law, including the law of Moses, according to its intent and purpose, and apply it in our lives.
- Though some of the laws mediated by Moses were temporary and are no longer incumbent on Christians, the principles they reflect can still serve as vital guidelines

in our thinking, our outlook on life and our relationships with God and with our fellow human beings.

- The book of Hebrews, along with several other New Testament passages, makes it clear that the New Covenant is based on and furnished with law.
- The Bible elevates the Ten Commandments above the laws mediated by Moses, and shows that the love of God, expressed in the Ten Commandments, constitutes the center of God's way of life under both the Old and the New Covenants.

Appendix A Galatians 3:19

The word *circumcision* (or its derivative) is used 54 times in the entire New Testament. Sixteen occurrences of this word, about 30 percent, are found in one single book—the book of Galatians. The only New Testament book that uses this word more is the book of Romans, where it is used 26 times (48 percent). Interestingly, these are two of the most misinterpreted books in traditional Christianity. And Galatians 3:19 is often a major part of this misunderstanding.

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator (Galatians 3:19).

This verse can be broken down into four parts:

1. the law
2. added because of transgressions
3. till the Seed should come
4. appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.

Examination of these four parts should make it clear that the Ten Commandments are not part of the “law” being discussed in this verse, as we will see.

Part 1: “the law”

Some people in the early Church had gotten off track by coming to believe that they could “earn” salvation by something they did, thus not fully (or even *at all*, in some cases) appreciating the sacrifice of Christ and our utter dependence on it, coupled with the Father’s merciful willingness to apply it to our sins.

The Jews had corrupted the law of God by adding a lot of human traditions, reasoning and practices, for example, (1) the perversion of the intent of “honor your father and mother” with their “Corban” escape clause, and (2) ceremonially washing their hands before eating.

“Judaizing” elements in the early Church had influenced some people to believe that being circumcised and adopting the legal and, perhaps, judicial requirements of Judaism were necessary for a person to be accepted as a Christian.

Some of the laws of God revealed to Moses and then to the nation of Israel were meant to be temporary. They are no longer in force and are not obligatory for a Christian. For example, the entire set of “fleshly ordinances”—including animal sacrifices, temple liturgy and practices of the Levites and washings, among other things—are no longer imperatives for Christians, who constitute the Israel of God (see accompanying chart and commentary at the end of this appendix). In addition, the physical administration of penalties for breaking the law (the “ministration of death”) was temporary, as Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 3.

The knowledge and awareness of and obedient devotion to keeping the “moral” law of God preceded Sinai, since Abraham (the father of the faithful) kept God’s laws, commandments and statutes—though it is possible that they were never all written down (codified) at one time before Sinai.

In Galatians 3:19, was Paul using “the law” in the context of the *entire Old Covenant*? Was Paul essentially saying, “What purpose does the *entire Old Covenant* serve? It was added because of transgressions...”?

A covenant is typically based on laws, and composed of obligations that are then binding as law. Thus, there are passages where “law” and “covenant” can be used interchangeably without contradicting the intent of the scripture. For example:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the *book of the law*, to do them” (Galatians 3:10).

This is the only time the term “book of the law” is recorded in the New Testament. The “book of the law” is also called the “Book of the Covenant” (Exodus 24:7; 2 Kings 23:2; 2 Chronicles 34:30). So in Galatians 3:10, Paul could have noted the “book of the covenant” without altering the intent of this verse.

Nevertheless, these terms do have different meanings. A covenant is an agreement. A law is an instruction. So there are times when it would be incorrect to use these words interchangeably. In the Old Testament, the term “Book of the Law” or “Book of the Covenant” was held in contrast to the “tablets of the covenant” (Deuteronomy 9:9, 11, 15; Hebrews 9:4). When God referred to the “tablets of the covenant,” He distinguished the Ten Commandments from the set of laws contained in the “Book of the Law.” These two sets of laws clearly were not the same, though the “Book of the Law” complemented the principles outlined in the Ten Commandments.

So even if “law” was replaced by “covenant” in Galatians 3:10, it still points to something other than the Ten Commandments. The “Book of the Covenant” contained the curses imposed *because of transgressions*.

And the LORD would separate him from all the tribes of Israel for adversity, according to all the *curses* of the covenant that are written in *this Book of the Law* (Deuteronomy 29:21-22).

When Christ became a “curse for us” (Galatians 3:13), He replaced the curses, all of which were written in the “Book of the Covenant,” not the tablets of the covenant. The reason they were under a curse is because “the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, *can never with these same sacrifices...make those who approach perfect*” (Hebrews 10:1).

The ultimate curse is the death penalty for having broken God's law. All humanity is under that curse (Romans 3:23; 6:23). But how is that curse to be eliminated? The various fleshly ordinances, including sacrifices, could not do it—"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). But the sacrifice of Christ does eliminate that curse. Therefore the temporary, insufficient fleshly ordinances, not the Ten Commandments, constituted the law that was only until the Seed should come.

Take this *Book of the Law*, and put it *beside the ark* of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as *a witness against you* (Deuteronomy 31:26).

Moses said that the "Book of the Law," not the tablets of the law, was a "witness against you." The tablets of the covenant were put "in the ark" (Exodus 25:21; Deuteronomy 10:2, 5; 1 Kings 8:9; 2 Chronicles 5:10). The "Book of the Law" was placed *alongside* or "beside" the ark (Deuteronomy 31:26).

The writer of Hebrews, most likely the apostle Paul, also referred to the "covenant," the "law" and the "book." In Hebrews 8:7, he noted the "covenant": "For if that *first covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." In Hebrews 9:19, Paul referred to the "book," meaning the "Book of the Covenant": "For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood...and sprinkled both *the book itself* and all the people." And in Hebrews 10:1, Paul referred to the "law," meaning the fleshly ordinances: "For the law...can never with *these same sacrifices*...make those who approach perfect."

Notice that the "first covenant" was not "faultless." However, the fault was not with the Ten Commandments, nor any other law of God. The fault was with the people (Hebrews 8:8). It was not in their heart to keep the laws of God (Deuteronomy 5:29). So God initiates a New Covenant in which the people are enabled to obey. It is for this reason that Paul quotes the promise of God: "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10).

God revealed and commanded many imperatives at Sinai. Some of what was commanded was temporary (until the Seed should come) or social laws, and the rest was the fundamental, eternal, spiritual law of God. When the term *the law* is used in the Bible, it is important to discern from the context and from other scriptures whether the term refers to every law, or whether it refers to only one or more portions of what was revealed and commanded at Sinai.

It's a mistake to assume that "law" must mean the *entire* set of covenant obligations. Actually, Paul's use of the words *law* and *covenant* reflects the fact that he meant one or the other in his respective use of them. The controversy in Galatia concerned "*the book of the law*" (Galatians 3:10), not the tablets of the law.

Much confusion over Paul's writings has resulted from the misinterpretation of the term *law*, which is also used more in the books of Galatians (32 times) and Romans (78 times) than other New Testament books. This confusion is due largely to the mistake of seeing circumcision

as a generic term for the totality of all law. This false premise has led to the false conclusion that the entire law is done away, since physical circumcision is no longer required.

