

# Discerning a biblical and balanced view of grace.

## A. SOUTHLAND CHURCH'S POSITION ON GRACE, SALVATION, REPENTANCE, THE LAW, AND WORKS.

1. ***We believe that salvation is by faith alone and that no human being can earn salvation through good works.*** Earning salvation through good behavior (works) is impossible for two reasons:
  - ◇ First, every human being has sinned (Rom 3:23) and is born with a sin nature (Rom 5:12), utterly incapable of living up to God's holy standard (Isa 53:6; 1 John 1:8; James 3:2). It is impossible for any human being to please God on human effort alone; apart from God's help, our best attempts at goodness are still nothing more than filthy rags (Isa 64:6) because human nature is fallen and wicked to the core. A person who is covered from head to toe in mud will taint everything they touch with mud, no matter how hard they try not to. So too a person whose very nature is sinful will taint everything they touch with sin, despite their best efforts not to, simply because their human nature is by default covered in, and made up of, sin.
  - ◇ But even supposing for a moment that a person *could* be good and holy by their own human effort alone, apart from God – an utter impossibility as we just showed, but even just supposing – they would *still* not possess eternal life since eternal life is found only in Jesus. In such a case, the person would be spotlessly clean but they would still be dead; kind of like a dead corpse that has been perfectly cleaned by the embalmer – it might be clean, but that doesn't mean it's alive! So too, the Bible tells us that Jesus is life and that He is the source of all life (John 1:4; 5:26; 11:25; 1 John 5:11) – thus, no one can have life apart from Him, no matter how good they are. By definition, according to the Bible, death is separation from God – so even supposing that a person could be holy on their own effort apart from God, they would still be dead and on their way to an eternity of separation from Him, which is hell.
2. ***Salvation is a gift given in response to repentance that comes from faith.***
  - ◇ God does not give us salvation because we have earned it (in that case it would be a wage), nor because we did something to deserve it (in that case it would be a reward); the Bible is clear that salvation is neither a wage, nor a reward, but rather a gift (Rom 5:15; 6:23; 2 Cor 9:15; Eph 2:8)! God gives it freely, out of His loving kindness and goodness and generosity, in response to repentance that comes from faith.
3. ***Though salvation is a gift which cannot be earned through good works, or obeying the commandments, or human effort, we wish to affirm the absolute importance of human effort, obedience to the commandments, and good works as necessary components of a life of faith.***
  - ◇ Some Christians today, in their zeal to affirm the truth that salvation cannot be earned through good works, or obeying the commandments, or human effort, go too far in their statements *against* effort, obedience, and good works. In their minds it is considered legalistic and harmful for a believer to ever exhort another Christian to obey God's commandments, or to expend effort in order to do good works and follow God.
  - ◇ A quick survey of Scripture, however, will quickly show that this is an exaggerated and distorted view of God's grace and the gift of salvation. Though the Bible clearly teaches that salvation cannot be earned through human efforts or obeying the Law, that is not the same thing as saying that human efforts and obeying the Law are harmful or unnecessary to the Christian walk. Quite the opposite! Though a person cannot *earn salvation* through human effort or obedience to the commandments or good works, the Bible is very clear that these things are all absolutely essential components of the believer's walk of faith.

We will flesh this out biblically through the questions below . . .

