

TO OBEY



is BETTER than



SACRIFICE

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All we like sheep have gone astray



Adam and Eve leave the garden

TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

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INTRODUCTION – THE LAW OF GOD

This statement, the title of the book, was a turning point in King Saul's life, and spoken to him by Samuel, the prophet who had been appointed by God to anoint him for his life's work. (1 Samuel 15:22)

We have discussed our role as "speaking spirits" in previous books so the purpose of this book is to emphasise the responsibility of all who call themselves Christians, followers of Christ, the Anointed One and His Anointing, to understand this eternal precept of God.

A precept is a rule of conduct which helps us to avoid learning by the hard knocks of bad experiences. The Word is used 21 times in Psalm 119, along with law/s (44), statutes (23), commands (22), Word (of truth) (30), ways (4), wonders (1), promise (12), and decrees (22). In this poem the psalmist's desire is to know how a relationship with God works. Laws refer to the way things are to work – cause and effect. Statutes are permanent principles laid down for the smooth function of a kingdom. Commands are rules which are for specific occasions. Decrees are issued by authority as legal safeguard. These are issued by God to protect us from giving Satan licence in our lives. Promises and wonders are free gifts to be received by those to whom the promises are made. Ways are how God chooses to relate to humans. God's Word is the whole body of God's revelation, written and spoken personally by the Holy Spirit. This

psalm has always interested us as to why the psalmist chooses the different words throughout the psalm, and it makes a very interesting study if we seriously want to learn about obeying God.

Statutes are permanent principles laid down for the smooth function of a kingdom.

CHAPTER 1 HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

God had all His plans from the very beginning, but He intended to teach one precept at a time. The first one was "Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die". (Genesis 2:17)

God did not explain this. Was this a statute or a command, a decree or a precept? There was a promise there too but not a pleasant one.

Adam and Eve did not know that Satan had already been cast down from Heaven for pride and insubordination, and had a score to settle with God. They did not know that Satan was very jealous of these "men" that were to rule the earth as he intended to rule the domain in which God had permitted him to go for the while until his final judgement. Adam and Eve were really just like carefree children who could play in the garden, picking the

flowers, eating the fruits and enjoying the animals, running naked and unashamed.

All they had to do was to **obey** this one command. (v16) For a child (or a child-man) obedience is very simple; in this case do not...but maybe Adam did not take enough notice because Eve did not have the command correct. She had it in her mind that God said, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die".

(Genesis 3:3) Now clearly there were two trees in the middle of the garden. (Genesis 2:9) God had specified that they could eat freely from the tree of life but not from the other. God had also commanded that Adam and Eve were to work in the garden and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15) God therefore had included a decree and a promise with His original command. Interpreting God's Word wrongly comes from a wrong attitude. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:7) This is God's nature, so it is safe to follow His commands without question. **If we think that God's commands are uncaring and unloving we will want to go our own way because we suspect His motives.** If we understand that the one telling us what to do is motivated by love and care we will obey quite readily. This is why Paul wrote that children should obey their parents in the Lord for this is right.

(Ephesians 6:1) "Honour your father and mother – which is the first

*Commands
are rules
which are for
specific
occasions.*

commandment with a promise."

Adam and Eve did not understand God's motives and disobeyed Him. Thus, death came to humankind. (Romans 5:14) The curse brought a spirit of rebellion into the world and Satan had won the first round in the battle for the rule of the earth.

It is really important to believe that the Maker has only good motives and really knows how the world is to function because it is He who made the immutable laws. (James 1:17)

Cain and Abel must have been taught some of the hard lessons that Adam and Eve had learned. Honouring God's precepts brings blessings and disobeying Him causes problems. **Honouring is more than obeying.** The attitude of the heart is the difference between cold obedience and appreciation of the one being obeyed; an acknowledgement that there is wisdom behind the command. However when Cain brought his sacrifice he seems to have had an attitude problem – any offering would do as long as he "obeyed". There was no faith, hope or love in the offering. Abel however, in love, brought his best, chosen with care from his flock, with a desire to bless God. He had faith, hope (expectancy that God would like his offering) and love. Cain was angry that God received Abel's offering because he only looked on outward things and allowed jealousy to overwhelm him. God warned Cain that "sin (disobedience which would break fellowship and connection to God) was crouching at your door; it desires to have you but you must master it". (Genesis 4:7) We must

change our attitude (*mores suos mutare* – Latin – repent) to master sin.

