

Keeping God's Commandments in the 21st Century

Although it might come as a surprise to some, the commandments of God are not limited to the ten listed in Exodus 20. In fact, the New Testament teaches that those ten commandments were nailed to the cross of Christ (Ephesians 2:13-16; Colossians 2:14). The Old Testament, including the ten commandments and the law of Moses in its entirety, no longer functions as our authority but does continue to serve effectively as a source for our learning (Romans 15:4).

Even though we are not under the law of Moses and its commandments, we are nonetheless subject to commandments that God has given in the New Testament. The expiatory death of Jesus Christ did not eliminate the need for commandments from God. The Lord still demands obedience (Matthew 7:21-23). Where there is a demand for obedience, there is also the existence of something that needs to be obeyed. How could God hold us accountable for disobedience if He had not told us what He wants us to do? He has given us commandments in the New Testament, commandments that are to be obeyed.

Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15.) Soon after making that statement He added, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:14). These words were uttered by our Lord in the hours just prior to His being taken away to "trial" by the "band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees" (John 18:3). In this setting, Jesus more than once stressed the importance of obeying God's commandments. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." (John 14:21). He Himself gave a commandment in this same context. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." (John 15:12). "These things I command you, that ye love one another." (John 15:17).

Later, Paul wrote of God's commandments for those of us under the new covenant. "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Romans 13:9). Some look at this passage and say that here Paul repeated five of the ten commandments of Moses. They continue by saying that all of the ten commandments save that regarding keeping the Sabbath are repeated in the New Testament. While that may be the case, any commandment found in the Old Testament that is also in the New is not authoritative today because it is in the Old Testament. These commandments in Romans 13:9 are authoritative because they are part and parcel of the covenant that Jesus died to establish (Hebrews 9:15). We should obey the instructions of Romans 13:9 because we shall be judged by these words in this particular passage (John 12:48).

The evidence for the existence of commandments in the New Testament is abundant. Acts 17:30 says that God "commandeth all men every where to repent." The word "commandment" does not even have to be connected with the instruction for us to know that it is something that God expects us to do. II Thessalonians 1:7-9 reads, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Since obedience is demanded, and since it is commands that are obeyed, we can understand from this passage that not obeying God's commandments leads to eternal damnation.

God has revealed His commandments through His written Word, the Bible. In order to know what He wants from us, we must read, study and apply that Word. As John wrote in the closing moments before the pen of Divine inspiration was laid down once and for all, "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).