

# Is Christ the End of the Law?<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In Rom 10:4 Paul says, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." This is a difficult passage. Under one popular interpretation, the law begins at Sinai, extends up to the cross, and stops. Thus it applies only to Jews. Christians and all others are exempt.

This is not what Paul was saying. To understand his intent we must read what Scripture tells us about two different periods: (1) the time before Sinai and (2) the time after the cross. Doing this should tell us if there was a law then or not. I challenge the assumption that the moral law of God has had only a brief career and applies only to one segment of mankind. But let us see if it does or does not.

## Was the Law Only For the Jews?

The question whether the law was only for the Jews raises issues that go far beyond the wording of a passage or two. We now propose a method for determining whether God had a law that was binding on His creatures before Sinai and after the cross. Before the cross we learn whether there was law by asking whether there was sin (wickedness) – or righteousness for that matter. There was.

### Before Sinai

In one passage Paul says, "And where there is no law there is no transgression" (Rom 4:15). This is an important concept. Was there transgression before Sinai? If so, there was a law before Sinai. If not, there should be no punishment before Sinai, because it would be unfair to punish people if they have done nothing wrong.

Let us start at the beginning with Cain. When he killed his brother was he breaking God's law? Or any law? Was he doing anything wrong when he killed his brother? The fact that God punished him for killing his brother tells me that, yes, what he did was wrong. (How have we come so far that it becomes necessary to establish the factual accuracy of points like this?) What Cain did was a transgression. Of what?

There are other examples. Consider the flood of Noah. Why did the Lord send a flood on the earth to destroy every living thing? They weren't transgressing because there was no law to transgress, so why did God punish them? But if the punishment was fair, it follows that there was transgression and that there was a law to transgress. Well, there was transgression before the flood. Otherwise, God would not have destroyed the world by a flood. Below I show six examples of the word "sin" in Gen before Sinai and nine references to the word "wicked(ness)":

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper is based on a sermon I gave at Westminster, MD, July 22, 2006.

### Sin

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Gen 4:7)<sup>2</sup>

In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." (Gen 15:16)

Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous (Gen 18:20)

Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. "What is my crime?" he asked Laban. "What sin have I committed that you hunt me down? (Gen 31:36)

No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9)

Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." (Gen 42:22)

### Wicked(ness)

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. (Gen 6:5)

Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD. (Gen 13:13)

Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? (Gen 18:23)

Far be it from you to do such a thing- to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25)

and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. (Gen 19:7)

But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to death. (Gen 38:7)

What he did was wicked in the LORD's sight; so he put him to death also. (Gen 38:10)

No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9)

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Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done." (Gen 44:5)

From the above passages we can be sure that there was both sin and wickedness before Sinai, but if this had not been the case, i.e., if there were no transgression of a law because there was no law to transgress, it follows that there should be no righteousness either. Calling someone "righteous" presupposes a standard of righteousness. So was there righteousness before Sinai? That term also is used in nine passages:

#### Righteous(ness)

This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. (Gen 6:9)

The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. (Gen 7:1)

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:6)

Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? (Gen 18:23)

What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? (Gen 18:24)

Far be it from you to do such a thing- to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25)

The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." (Gen 18:26)

what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it." (Gen 18:28)

Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again. (Gen 38:26)

**In view of the evidence presented so far, I think we can safely infer that God had a law before Sinai. In Exod 16 the God says in so many words that breaking the Sabbath breaks one of His "commands." This is from the story about manna in the wilderness.**

Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." So the people rested on the seventh day. (Exod 16:28-30)

**The manna fell in chapter 16. God came down on Sinai in chap. 20. From this I conclude that there were "commands" before Sinai (vs. 28) and that those pre-Sinai commands included the obligation to rest on the seventh day (vss. 29-30).**

## After the cross

Up to this point our focus has been on whether there was sin, and righteousness, during the time before Sinai. We now change our focus and come directly to the point of whether the earliest church kept the seventh day holy as a day of rest and worship after the cross. There are many ways to approach the question of Sabbath keeping in the apostolic church. The one I use here views the church's practice through the eyes of those who were not yet Christians. How did Jews living in Jerusalem relate with the disciples during the first three and a half years after Christ – from His ascension in Acts 1 to the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7? They related with them as fellow Sabbath keepers.