Sacrifices or offerings have always been connected with worship, demonstrating God's worth-ship. Psalm 2:12 says to kiss the Son, lest He be angry. In the Mediterranean cultures kissing is a gesture of honour. Some kiss on both cheeks and some kiss a third time. It is a formality practised from ancient times and is an important tradition for them. It requires focus on the person being so honoured. There is nothing more dishonouring than to focus on something else while greeting someone. God wants us to focus on Him so that we begin to reflect Him rather than the worldly things that seem attractive. This reflection is His glory and His strength. Many times the Psalmist acknowledges this in Psalm 119.

- They do nothing wrong who walk in His ways (v3)
- A young man keeps his way pure by living according to your Word. (v9)
- Your Word is hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you. (v11)
- Your statutes are my delight, my counsellors. (v24)
- Strengthen me according to your Word. Keep me from deceitful ways (v28&29)
- I will walk about in freedom for I have sought out your precepts. (v45)
- I remember your ancient laws...and find comfort in them. (v52)

- The earth is filled with your love...teach me your decrees. (v64)
- You are good and what you do is good; teach me your decrees. (v68)
- The law...is more precious to me than...silver or gold. (v72)
- I have put my hope in your Word. (v81)
- All your commands are trustworthy. (v86)
- Your Word is eternal...your faithfulness continues through all generations. (v90)
- Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you. (v91)
- I will never forget your precepts, for they preserve my life. (v93)
- Your commands make me wiser than my enemies. (v98)
- I have more insight than my teachers for I meditate on your statutes. (v99)
- I have more understanding than the elders for I obey your precepts. (v100)
- My heart is set on keeping your decrees. (v112)
- Sustain me according to your promise and I shall live. (v116)
- Because I consider all your precepts right, I hate every wrong path. (v128)
- Your statutes are wonderful, therefore I obey them. (v129)
- **Make your face shine on your servant and teach me your decrees.** (v136)
- The statutes you have laid down are righteous and fully trustworthy. (v138)

- Your promises have been thoroughly tested and your servant loves them. (v140)
- All your words are true. (v160)
- I rejoice in your promise. (v162)
- Great peace have they who love your law and nothing can make them stumble. (v165)
- May my lips overflow with praise for you teach me your decrees. (v171)
- May my tongue sing of your Word for all your commands are righteous. (v172)
- May your hand be ready to help me for I have chosen your precepts. (v173)
- Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me. (v175)

A precept is a rule of conduct which helps us to avoid learning by the hard knocks of bad experiences.

CHAPTER 2 WHY DID GOD ASK FOR A SACRIFICE?

The first sacrifice in the Bible is the animal that provided the skin to cover Adam's and Eve's nakedness. First things in the Bible are important. Adam and Eve, by their disobedience, lost

the glory covering which was the reflection of God's glory. This is why they felt naked and ashamed. Blood had been shed to cover the sin. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us of this. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (9:22)

The second sacrifice was Cain's and Abel's offering which is mentioned in Chapter 1. This shows that the attitude behind the sacrifice is important. Isaiah wrote that God's grief was that the people honoured Him with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him. Their worship of Him is made up only of rules taught by men. (Isaiah 29:13)

The pattern of worship throughout the Old Testament was animal sacrifice, shed blood. Noah's first act when he came out of the Ark was to use the "clean" animals, God's direct command to him, to sacrifice a burnt offering to God in gratitude for his salvation. The Lord was pleased with this and made Noah a promise and a Covenant. It is interesting to note that if Noah had not obeyed God's instruction to build the Ark he and his family would have drowned with the rest. Noah believed God that it was going to rain, even though he had never seen rain before. Obedience came before the acceptable sacrifice. **Worship of God, giving Him honour, is acceptable when the attitude of the worshipper is simple trust.**

