

SABBATH THOUGHT 2022-12-10—GOD’S LAW IS LOVE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Bible says, “The **fear** of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” (Prov. 1:7). In fact, this statement is repeated two more times in Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10. Why fear God? Jesus answers that question by saying, “... fear Him [*God*] Who has the power to destroy both life and body in Gehenna [*fire*].” (Matt. 10:28). But is that what God wants—for us to fear Him? Yes, at least in the BEGINNING. Still, that sounds terribly harsh.

Fear of death is common to everyone, so how does one avoid eternal death in the lake of fire? Jesus Christ also answered this by saying, “But if you desire to enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Matt. 19:17). This sounds simple enough; however, Paul made it very clear that it is impossible to perfectly keep God’s Law. He said, “For **if a law had been given that had the power to give life**, then righteousness would indeed have been by law.” (Gal. 3:21). He lamented about this more fully in chapter 7 of Romans:

What then shall we say? *Is the law sin? MAY IT NEVER BE!* But I had not known sin, except through the law. ... 8 But sin, having grasped an opportunity by the commandment, worked out within me every *kind of* lust because apart from law, sin was dead. ... 10 And the commandment, which *was meant to result in* life, was found *to be* unto death for me; 11 Because sin, having taken opportunity by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed *me*. ... 14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, having been sold *as a slave* under sin; ... 18 Because I fully understand that there is not dwelling within me—that is, within my fleshly being—*any* good. For the desire to do good is present within me; but how to work out that which is good, I do not find. 19 For the good that I desire to do, I am not doing; but the evil that I do not desire to do, this I am doing. ... 23 But I see another law within my own members, warring against the law of my mind, and leading me captive to the law of sin that is within my own members. ... 25 I thank God *for His salvation* through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 7:7-8, 10-11, 14, 18-19, 23, 25).

James also points out that “*if* anyone keeps the whole law, but sins in one *aspect*, he becomes guilty of all.” (Jas. 2:10). The Bible is very clear that eternal life requires us to keep God’s Law. So, how is it possible to avoid death if we all sin? Obviously, sins are forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But now we are talking about a completely new perspective toward keeping the Law because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was motivated by AGAPE LOVE. It was God the Father Himself who “... **so loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have everlasting life.” (John 3:16).

It was out of agape love that God sacrificed His Son. That same agape love motivated Jesus Christ to endure death for us. As it says in Galatians 2:20, “the Son of God ...

loved [us] and gave Himself for [us].” So, how are we to keep God’s Law?¹ Is it out of fear or a strict discipline of obedience? If that were the case, then why did Jesus say, “If you **love** Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments.” (John 14:15). Even so, on the surface this sounds like keeping the Law is an unemotional discipline of the mind rather than something of the heart. So, is love toward God only a matter of obedience? Does God want us to focus on the all “thou shalt nots” of the Law? That sounds more like someone who is in prison. There, an inmate is so constrained that it is quite hard to break any rules. In a prison, the rules are nothing more than lists of prohibited and permissible behaviors wherein no one is allowed to do as they please. Is that what keeping God’s Law is all about? Is loving God the Father and Jesus Christ merely adhering to a set of rules? Not at all. In fact, the Law **is** agape love! Remember the two great commandments?

MATTHEW 22:36-40 “Master, which commandment *is the* great commandment in the Law?” 37 And Jesus said to him, “ ‘**You shall love the Lord your God** with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is *the* first and greatest commandment; 39 And *the* second *one is* like it: ‘**You shall love your neighbor** as yourself.’ 40 **On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.**”

Verse 40 tells us that the Law and Prophets² are “hung” underneath agape love. In other words, God’s Law DEFINES agape love. If God’s Law is agape love, then why are there so many “thou shalt nots?” Perhaps the more important question is why is agape love even COMMANDED at all? How can love or any emotion be demanded of anyone? The apostle John spoke about agape love often and even he said, “... **this is His [God’s] commandment: ... that we love one another**, exactly as He gave commandment to us.” (1 John 3:23). However, when it comes to our emotions, no one can force someone to FEEL something, whether it is love or fear or anger.

Someone who first begins to seek God might be fearful of the consequence of death for disobedience. Fear can be a motivation to begin keeping God’s Law, even if it is strictly doing the “thou shalt” or avoiding the “thou shalt nots.” However, this is not the ultimate purpose for keeping God’s Law. While this was generally the situation with the ancient Israelites, a big change came about when God gave His Holy Spirit to people:

EZEKIEL 36:26 And **I [God] will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you.** ...

