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**What Jesus Said about
Right Judgement**

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Top Ten

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**Notes from a Group Study
of the Epistle to the Hebrews**

WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT RIGHT JUDGEMENT

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In Isaiah 11:1-5 the prophet wrote of the coming of Jesus, giving us a description of his character: *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins.”*

The important verse in this passage is verse 4: *“He (Jesus) shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.”*

Humanity likes to think the worst of people. But Jesus did not judge by first impressions, neither did he jump to conclusions or take repeated information or gossip as fact. He knew that things are not always as they appear to be. The human race, on the other hand, for many reasons, is prone to making judgements even before God judges a situation.

‘Trial by media’ is an expression used to describe a situation in which an individual is prejudged by zealous reporters even before a court has passed its judgment. An example of this was the unfair miscarriage of justice done to the Chamberlain family in the early 1980s following the death of their baby daughter, who was taken by a dingo.

As followers of Jesus, when it comes to making personal judgments on individuals, we need to be very careful with what we think we see, and also any information we hear, especially without having all the relevant facts.

In Matthew 7:1-2 Jesus said: *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment, you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give, will be the measure you get”*. These verses must also be considered with everything else Jesus said about judgement. For

example, in the same chapter Jesus warned his followers to beware of false prophets and teachers (Matthew 7:15-16), and obviously this cannot be done without assessing the difference between who is right and who is wrong.

There are times when we are required to judge between good and evil, but never to penalise anyone or to pass a final sentence. That prerogative is God's alone at the appointed time (Romans 14:4-10; James 2:4). To this end Jesus said: *"If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world"* (John 12:47). Jesus made no final judgement on anyone, and if we are true followers of Jesus, this conviction, to make no final judgement, should be ours as well.

This does not mean that we turn a blind eye to the sins and failings of others or that sin does not have to be addressed and people not helped. However, depending on how it is done, to call attention to somebody's sin is not judging or penalising the individual. It is actually extending kindness, both to the sinner and to others who may see and copy their sin. However, there are scriptural guidelines for how this should be done, and also who is qualified to do it.

In Matthew 7:3-5 Jesus said: *"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye"*.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:14 Paul supplements these words; *"Now we exhort you, brothers, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, and be patient with them all"*. In Galatians 6:1 he also informed us of the qualifications required to help an individual, stating, *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness"*. So, those who are qualified to exercise church discipline need to be 'spiritual' men endowed with 'a spirit of gentleness'; men who are not arrogant, heavy-handed or judgmental.

Those who have the 'spirit of gentleness' will bear the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, which includes *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (Galatians 5:22). The 'spirit of gentleness' also includes a forgiving spirit, without anger or

desire to find fault in others, or to inflict harsh discipline with an unforgiving tone. It is only by prayer, patience, affectionate admonition and genuine love that an offender can be helped or recovered.

People cannot be hounded, goaded or bullied into the kingdom of God. To this end Peter encouraged true leaders to *“tend the flock of God that is in your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock”* (1 Peter 5:2-3). Peter, in fact, says that example is the greatest teacher. No one can be helped by ‘unspiritual men’ claiming to be ‘spiritual men’.

The opposite to right judgment is wrong judgement, and a half-right judgement is also a wrong judgement. It is one thing to recognise that we have made a wrong judgement, but another thing to understand why we made that improper judgement in the first place. So, before we attempt to judge any situation, we must judge ourselves first, lest we judge with beams in our eyes (Matthew 7:3-5).

Wrong and inappropriate judgement can stem from bias, enmity, suspicion, intolerance and even revenge, which, if not properly addressed, will invariably lead to the desire to use the situation as a means for payback. Very often this can involve indifference, coldness, complaining, gossip, slander and mocking of individuals both in or out of church. James warned, *“Do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors”* (James 5:9; RSV). The word grudge is used for the word grumble in the KJV; its meaning is to sigh or to groan.

In any judgement we might feel justified to make, we also need to be absolutely sure that it is not clouded by prejudice, assumption, suspicion or hearsay. In the words of the proverb, *“Partiality in judgement is not good”* (Proverbs 24:23). The basis for all wrong judgement boils down to a lack of love. In point of fact, people who judge wrongly do not love, and *“he who does not love, does not know God”* (1John 4:8).

One other thing is very certain; all of us shall stand before the judgment seat of God to give account of ourselves to God. So *“why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?”* (Romans 14:10). We need purity in our judgement of people. The word brother is not limited to each of us in this room. According to how Jesus used this word in his teachings, it includes the whole of the human race.

In making any judgements, Jesus said *“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment”* (John 7:24). Situations are not always as they appear, especially without consideration of all the facts. Again, we read in the proverbs: *“If one gives answer (or makes a judgement) before he hears (all the facts), it is his folly and shame”* (Proverbs 18:13). So, lest we become guilty of making false judgements, it must be supported by the entire truth.

Even when Jesus had all the facts, his judgements were very different from those of other men. An example of this is found in John 8:4, in the lesson of the Scribes and the Pharisees who brought a woman who had been caught in adultery to Jesus. They asked him: *“Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her? This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him.*

“And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, ‘Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her’. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, ‘Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her’. And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord’ “. In this situation, without any accusers, the woman had nothing to answer for.