Abram also obeyed God by travelling to the place God asked him to go in faith before it is recorded that he built an altar to worship God. Later when asked by God to sacrifice Isaac he is

confident that God will provide the lamb for the sacrifice. (Genesis 22:8)

Obedience always comes before an acceptable sacrifice. Even Jesus' sacrifice was His response to the will of His Father. He expressed His faith by believing God's Word that He would not be abandoned to the grave and God would not let His Holy One see decay. (Psalm 16:9) Isaiah said it was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer. (Isaiah 53:10) Acceptable sacrifice is submission to God's will, but He is always full of love and is totally trustworthy. God always knows the end from the beginning.

The concept of sacrifice has been warped by the devil whose intention is to kill, steal and destroy. **Sacrifice has come to mean placating an angry god.** Rituals have been devised in all religions, even Christianity. These have given rise to all sorts of superstitions to avoid "bad luck" or "bad karma". This fear plays right into the hands of the devil who thrives on our fears because it proves that we are not perfected in love. (1 John 4:18)

Hebrews 13 urges us to continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (v15&16)

Even though God introduced animal sacrifice in the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesied that whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig's blood, and whoever burns memorial incense,

like one who worships an idol. (Isaiah 66:3) This seems very strange unless we know what God is saying here. **It would seem that if offerings are made ritually without faith and love they are repulsive to God.** A sacrifice is not a sacrifice **to Almighty God** if it is not made according to His way. So much "worship" is done ritually, without faith, so it does not please God at all, but it does play into the hands of the devil.

True sacrifice, therefore, is laying down one's life for one's friends. This involves preferring others to oneself and obedience to God's Holy Spirit because Jesus said you are my friends if you do what I command. (John 15:14) This is not necessarily dying physically but surrendering all worldly attractions to do His will instead. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would see the result of His suffering and be satisfied; He would bring the Light of God to many because they would be justified in God's sight by His sacrifice. (Isaiah 53:11&12)

Laws refer to the way things are to work - cause and effect.

CHAPTER 3 GOD REQUIRES OBEDIENCE

When we look at the Ten Commandments, eight of them are "you shall not..." The only two that are direct commands are to remember to keep the Sabbath holy and to honour your father

and mother. These ten commands are prefaced by a statement, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of slavery". (Exodus 20:2)

If we look at this list in the light of the first chapter we can see that we need to understand God's precepts, the laws of His creation and the power of His spoken (and written) Word. Although they are referred to as commandments, God actually calls them words of the covenant. (Exodus 34:1&27) These precepts are laid down by God as **the way to relate to Him** because the Israelites did not want to meet God at Sinai. They were too frightened by the fire and thunder. Commands are things you DO in obedience. It was the writer of Exodus who named them "Ten Commandments." These were written by the Finger of God. (Exodus 31:18) The Laws of God were all the rest of the specific instructions given to Moses orally on Mount Sinai which the Jewish leaders number at 613.

We could therefore describe the "do not" commandments as warnings against ignoring the precepts of God. Our loving God gives these instructions to help us avoid disasters in our lives and in the lives of those with whom we associate.

The oral instructions which Moses wrote down were, to a large extent, rituals to obey which made it simpler to follow God's plan, just as we give our children rituals to follow, so that they know the steps to achieving a goal. The goal for the Israelites was to demonstrate His loving care and His holiness and righteousness so that others would also want to follow Him. God's awesome

acts were meant to encourage these others to want to be "adopted" into His "chosen people". There are many stories in the Old Testament to show that this happened many times. (eg, Exodus 12:38&48; Joshua 2:11ff; Ruth 1:16) Paul describes it very well when he is speaking in Athens (Acts 17:27) and of his commission in his testimony to Agrippa. (Acts 26:18)

The Israelites promised they would keep the commandments but they disobeyed even before Moses returned from the mountain where God gave him the tables of stone. The whole of the Old Testament is a sorry testimony to their inability to keep the commandments, and God's pleading to them to keep covenant with Him. Obedience is not easy! In fact, without some supernatural help His commands are impossible to keep because fallen man has such a rebellious nature.

