

The Ten Commandments today - or are there Eleven?

I've mentioned elsewhere that when I was asked to speak at Christian meetings and to choose a subject, I often suggested 'Common Grace and Saving Grace'.¹ If I was asked back, and again asked for a subject, it was often 'The Ten Commandments today - or are there Eleven?' My talk went as follows - footnotes and additional information have been added for this printed version.

1. Introduction

One Saturday evening, there was a knock on the manse door and a visitor asked to speak to the Minister. He had been passing through the town, noticed the name of the Minister on the church notice board, recognised him as a fellow-student of many years ago, and decided to call.

The Minister was glad to renew the acquaintance and invited the visitor not only for supper but to stay the night. After supper, as was their custom on Saturday evenings, the family asked each other Bible questions - graded for the different ages of the children.

One of the children thought it would be polite to ask the visitor an easy question to start with, and said: 'How many Commandments are there?'² The visitor thought for a moment and then answered 'eleven'. Some of the children were shocked, others laughed, but no one asked the visitor any more questions.

However, after the children had gone to bed, the two old friends got talking and to the surprise of the family, it was the visitor, not their father, who went into the pulpit on the following morning. They were even more surprised when he took for his text, John 13:34: 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.'³

¹ <http://www.ianbalfour.co.uk/common-grace-saving-grace>

² Ten in Exodus 20:3-17 and Deuteronomy 5:7-22.

³ All Biblical quotations are from the New International Version, 1984 edition.

So what was new? What was previously missing? Are the Ten Commandments relevant today? If they are, what about other Old Testament commandments, generally reckoned to total 613⁴ - including the commandment not to eat bacon or shrimps?⁵

On the other hand, if the Ten Commandments are not relevant today, why do we teach them in Sunday School, why, at Anglican and some other Communion Services, do the clergy read the Ten Commandments, one by one, and the congregation respond, 'Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep *this law*'?⁶ (italics mine).

2. Old Testament Law

The Ten Commandments come in the first part of the Old Testament, usually described as 'Law' - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy; the other parts of the Old Testament are known as the Prophets and the Writings.⁷ Old Testament Law is not found exclusively in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, but it is concentrated there.

Exodus records how the Law was first given when Moses was on Mount Sinai.⁸ That was followed by forty years in the desert, during which most of the generation who had left Egypt died. When the next generation was preparing to enter the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership, Moses gave the Law again, a second time, as recorded in Deuteronomy - the word Deuteronomy means, simply, 'second Law'.⁹

3. Three types of Law

⁴ In a sermon in the third century AD, a Rabbi proposed this number and it has been widely accepted - and later embellished, to count 365 negative commandments, which coincides with the number of days in the [solar year](#), and 248 positive commandments, the number of [bones](#) and main organs in the [human body](#). (Babylonian Talmud)

⁵ Pig meat and its derivatives and shellfish were not kosher - fit to eat - for a Jew, because Deuteronomy 14:3-10 sets out two requirements for an animal or a fish to be kosher. Animals must chew the cud and have split hooves; pigs have split hooves but don't chew the cud. For seafood, only fish that have both fins and scales may be eaten.

⁶ Anglican Prayer Books from 1662 to now. From 1979, the congregational response may be in one of two version; the first has all these words, the second has only 'Amen, Lord have mercy.' *Holy Communion according to The Book of Common Prayer (Common Worship Order Two)*. Also in the *Wesleyan Methodist of Order of Service*.

⁷ When Jesus spoke in Matthew 5:17 about 'the Law and the Prophets', he was referring to the whole of the Old Testament, but Judaism divided the Thirty-nine Books of the Old Testament into Law, Prophets and Writings.

⁸ Genesis chapters 19 to 35 - all seventeen of them.

⁹ From two Greek words, *deuteros* (second) and *nomos* (law), a mistranslation of the Hebrew words in Deuteronomy 17:18, which really mean 'a copy of this law'.

The key to understanding Old Testament Law, both in its original setting in the Jewish community before Christ, and in our society today, is to distinguish three types of Law, three categories, three strands, which are interwoven in the Old Testament. It's like looking at a rope; from a distance, we see only one rope, but if we examine it more closely, we find three (or more) strands interwoven to make up the rope. So we should distinguish three distinct and different strands of Law, interwoven in the Old Testament, Ceremonial Law, Social Law and Moral Law.¹⁰ If we unravel them, we can then see what happened to them when Christ came.

The Ceremonial Law detailed how priests and people were to worship God. The Social Law guided daily living in the nation of Israel, diet, crime, punishment, master-servant relationships and much more. The Moral Law declared what God deemed right and wrong.¹¹

All three were binding on everyone in the Jewish nation. Shortly after a baby was born, the parents presented the child to a priest and certain ceremonies followed - that was part of the Ceremonial Law. As children grew up, they learned what food was permissible and what was not - an example of the Social Law. Children were taught to honour their parents, not to steal, not to kill and so on - part of the Moral Law, succinctly summarised in the Ten Commandments.

Let's consider, in turn, the Ceremonial, the Social and the Moral Law, and then see what happened to them when Christ came.

4. The Ceremonial Law

The Ceremonial Law (for details, see footnote 11) described how priests and people were to worship God, initially in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and then in the Temple in Jerusalem. Through different courts and veils and prohibitions, the Ceremonial Law had

¹⁰ First distinguished, as far as I know, by the 16th-century Reformer John Calvin.

