

The Way of Life

The Ten Commandments Fulfilled in Christ

What are the ten commandments?

An outdated list of rules? We are talking about rules written about 1,500 years before Christ. 3 and a half thousand years ago. Surely, in all that time, mankind has improved the list. Surely, in the 21st century, we can set a better standard than 3.5 millenia ago.

Sometimes you see revised commandments. People chuck out the ones they don't like. Why should the Sabbath get a mention? Surely the Sabbath can't matter much. And hasn't God missed a few thing important things out? Even the church doesn't seem very interested in them. "A survey of Anglican vicars in Britain found that .. only 68 of the 200 surveyed could name all 10 of the Bible's Ten Commandments." (Source: UPI) And lets remember we probably can't do it either.

But they are not outdated. God's law is ancient but it is perfect. There is no better standard for living because. God is good and he is the ever-living. His law defines the difference between good and bad, between living and dying. His law will never be surpassed nor updated.

Jesus said "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." Not even the smallest part of the Law shall be dropped or updated. The Law stands. You may be surprised to learn quite how relevant and essential God's original instructions are to us today.

Maybe we should consider them a to-do list? They are a nice idea but they cannot be kept. We might call them the ten suggestions? Many suggest you should just try your best and that'll be good enough.

But they are not the ten commitments. They are the commands of God. They are not an optional extra. God means for us to keep them. All of them. James wrote that: "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." (James 2:8-10)

You know the analogy of how putting one bad egg in your omelette ruins the whole dish. It is the same with the law. It is meaningless to keep some of the law. If break any part of it you are a lawbreaker. And check out how James applies the law. He sets quite a standard. He says you may love your neighbour as yourself in every way except you prefer one to another. In that case, you are guilty of breaking the whole law.

Many churches resist teaching from the Old Testament as being part of the Old Covenant. Away with your rules, they say. We live under grace, don't you know. No nasty rules for us.

But Jesus clearly taught that the law is relevant to believers. He spent most of the sermon on the mount, preaching the ten commandments. The Jews had wrongly interpreted the law as a set of rules which you need to follow precisely to get you God's

favour. They had failed to see the spirit of the law – what it revealed about their hearts and about their God. Jesus sought to explain the commandments in light of his life, the new way of life he was bringing to the world.

So he told them: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5: 27-28)) Jesus intended to change hearts not merely restrict behaviour.

The New Covenant has replaced the Old Covenant but in a sense the Old Covenant is part of the New Covenant. For the New Covenant completes the Old Covenant. Under the Old Covenant God promised to lead the Jews if they kept his law. They failed. The New Covenant was completed in the blood of Jesus. By the grace and sacrifice of Jesus and the victory of his spirit over death a new way has opened for us. So by receiving Him and living in Him we can fulfil the Old Covenant through Him.

Jesus did not come to replace the law but to fulfil it. He said "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." (Matt 5: 17).

And here is the heart of the matter. The commandments are fulfilled in Jesus.

God used the ten commandments to lay down a blueprint for life. They are the maker's instructions for life. You're going to make a mess of your ikea kitchen if you don't follow the instructions and you're going to make a mess of life without following the ten commandments.

The commandments define a way of life. What is the way of life? Jesus declared himself both the way and the life. Jesus is the fulfilment of the way of the life revealed in the ten commandments. He is the realisation of God's blueprint for life.

Jesus kept every command. He always has. The commandments reflect the nature of God and so the nature of Jesus reflects the commandments. John wrote that in Jesus 'the Life' appeared. Jesus is the everlasting God. He is himself eternal life. Jesus defined the eternal life he promises us as knowing the living God. Jesus is the Life.

He came to earth to become our way to God, that through Him we could relate to God. Hence, He is the way to the life in God. Only He has the power to give His Life to us. The only life we can have is that we share in Him. Jesus is the way to life and the way of life.

When Jesus said He had come to fulfil the Law was he referring only to himself? Had he had come only to show that he could keep the Law. He did come to display the holiness of God but he came for us. He came out of love for us. He came to help us get into a relationship with our wonderful God. He came to be the missing link. To give us the power we need to keep the commandments and enter into relationship with God.