Jesus said He came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets but not to abolish it. (Matthew 5:17) Anyone who breaks any one of the Commandments is guilty of breaking all of it. (James 2:10) Jesus' interpretation of the Law is even more strict than the Pharisees allowed. "Do not murder" becomes "do not be angry with a brother" and "do not call anyone a fool". "Do not commit adultery" becomes "do not look lustfully". (Matthew 5:21&28) Jesus considered that the attitude was well on the way to the sin. He is emphasising that our attitude is so important. James explains it – "each one is tempted by his own evil desire. If this is meditated on and allowed to grow it will result in sin which will end in spiritual death – separation from God." (see James 1:14&15)

No wonder Paul cried out to God, "Who will rescue me?" (Romans 7:24) Of course in the next chapter (Romans 8) he triumphantly tells what Jesus has done to rescue us. Jesus came to deliver us from the curse of the Law, because otherwise we would never be holy enough to come into the presence of God.

Promises and wonders are free gifts to be received by those to whom the promises are made.

CHAPTER 4 JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them." (John 15:15-17)

Jesus obeyed His Father but He often "disobeyed" the Pharisaic laws, to their great annoyance and anger. This demonstrates that doing the will of the Father takes precedence over "the traditions of men". It is very interesting to look at where Jesus ran counter to the Pharisees because some of the instances "seemed" to also counter Old Testament laws too.

The most frequent "offence" in the eyes of the Pharisees was healing on the Sabbath. The first mistake the Pharisees made

was that they did not understand the concept of "Sabbath", which means "to cease". God rested or ceased from His labour, not because He needed a rest but because He had made man and He knew that man needed one in seven days for rest. The Sabbath was also a gift to God and to any servants that one might have, so God's law had a humanitarian aspect. (New Bible Dictionary) Because Jesus came to fulfil the law (Matthew 5:17) He needed to point the way back to God's original purpose where the Pharisees were enforcing oral tradition without any reference to God's heart in the matter. Jesus attended the synagogue each Sabbath, but He emphasised loving God, hearing His Word in order to obey it, and loving one's neighbour. Jesus went about doing good in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:38)

Jesus actually expanded the written law to show how important the heart attitude is. Being angry is very close to murder and looking lustfully at a woman is very close to adultery. (Matthew 5:22&28) Jesus also said to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44) The Sermon on the Mount is really a fresh look at the laws and precepts of God. This was needed because of the legalism that the Pharisees and teachers of the law had introduced. When Jesus taught, the crowds were amazed because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:29) What must this have felt like? Jesus exuded the love of God in His Presence. **When people feel that you love them they are happy to believe that you are speaking for their good, whereas when people feel**

you despise them as inferior to you, they also feel that they are being manipulated to conform. The law of God is good but enforced conformity opens the way to rebellion and unbelief. These crowds must have felt the love and wanted to conform because Jesus was teaching the wisdom of God.

Another time the teachers of the law were watching Jesus

Ways are how God chooses to relate to humans.

and decided that He was blaspheming because He forgave the sins of a paralytic who had been brought to Jesus by friends. Jesus responded to the faith of the friends. The teachers considered that only God could forgive sins even though they also should have known that God gave authority to the priests to make atonement for sins under the Old Covenant through blood. Jesus' answer was that God had given authority on earth to the Son of Man to forgive sins, and He demonstrated this by healing the paralytic completely. This plainly shows that they were not interested in knowing who this special person, the Son of Man, was. They were only concerned with their own power and authority, and their status in the community.