¹¹ The subject-headings added in the New International Version give an excellent guide to the areas covered. For the Ceremonial Law, Exodus describes Festivals, the Tabernacle, its furnishings and altars, priestly garments, the consecration of priests, incense and the Ark of the Covenant; Leviticus describes the priests and their duties, burnt offerings, grain offerings, fellowship offerings, sin offerings and guilt offerings, and more about the priesthood and the Festivals (especially the Passover); Numbers has more details about the Passover and other Feasts; Deuteronomy describes true worship of God in Feasts and Festivals (especially the Passover) and tithes and offerings.

For the Social Law, Exodus describes servant-master relationships, personal injuries, protection of property, social responsibility and mercy; Leviticus describes clean and unclean food, responses to infectious diseases and the Jubilee; Numbers includes a census of the people; Deuteronomy covers marriage and divorce, loans, law courts, witnesses, murder and the Cities of Refuge (for homicide), appointment of leaders, clean and unclean food and detestable practices.

The Moral Law includes, in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, the Ten Commandments; these two Books and also Leviticus cover blasphemy, adultery, unlawful sexual intercourse and much else of what we would describe as 'moral teaching'.

three great lessons for the People of Israel. First, that God is holy; second, that people are unholy; third that there was a way for the penitent sinner to find peace with God, through the blood of atonement and the water of cleansing. The Ceremonial Law taught in picture language that there was a way for penitent sinners to come back to God.

The Ceremonial Law should have ingrained into Israel's minds just how large the gap was between sinful humanity and a perfect God - and how costly it was to bridge that gap. It's no part of this talk to consider why many Jews came to believe that their sacrifices and tithes and prayers demonstrated not their sinfulness but their self-righteousness - a very different concept from recognising their sin and God's remedy for it. (Romans 9:32 and 10:3)

Then Christ came. He came under the Ceremonial Law. Mary and Joseph took him to the Temple and presented him to a priest - that was part of the Ceremonial Law. (Luke 2:22). Throughout his life on earth, Jesus observed the Ceremonial Law - although not the additions and circumventions devised by the Scribes and Pharisees. How the death and resurrection of Jesus affected the Ceremonial Law, we'll look at after we've considered the other two strands of the Mosaic Law, the Social and the Moral.

5. The Social Law

The Social Law (for details, see footnote 11), sometimes called Civil Law, dealt with diet, personal injury, crime, penology, protection of property, master-servant relations and many other aspects of daily living as a community. This is pre-eminently law in the modern sense - law applied by the courts. Parts of the Mosaic Social Law don't appeal to the Christian conscience, for example the permission of divorce, of which the Lord said it was for 'the hardness of your hearts', and that 'from the beginning it was not so'. (Matthew 19:8) The Social Law in the Pentateuch was for the realistic government of a very imperfectly disciplined theocracy.

What made, or should have made, Israel different and distinct from the other Semitic peoples round about was linking the Social Law with the Ceremonial Law, to make Israel both a nation and a God-worshiping community:

'You are the children of the Lord your God. Do not ... x ... for you are a people only to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession.' (Deuteronomy 14:1-2.)

What happened to the Social Law after Christ's death and resurrection, we'll look at after considering the third strand of Old Testament Law, the Moral Law.

6. The Moral Law

It's here that we find the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20:3-17 and again in Deuteronomy 5:7-22. They are a succinct expression of the Moral Law, although other aspects of it are articulated throughout the Pentateuch. I said a moment ago that linking the Social Law and the Ceremonial Law made Israel a distinctive community, but the Moral Law went hand-in-hand with them; the way back to God, after breaking a moral law, often required ceremonial and civil action by the penitent sinner. So for Israel, all three types of Law blended together into one Law.

7. Christ and Old Testament Law

At the beginning of Jesus' public teaching, the Pharisees accused him of 'destroying' the Mosaic Law; he replied that his mission was not to set aside the Old Testament, but to fulfil it, to fill it out, to explain its highest meaning, both by his life and by his teaching, and to accomplish what the Law was intended to show and to be.

17. Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. 18. I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20).

The Lord Jesus perfectly obeyed all aspects of the Law - but not, as mentioned earlier, the additions and circumventions devised by the Scribes and Pharisees. He protested time and again when they used human tradition to usurp God's Law. For example, saying that something was 'Corban', meaning 'devoted to God', was a recognized way of giving to the Temple treasury. That was a good principle, but the Pharisees misused it to nullify the Fifth Commandment, to honour your father and mother (Exodus 20:12). The Pharisees taught that money which children should have used to help aging parents in need could be deviously misused by saying 'It is Corban' and giving it to the Temple - enriching themselves and depriving the parents.¹² In condemning this misuse use of Corban, Jesus said: 'Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.' (Mark 7:13).

Let's now apply Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17 to the three strands of the Law, and see how his coming affected them.

8. Christ and the Ceremonial Law

Jesus came under the Ceremonial Law, as described earlier, so how did he fulfil it? At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, John the Baptist identified him as the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Isaiah 53 dominated his messianic consciousness throughout his life, culminating in, as Paul succinctly put it, 'Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed'. (1 Corinthians 5:7).

