The Great Commission and God's Law

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INTRODUCTION

> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Mt 28:18-20.

If you spent any significant amount of time attending a church that identifies itself as *evangelical*, then you would likely be familiar with these last three verses of the book of Matthew, commonly called the Great Commission. These are ostensibly the last words spoken by Jesus just prior to the remarks He made at His ascension in Acts 1:6-8.

If these verses are not familiar to you, they are viewed by many Christians as the marching orders of the universal Church. That is, the worldwide body of Christ through the years, not tied to any specific group, congregation or denomination. These verses sum up what it is that Christians are supposed to do in the world *as Christians* until Jesus returns.

The Great Commission is one of those statements everybody refers to, but no one actually pays attention to the words that were and were not used. The statement seems straightforward - until you see how people have mangled it over the years.

If someone were to ask you what the Great Commission is all about, quick! - what's the first thing that pops in your mind? *Evangelism and discipleship*. Right? But is that right? Is that actually what the Great Commission is all about? Is the word *evangelism* ever mentioned in the Commission? How about the words *gospel*, *preach*, or *good news*? But you say, "See right there - it says to 'make disciples.' And that means evangelism. Ha!" Yet, if that is the case, how does anyone get both evangelism *and discipleship* out of the Great Commission? Doesn't that interpretation make them, in effect, the same thing?

And of course, culturally and ministerially, that is exactly what has happened. Making disciples (and baptizing them) is viewed as evangelism, and discipleship is viewed as merely taking those new converts and teaching them how to evangelize others. (OK, so maybe we also teach them how to be better Christians and fit into the church culture.) But even our lives, when lived piously, become an example by which we can draw others to Christ. So the only reason for discipleship, ultimately, is to serve the purpose of evangelism.

Have you ever heard anyone say, "evangelism is the most important thing we can do, therefore it is the only thing we will do." Perhaps you haven't. I have - for a number of years I was associated with a large international campus ministry, and that was the creed they lived by. I got out, because among other reasons, I knew that God had never called me to be an evangelist, and I was wasting my time there. Unfortunately, however, this way of thinking is not limited to campus ministries.

I daresay most of the *Evangelical Church* is infected with this mentality. (Point of fact: that's why they call themselves *evangelical*.) Where every sermon, ultimately, is a call to salvation. Where

every charitable outreach or special ministry event is primarily intended to reach the lost. Where seminars and small group sessions are mainly focused on being a better witness of the gospel. Where "you will be my witnesses to the end of the earth" is the constant rallying cry, along with "missions, missions, missions."

Don't get me wrong - there is nothing inherently bad about evangelism or missions. But this understanding of the Great Commission, as a matter of biblical interpretation, is seriously deficient. It puts the emphasis of Jesus' words in the wrong place, drastically alters the true nature of evangelism, and completely misses the greater part of His commission. It is my intention in this essay to explore what most people have missed.

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Before we actually try to interpret and understand the Great Commission, we should understand its larger biblical context. That's because the Great Commission is ***not*** the single greatest set of marching orders ever given to people. If we look at how the Commission has generally been understood in the last 100 years, the main error has not been to *underestimate* its importance, but to *overestimate* it.

This has resulted from two related erroneous assumptions. First, that the Great Commission is the *culmination* of all of God's prior commands to humanity. Second, that Jesus' claim of authority, when stating the Commission, meant that He intended it to *supersede* all prior grants of authority.

The Four Great Commands

Many people miss the fact that God has issued four great commands in scripture, or sets of commands, not just one or two. Granted, many are familiar with Jesus' statement of the Greatest Commandments (which I count as only one command), also found in the book of Matthew. But because of the general lack of regard for the laws of the Old Testament, few people grab onto the significance of the Dominion Mandate in Genesis. And most completely overlook scriptural descriptions of the authority of nations, except to use them to beat people into an unbiblical submission.

The key to understanding these four great sets of commands is to realize that each of them is given to people in different social capacities, or *jurisdictions*. Thus, the Greatest Commandments (Mat. 22:36-40) were both directed to *individuals*, all of the Dominion Mandate (Gen. 1:28-30) was given primarily to *families*, the purposes of civil power (1 Pet. 2:13-14) were directed to *nations*, and the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) was given to members of the universal *Church*.

To have a mastery of these four great commands, you should understand what each includes and excludes, and how to interpret them without bringing them into conflict with each other. Then you are well on your way to understanding God's overall plan for humanity and His will for society. Their importance cannot be overestimated.