Therefore, Jesus said, *“Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again”* (John 8:4-11). According to the law, this woman should have been stoned to death for adultery. But so also should the man with whom she allegedly committed the sin. However, Jesus did not condemn her. He was the only man in that scene who had the right to cast the first stone. But he saw her contrition and remorse and chose to let her off with a warning. His reason for taking these steps is also clearly laid out in God’s Old Testament Law.

In God’s Law, before any judgement could be made, it was necessary for both the accused and the accuser(s) to appear before the elders. God’s Law also stated that *“a single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained”* (Deuteronomy 19:15). If we read this

carefully, two or three people must have witnessed the committing of the offence. If there was more than one offence, then, according to God's law, each offence that was allegedly committed required at least two witnesses.

It also followed that *"if a malicious witness rises against any man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days; the judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother; so you shall purge the evil from the midst of you"* (Deuteronomy 19:16-20).

The whole process required both the accused and the accuser(s) of the dispute, including the witnesses of the offence, to appear before the priests and the judges. A witness who was not prepared to stand before the judges and the accused was not a witness at all. It should also be noted that a single judge could not officiate on his own. This procedure is still very relevant to the New Testament church today. When any part of this protocol is ignored, the results will inevitably be disastrous.

In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus said, *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican"*. Furthermore, in 1Timothy 5:19 Paul wrote, *"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses"*.

This situation was designed by God to protect the innocent from being judged and slandered at the mouth of a single witness, especially if that witness might want to extract some form of revenge or retribution for past wrongs.

In effect, the Pharisees had attempted to set up what could best be described as a 'Kangaroo Court'; a sham legal proceeding set up to give the impression of a fair and legal process. However, in reality the principles of law and justice are disregarded and perverted and the fate of the accused is actually decided in advance, with no consideration being made to all the facts and to the fairness of the situation.

The Pharisees were malicious in their intent and ‘judged according to the flesh’. The woman caught in the act of adultery was simply being used as a pawn to set Jesus up. In this situation, Jesus made a judgement founded on the facts, and more importantly, based on how he understood God’s Law, and because he sought to do the will of his Father, his judgment was not what the religious leaders had in mind. Jesus said of himself in John 5:30, *“I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me”*. Also, in John 8:15-16, *“You judge according to the flesh, I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone that judge, but I and he who sent me”*.

Jesus’ judgement was just and true, and he made sure that *“mercy triumphed over judgement”* (James 2:13). To this end Jesus also taught us saying, *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment, you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get”* (Matthew 7:1-2). It is better never to have judged at all, than to have judged wrongly, for ‘the measure we give will be the measure we get’.

If we are harsh or merciless, and unrepentant in our judgement of others, it will come back on us. So, in any judgement we care to make, it is better to err on the side of mercy and leniency than to be found later to have judged wrongly.

If we find ourselves placed in a situation where the modern-day Pharisees come with their gossip or attempt to set up their ‘Kangaroo Court’, we need to be very careful about accepting gossip, and, in accordance with the scriptures, we are entitled to ask if there are at least two witnesses who observed to the alleged offence.

Unfortunately, the attitude of the Pharisees still exists in the church today. The question you and I need to ask ourselves is, ‘Does that attitude reside in me?’ To receive the answer, we must be prepared to examine ourselves very seriously, and at the same time be open to God’s conviction.

May God bless us in our prayers as we *“Strive for peace with all men, and for true holiness (which does include purity in our judgement), without which no one will see the Lord”* (Hebrews 12:14).



TOP TEN

(References from the KJV unless otherwise stated.)

Merv Buckmaster

Introduction

Although ten is a very important number, whether it be used to list the most popular hit songs, the richest people in the world, or the world's most live-in-able cities, ten is more important as the basis for the metric system of weights and measures. But there is another Top Ten that is the most important. It is concerned, not with worldly things but with the law. It is the Decalogue, more widely known as the Ten Commandments. These commandments are God's laws, and were given verbally by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. They were written by miraculous means on tablets of stone, and taken by Moses to be shown to the nation of Israel waiting fearfully at the foot of the mountain. They are spelled out in the twentieth chapter of Exodus and in the fifth chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses proclaimed them to the members of the nation of Israel assembled on the plain below Mount Sinai.

When Adam and Eve were established in the garden of Eden, and God gave them a variety of fruit and grains to eat, there was a provision embedded in that benevolence, which was pointed out by Jesus when he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus told the devil, "*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). The Decalogue is at the forefront of God's every word.

The Ten Commandments are God's moral law; his laws of morality, the complete guide to moral behaviour. They have existed since the creation of man, although not formalised at that time. They were the foundation of the Law Covenant, the first ten of all the rules and instructions which God proclaimed in detail, through Moses, for the obedience of his chosen people, and on these ten commands he built a legal system for the people with respect to how they should behave and manage their lives every waking hour. We are taught by Paul in Galatians 3:24 that the failure of the Israelites to keep God's laws should have alerted them to the need for a different arrangement, a better and properly effective dispensation from their creator, who had rescued them from slavery in Egypt only to, seemingly, shackle them with a multitude of laws that they could not keep.

Paul also taught that Jesus had established that new and fully effective dispensation through the gospel message and his sacrifice on the cross, thereby replacing the covenant made with the Israelites through Moses,

which is often called the Law Covenant (although this is not a scriptural term), with the New Covenant. According to Hebrews 10:9, Jesus, in obedience to God's will, "... *take away the first, that he may establish the second*". The previous chapters of Hebrews deal with the new covenant foretold in Jeremiah 31:31, which is the 'second' of Hebrews 10:9. Therefore the 'first' of that verse is the first covenant which God made with the nation of Israel, which was God's system of law passed on to them by Moses, its mediator. Thus, the Law, or Old Covenant, with all its complexity, was replaced by the New Covenant in its simplicity, as Jesus explained in answer to the lawyer's question "*Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*" (Matthew 22:36). "*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*" (Matthew 22:37-39; see also Mark 12:28-31).