'At the moment' (Matthew 25:51) when Jesus died, the veil of the Temple, the heavy curtain that separated the outer part of the Temple from the inner Holy of Holies, which

¹² You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honour your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. (Mark 7:9-12).

represented God's presence, was torn in two, from top to bottom - top to bottom symbolizing that this was the work of God, not of human hands.¹³

The book of Hebrews shows how the Ceremonial Law was perfectly fulfilled in Jesus' death, and so is no longer required. The central message of the entire book of Galatians is that Christians are not obligated to fulfil the requirements of the Ceremonial Law. That is also one of the major themes of the book of Colossians, which specifically states that on the cross, Jesus took away the requirements of the Ceremonial Law. (2:14-15).

If we accept Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice, we don't need the provisions of the Ceremonial Law anymore - indeed, it would be offensive to go back to them, because that would imply that Jesus' sacrifice wasn't sufficient. That was the error, above all others, which is condemned in the Letter to the Galatians - the error of those who say that salvation is not through Christ alone, but through Christ *plus* something else.

What, then, is the value (if any) of the Ceremonial Law for the Christian today? Paul described it as our schoolmaster, or tutor, to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24). The festivals and sacrifices, Temple and priesthood, were types and foreshadows of what we have in Christ, (Hebrews 10:1), illustrating many facets of the wonder of Christ's salvation. For example, the sacrificial system taught that 'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness' (Hebrews 9:22), pointing to Jesus on the cross - 'A sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.' The Ceremonial Law has served its purpose and has been fulfilled in Christ.

9. Christ and the Social Law

The parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21:33-43 concludes with the Lord's terrible comment that because the husbandmen killed not only the messengers (the prophets) but the owner's son (himself), 'The kingdom of God will be taken from you, and given to a people who will produce its fruit'. So God's new People no longer form an earthly theocracy, for which laws of human government are needed; instead the redeemed, who have called on Jesus' name, are found among all nations of the world; the New Testament, not the Old, guides what they believe and how they should live.

Forty years after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Romans crushed a Jewish rebellion and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, as Jesus had predicted; the Jewish nation was

¹³ Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38 and Luke 23:45. The Temple was divided into two areas by an elaborate and beautifully embroidered curtain, 30 feet wide, 60 feet high and three inches thick (according to Jewish tradition). Many priests served daily in the outer part of the Temple, called the Holy Place, but the inner part of the Temple, separated from the rest of the Temple by the curtain / veil, represented God's presence. It was called the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies. It was so sacred that only the High Priest could go into it, and then only once a year, to make atonement for the sins of himself and the people. For God to tear this curtain in two, from top to bottom, at Jesus' death, demonstrated that there was now a new way back to God from the dark paths of sin. Hebrews 10:19-22 explains that a new High Priest, Jesus Christ, through his sacrifice, superseded this ritual for all time and now gives us direct access to God through Christ. Following heartfelt repentance, we can 'approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.' (Hebrews 4:16).

scattered. The Social Law which had governed Israel as a nation had fulfilled its purpose and passed into history.

10. Christ and the Moral Law

Jesus fulfilled the Moral Law, in that he kept all of it perfectly, every day, always, for his entire life. He also fulfilled it by giving it a deeper, more searching and more exacting meaning - that it now covers our inward thoughts and imagination as much as our outward deeds and words. The prohibition of murder now includes the venomous or vengeful thought, and the prohibition of adultery includes the lustful look.

Not only did Christ reinforce the demands of the Moral Law on his disciples - that is, on us - but the apostles re-expressed and re-imposed the Moral Law on the Church; the New Testament Letters abound with commands, prohibitions and exhortations about it. In both Testaments, the basis of the Moral Law is the character of God. 'Be holy, for I am holy' God said of old. (Leviticus 11:44, 19:2, 20:7). 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' (Matthew 5.48).

So the importance of the Moral Law for the Christian can scarcely be exaggerated. We should study it to know God, and apply it in our lives and characters in order to please God and fulfil his purposes for us.

Evangelical Christians have consistently held that the Ten Commandments are binding on all Christians. The Swiss Reformer, John Calvin, wrote: 'they are the true and eternal rule of righteousness, prescribed for people of all nations and times.' (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 20.) The *Westminster Confession*, drawn up initially in 1646 and still summarising the Reformed faith, says 'They do forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to obedience of them of all nations and times.' The Anglican Church's *Thirty-nine Articles* include: 'No Christian whomsoever is free from obedience to the Ten Commandments.'

The Catechism in the *Prayer Book* goes:

Q. What is the purpose of the Ten Commandments?

A. The Ten Commandments were given to define our relationship with God and our neighbours.

Q. Since we do not fully obey them, are they useful at all?

A. Since we do not fully obey them, we see more clearly our sin and our need for redemption.

So, the Ten Commandments show us our sinfulness; they are the plumb line to let us see ourselves as Scripture sees us, but what else? They continue to reveal sin in the believer, even after the experience of regeneration, and so drive us continually to seek renewed forgiveness and sanctifying power. The Apostle John tells us: 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves,' but if we 'confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.' (1 John 1:8-9).

Christians observe the Moral Law, not because 'it's the law', but because it's our guide for living new life in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:16-26).

There's a chart at page 8 of these notes - before the transcript of Norman Anderson's Presidential Address - showing the repetition of the Ten Commandments in the New Testament. The Fourth Commandment, about the seventh day of the week (the Sabbath,

Exodus 20:8-11) was early in the Christian Church applied instead to the first day of the week, Sunday, to commemorate the Lord's resurrection.

