

# Playing By The Rules



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*The following notes contain some of the material presented in the series “Is God for Real?”*

What values are important to you? Where do those values come from? From your parents, or your social circle? Or did you create them for yourself? And are there any values that are universal to everyone?

In the Bible God created a code of law that upholds and protects the values that build strong relationships and strong communities. That code of law is known today as the Ten Commandments. But are those commandments still valid now? Does God expect people to keep His commandments today?

In 1993 a young British woman was caught smuggling heroin in Thailand and was arrested, tried and sentenced to 25 years jail. She was repentant, accepted full responsibility for her actions and, after seven years of being a model prisoner, was given a Royal pardon by the King of Thailand. The question is, now that she has been given a royal pardon, is she free to continue drug smuggling? This may seem to be an absurd question, and yet it is a relevant question for the Christian world because many Christians today seem to believe that because God has forgiven our sins, then we are no longer expected to keep His law. What does the Bible teach in regard to God’s law? Is it still binding on Christians today? Has it been ‘done away’ with? And if we abandon God’s values, what will we adopt instead?

Lawlessness in Western society is increasing, and we are reminded of it daily in our news bulletins. Many Christians would say that we should be law-abiding citizens, but what about God’s law? Shouldn’t we obey that too? Who decides what is right and what is wrong? Shouldn’t obedience to God’s law have priority for the Christian even above the laws of the land?

Proverbs 16:25 tells us that “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Sometimes we might think we know what is best for our society and for our lives, but it is God who ultimately declares what is right and wrong. God wrote down His law with His own finger on tablets of stone. The Bible calls them The Ten Commandments, and you can find them in Exodus 20:1-17. These Ten Commandments can be divided into two groups. The first four deal with our relationship to God. The last six deal with our relationship to each other. Jesus summed up these two principles of the law beautifully in Matthew 22:37-40. They are designed to create a happy and harmonious society where people can live with each other in love, honour and respect. They act as a boundary to prevent us from falling into destructive behaviours, and each one has love at its foundation – love to God and love to our fellow human beings.

Some believe that we can get rid of the law of God since we now live in the New Testament era. Now we have Jesus – isn’t He all we need? However, the New Testament tells us that “where there is no law there is no transgression,” Romans 4:15. If there is no transgression, we need no Saviour. Furthermore Romans 3:20 says, “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” In other words, the law tells us what is right and what is wrong. When we look at the law, we realise that we have sinned, and then we go to Jesus who saves us from our sins, Matthew 1:21. The Bible tells us that ‘sin is the transgression of the law,’ 1John 3:4. The Devil hates the law of God because the law points out our sin and shows us our need of the Saviour, Jesus.

Many will often point out that in the New Testament we are under the New Covenant. What many do not realise is that the New Covenant is mentioned first in the Old Testament, Jeremiah 31:31, and then repeated in the New Testament, Hebrews 8:8-10. Under this New Covenant God will put His laws in our minds and write them in our hearts. It is still God’s law, but it

is to become part of us, part of who we are. God wants our thoughts and motives to be the same as His.

But doesn't the Bible say we are not under law but under grace, Romans 6:14-16. It certainly does, and the writer of Romans, Paul, goes on to say that we should not sin since we are no longer under law. The text in Romans 8:2 reveals that, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." We have been freed from the law of 'sin and death.' In other words, now that we are in Christ we are no longer under the condemnation of sin which leads to death, hence Romans 6:23, 'the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

When we look at the way the law is described in the Bible we find a remarkable comparison with the way in which God Himself is described in the Bible. Notice the chart below comparing the characteristics of God with the characteristics of His law:

<u>GOD</u>		<u>The LAW</u>
Luke 18:19	Good	Rom 7:12
Isaiah 5:6	Holy	Rom 7:12
Deut 32:4	Just	Rom 7:12
Matt 5:48	Perfect	Psalms 19:7
1 John 4:8	Love	Rom 13:10
Exodus 9:27	Righteous	Psalms 19:9
Deut 32:4	Truth	Psalms 119:142
1 John 3:3	Pure	Psalms 19:8
John 4:24	Spiritual	Rom 7:14
Malachi 3:6	Unchangeable	Matt 5:18
Gen 21:33	Eternal	Psalms 111:7-8

At the end of His ministry, when Jesus was talking with His disciples, He said to them, 'if you love Me, keep My commandments,' John 14:15. Jesus Himself kept the commandments, John 15:10, and asks His followers out of love for Him to keep them also. Some years later, after Jesus had ascended to heaven, John, quite boldly, wrote in his first letter to the church, 'now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him,' 1John 2:3-4. These are strong words indeed. Later in the same letter he writes, "By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome," 1John 5:2-3. Certainly, the Bible writers expected God's people to be keeping the commandments. In fact, in the Bible's last book, Revelation, the angel identifies God's people as those, 'who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus,' Revelation 14:12. Clearly God intends for His people to obey His commandments.

Of course, some will say, 'we're not saved by works,' - but who ever said we were? All Christians are saved by grace through faith in what Christ has done for us. Obedience to the law of God is not the means by which we purchase salvation, rather it is the evidence that we have accepted that salvation. We love God because He first loved us. Our willingness to obey Him is a response that flows from that love. What will your response be? Will you choose to obey God's law and uphold His values?

*If you would like to know more about this subject, or others in the series, 'Is God for Real?' then please contact one of our staff and they will be happy to help you.*