Jesus added the comment that, "*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*" (Matthew 22:40). This pronouncement may seem to re-instate the Old Covenant, but it does not do so because the New Covenant has a new law which is a royal law, the law of love as displayed by Jesus during his ministry. It is God's design that there are three great tenets of Christianity: faith, hope and love, and the gospel message affirms that the greatest of these three is love (1 Corinthians 13:3) for God is love (1 John 4:8). However, the Ten Commandments, God's moral law, were firstly, set in stone as the foundation of the Old Covenant, and secondly, and finally, re-affirmed in the law of love as the foundation of the New Covenant.

ONE

"I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2-3).

In the beginning God created all things for his pleasure (Revelation 4:11). His work of creation began with a spirit being like himself (Colossians 1:15 and Revelation 3:14), a spirit being whom he called his son (Matthew 3:17 and John 20:31).

God's firstborn was the Logos of John chapter one. As such he participated in the work of creation. His work continued with the development of the nation of Israel as God's chief angel, Michael, and he supervised the fortunes of that nation until it was time for God to transform him to become the man, Jesus Christ; God's anointed son.

After an inspirational life of perfect obedience Jesus was willing to make the sacrifice that God deemed to be the ransom for the fallen human race, that is, his death by crucifixion. Then, as God had promised, Jesus was resurrected, to continue his service to the creator by establishing the new dispensation of God's grace to men and women of faith. He now waits for the time when God will ask him to return to earth to begin the kingdom age work of the reconstitution of all things (Acts 3:21), when divine power will make all things new (Revelation 21:5).

Surely the actions of Jesus Christ through all the ages of history are the perfect example of *"Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy breath, and with all thy mind"* (Matthew 22:37). This commandment, all-encompassing as it is, is Jesus' re-statement of the first of God's Ten Commandments, *"I am the LORD, your God ... You shall have no other gods before me"*. Therefore this, the first of the Ten Commandments, was invoked from the beginning of creation.

For us, recognising the God of creation brings amazement, admiration, reverence and worship, and leaves no room for any other, because there is only one God (Isaiah 45:5,6,18,22; 1 Timothy 2:5).

TWO

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:4-6)

This commandment is the prohibition of idolatry. The Lord God is jealous, or possessive, of the love and worship of his people. Because God cannot be seen, cannot be heard and is undetectable to our other senses, this commandment is a challenge to faithfulness. But the existence of everything all around us is evidence of God's existence, so there is no excuse to allow human failings to lead to unbelief, as shown by fealty to material things which can be seen and touched. Since faith is the conviction of things unseen, the assurance of God's existence (Hebrews 11:1), the gospel message goes further than that which can be seen, and it becomes the power of salvation to those who believe (Romans 1:16). That message needs no support from other idols of superstition, and there must be no association with them (Acts 17:16-30).

This lesson from many passages of scripture is in harmony with the first commandment and again, is stated simply and clearly in 1 Timothy 2:5; “... *there is one God ...*”.

THREE

“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7)

The key element of this commandment is in Leviticus 19:12, viz. “*And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God*”. The meaning is made clear by James, “*But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation*” (James 5:12).

While it is incumbent upon the believer to call upon God in times of spiritual need, to mock him or try to tempt him is a betrayal of his goodness. And to be guilty of such disregard for his grace and mercy is to incur God’s displeasure, and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

Since God is the source of life, Jesus’ words which frame the ‘golden rule’, “... *all things whatsoever ye would that men do unto you, do ye even so unto them*” (Matthew 7:12), contains the principle to show respect to all living things which, in turn, is to show respect to the creator.

FOUR

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11)

God rested from his creation work, not because he was tired, since he is all-powerful, but because he chose to do so. However, he knew that men and women would need to rest after each six-day period of work, and showed that knowledge by setting it in the law to be a special day called the sabbath. Jesus made this clear in Mark 2:27, declaring that “*The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*”.

The requirement to rest from work on the sabbath was known to the Israelites before the giving of the Ten Commandments. In the wilderness, when they complained of hunger, God provided manna for them. Through Moses they were instructed that on the sixth day they were to collect twice as much as was needed for a day because there would be none provided on the seventh day.

“And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: ... and on the sixth day they gathered twice as much ... And he (Moses) said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: ... and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. ... And Moses said, Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none” (Exodus 16:21-27; NIV). When some went out to gather manna on the seventh day God asked Moses *“How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?”* (Exodus 16:28; NIV).

Jesus himself did not keep strictly to the requirement to do no work on the sabbath, as is set out in the commandment, which indicates that the sabbath restrictions are less severe now than they were for the Israelites. On one sabbath when out walking his disciples picked some heads of grain to eat, and some of the Pharisees asked, *“Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”* (Luke 6:1; NIV). Jesus answered them, *“The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day”* (Luke 6:5; NIV). On another sabbath he went into the synagogue and, while teaching, he healed a man with a shrivelled hand. Jesus said to the congregation, *“I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”* (Luke 6:9; NIV).

