



by Steve Reynolds

Once upon a time there was a young man (to whom I'm very close) who kept a big plaque of The Ten Commandments on his wall. It was my own personal monument—a constant reminder of how I wanted to live my life. I was sincere. I really wanted to keep those commandments, but somehow not only did I fail, but I failed repeatedly, and I failed grossly, and I failed miserably.

We're big on monuments in the U.S. of A. Take a trip to Washington D.C., and you'll see monuments to our great leaders and our great government that are impressive reminders of our rich and varied heritage. You might not have to go that far. You may be able to ride down to the local courthouse and see a representation of the greatest laws ever written—the ones written by the very hand of God—the Ten Commandments.

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ca." With all due respect, my dear brothers and sisters, that's about as likely as "when pigs fly." In other words, it ain't gonna happen.

Law and Grace:
A Tale of Two Covenants

What I didn't know was that trying to live the Christian life by focusing on the Ten Commandments is a little like trying to put out a fire with gasoline. Paul said in Romans 7:9: "Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died." Bill Gillham, in his

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book, *What God Wishes Christians Knew About Christianity*, puts it this way: "What if you were to begin each day with repeating 'Keep off the grass' ten times? This would tempt you to walk on grass that you had hardly noticed before.

Hammering away with oughts and ought nots is not God's plan for stimulating Christians to do good works."

So, what exactly is the purpose of the law if it is not to be the focus of the Christian life? The law can be harsh, demanding and intimidating for us flawed human beings. It's no wonder—it represents the fullness of God's demands for righteousness! This is why some of the Lord's sayings are so very, very hard.

Jesus' preaching was meant to bring the people of his time to the

end of themselves—to leave them desperately looking for another way to be saved other than by keeping the law. And then, at just the right time, the gospel was preached, and 3,000 people were saved at Pentecost! Jesus did all the

work and Peter got all the credit!

Jesus' preaching took place under the old covenant—under the law. The new covenant was instituted by the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and not a minute before. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17).

He fulfilled the law in two ways—in his preaching and in his life. In his preaching he raised the bar so high that there could be no mistaking that God's salvation would be by grace alone. As defined by Jesus' preaching, there would be no chance of attaining eternal life by works. He would make it as impossible as a camel going through the eye of a needle. He also fulfilled the law in his life. He lived a perfectly righteous, self-controlled life. He was the unblemished, precious lamb of God.

If you've ever wondered why some of Jesus' sayings seem so harsh and Paul's, on the other side of the cross, seem so full of grace, this is the answer.

Exit Law, Enter Grace

The Old Covenant Law, including the Ten Commandments, was fulfilled and ended at the cross (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:13). So, if the

Ten Commandments are not supposed to be the focus of the Christian life, what then?

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...the Ten Commandments are indeed the greatest laws ever written. They are good, and they are worthy of respect. They represent moral virtues that are excellent and praiseworthy. But, for all that they are, they are not a savior.

In a word, it's Jesus. Jesus is the only one who ever kept the law perfectly. He put his Spirit into you when you were saved so that you can keep his commandments. This requires a fundamental shift in your thinking, which by the way, is the nature of repentance.

In the book of Galatians, Paul delivers a blistering rebuke to the churches in Galatia, but mostly, his harsh words are directed toward the legalistic teachers who were leading Paul's precious flock astray. These new Christians had abandoned living by grace and had made the focus of their Christian life the law. Paul was livid. And, by the way, those words in Galatians are not just Paul's words; they are the words of God.

The Christian life is to be lived by walking in the Spirit.

It is a moment-by-moment dependence on Christ to live the Christian life through us. Jesus alluded to this in John 15:5: "I am

the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

This moment-by-moment dependence on Jesus is called "walking in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16). It is not an easy thing to get your arms around sometimes. I'll admit a system of dos and don'ts is at least a little easier for me to understand (infinitely harder for me to live under, though).

My Monumental Failure

My attempt to lead the Christian life by keeping the commandments was a monumental failure. How's your progress? Ready to try a different approach? There is one true test of the system that I just described to you. Does it work? Will it bring victory over sin in my life? Will it help me to face each day of my life with a sense of peace and joy? My answer to these questions is a resounding, whole-hearted "Yes!"

Needless to say, I don't have a plaque of the Ten Commandments on my wall anymore. In its place there is a picture of Jesus—smiling, laughing, full of life (thanks Bruce Marchiano! You played a big part in this journey of mine). Bruce Marchiano's depiction of Jesus in *The Visual Bible* was a godsend to this recovering legalist. If you have a warped view of God and Jesus from religion and legalism, it will be to you, too. You can probably find *The Visual Bible* at your local bookstore or check out Bruce's ministry at www.brucearchiano.com.

See folks, the Ten Commandments are indeed the greatest laws ever written. They are good, and they are worthy of respect. They represent moral virtues that are excellent and praiseworthy. But, for all that they are, they are not a savior. Jesus is the only savior, for America, for the world ...forever. □

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