It is clear that Paul uses the term *the law* (Greek *nomos*) in a number of different ways. He sometimes uses the term *the law* to refer to a *subset* of all that God commanded. That is, there are instances when he is clearly referring to only a *portion* of the laws that were commanded. Other times he uses “the law” to refer to something other than any of God’s law. Some examples follow.

Romans 2:26: “Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the *righteous requirements of the [ho] law [nomos]*, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?” Obviously, “the law” here cannot include circumcision and related obligations, since Paul clearly states “an uncircumcised man.”

Romans 2:27: “And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he *fulfills the [ho] law [nomos]*, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the *[ho] law*?” The “law” here cannot include circumcision. Otherwise Paul would not have said that the “physically uncircumcised” had already *fulfilled* it.

Romans 7:23: “But I see another *law in my members, warring against the [ho] law [nomos] of my mind*, and bringing me into captivity to *the law of sin* which is in my members.” Paul is not referring to the law of God in this verse. He is referring to that which we call human nature. It acts as a law in our members. Here the modifier—“of my mind”—dictates how “the law” is defined. Therefore, the interpretation of “the law” is subject to the *context* and *modifiers* in a given verse.

Romans 8:7: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is *not subject to the [ho] law [nomos] of God*, nor indeed can be.” Paul is referring to the fundamental law of God that we are subject to. Of course, this would not include anything temporary, such as physical circumcision, sacrifices or rituals. Nor would it refer to any laws that are not applicable under certain circumstances. If “the law” here denotes the *entire* law, then anyone not subject to circumcision would be carnally-minded, which would contradict many of Paul’s own writings (i.e., Romans 2:26-27).

Galatians 6:2: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so *fulfill the [ho] law [nomos] of Christ*.” Of course, physical circumcision is not part of “the law” here. It’s a mistake to broadly define “law” as though it *always* means the same thing.

Hebrews 7:12-13: “For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also *a change of the law*. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.” Notice that the “law” that was changed had to do with the *priesthood*. A change was necessary in order to transfer the priesthood from Levi to Christ. However, when the priesthood changed, the Ten Commandments remained intact.

Hebrews 10:1: “For *the law*, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with *these same sacrifices*, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” The Levitical laws were a *shadow* of things to come. They taught lessons about the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus Christ. One might say that they were a *tutor* or substitute teacher until the Seed should come.

Hebrews 10:8: “‘*Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin* You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are *offered according to the law*).” Sacrifices were offered according to the priestly laws, not the Ten Commandments.

1 Corinthians 7:19: “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but *keeping the commandments of God is what matters*.” The “commandments” here obviously cannot include circumcision and related laws. This is similar to Romans 2:26-27.

All of these verses, and more, support Paul’s assorted use of “the law.” Therefore one should not assume that the entire law is automatically intended in Galatians 3:19.

Consistent with these examples, Paul refers to “the law” in Galatians 3:19 to mean only a portion of what was given at Sinai—specifically, the temporary “fleshly ordinances” that are no longer required of Christians now that the Seed has come.

Part 2: “It was added because of transgressions”

In what way was the “law” in Galatians 3:19 “because of transgressions”? Some interpret “because” as being causal—*as the result of* previous transgressions (1 John 3:12). For example, the ceremonial, fleshly ordinances were the *result* of previous transgressions and served as a “reminder of sins” (Hebrews 10:1, 3). Others interpret “because” as meaning—*for the purpose of showing* transgressions (see Titus 1:5). For example, the law was given for the reason of making transgressions more blatant or “exceedingly sinful” (Romans 7:13).

Which one of these applications is intended in Galatians 3:19? The answer to this question lies in the next clause in this verse—“until the Seed should come.” The “law” of Galatians 3:19 served in one of the two capacities above “until the Seed should come,” and then ceased to function in that capacity.

So did the fleshly ordinances function as a *reminder* of sins “until the Seed should come?” Yes. Circumcision and fleshly ordinances were *required* (for this purpose) *only* until the Seed should come.

Did the “spiritual law” (the Ten Commandments, etc.) function as a definer of sin only “until the Seed should come,” and then cease to serve in this capacity? No. The “royal law” continued to function as the clear definer of sin even *after* the time of Christ. Today that law still clearly defines sin and makes transgressions as blatant as ever, as can be seen from Romans 7:13 and 1 John 3:4. It should be noted that Paul and John were not referring to the *entire* law in these verses. Sin is not the transgression of the temporary, ceremonial law. Notice the example of the

law that continued to clearly define sin to Paul: “You shall not covet” (Romans 7:7). So in this verse, the law that made sin “exceedingly sinful” did not include circumcision and related laws. Therefore, this law did not include the *entire* law. Nor is this the context of Galatians 3:19.

Some think that the law ceased to clearly define sin because the law was “nailed to the cross.” Yet when Christ came He did not make the transgression of law less defined. With His death, however, He did replace the substitute ceremonial laws that served as a reminder of sin. In Galatians 3:19, the context of “because” is causal—as *the result* of previous transgressions.

“Added” simply refers to one item being accompanied later by another item. Because something is added, this doesn’t necessarily mean that the law in question here was an *afterthought*.

After the first human transgression in the Bible, God told the serpent, “...He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). This is a reference to the sacrificial bruise Christ would incur in His victory over Satan. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was not an *afterthought*. On the contrary, it reflects the *forethought* of God, knowing that *because of transgressions*, mankind would need a Savior: “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

Romans 4:15: “Because the law brings about wrath; *for where there is no law there is no transgression.*” Sin has existed since Adam. Therefore, a law of God has been in existence since Adam, regardless of whether or not it was codified. The laws pertaining to the two trees were not codified. Nevertheless, they were binding for Adam and Eve. God’s law is binding when it is clearly communicated, regardless of when or if it is codified.

So a *temporary* law was added “because” a *permanent* law was being transgressed. Some contend that Paul is saying in Galatians that what was *transgressed* (thus leading to the *adding* of the *law*) was God’s *promise* to Abraham. But that is not the case. It is not logical. It’s illogical to state that party B *transgressed a promise* made to him by party A. A person does not *transgress* another person’s promise. Promises were not being transgressed. Laws were being transgressed.

Each one of the principles outlined in the Ten Commandments was clearly communicated by God from the time of Adam and Eve. And mankind had transgressed those laws. It is true that circumcision and sacrifices also existed from early times (before Sinai). However, the Levitical administration of these laws was unique and far more elaborate than anything that had existed before. The Levitical laws were added alongside the pre-existing principles of the Ten Commandments.

Galatians 3:19: “*What purpose then does the law serve?*” The answer to this question is that this *temporary* law was *added* to serve as a “tutor to bring us to Christ” (verse 24). Paul repeated this answer in Hebrews 10:1, 3: “*For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.... But in those sacrifices there*

is a *reminder of sins every year*.” The Galatian controversy surrounded *circumcision and its obligations*, which included sacrifices among other things.

Part 3: “till the Seed should come”

The priesthood was a type of Christ, our High Priest. The sacrificial animals were a type of Christ, the Lamb of God. When Christ came, the types were no longer necessary. The Ten Commandments were not a *type* of Christ, therefore they were not part of the *substitute tutor* that was removed when the eternal Tutor arrived.

