

LAW-LESS OR LAW-FULL?

Introduction

In a predicted confrontation, the remnant will shortly be summoned to explain why the Decalogue is still binding. The defense will rest on an unmitigated conviction of its divine origins. The risk of being charged with law-lessness will be high. Even now the Protestant world is divided on the merits of those ten commandments. Some defend their moral principles (albeit, often in an abridged form) as law-full Christian responsibilities, others contend that they've been eliminated.

- Some claim that this law was only for the Jews.
- Others that it was part of the Old Covenant.
- Many say “grace” has made it unnecessary.

There are two key Greek words used in the New Testament which portray God's requirements. What each means must be guided by the context. Isolated, however, they become flint stones where opinion often strikes.

1. *nomos* – “law” (KJV)
2. *entole* – “commandments” (KJV)

Favorite claims against the perpetuity of many Biblical regulations are numerous. Examples:

1. Christ's admonitions before the Cross simply don't apply now. Examples:
 - *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”* (John 14:15).
 - *“If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments”* (Matthew 19:17).
 - *“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me”* (John 14:21).
 - *“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love”* (John 15:10).
 - Have such imperatives or statements by Jesus been replaced or abrogated?
2. We “are not under law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14). “Christ is the end of the law” (Romans 10:4).
 - Most scholars identify *nomos* in such verses as the Mosaic law.¹
 - Schreiner even lists sixteen scholars who strongly defend this understanding to emphasize the importance of this setting and purpose!
3. The Ten Commandments were nailed to the Cross (cf. Col. 2:13-14).
 - The Greek nuances in these verses have been analyzed in great depth by many expositors. They are nicely summarized by James D. G. Dunn: “Once again we should just note that it is not the law which is thought of as thus destroyed, but rather

¹ Barnhouse, Donald Grey; *Romans Chapters 5:12-16:27* (Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC; 2013), vol, 2, p. 68. Schreiner, Thomas R.; *Romans* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI; 1998), , pp. 325-327, 346.

its particular **condemnation** of transgressions, absorbed in the sacrificial death of the Christ (cf. Romans 8:3).²

- Other contextual references drive many scholars to say that it was specifically the Mosaic law that was nailed to the Cross.³
- With both viewpoints⁴ – the Decalogue is preserved.

The New Testament “Law”

The word *nomos* (law) is used in many ways in the New Testament. Romans 6–8 is an example where Paul broadly ties it into numerous applications. Examples:

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Not under the law (6:14) | Law of God (7:22) |
| Law hath dominion (7:1) | Law of my mind (7:23) |
| Bound by the law (7:2) | Law of sin (7:25) |
| Delivered from the law (7:6) | Law of spirit (8:1) |
| Not known sin but by law (7:7) | Law weak (8:3) |
| The law is holy (7:12) | Law might be fulfilled (8:4) |
| Law is spiritual (7:14) | Law of God (8:7) |

Paul’s use of law (*nomos*) ranges from the Mosaic laws to the nature of man, the moral guidance of the Holy Spirit to the actual Decalogue. Again, only in the immediate context can this be deciphered – and that can even be challenging.

In His sermon on the mount, Christ made this statement:

- *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”* (Matthew 5:17).
- The word for “law” is, again, *nomos*. The word for “fulfil” is *plerooai* – *to bring it to its fullest meaning and purpose*.
- In the rest of the chapter the focus is on the Decalogue. Christ demonstrated the highest meaning of this moral law in His life – its elevated meaning.

Jesus then noted that not even the dotting of an “i” or the crossing of a “t” would change (Matthew 7:18) until all is completed.

- Then He warned:
“Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:19 – NIV).

² Dunn, James D. G.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary NIGTC* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI; 1996); p. 166 (emphasis added).

³ Reynolds, Edwin; *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, “Let No One Judge You”: Col 2:16-17 in Exegetical Perspective,” 20/1-2 (2009), p. 210 (article in Dunn’s jacket).

⁴ *Ibid.*

- This means that a knowledge base of God’s directives must be understood! It has eternal implications.

The New Testament “Commandments”

Understanding the word “law” or “commandments” can be daunting and misleading when a verse is quoted without its frame of reference.

1. Jesus did note: *“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love”* (John 15:10). The word *entole* is used in both instances. Contextually, these requirements have divine origins – thus must be identified! Paul did a unique comparative follow-up.
 - *“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God”* (I Corinthians 7:19). (Mosaic versus the Decalogue)
 - Most scholars reason against the obvious.⁵ Paul is stating that obedience to the moral law (the Decalogue) means everything.⁶
 - Christ had alluded to the same principles. Man can and should keep God’s commandments, whether he is circumcised or not.⁷

Since they are derived from the mind of God, they are sacred.