## B. IS SPIRITUALITY SUPPOSED TO BE EFFORTLESS?

- In their zeal to affirm the truth that salvation is a gift, many Christians reject as ‘works-based salvation’ any teaching which exhorts believers to expend effort in pursuing holiness and following Jesus. In their minds, if spirituality is not effortless, then that means the believer is relying on themselves, rather than on Jesus. A quick survey of Scripture, however, shows us that this is a distorted and unbiblical view – in reality, human effort is often the outworking of God’s grace in our lives, and part of the sacrifice of love we give to Him. Of course, we wish to affirm the truth that the Christian life isn’t supposed to be *all* effort and struggle, and certainly, the closer we walk with Christ, the more He changes us and the more we will find that the fruit of the Spirit will come to us naturally . . . but the Christian life will still require, according to the Scriptures, a healthy dose of human effort and struggle.
- But let us ask Jesus and the apostles what they think about effortless spirituality:<sup>1</sup>
  1. **“Jesus, do you believe in effortless spirituality?”**
    - a) *Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you will seek to enter and will not be able.* – Luke 13:24<sup>2</sup>
    - b) *No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.* – Luke 9:62
    - c) *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. . . . Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. . . . Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.* – Luke 9:23; 14:27, 33
  2. **“Lord, what about the issue of sin? Is our victory over sin supposed to be effortless?”**
    - ◇ *And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ For everyone will be salted with fire.* – Mark 9:43-49
  3. **“Paul, do you believe in effortless spirituality?”**
    - ◇ *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.* – 1 Cor 9:24-27 (NIV)
  4. **“But Paul, what about the issue of sin? Is our victory over sin supposed to be effortless?”**
    - ◇ *But as for you, O man of God, flee these things [sinful temptations]. PURSUE righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. <sup>12</sup> FIGHT the good fight of the faith. TAKE HOLD of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.* – 1 Timothy 6:11-12
    - ◇ *Flee from sexual immorality. . . . Flee from idolatry. . . . Flee youthful passions and PURSUE righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.* – 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14;

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<sup>1</sup> These questions and passages are taken out of Michael Brown’s fantastic book *Hyper-Grace: exposing the dangers of the modern grace message* (chapter 9; pages 138-145 in the paperback edition, 2014), with some minor modifications and reordering.

<sup>2</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

2 Timothy 2:22. None of this looks like it is supposed to be effortless or automatic – clearly the Christian life requires strenuous effort in order to overcome sin, and live in holiness and walk with Jesus!

5. **“But Paul, wasn’t your own spiritual walk effortless?”**

- ◇ *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I PRESS ON to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and STRAINING forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Let those of us who are mature think this way . . . – Philippians 3:10-15*
- ◇ *Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. – Colossians 1:28-29*
- ◇ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. – 2 Timothy 4:7*

6. **What about the apostle Peter? “Peter, in Christ we have effortless victory over sin, right?”**

- ◇ *For this very reason, MAKE EVERY EFFORT to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be ALL THE MORE DILIGENT to confirm your calling and election, for if you PRACTICE these qualities you will never fall. <sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. – 2 Peter 1:5-11 (ESV)*
- ◇ *Therefore, beloved [speaking to believers], since you are waiting for these, BE DILIGENT to be found by him [God] without spot or blemish [ie. holy], and at peace. – 2 Pet 3:14*

Why would Peter tell us here to be diligent to be found by God as holy, if holiness for the Christian is automatic and effortless? If language has any meaning at all, then the clear warning of this passage is that those who are *not* diligent in their pursuit of holiness may end up in impurity, and be found by Jesus with ‘spot and blemish.’

- ◇ *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. – 1 Peter 2:11 (NIV)*

7. **“So, author of Hebrews, what do you have to say about effortless holiness and spirituality – does such a thing exist?”**

- ◇ *Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup> In your STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. – Hebrews 12:3-4*
- ◇ *STRIVE for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one FAILS to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; <sup>16</sup> that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. – Hebrews 12:14-16*

- ◇ *Therefore, while the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. . . . Let us therefore STRIVE to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. – Hebrews 4:1, 11*
- ◇ *Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For you have need of ENDURANCE, so that when you have DONE the will of God you may receive what is promised. – Hebrews 10:35-36*
- ◇ *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us RUN WITH ENDURANCE the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:1-2*

- **CONCLUSION:** Holiness is certainly not something any human being could ever attain by human effort alone. Impossible! Only God is holy, and only He is capable of making a person holy. With this in mind, however, it is also clear from Scripture that holiness is not something God will work out in people apart from their partnering with Him by giving Him their best efforts! Let me repeat this: we cannot attain holiness only by our human efforts, but God also won't just work out His holiness in us if we lie around doing nothing, waiting for Him to do everything. In fact, in a person who is walking closely with the Lord, strenuous effort is sometimes the sign of God's power working in that person's life (Col 1:29) because God has chosen to work, quite often, *through* our efforts.