Another issue was that Jesus ate with outcasts (tax collectors and sinners). (Matthew 9:11) The Pharisees obviously did not understand God's concept of holiness and "keeping oneself unspotted from the world". On another occasion Jesus had to explain to them what "clean" and "unclean" meant. (Matthew 15:1-20) Their traditions had replaced God's standard. "What does the

Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

There were more issues for His critics too. Jesus and His disciples did not fast according to the traditions insisted on by the teachers of the law. (Matthew 9:14) Jesus was often referring to the Old Testament prophecies which He came to fulfil. Isaiah wrote God's choice of true fasting – to loose the chains of injustice, to untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke, to share food with the hungry and provide the wanderer with shelter, to clothe the naked and to care for your own family. (Isaiah 58:6-7) He had to rebuke the Pharisees for using "devotion to God" as an excuse for not helping their parents. (Matthew 15:5)

Jesus' constant testimony was that He only did what the Father wanted, and what He did was in the power of the Father. (John 5:19&20)

Decrees are issued by authority as legal safeguards. These are issued by God to protect us from giving Satan licence in our lives.

CHAPTER 5 OUR SACRIFICE

If it was good enough for Jesus to obey the Father in all things, it should be good for us too. The question is how do we know what the Father's will is? Paul gives us some advice. "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

(Romans 12:1&2) In the Bible there are many statements made by God that we might find it hard to agree with. Even if we do not understand we agree that God is right all the time, and we can seek enlightenment on anything if we come to God in simple faith because God gives wisdom generously, without finding fault. (James 1:5) It is a wonderful adventure seeking understanding of God's ways and God's thoughts. We can come to Him every day as a child, asking for understanding of His Word and His heart, and He really likes to explain things to us to enable us to "grow up".

There are some very basic teachings as mentioned in Hebrews.

- Repentance from acts that lead to death (turning away from what the Holy Spirit tells us is not good for us)
- Faith in God (because He promises to be our Comforter, Healer, Guide, and generally our Daddy)
- Instruction about baptisms (eg, John's baptism, Jesus' baptism)

- Laying on of hands (healing, power, transfer of blessing and anointing)
- The resurrection of the dead (eg, John 11:25&26)
- Eternal judgment (eg, Hebrews 9:27)

The writer to the Hebrews considers that these are for those who are not yet mature. We must therefore make it our business to be fully persuaded of God's point of view about these topics as we "work out our salvation with fear and trembling", even though some of these are topics that different denominations argue and differ about. Yet we do not need to be dogmatic about these differences. We just need to know what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us and to respect each other's point of view. A Coptic Christian gave us a very good example when he decided to employ a Muslim man in his shop. The Muslim worshipped on Friday and the Coptic Christian on Sunday so the Muslim was perfectly happy to open the shop on Sunday so that it could be open seven days. They respected each other. The interesting outcome was that the Muslim felt so respected and appreciated that he decided that he loved Jesus and could pray in the Christian way.

Paul describes the will of God in these matters. "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then...be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility count others better than

yourselves...Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:1-5) "Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgement on disputable matters." (Romans 14:1) This really brings us to what is really important in the mind and heart of Jesus.

*Love GOD and
love one another.*

CHAPTER 6 THE ONLY LAW THAT JESUS GAVE US

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:37&39) Two other gospels add..."and with all your strength". (Mark 10:30 & Luke 10:27)

"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34&35)

This love that Jesus asks us to imitate is based on God's unconditional and sacrificial giving of the Lover to the object of that love. The unloveliness or undesirability of the loved one does not matter. This kind of love has a transforming power that makes all ugliness to be beautiful. Even if sin has spoiled the object of Love, Love can recreate the original that God made and decided that it was very good. What this is on the outside might look to the critical and judgmental eye to be deficient but to God it

is right. The problem facing fallen humans is to agree with God and not with our warped standards.