There is no command or law higher than these. They are supreme over all other laws and commands found in the laws of nature and nature's God, equal in authority and importance with the divine covenants. Indeed, two of them *are* divine covenants (the Dominion Mandate - Adamic covenant; and the Great Commission - Church covenant). The Greatest Commandments and the principles of civil power, in contrast, summarize eternal principles of God's universal laws for all people at all times.

Let's look at each of these sets of commands briefly. The Greatest Commandments commend us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Essentially, this describes God's expectations for every person. Broadly speaking, the love of God includes what we would normally call morality and piety (*legally*, freedom of conscience and religion). The love of our neighbor includes a whole range of topics on human interactions and the ways in which we wrong each other (*legally*, all manner of wrongs and disputes, but also charity).

When I say the Greatest Commandments are directed to *individuals*, I mean two things. First, these commands and duties did not first arise only when Jesus said them. Nor did they arise when Israel received the Mosaic law (which Jesus was largely quoting). Instead, these commands trace back to the creation - they merely describe what God had implanted into the human soul back in the very beginning, when man was created in God's image. Thus, these commands are part of our human nature, and part of the *laws of nature* (God's will impressed upon the creation). For that reason, they apply to each individual for all time, without exception.

Second, I mean that these commands were not given to the other jurisdictions, as such. Sure, there is some overlap with the family (which also traces back to the very beginning of creation), in the duties of love and morality, etc. But mainly, the Greatest Commandments do not apply to either nations or the Church, for the fact is neither of them trace back to creation, but only came along thousands of years later. It is not the job of nations (via civil government) to promote or practice religion, which inevitably results in tyranny. Nor is it the job of nations to love people (which inevitably leads to a welfare state and an unholy redistribution of wealth).

Neither do these commands apply to the Church, strictly speaking. What I mean is that religious liberty is not a right, or a duty, of the Church, *per se*. Religious liberty does not spring from the Great Commission, because if it did, it would only apply to Christians and no one else. Each individual Christian does have religious liberty, of course, but because of their *human nature*, not because of their Christianity. When a church exercises religious freedom, it is the right of the *individual* members to do so, not the right of any *institution or organization*.

Similarly as to charity. Churches have historically sponsored many charitable works. But ultimately, it is the God-given right of church *members* to love their neighbor *as individuals* that furnishes the legal basis for those works. Go back and look at the Great Commission again. Are there any words authorizing charitable ministries? No. Again, I'm not saying church sponsored charities are invalid - I'm saying *anyone* can sponsor a charity, not just those people covered by the Great Commission. Charity is a right of individuals as *humans*, not as Christians.

The analysis of the other Great Commands is to the same effect. According to the Dominion Mandate, it is the job of families to bear children (*be fruitful and multiply*), and to take dominion (*subdue the earth and rule over every living thing*). This comprehends almost everything we normally think of as belonging to the private sector - property, commerce, industry, occupation, labor, reproduction, education, etc.

Is it the job of civil government, or the Church, to bear children? No. What about education? Here is a hard truth: civil government has no authority to educate children at all, and churches have only what authority parents voluntarily give to them. Is it the job of either civil government or the Church to subdue the earth, to drive the economy, to control industry and manufacturing, or to regulate employment? No, no, no and no. But that's probably not what you've been told, is it?

Nations have the dual purpose of punishing those who do evil (which includes both criminal law enforcement and general dispute resolution via the court system), and praising those who do right (which historically has been understood as the protection of individual rights). Do we allow that individuals, families and churches may punish crimes, establish courts, maintain national defenses, or have the job of protecting individual rights? No, we do not.

As for the authority and purposes of the Church - well, that is what we will shortly examine.

Not a Lens for Viewing the Rest of Life

Each of the four main social jurisdictions (individual, family, nation and Church) have a commission from God to do certain things unique to that social capacity, which things are basically *non-overlapping*. God, by granting each jurisdiction only certain named purposes (or types of authority), expects each of them to stay exclusively within the express powers granted. Each jurisdiction is expected to refrain from doing the things committed by God to other jurisdictions. God, who is not the author of confusion, never intended for these jurisdictions to conflict with each other, that is, to fight with each other over who does what in society.

As long as everyone stays in the spheres of authority God gave them, society will benefit. From God's perspective, this makes each jurisdiction co-equal with the others. The entire history of the world, in a sense, is one long example of people overstepping their proper authority and usurping the authority of others. And also overstepping God's authority in matters that He never delegated to anyone to do, *i.e., playing God*.

Think of it like the original design for the constitutional separation of powers between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. They each have their own set of defined powers which are expressly granted. The same powers are never given to more than one branch. No branch can assume authority that has not been expressly given to it. The people (like God) have some powers that they never granted to any branch of government. When any branch assumes power given to another branch, or assumes rights or powers retained by the people, it is a usurpation.

