

Divine Standards

“The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”

—John 1:17

IT IS PROBABLY ACKNOWLEDGED universally that something is wrong in the world today. In reality, however, that observation could have been

made during any period of history since mankind fell from perfection in Eden. Hardly a day goes by without most of humanity witnessing some form of societal dysfunction. The news regularly reports acts of violence, including physical abuse, murder, inter-ethnic as well as international conflict. This list comprises but a few of the many areas which reflect the existence of sin in today's world.

Examples of such evils go back to Old Testament times. The Biblical narrative of the Genesis account tells us that Adam and Eve disobeyed God's law by partaking of the forbidden fruit. “Unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground;

for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—Gen. 3:17-19

The account continues: “The LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”—vss. 22-24

SIN AFFECTS ALL

All mankind has been affected by the disobedience of the first pair because Adam is the father of the human race, and his offspring inherited the sentence of death. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”—Rom. 5:12

Eventually, through Moses, God established a covenant with the nation of Israel. One of its purposes was to illustrate the inability of fallen humanity to keep God’s standards of perfection. The Lord promised that anyone who could keep the laws associated with that covenant would no longer be under condemnation but would have earned the right to everlasting life. The promise given was, “Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.”—Lev. 18:4,5

WRITTEN ON TABLETS

God's requirements were written on tablets at Mount Sinai and represented the righteous standards that were to be followed by his covenant people, the nation of Israel. When Moses descended and observed the Jewish people engaged in lewdness as well as paying homage to a golden calf, his anger was kindled, and he cast the tables out of his hands and broke them in pieces. (Exod. 32:19) This incident is well known by those who have familiarity with this Old Testament narrative. After a subsequent appearance before the Lord, Moses brought the people a second set of tablets on which these standards were re-inscribed.—Exod. 34:1

It has been expressed by some who appreciate the godly requirements recorded in the Ten Commandments that society would be so much better if these laws were posted in prominent places where they could be easily read as reminders for personal conduct or taught to children in schools for emulation. It would be well to keep in mind, however, that God only dealt with natural Israel during the Jewish Age, so this written law applied to them exclusively. Actually, neither they nor any sinful human being could actually keep it in a flawless manner. Nevertheless, its precepts, even though put into practice imperfectly, served as a “schoolmaster” to lead some of them to Christ when he came to die as man's Redeemer.—Gal. 3:24-26

THE DECALOGUE

The Ten Commandments, sometimes called the Decalogue, may be categorized in the following manner. (Exod. 20:3-17) The first three related to Israel's obligations to God. The fourth may be described as

a connecting link which applied to both God and man. The final six pertained to each Israelite's relationship to one another as well as to all men. These ten specific laws were given as a literal guide as to God's standards of conduct for his covenant people, Israel, who were specially favored above everyone else at that time. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."—Amos 3:2

For the consecrated followers of Christ during the present Gospel Age, although imperfect according to the flesh, it would be unnecessary to prescribe a set of commands to observe such as those given to Israel. This is because Jesus' sacrifice is the basis for our relationship with God at this time. The Apostle Paul indicates that having received the Holy Spirit, it would be improper to place ourselves under the bondage of the Mosaic Law, which could not offer life to any imperfect being.—Gal. 3:1-3

As the commandments given to Moses pertained to natural Israel, these ten requirements served as a reminder concerning God's expectations for them and may be summarized as follows:

1. Do not have any other gods before me
2. Do not make any idols to represent me
3. Do not take the Lord's name in vain
4. Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy
5. Honor your Father and Mother
6. Do not murder
7. Do not commit adultery
8. Do not steal
9. Do not testify or bear false witness against your neighbor
10. Do not covet

GOSPEL AGE TRANSITION

Christians, like the nation of Israel, are imperfect. However, they appreciate the faithfulness of Jesus Christ in laying down his life to purchase the entire human family from its sinful and dying conditions. Jesus was perfect, and he was able to keep not only the letter of the Law but also its spirit. As his footstep followers we are required to keep the spirit of the Law only, as our imperfections and weaknesses of the flesh are covered by the redemptive merit of the “precious blood of Christ.”—I Pet. 1:18,19

Paul further explains, “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom. 8:3,4) In view of this gracious provision, let us consider how the spiritual principles related to each aspect of the Decalogue might be applied in the lives of consecrated Christians today.