This love is described in practical terms. "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3:12-14)

John, who wrote the fourth gospel, 3 letters and Revelation majored on preaching about love. History says that as a very old man he still preached "Love one another". This love is an act of the will. It is not based in emotion and does not require emotion to act. One can love while angry, disappointed or even despairing that the loved one will ever be sorry or willing to change. It does not even require that the loved one is "liked" When we look at ourselves we know that this is true. It is only when we lose love for ourselves that we are "out of reach". This is when some people suicide. They are not aware of God's intense love for them and His answers for their despair. Someone has said that love makes the world go round. God says that love never fails. It never fails to do what it is designed to do. It makes people feel good about themselves and others. It lifts people up to where God always wanted them to be. God is Love and when we love we are in tune with God. Love in action

is a mighty power for good because loving the unlovely helps to change the person and the situation they are in.

This is the "law" that Jesus re-introduced when He died on the Cross and rose again to connect us to God. The more we love God the more we reflect His love for the benefit of others. "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law...Love is the fulfilment of the law." (Romans 13:8&10)

Jesus commanded us to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:44&45) "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you...turn the other cheek...give to those who ask you...do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:27-31) If Jesus asks this of us we can safely assume He must do it Himself. "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners (not in covenant relationship and therefore enemies of God) Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) "We were God's enemies, (but) we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son." (Romans 5:10)

Accepting, receiving, appropriating this love means that we are no longer "sinners" even though we still continue to make mistakes for which we need to say sorry to God (and each other). If we continue to call ourselves sinners we are confessing that we are not in covenant relationship with God. This results in us losing the confidence that God loves us, that we have received

His gift by faith. Satan will take advantage of us and we will continue in fear. "Perfect love drives out fear". (1John 4:18) John has previously written that "no one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God." (1John 3:9)

This law is the essence of the new Covenant. "I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds...Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." (Hebrews 10:16&17) "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:10) Obeying the old laws will never make us righteous because they are impossible to keep to the letter, as they were meant to be. Righteousness was always to be by faith in God. "Perfection" (sinlessness) is only possible if we not only know God's ways but also **DO** them. God's ways and God's thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9), and no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1Corinthians 2:11). King David begs God not to take His Spirit from him (Psalm 51:11). But the new Covenant gives us a greater promise. "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (John 14:23) "On that day you will realise that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." (John 14:20) Jesus, by His Spirit, is in our hearts, our souls (our minds, wills and emotions) and in our strength (our actions). Because He is perfect it is possible for us to be perfect also! **What a Law!!** Who would not want this law as the guiding principle for our lives when we understand it? All it

requires is surrender of the old self that sometimes rears its ugly head each time the Holy Spirit convicts our hearts; not just on Sunday but daily or minute by minute. That is why the Bible tells us that God makes His dwelling with those who are contrite and lowly in spirit. (Isaiah 57:15) This does not mean that we are a bad person and certainly not a worthless person. This means that we are always soft to the voice of God and we want Him to lead and guide us always.

CHAPTER 7 THE LAW HAS BEEN FULFILLED

Jesus said "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come...to fulfil them". "I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."
(Matthew 5:17&20)

The apostle, Paul, considered himself to be legalistically righteous, because he was so meticulous in keeping the Law of Moses. (Philippians 3:6) Yet he came to consider this "rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith". (Philippians 3:8&9) He agonised in prayer for his fellow Israelites who were so zealous for God. "Their zeal is not based

on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."

(Romans 10:2-4)

Although Paul agonised in prayer for his fellow Jews, it is just as common in these days that people like to establish their own righteousness. So many people say they are OK. They don't hurt anyone and they obey the Ten Commandments. They might not be able to recite them but they have a vague idea about the duty to our neighbour. Just as the rich young ruler was so confident that he had kept the commandments that Jesus quoted to him and was blind to the ones not mentioned (Luke 18:20&21) they ignore the ones they consider inapplicable or unnecessary for their lifestyle. According to Jesus, these people whose righteousness has NOT surpassed that of the Pharisees will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven and this relationship with God MUST begin while we are on this earth.