The apostles recognised the sabbath as a day of worship, as shown by Paul who went to the synagogue on each sabbath day to teach the people: *“And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks”* (Acts 18:4).

I believe that, as with the other nine commandments, the principle of this fourth commandment is still applicable today. God commanded that the sabbath was to be a day of rest, although from the above reports Jesus showed that the strict adherence to doing no work on the sabbath no longer applies to the extent of preventing good works. Thus, to keep the sabbath holy, and apply that principle today seems to require of the believer a stronger focus on worship, while those who do good work in caring for the needs of others are not to be restricted in doing those necessary tasks.

A few strict religious groups adhere to the letter of this commandment, consecrating the seventh day of each week to be for worship and rest only. However, Paul allowed for each individual to decide what to do with each day, but reminded them that God called for respect and commitment every day. *“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord”* (Romans 14:5-6; NIV). The details of the fourth commandment are not now commands to which we are bound. It is the responsibility of each individual to decide how to apply them. Although we are told that we should live each day as to the Lord (Romans 14:8), it is by the authority of God that the Sabbath is set apart for rest and religious purposes, as the six days of the week are appointed for labour (Genesis 2:3).

FIVE

“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12).

“And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

God put Adam in the garden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15). God made every beast of the field and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he called them: and Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field (Genesis 2:19,20). And then through an act of disobedience both he and Eve became aware that they were naked and hid from God when they heard his voice (Genesis 3:9-11).

I think that there is implied in these verses several basic aspects of the original relationship between God and man. Adam did God’s bidding by naming the animals, thus honouring his heavenly father. He tried to hide from God when he had done wrong, so he had respect for his creator; and respect for the truth, by not lying even when he had been deceived by a lie.

The commandment is to respect one’s earthly parents in honesty and truth, which is the proper extension of the law to respect God, our heavenly Father, clearly stated in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27. Paul also respected this commandment. *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise)”* (Ephesians 6:1-2).

SIX

“Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13).

As the self-existent one, God is the source of all life; thus all life belongs to him. Therefore, it is an offence to him to cause loss of life under any circumstance. The examples of killings throughout the Bible, from Cain and Abel, Moses and the Egyptian to Jesus’ crucifixion, are sufficient to show that it is human life which is to be regarded as sacred. Jesus took this principle further, beyond the command not to kill, by pointing out that to be angry without cause is tantamount to having murderous thoughts (Matthew 5:20-26).

The loss of human life, by whatever cause, is grievous to those who suffer because of the loss of that person. It would seem that God is experiencing grief as a consequence of the loss of lives from war and earthly disasters.

The command not to kill has its foundation when God created life, as indicated by God’s reaction to Cain’s murder of Abel. This command was given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. It was re-affirmed by Jesus in his sermon recorded in Matthew 5:20-22, and by Paul in Romans 13:9; *“For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”*.

The Law Covenant designated cities of refuge (Numbers chapter 35) for any Israelite who had inadvertently killed anyone, whereas the New Covenant provides the way to ask for forgiveness in such circumstances.

SEVEN

“Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

When God created Eve as a partner for Adam he made it clear, and Adam acknowledged God’s intention, that a man should cleave unto his wife. This is the divine arrangement called marriage, which is held to be inviolate through all the circumstances of life, and to be dissolved only by death of either marriage partner.

For the sake of fallen man the provisions which God allowed for divorce within the nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 24:1) were to eliminate the conflict brought about by incompatibility within a marriage.

The command to marriage fidelity was re-stated and strengthened by Jesus words in Matthew 5:27-28, *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”*, clarifying this troublesome situation with, *“But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, save for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery”* (Matthew 5:32). In his epistles, particularly in 1 Timothy 3:2,12, Paul re-asserted the sanctity of marriage as it was established in the seventh commandment of the Decalogue. He repeated the commandment in Romans 13:9, *“... Thou shalt not commit adultery”*.

EIGHT

“Thou shalt not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

“... all the earth is mine. saith the LORD” (Exodus 19:5). As the creator of all things, all things belong to him. The human race is privileged to have been granted custody of, and responsibility for, the things of this earth, whether those possessions are few or many, because we have not brought anything into the world at our birth. And that privilege is only temporary because we cannot take anything out of this world when we die. Thus, it could be said that we cannot steal anything from God, but because of fallen human nature, he knew that he had to give the command that no-one may steal any thing from any other person.

He also knew that the ambition to accumulate wealth is unworthy of the faithful (Matthew 6:19-21), a principle which was set out by Jesus’ command to focus not upon earthly treasure but upon heavenly rewards for faithfulness to God, who has promised to supply all the spiritual needs of those who understand and accept the terms of the New Covenant (Matthew 6:22-34).

Honesty is also the keynote of Jesus’ lesson in Matthew 22:15-22 about the tribute money, and in Paul’s re-statement of *“... thou shalt not steal”* in Romans 13:9.

NINE

“Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour”
(Exodus 20:16).

God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). But Satan, who is identified as God’s adversary, is also identified as the father of lying (John 8:44). Thus, to

indulge in lying is to copy, and so condone, the disobedience of Satan, and by that association be alienated from God. Jesus reminded the rich young man of God's prohibition of lying in Matthew 19:16-22, and a further reminder was given by Paul in Romans 13:9.