Bottom line: this makes the three branches of government co-equal. Co-equal with each other, and

co-equal in their relationship to the ultimate source of political power, the people. Same thing regarding individuals, families, nations and the Church. In God's universe, they are co-equal with each other, and co-equal in their relationship (and accountability) to Him. After all, God Himself is the Creator of all of these social jurisdictions. He made individuals, He made families, He made nations, and He made the Church. Equally. Not all at the same time - but equally.

This is the proper context for looking at the Great Commission. Yes, it is pretty darn important and well worthy of our attention, as would any statement beginning with the phrase, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Yet, at the same time, this statement is *not over or above* the other great commands of God. The Great Commission does not supersede or control the Dominion Mandate, the Greatest Commandments, or the nature of civil power. It is equal, not dominant.

One thing we must completely avoid is the common historical mistake of using the Great Commission as the *lens* through which we view the other Great Commands, the will of God, or the rest of life. That is not its function. We are not to understand the other Great Commands as a subset of the Great Commission any more than individuals, families and nations are subsets of the Church. They are separate, and functionally *autonomous*. The Church is not the great supervisor for the rest of society.

When teaching or preaching the laws of God, pastors and teachers should resist the urge to Christianize the discussion, *e.g.*, What does a Christian family look like? *It's not about Christian families*. It's about what God's plan is for *all families* as a dominion-taking institution that He has created. Focus on the fact that since God created the family, it was never man's place to redefine it or to reshape the principles by which it is governed.

It's the same way regarding government. It's not about what *a Christian government* would look like. What are God's laws for all nations, and all civil governments? What - they never taught those laws at your pastor's seminary? I'm really sorry if a discussion of God's will for the nations doesn't lend itself to an altar call, but if your pastor feels the need to turn every sermon topic into an evangelistic moment, *that's a big part of the problem*. That's why your church congregation is so ignorant.

Fundamentally, people should realize that God does not have two sets of rules - one for Christians under the Great Commission, and another for everyone else. All of the universal laws of God apply to everyone regardless of their personal spiritual salvation status. When you start distinguishing Christians from non-Christians in the examination of God's laws, you are going down the wrong path.

It Came Last

Let me give you one more thing to chew on regarding the Great Commission compared to the other Great Commands of God. Namely, as between individuals, families, nations and the Church, *the Church came last*. Some people think what came last supersedes and/or incorporates what came

earlier. Or at the very minimum, that what came last is the *culmination* of everything that came before. Not so - *what came last was least essential* to existence. Don't get your hackles up - I am not trying to minimize or downplay the Church, or its importance historically and spiritually.

I am, however, looking at the Church in the context of the full history of humanity. We cannot ignore the *fact* that people existed for at least 4,000 years without the Church and only 2,000 years with it. And the timing of the inauguration of the Church was determined by God, not man. If the Church was as crucial to existence as the bearing of children, then God would have introduced it into history much earlier. Can you imagine if the situation was reversed: if the Church was introduced at creation and the Dominion Mandate only came along 4,000 years later? Humanity would never have survived.

But if you're looking for a great culmination in history, folks, the Church wasn't (and won't be) it. No, that, my friends, will be the coming of the physical kingdom of Christ on earth after the Second Coming. The Church is just a preview - not the main event. The spiritual kingdom is *not* the physical kingdom.

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN?

Jesus' Commands Are God's Laws

Now let's look at the words of the Great Commission itself. The Commission, in very condensed form, is to "make disciples, baptizing and teaching them." The best construction of the words is to make disciples *by* 1) baptizing; and 2) teaching. In other words, the Commission does not have three separate purposes (disciple, baptize and teach). Instead, it has one main purpose - to make disciples - which is accomplished by baptizing and teaching. Disciples are the *goal*, and baptizing and teaching are the *means* by which disciples are made.

Admittedly, when all the wordplay has been done, understanding the Commission is going to look a lot like *make converts and train them*. And to most people's ears, that's going to sound like *evangelize and disciple*. But the real question is what it means to *teach people all that Jesus commanded*. Does it mean to train or disciple people mainly to make more converts? God forbid!

Allow me to suggest that what Jesus meant is actually much more comprehensive, and ultimately, much more useful. Namely, that ***the commands of Jesus are in fact all of God's laws*** (that is, all of God's laws for all nations). It's not that hard to grasp. Jesus is God, and Jesus is the *Logos*, the Word, the mouthpiece of God. Whatever Jesus says, is what God speaks. And since Jesus is also the great I AM, that is *Jehovah* (Jn. 8:58), then whatever God said in the Old Testament as Jehovah is also the word of Jesus. Jesus' words are God's words, and *vice versa*.