Hebrews 9:9-10 states, “It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and *sacrifices* are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— concerned only with *foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation*.” None of the Ten Commandments is a fleshly ordinance. The language of Galatians 3:19 melds perfectly into the language and thought of Hebrews 9:9-10.

Galatians 5:2: “Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become *circumcised*, Christ will profit you nothing.” The fleshly ordinance of circumcision resulted in the obligation to keep all the fleshly ordinances. The *Jewish New Testament* notes, “In other words, circumcision is part of an initiation rite which makes a Gentile part of the Jewish community. At that point he ceases to be a Gentile, becomes a Jew, and voluntarily obligates himself to do everything a Jew is expected to do” (David Stern, p. 561, Galatians 5:2-4, 1992, Clarksville, MD).

“Justification” is mentioned 38 times in the New Testament; 8 times in Galatians; 14 times in Romans. In the Old Testament, after one committed a sin, the fleshly ordinances allowed for him to be right with God again. The fleshly ordinances involved a type of justification process *until the Seed should come*. In the Old Testament the purification process was through fleshly ordinances *until the Seed should come*. Christ came so that we can be purified “by faith” (Acts 15:9). The Ten Commandments are not included in the justification or purification laws.

God temporarily imposed the system of Levitical priests, physical sacrifices and other tabernacle- and temple-centered carnal ordinances on a group of people whose males were circumcised—until the Son of God gave His divine life as a sacrifice for sin, and then was resurrected to be a spiritual High Priest to those who trusted in Him for grace and for mercy and for the strength to receive salvation on His terms, one of which is determination to obey the spiritual law of God.

Part 4: “appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator”

Moses was not the “mediator” of the Ten Commandments, which were spoken by God directly to the people. Consequently the unmediated Ten Commandments are not in question in Galatians 3:19. When Moses came down from Sinai with the two tablets of stone, it was 40 days and nights *after* God’s voice had spoken these commandments. Israel was expected to obey

God's voice. And the Sabbath command was given twice by *God's voice* before the Ten Commandments were written in stone (Exodus 16; 20).

When the covenant was ratified (Exodus 24:1-8), sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the "Book of the Covenant" (verse 7) and the "people" (verse 8). At this point, the Ten Commandments had not yet been written by the finger of God (Exodus 24:12-18). It doesn't seem logical that God would have Moses come up on the mountain to receive His own *personal* rewrite of something that Moses had already written in the "Book of the Covenant" (24:7). And even less logical that God would later have Moses come up yet a *second* time to receive His second *personal* rewrite of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:1-4), if they were already written in the "Book of the Covenant." There is simply no evidence that the words of the Ten Commandments were included in the "Book of the Covenant." The fact that God wrote *only* the Ten Commandments *again*, with His *own finger*, shows how distinct God considers these commandments to be.

The point of all this is that God views the Ten Commandments as something special. If there is scriptural evidence of *anyone* "compartmentalizing" the law, it is God Himself who did it. The Ten Commandments are the only words of law that He wrote with His own finger. They were given by the unmediated hand and voice of God; all else that God mandated at Sinai was given by God, but through Moses. All other laws that God has given are in some way reflective of the *principles of love* contained in this perfect "law of liberty" (James 2:12). They are the font from which all other godly laws flow.

Exodus 32:16: "Now the tablets were *the work of God*, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets." And the codified version of the Ten Commandments in stone was written by "*the finger of God*," both times, *not by the hand of the mediator, Moses* (Exodus 24:12; 34:28).

Deuteronomy 4:13-14 states, "*So He declared to you His covenant* which He commanded you to perform, *the Ten Commandments*; and *He wrote them* on two tablets of stone. *And the LORD commanded me* at that time to teach you *statutes and judgments*, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess." Notice that Moses said the "Ten Commandments" were commanded to "you" and the statutes to "me." Moses did not see himself as the mediator of the Ten Commandments. Did Moses compartmentalize the law?

The Ten Commandments, alone, are called "His covenant." The word *covenant* can be used in a broad sense or a narrow sense noting specific areas. So in a narrow sense, the Ten Commandments alone were a smaller covenant. The Sabbath was also a covenant that God gave Moses instructions about (Exodus 31:16).

Deuteronomy 5:22 states, "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; *and He added no more*. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me." Why didn't He add any more? Was it simply because the people were afraid? If so, then was it a coincidence that He stopped after the Tenth Commandment? Surely they were afraid beginning with the First

Commandment that thundered from God's voice. A bigger question is: Why did God only write the Ten Commandments? Certainly the people were no longer afraid while Moses was on the mountain for 40 days. Why didn't God say, "I'll write all the commandments that I intended to speak to them but couldn't get to because of their fear"? By both speaking and writing the Ten Commandments only, God distinguishes these commandments in a special way.

2 Chronicles 5:10: "*Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they had come out of Egypt.*" Did the people's fears at Sinai also dictate how many commandments would be put in the ark? Of course not. God clearly distinguished the Ten Commandments in a unique way. They were put in a different compartment or *compartmentalized*. And the other laws were laid *alongside* or "beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you" (Deuteronomy 31:26). Yet the uniqueness of these commands is decreased when they are viewed as just a part of the *entire* law. Without delving into a discussion of every law that is binding today, it's quite obvious that the Ten Commandments were not part of the problem in Galatia.

The following scriptures describe some of the laws that Moses was the "mediator" of. Instructions for the tabernacle were given to Moses in Exodus 25-31. God commanded Moses, and then Moses instructed the religious leaders, who in turn instructed the people.

This is the law of the burnt *offering*, the grain *offering*, the sin *offering*, the trespass *offering*, the consecrations, and the *sacrifice* of the peace *offering*, which the LORD commanded Moses on Mount Sinai (Leviticus 7:37-38).

But Aaron and his sons offered *sacrifices* on the altar of burnt *offering* and on the altar of incense, for all the work of the Most Holy Place, and to make atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded (1 Chronicles 6:49).

Then you will prosper, if you take care to fulfill *the statutes and judgments with which the LORD charged Moses concerning Israel*. Be strong and of good courage; do not fear nor be dismayed (1 Chronicles 22:13).

Then Solomon, and all the assembly with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for *the tabernacle* of meeting with God was there, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness (2 Chronicles 1:3).

The Ten Commandments were not commanded *by the hand of Moses*. Therefore, he is not the "mediator" of these commandments. The phrase "by the hand of a mediator" appeals to "by the hand of Moses," which was used 20 times in the Old Testament. This phrase denotes laws God commanded first to Moses, most of which were later written *by the hand of Moses*. This should not be confused with the fact that Moses simply carried the Ten Commandments "in his hand" (Exodus 32:15).

Not every law given *by the hand of Moses* is abolished since the principles of the Ten Commandments were reiterated in some fashion in other laws. Obviously, these principles were not part of the controversy in the book of Galatians. However a common denominator between the laws in question in the book of Galatians is that Moses was the “mediator” of them. Circumcision was a prerequisite to many, if not most, of the laws commanded *by the hand of Moses*. Circumcision and related obligations were at the heart of the controversy in the book of Galatians. Notice how “by the hand of Moses” is commonly used to denote laws that Moses was a “mediator” of:

The children of Israel brought a *freewill offering* to the LORD, all the men and women whose hearts were willing to bring material for all kinds of work which the LORD, *by the hand of Moses, had commanded* to be done (Exodus 35:29).