We see this same principle at work in the way God provides for us materially, in terms of providing shelter and food and clothing for us. In Matthew chapter 6 Jesus promises that the Father will always provide what we need. But does this promise hold true for Christians who are lazy and refuse to work? No! God chooses to provide for us *as we partner with Him* and do our part by getting a job and working hard.

## C. DOES GOD SEE US AS PERFECT AND HOLY NO MATTER WHAT WE DO?

### 1. *When a Christian sins does God continue to see them as if they are holy and pure and righteous no matter what they do? Does God the Father only see Jesus' righteousness when He looks at a Christian?*

This is a common claim made by some Christians today, yet it is not Scriptural. Consider the following passages:

- a) Jesus said this to the Christians at Sardis: *To the church in Sardis write . . . I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete IN THE SIGHT of My God. Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.* – Revelation 3:1-4
  - ◆ In this passage Jesus clearly tells the Christians at Sardis that He knows their *WORKS*. In other words, He does not see them as holy no matter what they do, He sees exactly what they are *doing*. And He says, 'I have not found your works complete in the sight of My God.' In other words, their behavior was falling far short of His expectations!
  - ◆ Furthermore, He goes on to say that only a few people in the church of Sardis were left who had not soiled their garments. But this means that in God's eyes many other people in the church at Sardis *had* soiled their spiritual garments and were *no longer* worthy to walk with Jesus dressed in white. This one passage alone is all the proof that is needed that Christians who walk in sin and apathy are not seen by God as being holy and pure and righteous. They need to repent and be forgiven and turn back to Him!
- b) And how about Jesus' words to the Christians at Laodicea? *"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!"<sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.<sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."* – Revelation 3:14-17
  - ◆ So much for the idea that God only sees Jesus' righteousness when He looks at a believer! In this passage He clearly rebukes the Laodicean believers saying 'I know your works,' and because of the apathy and wickedness of their behavior, He saw them not as holy and pure and righteous, but as 'wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.'
- c) *So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every EFFORT to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.* – 2 Peter 3:14 (NIV)
  - ◆ Why would the apostle Peter tell Christians to make 'every effort' to be found spotless and blameless before the Lord, if God already automatically sees them as holy and pure and righteous no matter what they do? Obviously, being 'found spotless, blameless and at peace with God' is not automatic.
- d) *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us [believers] purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.* – 2 Corinthians 7:1 (NIV)
  - ◆ Why should believers have to purify themselves if God already automatically sees them as pure and holy and righteous no matter what they do? And how could anything 'contaminate' our 'spirits' if God sees us as pure and holy even when we sin?
- e) *See to it that no one [speaking to believers] misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.* – Hebrews 12:15 (NIV)
  - ◆ How can believers ever be defiled if God only ever always only sees them as holy and pure and righteous?
- f) Annanias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) – God killed these two believers for lying! Obviously, He does not always automatically see Christians as holy and pure and righteous in His sight, no matter what they do.

- g) Did God see the Corinthian Christians as perfectly holy and pure and righteous in Christ? No! *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.* <sup>28</sup> *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.* <sup>29</sup> *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.* <sup>30</sup> *That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.* <sup>31</sup> *But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.* <sup>32</sup> *When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.* – 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 (NIV)
- h) **And what about those passages of Scripture which clearly state that God disciplines those He loves?** If God only sees a believer as being pure and righteous and holy, no matter what they do, how could He ever discipline people? A loving Father only disciplines His children when He sees them doing something wrong! (See Heb 12:6-17; 1 Cor 11:31-32)

**2. Furthermore, if God only ever sees the Christian as perfectly pure and holy in Christ, why does the New Testament repeatedly exhort us to find out what pleases God?**

- ◇ The direct implication of this is that it is possible to live in a way that is not pleasing to God, which means that He does not always automatically only just see us as perfectly pure and holy and righteous in Christ, no matter what we do.
- a) *“Find out what pleases the Lord.”* – Ephesians 5:10 (NIV)
- b) *“So we make it our goal to please Him.”* – 2 Corinthians 5:9 (NIV)
- c) *“And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.”* – Colossians 1:10 (NIV)
- d) *“Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.”* – 1 Thessalonians 4:1 (NIV)
- e) *“We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.”* – 1 Thessalonians 2:4 (NIV)

