



discover freedom

*Uncover the Law of Liberty
that highlights the loving character of God*

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Popular western morality today says you can believe what you like and behave as you like, so long as it doesn't hurt anyone else. Consequently, almost anything goes. It is saying that there are no moral absolutes - everything is relative. It tells us a lot about the current moral fabric of western society. And that is partly a logical conclusion from our western world view.

Obviously, in the end, no matter how nice it all sounds, few really believe in that kind of moral relativism, and even fewer will take it to its logical conclusion.

So, the question remains: *In this epic struggle in which we are all caught, is there a moral benchmark?*

TRAFFIC SIGNS

Years ago, a few friends, just normal young adults in their early twenties, decided to have a little fun, so they took down a stop sign at a traffic intersection. They just went behind the sign, unscrewed it from the post, and threw it on the ground.

They thought it would be funny. Plus, even better yet, it would be one less rule to follow.

Within an hour, a truck driver, not having that rule to follow, slammed into the side of a passenger car. Three 18 year olds, leaving a bowling alley, were in the car that got smashed.

All three died.

But, again, it was one less rule to follow, wasn't it?

SOMETHING ABOVE US

The story of those three teenagers has a core message - the need for law, for rules, for something transcending, or above us, to guide us, to limit us, to tell us what we can and cannot do.

Now, no doubt, the idea of rules or laws *to* limit us might sound very uncomfortable to ears used to hearing nothing but talk about personal freedom, moral autonomy, and personal rights. Yet no society can function without such limiting rules and laws. And no one would want to live in a society without them either. The irony is that true freedom is found only in an environment of law!

Imagine, for instance, a society with no traffic laws - no stop signs, no red lights, no give-way signs, no crosswalks, no speed limits, and no right-of-way - nothing to stop you from doing whatever you wanted behind the wheel of a car - except, perhaps, the semi or the SUV that squashes you flat. Are these the kind of roads you would want to be driving on, or that you would want your family on?

Of course not.

It's the same with morality. For all the talk about moral relativism, would you want to live in a society with no laws against stealing, murder, kidnapping, arson, assault, torture, rape, child molestation, sexual trafficking, and so forth?

Of course not. Who would?

Which means, then, that we all need to live under laws and rules that transcend us, that are over us, and that tell us what we should and should not do.

This, though, brings us back to the question posed above. OK, so we do need certain rules and laws to guide us. That's fine, even obvious. *Where, though, should those laws and rule come from?*

THE COMMANDMENTS

Look at the following texts:



The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul.

Psalm 19:7



My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.

Psalm 119:172



Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.

Ecclesiastes 12:13

The New Testament, too, talks about the commandments.



For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

1 John 5:3



He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1 John 2:4



For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, Do not

commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James 2:10-11



Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 14:12

Old Testament, New Testament - the Bible is clear. God's commandments are to be kept.

Here it is - simple, concise, clear and all inclusive. The only part of the Bible God wrote with his own hand. See Exodus 31:18.



I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

You shall have no other gods before Me.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image - any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.

For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.

Exodus 20:2-17

It's God's law, that's why it's called *the royal law*. James 2:8

I DON'T LIKE IT!

Think of this: If our natural inclinations were to keep God's law, there would be no need for commandments calling us to keep that law and to point out our law breaking - because there would be no law breaking.

When the law of God is taken seriously, it's not long before we find things in it that we don't like. That's because God's law - how He wants us to live - cuts right across how we want to live naturally. Some think that real freedom means living without the restriction of laws. That's a false idea. Once a person rejects the restraints of God's law, they simply become slaves to the law of selfishness - and that's the worst kind of slavery there is.



Because the carnal* (natural human) *mind is enmity* (at war) *against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Romans 8:7

The villain in this epic story is not slow to raise all kinds of objections and arguments to convince and deceive people that the law of God is irrelevant, or Jewish, or antiquated - or whatever, so long as it is rejected, and people remain in rebellion and sin.

God's law is a way of living apart from the tyranny of slavery to our own ideas and the awful consequences of our own poor choices. That's why it is called the *law of liberty*. See James 1:25 and 2:12.