So, what about the Eleventh Commandment?

What was new about it? Leviticus 19:18 required Israelites to love their neighbour as themselves. When a lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus asked him in response: 'What is written in the Law?', the lawyer answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' (Deuteronomy 6:5) and 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus replied that he had answered correctly, but the lawyer, 'wanting to justify himself', asked 'who is my neighbour?' - leading to the parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-36)¹⁴

So what was new in the Eleventh Commandment? Two things, found in the two sentences that follow the words: 'A new command I give you: Love one another.' First, 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another.' Jesus 'raised the bar', if I may use that phrase reverently, by prefacing the command with 'As I have lived you'. Jesus' love for his disciples was strong, continued, unremitting, and he was about to show his love for them in death.

Secondly, and with this I finish, the words of verse 35: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' Never before was 'loving one another' the badge by which any class or body of people had been distinguished. The Jew was known by his rites and by his dress, the scholar by his parchments, the military man by his discipline and loyalty to his leader. Christians were now to be known, not by dress or learning, not by country, colour or status, but by loving concern for each other. They were to befriend each other in trials, be careful of each other's feelings and reputation, and promote each other's welfare.

This new Command is repeated or referred to in 1 John 3:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Galatians 6:2 and 2 Peter 1:7. These verses show how much the first disciples considered this to be the special law of Christ.

An early Christian writer, Tertullian (of whom much elsewhere on this website), recorded that the persecuting heathen were struck by the witness of Christian love. 'See how they love one another ... and how ready they are to die for each other!'¹⁵

So, John 13:34 is indeed a new Commandment; no system of morality, before or since, has prescribed anything so pure and disinterested as: 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another.'

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17)

¹⁴ For more about this lawyer, see <http://www.ianbalfour.co.uk> - then Theology, *The Peril of Taking a Lawyer's Advice*.

¹⁵ 'The practice of such a special love brands us in the eyes of some. "See", they say, "how they love one another"; (for they hate one another), "and how ready they are to die for each other." (They themselves would be more ready to kill each other.)' (Tertullian, *Apology* 39:7)

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. **5**You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, **6**but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
5. Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”

This chart gives references to the Ten Commandments in the Old and New Testaments.

	Old Testament	New Testament
1	Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7	Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; Revelation 14:7
2	Exodus 20:4-6; Deuteronomy 5:8-10	Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-20; Ephesians 5:5
3.	Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11	Matthew 5:33-37; 1 Timothy 6:1; James 2:7
4.	Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15	Luke 4:16; 23:55-56; Acts 17:1-2; 18:4; Hebrews 4:9; 1 John 2:6
5.	Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16	Matthew 15:4-9; 19:19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 1:29-30; Ephesians 6:1-3
6.	Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17	Matthew 5:21-22; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 1:29-30; 13:9
7.	Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18	Matthew 5:27-28; 19:18; Mark 10:11-12, 19; Luke 16:18; 18:20; Romans 7:2-3; 13:9

8.	Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19	Matthew 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 13:9; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Peter 4:15; Revelation 9:21
9.	Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20	Matthew 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Acts 5:3-4; Romans 13:9; Ephesians 4:25
10.	Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21	Luke 12:15; Romans 1:29; 7:7; 13:9; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3, 5

Appendix

Professor J. Norman D. Anderson gave the following Presidential Address at an Inter-Varsity Fellowship student leaders conference which I attended in March 1954. His talk was then printed, but since the booklet is not only out of print but, apparently, unavailable on any of the second-hand bookshop websites, I have copied it here.

LAW AND GRACE

The subject of 'Law and Grace' is one which, as a lawyer, I always find interesting, but which, as a Christian, I have often found bewildering. It is a topic on which it seems unusually easy to be woolly-minded, with great damage not only to the understanding but to the whole spiritual life. So I felt that I should like to try to clarify my own thinking on this subject, and perhaps thereby to help some others to a clearer understanding also.

Now it seems to me that there are three chief dangers which may beset us in this connection.

There is, first, the danger of erecting a *false antithesis* between law and grace. This, I suppose, is the salient danger of an exaggerated dispensationalism which regards the Old Testament as all law and the New Testament as all grace; and which thinks of the Jews as 'under law' - with the implied corollary that there was then no place for grace, and regards the Church as 'under grace' - with the spoken or unspoken inference that there is now no place for law.

Any such attitude must, logically, lead to the most serious consequences. It involves, in the first place, a misunderstanding and misuse of the Scriptures. Still worse, it necessarily implies a misunderstanding of God Himself, for it denies any continuity or consistency in His dealings, His attitude and His character. The truth is, of course, that we find both law and grace in both Testaments, for we find both law and grace in the very character and heart of God.

Again, this false antithesis may lead to a virtual antinomianism in both doctrine and practice. As a simple example of the mental attitude involved, I venture to suggest that a number of evangelical Anglicans feel a certain hesitation in repeating in the Communion Service, after each of the Ten Commandments, the words 'Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep *this law*' - as though to use this phrase were somewhat inappropriate for one living in the 'dispensation of grace. And visitors from other denominations, which seem to have no equivalent to this practice, would, perhaps, be inclined to hesitate still more. But does not this hesitation find its origin in the false antithesis which we are considering?