*Acts 2.* The Holy Spirit was poured out on the church at Pentecost in Acts 2. This was fifty days after the Passover at which Christ was crucified and ten days after He ascended to heaven in Acts 1. Seven weeks should be enough time for everyone in Jerusalem to know it if the apostles had abandoned the practice of worshiping on the seventh-day Sabbath after the cross. Evidently they hadn't – for two reasons. First, they were still alive. According to Exod 31:14 breaking the Sabbath was a capital offense. And second, because the church's message was so well received by Jews who had come from everywhere and who themselves were zealous Sabbath keepers. Three thousand souls were added to the church when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. We have no information that renouncing the Sabbath was part of their baptismal vow, and much that would confirm it was not.

*Acts 4.* In Acts the apostles were arrested because they were teaching the people about the resurrection of Jesus (see vss. 1-2).

But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. (Acts 4:14)

After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. (Acts 4:21)

If these men had been Sabbath breakers, the priests and rulers would not have known how to punish them.

*Acts 5.* While the rulers were becoming increasingly frustrated with the apostles, the common people held them in high esteem. One example of this is found in Acts 5.

As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. (Acts 5:15)

In my view, evidence such as this clearly indicates that the apostles were still Sabbath keepers at the time these events occurred. Bringing the sick out where Peter's shadow would fall on them as he walked by is not the sort of response one would expect from people who thought the disciples were anything other than loyal Jews.

*Acts 6.* In Acts 6 notice two things. First the apostles' teaching was well received by at least some of the temple priesthood.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

There were those who opposed the church's teaching, but they had to resort to slander in order to have anything to say.

Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God." (Acts 6:11)

They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." (Acts 6:13-14)

Please notice that the witnesses who said the above things were "false witnesses" (vs. 13). In any event, if Stephen had been breaking the Sabbath they would not have needed to persuade men secretly to report what they heard him say – accurately or otherwise. He would have been stoned in chap. 6 rather than chap. 7.

*Acts 7.* When Stephen was finally executed, his accusers listened patiently to everything he said up until the crucial moment when he spoke about seeing Jesus at the right hand of God.

"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Acts 7:56-58)

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). The seventy weeks of Dan 9:24 were now over. From this point on the gospel would go primarily, though not exclusively, to the Gentiles. Actually it would go to everyone without distinction. But throughout the second half of the seventieth week (from the ascension to Stephen), the church remained in Jerusalem and was widely respected by everyone living there. The highest levels of leadership among the Jews were opposed throughout this period, of course, but the masses were not. They were open to the apostles' influence. This fact is impossible to account for on the assumption that the members of church were no longer keeping the seventh day as the Sabbath. They were keeping it.

From this I draw that the Sabbath was not abolished at the cross, or if was, no one told the disciples. There was a Sabbath before Sinai and the same Sabbath continue on after the cross without missing a beat. So what did Paul mean when he said that Christ is the end of the law? How can we interpret what he said in a way that is consistent with both streams of biblical evidence that we've examined so far?

First, we saw that, right from the beginning, God had clear moral expectations for mankind, and that when they set those expectations aside He punished them appropriately. The fact that a world-wide flood inflicted universal punishment is evidence that there was universal wickedness before the flood. If I could just comment on this fact, the fact that eight survived illustrates grace too. Thus long years before Sinai there was law, and also grace.

Next, we saw that for the next three and a half years after the cross the apostolic church was held in high esteem by the common people of Jerusalem, including many of the priests (Acts 6:7), and this under circumstances where the highest rulers of the people would love to have found some reason to condemn the church and disrupt it. At the end of this time, which was also the end of the seventy weeks of Dan 9:24-27, it is true that persecution broke out and the church was scattered everywhere. But up until A.D. 34 even the disciples' worst enemies could not find any way to accuse them. This fact speaks directly to the matter of Sabbath keeping, because Sabbath breaking was still punishable by death.<sup>3</sup> If the Jewish leaders had been able to accuse the apostles of Sabbath breaking, they surely would have. The fact that they did not tells me they could not. The only conclusion to draw from these facts is that the apostles were still keeping the Sabbath after the cross, and that they were keeping it in a way that even their worst enemies found to be blameless and above reproach.