- *“Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good”* (Romans 7:12). The Decalogue alluded to here is elevated to the level of divine holiness.
 - The New Testament notes that God even chastens us so we might become partakers of that holiness (Hebrews 12:10). This means that “holiness is nothing less than a reflection of God’s character.”⁸ It is defined through the commandments.
 - John reiterated (post-Cross) that the “saints,” the holy ones, would keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12, 12:17).
2. *“Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God”* (Leviticus 20:7).

“Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (I Peter 1:16).

Holiness is the great redemptive objective, a synchronized relationship with God. This is defined in the Bible as “sanctification.”

- *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification”* (I Thessalonians 4:3a).
- *“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (I Thessalonians 5:23).

⁵ Garland, David E.; *1 Corinthians* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI; 2003), pp. 305-306.

⁶ Kistemaker, Simon J.; *1 Corinthians* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI; 1993), vol. B, *1 Corinthians*, p. 231.

⁷ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 710 (1957).

⁸ Bahnsen, Greg L.; *God’s Law in the New Testament*, “Ethical Themes,” Part II.
<http://reformed-theology.org/ice/newslet/be/be.08.79.htm>

Keeping/following those holy directives makes us aware of God's character.

3. John preserves these standards in his title book (I John) that reflects Christ's admonition:
 - *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments"* (I John 2:3).
 - *"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (I John 2:4).
 - *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous"* (I John 5:3).

Are these "commandments" referring to the Decalogue? Jesus, in speaking through the same John with a message from God the Father in Revelation (Revelation 1:1), said:

- *"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which **keep the commandments of God**, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"* (Revelation 12:17).
- *"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that **keep the commandments of God**, and the faith of Jesus"* (Revelation 14:12).
- *"Blessed are they that **do his commandments**, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city"* (Revelation 22:14).

How can we be sure these "commandments" are referring to the Decalogue?

- In Exodus 34:28-29 there are three expressions that apply to the Ten Commandments.
 1. Covenant
 2. Commandments
 3. Testimony

John uses the identical expressions in Revelation, alluding, therefore, to this Decalogue:

Revelation 11:19 – "covenant"

Revelation 12:17, 14:12, 22:14 – "commandments"

Revelation 15:5 – "testimony"

Evangelist Herb Kersten, in his *"For such a time as this"* newsletter made this very insightful outline⁹:

⁹ Kersten, Herb; Victoria, Australia;

<http://static.squarespace.com/static/51784bc4e4b0cd137cf03ca6/t/5178e7fce4b0743cbe9893c6/1366878204380/tc.pdf>

TABLE 1
(cf. Exodus 34:28-29)

| “TABERNACLE OF THE TESTIMONY” Revelation 15:5 | “ARK OF HIS COVENANT” Revelation 11:19 | “COMMANDMENTS OF GOD” Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 22:14 |
|---|---|---|
| <i>The exact expression ‘tabernacle of testimony’ is also used in these verses:</i> | <i>The exact expression ‘Ark of the Covenant’ is also used in these verses:</i> | <i>The exact expression ‘commandments of God’ is also used in these verses:</i> |
| Exodus 38:21 | Numbers 10:33 | Mark 7:8 |
| Numbers 1:50 | Joshua 8:33 | John 15:10 |
| Numbers 1:53; 10:11 | Hebrews 9:4 | 1 Corinthians 7:19 |
| <i>A similar expression is also used in these verses:</i> | <i>A similar expression is also used in these verses:</i> | <i>A similar expression is also used in these verses:</i> |
| Exodus 16:34 | Deuteronomy 10:5 | Exodus 20:1-17 (especially verse 6) |
| Exodus 25:16 | 1 Samuel 6:15 | Deuteronomy 4:13; 5:29;10:1; 13:4 |
| Exodus 31:18 | 2 Samuel 6:2 | Joshua 22:5 |
| Leviticus 16:13 | 2 Chronicles 35:3 | 1 Kings 2:3 |
| Numbers 4:5 | Psalms 132:8 | 1 Chronicles 29:19 |
| Numbers 17:4, 7 | | Psalms 78:7; 119:151 |
| Numbers 18:2 | | Proverbs 4:4 |
| Joshua 4:16 | | Ecclesiastes 12:13 |
| 2 Kings 11:12 | | Isaiah 48: 18 |
| Acts 7:44 | | Matthew 5:19; 19:17-19 |
| | | Luke 23:54-56 |
| | | 1 John 5:2-3 |

The Decalogue has not been eliminated. It is an important guide for God’s last-day people!

