

Q. There are Scriptures in the writings of John that speak of keeping His commandments. You say that the Ten Commandments don't apply to Christians, so what do these Scriptures mean?

A. I have, as you pointed out, many times explained that the Ten Commandments do not apply to Christians, but were given only to Old Testament Israel (check out the list of articles under "Covenant and Law" on our articles index page http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wohg_003.htm). To answer your question, I will first go to the gospel of John. In John 13:34, Jesus says, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." In John 15:10-12, He further says, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." So we see that Jesus clearly identifies His commandments as loving one another.

Notice also in 1 John 2:3-5 and 7-11 how Jesus' commandments are directly associated with love:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.... Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of

stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

I want to point out that many mistakenly identify the "old commandment" in the passage above as the Ten Commandments. But 2 John 1:5 identifies the not new (or old) commandment that we had from the beginning as loving one another. In other words, the "old commandment" is the label that John has put on the commandment that Jesus gave during His ministry and that we have seen in John 13:34: "love one another." By the time John wrote First and Second John, more than fifty years had passed since Jesus spoke those words. So John was making a play on words. The new commandment is the old new commandment that Jesus gave at the beginning (during His ministry), that we love one another.

First John 3:22-23 says, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." Here we see not only love but also belief as His commandments.

This combination of love and belief is explained in 1 John 5:1: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." To be born again is to both believe and love.

In Matthew 7, Jesus warns of false prophets, speaks of good fruit and bad fruit, and says that men can be identified by their fruits (verses 15-20). He follows this immediately with the statement, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (verse 21). Jesus is often mistakenly interpreted here as speaking of the necessity of good works. But He then speaks of several good works and says that the people doing them are rejected (verses 22-23). What is necessary is building one's house on the Rock (verses 24-27), which is, of course, to trust in Jesus Christ. So, what are the fruits that identify good and bad men? Jesus makes this explicit in Matthew 12:33-37: "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A

good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Men are to be identified by what they say. And, what they say comes out of the abundance of their heart. Further, what is in their heart is determined by what they believe and whether there is love in their heart.

In 2 John 1:4-7, we read, "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." Again, the commandments are that we love one another and believe. The theme is always repeated. The Christian's commandments are belief and love.

John also penned Revelation, and there is nothing there to make us think any differently. In Revelation 12:17 and 14:12 we see that keeping the commandments of God is directly associated with having the testimony of Jesus (that is, the Gospel—what we believe) and the faith of Jesus.

The term "commandments of God" is found in only one other place in the entire Bible: 1 Corinthians 7:19, in which Paul says, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." Many take these three mentions of "commandments of God" to be references to the Ten Commandments. But this cannot be. There are simply too many Scriptures in which Paul explains that Christians are not under the law. Notice just this small sampling from Galatians 5: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.... For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.... But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (verses 1, 3-4, 18). Since the Ten Commandments are, of course, the law, Paul certainly cannot mean in 1 Corinthians 7:19 that circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing, but what is important is

keeping the law or the Ten Commandments. One of the very reasons he gives in Galatians 5 for not being circumcised is that it obligates the person to the law, which he calls a fall from grace. By "commandments of God," he is referring either to Jesus' new commandments that we have already discussed or to the ordinances Paul has given the church. Notice 1 Corinthians 14:37: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."

Notice also Acts 15:24. This is a part of the letter from the apostles, elders, and brethren in Jerusalem to the Gentile believers. In this verse, we read that this letter is specifically refuting the false idea being spread that was subverting and troubling the souls of the Gentile brethren. This false teaching was that they must be circumcised and *keep the law*. And the refutation is that "we gave no such *commandment*." So this verse is a double whammy against anyone who believes that Christians are under the law: It says that the teaching that we must keep the law *subverts souls*. And it shows that a mere charge given to brethren about what they should or should not say to others could be called a commandment—in other words, we must not assume that the word "commandment" in the New Testament refers to the Ten Commandments or to any Old Testament laws.

Thus, going back to Revelation 12:17 and 14:12, we see that the weight of the entire New Testament is against interpreting "commandments of God" as the Ten Commandments. As we have already seen, John's understanding of the commandments for Christians are that we are to believe on Jesus as our Savior and to love one another.

Now to address Revelation 22:14. After Adam and Eve sinned, we read in Genesis 3:22-23, "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken." In other words, God barred Adam and Eve and their descendents from access to the Tree of Life, which would have given them eternal life.

What we read of in Revelation 22:14 is a reversal of this barring for a certain group of people. To these people, God is granting a right to or authority to have access to the Tree of Life. The word "right" here is from the Greek word *exousia*. *Exousia* is found 103 times in the Bible

and is variously translated "power(s)," "authority(ies)," "right," "jurisdiction," "liberty," and "strength." These same people have authority to enter the New Jerusalem. Who are these people?

The King James Version says they are they who "do his commandments." Other translations, based on other texts, say that they are they who "wash their robes." The *English Standard Version*, for example, says, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates." Whatever may be the correct reading, it is not speaking of a works-based salvation. There are too many other Scriptures against this being a correct understanding. Ephesians 2:8-10, for example, says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Our salvation is by grace through faith. Our salvation may cause us to do good works, but our good works do not cause our salvation. If we say that the people in Revelation 22:14 are "washing their robes," then this is an obvious allusion to taking on the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Notice that Revelation 7:14 speaks of the 144,000 as having "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They do this by belief. They are depending on Christ's death for the remission of their sins; they are not depending on themselves in any way.

If we say that Revelation 22:14 reads "doing his commandments," then, as I have already explained from other Scriptures, the weight of Scripture determines that we are still speaking of belief (see 1 John 3:23, for example). To these people, God has granted right or authority to the Tree of Life. That is, He has given them eternal life. Notice the similarity to Revelation 2:7: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Notice that in this verse, eating of the tree of life is granted to those who "overcome," just as in Revelation 22:14, it is granted to those who "do his commandments" or "wash their robes." So, the Bible appears to be equating "do his commandments" or "wash their robes" with "overcoming." But the Bible also tells us that overcoming is not a matter of our human works, but something that Jesus has already done for us (John 16:33) and that we receive this as a matter of faith (1 John 5:4-5), "because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). So, whatever the proper translation

of Revelation 22:14, the rest of the Bible dictates that it cannot be teaching a works salvation.

In summary, then, keeping His commandments refers, not to the Ten Commandments or any Old Covenant law, but to keeping the commandments of Jesus, which are to love one another and believe on Him alone for our salvation.

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