So Aaron and his sons did all the things that the LORD had *commanded by the hand of Moses* (Leviticus 8:36).

And that you may teach the children of Israel *all the statutes* which the LORD has spoken to them *by the hand of Moses* (Leviticus 10:11).

These are the *statutes and judgments and laws* which the LORD made between Himself and the children of Israel *on Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses* (Leviticus 26:46).

These were the ones who were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all who might *serve in the tabernacle of meeting*, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to *the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses* (Numbers 4:37).

At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LORD, *at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses* (Numbers 9:23).

So they started out for the first time according to *the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses* (Numbers 10:13).

If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments *which the LORD has spoken to Moses*—all that the LORD has commanded you *by the hand of Moses*, from the day the LORD gave commandment and onward throughout your generations (Numbers 15:22-23).

And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, *just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses* (Numbers 27:23).

These are the *commandments and the judgments* which the LORD commanded the children of Israel *by the hand of Moses* in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho (Numbers 36:13).

He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God... and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses (2 Chronicles 33:7-8).

So slaughter *the Passover offerings*, consecrate yourselves, and prepare them for your brethren, that they may do *according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses (2 Chronicles 35:6).*

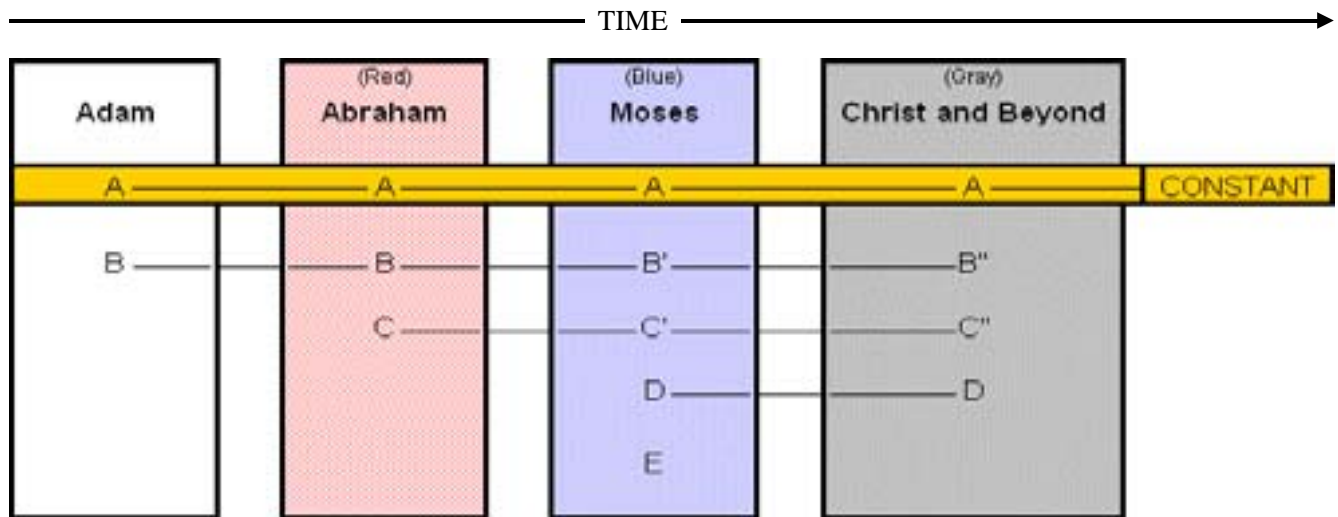
You made known to them *Your holy Sabbath*, and commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, *by the hand of Moses Your servant (Nehemiah 9:14).* [God introduced them to the Sabbath in Exodus 16 and 20 and later commanded precepts *by the hand of Moses.*]

The Bible is not absolutely clear as to the meaning of “angels” in the context of Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:19. Some believe that it refers to spirit angels having a part to play in the giving of some of the ceremonial/temporary laws. Others believe that it refers to human agents or messengers (Levites and prophets) who were used in this same manner. Regardless of the identity of those referred to as “angels,” the point is that the Bible makes a distinction between the unmediated laws which God gave directly (for example, the Ten Commandments) and the mediated laws given through “angels.”

Summary

The Ten Commandments are the most succinct summary and the clearest starting point of a discussion concerning which laws are still fully binding on Christians under the terms of the New Covenant. The purpose of this paper is not to note every single law that is still binding on Christians today. These principles define *how* we are to love God and man and are expounded upon throughout the Old Testament. However, circumcision is the initiation rite for the fleshly ordinances, which repeatedly are said to be no longer required for Christians. Unlike the Ten Commandments, it was the fleshly ordinances that were “added because of transgression, till the Seed should come...and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator [Moses].”

COVENANTS CHART



- A = “spiritual” and holy law, always expected of God’s people He is working with: Ten Commandments, tithing, clean/unclean meats, love toward God and neighbor, and other laws which are constant
- B = sacrifices offered by individuals
- B’ = sacrifices only administered by Levites at the tabernacle/temple
- B’’ = spiritual “sacrifices” expected of a Christian: Romans 12:1
- C = circumcision sign of the covenant between God and Abraham
- C’ = circumcision of Israelite males as initiation rite into community of Israel
- C’’ = “circumcision” of the heart, i.e., conversion
- D = imperatives that were initiated at Sinai, and continue for Christians today: e.g., don’t marry your sister
- E = imperatives that were initiated at Sinai, but are no longer imperative on Christians: e.g., levirate laws, civil laws, the “(ad)ministration of death”

Commentary

1. Refer to the accompanying time line and delineations of the “packages,” i.e., the various covenants God has entered into with men. Each “package” is a combination of imperatives that God has outlined that will permit people to be in relationship with God. The various letters (A, B, C, D, E) indicate God’s terms for the people to comply with, in order to maintain a covenant relationship with God. *An important point to make is that this chart has nothing to do with what makes eternal life possible to these people, in various covenant relationships with God, which is the atoning sacrifice and intercessory work of Jesus Christ.* For Abel or Jacob or David or Paul, forgiveness and being a spiritual new creation is only possible

through Christ. That is, salvation is a gift from a gracious God, through Christ. The graph only describes what God has expected the people to do, in order to maintain the covenant relationship with Him. Doing these things, of course, does not earn salvation or forgiveness for sins. But willful and unrepented-of refusal to do them constitutes rebellion against God's sovereignty, and will ultimately end the relationship with God, the culmination being eternal death.

2. There are certain *constants*, sometimes called the "spiritual, eternal law," that reflect the mind of God, and which God has expected people to obey, regardless of when they lived. These are designated as "A" on the graph. Examples of A are loving God and man, the Ten Commandments, tithing and not eating unclean meats.