God did not give the ten commandments to make us like him. They have no power of righteousness in them. Paul wrote that God gave the commandments to Israel that [*we would know what sin is*]. The commandments expose our sin, our ungodly behaviour. At the same time they reveal God. They reflect the nature of God: his sufficiency, his truth, etc.

So Jesus addressed himself to us. He addressed the commandments to us. And he taught that “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same 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. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5: 19-20)

Where is the church that thinks the commandments are of the Old Covenant? And the church that thinks they aren't relevant for believers today? And where are the people that teach and practice the commandments? And what is the standard? Is it try your best and that will do?

Please don't be confused: I am not preaching salvation by following the law. The Pharisees were guilty of thinking that by keeping all of the law could you be righteous. So they worked like crazy to keep it and where they couldn't they covered that up. And Jesus judged them for it.

Let me say once and for all: we believe salvation comes by faith alone. You cannot earn salvation. Instead, I am saying that salvation is realised in action. I am not saying we live by the law. We live by the spirit.

We have a confused fear of legalism and it drives me nuts. This fear of legalism annoys me because it is resulting in an unholy church and a world that thinks the gospel says: sin as you please and just ask forgiveness. The world scoffs at such nonsense. And they are right. It is nonsense.

We live under the amazing grace of God. There is no condemnation for those living in Christ Jesus. But grace cannot be twisted. Grace is a gift to be received constantly. It is not a passport you stuff in your pocket and forget about. You cannot receive and benefit from God's grace and reject it at the same time. You cannot say God forgives me for my lying as you intentionally chose to lie.

No. The standard of living has been set forever. We are to follow the commandments. The meaning of grace is that God will forgive us when we fail. And this forgiveness and his life in us can help us change.

And change we must. Isaiah wrote that in repentance is our salvation (Is 30:15). In repenting, in turning from our misbehaviour we are working out the salvation of our souls. Peter wrote of the joy that comes from standing the test in the time of trial. He says we have joy in such moments because we are receiving the goal of our faith: the

salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:8). As we choose to do right when it hurts because we believe, we are changed, our souls are being saved from their bondage to decay.

So the commandments define the way we should live. A way walked by Jesus. The way for us to follow. And Jesus is not just the example of their fulfilment he is the power by which we can fulfil them. As you know Paul writes extensively on these subjects in his letter to the Romans. He explains that believers live by a new law. The law of the Spirit of life. He does not mean some wishy washy spiritual way of life. He means we live, we walk the way of life, by the power of the Spirit in us – prompting and empowering us. We are not try and fulfil the law merely by repeating its precepts. But by a new way in Christ.

And the commandments are a blueprint of a community that speaks to a broken world. A community that proves it has something to say by the quality of its behaviour. To a world that has forgotten what is good and what is bad.

God's intent is to build a community of nations that will be a light to the whole world. First by its behaviour and secondly by its words. A holy and radiant community. God's word of love to a dying world. God called Israel to build such a community. Without Jesus, it failed. God is calling his church to make known his manifold wisdom. If Jesus is truly the head of the church, his glory will shine through us and all around.

God has plenty to say about the ways of the world. But how can we communicate it if we do not know it. How can we know it if we have not lived it.

This afternoon I am going to watch the New England Patriots play the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. It should be fun. But how should I get there? Any suggestions? *leaflets*

There are a few ways to get there. And a best way. In this respect, Jesus is different: Jesus is the only way to life. Only Jesus can lead us to the destination because He is the destination. Hence the early Christians were known as people of THE way. And I have entitled our series THE way of life. This is not a way of life. It is the only way. It is the way of our eternal God. The way he shaped us to live.

I have mentioned the way to Wembley to highlight that knowing the way is not enough. I now know the way to Wembley but I am not there. There are no hot dogs and cheerleaders here. In this sense, the Way of Christ is the same. Knowing the way of life is not going to get you there. If you want to get to Wembley, you must take the metropolitan line and stay on it.

In the same way Paul taught Timothy to “take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” (1 Tim 6:12). And having described the life available to us in Christ in Philippians 3 Paul wrote: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think

differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained” (Phil 3:12-15)

Paul knew he had to take hold of the life for which Christ had taken hold of him. He did not sit on his laurels thinking he had already obtained the life. For the way of life is an ongoing journey forward unto perfection. So Paul’s attitude was to forget what was behind, because that could no longer be life, and to strain towards what is ahead, always looking to receive more of the life of Christ and move towards perfection in Him.

