

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-08-12—THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Last week's Sabbath Thought was titled *The Law and Righteousness*. By definition, "unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17) and "all sin is the transgression of the Law" (1 John 3:4); therefore, *righteousness* is the perfect keeping of the Law. But avoiding sin means that we need to know and study the Law. But is that even possible? Even the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees knew Scripture better than anyone today were condemned by Jesus Christ for failing to understand the "weightier *matters* of the Law" (Matt. 23:23). Then there is the question about all those pesky statutes that address, dare I say "banal," topics such as clothing materials, animal husbandry, priestly duties, sacrifices, rituals, etc. Still, we know that all who desire eternal salvation are required to keep the Law of God:

MATTHEW 19:17 ... **if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.**

JOHN 14:15 **If ye love me [Jesus Christ], keep my commandments.**

JOHN 15:10 **If ye keep my [Jesus Christ] commandments, ye shall abide in my love;** even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

JAMES 2:10 For **whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.**

1 JOHN 2:3-4 And hereby **we do know that we know him [God], if we keep his commandments.** 4 He that saith, I know him, and **keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.**

REVELATION 12:17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, **which keep the commandments of God,** and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

REVELATION 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints: here *are* **they that keep the commandments of God,** and the faith of Jesus.

To begin to understand how the Law of Moses is understood and applied under the New Covenant, read what Jesus Christ said:

MATTHEW 5:17-18 **Think not that I [Jesus Christ] am come to destroy the Law,** or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. 18 For verily I say unto you, **Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law,** till all be fulfilled.

Which Law? The Law of Moses (the Torah—the first five books of the Bible). There is *no other Law* that Jesus was referring to; therefore, it is very clear that the Law of Moses must be obeyed. But He said something in verse 17 that is well known but not well understood—He came to FULFILL the Law. This is absolutely key. Jesus said that He came to bring a new level of understanding to the Law of MOSES! Why? Because it was impossible to perfectly keep nor did it take away sin. In fact, that is why many have tried

to do away with it entirely, not understanding that was the very reason for giving the Holy Spirit.

So, from the perspective of God, what is the PURPOSE of the Law? It does three things. First, it defines sin, which is the transgression of the Law<sup>1</sup>. Second, obeying it is required for God to love us (and offer the gift of salvation):

**JOHN 14:21 He that hath [possesses] my [Jesus Christ] 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.

1 JOHN 5:2-3 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. 3 For **this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments:** and his commandments are not grievous.

The third purpose is obedience to the Law. Because God IS LOVE, His children must also BECOME love and THAT is the purpose for keeping the Law:

1 JOHN 2:5 But **whoso keepeth his word [Law], in him verily is the love of God perfected:** hereby know we that we are in him.

Obeying the Law of God is salvational. The issue for many is HOW to keep the Law that was given to Moses. Why? Because it says odd things like do not light a fire on the Sabbath<sup>2</sup> or do not mix certain types of cloth<sup>3</sup>. To that end, it is critical to understand what changed in the New Covenant:

HEBREWS 7:12-28 For since the priesthood has **changed [transferred, not eliminated], it is obligatory that a change [transference, not elimination] of the law also take place;** ... 15 And it is even more evident because **a different Priest arises according to the order of Melchisedec;** ... 19 Because **the Law brought nothing to perfection;** rather, *perfection* is brought about by a superior hope, **through which we draw near to God.**

Obviously, the priesthood changed and Jesus Christ is now the High Priest. Moreover, the greatest failing of the Law of Moses is that it was a physical one that could never be kept nor perfect those who were under it. Read the last phrase carefully: “**perfection [in righteousness] is brought about by a superior hope [Jesus Christ], through which we draw near to God.**” How do we draw near to God? With the Holy Spirit in us! So, the New Covenant draws people to God in a far superior way—spiritually. The Holy Spirit is required not only for forgiveness of sin whereby God imputes His righteousness to us<sup>4</sup>, but it also gives understanding of how to FULFILL the Law! Okay, so how exactly do we “fulfill” the Law? Examples are usually better than long explanations, so begin with the statute about muzzling an ox:

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 3:4.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. 35:3.

<sup>3</sup> Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:11.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 4:6, 11, 22.

DEUTERONOMY 25:4 You shall not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out *the corn*.