3. But in different epochs of salvation history, i.e., as defining elements of the various covenants that God has entered into with men at different times, some parts of the package (some terms of the covenants) have varied. For example the designation "B" reflects the need for covenanters with God to make sacrifices to God. Some who knew God before Abraham, made individual sacrifices to God, e.g., Noah. Under the Abrahamic covenant—the relationship between God and Abraham (a different package, colored red)—Abraham could still, as an individual, make sacrifices. Later, in the (different) Mosaic covenant (colored blue), the concept of sacrifices was still present, but now it was changed (designated by B') so that sacrifices could only be made with the involvement of the Levitical priests. In the "new covenant" (a different package—colored gray), the expectation is that the people will no longer kill and sacrifice animals, but offer their entire beings as "living sacrifices" to God.

4. Some imperatives, designated as C, originated with the Abrahamic covenant. It appears that circumcision, for example, originated with God's relationship with Abraham. It represented the sign of the covenant between them. Circumcision also was included in the later Mosaic (Sinaitic) covenant, but it was not exactly the same—it now represented the sign of the covenant between God and the nation, and is represented by C'. But even in the New Covenant, there is still circumcision, though now it is of the heart—and is conversion, designated by C''.

5. Other imperatives (designated as D) originated at Sinai, and still apply to Christians today. Examples include prohibitions against marrying your sister. That imperative apparently did not exist between Abraham and Moses, but does still exist today.

6. Other imperatives were initiated at Sinai, and ended with the death of Christ (designated as E). Examples include the *administration* of the penalty of violation of the law—the "ministration of death," many civil laws (e.g., cities of refuge).

7. Note also that men have added some laws, rules and regulations which God did not initiate nor necessarily endorse. Some are perhaps acceptable, but not required by God, e.g., "the Festival of Lights." Others are clearly unnecessary, e.g., washing up to the elbows. Others are clearly displeasing to God, because they negate the intent of His laws, e.g., the "Corban" rules and the burdensome Sabbath restrictions of Judaism. Christ castigated some of the Jews of His day for exalting "traditions" and "commandments" of men above the commandments of God. The graph does not include any reference to these humanly-devised traditions and commandments.

8. *What was “added” 430 years later?* The weight of evidence is that what is referred to in Galatians as being added were the specific components that either changed (e.g., B becoming B’) or originated (e.g., E) at Sinai. That is, to the unchanging, holy and spiritual law of God (designated A), other imperatives were added at Sinai. Some of God’s commands have existed and applied to all people (who desire to maintain a relationship with God) since Adam to this day. Other laws originated at Sinai and were temporary. A key clarifying point, again, is that the “spiritual laws” neither originated with Sinai nor terminated at the cross.

9. Though obedience to the law of God is still incumbent on Christians under the terms of the New Covenant, it is important to stress that no obedience to any law or series of laws or components of any covenant will earn salvation or force God to forgive sin. *That is only possible through faith in Christ—both in His atoning death to justify us before God, and in His intercessory work as our High Priest and His sanctifying life within us. This is one of the key points Paul is arguing in the book of Galatians.*

Appendix B “Works of the Law”

In Scripture, the term *works of the law* (also translated *deeds of the law*) is found only in Paul’s epistles. It occurs in the following references:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28).

Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone (Romans 9:32).

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2:16, KJV).

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:2).

Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:5).

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them” (Galatians 3:10).

In each of the references the Greek is *ergon nomou*. In the Greek text there is no article *the* preceding “works” or “law.” The term, therefore, literally is *works of law*. If Paul had said “the” works of “the” law it would have meant specific works of a specific law. However, since Paul did not use the article *the*, his reference is to works in general and law in general.

Paul is not addressing in these scriptures whether or not a Christian should keep the law. Law-keeping, per se, was not the issue. The problem was the *absence* of faith in Christ with respect to law-keeping. Paul is addressing those who believed that law-keeping was sufficient and independent of faith in Christ. Therefore, “works of law” was not an issue for those Christians who understood that law-keeping is associated with faith in Christ and not independent of it.

Paul’s use of the term *works of law* has to do with justification—being aligned or right with God. In the books of Romans and Galatians, Paul refers to justification in two different ways. In some places he refers to justification in the sense of what Christ has done for us. Paul uses the

word *grace* to describe the forgiveness of sin that only Christ could secure for mankind through His sacrifice as our Savior. Human effort cannot forgive sin and justify us. Forgiveness of sin is granted only through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, not by good deeds that we may do. Of course, we must not forget that God does not grant forgiveness apart from repentance (Acts 2:38).

In other places Paul refers to justification in a behavioral sense. That is, in the sense of a way of life. One who is justified—a Christian—will live a godly life, as defined by the laws of God. One who is justified will show the fruits of the Spirit of God in his daily life, living righteously. Indeed, he must in order to stay right with God. That is, after initial justification, the believer must live his faith in a continual state of justification in order to remain justified.

Paul describes justification in this behavioral sense in Romans 2:13: “For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” Here Paul is not talking about how our sins are forgiven (the sacrifice of Christ), but how a Christian must live to remain justified.

James also speaks of justification in the behavioral sense, living in the justified state:

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it *was* accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? (James 2:20-25).

In the verses above, neither Paul nor James is addressing initial justification. That is accomplished only through faith in the sacrifice of Christ. It is only through His sacrifice that sins can be forgiven. However, both Paul and James speak about works and obedience to the law of God as evidence of Christ in us. A Christian—one who is justified by faith in the sacrifice of Christ—will obey God and live according to His law.

On the other hand, Paul makes it clear in Romans that our deeds—no matter how good they may be—do not forgive sins. Obedience does not justify. Only Christ’s sacrifice can do that. However, the believer must repent and begin to live a life of obedience. Christ came to save us out of our sins, not in our sins. As Romans 3:20-28 states:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had

passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

The law is necessary because it defines right and wrong. We must obey the law, but that obedience does not forgive sins. The answer to the question “How are we justified?” is not “Obedience to the law.” The answer is “by the sacrifice of Christ which alone brings forgiveness of sin.” And to remain justified? Through Christ in us to help us obey God. Any effort to obey God on our own will not forgive us of past disobedience and will not enable us to meet God’s requirements for us. As Paul states in Galatians 3:11, “But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’”

Paul makes both points several times in Galatians. He states in Galatians 2:16:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (KJV).

Paul is addressing the issue: How are we justified? How do we meet God’s requirements and become aligned with Him? Initially, it is through repentance and having Christ’s sacrifice applied to us. Repentance, it must be understood, is a commitment with the mind to obey God—and thus it is essentially obedience “in the spirit” prior to any works actually being done. This is the point at which we are justified. But how do we maintain that obedient attitude, which will translate into actual works of obedience as opportunity presents? Paul answers four verses later in verse 20:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Christ lives in us to help us obey God. And as long as He lives in us (which is forever if we don’t at some point reject Him), His sacrifice is always there as atonement for our disobedience.

Paul states three times in verse 16 that works of law (not “the works of the law”) do not justify. Which “law” is he referring to? Is he referring to any specific law? No. That is why he did not use the Greek article “the.” He is referring to works in general and law in general, without indicating any specific category for either one. Regardless of whose law it is, a person cannot be justified through law-keeping.