Because Jesus obeyed His Father perfectly and in all things He has fulfilled the Law. Sin (separation from God) is paid for. Jesus' shed blood is enough for all time and for all people and no one need be separated from God. People cannot be excluded from Heaven because of their sins, failures, shortcomings and mistakes. But they will be excluded from Heaven because they do not acknowledge Jesus. He says Himself, "I am the gate for the sheep...whoever enters through me will be saved". (John 10:9)

"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will". (Hebrews 10:8&9) God's plan was prophesied in Eden. He had redemption on His Heart as soon as Adam and Eve betrayed Him and had to leave His Presence and His place. Someone who was sinless would do His will perfectly and accomplish the rule of the earth and the defeat of Satan. He would be the first and those who became His followers would complete the task. They would do this in the same power as Jesus; by the power of the Holy Spirit. For this they would be born again by the Holy Spirit in the similar way to the way in which Jesus was born – power from on high. (Luke 24:48) Jesus instructed, "You must be born again". (John 3:3)

John wrote, "to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name [His character, His acts, who God has called Him to be – Son of God,] He gave the right to become children of God [and His brothers and sisters] – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God". (John 1:12)

In Colossians (2:9-12) the Bible tells us that in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and we have been given this same fullness in Christ (the Anointed One and His anointing) by His grace as a gift. Our sinful nature has been circumcised,

we have been buried with Christ and raised with Him through our faith in the power of God because Jesus has been raised as the first-born of the family of God. We are now His brothers and sisters. "Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers." (Hebrews 2:11)

The concept of spiritual circumcision is interesting when we think about ringbarking a tree. The tree does not die right away but eventually the open wound will cause the tree to die. The outer layers of bark (and just under that) are the vascular-like systems that transport water and nutrients to the leaves - just like your veins. Ringbarking can still kill if it stops the flow of water/nutrients from the roots and leaves. In the same way our old nature which is the root of all our guilt and shame is being starved because we are choosing God's way, which is so superior, and the old habits die off.

Since the law has been not only fulfilled but a new covenant is now in place which is written on our minds and hearts we are called to "enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain". (Hebrews 10:19&20) We are invited to go where only the High Priest could go under the old covenant because we are "family" and we have been washed by the Blood of the Lamb. God desires that we be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5) We are encouraged to draw near to God with sincere heart in full assurance of faith. (Hebrews 10:22)

Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:11&13)

Paul is completely amazed that the Galatians, who began by receiving the Holy Spirit so that they are born again, a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), would go back to trying to keep the Law by human effort. (Galatians 3:3) He was especially shocked that they would choose to submit to the sign of entry into the old covenant. Entry into the new covenant is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Continuing is by the refining fire of God's discipline. John's baptism in water is for repentance (Acts 19:4) but to be His priests we need to be clothed with power from on high.

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

CHAPTER 8 TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

We have come in where we began except that we are not looking at the Old Testament law but the New Covenant where the law is written on our hearts and in our minds. Because of the blood sacrifice of Jesus, God is able to give us a new heart.

Circumcision of our hearts is a real spiritual operation, cutting out the wrong thinking, bad habits and wounds from the past which shape our behaviour. It is truly a miracle which God desires to do. The pain, guilt and shame cause so much damage that we develop "coping mechanisms" to keep going, but unfortunately it is very difficult to forgive those who have caused our pain (including our own folly). The disaster is that this unforgiveness builds a barrier to closeness to God. We become deaf to His soft voice which guides and comforts us. When the heart is hardened by hurts, people blame God and even blaspheme God, which makes God feel even further away. His Holy Spirit is very sensitive and when He is not wanted He does not make Himself known. He seems to just wait but many people do not know how to come to God appropriately even though the Bible makes it very plain. **Repent and say sorry.** This is the first act of obedience and it brings back fellowship with God. When we share our prayer with people in the streets they immediately sense God's presence because God longs to be close to His children and most people are delighted to feel this love He wants to pour out.