NO OTHER GODS

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ: even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved: in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness

of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”—Eph. 1:3-7, *American Standard Version*

This text affirms that God is worthy of our praise, adoration and worship for all of his many blessings to us. As his obedient children, it behooves us to conduct our lives in accordance with his will as revealed in the Scriptures. Thus, the supremacy of God is not merely something we should appreciate intellectually, but more than that, the spirit of this reality compels us to reverence him by obedience to his Word. “Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.”—Isa. 44:8

MAKE NO IDOLS

Idolatry connotes the worship of something or someone as if it were God. As believers in Christ, it is unlikely that any of us would pay homage to statues or pagan deities as was a failing of the nation of Israel during Old Testament times. It is possible, however, if care is not exercised in our consecrated walk, to erect something of greater importance in our lives ahead of our Heavenly Father. Here is one of many such examples. We might have a desire for wealth or the things which money can buy. The Master speaks about the deceitfulness of riches, and we are told elsewhere that the love of money is the root of all evil. (Matt. 13:22; I Tim. 6:10) The temptation to strive for personal wealth is one which needs to be thwarted if we are truly committed to the service of the Lord. This of course, is not to say that the possession of means would necessarily cause the Lord’s dear ones to stumble.

Nevertheless, if we are motivated by a desire to increase our prosperity for the sake of any form of self-gratification, then surely such should be a red flag signaling danger. We are required to provide things needful and decent for those who are dependent upon us, and are reminded, “If any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.” (I Tim. 5:8, ASV) Passages such as this are absolutely correct, but the spirit of them must be balanced against other texts which stress the importance of not seeking “treasures upon earth” to lavish upon ourselves. (Matt. 6:19-21) We should recognize that we are stewards of all that the Lord has provided for us, and in giving an account at the end of our course, we want to be able to manifest that we were faithful in using everything in the Master’s service to the best of our ability.—I Cor. 4:1,2

TAKE NOT GOD’S NAME IN VAIN

As faithful Christians we strive to follow divine instruction as a daily lifestyle. “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. ... But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”—Rom. 6:15,22

A Christian who is true to his profession daily strives to attain mastery over sin in himself and is able, over time, to make progress in this direction. He puts on the “fruit of the Spirit,” and lives and walks “in the Spirit.” (Gal. 5:22-25) Thus the example of a righteous life reflects an appreciation for that holy name which is our standard to represent before the world as living epistles, known and read of all

men with whom we come in contact. (II Cor. 3:2) To do anything less, to that extent, may be considered taking God's name in vain as it relates to the daily fulfillment of our consecration vow.

SABBATH-KEEPING

As part of the divine arrangement, observance of the Sabbath was one of God's requirements which Israel failed to keep properly. Through obedience to its demands and the will of God, Jesus sacrificed his life on behalf of Israel as well as all the world and inherited the promises set forth in the Mosaic Law. Consecrated followers of Christ, by faith in his completed atoning work, realize the ultimate purpose of the Sabbath is for the church. To these, each day is a Sabbath of spiritual rest in Jesus.

Paul's admonition to us is to keep a daily rest of faith in God during our earthly sojourn, with the hope of entering into a condition of complete rest beyond the veil. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."—Heb. 4:1-11

HONORING PARENTS

Symbolically, the Sarah feature of the Abrahamic Covenant might be considered as our mother. (Gal. 4:26) Regarding our father, the following excerpt from the pen of a devoted Christian seems especially appropriate. "While fully commending the propriety of honor to earthly parents, and appreciating the Lord's promise of blessing to such as obey it, we have in mind that the Great King Eternal, the Creator,

has adopted us into his family and given us the spirit of sonship whereby we cry, Abba, Father. He has given us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might become partakers of the divine nature and sharers with our heavenly brother Jesus in his Messianic kingdom. How we should honor him! How it should be the chief endeavor of life to us to glorify our Father in heaven!"

DO NOT MURDER

As consecrated believers, we do not need the restraints of this commandment to make us know that we should not kill anyone, which even the civilized laws of the nations prohibit. To have evil thoughts or sentiments in our hearts against another of the Lord's people, or to entertain thoughts of hatred, malice or anger, reflects the spirit of murder in our hearts.