THAT OLD OUT-DATED LAW?

When these texts talk about the commandments, or even the commandments of God, are they really talking about the Ten Commandments? You know - Moses, Charlton Heston, and Mount Sinai? The ancient, antiquated Ten Commandments from thousands of years ago?

Yes exactly! But before we rush to judgment about them being antiquated, out-dated, and so forth, it might be good to think through that idea for a few moments.

Ask the children of divorce, children from a home ruined when a parent violated the seventh commandment, the one that says, *Thou shalt not commit adultery*. Ask them if this particular *thou-shalt-not* seems antiquated and out-dated to them.

Remember Dean Shillingsworth? He was the two year old boy whose body was found stuffed in a suitcase floating on a lake in Ambarvale in Sydney in 2007. Wonder what young Dean, if he could answer, would say about the Ten Commandments being out-dated?

Ask anyone who has lost their life savings through a dodgy investment scheme about how out-dated the Ten Commandments are, particularly the one about stealing.

Out-dated? On the contrary, you probably wouldn't need five seconds before thinking of a person whose life has been severely damaged through someone's violation of one of the Ten Commandments.

In fact, each one us, personally, has more than likely known the pain, the hurt, the suffering, and the guilt that come from someone - perhaps even ourselves - who has violated one of God's commandments.

Of course we have. No one has escaped the horrible consequences of what violation of God's law has done to humanity. We're victims, all of us, and big time too.

FOR YOUR GOOD

Look at the following texts:



And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to ... keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

A crucial theme is found in these verses, particularly the last part. He tells them to obey Him *for your good*. Your good.

Interestingly enough, too, the word for your in the Hebrew is in the singular. That is, it is talking about each individual, on a personal level. The Lord is telling us, individually, to obey His commandments, for our own personal good. That's a glimpse into God's character right there.

It's the same way a parent tells a child, individually, for that child's own good - not to eat any of the pills in the medicine cabinet.

In a crucial sense, the law reveals to us the character of the lawgiver. Parents set boundaries, rules and laws for their child to obey because they love them and want what's best for them. It's the same with God, and His law. The law reveals to us God's character, and His love for us, because the law is for our good. God is love, and His law reflects that love.

Look at it like this. What did the racist laws in Nazi Germany, or the American south, reveal about the character of the people who made those laws?

In contrast, God's law reveals what God is like. It shows that He loves us, wants to shield us and wants what's best for us. Disobedience to God is never good news. The outcomes of lawlessness are awful.

Then there's Satan, who seeks to get us to break God's law, to sin. Why? For so called freedom. He doesn't care that disobedience is deadly, and besides it makes God look bad as well. After all, who always gets the blame for all the sorrow and suffering in the world - sorrow and suffering that often come directly as a result of violation of God's law? In many ways, the great controversy centres on the very character of God Himself, a character that is revealed, at least partially, in His law.

LAW AND SIN

Isn't all this talk about God's law and keeping God's law legalistic? Haven't we just seen that we are saved by grace, without the deeds of the law? Aren't we saved by what Jesus did for us, symbolised before the time of Christ by the death of the animals as revealed in the sanctuary service? In an earlier booklet we have already seen that:



... a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Romans 3:28

Of course, we have. We read those texts and more, all of which teach that salvation comes only by grace, and not by law. In all those texts, however, the point was not to do away with the law, but to show the purpose of the law, which is to point out sin.

Look carefully at this text:



Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:20

Notice what Paul said: By the law is *the knowledge of sin*. The law, the Ten Commandments, shows us what sin is, shows us what the problem is.



What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, You shall not covet.

Romans 7:7

Again, the point of the law is not to bring salvation. The law can no more save us than scrubbing and perfuming a pig could turn it into a lamb. The law, instead, shows us our need of salvation, because the law reveals sin. And sin is what shows us our need of grace, of salvation in Jesus.