This is a command to act honestly in our dealings with God and with our fellow man. Too often in those dealings the truth is distorted or denied because of ignorance and human failings. We are reminded of our shortcomings by the wisdom of 'honesty is the best policy', and the moral quicksand of 'what a web of lies we weave, when first we practise to deceive'.

This principle is a fundamental tenet of good human behaviour and is eloquently expressed by Shakespeare; 'To thine own-self be true, and it follows as the night the day, thou canst not be false to any man.'

To fail the commandment to be true and truthful brings the need for repentance and for a plea for forgiveness.

TEN

“Thou shall not covet your neighbour's house, you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey nor anything that is your neighbour's”
(Exodus 20:17).

When Adam was expelled from the garden of Eden he was instructed to go forth and subdue the earth so that by the sweat of his brow he would be able to provide himself and Eve with food. That obligation has stood, in principle, since that time. There is a corollary to it in that what a man has gained by his work belongs to him, although only temporarily. This, in turn, applies to the work done when a worker is hired by another person, and the work done is paid for by that person. The principle is embodied in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-14). It is not acceptable to covet the higher wages of a fellow worker.

In a similar manner to the condemnation of malicious thoughts as being related to murder, covetousness is condemned as being related to stealing. Neither attitude is countenanced in the command to *“love thy neighbour”*. By conforming to that benevolent way of life, which was exemplified by Jesus, there should be no covetous thought about anything that is not our own.

The historical record of the Pentateuch shows that at that time it was the case that God provided for all temporal and spiritual human needs of those among the Israelites who were faithful to him, performing miracles on many occasions, despite the disobedience within the nation. With respect to the New Covenant, which is a spiritual covenant, God has provided for all our spiritual needs, and that providence requires nothing further, because the spiritual revival (Colossians 3:1), which brings faith, is the basis of justification and imputed righteousness, through which God's grace and mercy will achieve his ultimate intention.

A Précis

The Ten Commandments stand as the divine foundation of the Jewish and Christian faiths, and were the foremost laws of the Old Covenant, which also dealt with social and administrative matters, and together delineated every aspect of Jewish life. The Decalogue is the focal point of Jesus' answer to the question from the lawyer who asked, "*What shall I do to gain eternal life?*" (Luke 10:25). Jesus said, "*What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live*". (Luke 10:26-28). The lawyer had quoted the law of the New Covenant (Matthew 22:37-40) and Jesus told him that by keeping the law (the Mosaic Law for the Israelites, and the law of love for those under the New Covenant, both of which include the commands stated in the Decalogue), he would live.

However, there were commandments and laws from God established before the Israelites were given the social and administrative laws of the Old Covenant. When God instructed Adam not to eat the fruit of a certain tree he established a law, and with it a definition of disobedience given explicitly by John in 1 John 3:4 "*sin is the transgression of the law*", and exemplified by God's remonstrance with Cain "... *if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door*" (Genesis 4:6-7).

Colossians 2:14 says, "*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross*". By the "*handwriting of ordinances*" it may seem that the apostle meant the ceremonial laws which were written by Moses on parchment, perishable and impermanent, and not the Decalogue, which was divinely written on stone, imperishable and permanent. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, the initial inference is that the obligation to fulfil those ordinances was done away. The Mosaic Law, including the

Decalogue, and the ceremonial laws defined sin (disobedience) from which it may be inferred that the “... *ordinances which were against us ...*” means the ceremonial laws.

A more reasonable understanding is that the “*handwriting of ordinances*” means a record of their sins, and that was what was against the Israelites, because it was sin which condemned them. Thus, it was the record of their sins, the handwriting of ordinances, not the laws themselves, which were symbolically nailed to the cross. Jesus’ sacrifice enabled the forgiveness of sins.

Nevertheless, I do believe that there is a clear separation between the moral nature of the Ten Commandments, engraved on stone tablets, and the multitude of instructions to the Israelites for the conduct of their religious, social and business activities, written by Moses on scrolls and recorded in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. I believe that the ceremonial laws were dispensed with at the end of the Jewish Age, as indicated in the letter to the Hebrews, especially chapter 10, whereas the moral law was to remain, as shown by Jesus in Matthew chapters 5 and 6, and re-affirmed by Paul in Romans chapter 13 and by his instructions in his letters to Timothy. Both Jesus and Paul restated the commands of the Decalogue as part of the gospel message.

I believe that there is neither justification for diminishing the importance of, nor for expanding the coverage of the Decalogue. The Ten Commandments have an over-riding importance with respect to the New Covenant, re-affirmed by Jesus in his sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapter 5 *et seq*). From another viewpoint, human moralists, recognising that we have moral obligations, have composed a list of seven deadly sins. And children are taught in Sunday School that envy, jealousy, malice and pride, should never in the heart abide, whereas the Ten Commandments continue to stand alone as the complete authority for moral human behaviour. And from that deduction, the Decalogue, God’s moral law has no boundaries to that authority for life on earth. It applies to all mankind as it has done since Adam and Eve walked in the garden of Eden.

The first four commandments deal with man’s relationship with God, which together fulfil the command to love God with all your heart and mind, whereas commandments five to ten deal with man’s relationships with each other, which together comply with the command to love your neighbour as yourself.