We are forcibly reminded that any desire to do injury to another of God's anointed is strictly forbidden. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." (I John 3:15) How high a standard is thus set forth in God's word for each follower of Christ who is striving to become a member of his Bride.—II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7; 21:2,9

DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY

The influence of the Holy Spirit as well as our conscience would emphasize to us that "if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom. 8:13) This does not merely refer to immoral acts, but under our covenant of sacrifice, we are called upon to think in terms of how we can glorify

our Heavenly Father by having our minds focus upon the things that are above, as opposed to those which are here on the earth.

The Master said, “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.” (Matt. 5:27,28) Christians are to espouse the highest and noblest precepts at all times, which go far beyond merely the “letter” of the Law.—Rom. 2:29; 7:6

DO NOT STEAL

This is a direct statement which epitomizes God’s justice. The law of love, by which the Christian is guided, requires that our dealings with one another and with the world should neither directly nor indirectly be involved in any type of theft. For example, stealing the good name of another is but one illustration of a practice that could plague us if we are not vigilant and guided fully by the Holy Spirit.

Since our tongue is an instrument that can be used for good or evil, we must with great care regulate it with our hearts. All of our expressions are to be lovingly applied when making reference to others, whether within the brotherhood or with regard to neighbors and others that we meet in everyday affairs of life. “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”—Eph. 4:21-30

DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS

This exhortation would apply not only in the case of a formal setting wherein it would be necessary

to judge the truth of a matter, but equally it would relate to all the affairs of life. Justice demands the treatment of others in a manner equal to what we ourselves would desire. The sin of bearing false witness could be done not only by the expression of words, but by a look, or a shrug of the shoulders. Such sin might also be committed by keeping quiet, if silence could be understood to mean our consent to what is being stated in a negative manner about someone.

Here is a Scripture that we would do well to take to heart: “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” (I Pet. 1:14-16) We should daily strive to the utmost of our ability to bring our characters into conformity with God’s standards of holiness.

DO NOT COVET

Colossians 3:5 reminds us that covetousness is a form of idolatry. As believers guided by the Holy Spirit of love, we must not covet anything which belongs to another. A Scripture such as “it is more blessed to give than to receive” emphasizes the generous spirit which should continually be welling up in the heart of all God’s people.—Acts 20:35

As we seek to follow in the Master’s footsteps, we will see that the spirit of service is the spirit of discipleship. Therefore, our desires should be to develop the fruits and graces of the spirit, rather than seeking anything that would lead to self-aggrandizement. If envy or jealousy should enter into our hearts because we desire recognition that has been given

to others, we need to have a cleansing of our minds and heart so that the proper spirit of love will be manifested in our being.—II Cor. 7:1

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

In the 22nd chapter of Matthew is recorded a series of questions posed by the enemies of Christ who tried to entrap him. “Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 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. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”—Matt. 22:35-40; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18

To the Jew, the Mosaic Law was a schoolmaster to bring them to the acceptance of Christ. The Apostle Paul indicates that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom. 8:4) Thus, the spirit of the two commandments of the Law cited by Jesus is binding upon every true follower of the Master.

A NEW COMMANDMENT

Every footstep follower of Jesus must of necessity desire to serve his Heavenly Father with all of his power, mind, being and strength, and to love his neighbor. We might thus inquire as to why Christians should have the additional commandment which Jesus set forth. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” (John 13:34)

The implication of this exhortation implies a still greater devotion to our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus than the keeping of the previously mentioned commandments. "We know ... the love of God for us because Christ expressed it in laying down his life for us. We must in turn express our love by laying down our lives for those who are our brothers." (I John 3:16, *J. B. Phillips New Testament*) Mankind, after being brought to perfection and then living throughout eternity on the earth, will love their fellow man as they love God, with every fiber of their strength and being. This present age, however, for the spirit begotten, is the time when the commandment of loving one another as Jesus loved us is being put to the test.

The commandments relative to God's typical people, the nation of Israel, as well as those which address the spirit of the Law, and which are especially relevant to those who are consecrated believers in Christ, reflect the divine standard of righteousness. May we manifest obedience to the terms of our covenant of sacrifice by demonstrating faithfulness in laying down our lives for the brethren, as well as by serving and likewise encouraging them to rise to the maximum degree of faith possible. Faithfulness in this regard will enable us to assist the world of mankind to progress up the highway of holiness in that blessed kingdom of righteousness when the human family is reconciled to God.—
Isa. 35:8-10 ■