In fact, to single out any one category or group of laws would defeat the point Paul is making. If he were speaking about works from only one category or group of laws and that those works do not justify, then we might conclude that works from the other categories or groups of

laws do justify. Of course, that is not the case. The point that Paul is making is that obedience or works of law—any law—will not forgive sin. Only faith in the sacrifice of Christ can do that. And only Christ’s faith within us will enable us to continue in obedience to God and remain justified.

Concerning how we are justified, it does not matter how good our works may be, it does not matter how faithfully we obey the laws of God, it does not matter how much we may help one another. Even obedience to the spiritual law will not forgive sin. However, faith, as we have seen, is inextricably linked to obedience—even when it comes to initial justification. We cannot just believe in Christ’s atoning sacrifice with no commitment to obey God and still expect to be justified. Faith in the sacrifice of Christ is not just a mental exercise of belief.

Addressing this concern, Paul states in the next verse:

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! (Galatians 2:17).

Lest any misunderstand, Paul declares that being justified by faith in Christ’s sacrifice rather than by our own human effort does not imply that we are free to sin. Furthermore, if a person continues in the same course that he was going, he makes himself a transgressor (Galatians 2:18). Thus it is clear that Paul in no way indicates that the spiritual law of God is abolished. The law still will ultimately have dominion over him if he continues in sin. Paul makes it clear that Christ came to save us out of our sins, not in our sins.

We are still obligated to obey the laws of God. Even though faith is inextricably linked to obedience, sins cannot be forgiven apart from the sacrifice of Christ. Obedience to any law or set of laws cannot forgive sin.

An incorrect assumption would be that “works of law” means “actions done in obedience to the law of God” or “being under the jurisdiction of the law.” Paul is not negating the law of God nor is he saying that Christians should not obey it. He is countering the false belief that obedience to the law in one’s own strength, without any trust in God, can result in justification. Judaism held that performing the requirements of the law earned acceptance from God. Paul opposes “legalism,” not obedience to the law.

“Legalism” does not mean “under the jurisdiction of the law.” It can be defined as “belief in salvation by obedience to the law rather than by the grace of God or by faith” (Donald T. Kauffman, *Baker’s Concise Dictionary of Religion*).

Various scholars point out that *works of law* is a term used only by Paul in the New Testament and that possibly the term was coined by him. C.E.B. Cranfield writes:

...it will be well to bear in mind the fact...that the Greek language of Paul’s day possessed no word-group corresponding to our “legalism,” “legalist” and “legalistic.” This means that he lacked a convenient terminology for expressing a vital distinction, and so was surely

seriously hampered in the work of clarifying the Christian position with regard to the law. In view of this, we should always, we think, be ready to reckon with the possibility that Pauline statements which at first sight seem to disparage the law, were really directed not against the law itself but against that misunderstanding and misuse of it for which we now have a convenient terminology. In this very difficult terrain Paul was pioneering. If we make due allowance for these circumstances, we shall not be so easily baffled or misled by a certain impreciseness of statement which we shall sometimes encounter (C.E.B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary, Romans*, 1979, p. 853).

Ernest De Witt Burton in his commentary on Galatians writes:

Nomou is here evidently used...in its legalistic sense, denoting divine law viewed as a purely legalistic system made up of statutes, on the basis of obedience or disobedience to which men are approved or condemned as a matter of debt without grace. This is divine law as the legalist defined it. In the apostle's thought it stands for a reality only in that it constitutes a single element of the divine law detached from all other elements and aspects of divine revelation; by such detachment it misrepresents the will of God and his real attitude towards men. By *erga nomou* Paul means deeds of obedience to formal statutes done in the legalistic spirit, with the expectation of thereby meriting and securing divine approval and award, such obedience, in other words, as the legalists rendered to the law of the Old Testament as expanded and interpreted by them. Though *nomos* in this sense had no existence as representing the basis of justification in the divine government, yet *erga nomou* had a very real existence in the thought and practice of men who conceived of the divine law after this fashion.... The translation of this phrase here and constantly...by 'the works of the law'...is a serious defect of [versions that have it] (E. Burton, *The International Critical Commentary, Galatians*, 1921, p. 120).

David H. Stern in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* gives the following definition of "legalism" in his comments regarding Galatians 2:16:

I submit that in every instance "*erga nomou*" means not deeds done in virtue of following the *Torah* in the way God intended, but deeds done in consequence of perverting the *Torah* into a set of rules which, it is presumed, can be obeyed mechanically, automatically, *legalistically*, without having faith, without having trust in God, without having love for God or man, and without being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

"Works of law," or "legalism," does not refer to any one specific category or group of laws. It is general and all-encompassing. Can it include circumcision? Yes. See Acts 15:1 and Galatians 6:15. Can it include any ceremonies and rituals? Yes. See Hebrews 9:9-10. Can it include any of the Ten Commandments? Yes. See Luke 18:10-14. (Yet keeping them with this intent is not really keeping them.) The point is that any indication of human effort alone for the purpose of earning or deserving salvation is "legalism" or "works of law."

It would be a mistake to limit "works of law" to any one category of laws. To do so would be to ascribe to first-century Judaism the concept that their works were relative to only

one category of laws which would justify them. However, Judaism believed that obedience was necessary for the entire law. For that reason Paul did not single out any one specific category or group of laws. He used a term that includes anything and everything. Works of any law—no matter what it is—will not forgive sin. Christ’s sacrifice alone will do that.

Appendix C “Under the Law”

The term *under the law* is translated from the Greek *hupo nomon* (literally, “under law”) and occurs 10 times in eight verses—in Romans, 1 Corinthians and Galatians. What does this expression mean? Does it mean “under the authority of the law” or “under the requirements of the law,” as some maintain? Did Paul mean by this expression that Christians, now “under grace” under the New Covenant, are no longer subject to the law and its requirements? Or, on the other hand, does it mean “under the condemnation, or penalty, for having broken the law?” We conclude that this latter meaning is the one intended by Paul.

The first occurrence (by book order) of the term *under law* is in Romans 6:14. However, it is essential that we examine the context if we are to understand the meaning of the term. Paul does not explain specifically what the term means, therefore the context becomes all important. (Note: Romans 3:19 has the term *under the law* in many translations. However, the term is not *hupo nomon*—“under law”—but *en to nomo*, which means “in the law” or “within the law.”)

Paul begins the epistle to the Romans by showing the dire consequences of mankind having rejected God. Lacking moral restraints, man has gone the way of all the sins which Paul enumerates in detail (Romans 1:28-32).

Then, lest the Jews feel complacent and superior to the gentiles, Paul shows in chapter 2 that they are just as guilty before God. God is just and will equally condemn those who do evil, whether Jew or gentile, and bless those who do good, whether Jew or gentile (verses 6-11).

It is in this context that Paul establishes the concept that the law is a necessary part (though by no means the only part) of the foundation for a right relationship with God. He states:

For as many as have sinned without law [Greek, *anomos*] will also perish without law [Greek, *anomos*], and as many as have sinned in the law [Greek, *en nomo*] will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified (Romans 2:12-13).