Then, secondly, there is the danger of a *false synthesis* between law and grace. This, I think, is a danger to which evangelicals are less prone than certain other sections of the Church. It indicates that the man or woman concerned has no adequate grasp of the purpose and place of either law or grace; no clear apprehension of either the way of salvation or the process of sanctification. It is this error, above all others, which is attacked in the Epistle to the Galatians - the error of those who seek salvation not through Christ alone but through Christ *plus* something else. It is the error not of the antinomian but of the legalist.

And then, thirdly, there is, as it seems to me, the danger of what I can only describe as a *general confusion* on this subject of law and grace. This may show itself in a variety of different ways, but particularly, perhaps, in the matter of comparative religion, and in our attitude regarding the position, responsibility and possibilities of those who have never

heard the gospel and who earnestly and conscientiously follow some other faith. And this, in turn, may not only befog our message but even vitiate our apprehension of the essential nature of sin on the one hand and of salvation on the other.

A FALSE ANTITHESIS

let us consider first, then - and at disproportionate length - this primary danger of a *false antithesis* and its corrective in the Scriptures.

I suppose it is inevitable that when we speak of law our minds go back instinctively to the Pentateuch. It is not, of course, that law begins or ends with the Pentateuch; it is much wider than that in its scope. But be that as it may, we can, I think, profitably start at this very point. So I propose to examine this danger of a false antithesis in the light of two great statements of Scripture regarding the relation of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Old Testament law. The first is the statement of Christ Himself 'Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. (Matt. 5:17 rsv) And the second is the statement of St. Paul 'Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.' (Gal. 3.24)

Now when our Lord said He had not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it, what precisely did He mean? In approaching this question we should do well I think, to remember that the Mosaic law has been aptly described as comprising three main, and largely distinct, elements, which may be termed the moral law, the ceremonial law and the social law. And we must, as I see it, consider each of these separately..

First, then, the moral law - which we may venture to regard as constituting the 'weightier matters of the law'. (Matt. 23:23) This law, in its essence, is both eternal and immutable; necessarily so, for it is an expression of the holy character of God Himself, and of what God demands - and indeed must demand - of man. So, just as God cannot change, nor can His law. On the contrary, the moral law, as an expression of His holy character, endures from eternity to eternity, while as an expression of His demands on men and women it has existed at least since the creation. It existed in Eden before the Fall; it stood from the Fall until Sinai; and it was articulated in some detail in the Pentateuch. To fail to fulfil its demands was always sin: but such failure became actual transgression only after its demands were enunciated. 'Sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law . . . Law came in, to increase the trespass. (Roms. 5:13, 20, rsv) 'What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin'. (Roms. 7:7, rsv)

Then Christ came, and fulfilled this moral law in three distinct ways. He 'fulfilled' it by giving it a deeper, more searching and more exacting meaning. He showed, for instance, that the prohibition of murder includes the venomous or vengeful thought, and that the prohibition of adultery includes the lustful look. He taught us that the moral law is as much a matter of the inward disposition and imagination as of the outward deed and word; that it represents all-pervading principles of character and conduct even more than specific commands and prohibitions.

Again, He fulfilled it by perfectly keeping it, by epitomizing its very principles and spirit in His life and character. He did this, moreover, not only in His sinless life but also in His atoning death, in which He met, on behalf of others, the righteous demands of a law which had been broken. And He did all this alone and uniquely. To this aspect of His work we must return later.

But it is important to notice, too, that He also fulfilled it by reinforcing its demands on His disciples - that is, on us. For He said 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.' (Matt. 5.20) And the apostles in their turn re-expressed and reimposed this moral law on the Christian Church, for the Epistles abound with commands, prohibitions and exhortations to this very end. More, it is important to notice that in both Testaments the basis of the moral law, in its demands on the believer, is repeatedly depicted as nothing other than the very character of God. 'Be holy, for I am holy' God said of old. (Levit. 9:44 rsv) 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Matt. 5.48) our Lord reiterated.

Thus the value of the moral law for the Christian can scarcely be exaggerated. He must study it in order to know God in His holiness and perfection, and he must strive to apply it to his own life and character in order to know how to please God and fulfil His holy demands. It is clear, then, that isolated verses must not be wrested from their context and quoted in contradiction to this plain and consistent tenor of Scripture; so it would be quite out of place, for instance, to suggest that when St. Paul said 'All things are lawful for me' (1 Cor. 6:12 rsv) (probably, in any case, by way of quoting a popular phrase) he could have intended for one moment anything which was contrary to the moral law.

Secondly, *the ceremonial law* - which, it is important to realize, represented, in essence, the way of grace. That was its purpose and its objective; but in the Pentateuch it took the form of law.

In Eden man broke the moral law, and ever since then has been a sinner both by nature and by act. And sin always and inevitably separates from a holy God. In a sense this may be termed an impersonal, inexorable law which is inherent in the basic antithesis between God and sin. But there is also a more personal element involved - the holy wrath of an ever-loving, ever-holy God against that sin which corrupts His fair creation, which cuts man off from His life and fellowship, and which affronts not only His laws but His very nature.