Back to Rom 10:4

The passages we have examined so far show that the law did not end at the cross, and yet Paul seems to say that it does. What are we missing? Is there some way to reconcile the two lines of evidence? Or do they conflict with each other after all? Paul's words seem so clear that it would be impossible to misunderstand them. And yet if he means what they appear to say, we make Paul contradict himself, because in many other passages he speaks of the law with respect (see Rom 3:6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; Gal 2:17; 3:21). To answer this question we have to think very carefully about the words Paul uses to express himself. The one word requiring greatest scrutiny here is *telos* ("Christ is the *telos* of the law"). What does the Greek word *telos* mean? It occurs in the New Testament 33 times in 32 verses,<sup>4</sup> and in most cases simply means "end." No discussion required. But there are five examples, including the one we are studying here, where it means more than this. Consider the following passages:

It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment [*telos echē*]." (Luke 22:37)

Christ is the end of the law [*telos gar nomou*] so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Rom 10:4)

The goal of this command [*to de telos tēs paraggelias*] is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (1 Tim 1:5)

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about [*to telos kuriou*]. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. (Jas 5:11)

for you are receiving the goal of your faith [*to telos tēs pisteōs*], the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet 1:9)

<sup>3</sup> This is the context for the leaders' attempts to see Jesus as a Sabbath breaker – the Author of the law as One whose obedience was inferior to their own.

<sup>4</sup> Matt 10:22; 24:6, 13f; 26:58; Mark 3:26; 13:7, 13; Luke 1:33; 18:5; 21:9; 22:37; John 13:1; Rom 6:21f; 10:4; 13:7; 1 Cor 15:24; 2 Cor 3:13; 11:15; Phil 3:19; 1 Thess 2:16; 1 Tim 1:5; Heb 6:8; 7:3; Jas 5:11; 1 Pet 1:9; 3:8; 4:7, 17; Rev 21:6; 22:13.

In Luke 22:37 one could misinterpret the writer's intent to mean that those Scriptures come to an end which tell about Christ's earthly life. But in this case, why do New Testament writers speaking so often of the Scriptures being fulfilled?<sup>5</sup> If the Scriptures end, can they still be fulfilled? In one place Jesus mean by saying, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt 24:35). Skipping over Rom 10:4 temporarily, consider 1 Tim 1:5 where it appears that a "command" of some sort comes to an end. This is not one of God's commandments, but something Paul himself has said. Two verses earlier he tells Timothy to "command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer" (1 Tim 1:3). If this command ends, does that mean that the men in question can start teaching false doctrines again? (Saying they can do this would itself be a false doctrine.)

Now 1 Pet 1:9. One reason for wanting the commandments to go away is so that faith can come. Many assume that if we have law, we cannot have faith; if we have faith, we cannot have law. And so we interpret the word "end" in Rom 10:4 in a way that makes this conclusion seem plausible. But in 1 Pet 1:9 it is not the law that comes to an end. It is our faith. What Peter says is "the *telos* of your faith." If we are capable of interpreting in a way that leads to such results, it's clear that we're getting something badly wrong! Bringing our faith to an end is not what Peter has in mind at all (he's speaking of the goal of our faith, not the end of our faith), but my point is that the word *telos* can be misunderstood.

The best illustration of an impossibly bad misinterpretation of the word *telos* is found in Jas 5:11, where an unthinking literal translation of *to telos kuriou* would be, "the end [*to telos*] of the Lord [*kuriou*]." What James means is "the goal of the Lord," i.e., the goal that the Lord had in mind by dealing with Job as He did. And that is what the word *telos* means in Rom 10:4 as well.

In another passage Paul says, "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith" (Gal 3:24). What does the law lead us to? It leads us to Christ. So if I have this right, Christ is the goal toward which the law leads. The object and purpose of the law is to lead us to Christ. Why? Because the function of law is to show us our need. It can't supply our need. That's not what law does. But it works very well pointing out the fact that we are deficient. Once it does so, and we realize that we are sinful and need cleansing, the knowledge we have gained in this way drives us to Christ, because He *can* supply our need – abundantly, far more than we ask or think. The moral law of God always – even in Old Testament times – had the goal and purpose of causing people to respond by faith to its Author. Here is the meaning of Rom 10:4, and the law still serves this same function now. We can be glad that it does. Otherwise we would need Christ just as much as we do now, but would be unaware of the fact. Without the law we can say we need Christ, but it's just a formula of words. The law is what drives the point home to our hearts.