Now what about this word *commanded* as used in the Great Commission? You can look it up in any exhaustive concordance - the words *command*, *commanded* and *commandment* as used in the New Testament are all variations of the same word. In essence, *command* is the verb form, and *commandment* is the noun form, of the same word. And *commanded* is just the past tense verb form.

So what are the things Jesus commanded? His commandments. And what is the difference between who spoke commandments in the N.T. and who spoke commandments in the O.T.? No difference. God never spoke a command that Jesus did not also (as the Word of God) command.

Scripturally, there is a strong connection between Jesus, the creation, and the laws of God which existed before His birth in Bethlehem. Scripture tells that not only is Jesus *Jehovah*, He is also the Creator of the universe. "For by [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him." (Col. 1:16).

It is no mere coincidence that the universe was created by ***speaking*** it into existence. (Gen. 1). Jesus is the Creator *because* He is also the Word of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." (Jn. 1:1-3).

Thus, Jesus' commands are not limited to things said in His First Advent. Nor are they limited to the words printed in red in your red letter edition of the Bible. They include all of the *laws of nature*. Is it no wonder then, that Ps. 19:4 specifically refers to the law of nature as *speech*, *knowledge* and *words* evident in both the heavens and all the earth? And the laws of nature, remember, apply to all people and all nations.

Jesus' commands also include the *laws of nature's God* (the will of God revealed in scripture). After all, what is scripture except the written Word of God? And who is the Word of God, but Jesus? That makes the entire Bible the words of Christ. Who are we, to limit the scope of His commands to things said while He was in the flesh, when His authority extends to all things past, present and future? Again, I am specifically referring to God's laws for *all people* as are found in scripture.

Look at Col. 1:16 again - Jesus created all thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities. What are any of those things without *laws*? Therefore, if Jesus created those things, He must also have created the laws that govern them. When you put together the facts that Jesus has Himself declared all the commandments of God, is the author of both the laws of nature and the laws of scripture, and has created those things which require laws for their own existence, is it not crystal clear? ***The commands of Jesus***, or if you will, the things He has commanded, ***are all of the laws of God for all people***.

Some of you are no doubt thinking that what I have just said cannot possibly be true. You have had it drummed into your head all of your church-going life that God's laws were relevant in the Old Testament, but not the New Testament. But you have been sold a bill of goods. Teaching and following God's commands is not a concept negated by the N.T., but rather embraced by it. Let's allow the scripture to speak for itself.

> And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever ***keeps his commandments***

> abides in him, and he in them. 1 Jn 3:23-24.
>
> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and ***obey his commandments***. For this is the love of God, that we ***keep his commandments***. And his commandments are not burdensome. 1 Jn 5:2-3.
>
> I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady — not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning — that we love one another. And this is love, that we ***walk according to his commandments***; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. 2 Jn 4-6.

Do you really think what is meant by these verses is that we should get out there and preach the gospel? Is that what it means to *keep his commandments*? Some people would like to think so - that believing in Jesus and loving one another are the full extent, or limitation, of Jesus' commands. However, the full context of scripture paints a much broader picture, as we have seen. People find all kinds of ways to try to limit Christ's commands - to the Mosaic law, to the gospel, or to the New Testament, etc. But Jesus is *fully* God - and that means the full extent of God's laws are Jesus' commands. That is - and I'll pick this up in a bit - the full extent of God's laws *for all people*.

Give Jesus some credit. He knows very well that some of His laws were given exclusively to the Jewish people, the nation of Israel. By telling us to obey His commandments, and teach His commandments to all nations, that does not include those laws which only apply to Israel. So don't think for a *second* that what I am advocating in this essay is an application of the Mosaic laws to Gentile nations, or to the Church. Nothing could be further from the truth.

All the prior discussion was meant to show is that just because we live in the age of grace does not mean that obedience to God's commandments has somehow become irrelevant. God has commandments that still apply to all people and He expects us to still obey them. What those universal laws are, we will look at shortly.

These same laws are the commandments of Jesus that the Church is supposed to be teaching the nations pursuant to the Great Commission. But, Lord help us, the Church is NOT teaching the universal laws of God to anyone, much less the whole world. In fact, just the opposite. Asserting the pseudo-argument of law vs. grace, we negate the Great Commission and do the very opposite of what Jesus commanded - all while we claim to be doing His will. So before we look at God's universal laws, we need to deal with the pseudo-problem of law vs. grace.