Having established previously that both gentiles and Jews stand condemned before God as evildoers, Paul now emphasizes that it is the doers of the law who will be justified. The gentiles, who were not given the law of God, sinned. The Jews, who were given the law of God, also sinned. The issue is not whether or not they had received the law of God. It was whether or not they were obedient to the law. Since neither Jews nor gentiles were obedient to the law, all were sinners. All had some sin (breaking the law) on their record. Paul also contrasts those gentiles who “by nature” obey the law with those Jews who did not obey the law that God gave to them. Even the gentiles understood that there were certain laws that were necessary for society, such as laws against theft and adultery (Romans 2:14).

Therefore, the whole world stands guilty before God. As Paul states in Romans 3:9, “For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.” And, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Paul then explains that justification, having our sins forgiven, comes only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). However, Paul explains at length that this forgiveness (grace) does not imply that we are free to sin: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!... Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:1-2, 12-13). Paul is careful to explain that law-keeping does not justify—only the sacrifice of Christ can justify (Romans 3:28; 5:1, 9). At the same time, law-keeping is necessary because it defines righteousness and sin (Romans 3:20, 31; 4:15; 5:13; 7:7).

This, then, brings us to Romans chapter 6 where Paul used the term *under law* (*hupo nomon*): “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” (Romans 6:14-15).

What does Paul mean by the expression *under law*? Is this a reference to all or part of the Old Testament laws? Is Paul saying that man was previously under the authority of the law but now grace has come, replacing the law? Does being under grace mean that the law has no place in the life of a Christian and that we no longer are under submission to it?

What is the context of this term? Paul is making a sharp distinction between “under law” and “under grace.” Whatever “under law” means, it is the opposite of “under grace.” While Paul does not define either term specifically, he does use a parallel structure which will enable us to understand what each term means. The chart below illustrates how Paul used different expressions to convey the same thought for each term:

Under Grace	Under Law
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glory, honor and peace on all who work good—both Jews and gentiles (2:10)• The doers of the law will be justified (2:13)• We are justified freely by the grace of Christ (3:24)• God has passed over our sins through faith in the blood of Christ (3:25)• Lawless deeds are forgiven, sins are covered, sin is not imputed (4:7-8)• Justified by the blood of Christ, we will be saved from wrath (5:9)• Grace came through the Man, Jesus Christ, and is a gift to all (5:15)• The free gift from many offenses resulted in justification (5:16) • Grace and righteousness will reign through Christ (5:17)• Christ’s obedience will make many righteous (5:19)• Grace reigns to eternal life (5:21)• We have died to sin (6:2)• Sin must not reign in our bodies (6:12)• Sin does not have dominion over us (6:14)• We are under grace (6:14)• We are not to sin if we are under grace (6:15)• We are slaves of obedience leading to righteousness (6:16)• Set free from sin, you are slaves of righteousness (6:18)• You are slaves of righteousness for holiness (6:19)• Now free from sin as slaves of God your fruit is holiness and the end is eternal life (6:22)• Gift of God is eternal life (6:23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The wrath of God is against ungodliness and unrighteousness—those who practice such things are deserving of death (1:18, 32).• Those who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness (2:8)• Tribulation and anguish on all who do evil—both Jews and gentiles (2:9)• All are under sin—both Jews and gentiles (3:9)• The whole world is guilty before God (3:19)• Sin entered the world through one man, but all have sinned (5:12)• Judgment from the offense resulted in condemnation (5:16)• Death reigned through one man’s offense (5:17)• Adam’s disobedience made many sinners (5:19)• Sin reigns in death (5:21)• We are not under the law (6:14)• Slaves to obey sin leading to death (6:16)• You were slaves of sin (6:17)• You were slaves of uncleanness and lawlessness (6:19)• When slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. The end of those things is death (6:20-21)• Wages of sin is death (6:23)
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The context clearly shows that “under grace” has to do with a free gift from God, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on behalf of mankind. We also see that obedience to the law is still required, though law does not of itself justify. The result of being “under grace” is that our sins are forgiven and we are promised eternal life. We are no longer under the penalty of the law—death. However, we are cautioned not to return to the dominion of sin, lawlessness and unrighteousness.

By contrast, those “under law” are described as ungodly, unrighteous and disobedient. They stand guilty before God because of their unforgiven sins. While all have sinned, those “under grace” had their sins forgiven because of their acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ to forgive their sins. The implication for those “under law” is that they have not repented and accepted the sacrifice of Christ and, therefore, their sins are not forgiven. The end for those “under law” is death.

“Under law,” therefore, is not describing an approach by some (usually labeled “Judaizers”) who insisted that we must come under the requirements and obligations of the law in order to be saved—as though obedience could save. The context shows that “under law” has to do with sin and disobedience and the consequence is death. “Under law,” then, means being under the condemnation that the law requires because of violating the law and living a life of unrepentant sin. “Under law” is best understood by the phrase “under the penalty of the law.”

Phrases such as “under the authority of the law” or “under the requirements of the law” do not fit the context. How can “under the authority of the law” fit with sin, disobedience and unrighteousness? Surely those “under the authority of the law” are obedient and righteous. Those “under the authority of the law” are not evildoers and sinners. Why would death be the end result for those who submit themselves to the law?

Furthermore, how could these phrases apply to the gentiles? They did not know the true God nor did God reveal His law to them. They were never in subjection to the law of God. Yet the same condemnation of being “under law” applied equally to the gentiles and to the Jews.

Let us now look briefly at each place where Paul used the term *under law*:

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! (Romans 6:14-15).

If the phrase *under law* meant “under the authority of the law,” how could sin have dominion over the person? While Paul certainly dealt with Judaizers, that is not the focus of the phrase *under law*. The issue for Paul was not the Judaizer’s intent to obey the law. It was, rather, his insistence that his obedience justified him, which was not the purpose of the law. By using the phrase *under law*, Paul refers to the condemnation to death, which is the consequence of sin (Romans 7:10-12). If we are “under grace”—having had our sins forgiven—then we are no longer under the condemnation or penalty that the law requires for sin (violating the law) having dominion over us.

And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law [*ennomos*, correctly translated: “within law”] toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law (1 Corinthians 9:20-21).

The context of these verses is that of putting oneself in the shoes of the other person in order to better understand him and help him (Galatians 6:2). We do not take a superior attitude toward other people. Rather than condemning them as evildoers, we identify with them and humbly acknowledge that we, too, have sinned (Romans 3:23). We have all been “under the penalty of the law” and, by admitting that to others, we may be able to bring them also to being “under grace.”

If Paul were using the phrase *under law* in the sense of “under the authority of the law,” as a reference to Judaizers, it is doubtful that he would have phrased the verses in 1 Corinthians 9 as he did. Paul didn’t show a sympathetic view toward Judaizers. On the contrary, he soundly condemned their approach. While Paul could identify with “being under the penalty” of sin, since all have sinned—including Paul—he did not seek to identify with Judaizers.

But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law [*hupo nomon*], kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed (Galatians 3:23).

Before faith in Jesus Christ came, all were imprisoned or confined—as it were—by sin (Romans 3:19). We were condemned to death because of our sins. Grace through Christ’s sacrifice provides forgiveness and eternal life, which stands in contrast with our sins and the penalty thereof, which is death.