Decalogue Referenced in the New Testament

If the Decalogue was eliminated, why does the New Testament emphasize its principles repeatedly? Bob Thiel, Ph.D. gives us this outline (quoted):

“Commandment 1: Paul said, ‘God, who made the world and everything in it ... they should seek the Lord’ (Acts 17:24, 27). Paul also said, ‘I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law’ (Acts 24:14). ‘And what agreement has the temple of God have with idols?’ (II Cor 6:16). ‘you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God’ (I The 1:9). ‘Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God’ (2 The 2:3-4).

“Commandment 2: ‘we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols’ (Acts 15:20). ‘Now while Paul waited for them in Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols ... Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said ... “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything”’ (Acts 17:16, 22, 24, 25). ‘Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four footed animals and creeping things’ (Rom 1:22, 23). ‘But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is ... an idolater’ (I Cor 5:11). ‘Neither ... idolators ... will inherit the kingdom of God’ (I Cor 6:9, 10). ‘And do not become idolaters as were some of them ... Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry’ (I Cor 10:7,14). ‘And what agreement has the temple of God have with idols?’ (II Cor 6:16). ‘Now the works of the flesh are evident ... idolatry’ (Gal 5:19, 20). ‘For this you know that no ... idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God’ (Eph 5:5). ‘Therefore put to death ... covetousness, which is idolatry’ (Col 3:5). ‘you turned to God from idols’ (I The 1:9).

“Commandment 3: ‘they are all under sin ... Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness’ (Rom 3:9,14). ‘Let all ... evil speaking be put away from you’ (Eph 4:31). ‘But now you yourselves are to put off all these: ... blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth’ (Col 3:8). ‘they may learn not to blaspheme’ (I Tim 1:20). ‘But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be ... blasphemers’ (II Tim 3:1, 2).

“Commandment 4: ‘Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures ... And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks’ (Acts 17:2; 18:4 see also 13:14, 27, 42, 44).... ‘And to whom did He swear they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?’ (Heb 3:18). ‘For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”’ (Heb 4:4). ‘There remains therefore a rest [literally *sabbatismos*, ‘Sabbath rest’] for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His’ (Heb 4:9, 10).

“Commandment 5: ‘being filled with all unrighteousness ... disobedient to parents’ (Rom 1:29, 30). ‘Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you

may live long on the earth' (Eph 6:1-3). 'the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience' (Col 3:6). 'Children obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord' (Col 3:20). 'But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be ... disobedient to parents' (II Tim 3:1, 2).

“Commandment 6: 'being filled with all unrighteousness ... murder' (Rom 1:29). 'You shall not murder' (Rom 13:9). 'Now the works of the flesh are evident ... murders' (Gal 5:19, 21). 'the lawless and insubordinate ... murders ... manslayers' (I Tim 1:9).

“Commandment 7: 'being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality' (Rom 1:29). 'So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress' (Rom 7:3). 'You shall not commit adultery' (Rom 13:9). 'But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral' (I Cor 5:11). 'Neither ... adulterers, nor homosexuals ... will inherit the kingdom of God' (I Cor 6:9, 10). 'Nor let us commit sexual immorality as some of them did' (I Cor 10:8). 'Now the works of the flesh are evident ... adultery, fornication' (Gal 5:19). 'For this you know that no fornicator ... has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God' (Eph 5:5). 'the lawless and insubordinate ... fornicators ... sodomites' (I Tim 1:9,10). 'fornicators and adulterers God will judge' (Heb 13:4).

“Commandment 8: 'You shall not steal' (Rom 13:9). 'nor thieves ... will inherit the kingdom of God' (I Cor 6:10). 'I have been ... in perils of robbers' (II Cor 11:25, 26). 'Let him who stole, steal no longer' (Eph 4:28).

“Commandment 9: 'You shall not bear false witness' (Rom 13:9). 'Therefore, putting away lying' (Eph 4:25). 'Do not lie to one another' (Col 3:9). 'the lawless and insubordinate ... liars ... perjurers' (I Tim 1:9,10). 'Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy' (I Tim 4:1, 2). 'But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be ... slanderers' (II Tim 3:1,3). 'God, who cannot lie' (Ti 1:2). 'it is impossible for God to lie' (Heb 6:18).