**3. Does God ever get angry at Christians or judge Christians because of sin?**

- ◇ It is claimed by some Christians today that God does not because He can only see us as pure and righteous and holy in Christ. What then are we to make of the many passages in the New Testament which clearly state that God holds Christians living under the New Covenant responsible for their sins?
- a) *For it is time for JUDGMENT to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us [believers], what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> And “if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” – **1 Pet 4:17-18 (ESV)***
- b) *For if we [believers] go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth [after becoming Christians], there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a fearful expectation of JUDGMENT, and a FURY of fire that will consume the adversaries. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” [believers] <sup>31</sup> It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. – **Heb 10:26-31 (ESV)***
- c) *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself [look for sin], then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks JUDGMENT on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died*

[God's judgment today can even include killing believers!]. <sup>31</sup> But IF we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But WHEN we [believers] are JUDGED by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world [God judges us and disciplines us, sometimes severely, in order to keep us from Hell]. – **1 Cor 11:27-32 (ESV)**

d) For we [Paul speaking of himself and all believers] must ALL appear before the JUDGMENT seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. – **2 Cor 5:10 (ESV)**

◆ So much for the teaching that God doesn't judge Christians. We will *all* stand before Him someday and receive our due for things done *both* good and evil. For some Christians, this judgment will end up sending them to Hell (Matt 7:21-23; Heb 10:26-31), for others this judgment will mean a severe punishment that leaves them barely making it into heaven alive (2 Cor 3:15), and for others it will mean tremendous reward (Matt 25:21).

e) He [God] will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup> but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. – **Rom 2:6-8 (ESV)**

◆ Some people may attempt to argue that this passage is only talking about non-believers; that only non-believers will be judged according to their works. But if this is true, why does Paul say in verse 7 that God will give eternal life to 'those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality?' Is God going to give non-believers eternal life?!? No. This passage is being addressed to both believers and unbelievers, which means that God will reward or judge *believers* according to their works, just like He will non-believers.

◆ Of course, believers who repent will be forgiven of their sins – but those who do not repent, need to! This passage proves that God does not just automatically see all Christians as pure and spotless and holy, no matter what they do.

- **CONCLUSION:** It is certainly true that there is no condemnation for those who are genuinely following Christ (Rom 8:1)! Such a person's sins are forgiven, and God is gracious and merciful to them no matter how many times they might fall. But this does not mean that God sees Christians who live in sin as pure and holy! God disciplines Christians who are immature, to bring them to maturity, and He judges with wrath those believers who live in apathy and sin without repentance.

## D. SIN, THE CHRISTIAN, AND THE NEW COVENANT.

### 1. *Under the New Covenant is it possible for a Christian to sin?*

#### ◇ **If no, then why does the New Testament repeatedly say that we *do* sin?**

- a) *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* – 1 John 1:8 (ESV)
- b) *For we all stumble in many ways.* – James 3:2 (ESV)
- c) *If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.* – 1 John 5:16 (ESV) In this passage the apostle John specifically talks about what to do in the case where you see a Christian brother or sister living in sin! In light of the many New Testament passages like this one, how can anybody argue that it is impossible for a Christian to sin?!?
- d) *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us . . .* – Hebrews 12:1 (ESV) If it was not possible for believers to sin, why would the writer of Hebrews tell us to lay aside the ‘sin which clings so closely?’
- e) *Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.* – 1 Corinthians 6:18 (ESV) If it was not possible for believers to sin, why would Paul tell us as believers to flee from sexual immorality?!?
- f) *But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”* – 2 Tim 2:19 (ESV) Paul here clearly states that Christians (people who ‘name the name of the Lord’ and who belong to the Lord) need to depart from iniquity! In other words, Christians need to stop sinning . . . which means it is possible for Christians under the New Covenant to sin.
- g) And there are so many other examples – dozens of other passages could be cited, like Acts 5:1-11, where two early Christians, Ananias and Sapphira, are killed by God for lying! And the many dozens of New Testament passages where Christians are told to abstain from various sins (eg. Col 3:5-9; 1 Pet 2:1; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22, etc., etc.)