But from the first God revealed a way back to His life and fellowship. It seems clear that even in Eden God taught man the basic need for - and perhaps the meaning of - animal sacrifice. Soon after we find Abel's lamb accepted, and Cain's fruit offering rejected; while the latter was told 'If thou doest well (i.e. if you perfectly keep the moral law), shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin (or, more probably, a sin offering) lieth at the door.' (Gen 4.7) Again, in Noah and the ark we find another 'type' of deliverance by grace from judgment by law. (Gen. 6 and 7; cf. Heb. 11.7)

The New Testament, moreover, tells us explicitly that Abraham was justified by faith, for he 'believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.' (Roms. 4:3) David, too, clearly knew the same secret - and that after Sinai - for he could say 'Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin. (Roms. 4:7,8 rsv)

But between Abraham and David the Mosaic ceremonial law had been imposed. The underlying purpose was, indeed, to teach the way of grace - the way for a sinner back to God. Thus the different courts and veils of the temple and tabernacle, and their manifold prohibitions, were to inculcate the lesson that the sinner could in no sense saunter into the presence of a holy God; while the sacrificial system and temple ritual were designed to demonstrate that there was, none the less, a way back, for the penitent and the obedient, through the blood of atonement and the water of cleansing. But these truths were all taught in picture language, 'through a glass, darkly'; they were embodied in a code of

detailed rules, in the guise of law; and they involved many human distinctions, such as that between Israelite and Gentile, and between priest and layman. Essentially, then, the ceremonial law enshrined the way of grace, epitomized in the repentant sinner with his sacrificial lamb. But the outward form was one of law, stereotyped in the minutiae of the temple ritual.

Then Christ came. He came 'under' the ceremonial law, (Gal 4.4) and He Himself observed it – although not the additions and circumventions devised by men. But the Baptist identified Him at the beginning of His ministry as the Lamb of God; (John 1:29) and it seems clear that the prophetic vision of Isaiah 53 (in particular) dominated His messianic consciousness throughout His whole life, and especially on the eve of His passion. (Cf. Luke 22:37) It was for this, supremely, that He had come. So at the Passover feast the Paschal Lamb was slain; ((Cf. 1 Cor. 5:7) the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; (Mark 15:38 rsv) and the ceremonial law had been perfectly fulfilled.

It is well, perhaps, to pause at this point to emphasize the difference between the way in which our Lord dealt with the moral law on the one hand and the ceremonial law on the other. The first He fulfilled both in His life and death, but reimposed on His disciples; the second He not only fulfilled but, in so doing, abolished. Type was henceforth to be swallowed up in antitype, and shadow to give way to substance. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us 'For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.' (Heb. 7:18, 19; cf. also Heb. 9:12-14, 10:1-4, 9-14)

What, then, is the value of the ceremonial law for the Christian? Much, for its detailed provisions illustrate different facets of the all-embracing work of redemption and serve to impress upon him the wonder of Christ's salvation. But sacrifice, temple and priesthood have all now done their work, in pointing to Calvary, to the throne, and to the Saviour; to attempt to carry over into the Christian Church any of the ritual, imagery or human distinctions (as some of our sacerdotal friends appear to do) is to go back from the substance to the shadow; while to believe that any of the Jewish exclusiveness or sacrificial observances will be reimposed, at least with any semblance of divine approval (as some extreme dispensationalists seem to postulate), is surely a reversal of the whole progress of revelation. The ceremonial law has been finally and perfectly fulfilled: it was grace taught through law, and now grace stands openly revealed.

Thirdly, there is the *social law* - that is, the ordinances regarding such matters as homicide, slavery, crime, penology and diet. These laws were for the temporal government of the nation of Israel, which was, indeed, God's chosen race, but was a very earthly and largely unspiritual people - except always for what the Bible calls the 'Remnant'. (Cf. Rom. 9:27, 11:5)

This is the part of the Pentateuch which is preeminently law in the modern sense - the law applied by the courts (although much of the moral law and even of the ceremonial law also, no doubt, shared this distinction). Parts of this social law, moreover, do not appear particularly lofty to the Christian conscience, and have close parallels in the Code of Hammurabi and the laws of other Semitic peoples of antiquity which have come down to us. It was God-given, indeed, in the sense that He specifically allowed its promulgation in the form found in the Pentateuch and its enforcement for the daily government of a very imperfectly disciplined theocracy: but at the same time it often fell far short of the moral law. An obvious example of this is provided by the Mosaic law of divorce, of which our

Lord observed that for ‘the hardness of your hearts’ Moses gave this commandment, ‘but from the beginning it was not so’. (Matt. 19:8)

Then Christ came, and fulfilled the social law. How so? Do you remember the parable of the vineyard in Matt. 21 and our Lord's terrible comment when the husbandmen killed not only the messengers but the owner's son: ‘Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof?’ (Matt. 21:43) So God's people no longer form an earthly theocracy, for which ordinary laws of human government must be prescribed; instead there is found among all nations the company of the redeemed, the congregation of the regenerate, on whom the moral law in its fullness is incumbent. Thus the social law has fulfilled its purpose and been done away.

The second great New Testament statement about the law we must consider is that of St. Paul in Gal. 3:24. Let us ask ourselves precisely how it may be said that it was our schoolmaster, or tutor, to bring us to Christ. It seems to me that this statement is true in three distinct senses.