It is interesting that verse 22 expresses the same thought as verse 23 in slightly different words: “But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” The main verb (*sunkleio*—“has confined” in verse 22 and “kept under guard” in verse 23) is the same in both verses. However, Paul uses “under sin” in verse 22 and “under law” in verse 23. In each case he is saying that we have been confined or imprisoned by our sins—our transgressions—waiting for the promise through faith. We are under the curse of the law (verse 10) because we did not obey it. Therefore, because of disobedience and the fact that good deeds cannot forgive sin, we are under a curse unless we accept through faith the sacrifice of Christ. Under sin and under law are the same thing.

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4-5).

Is Paul saying that Christ had to be born “under the requirements of the law” in order to redeem all of mankind, who have been “under the requirements of the law”? Did Christ come to the earth as a human being because He had to place Himself “under the authority of the law”? What purpose would that serve? Has all of mankind—gentiles included—been “under the requirements of the law” and would the death of Christ be necessary in order to redeem mankind from the requirements of the law?

Paul is saying that Christ was born under the penalty of the law (death). He was born so that He could die for us, taking upon Himself the penalty of the sins of the world—death. See John 3:14-18; 12:27; Romans 5:6-10; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 1:19-23; 1 John 2:2. He

was indeed slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8; 1 Peter 1:20). In that sense, He was born “under the law”—under the penalty for mankind’s breaking of the law. Certainly not for His sins (He was sinless), but for ours, He had to die, so that the wages of sin could be paid on our behalf. He was born under a death penalty caused by our sins. Mankind did not need to be redeemed from “the requirements of the law” but rather from death, which is the penalty for having lived under the dominion of sin. Man’s sins placed him under that penalty—under the claim of the law—and the only deliverance is through accepting the sacrifice of Christ which places us under grace.

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? (Galatians 4:21).

Paul was not above using sarcasm in order to prove a point. The Judaizers who thought that their own works and obedience would justify them in reality were rejecting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their sins. Why would Christ need to die when their own works would achieve the purpose intended, i.e. salvation? Paul is asking them, sarcastically, “Why do you desire to remain under the penalty of death, which is the consequence of having violated the laws of God?” This is in essence what the Judaizers were saying by insisting that their works would justify them, and Paul uses sarcasm to drive home the point that human effort cannot remove the penalty of death. The unintended consequence of their looking to the law to justify them before God was to guarantee that they would not be forgiven, having rejected the sacrifice of Christ, the only true source of justification before God.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (Galatians 5:18).

Does this verse mean that if one is not being led by the Spirit of God, that he is living “under the requirements of the law”? If he is living “under the authority of the law,” why are his works evil, as described in the preceding two verses?

The context of this verse is the contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit of God. In verse 21 Paul states that those who live according to the works of the flesh will not inherit the Kingdom of God. The contrast presented is not one of being led by the Spirit of God versus those who live according to the requirements of the law. Rather, the contrast is between the fruit that will be produced in the life of the individual led by the Spirit of God which will lead to eternal life in the Kingdom of God versus the ungodly and evil works of the flesh which will lead to the ultimate penalty—death. Christians are no longer under the penalty of death because their sins have been forgiven, and they are now leading a righteous life because of the Holy Spirit which is within them.

The term *under law* addresses a situation that applies to all of mankind—gentiles as well as Jews. It does not address only those to whom God gave His law. Nor does it address specifically the mistaken notion of the Judaizers that their works would justify them. The term addresses the state of all of mankind. All have sinned and consequently stand condemned before God. All are guilty before Him and are under the penalty of death for their sins. However, through the wonderful free gift from God, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our sins

can be forgiven and we can be delivered from the penalty of death and live forever in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, we are no longer under law but under grace.

Appendix D

How Did the Law of Moses Apply, Then and Now?

The laws of Moses are defined as those laws given by God to Israel (or to a sub-group in Israel, such as the priests or the judges) through the mediation of Moses. Usually they are prefaced with the phrase “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them...’” Many Mosaic laws are apodictic in their structure; that is, they are cast in the pattern, “If X, then Y.” Typically, each of the laws of Moses had three components:

- A statute or ordinance.
- Punishment prescribed for violation.
- Enforcement by judiciary.

Let us take an example. In Exodus 21:33-34 we find the following law: “And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, the owner of the pit shall make it good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead animal shall be his.” This law is found among the animal control laws of Exodus 21:28-36, an integral part of the law of Moses.

The law makes it an offense for a man to leave an open or uncovered pit. Should an ox or donkey (animals selected in all probability for their value as domestic farm animals) fall into such an open pit and die, a punishment is prescribed: the owner of the pit is to reimburse the owner a sum of money, and he may retain the dead animal. Although not explicitly stated, it was presumably the responsibility of the judges to determine whether the law applied and, if so, the amount of the fine.

How would this law be administered in the New Covenant Church of God? Israel was a nation, with a civil government and a judicial system. It had the authority and power to administer all civil judgments, including the death penalty. These laws were written with that in mind.

However, civil judgments, judicial discipline and punishment do not fall within the purview of the Church. Civil government and judgment, where applicable, belong to the nations in which we live. The Church certainly can, and should, speak about the principles involved, based on love toward our neighbor; but the Church has no involvement in the administration of civil justice.

Let us take a look at a few more examples from Moses:

- In Exodus 21:17, the act of cursing one’s parents is prohibited, under pain of death.

Obviously, cursing one’s parents is a sin. How should this be dealt with by the Church today? The Church’s involvement would be limited to counsel and advice, if sought by the parents. The Church has no authority to involve itself directly in any kind of disciplinary judgment (apart from perhaps not allowing a teenage person guilty of such

actions to attend services). The Church is not a civil authority and consequently cannot be involved in the administration of death or any other kind of civil administrative judgment. The civil authorities probably would not become involved in a case such as this. Therefore, whatever kind of discipline would be administered would be by the parents, seeking, as appropriate, professional and ministerial counsel.

- Exodus 21:28-29 prescribes penalties for the owner of an ox that gores someone to death. If it is a first-time offense, the ox is to be stoned, and the owner acquitted; if the ox has been known to thrust with its horn in times past, and the owner was aware of the problem and failed to confine the ox, both the owner and the ox are to be put to death.

The law of the land would undoubtedly be involved if an animal caused injury or death to an individual. Most nations have laws that deal with such matters. The Church would have no involvement in the administration of any legal penalty.

- Exodus 22:26-27 prohibits the holding of a garment taken in pledge once the sun has set. Notwithstanding the unresolved debt, the garment is to be returned, since the owner might freeze to death for lack of the garment. There is no specific penalty prescribed here, only a warning that God Himself will hear the cry of such a one deprived of his garment.

Clearly, such a mean-spirited act has no place in a truly converted Christian. However, we might find a practical application of the spirit of this law. Let us imagine that a Church member, owed money by another member, decides to take the debtor's old truck as settlement for the debt. The debtor protests that without his old truck he has no means of earning a living and thus of feeding his family. Would not the spirit of this law apply and dictate that humanitarian considerations at times override one's right to call in a loan?

The law of Moses deals with many situations that also arise in our modern world, either in the letter or in their principle. These principles can be used by the Church in order to help the members understand the spiritual intent of many of these laws and how they apply to the overall command to love our neighbor. However, while the Church can teach these principles and can counsel members, the Church has no involvement in the actual administration of justice.