### 2. *If it is possible for a Christian to sin, then we have to define what sin is – What is sin?*

This is a real problem for believers who think the Law has been cancelled under the New Covenant: if there are no commandments to follow, then what constitutes a sin? Is it a sin for a Christian to commit adultery or murder or bestiality? Christians everywhere would wholeheartedly agree, ‘Yes!’ But if those things are sin, that means there is still a standard of right and wrong out there somewhere, by which we know that some things are right and that some things are wrong . . . which is what a law is, *by definition*. A law is simply a rule that tells us what is right or wrong.

And this is exactly how the Bible defines sin: law-breaking.

- a) *Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin IS lawlessness.* – **1 John 3:4 (NIV)**
- b) Paul says the same in Romans 6, as well: *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.* – **Romans 6:19 (ESV)** Thus, according to Paul himself in Romans 6, sin (ie. ‘impurity’) is lawlessness (ie. law-breaking).

## E. HAS THE LAW BEEN CANCELLED?

### 1. *Under the New Covenant are Christians no longer anywhere in the New Testament asked to obey any Old Testament laws?*

- ◇ (Ephesians 6:1-3). Then why does Paul explicitly quote the Ten Commandments in Ephesians 6:1-3 when he tells children to obey their parents? He says, quoting Exodus 20:12, “Honor your father and mother” and then goes on to say, “this is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” If Paul believed the Old Testament laws were all cancelled, why did he quote this law to us, expecting us to follow it? Clearly, Paul’s default position was that the Ten Commandments are still in effect today and that we are still expected to follow them!
- ◇ Furthermore Jesus, when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, three times responded to Satan’s temptations by quoting the Old Testament Law as authoritative in determining right and wrong (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).
- ◇ Incidentally, all the rest of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament as well, except the Sabbath,<sup>3</sup> as the table here clearly shows:

	Old Testament	New Testament
1. First Commandment – “You shall have no other Gods before Me.”	Ex 20:3; Deut 5:7	Mt 4:10; Lk 4:8
2. Second Commandment – “You shall not make any images or idols.”	Ex 20:4-6; Deut 5:8-10	Acts 15:20; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-20; Eph 5:5
3. Third Commandment – “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.”	Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11	1 Tim 6:1; James 2:7
4. Fifth Commandment – “Honor your father and mother”	Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16	Mt 15:4-9; 19:19; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20; Rom 1:29-30; Eph 6:1-3
5. Sixth Commandment – “You shall not murder”	Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17	Mt 5:21-22; 19:18; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20; Rom 1:29-30; 13:9
6. Seventh Commandment – “You shall not commit adultery”	Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18	Mt 5:27-28; 19:18; Mk 10:11-12, 19; Lk 16:18; 18:20; Rom 7:2-3; 13:9
7. Eighth Commandment – “You shall not steal”	Ex 20:15; Deut 5:19	Mt 19:18; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20; rom 13:9; Eph 4:28; 1 Pet 4:15; Rev 9:21
8. Ninth Commandment – “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”	Ex 20:16; Deut 5:20	Mt 19:18; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20; Acts 5:3-4; Rom 13:9; Eph 4:25
9. Tenth Commandment – “You shall not covet”	Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21	Lk 12:15; Rom 1:29; 7:7; 13:9; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:3,5

So if the Ten Commandments were all repeated by Jesus, as well as Paul and the rest of the authors of the New Testament, then that means we still have to obey them under the New Covenant! How then can it be said that they have been cancelled under the New Covenant?

<sup>3</sup> The Sabbath was explicitly annulled under the New Covenant, and Paul goes to pains to point this out in several places.

## 2. ***Under the New Covenant should believers not feel convicted of sin when they break an Old Testament command?***

THEN WHY IN ACTS 23:5 DID PAUL FEEL CONVICTED OF SIN AND REPENT FOR BREAKING AN OLD TESTAMENT LAW? Here's the story: *And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.* <sup>3</sup> *Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?"* <sup>4</sup> *Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?"* <sup>5</sup> *And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"* – **Acts 23:2-5 (ESV)**

This is a very interesting story. Paul rebukes the high priest with sharp words for striking him without cause. But then, when he is informed that the man he rebuked was the high priest, he repents for doing wrong. Why does he feel guilty? How does he know that he has done something wrong? He explains that he has done wrong because he has disobeyed an *Old Testament law*, citing the law in Exodus 22:28 that a person should never 'speak evil of a ruler of their people.' When Paul makes this statement he is only a couple of years from the end of his life, and has already written a number of his epistles. How can it then be said by people that Paul considered the Law to be cancelled in the life of a believer?