Firstly, the moral law convicts us all of sin; of commands transgressed, of demands disregarded. So it drives us to the need for forgiveness (that is, grace) as our only hope. (Cf. Gal. 3:19-22) As we have seen, sin - in the sense of falling short of God's eternal standard - has reigned ever since the Fall, but sin only becomes conscious transgression in the light of law. Again, the ceremonial law always pointed the awakened sinner to the possibility of grace, but it was grace in the semblance and shackles of law - and Calvary, where grace stands fully revealed, represents a wonderful liberation from these exacting and meticulous demands. (Cf. Gal. 4:4-5) But Israel as a whole stumbled in both Old and New Testaments. Instead of being driven by the moral law to take refuge in grace through the ceremonial law, the Jews erected out of the moral and ceremonial law together a false way of self-righteousness. So they missed the very purpose of both laws, and refused to submit themselves to the righteousness of God. (Cf. Rom. 9:30, 10:4)

Secondly, the moral law reveals not only human failure and transgression, but the essential sinfulness and rebellion of the human heart. Thus it drives us to regeneration (that is, grace) as the only remedy. It is not merely that we have not kept the law; we have often not so much as wanted to keep it, but have rebelled against it. (Rom. 7:7-13) So we do not only need forgiveness, but cleansing of heart, the new birth, a radical change in our innermost beings. There is, of course, something of this in the Old Testament. It was typified, in part, by the laver (Exod. 30:18-21 etc) of the ceremonial law; and it was apprehended by faith in such passages as Psalm 51. But chiefly, in the Old Testament, it was depicted as characteristic of the New Covenant, in such passages as Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek. 36:33-36. For this New Covenant was not only to include heart cleansing, but to substitute for an external commandment, graven on stone and demanding an unwilling obedience, a commandment written on the heart and mind - signifying the glad response to its dictates of one regenerate in will, affections and outlook. (Heb. 8:10) It was thus that the apostle could write ‘For I delight in the law of God after the inward man...’ (Rom. 7:22)

Then, thirdly, the moral law continues to reveal sin in the believer even after this experience of regeneration, and so to drive him continually to seek renewed forgiveness and sanctifying power (that is, grace). St. John tells us that ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,’ but if we ‘confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ (1 John 1:8-9) And St. Paul, after saying that he delights in the law of God after the inward man, adds ‘But I see another law in my

members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.’ (Rom, 7:23) For this situation the New Testament reveals only one remedy, when the apostle continues. ‘For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For 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 (or, as a sin-offering), condemned sin in the 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. 8:2-4) The reason, he tells us, is that the ‘flesh’, (that is, the principle of the self-life) always and inevitably ‘serves the law of sin’ (Rom. 7:25) and the ‘fleshy mind’ is constitutionally at enmity with God; (Rom. 8:7) but the Christian is commanded and enabled to ‘walk by the Spirit, and thus ‘not gratify the desires of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16 rsv)

Put in quite different terms, we are told that. ‘love is the fulfilling of the law’ (Rom. 8:10) and the only secret of victory, therefore, is the love of God, ‘shed abroad in our hearts- by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us’. (Rom. 5:5) So only can we ‘serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit’, (Rom. 7:6 rsv) and find that sin no longer has dominion over us, since we are ‘not under law but under grace’. (Rom. 6:14 rsv)

A FALSE SYNTHESIS

Secondly, and very much more briefly, let us consider The opposite danger of a false synthesis between law and- grace. This has in fact been partly covered already. But let us ask ourselves this question: what, then, is the scriptural way of salvation.

Salvation is certainly not a combination of law and grace, in the sense that grace alone is in any way inadequate or defective. On the contrary, the New Testament is crystal clear that we are saved by grace alone (that is, by Christ alone, on the basis of faith alone). For it is certain that no one can be saved by the moral law, which must inevitably postulate perfection as the only basis for approach to a holy God. 'That, surely, is the meaning of St. James’ hard saying: ‘For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.’ (James 2:10) In other words a single sin is enough for the law to stand broken, and the transgressor to stand condemned as such. No, the moral law must drive us continually to complete abandonment to grace alone, that we may be ‘found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.’ (Phil. 3:9 rsv) ‘But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation (propitiation) by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.’ (Rom. 3:21-26 rsv)

But this last verse brings us to a further truth. In human affairs we can and must make a sharp distinction between law and grace, between justice and mercy. There is an enormous difference between being declared free by the verdict of justice, on the one hand, and pardoned by the prerogative of mercy, on the other. A court of law can deal with a criminal in three distinct ways: it may declare him guilty and condemn him; it may declare him guilty, pass sentence, but record a plea for mercy; or it may declare him free of the law. The first and third are the two opposite verdicts of the judgment of justice,

while the second relies on the prerogative of mercy alone: and in human affairs the two are not only distinct but may be contradictory. But God, if I may say it reverently, is 'all of a piece'. He cannot condemn and then exercise a prerogative of mercy, without at the same time declaring the prisoner 'free of the law'. With Him righteousness and peace (justice and mercy) must 'kiss each other', (Cf. Psalm 85:10) to forgive He must also justify.