The way of life requires ongoing action, constant action, until the end. We do not have the life already, we must be constantly taking hold of it. Constantly forgetting the past and looking to take hold of the life of Christ in this moment.

Not because life is ephemeral and hard to keep hold of but because it is ongoing. Is what happened last week life? No it is past. This plant was once a seed. Is that seed life. No, the life this plant now lives is life. Just as physical life exists in the moment so must spiritual life be lived/received in each moment. You can only say you have life if you are taking it in that moment. If you think you have got it already, you have lost it.

It is with this spirit that we are planning to study the ten commandments. We don’t need another sermon telling us to GO. We need to go. My hope for this series is that we can define the kind of action that is needed. I think the commandments can help us break down the nature of Jesus to understand what His way looks like - so we can understand how we are supposed to go. And be a framework for putting for realising His way in our lives.

We are going to have some wonderfully practical teaching. But, as with all preaching, if we do not carry it out it will be meaningless. Lets take up this vision together. Lets set aside other teaching and other distractions for this season. Lets commit together to understanding Jesus, the way of life, through the lens of the commandments.

Lets study His commandments in our personal time, lets engage carefully with the Sunday teaching, lets discuss the teaching further in our CCGs (the CCG leaders are preparing bible studies on each commandment to follow the relevant Sunday) and lets actually try to live it out. Moment by moment.

We need God to write his commands on our minds: that we may understand them. It is the truth that sets us free. We need to study the commandments, we need to know what they mean, the principles underlying them and how to apply them to the trials we face (as Jesus did on the mount). We cannot live them out if we do not understand them.

We need God to write his commands on our hearts, that we may live them out from the heart. That they may become part of our nature. That our nature may be renewed in his image. That we may develop purer hearts. This was His plan and promise all along.

God has promised that He would write his commands on the hearts and minds of the new covenant people. What did he mean. How will he write on our hearts and minds? As we live them out. As we follow His way by the Spirit. As we follow his

way even when we don't want to we find out the quality of his way. And that is a knowledge that doesn't need to refer to books. It is a knowledge of experience, written through experience on hearts and minds.

Lets commit to this way of life. To humble ourselves to accept God's standard, to repent of our current way of life, to raise our game to meet the standard, to pray where we find weakness and brokenness in ourselves or our brothers, to ask God for grace to fulfil the commandment when the trial comes, to step out in trust and see him transform us in that moment – to transform our actions and in time our hearts and our worlds.

[Kissing girl example. Teaching on truth.]

Acts 2:42 tells us that the early church was 'devoted' to the apostles teaching. We have the apostles teaching. It is recorded in the bible. What does it mean to be devoted to this teaching? Does it mean to think the sermon was good? Or does it mean to be constantly reading the word and doing our utmost to live it out. Can you be devoted to the teaching if you do not do your utmost to live it out?

Paul taught that we must "be transformed by the renewing of our mind" and that we must "take hold of life". This transforming and taking hold happens in action: by by rejecting the worldly way and stepping out in a new way of life.

I hope we can discover the life-giving way of life in Jesus through the commandments and build a community that lives God's way. A holy community, set apart from the broken and selfish ways of the world. A community that displays God's glory to the world. A community where God is pleased to make his home and draw the hurting for healing.

I think we are on that way already. And am planning to invite my friends to hear this teaching. Why don't you? For God's law enlightens the darkness of the world. It exposes falsehood and corrupt practices. It explains why things are going wrong. And it points to a better way. A way through Christ that gives life. Our teaching could not be more relevant. When Jesus saw the crowds following Him they looked to him like sheep without a shepherd. He had compassion on them and this is what he taught. A way of life revealed in the commandments, though misunderstood, and fulfilled in Him. Lets learn to teach God's way.

Choosing to live out the way of life together and building a community to be a beacon to the world should be exciting. But I know I am not speaking to people marching forward in that life. Maybe you are wondering whether you have time for this. It sounds like hard work.

Let me assure you that the way of Christ will not add to your burdens. It will lift them off. Jesus says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (matthew 11:28-30) He does not burden us like the world does. His way is easy. On his way, we can go from strength to strength.

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Pressing On "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained" (Phil 3:12-15)