Does this apply only if you own an ox and use it to tread grain? If you feed the ox either before or after the grain is threshed does the Law still prohibit you from muzzling him? Is this statute to prevent animal abuse? It would be difficult to argue that the ox is being abused or harmed if it is fed and watered before treading the grain, so why is it a sin to muzzle it? Obviously, there is more to this and now I want to show you how to THINK of the Law FROM A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:1-14 Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? 2 If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. 3 Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, 4 Have we not power to eat and to drink? 5 Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? 7 Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? 8 Say I these things as a man? or saith not the Law the same also? 9 For **it is written in the Law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? 10 Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this is written***: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. 11 **If we have sown unto you spiritual things, *is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal [physical] things?***

Paul is discussing receiving physical things necessary for life (he does NOT say WAGES!) for their labor of preaching the gospel and he claims it several times as a RIGHT (vv 4, 5, 12). He likens this to the army that provisions a soldier, a farmer or a shepherd who reaps the produce of his work, and the priests and Levites living off of the sacrifices. Then, just when you might think he would try to prove his point by referring to scriptures mandating tithes and offerings to the priesthood, he refers to the scripture in Deuteronomy 25:4 that prohibits muzzling an ox! Paul says that statute is not about the ox but about PEOPLE (vv 9-10). It has **nothing** to do with the ox. The spiritual understanding, fulfillment, and application of it produces agape love toward PEOPLE.

While there is not enough space to cover this topic in depth, the Bible is clear we must keep the Law of God. But first I must admit that I have been using two terms for the Law without an explanation. It is important to understand that I use the phrase the Law of Moses (the Torah) to refer to the physical Law given at Mount Sinai and the Law of God to refer to the agape love spiritual fulfillment of the Law of Moses. Paul said, “**the Law is [now] spiritual**” (Rom. 7:14) and “**love is the fulfilling of the Law**” (Rom. 13:10). He understood that “**the PURPOSE of the commandment [the Law] is love out of a pure heart**” (1 Tim. 1:5). The Law of Moses failed because it was physical and could never be perfectly kept. However, with the addition of the Holy Spirit, people can finally fulfill the true purpose for keeping the Law—to grow in agape love. As it says:

1 CORINTHIANS 2:12-14 Now **we have received**, not the spirit of the world, but **the spirit which is of God**; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which **the Holy [Spirit] teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual**. 14 But **the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness** unto him: neither can he know *them*, because **they are spiritually discerned**.

There you have it. Do we need to know the Law of Moses? Yes, but we fulfill or perfect it in agape love. The Psalmist (perhaps David, Ezra, Daniel, or Jeremiah) understood this well before Jesus Christ came:

PSALMS 119:96-105 I have seen an end to every purpose, but **Your [God's] commandment [Law] is exceedingly broad [more than physical]**. 97 O how love I Your law! **It is my meditation all the day**. 98 Your commandments make me **wiser than my enemies**, for they are ever with me. 99 **I have more understanding than all my teachers**, for Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 **I understand more than the ancients** because I keep Your precepts. 101 I have **held back my feet from every evil way**, so that I might keep Your word. 102 I have not departed from Your ordinances, for You have taught me. 103 **How sweet are Your words** to my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 **Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way**. 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Why would the Psalmist need to meditate all day on a statute such as one that prohibited muzzling an ox? Did he really 'love' (v97) such a statute? It is not that complicated or very interesting except maybe to a farmer. Knowing such a statute surely would **not** make him wiser than his enemies, teachers, or the ancients, either. You see, the Psalmist **meditated** on the Law to understand its SPIRITUAL fulfillment in agape love. He summed it up by saying, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (v105). What path is he referring to? Some well worn dirt trail through a field at night? No! He was thinking of the narrow path to eternity, God the Father, and Jesus Christ!

We, too, need to read the Law of Moses and spend time meditating upon its spiritual fulfillment so that it becomes the Law of GOD in our hearts and minds and we BECOME AGAPE LOVE!

(This topic is discussed in greater depth in the website audio message *Understanding God's Law*—<https://sabbathreflections.org/bible-studies/messages>.)

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

<https://sabbathreflections.org>  
[sabbathreflections@gmail.com](mailto:sabbathreflections@gmail.com)