Law vs. Grace

Some of you, no doubt, have already been thinking, "But we are under grace, not law!!" In effect, this is an argument that the Great Commission cannot mean we are to teach God's laws, even limited to His universal laws, because we are under grace, *not law*, and we cannot give a construction to the

words which puts us "back" under law. To be sure, grace has come, thanks to Jesus. But this argument about grace vs. law when applied to the Great Commission is just all kinds of wrong.

To start, let's review what the scripture says about law and grace:

> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (Rom. 6:14-15). See also, Gal. 2:21; 5:4.

The problem isn't that grace and law are two different things - the problem is what is meant by the word *law*. In the vast majority of instances, when the New Testament writers use the term *law*, they mean specifically, *and only*, the Mosaic law. This is clearly the sense intended by the apostle John:

> For *the law* was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (Jn. 1:17).

And of course, the main thing about the Mosaic law is that it was only ever given to, or applicable to, the Jewish people, *i.e.*, the nation of Israel. It is impossible that people who were never under the Mosaic law in the first place, namely Gentiles, could ever go "back" under that law. That law never applied to Gentiles in either the Old or New Testament periods. The apostle Paul was acutely aware of this:

> For when ***Gentiles***, who ***do not have the law***, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they ***do not have the law***. (Rom. 2:14). See also, 1 Cor. 9:21-22, where Paul again makes this plain (Jews are *under the law*, Gentiles are *outside the law*).

By referring to the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, we know that when speaking of law and grace Paul was not speaking of all law in general, the law of nature, or what we would call civil or municipal laws (*i.e.*, the laws by which nations govern themselves). Rather, he was speaking exclusively about that law which was given to ancient Israel *through Moses*. Also remember that Paul was himself a Jew born *under the Mosaic law* (as were many early believers). So from his vantage point, one of his principal concerns (especially in Galatians) was to convince fellow Jewish believers not to "return" to a reliance on the Mosaic law.

In Romans, however, writing mainly to Gentile believers, Paul's concern was different. There, he was addressing the fact that Gentile believers did not have to become Judaized (Jewish converts) in order to follow Christ. Ultimately, this problem was addressed and resolved by the Jerusalem Council (see Acts 15:1-29). When Paul said (in Rom. 6), *you are not under law but under grace*, he was simply stating a fact. The grace of Christ applied to Gentile believers, and the Mosaic law did not. There was no need for Gentiles to become Jews in order to become Christians.

Consequently, no Gentile believers today were *ever* under the law given to Israel through Moses to begin with. We cannot therefore, consider ourselves as having come out from under that law,

because it was never over us. And unless you are a biological Jew, your ancestors were never under the law given to Israel through Moses either.

However, whether a Jew or a Gentile, your ancestors were under the laws of nature, *and so are you*. Your ancestors were also under the divine covenants mediated through Adam and Noah, *and so are you*. In fact, insofar as the laws of God are concerned, you and your ancestors (even going back more than 3,000 years) *were and are under the exact same laws of God*. The birth, death and resurrection of Jesus had absolutely no impact on which *universal laws of God* applied to which people.

I have a challenge for you, if you care to consider it. Name one law of God that applied to the Gentiles nations *before* the First Advent of Christ that no longer applied to them *after* grace had come. Go ahead. I'm waiting. There's, uh, and there's this other, uh .... Nothing. *There are no such laws*. Admit it. As to Gentiles, there are no laws of God that grace has obsoleted or displaced.

The whole law vs. grace thing has only a very narrow and limited purpose, *i.e.*, to illustrate the change in program between the Mosaic covenant and the Church covenant as far as the means of redemption *for the Jews* is concerned, and to extend the means of grace to the Gentiles. Yes, of course, as Gentiles we can use the discussion of law vs. grace to help us better understand the nature of grace and appreciate how much better it is than *if* we had been under the Jewish law. Just because Gentiles were without grace in the O.T. period, does not make them under the law at the time.

Remember what the Great Commission says: make disciples of all nations, teaching them Jesus' commands. By definition, Jesus *could not have meant* for the Church to teach ***all nations*** (which are 99.9% Gentiles) the Mosaic Law, which only ever applied to the Jews. Jesus certainly knew what John, Paul, Peter and the Jerusalem Council knew. Therefore, when He urged us to teach *all that I have commanded you*, He must have meant something else. He must have meant for us to teach the nations all of God's laws *which actually apply to all nations*, that is, His universal laws.

Consequently, the words of the Great Commission in Matthew *are what they are*. Either they are God-breathed and authoritative, or they are not. We need to accept the fact Jesus knew what He was saying, and His words carry divine authority. Now, assuming the words of Jesus in the Great Commission mean what they say, what are the commands of Jesus (the laws of God) that we should teach?

WHAT SHOULD WE THEN TEACH?

