

"ARE 'THE TEN' BINDING TODAY?"

by David Vaughn Elliott

The Ten Commandments are arguably the most famous law ever written. Many people are confused about this law. Did Jesus come to destroy the law? Are the Ten Commandments God's greatest commands? Should we join the fight in the U.S. to defend them? Are "The Ten" binding on Christians today? The first three questions are discussed in Insights #143, #230, and #142. In today's Insight we discuss the final question. We will examine both some of the arguments used to answer the question in the affirmative, as well as some of the NT texts which directly speak of The Ten. To begin with, there is the question of ...

"The Law of the Lord" and "the Law of Moses"

The Bible frequently speaks of "the law of the Lord" and other times of "the law of Moses." Are these two different laws? Is "the law of the Lord" eternal, while "the law of Moses" was temporary? Does "law of the Lord" refer to The Ten, whereas "law of Moses" refers to other commandments which Moses wrote in the books of the Law?

In 2 Chron. 31:3 we read of "the burnt offerings for the sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the Lord." Note that the text refers to "the Law of the Lord," but it is not quoting The Ten.

The OT often uses such expressions as "the book of the law of Moses, wherein the Lord commanded" (2 Kings 14:6). Thus we see "the Law of Moses" was not composed of Moses' ideas. It was God's law from beginning to end! Moses was just the scribe.

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra reads the law to the people. In that chapter, the book of the law is called both "the book of the Law of Moses" (verse 1) and "the book of the Law of God" (verses 8, 18). The same is true in Luke 2:21-24, 39, relating what Mary and Joseph did after Jesus' birth in order to fulfill the law. Luke 2 in part refers to the requirements found in Lev. 12. In Luke 2 these requirements of Leviticus are called both "the law of Moses" (Luke 2:22) and "the law of the Lord" (Luke 2:24, 39).

There was only one law before the death of Christ. It was interchangeably called "the law of the Lord," "the law of Moses" and variations of "the law of the Lord given by Moses." It included The Ten and all the other commandments found in Exodus thru Deuteronomy. One law!

Can God's "Everlasting" Law Change?

Various texts in the NT say that God's law was changed in Christ. (Col. 2:14; Heb. 7:12-19, etc.). But other texts in the Bible say things like: "All his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever" (Psalm 111:7-8). How can we harmonize this apparent contradiction? Does "forever" mean "forever"?

In 2 Chron. 33:4 we read: "the Lord had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever." Verse 8 adds: "Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from off the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will observe to do all that I have commanded them even all the law." "If only." God's "forever" includes conditions. God can change his "forever" when man sins.

Jeremiah prophesied a change of covenants. One reason for the change: "My covenant they brake" (31:32). Israel broke the covenant; God planned "a new covenant" (verse 31).

God also changes his covenants according to his own eternal purpose. In Gen. 17:9-14, God said: "This is my covenant... Every man child among you shall be circumcised... My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant." And yet in Gal. 5:6 we read: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision." God's "everlasting covenant" of circumcision ceased when Christ died.

God's commands and law can change, did change, and had to change. God had said that the Aaronic priesthood would "surely be an everlasting priesthood" (Ex. 40:13-15); yet that priesthood was changed when God made Christ our High Priest. God added: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12).

Over and over in the OT "forever" and "everlasting" simply indicate that a covenant or law will continue in force, year after year and generation after generation. However, the "forever" is frequently conditioned, on the one hand, by man's faithfulness and, on the other hand, by God's own plans. Many times, in the light of total Bible teaching, "forever" can only be understood as meaning "continuously" *until the arrival of the Messiah*.

"The Ministry of Condemnation"

The NT often quotes individual commandments from The Ten. But 2 Cor. 3 is a text which discusses The Ten as a single unit. When verse 3 says, "tables (tablets) of stone," it must be speaking of The Ten. Deuteronomy 4:13 says: "He declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone."