Thus we see that the apostle Paul was convicted in his own life when he broke the laws of the Old Testament – proving that the Law is still in effect for Christians living under the New Covenant. In fact, in Acts 21:24 the apostle James and Peter and the other leaders of the Church state clearly that both they and Paul lived in observance to the Law.

### **F. IS IT DEATH TO HAVE TO FOLLOW RULES?**

There are some Christians today who teach that the Law is death, and that following rules is nothing more than religion and death. They also state that Christians who try to follow the laws found in Scripture are only hurting themselves and bringing condemnation and death on themselves spiritually.

Of course, we wholeheartedly agree with these people that if you *replace* an actual relationship with Jesus with mere rule-following, that certainly is death! To try to please God *only* by following rules is not only impossible, it is empty and lifeless and awful. There is no salvation or joy to be had in mere rule-following alone.

Where so many Christians go wrong today, however, is in thinking that the two things are mutually exclusive; that you can't have a relationship with Jesus and have rules to follow at the same time. False! In reality, the two go hand in hand – *within* our relationship with Jesus there are some rules to follow. We don't get life from those commandments – life comes from knowing Jesus – but part of having that relationship with Jesus means there are some rules we need to keep as part of the relationship.

A good analogy here would be marriage. If a marriage is based only on rule-keeping – 'you have to do this,' 'I have to do this' – that will be a dreary and terrible marriage. A great marriage will be based on love; two people gladly appreciating each other and building intimacy with each other. But that doesn't mean that in a great marriage there aren't any rules. Even in the best marriages there are rules: Be faithful to your spouse, don't commit adultery; honor your spouse; submit to your spouse; be thoughtful; fight fair (and there are all kinds of rules that go with this one); when you are angry don't use bad language or name-calling; don't spend extravagant amounts of money without discussing with your spouse first; etc., etc. The rules and the relationship go hand in hand!

Rules *without* a relationship are death, but that doesn't mean that in a good relationship you won't have any rules – some rules are necessary as a boundary within which the relationship can flourish. Same with our relationship with Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

And this is why we find throughout the New Testament that there are actually a number of rules that believers need to follow, and this is also why throughout the Bible, God's laws are said to be life, not death.

1. ***Obeying God's laws, and meditating on them, brings life not death.***

◇ Consider the following passages of Scripture:

a) *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup> the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup> the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. <sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. <sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. – Psalm 19:7-11*

b) All of Psalm 119!

2. ***Under the New Covenant are believers not supposed to have to follow any rules?***

◇ It is often said by Christians that the Old Covenant was all about rules, while New Covenant is all about relationship and love. This is false in so many ways. The Old Covenant was not all about rules, and the New Covenant is not against rules. In both the Old and New Covenants God's people were/are saved by faith in God, and in both covenants God's people are expected to obey God's rules!

1) *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. – 1 John 5:2-3*

2) *Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. – John 14:21 (NIV)*

3) *Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. – 1 John 2:4-6*

4) *Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. – 1 John 3:24*

5) *If you love me, you will keep my commandments. – John 14:15*

6) *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. – John 15:10 (NIV)*

- **CONCLUSION:** It is not the Law which brings death to Christians, it is sin! Sin is what brought death to the human race, the Law is merely that which points out our sin. As such, it sometimes feels like the Law is bringing death to

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<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, I might add, as Christians living in Canada today we have many rules our government imposes on us as well: is it death to obey these rules? Is it death to us to stay within the speed limit? No, rules like these keep us safe. Is it death to us to obey the rules and pay our taxes? No, our taxes pay for our roads and health care and many other such things! How is it, then, that we can accept that following our government's human rules is not death, but somehow we have gotten to this place where we teach that trying to follow God's rules as recorded in Scripture is death?!?

us, but in fact it is sin that kills us, not the Law. Of course, this is not to say that the Law brings life – only Jesus brings life! But part of following Jesus is obeying His commands.