And therein, of course, lies the wonder of the cross. It was there that the One who is Himself the fount and origin of the moral order, against which our sin is an outrage; the Creator, who never willed our sin but did put us into a world where we should be subject to temptation; the Judge, before whom we must stand and whose holiness can accept nothing less than perfection - it was there that God Himself, in the Person of His incarnate Son, took the sinner's place. There the penalty was paid, the law was vindicated, sin was judged, and the sinner was justified. This was no doubt experienced, and dimly understood, by the saints of the Old Testament; (Cf. Galatians 3:6) but it was only made manifest and fully understood after Christ had in fact died and the Holy Spirit had come in power at Pentecost. (Cf. Galatians 2:16, 3:10-13; 1 Pet. 2:24, etc) But there must be a complete abandonment to this way of grace, and to Christ as the only Saviour. For just as no man can be saved by the moral law, so none can now be saved by the ceremonial - whether Mosaic or sacramentalist. To obscure this fact is an utter perversion of the 'means of grace', for the gospel must always remain:

*'Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.'*

But it is also true, on the other hand, that true grace always shows itself in action, and that living faith must find expression in 'works'. New Testament faith is no mere mental belief that God is One, a belief in which even the devils share; (James 2:19) but a commitment of the soul to the grace of Christ, a faith that acts, 'working through love'. (Gal. 5:6 rsv) It represents not so much a dogma as an abandonment; not so much a doctrine as a relationship. The Christian's attitude is admirably epitomized in the children's verse:

*'I would not work my soul to save,
For that my Lord has done:
But I would work like any slave
For love of God's dear Son.'*

A GENERAL CONFUSION

Finally, it remains to say a few words about the danger of what I have termed a general confusion on this subject - a confusion- which may particularly affect our attitude to those of other religions. One continually hears something like this. 'Yes, this is all very well for those who have been born and bred in Christendom; but what of others? Surely the good Muslim, the consistent Confucianist, and the believing Buddhist, will be judged by their own standards? Do you suggest that they are doomed to inevitable damnation'? That would be an intolerable doctrine.

Now what is the truth of this difficult question? May I briefly outline the facts as I myself see them? Let us postulate, in the first place, that something of God's moral law is known to all, for God has not left Himself without witness. (Acts 14:17) There is no partiality with God; but to *all* who 'by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality' (Rom. 2:7) He has promised eternal life. This seems to be the plain teaching of Romans 1 and 2.

But it is equally clear from the same Epistle, in the second place, that man always and everywhere falls short. He falls short, inevitably and by nature, of the ultimate moral law. So he is a sinner. And he also falls short of the standard he knows, the code he ought to follow. So he is a guilty sinner. 'For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.' (Rom. 3:22, 23 rsv) 'No human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law.' (Rom. 3:20 rsv) So all men, whatever their religion and whatever their moral condition, stand in urgent - and equal - need of a Saviour.

And it seems inescapably clear, in the third place, that there is only one Saviour. (Acts 4:12, John 16:6) It is fundamental to the whole biblical revelation that no one else could ever meet human need, except God Himself in the Person of His incarnate Son. How else can we explain the manger of Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary? And it is equally fundamental that even God can never forgive human sin except on the basis of the atonement, when He Himself judged sin, bore its penalty and justified the sinner. How else can we explain the agony in Gethsemane, (Luke 22:42) and the cry of desolation on the cross? (Matt. 27:46)

Then is there no hope for those who have never heard the good news, who have had no real opportunity to embrace the gospel? That does not necessarily follow. It seems clear, indeed, that a Muslim, for instance, cannot be saved by trying to be a good Muslim, or a Confucianist by striving to be a consistent Confucianist. But then neither can a Baptist be saved by trying to be a good Baptist, nor an Anglican by striving to be a consistent churchman. But suppose the Muslim, the Confucianist or the pagan were to come to realize - by the gracious working of God's Spirit - that he is a sinner, and suppose he were to cast himself, in his sin and need, on the mercy of God, to the best of his knowledge? Does not the Scripture say that 'there is no distinction ... For, 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved'? (Rom. 10:12, 13 rsv) Such would, of course, be saved through Christ, the only Saviour - just as the Old Testament saints were saved through Him alone. And if they should ever really hear the good news on earth, they would surely be among the company of those who accept the gospel with joy at its first hearing. But if they should never hear at all on earth, I suppose they would awake on the other side of the grave to know and worship the One to whom they owe their salvation. Is not this what St. Peter meant when he said, in the house of Cornelius, 'Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him'? (Acts 10:34, 35 rsv) Not, of course, that any one can earn acceptance by their good works. The teaching of Scripture is quite clear regarding this. But from the passage just quoted it would seem that men are accepted on the grounds of their 'fear' of God and their consequent abandonment of themselves to His mercy - an abandonment which, like the understanding faith of the Christian, must always issue in righteous living.

Two further points must be stressed. Firstly, this line of reasoning, if it be true, by no means lessens our missionary responsibility. We need only remember how we ourselves were brought to this commitment of faith. Was it not by the appeal of the gospel story? And did not St. Paul, as soon as he had declared that 'Every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved', immediately add: 'But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?'

And how are they to hear without a preacher?' (Rom. 10:13, 14 rsv) And if there be some who, like Cornelius, grope their way to an abandonment of themselves to God's mercy, is it not our privilege and responsibility, like that of John the Baptist, to 'go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins'? (Luke 1:76, 77 rsv)

Nor, secondly, does this lighten the responsibility of those who have heard the gospel message but not accepted it. On the contrary, it accentuates that responsibility - for such have no manner of excuse, and no semblance of alternative. There is no other Saviour, and no other way; there is a real salvation, but through grace alone; and that salvation, when truly experienced, must always show itself in practical obedience to the moral law.