

God's Law and the New Covenant

The New Covenant is made between God and Israel. The primary characteristic of those who enter into it is "I will put My law in their inner being, and will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they will be My people." (Jer.31:33/Heb.8:10). In the New Covenant, Israel will be God's people in every respect because they will have His law in their inner being and written upon their hearts. God promised Israel, "I will put My Spirit within you⁺ and cause you⁺ to walk in My statutes, and you⁺ will keep and do My judgments.." (Ezek. 36:27)

Regarding the commandments of the Law, Moses told Israel, "Therefore keep and do them, because this is your⁺ wisdom and your⁺ understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'" (Deut. 4:6)

That is why all Israel was given an additional requirement: "And these words which I command you today are to be on your heart, and you are to teach them diligently to your children..." (Deut. 6:6-7) All Israel is to think and meditate on what God has commanded, and understand it well enough to teach future generations.

Meditating on God's Law enables us to see what God is seeking. Here's a simple example. "When you build a new house, then you are to make a railing for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it." (Deut. 22:8)

Beyond the specifics about a house and a roof, this statute lays out a principle of personal liability. It is a practical example of what love of one's neighbor entails. So far as your own property is concerned, you must act to insure your neighbor's safety. Other statutes lay out the principle of compensation if you are negligent in that responsibility. (e.g. Ex.21:19,22,36)

Murder is wrong because mankind was made in the image and likeness of God. (Gen.9:6) If you meditate on that, you will see what value the commandment is protecting. Every action that destroys that image and likeness of God in another is wrong.

Yeshua illustrated the fulness of that law, what it means when that law is written on the heart: "...Everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause will be guilty in the judgment. And whoever calls his brother, 'Brainless!' will be in danger of the Council. And whoever says, 'Stupid fool!' will be in danger of the fire of Gehinnom." (Matt. 5:22)

The connection between the purpose of a particular commandment or statute and the values it is protecting is not always obvious. For example, Yeshua went on to say, "Again you⁺ have heard that it was said to those of long ago, 'You are not to make false vows, but are to perform your vows to the Everpresent.' But I tell you⁺, do not swear at all, not by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, nor by Yerushala'im, for it is the city of the great King. Nor should you swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black." (Matt. 5:33-36)

What is the relationship between "you cannot make one hair white or black" and "you are not to swear falsely"? If you make an oath to the Lord, you must do what you have vowed, but you do not control many things about yourself or about the world. You do not have the power to declare something and make it happen. So in order not to swear falsely, you had best "not swear at all".

If you take to heart the commandment given at Sinai, you will become aware of your own limitations. When you are truly aware of your own limitations, you will be content to let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No" be "No." You are not in control, God is.

For all those whose ancestors the Everpresent brought out of Egypt, the role of God's Law in the New Covenant is quite clear, even if the details require some meditation. The Law which

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God gave us at Sinai is to be upon our hearts.

What then is the relationship of Gentile followers of Yeshua to God's Law? When Messiah rules over all the earth, "Many people will come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Everpresent, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths,' because the Law will go forth out of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." (Is.2:3)

Since all the earth is to be brought under Messiah's rule, and be judged by him, there must be universal Law that is applicable to all peoples and nations. There has always been God's Law for all people, long before He created Israel. The difference between good and evil, right and wrong, permitted and prohibited, comes from who God is, and from humanity having been created in His image and likeness.

That is why it was wrong for Kain to kill Abel. That is why, centuries before Sinai, Abimelekh knew that adultery was wrong. (cf. Gen.20:2-18) That is why it is possible for non-Jews to sin. "Sin" is breaking God's Law. (cf. 1Jn.3:4b)

Adam sinned in disobeying God's command. Kain sinned in murdering his brother. The generation of Noah sinned in filling the earth with violence, and corrupting their way on the earth. (Gen.6:11-12) The people of Sodom and Gomorrah sinned; so did the tribes of Canaan. That is why God brought judgment upon them. There was a way for humans to live, but they had distorted and corrupted it. They knew the good, but they chose the evil.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. This is because what is known about God is evident in them, since God has revealed it to them. For His invisible characteristics, even His everlasting power and divine nature, are clearly seen by the creation of the world, being perceived through the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.... Knowing the ordinance of God that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do these same things, but also approve of those who practice them." (Rom.1:18-20,32)

There is a Latin legal saying, *Nullum crimen sine leges*. I.e., there is no crime without law. It is simple and obvious that one can only break a law if that law exists. If no law exists, then one cannot break it. Breaking an existing law is a crime, but there is no crime without law.

Sha'ul says the same thing. "...Sin entered the world through one man, and death through Sin... For even before the Law [of Moses], Sin was in the world, but sin is not charged unless law exists." (Rom. 5:12-13)

God did not give written Law to the other nations, or to the people who existed before He created the nations at the Tower of Babel. But He nevertheless had given them law. If He had not given them law, then He could not have charged them with sin. It would have been impossible for them to sin unless certain actions had been forbidden.

If there had been no law from Adam to Moses, then there could not have been the breaking of any law. There could not have been sin. But the Scriptural record is clear that non-Jews can and do sin.

The law that they violate does not come from Moses, since God brought judgment on certain actions long before Moses was born, long before Israel was created. The law that they violate has been implanted in the very nature of humanity. It is a law to which all people are subject.

Sha'ul addressed this issue also. "For whenever the Gentiles, who do not have the Law, naturally do the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves. They show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying with them, and their inner thoughts accusing or else defending themselves in the day when God will judge the secrets of men through Yeshua the Messiah, as in my good news." (Rom.2:14-16) All people will be judged

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for their sins.

So for Gentiles who enter into God's New Covenant with Israel, God will put within their inner being and write on their hearts His universal law that has always been applicable to them. If one meditates on His Word, the actions and principles are clear enough. God punishes those actions that are wrong, sinful, ungodly.