

# Our Most Sacred Cow



From *Are We Preaching “Another Gospel”*: A 31-Day Journey toward  
Rediscovering the Gospel of the Grace of God, Day 13 by C. D. Hildebrand

## The Ten Commandments

However difficult redefining “the gospel” and “grace” made it for us to discern the importance of God’s grace and to understand the need for the gospel to be preached to the saved, the most devastating redefinition of terms<sup>1</sup> we embraced was our understanding of what Paul meant in his letters when he referred to “law”. This confusion is still commonplace among believers today, contributes to promoting “another” gospel, and is robbing us of receiving and enjoying what Jesus accomplished by His sacrifice for us.

Theologians divide Old Covenant law into three basic categories: the ceremonial laws, the civil laws, and the moral laws also known as the Ten Commandments. After making these distinctions we conclude that when Paul spoke about the law, he was *only* referring to the ceremonial and civil laws and not the Ten Commandments.

Once we believed this premise, David and I became incapable of perceiving what Paul actually meant when he spoke of the law. Because of this blind spot we’d created by redefining “law”, we never worried about nullifying the grace of God by moral law, nor were we concerned that living by moral law was implying that Christ’s death was in vain. (Gal. 2:21). We saw “law” and immediately thought of Jewish ritual. When we read that no flesh would be justified before God by the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:20), we simply agreed that it was foolishness to think that by keeping the *ceremonial* law someone could be righteous before God.

These three divisions, while logical, are not inherent in the law but rather a conclusion to which we have come. In actuality, the law of Moses was *all* of the law given to Moses. Thus, when Paul wrote “law” in reference to the Old Covenant, *he* meant the entire law.

**If we do not understand this, we miss the major components of why the New Covenant is “better”. We end up setting aside the grace of God by mixing it with law, and the greatest accomplishments of His sacrifice are easily swept aside because we can’t see them.**

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<sup>1</sup> Redefinition of terms: Changing the original meaning of a word or term so that it fits with our personal doctrine and thus losing its impact and importance.

No topic has been met with more vitriol than this one, for the moral law is our most sacred cow. Ideas that we have believed, practiced, taught and defended tooth and nail for most our lives become something untouchable for us, and this is strikingly true with the commandments.

We *revere* the Ten Commandments. In the United States we legislate for the right to display them at our courthouses. We post them on our monuments and church walls. We go to great lengths to prove that each and every one of the commandments is mentioned within the New Testament writings. We develop lengthy teaching series about them and compose musicals to commemorate their importance and produce movies to prove how important they still are. We make sure our children memorize them. We follow them with all our might.

David and I were able to remain ignorant of the original, contemporary, and personal import of many of Paul's writings, especially Galatians and Romans, because when we read the word "law" we automatically *redefined* it in our thinking to mean **only** the ceremonial and civil laws of the Jews and not the moral law. We wouldn't have even *considered* touching the sacred Ten!

We, the church, have a difficult time rationally discussing this topic because the Ten Commandments are ingrained in our thinking and deeply set in our traditions. There is often a near automatic visceral response to any possibility that we don't need them as believers. We tend to ignore those who bid us to consider a differing theological point of view which would remove them from Christian living, so much so that I am guessing that many who are reading this chapter are right now getting ready to toss this book in the trash! When the conversation begins, if it begins, we pull a veil across our faces and ignore what is being said. We start labeling those who are trying to point out these truths so as to silence them. We put up our defenses and can't have an honest discussion because we are too emotionally involved. We roll our eyes far back into our heads thinking that those who share such things are ignorant buffoons while we ourselves are hiding behind the veil we've closed, willfully ignoring clear Biblical evidence. We quote only the verses which *seem* to say that we are still under them, completely disregarding the scriptures that clearly say we are not.

We understand this reaction. At one, time the idea that anyone would believe that the Ten Commandments are no longer our ethical guide offended us to our core. Even after many years of understanding that we are not under "law", but grace, I still couldn't let go of them. Yet, when I finally understood that when Paul wrote "law", he meant *all* religious laws, everything else came into sharper focus and I began to see in Scripture what I could not see previously due to the veil I had closed.

Please allow me to explain why I believe that the Ten Commandments are not for Christians. If what I write here is inaccurate, you will be harmed in no way by reading it. If what I am saying is true, you will be set free. It really is so simple and obvious, that no lengthy explanation is even necessary. Father, open our eyes that your church might see!

In Exodus, we read that God miraculously delivered the Children of Israel out of captivity from Egypt where they worked as slaves. God opened the Red Sea and brought them to Mt. Sinai. There God called Moses up to the mountain and God Himself wrote on **stone tablets** the Ten Commandments. Later, when Moses saw that they had constructed a golden calf and were worshipping it while Moses was meeting with God, he threw the tablets to the ground and they were broken. However, God in His compassion called Moses back up into Mt. Sinai and the commandments of the Old Covenant were written again on stone tablets. Please pay close attention to these passages.

### **Exodus 34:1, 27-28**

*And the LORD said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these **tablets** the words that were on the first tablets which you broke." <sup>27</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write these words, for **according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.**" <sup>28</sup> So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the **tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.***

### **Deuteronomy 4:13**

*So He declared to you His **covenant** which He commanded you to perform, **the Ten Commandments**; and He wrote them on two **tablets of stone.***

How clearly obvious this is! The Old Covenant was the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were His covenant. A person needs to do some mighty convoluted explaining to say otherwise. God Himself calls the Ten Commandments the "covenant" which He was making with Israel.

What is the status of this covenant? It is obsolete (Heb. 8:13). It is annulled.