Do the commandments remain?

Many, even of our opponents, do not deny what we have been saying here. It is obvious that human society cannot function without some sort of moral principles to give it direction, so many Christians freely admit that nine of the commandments are restated in the New Testament after being done away on the cross. Here is a list of the ones that remain – drawn in part from one put forward by a group that opposes the positions I advocate here:

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<sup>5</sup> See Matt 2:15, 17, 23; 13:14, 35; 26:54, 56; 27:9; Mark 13:4; 14:49; Luke 1:1; 4:21; 18:31; 21:24; 22:37; 24:44; John 17:12; 18:9, 32; 19:24, 28, 36; Acts 1:16; 3:18; 13:27, 33; 23:1; 26:7; Rom 13:8; Jas 2:23; Rev 17:17.

## 1.

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Matt 4:10)

No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. <sup>21</sup> You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. (1 Cor 10:20)

## 2.

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. (1 Cor 10:14)

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21)

## 3.

"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, . . ." (Matt 6:9)

## 4.

[No allusions to this one. Or that's the claim.]

## 5.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup> "Honor your father and mother"- which is the first commandment with a promise- . . . . (Eph 6:1)

## 6.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. (Matt 5:21-22)

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. (1 John 3:15)

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." (Rev 21:8)

## 7.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'<sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt 5:27-28)

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, <sup>5</sup> not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. <sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. (1 Thess 4:3)



Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. (Heb 13:4)

### 8.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'<sup>39</sup> But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.<sup>40</sup> And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.<sup>41</sup> If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.<sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (Matt 5:38-42)

[Here Christ does not say, Don't steal. Instead He says, Give. This is a comment on the eighth commandment.]

He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. (Eph 4:28)

### 9.

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.'<sup>34</sup> But I tell you, Do not swear at all:" (Matt 5:33-34)

[This is the ninth commandment – the one that deals with our use of words.]

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. (Eph 4:25)

### 10.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'<sup>44</sup> But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.<sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?<sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?<sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:43-48)

[Coveting takes place secretly in the heart. When Christ says don't be incomplete in the way you think toward people, be perfect, mature, complete – like your heavenly Father – that's a comment on the tenth commandment.]

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

In the above list of passages notice that three commandments (1, 3, and 10) are restated *before* being done away, i.e., they are restated first and then the cross comes and sets them aside. So are these three commandments still in effect (they are restated), or not (they are done away afterwards)? Or at least this is the way some think of them. This is not abrogation followed by restatement, but restatement followed by abrogation. What? Commandments 1, 3 and 10 are still very much in effect – not because they were restated, but because they were

never done away. The whole idea setting the commandments aside and then restoring nine of them is double talk. It is abundantly clear from the passages quoted above that nine of the ten commandments are supported by the New Testament. Only the fourth is missing. Or is it?

Does the Sabbath remain?

What would a reference to the fourth commandment look like in the New Testament, or elsewhere? To answer this question we need to reflect on exactly what it says. Here is the fourth commandment, then, as given in the New International Version:

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod 20:8)

Does any part of this passage appear in the New Testament? Yes! It does. But this is the longest of the commandments. Which part should we look for? It makes a difference whether we look in the command clause ("Six days you shall labor") or the explanation clause ("For in six days"). Apart from Exod 20:11, there are seven references to the Sabbath commandment in the Old Testament and seven in the New. Look for the words "heaven(s)," "earth," and "sea" all in the same verse. When these three words appear together in an appropriate context, that's a reference to the Sabbath commandment. Here's the list:

#### Old Testament

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod 20:11)

You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. (Neh 9:6)

Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them, (Ps 69:34)

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; (Ps 96:11)

The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. (Ps 135:6)

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, <sup>6</sup> the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them- the LORD, who remains faithful forever. (Ps 146:5)

he who builds his lofty palace in the heavens and sets its foundation on the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land- the LORD is his name. (Amos 9:6)

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. (Hag 2:6)

### New Testament

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. (Acts 4:24)

"Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. (Acts 14:15)

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Rev 5:13)

And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! (Rev 10:6)

Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." (Rev 12:12)

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth— to every nation, tribe, language and people.<sup>7</sup> He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." (Rev 14:6)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. (Rev 21:1)