Conclusion

Because God is the source of life (Genesis 1:1 – 2:25), because he is all-powerful (Revelation 19:6) and all-knowing (1 John 3:20), because he cannot lie (Titus 1:2), because everything which he does is for the ultimate benefit of his creation (Romans 8:28), and because he does not change (James 1:17), it follows that the moral law, that is the Decalogue, is implicit in his divine character, and, like him, is everlasting (Genesis 21:33). Because he exists, his moral law is part of the fabric of life of the human race which he created in his likeness. So, it is my understanding that although the Old Covenant has been taken away, the Ten Commandments remain as part of the covenant of love, and God still expects us to obey them.

Faith has always been the means to justification with respect to both the Old and New Covenants. But, “ ... *Faith without works is dead*” (James 2:20), and “ *I will shew thee my faith by my works*” (James 2:18). Obeying the commandments is part of the works that show our faith, and fulfils the requirement to love the Lord thy God and to love thy neighbour as thyself. The difference now is that we can now ask for, and receive, forgiveness under the terms of the New Covenant when we disobey.



Notes from a Group Study of the Epistle to the HEBREWS

Hebrews 12:5-11

5. *And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:*
6. *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*
7. *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*
8. *But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*
9. *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*
10. *For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*

11. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Paul reminded them of the exhortation in Proverbs 3:11-12 which they were given from their childhood, and which they had forgotten, according to verse 5. They had to change with the change of the covenants, which would be difficult, but, as before, obedience would bring great benefits. Jesus was rewarded with joy, and believers will be rewarded according to God's promises of the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7) and the call to a heavenly inheritance (1 Peter 1:4).

These verses deal with chastisement, which some versions give as discipline and some as hardship. This can be both physical and spiritual. The Hebrews suffered physical persecution under Roman rule, and also from the Jewish hierarchy. Trying to be separate from the world while living in it can cause social hardship in that its temptations are most difficult to resist because of their subtlety. Also, much wrongdoing is accepted by most societies. There is also spiritual hardship consequent to the widespread ignorance of the truth, which is governed by the conscience in discerning good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

All these hardships are to be taken for discipline or chastisement, just as "*fathers of the flesh*" (verse 9) chastised or disciplined their children as part of child training, and did it, "*after their own pleasure*" (verse 10), that is, as they thought best, not because they enjoyed doing it. Having suffered that chastisement for a few years as children, so the believer should accept God's discipline with patient endurance, suffering because God's discipline is "*for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness*" (verse 10).

God's chastisement may be active or passive. During the Patriarchal and Jewish Ages he dealt directly with men and women, sometimes admonishing them for a variety of sins, just as a father disciplines a child when it does wrong. The provision of the New Covenant is an example of God's intervention. Jesus also was active in chastening his disciples during his ministry.

Since that time God takes action through the holy spirit which strengthens the conscience to bring obedience to his rules, knowing that whoever breaks his rules suffers the consequence of loss of divine favour. This may be regarded as active chastisement although it is spiritual, not physical in nature. One rule for us is to show moderation or forbearance in all our dealings (Philippians 4:5).

God also takes action through the angels who are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation (chapter 1 verse 14). The Lord told Paul that his thorn in the flesh was a message from Satan and a chastisement to remind him to be humble in the Lord's service (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

In the light of the universal observation that good things happen to bad people and that bad things happen to good people, and with the knowledge that divine justice is perfect, it is difficult to justify the idea that God intervenes directly in men's affairs at the present time. However, we acknowledge his power to intervene at any time according to his will, and James reminds believers to acknowledge this in prayer and in every daily activity (James 4:15).

Verse 11 shows that the purpose of chastisement is a *"harvest of righteousness and peace"* (NIV). Paul claimed that *"tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed"* (Romans 5:3,4), indicating that to accept suffering, to endure chastening as in verse 7, will produce what God desires in us.

To receive chastening is a sign of sonship according to verse 6, so being without chastening is a sign of the opposite, that is a decline from sonship as in verse 8. This gives rise to the question; 'How does the believer differentiate between God's chastening and other adversities?' God does not have to instigate trials since they are with us all the time, many of them caused by ourselves, and others that are beyond our control. Chastisement comes mostly from living to Christian principles, and our faith should indicate any discipline that is worthwhile for us if we are rightly *"exercised thereby"*.

Everyone is subject to time and chance (Ecclesiastes 9:1) and God does not tempt us (James 1:13). *"He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the justified and the unjustified"* (Matthew 5:45), and *"works all things together for good to those who love him"* (Romans 8:28). Verse 7 of our chapter calls the believer to endure chastening, even hardship for the sake of the life and its benefits to come.

Hebrews 12:12-17

- 12. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;**
- 13. And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.**

- 14. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:**
- 15. Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;**
- 16. Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.**
- 17. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.**

In verse 12 the Hebrews were instructed to brace their weakened hands to take a stronger grip on the life offered through the resurrection, and to brace their weakened knees to stand firm in their faith in God's promises. Their faith may have been weakened by worldly cares, and Paul was giving them further encouragement to look to Jesus and his example, as he wrote in verse 2. The believer should guard against distractions and conserve energy by not taking on more than can be coped with, such as worldly activities that weaken or distract, and find the level path which is easier for all, even the lame to walk (verse 13).

In verse 14 Paul wrote "*Follow peace with all men*". Peace is an important aspect of Christian life. "*Blessed are the peacemakers*" Jesus said (Matthew 5:9); and Paul exhorted Christians to "*live peaceably with all men*" (Romans 12:18) and also to follow holiness, to seek it out. Peace is external while holiness is internal, observed by God and displayed by the manner of our conduct (1 Peter 1:15). Holiness is sanctification, the state of separation from the world to serve God; to be fashioned after Jesus' nature which can be seen, that is, perceived in his conduct while on earth, and to perceive also the truth and value of the gospel message.