### **Hebrews 7:18-19**

*For on the one hand there is an **annulling** of the former **commandment** because of its weakness and unprofitableness, <sup>19</sup> for the **law** made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a **better hope**, through which we draw near to God.*

Understanding that the Ten Commandments *were* the Old Covenant and that the Old Covenant is obsolete and has been replaced with the better New Covenant, empowers us to more fully understand not only the writings of Paul but also guide us to comprehend what it means to live under grace and not under law.

What we should ask ourselves next is if there is any evidence within the *New Testament* writings that when Paul said “law” he was including the Ten Commandments? The answer is, yes!

Immediately after Paul stated that we are dead to the law (Rom. 7:1-6), it is made clear that he was including the Ten Commandments by quoting one of them.

**Romans 7:7-11**

*What shall we say then? Is **the law** sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through **the law**. For I would not have known covetousness unless the **law** had said, “**You shall not covet.**”*

*<sup>8</sup> But sin, taking opportunity by the **commandment**, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the **law** sin was dead. <sup>9</sup> I was alive once without the **law**,<sup>2</sup> but when the **commandment** came, sin revived and I died.<sup>3</sup> <sup>10</sup> And the **commandment**, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.<sup>11</sup> For sin, taking occasion by the **commandment**, deceived me, and by it killed me.*

It is significant that Paul quotes the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet,” as what the *law* says and then goes on to refer to the

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<sup>2</sup> Paul was born under the law and circumcised the eighth day. At no time was he “alive once without the law” until he was born again, for prior to that he was spiritually dead and under the law.

<sup>3</sup> Paul was freed from sin, but when the commandment came, sin was revived. We believe he is speaking about a personal experience when, being a Pharisee, he started to believe that even though he was saved by grace through faith, he also needed to obey the law. When this happened sin revived in him making it difficult to do what he knew was right and to stop doing what was wrong. **In other words, the law introduced into the believer’s life, brings death.** Others deduce from this passage that Paul is referring to the unsaved man trying to live under law. Whatever conclusion one may assume, it is clear that Paul is blaming the law, including the Ten Commandments, for bringing death. The New American Bible Commentary for Romans 7:13-25 reads: “**Far from improving the sinner, law encourages sin to expose itself in transgressions or violations of specific commandments (see Romans 1:24; 5:20). Thus persons who do not experience the justifying grace of God, and Christians who revert to dependence on law as the criterion for their relationship with God, will recognize a rift between their reasoned desire for the goodness of the law and their actual performance that is contrary to the law. Unable to free themselves from the slavery of sin and the power of death, they can only be rescued from defeat in the conflict by the power of God’s grace working through Jesus Christ.**”

*commandment*. When Paul wrote “law”, he clearly intended to include the Ten Commandments, the very Ten Commandments to which he undoubtedly proclaims in this same context that we have died (Rom. 7:4).

He also makes some strong commentary on the law with clear evidence to the fact that he was including the entire law, specifically the Ten Commandments, stating that the “letter kills”, referring to law as “the ministry of death”, and reiterating that the commandments are “the ministry of condemnation”.

### **2 Corinthians 3:4-11**

*And we have such trust through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup> who also made us sufficient as ministers of the **new covenant, not of the letter** (not of the law) but of the Spirit; **for the letter kills**, but the Spirit gives life.<sup>7</sup> But if the **ministry of death, written and engraved on stones**, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, <sup>8</sup> how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? <sup>9</sup> For if the **ministry of condemnation** had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. <sup>10</sup> For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. <sup>11</sup> For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.*

The “letter”, which is the ministry of death and condemnation, is clearly referring to the whole law and even more specifically to the Ten Commandments in this passage (and not to the written word, as some have falsely assumed). Which ministry do we live under: the ministry of death and condemnation which kills or the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness which gives life?

If Paul were to preach like this in many of our churches today, he would be expelled immediately. Imagine saying that the Ten Commandments revive sin in our lives—that they kill and condemn. That would be to attack in no uncertain terms our most holy livestock!

Paul who makes the amazing claim that he was “blameless” in respect to the righteousness in the law in Philippians 3:6, declares in the same passage that He considered that law-based righteousness was “rubbish” which he forsook in order to obtain the righteousness that comes through faith alone. We don’t mind him saying that he forsook self-righteousness or even his religious pedigree, but if he were to visit a church and clarify

that he was referring to the righteousness gained by keeping the entire law including the sacred Ten as “garbage”, would any pastor invite him back?

**As long as we insist that the moral laws are excluded from Paul’s teachings about the law, we cannot understand what he is saying about how we now live. In fact, his teachings lose their significance almost entirely.**

However painful it might be for us to recognize these truths, how can we go on feeding a sacred cow to which we are now dead; one which brings death and condemnation and empowers sinful passions in our lives? How can we continue purporting something as necessary when God declares that we are dead to it and that it has been annulled and is now obsolete?

The only way to continue in this false teaching is to cover our eyes, plug our ears and begin singing, “Tradition! Tradition!” Go ahead; sing it louder and louder until you can no longer hear this glorious truth that we are **dead** to the Ten Commandments.

Not until we hear what Paul was truly saying when he spoke of the law will we be able to fathom the depths of the Holy Spirit’s message to us through his letters. When we reread them with the understanding that when he writes “law”, he means the *entire* law, only then can we begin to understand the glorious accomplishments of the cross.

Beloved, we are free from the entire Old Covenant. We are under the New Covenant only. Mixing law back into grace by excluding the Ten Commandments from what Paul meant when He wrote “law”, is to preach “another” gospel, for if righteousness can come from keeping any part of the law, then Christ died unnecessarily (Gal.2:21).