“Commandment 10: 'being filled with all unrighteousness ... covetousness' (Rom 1:29). 'You shall not covet' (Rom 7:7). 'You shall not covet' (Rom 13:9). 'But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is ... covetous' (I Cor 5:11). 'nor covetous ... will inherit the kingdom of God' (I Cor 6:10). 'we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted' (I Cor 10:6). 'you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh' (Gal 5:16). 'For this you know that no fornicator ... nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God' (Eph 5:5). 'Therefore put to death ... covetousness, which is idolatry' (Col 3:5). 'For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness' (I The 2:5). 'Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have' (Heb 13:5).

“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city' (Rev 22:14). Since 'those who do His

commandments ... have the right to enter ... the city' (Rev 22:14), the ten commandments could not be 'contrary to us.'"¹⁰

The final battle between Christ and Satan is centered on the justice of God's laws.

The law (the commandments) serves, therefore, as the basis for apocalyptic justice and mercy. This is presented in a remarkable array of thoughts from the pen of the late Ellen G. White:



Until the very end, Satan will appear to have the advantage. A remnant finally becomes the pivotal witness that tips the balances the other way. They followed heaven's requirements and vindicate God's holiness!¹¹

Satan's Initial Charges

1. The Son of God had too much authority.¹²
2. All created beings could and should be equal with God.¹³

Delay of Justice in Heaven

"God permitted Satan to carry forward his work until the spirit of disaffection ripened into active revolt. It was necessary for his plans to be fully developed, *that their true nature and tendency might be seen by all*.

"All his acts were so clothed with mystery, that *it was difficult to disclose to the angels the true nature of his work*. Until fully developed, it could not be made to appear the evil thing it was; his disaffection would not be seen to be rebellion. ***Even the loyal angels could not fully discern his character or see to what his work was leading.***"¹⁴

Delay After Casting Out from Heaven

"Even when he was cast out of heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since only the service of love can be acceptable to God, the allegiance of his creatures must rest upon a conviction of his justice and benevolence. *The inhabitants of heaven and of the worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice of God in the destruction of Satan*. Had he been immediately blotted out of existence, some would have served God from fear rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, he must more fully develop *his principles*, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, and ***that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of his law might be forever placed beyond all question.***"¹⁵

¹⁰ Thiel, Bob, Ph.D.; *Were the Ten Commandments "Nailed to the Cross"*; www.cowriter.com/tenc.htm

¹¹ White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, September 7, 1891 (paraphrased).

¹² White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 36-38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42 (emphasis added).

Satan's New Charge after Being Cast Out of Heaven

3. "God could not be just, he urged, and yet show mercy to the sinner."¹⁶

Christ's Birth and Perfect Life Neutralized Charges 1 and 2

Christ's Death on the Cross Neutralized Charge 3

"Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe.... The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken."¹⁷

Satan's Final Charge after the Cross

4. Another deception was now to be brought forward. Satan declared that mercy destroyed justice, that *the death of Christ abrogated the Father's law*.¹⁸

Still a To-be-Resolved Issue

"Here will come the last conflict of the great controversy [over the law]."¹⁹

End-Time Saints Must Understand the Issue of the Law and its Binding Nature

"Had it been possible for the law to be changed or abrogated, then Christ need not have died. But to abrogate the law would be to immortalize transgression, and place the world under Satan's control. It was because the law was changeless, because man could be saved only through obedience to its precepts, that Jesus was lifted up on the cross. Yet the very means by which Christ established the law Satan represented as destroying it."²⁰

The Cross did not Resolve all Issues for the Angels

"The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in *the great controversy*. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, *Satan's existence must be continued*. Man as well as angels *must see the contrast* between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness."²¹

How Will that Final Charge be Resolved?

By the perfect obedience to the law by a final group of people called the 144,000. That is a beautiful deep study. They become part of the final vindication and glorification of God's character before the universe. They become the answer to the "final" issue in the Great Controversy.

¹⁶ White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 761.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 763 (emphasis added).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 762-763.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 761 (emphasis added).

“The plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice – its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man – the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: ‘Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.’ John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.”²²

“The Saviour came to glorify the Father by the demonstration of His love; so the Spirit was to glorify Christ by revealing His grace to the world. The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”²³

The risk ahead for God’s people? Being charged as law-less by a world bent on defying God’s precepts. The reward? Being identified as a law-full citizen in God’s kingdom.

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²² White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 68-69.

²³ White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.