In verse 15 the phrase "*fail of*" the grace is better rendered as 'fall short of', with the meaning to be left behind, or late to arrive, or fail to reach God's grace which is a gift. That grace will not fail, but the believer has to be diligent in order to be eligible to receive it.

From Deuteronomy 29:18 it was suggested that the "*root of bitterness*" was apostasy. The Israelites were prohibited from turning away from Yahweh to serve other gods. The Hebrews were warned against anything similar taking root among them, because its influence could increase and become harmful to others, turning them away from the truth and resulting in schism or division between brethren.

Verse 16 has a warning against accepting any profane, or Godless person such as Esau was. Profanity, or disregarding God's providence became prevalent among the Israelites, as is shown in the Old Testament by the record of their behaviour throughout the Jewish age.

The blessing that Esau despised (Genesis 25:29-34), and that is mentioned in verse 17 as the birthright, included a double portion of the material inheritance from Isaac (Deuteronomy 21:17), the judicial authority of his father, the position of being the priest for the family and the pronouncement upon him of increases in wealth of grain, flocks and herds. However, he also despised the promise to Abraham and Isaac of the seed that would bless all the families of the earth, and it would seem that it was the rejection of that promise that incurred God's greater displeasure.

Hebrews 12:18-24

- 18. *For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,***
- 19. *And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:***
- 20. *(For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:***
- 21. *And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake,***
- 22. *But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,***
- 23. *To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,***
- 24. *And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.***

In verse 18 Paul returned to his main theme of contrasting the old and new covenants. From there to verse 21 he described the old arrangement between God and the Israelites, and in verses 22 to 24 he dealt with the new arrangement of the Gospel Age. In all these verses he made the distinction between the Israelites who gathered at the physical Mount Sinai where God spoke to them through Moses, the

mediator of the Law Covenant, and the Christian Hebrews who have come to the spiritual New Covenant mediated by Jesus Christ through whom God now speaks to them (chapter 1 verse 2) with the gospel message. The former occasion was one of fear because of its presentation with thunder and lightning, but the New Covenant comes in peace with the offer of reconciliation.

The Law Covenant applied only to the Israelites (Amos 3:2) and was imposed upon them, whereas believers from all nations who understand and accept the invitation of the New Covenant take up a provisional citizenship of the new world order that will come to completion at God's appointed time.

In verse 22 "*Mount Zion*", "*the city of the living God*" and "*the heavenly Jerusalem*" were thought to be referring to the same thing, that is God's righteous government of the Kingdom Age. However, there appeared to be differences between the "*innumerable company of angels*", the "*general assembly*" and the "*church of the firstborn*", although all are probably part of the same order or dispensation.

The Israelites went to Mount Sinai where the Law Covenant came into effect, and the Christian believers "*are come*" or have come to the New Covenant, which was brought into effect by Christ's death and resurrection. They are not waiting for it to be implemented.

The church of the firstborn was identified with Jesus' little flock because he was the firstborn of creation and the first to be resurrected to eternal life. He was the firstfruits of 1 Corinthians 15:23 and James 1:18. The members of that church have their names written in heaven (verse 23), and the mark of the Lord's approval on their foreheads (Revelation 20:4), beginning with Jesus' disciples (Luke 10:20).

In verses 18 to 21, although Mount Sinai is not named it is clearly identified, and Paul had shown in earlier chapters of Hebrews that it symbolises the Law Covenant that was sealed with the blood of beasts and had Moses as its mediator, although again these features are not mentioned. That old system of worship had no provision for its cessation. The Israelites had to continue with it without any prospect of release unless it was replaced, and so it had to be replaced. It was to guide them to a better dispensation (Galatians 3:24).

In verses 22 to 24 the New Covenant is identified by the symbolic Mount Sion, and Jesus is named as its mediator, who sealed it with his blood. The city, or government of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem or centre of its administration, the innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the firstborn, God the judge of all, and the spirits of justified men made complete, may all be regarded as features of the whole arrangement under the New Covenant. That arrangement provides for the reconstitution of all things (Acts 3:21) and it will not be needed further when God's plan has been completed, at the end of the kingdom age.

The New Covenant has been established. Each believer comes to it during his or her life, and by accepting its terms in faith, becomes a participant in the whole arrangement. The angels already do God's bidding. A few human beings will be chosen to join the organisation as the church of the firstborn, some as the general assembly, and the faithful of the pre-Christian era as princes in all the earth. The angels "*desired to look into*" things preached as the gospel (1 Peter 1:12), and Paul told the Corinthian congregation that "*the saints shall judge the world*" and that "*we shall judge angels*" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

The "*spirits of just men*" of verse 23 are related to the New Covenant because they are linked with "*Jesus the mediator of the New Covenant*" which follows directly in the next verse. It was suggested that the men referred to could be the apostles who were justified by their faith, and given the commission to preach the gospel message, for which purpose they were made mature or complete for that task by Jesus' teaching, and especially by the miraculous power of the holy spirit given at Pentecost.

However, the apostles would be included in the "*church of the firstborn*", thus the justified men could include believers as they come to an understanding of the gospel call and their faith grows to maturity. The holy spirit works with their spirit, that is in their minds, to teach the truth that is recorded in the scriptures. During the gospel age the few will be chosen as the joint-heirs, who will then bring to maturity the faithful ones of the ages before Jesus' advent, while others will be justified by their faith which they develop during the kingdom age.