**Please bear in mind that the words "heaven," "earth," and "sea" do not occur together in Gen 1 or 2:1-3. The first place where they all appear together in one verse is Exod 20:11. So finding "heaven," "earth," and "sea" together not a reference to the creation story, but rather to the fourth commandment.**

Someone will object that the above writers don't have the Sabbath commandment in mind at all. They're just praising God.<sup>6</sup> And so? If we praise God in the language of the Sabbath commandment, that's still praise. And it's still a later use of the commandment. What is very clear is that in their praise these writers are identifying who God is. They're directing attention to the fact that God as the Creator of all things. So what does the Sabbath commandment do? What is its purpose? It also identifies who the true God of heaven is. It also directs attention to Him – as the Source of our being and the Creator of all things. This is one reason why it is so extremely important to "remember the Sabbath day" and not forget what it stands for. The Sabbath commandment goes far beyond providing for worship on the seventh day. It provides

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<sup>6</sup> Actually Acts 4:24 and 14:15 are quoting the Septuagint translation of the fourth commandment word for word. Even the accent marks are identical. I'll discuss this in a separate paper.

the only biblically sound basis for worshiping God at all. (He made us.) As such the Sabbath – kept as God intends – is a safeguard against idolatry in all its forms. Is this something we really want to set aside?

If the first commandment is based on God's act of delivering Israel from Egypt long ago ("I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other Gods before me" [Exod 20:1-2]), and we consider it binding on Christians nonetheless, how much more the fourth commandment, when it points out that this same God called all mankind into existence in the beginning – before there was an Egypt to deliver people from, and before there was sin of any kind?

## The Meaning of the Sabbath

The commandments don't end at the cross. In one sense one could say they begin there. Because of the cross His law is written on our hearts. The love of Christ constrains us and makes us want to obey Him – not from compulsion, but from our hearts. When we see what Christ has done for us, and what doing it cost Him, we no longer want to dishonor our parents, or kill, or commit adultery, or steal, or lie, or covet. We have no desire to put other gods before Him, or make idols, or misuse His holy name. With this much there is no argument. Christians accept all the commandments willingly – except one. The Sabbath is the only commandment they object to.

But if we love Jesus this much, why wouldn't we enjoy spending time with Him? Every Friday evening at sunset He comes to us where we are and says, "If I were to take a whole day to be with you, would you like to spend that day with Me? It will be our special time together." Those who reject this invitation don't realize what they're saying. They know not what they do. If we can't bring ourselves to spend a day with Jesus, how could we endure spending eternity with Him? He won't force anyone to do that. But if we're going to take a position that leads to such a conclusion, we should be very sure we know what our words imply.

## Discussion

What we have said about the commandments not coming to an end has an opposite counterpart. If they have no end, do they have a beginning? Did the commandments only come into existence when they were written down? Writing our name down on a birth certificate implies that we have a name to write. Writing our name does not make us who we are, and writing the law on stone does not make the law what it is. We can only understand the law when we understand the law Giver and we can only love it when we love Him. Here is the "end" of the law that Paul was referring to in Rom 10:4. It is the great Object (*telos* "end") of the law to lead us to Christ in humble submission to His will.

## Conclusion

God's law is eternal because He is eternal. His law is a transcript of His own character, which needs no changing. It is already holy and just and good. It was no part of Christ's purpose

on the cross to change the status He has, in union with the Father, as our Creator, or to change any part of His own holy character or His law. It was every part of His purpose to change us – to separate us from our sins so we would not perish in them, i.e., to separate us from our sins by drawing us to Himself. What better way to do this than by spending time together? The closer we are to Him, the farther we are from our sins. This is why He says, The Sabbath is the perfect summing up of that process. So no, the standard has not changed. It would not be possible to change it and in view of its inherent goodness, why would anyone want to?

The Sabbath is the birthday of the world celebrated on a weekly cycle. Nothing we do later in life can change our birthday or the identity of our parents. In this context it would be radically impossible to think that any one of the commandments could be changed or done away with, and this is all the more true in the case of the Sabbath which tells us who our heavenly Father is, i.e., the One who brought us into existence originally, and that He continues to supply all our needs now. We can rest in this knowledge only if we believe it's true. Resting? Believing? The two correspond perfectly.