So, does this change the perspective of keeping the Law? If ALL the Law is based upon agape love toward God and toward people, then how should we view it? What is the fundamental purpose for keeping God’s Law? Read this carefully to answer that question:

¹ 1 John 4:9-11.

² A prophet did not only deliver prophecies. They also declared the testimonies and judgments of God, which are a part of the Law. Prophecies (predictions of future events) are not part of the Law.

1 TIMOTHY 1:5 **Now the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart**, and a good conscience, and genuine faith;

There it is! We might strictly obey God's Law in the beginning, but the whole purpose is for us to grow and develop the agape love of God in our OWN hearts! The apostle John had much to say about keeping God's Law because he fully understood the purpose of it: "... if anyone is keeping His [*Jesus*'] Word [*to keep His commandments*], truly in this one **the love of God is being perfected**." (1 John 2:5). Keeping the Law PERFECTS agape love in US!

Jesus Christ lived a life of flesh on this earth to become the perfect sacrifice for sins; however, He also came to explain God's Law: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; **I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill [the Law of God]**." (Matt. 5:17). As Christians mature in their relationship with God, Jesus Christ, and people, their hearts and minds are changed from seeing the Law as a matter of strict obedience. They begin to have the same agape love that motivated God to sacrifice His Son and Jesus Christ to give His life for us. It is only with agape love that the Law is FULFILLED! It is so much more than strict obedience because it is a desire of the heart to give our lives in service to God and others.

David was a man after God's own heart BECAUSE he kept the Law, even though it was painful at times. David had God's agape love in him and understood that the "... law of the LORD is perfect, **converting the soul** ..." (KJV Psa. 19:7).

Now the question becomes—is there more to life than strictly keeping God's Law? Yes, in every way! The purpose of obeying God is to produce a heart filled with agape love. Keeping the commandments is a **way of life**—one of giving and serving God and others as God gives us the opportunities. The mature Christian sees someone in need and tries to help or encourage or teach or pray or comfort. This is because agape love is manifested as FRUITS of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control are not "thou shalt not's." They are the natural desires and expressions of agape love toward God, Jesus Christ, and this world. Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever considered that a perfect Christian is not only keeping the Law but doing good things for others that are not "commanded" in it? This is exactly what we find in the parable of the sheep and goats. In this parable we find **THE litmus test** for those children who enter into the eternal Kingdom. They are the ones who showed kindness and mercy and love to others:

MATTHEW 25:34-36 Then shall the King say to those at His right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from *the* foundation of *the* world. 35 For I was hungry, and **you gave Me something to eat**; I was thirsty, and **you gave Me something to drink**; I was a stranger, and **you took Me in**; 36 I was naked, and **you clothed Me**; I was sick, and **you visited Me**; I was in prison, and **you came to Me**.'

The Law does not say “thou shalt” feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, comfort a stranger, cloth the naked, visit the sick, or spend time with those in prison. Those are voluntary good works to others who are in need or suffering. However, the sheep do those good things because they have a need to help others motivated by agape love in their hearts. The goats do not have agape love in their hearts and will not think about the needs of others. Rather, they might even find the thought of it repulsive, as was the case of some in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Interestingly, this parable immediately follows Luke’s account of the two great love commandments (Luke 10:27).

In the end, the parable of the sheep and goats show us that only those who have agape love in their hearts will be in the kingdom:

MATTHEW 25:33-46 33 And He shall set the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at *His* left. 34 Then shall **the King say to those at His right hand [the sheep], ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ... 41 Then shall He also say to those on the left [the goats], ‘Depart from Me, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. ... 46 And they [the goats] shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous [the sheep] into eternal life.’**

The sheep represent the children of God whose hearts are filled with agape love. The goats are those who never grew past fear of their own death or never understood the Law as more than “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.” So, God’s Law produces agape love and that is the ultimate **purpose** for keeping it.

1 JOHN 3:16-18, 22-23 By this *very act* we have known the love of God because He laid down His life for us: and we ourselves are to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world’s goods, and **sees his brother in need, and shuts up his feelings of compassion** from him, **how can the love of God be dwelling in him?** 18 My little children, we should not love in word, nor with *our* tongues; rather, **we should love in deed and in truth.** ... 22 And whatever we may ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and **practice those things that are pleasing in His sight.** 23 And this is His commandment: that we believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and that we love one another, exactly as He gave commandment to us.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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