

LAW or LOVE – or BOTH?

By

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A false dichotomy is being presented the world through the fragmented churches of our day. On the one hand is the plea to obey the Lord and live according to His commandments. On the other hand is the popular doctrine that Christianity is simply a matter of love, that commandment-keeping hinders Christian expression, and that we can be silent about God's commands as long as we are filled with love. In effect, it says: Don't worry over commandments, just love Jesus and everybody else.

How do we know "love" except it be measured by the One of Whom it is said, "God is Love"? How can we judge an act as an act of love unless it can be tested by the law that establishes the nature of all action? For this reason, the more our generation ignores the commandments given in the Bible, the more it will deteriorate in human relations, while at the same time talking, singing and writing about "love". Men, without the commandments of Christ, promote all manner of perversions in the name of love. Couples who live together without assuming the responsibilities of marriage claim that the arrangement is one based on love. OF course, they are ignoring the love they owe to parents, to the Christian community and even to the offspring that might be produced from such an arrangement. Without commandments of God, there is no way to determine love; each man does what is right in his own eyes, but to him it may be an act of love, even if it brings disaster to others as well as himself.

David is one who learned the truth about love and the law of God. As a young man he was plummeted to the throne and hailed as a mighty warrior, a hero to the whole nation. With the reigns of government in his hands, nothing impeded the fulfillment of his every wish. Young, passionate and impulsive, he satisfied his lust with Bathsheba, then sought to cover up the adultery by having her husband slain.

But this kind of love was a bitterness to him all his life. He wrote, "my sin is ever before me." Deeply repentant, he turned to the law of God. Then began the real love affair. "O how love I thy law." The very law he had trampled in the name of love became his delight. "I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved" (Psa. 119:47).

Many who have walked David's footsteps have learned that God's laws, which were broken, are far more desirable than that which drew them into sin. Sometimes we do not see the perfect beauty of God's law until we see it from the reverse side, until we lay broken upon it, until we see what it could be to never have broken it.

Love and commandments go together. Love can have meaning only if it means the same to all, for all time. In order for it to have universal and unchanging meaning it must be defined by that which is universal and eternal. This requires an infallible source: God. But man has for the most part ceased to look to God as infallible. From kindergarten upward through the public schools he is taught that standards are set by "society", by the common opinion of his peers. Thus the democratic process is applied to love, bringing it down from the lofty and infallible realm of God to the lowest common denominator, so that God's laws are flouted in the name of love.

Love that is defined by law makes stringent demands, as demonstrated in the giving of Christ in death, because “God so loved the world.” No one is going to go all out to fulfill such demands unless he recognizes the source from which they come as having priority over all. This is the secret of David’s great love for God’s law. He was convinced that “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all” (Psa. 102:19).

Moreover, David recognized the inevitable logic, that since God is infallible and Sovereign over all, therefore His law is good. “Thou are good, and does good; teach me thy statutes” (Psa. 119:68). IF God is, the He is good; and if good then He does good; and if He does good then all His commands must be good; and that being the case, I want to know them.

At the root of rebellion and disobedience is the conviction that God is not as good as He is reported to be in scripture and therefore His commands are not good, especially when they are restrictive and prohibit our full enjoyment of all the “good” we might get out of life.

Having rejected the infallibility and sovereignty of God and decided that His commands are NOT especially good, men have proceeded downward to the conclusion that many of His commands are actually evil and must not be taught nor observed. George Wilkins, a Church of England minister declared: “They (God’s commandments) are very largely responsible for giving young people the idea that the church is a wet blanket...” After Joseph Fletcher came out with his doctrine of “Situation Ethics”, the *National Observer* wrote that “He (Fletcher) has spelled out a controversial manifesto of individual freedom and responsibility, based on an ethic of brotherly love, which he says should free modern man from rigid, archaic rules and codes like the ‘Ten Commandments’.”