John's first letter explains how to have the fellowship and unity. First he writes about walking in the light. This is not sitting but moving, and involves interaction and risks. If we sit inside a church building and make sure we are OK we are not obeying Jesus' command to make disciples. This is not a command just for pastors and clergy because we are all given gifts as the Holy

Spirit chooses, for us to use for the honour and glory of Jesus and His Kingdom. However, when we are moving it is also easy to make a mistake. We heard a pastor preach recently that delayed obedience is disobedience so God goes quiet until we take our first step towards what He has asked us to do. This is why God asks us to confess when the Holy Spirit convicts us so that we can be completely cleansed of all taint, self-blame, and beating ourselves up. This verse is not primarily referring to our original sin which kept us outside the Covenant because John also writes that those who are born by the Spirit do not sin.

Next John writes about obedience enabling God's love being made complete in us. If we do not love we do not know (are not intimate with) God. Because God IS love and He has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, (Romans 5:5) we should be filled and go on being filled with His love so that we can love others. John warns us not to love the things of the world because they will weaken the glory we are entrusted with. Our "white garments" will become polluted. James writes that to be pure and faultless we must keep ourselves from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27) Jesus has taken away the sins of the world so that we can walk in holiness and righteousness. Love is the identifying mark of belonging to Jesus. He promises that His own hear His voice. We were shocked once when a minister asked us why God talks to us but does not talk to him. Had God gone quiet on him because he had not obeyed?

John writes God's command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another. (1 John 3:23) The promise is that those who obey live in Him, and He in them. We become faithful representatives for Him. We are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

It was impossible to keep the Old Covenant Law because of the sinful nature, but Jesus has made it possible through the power of the Holy Spirit to keep the law of love.

Paul's letters are full of good advice on how to keep this law.

We begin with faith in God, in His promises and in the powerful and effective completed work of Christ for our salvation and our standing before a holy God. We need to be confident that we are members of God's own family and that He has a Father's heart towards us. We need to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. (Romans 1:12)

It is good that we repent (actively turn away from sin) regularly because Satan and his helpers "prowl" and our weaknesses are always under attack and we can be caught unawares. Sometimes our strengths can cause us to sin if we become proud of them so we need to keep a thankful heart for His goodness to us.

We need to keep developing great faith so that we can overcome every challenge that life throws up whether it is sickness, weakness, persecutions, "natural" disasters, disappointments and seeming failures. For this we need to learn every promise that God has made. The more promises we know

the more we are able to overcome by the Word of God in the same way that Jesus overcame the temptations.

We need to know and love God's presence in our daily lives. His presence is not just for Heaven because the Kingdom of God in our lives starts as soon as we commit our lives to Jesus. That is why Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed". (John 20:29) Jesus makes His presence real to those who come to Him. When we pray with people in the streets many say they felt love or joy or warmth or cleanness which they did not expect. Some are even so overwhelmed they give us hugs and kisses!

There is plenty of advice for how we should treat others but it can be summed up thus: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ". (Galatians 6:2) We have a mutual responsibility to each other as the Body of Christ and we need each other even though we might think some things differently. Paul emphasises that we each have different gifts and functions but they must work in sync. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) Peter writes about living stones being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. (1 Peter 2:5) This is what we find is very exciting about cross-cultural ministry. There are so many languages, customs, experiences and revelations, that every encounter means more to learn and more understanding of God's whole church. We can revel in the differences because God has made us all different. He also placed us in countries and cultures according to His excellent ways. Paul explains, "From one man He made every

nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth, and He determined the times for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him..." (Acts 17:26&27) This act of brotherly love enables us to realise God's unconditional love in our lives. The outworking of this is God's heart of generosity as happened in the early church. (Acts 4:32-35) We long for the miracles but we do not follow the love plan.

Obedience is an act of the will. A long time ago we sang a song; "Lord, I will, I will love your chosen people Lord, I will. I have made up my mind to bless them Lord".

One of the verses in the Bible which encourages us is that Jesus knew who He was and what His role was. He accepted it and carried it out in God's strength and according to His purpose. (John 13:3) He told His disciples to do the same. (John 13:15) When we know what God has designed and designated us for we have absolute confidence that we are in His will when we obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"If you love Me you will obey what I command." (John 14:15)

And so we have come to the conclusion that to obey is better than sacrifice.