Exodus 34:28-35 narrates that at the giving of the "two tables," "the ten commandments," Moses' "face shone," so "Moses put the veil upon his face." Then 2 Cor. 3:7, 13 says: "The children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance... Moses, who put a veil over his face." Thus there can be no doubt that 2 Cor. 3 is talking about The Ten in their entirety. The chapter is contrasting The Ten (the old covenant, OT) with "the new covenant" (NT). Study the contrast:

The Ten Commandments vs. the New Covenant

2 Cor. 3:3....Written in tables of stone vs. Written in the heart
3:6....Of the letter, which kills vs. Of the spirit, which gives life
3:6,14....The old testament vs. The new testament
3:7,8....Ministration of death vs. Ministration of the spirit
3:9..Ministration of condemnation vs. Ministration of righteousness
3:10....No glory in comparison vs. Excelling glory
3:11....Is done away vs. Remains
3:13-14....Given thru Moses vs. Given thru Christ
3:14-17....A veil on the heart vs. Veil taken away; liberty

The ten commandments -- in their totality, as a code of law, as a covenant of God with his people -- were a ministration of death and condemnation. Yes, it was a glorious covenant; but as the sun outshines the moon, so the new covenant outshines the old. On the basis of 2 Cor. 3, we can affirm **that whatever parts** of the OT may not have been done away, one thing was clearly done away: the covenant of the Ten

Commandments!

The Old Testament is Old; We Have a New Testament

The words "testament" and "covenant" are the same word in the Greek. In each text where the Greek word is found, the various Bible versions may translate the word either way.

Some 600 years before Christ, Jeremiah prophesied the coming of "a new covenant" (31:31; Heb. 8:8). Hebrews 7:22 and 8:6 says that the covenant of Jesus is "a better covenant." Then Heb. 8:13, making a contrast, says: "In that he says, A new covenant, he has made the first old."

Since the Bible speaks of various covenants before Christ, it is important to correctly identify the "first," "old" covenant. Hebrews 8:9 says that it was the one that God made with Israel when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. Hebrews 9 further identifies "the first covenant" (verse 1), by giving many details. There was a tabernacle and candlestick (verse 2). There was an "ark of the covenant," in which were "the tables of the covenant" (verse 4). We have already identified these tables as containing The Ten.

So the "tables of the covenant" (The Ten) were an integral part of the covenant which, when Hebrews was written, "decays and waxes old" and was "ready to vanish away" (8:13). Hebrews 9:14-17 explains that the new testament came into effect at the death of Christ. And 10:9 says: "He takes away the first that he may establish the second."

Ephesians 2:11-22, addressed to "Gentiles in the flesh," explains that before Christ they were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants." Verse 14 explains that before Christ there was a "wall of partition between us," (between Jews and Gentiles). But Christ broke down the wall, "having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances" (2:13-15). Thus it is clear that the old commandments (The Ten and the rest) formed a divisive wall between Jews and Gentiles. But Christ, dying on the cross, put an end to the old covenant, thus breaking down the wall, so that in its place both Jews and Gentiles could receive a glorious New Testament!

Nine of the Ten Are Repeated in the NT

How could the ten commandments be done away? Is it all right today to steal, to murder, to dishonor parents? Of course not. Nine of The Ten are repeated in the NT. Some are repeated in identical words, while others are found in synonymous expressions. The Ten themselves, found in Ex. 20 and Deut. 5, are here shown in abbreviated form.

The Ten Commandments in the New Covenant

1. Have no other gods.....Lk.4:6-8; 1 Co.8:5,6; 1 Ti.2:5
2. Do not bow down to any image.....Jn.4:24; Acts 17:29; 1 Co.6:9
3. Do not use God's name in vain.....Mt.15:19; Ro.2:24; 1 Ti.1:20
4. Do not work on the seventh day.....-----
5. Honor your father and mother.....Mt.15:4; Lk.18:20; Eph.6:2
6. Do not kill.....Mt.15:19; Lk.18:20; Rom.13:9
7. Do not commit adultery..... Mt.15:19; Lk.18:20; 1 Co.6:9
8. Do not steal.....Mt.15:19; Lk.18:20; 1 Co.6:10

9. Do not bear false witness.....Mt.15:19; Lk.18:20; Rom.13:9

10. Do not covet.....Mt.5:28; Rom.13:9; 1 Co.6:10

The fourth commandment of The Ten is not commanded in the NT. Jesus, indeed, living under the law, kept the Sabbath. He also corrected some false concepts held in his day regarding the Sabbath. But there is no record of Jesus ever commanding anybody to keep the Sabbath. Nor did the Apostles ever command it. Today we must obey nine of The Ten -- not because they were part of The Ten, but because they are a part of the New Covenant. In a later Insight, Lord willing, we will examine the Sabbath question in depth.

The Ten Commandments in their entirety, as a code of law, as a covenant, are not binding upon us today. As a code of law, they are old and done away. Nevertheless, nine of The Ten must be obeyed -- not because they are part of The Ten, but because they are part of the New Testament.