A biblical understanding of God's laws is not as impossible as some think it is. (I have had people tell me such knowledge was, at best, merely my opinion, or at worst, an evil pursuit). To be sure, the subject matter of the laws of God covers every area of life. Even to the extent that, if one wished, an entire professional law school curriculum could be built upon the laws of God, comparing them to the laws of men. The fact so few people have even dared to dream about the possibility of doing such a thing in the last 150 years shows how far the faithful have fallen in taking every though captive to the obedience of Christ.

But neither is a biblical view of law in general, or God's laws specifically, something that you automatically have just because you are a Christian. Same thing for a biblical worldview of any subject. Merely crossing the threshold into the spiritual kingdom of Christ doesn't vest anyone with more knowledge than they had before. Such knowledge has to be acquired by the constant renewal of the mind that only comes by study and hard work over a period of time.

But there is a fairly easy balance which can be achieved for the layman (*i.e.*, the non-lawyer). That is, basic principles drawn from scripture, and from life, that show people in general what God's expectations are with respect to our conduct. Expectations of behavior that may be described as *rules*, which God has laid down for everyone to see. And these rules apply to all people, in all places, and all times - that's what makes them universal laws. If we fail to teach them, God will hold us accountable for that failure.

I break these universal laws into two main parts: 1) the laws of nature (creation laws); and 2) the laws of nature's God (biblical laws). I will also talk separately about a particular part of the biblical laws - the Mosaic laws - just because people have so much trouble understanding them.

The Laws of Nature

I ask that you resist the urge to jump straight to the Ten Commandments at this point. Yes, they are acknowledged by all to be a part of the eternal moral law, or the law of nature. *However*, the Ten Commandments are not the place to *start* a discussion of the laws of nature because they neither originated *in verbal form* at the creation, nor are they the foundation of all laws in the Old Testament. In addition, there is actually nothing either Christian or Gentile about them - they are distinctly Jewish, being the core text of the civil constitution of the nation of ancient Israel. They just happen to *reflect* the laws of nature, as I will discuss later.

Since our focus here is on God's *universal* laws, it would be good to avoid discussing laws of a peculiar national character until we have laid a foundation for understanding such things. Plus, the question of who can *enforce* the Ten Commandments (or any of God's laws) must be dealt with first. Accordingly, I will pick up discussion of the Decalogue when we get to the Mosaic law below.

What is the proper starting point? A biblical view of creation itself. Namely, that creation was specially made by God *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), and the world is not the result of evolutionary (impersonal and random) forces. It's pretty hard to take seriously the law of nature, if God didn't actually create the world, or if humanity sprang up from the primordial ooze *after* God had done His part. Would to God that churches today taught a biblical view of creation!

Along with that, of course, is a biblical view of history and anthropology. By which I chiefly mean a literal Adam and Eve. Why are they important? Because the making of mankind in the image of God, mankind's dominion over the earth, the fallen nature of mankind, and the eventual hope of mankind all rest on the fact that everyone alive today is a descendant (that is, an *inheritor*) of Adam. If Adam and Eve are not literal, then you may or not be personally made in God's image, you may or may not have any earthly dominion, and you may or may not have a fallen nature, etc. All

because you won't know for certain whether such things are literal or merely allegorical or mythical.

If such things are only mythical, then the existence of truly universal laws is much harder to prove. Things which are *mandatory* (laws) are not based on *faith*, but on *facts*. If the facts are uncertain, it even opens up the possibility that some people will be made in God's image, others not; some will be fallen, others not, etc. So the very concept of universal laws of (human) nature depend entirely on God's special creation of the world and a literal Adam and Eve. Failure to teach these foundations can only result in a failure to teach the universal laws of God, as well.

The next logical step is to teach that such a thing as the law of nature exists. Strangely, there are some Christian traditions that deny the existence of a law of nature, or claim that it no longer applies to us. What foolishness! You want some good law of nature scriptures? Psalm 19. Rom. 1:18-32; 2:12-16. Lev. 18. 1 Cor. 11:14. But merely acknowledging the law of nature is not enough - we need to teach its specific content.

For example, that all people are created equal. This is not just an American principle of government. It flows from the very nature of humanity's creation in Genesis 1-2, and is a universal *law*. The Genesis account of creation also reveals that of all of the creatures God ever made, people are the only ones to whom God expressly gave *authority*. Yes, that goes to the nature of God's image in us. But did you know there is a whole set of God's laws of authority? There is. I discuss this at length in my essay, *God's Laws of Authority*. (See also, *Legal Foundations: Framework of Law*, chap. 6.)