From Fletcher we have come a long way. It is not uncommon to hear professing Christians say that what you do is not so important as your attitude, that Christianity is not a matter of keeping commandments but a matter of love for your fellow man, and that what we need to preach is not doctrine but love. Certainly it is true that all this knowledge and good works are nothing without love (I Cor. 13). But love does not replace knowledge or faith or obedience. The love God commands is not a sentiment. It is not measured by how one feels. There is only one way to test your love and know when we have the proper feeling toward a brother, and this is the test of the commandments. How do you know you really love the other person? When you treat him like God tells you to!

It is a satanic suggestion that we must choose between love and law as if they were opposites. Modern education emphasizes the concept of “love” while strictly forbidding the teaching of God’s commandments. The courts carry this out to the logical conclusion by protecting the violator of the law. R. J. Rushdoony points out that “the children of the upper, middle, and lower classes increasingly ape the hoodlum and the psychopath. They imitate the new prophets of history by wearing their hair long, by being lawless, and by despising authority... Immoralism is now a matter of boasting...”

So the commandments of God are seen as obstacles to the fulfilling quality of love. But John writes: “Hereby we know we love the children of God, when we love God and do His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous” (John 5:2–3).

Not grievous! Please take note, disciples of Fletcher, who break the commandment is the name of “Meaningful relationships”. Take note, evangelists who

make cheap talk about love but have no sermons on the good commandments of God? Take note, all you who seek an “experience” with Jesus but care not to experience walking by His commandments. They are not grievous.

Then why do the commandments seem grievous? Is it not because one fails to seek the purpose of God, and sets up his goal contrary to God? God’s commandments are for the purpose of bringing us to Himself, but if we are striving to go the other direction, the commandments will hinder and work contrary to our desire.

For this reason millions of people choose the idea of “love” in opposition to the doctrine of obedience to Christ. It is simpler, and easier, to fall in line with the popular notion of one great loving brotherhood, and not bother too much with the difficult commands. The result is just what we see today in the name of Christianity — confusion, division, shallowness, people adrift, tossed by “every wind of doctrine”, and lacking in peace.

“Great peace have they that love thy law” (Psa. 119:165). Here is the secret of David’s love affair with the law. The commandments were not grievous because he had learned to love them. It is one thing to obey a command, it is quite another to enjoy obeying it and love doing it. A man may refrain from stealing, and yet not really enjoy being honest. And how many people keep the law which forbids adultery while all the time wishing they could break it? They have no peace, even though they observe the letter of the law, because they do not love it. God’s laws reflect God’s nature. Therefore to love God is to love the laws He has given, for in keeping these laws one becomes more like the Author of them. True godliness is not a mere legal observance of law in slavish fear, but the joyful exercise of just what God’s child loves to DO: Obey God.

Christians who love God never get enough of Him. The man who has had a taste of the bread of truth and like it hungers for more. His “delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law does he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:2). It is a sad commentary upon the modern church that so often it is looking for means to pry action and obedience from its people, which genuine love would produce. Jesus offered no prizes for reading Bible verses. He did not lure people out to worship by setting up competition with one another. Instead of rewards in this world He demanded self-denial, and promised the world’s animosity and even persecution or death. He did not beg, bribe, nor coerce anyone to discipleship. He only said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

If the commandment is hard, it is only because we are far from the One who gave it, and it leads us back into His way; hence we love it all the more. No one who despises His way will have eternal life, for in God’s New Creation everyone will live under His law, imperfect fellowship with Him as He designed. God is love; all His laws are bonds of love to bind us to Him. If you would know peace, learn to love His law.

The perfect example of unity between Love and Law is the cross. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The law says, “The wages of sin is death.” Thus all are doomed to perish, to die the “second death” in the lake of fire. But Christ, in love, died the death in the believer’s place, so that the believer may not perish, but live. His love is expressed, not in suspending the law, but in meeting it, in fulfilling it for our benefit. Love is not greater or better than the Commandments, but rather the inner force that engages them.

Law (doctrine) and love are not in conflict. The fact is, they are inseparable, and you cannot have one without the other.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

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