In verse 24 the "*blood of sprinkling*" is Jesus' blood that sealed the New Covenant. It provides a better arrangement than Abel's blood, whether it is his own blood regarded as a sacrifice, or the blood of the sacrifices he made that was accepted by God. According to

Genesis 4:10 Abel's blood "*crieth from the ground*" for justice and retribution, whereas Jesus' blood speaks of forgiveness, reconciliation and salvation.

Hebrews 12:25-29

- 25. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:**
- 26. Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.**
- 27. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.**
- 28. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:**
- 29. For our God is a consuming fire.**

The purpose of comparing the nature and scope of the two covenants is brought into focus in verse 25. "*Him that speaketh*" is God, because he speaks from heaven. He spoke through Moses during the giving of the Law Covenant, and through his appointed servants, judges and prophets during the Jewish Age. He speaks through Christ and the apostles with the giving of the New Covenant during the gospel Age. Jesus acknowledged God as the source of everything he taught and the authority for everything he did.

The nation of Israel turned away from God, firstly because of their fear of him when he spoke to them at Mount Sinai, and secondly by disobeying the Law Covenant. Paul told the Hebrews not to turn away from Jesus, who spoke to them about the New Covenant. The Israelites did not escape the consequences of their apostasy, and similarly the Christian believer cannot avoid the judgement of "*him that speaks from heaven*".

To refuse what God has offered allows no alternative for life, because only he offers reconciliation and salvation through the New Covenant. To a select few his call is to a heavenly inheritance; to others he offers life on earth as he gave it to Adam. The Israelites tried to escape from God's voice heard on earth at Mount Sinai, but they were reminded of his voice and commands through the prophets, and they could not avoid the punishments for their disobedience. Nor can believers escape from God's voice and commands sent from heaven and recorded in the scriptures.

At Sinai God's power shook the earth literally with an earthquake. He also caused an upheaval in the social order and governing arrangements by establishing the Law Covenant, overturning the previous systems. Also, in verse 26 it is stated that he will shake the earth and the heavens of the present order of things that man has made. He will overturn those systems of society and government and remove them so that his unshakeable kingdom can be established and will remain.

Comparison of the setting up of both covenants again reveals similarities. At Sinai there was an earthquake in both physical and figurative senses, in that the mountain shook and a new religious order was established. Those arrangements were unsatisfactory to God and needed to be shaken. Then at the ratification of the New Covenant the earth was also shaken by an earthquake and the heavens were also shaken as a new religious order was established (Matthew 27:51).

And in verse 27 Paul pointed out two things concerning the shaking of earth and heaven at the crucifixion. Firstly, God replaced the old covenant order with the new covenant arrangement, and secondly, that change enabled the removal of the man-made arrangements that were unsatisfactory to God, thus allowing his new heavens and earth to be set up when he decides that the time for them has come.

Although there are physical and symbolic features associated with the giving of the Law Covenant and with the establishment of the New Covenant, the verses from 18 to 24 seem to give more emphasis to the physical aspects of the confrontation at Mount Sinai.

The shaking of the earth and the heaven, as in verse 26, may take place at the end of the Gospel Age, and at the beginning of the Kingdom Age, because only the Kingdom will remain after the shaking. It will be a testing time for all mankind. While some shaking of social and religious systems occurred when the New Covenant was established, those systems have not yet been removed for the kingdom to replace them.

The reference in Haggai 2:5-7, which also foretold a shaking of earth and heaven, included the sea and the dry land in the shaking, and seems to allude to the upheaval and total renewal of all things that will take place during the kingdom age. Only God's righteous rulership, that cannot be shaken, will remain after the shaking, as is noted in verse 28.

However, the kingdom of God is not only the thousand-year reign. The means of establishing it, and the principle or complete picture of the

kingdom itself began at the end of Jesus' ministry with his sacrifice. A further shaking of earth and heaven was required as shown by the phrase "yet once more" in verses 26 and 27. That shaking took place for the sake of all mankind, or "once for all" according to the Diaglott; and was the only time it was needed as part of God's plan. The Law Covenant was removed, the New Covenant and all the consequences of it were set up, not necessarily to be time dependent.

In verse 28 the "receiving a kingdom" is the same as "coming to" of verse 22, and in Colossians 1:13 the expression "conveyed into the kingdom" is used.

In verse 29 the allusion to God as a consuming fire appears to be contrary to a God of love; but that aspect of his power is to do with justice, not benevolence, and symbolises the destruction of all the things which he detests (Psalm 119:104,128). Deuteronomy 4:24 shows that God is jealous for, that is, protective of, his people, being all those who are accepted through the covenants sealed by the shedding of blood: the Israelites, through the Law Covenant, which was temporary, during the Jewish age; and the believers through the New Covenant, which is permanent, during the gospel age.

According to 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, God will take vengeance as a flaming fire on those who are disbelieving, disobedient and do not accept the offer of grace through Christ's ransom sacrifice. They will be destroyed, removed from the presence of the Lord forever.



THE NEW COVENANT NEWS

The New Covenant News is compiled by an editor responsible to the New Covenant Fellowship. The thoughts expressed do not necessarily represent the understandings of all the members of the group, and readers are requested to heed the words: **"Prove all things"** (1 Thessalonians 5:21).



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