The Sabbath principle is another law flowing directly from the creation account. (By definition, all laws of nature must be traceable back to creation, because that is when God's will was impressed upon the natural world.) The Sabbath was not invented in the time of Moses. But in teaching the Sabbath principle, it is important to distinguish the penalties for violating the Sabbath which were peculiar to ancient Israel. The law of nature, as such, imposes no penalties - it simply establishes what is right and what is wrong.

I realize there's a lot of theological baggage associated with the Sabbath. But that's because people don't treat it the way it should be - as a universal and eternal law which has never changed and never will change. Do what you want in interpreting the Sabbath consistent with that. But don't deny that it is an eternal universal law. And don't deny what Jesus expressly stated - He did not come to abolish (or change) the laws of God. (Mat. 5:17-19).

What else can I say? Plenty. There is the law of the nature of inheritance, which I discuss at length in *Biblical Genealogies and the Law of Inheritance*. There is the law of conscience, which I discuss at length in *Self-Government, Conscience and True Liberty*. There's always the Big 3 major sins: idolatry, immorality, and violence. On immorality, see my essay on *Sex, Crimes & Punishment*, which is essentially an exposition of Lev. 18 as the enumeration of God's laws of sexuality for all people, places and times. Or, one can always discuss the laws of family structure and authority, springing from Genesis 2. The apostle Paul, in 1 Cor. 11, expressly regards such laws as proceeding from *nature*, and not from cultural influences.

Before leaving the realm of the law of nature, I'd like to address the most ignored aspect of God's laws in all of human history - the laws of jurisdiction. Start with the basic question: What things has God delegated to men to handle, and what things has He reserved for Himself? This will get into a discussion of jurisdiction over the heart and the mind, the law of love, freedom of thought and related matters, including the extent to which civil government ought to be involved (if at all) in educational and psychological matters. (Again, see *Legal Foundations: Framework of Law*, chap. 6.)

But the most important jurisdictional issue of all is this: In any given situation when addressing something that someone has done wrong, we must always ask *two* questions. First, what law has been violated that makes this something wrong? Second, what authority has God given *me* or *us* to do anything about it, and how did I/we get that authority? Nobody ever asks the second question - people just assume that because something wrong was done, anybody and everybody can jump in at will to address it. Bzzzzz! Wrong!

Use the example of Cain and Abel in Gen. 4 to show that just because Cain murdered Abel (*i.e.*, he did wrong) does *not* mean that anyone had any authority (*i.e., jurisdiction*) to do anything about it. In fact, God didn't give anyone that authority for another 1600 years or so (after Noah's flood). Further, while Cain was still alive, if anyone had tried to exercise jurisdiction over Cain, that is, to punish him for killing Abel, God said "vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." (Gen. 4:15). In others words, it can be argued, *who had jurisdiction* was <u>seven times</u> more important a question to God than *whether Cain was a murderer*.

So the fact hardly anyone ever asks the jurisdictional question before acting is a big deal to God - and it should be to us, too. Why aren't we teaching this principle to the nations? Why aren't we teaching it in our churches? Why is it the people who claim to be the "people of the Book" know the least about what's inside it? Don't you dare ask for God's mercy to cover a multitude of sins of omission. You now know the principle - go out and teach it! The Church *will* be held accountable.

And if, by any chance, you are saying to yourself, "I've never heard any of these laws taught in my church (or any church)," THAT'S THE PROBLEM.

<u>The Laws of Nature's God</u>

The laws of nature, ostensibly, are those rules of conduct which we should be able to discern just by observing our world and human nature. Certainly, they will often be confirmed and repeated in scripture, but they would be just as true, universal and mandatory if scripture were silent about them. The laws of nature's God, on the other hand, are those rules of conduct which we only know *because* they are contained in the scriptures. By definition, these divine laws do *not* trace back to creation, but arose at a later date.

Chief among these are the Four Great Commands, discussed earlier, and the four social relationships created by God: individuals, families, nations and the Church. Technically, yes, the Greatest

Commandments to individuals (love God and love your neighbor) are part of the law of nature. But the teaching of these commands is usually best done as a group, in order to see how they do and do not interrelate to each other. And for the most part, they fall squarely into the divine law (or laws of nature's God) category.

The second obvious starting point is to consider the divine covenants between God and men, *i.e.*, Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and the new covenant in Christ (*i.e.*, Church covenant). The tendency of many pastors and teachers will be to either: 1) tie all the divine covenants together with the thread of redemption; or 2) posture all of the divine covenants as the progressive unfolding of the Church covenant. I will not comment on the relative value of these perspectives, except to say if that is all you get out of the divine covenants, then you have altogether missed the point of teaching *God's laws*.