As we said in an earlier booklet: *The law is like a mirror; it might show you the flaws on your face, but the mirror has no power or means to remove them.* At the same time, smashing the mirror, or ignoring the mirror, isn't going to remove those flaws. The mirror simply shows you the flaws; something else entirely is needed to get rid of them.

LAW AND GRACE

Contrary to popular theology, Paul's purpose was never to tell people that, because of grace, we could violate God's law; that is - sin! On the contrary.



What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Romans 6:1-2

In the last booklet we talked about a new life in Jesus, a life where we can be free from the slavery of sin, free from our old ways and habits. However much people sometimes talk about freedom from the law, the opposite is true. It's in obedience to God's law that we find true freedom, because in that obedience, which comes by God's power working in us, we are set free from the slavery of sin.



Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law.

1 John 3:4 KJV



Jesus answered them, Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.

John 8:34

The gospel frees us - frees us from the condemnation of the law, from the condemnation of sin, and from the choke-hold that sin has over our lives. And this freedom doesn't come by removing the law. It comes by giving us a new life in Christ, by bringing us into harmony with the law of liberty.

TRAFFIC ANALOGY

You get pulled over for violating a traffic law - those laws that we, indeed, need. You ran a red light, endangering not only yourself but others as

well by your violation. You are brought before a judge, and your guilt is established. They have even got it on video.

The judge, however, shows you grace and pardons you. You face no penalty, no condemnation; even the record of your violation is wiped clean. You are free from the penalty and the condemnation of the law that you have just broken.

So what happens? You walk out the door, get in your car, and - because you have been freed from the condemnation of the law - the first thing you do is run another red light?

Of course not. You have been pardoned, you have been shown grace, and you have been freed from the condemnation of the law. But that pardon, that grace, that freedom, doesn't mean you are now free to violate it again. No, what it means instead is that you are thankful for the pardon and freedom you have been given, and you seek to obey that law better than you had done before.

It's the same with God's law. We have violated it; that is what sin is - violation of the law - and we are all sinners. But, through the grace of God, revealed in the death of Jesus on the cross, we have been pardoned for that violation. The law no longer condemns us.

Does that mean, then, that we no longer have to obey that law that brought our condemnation to begin with?

Of course not. We need to obey, but thanks to Jesus, we are free - free from the condemnation of the law, free from the slavery that violation of the law - sin - brings.



Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Romans 6:6-7

SIN ABOLISHED?

Ever hear preachers rail against sin and yet, in the same breath, declare that God's law is no longer valid? That makes no sense. How can sin - which is transgression of the law - exist, if the very thing that defines sin - the law - were abolished?

If God's law has been abolished, then sin has as well. And, last time we looked, people are still stealing, murdering, coveting, violating the Sabbath, and committing adultery. If the law were abolished, then these things must no longer exist, at least not as sin - and what serious person believes that?

No question, not only does God's law remain, those who love God are commanded to obey it.



For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

1 John 5:3

Seems simple enough.

As we have observed, we are in the midst of a cosmic conflict, a great controversy between good and evil, between Christ and Satan - and we

are all, each one, involved. No one is neutral, no one sits this one out on the sidelines. And there's nothing Satan likes more than to get people to sin, to get them to violate God's law, which, as we have seen, is sin. And sin is a pernicious form of evil, because it brings pain, suffering, hurt, and guilt - the kind of things that cause people to question God, question his goodness or, in many cases, even His existence.

In this epic story, Satan hates God's law because it reveals God's righteous character and his own deceitful one. And this story gets personal right here. Where do I stand in relation to God, and His law? Jesus invites us *If you love Me, keep My commandments.* John 14:15



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- 07 Discover Eternity
- 08 Discover Peace
- 09 Discover Steps
- 10 Discover New
- 11 Discover Freedom**
- 12 Discover Rest
- 13 Discover Authenticity
- 14 Discover Immortality
- 15 Discover Restoration
- 16 Discover Justice
- 17 Discover Judgment
- 18 Discover Allegiance
- 19 Discover Safety
- 20 Discover Loyalty
- 21 Discover Wellness
- 22 Discover Intimacy
- 23 Discover Tribute
- 24 Discover Belonging