Each of the O.T. divine covenants has as much or more to do with non-religious and non-redemptive commands as it does with spiritual matters. Of these, the first two are far and away the most important, *because they are the most universal*. That is, the Adamic covenant applies to all descendants of Adam, the first man. The Noahic covenant applies to all the descendants of Noah. If Adam and Eve were literal persons, and the great flood of Noah was also literal as described in Genesis, then every person alive today is a descendant of both Adam and Noah. Thus, these two divine covenants, though not part of the law of nature, are every bit as universal as nature today.

Take the Adamic covenant, which consists of the Dominion Mandate of Gen. 1:26-30. What does it consist of, really? Redemption? No, that doesn't come in until Gen. 3, and is not part of the *terms* of the Adamic covenant, *per se*. What do the covenantal terms pertain to? Human sexuality and gender identity. The image of God in man. Marriage and family. Childbearing and all that goes with it: discipline, care, provision, authority, education, etc. If you want to talk about the right to life, abortion, or reproductive rights, where should you start? The Dominion Mandate.

But there's also everything to do with subduing the earth and all it includes: private property, land development, cultivation, industry, labor and occupation, etc. Dominion over the entire animal kingdom and all it implies. You want to talk about the environment, the EPA, game and fishing laws, etc.? Start here. Even the food laws are important. Have you ever asked the question, what every *plant yielding seed* includes? You might be surprised. I suggest, many religious commentaries to the contrary notwithstanding, there is absolutely nothing religious about the Adamic covenant. But universal laws? There are plenty.

The Noahic covenant is similar (Gen. 8:20-9:17). Sure, I know the *circumstances* surrounding that covenant involved the physical salvation of Noah, his family, and all the land creatures. But what are the express *terms* of the covenant? No further curse of the ground, or killing of all flesh. The continuance of day and night, and the seasons, forever. Reiteration of the command to be fruitful and multiply (nothing had changed, just because God killed everyone else). Enmity between men and animals in a new way, and a command to eat meat. (Talk about the basis for a good discussion of the merit, or lack of merit, for vegetarianism and veganism.) Yes, the command to eat meat is a *law*.

Don't forget capital punishment, not as a cultural or temporary rule, but as a universal law for all people always. Or the promise of the rainbow as a sign of the covenant (and not merely as a scientific phenomenon). Lots of good, non-redemptive, non-religious, stuff there.

Granted, the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants are applicable chiefly to the descendants of Abraham, and specifically, the nation of Israel. But that doesn't mean they have nothing to teach Gentiles about God's laws. The Abrahamic covenant is chiefly about three things: 1) that Abraham will have many descendants, including many nations and kings, but among them will be one special "great" nation (Israel); 2) that the chosen nation will inherit a specific parcel of land to be their possession forever; and 3) that all families of the earth will be blessed (primarily via Abraham's spiritual descendants).

What does any of that tell us Gentiles, as a matter of law? Well, for one thing, it tells us who has the original and perpetual title deed to the land of Israel. Did you know God specifies the boundaries of the land of Israel five times in scripture, including by specific metes and bounds? (Num. 34:3-12). Might that give us a clue about how to handle some aspects of international relations in the Middle East?

The Davidic covenant relates to who can rightfully claim the throne of David as the ruler of Israel. Again, as to matters of foreign relations, that may help us Gentiles identify or distinguish who is the legitimate head of state, in some instances. (No, the Israeli prime minister is not a king, nor a claimant to the throne of David.)

As for what Gentiles can learn from the Mosaic covenant - a set of laws admittedly given solely to the nation of Israel - I will consider in the next section.

What else can I say about the laws of nature's God, or the divine laws of scripture? Churches should be teaching their members about the Tower of Babel and the origin of nations. And that even though God created the nations, He did not create any civil government (even in ancient Israel). Instead, he always lets the people decide what form of civil government to have. The principle is, God makes nations, and men make governments. See my essay, *The Right To Alter or Abolish the Government*, for a detailed discussion of this principle, based largely on 1 Sam. 8.

And of course, the one thing churches absolutely never discuss about the laws of nature's God, but should, is the principles of Church government. Yeah, those are divine laws, too. See my essay, *Five Biblical Principles of Church Government*. You'll be surprised by what's in there, too.

A Proper Regard for the Mosaic Law

Unfortunately, there is a long history of people mishandling the Mosaic law, and failing to properly understand what applicability it has, if any, for everyone. One common tendency is to regard the Mosaic law as completely dead, having nothing to teach of any value to people today.

The opposite tendency is to import too much of the Mosaic law as though it is directly applicable

to everyone. Usually, this shows up in the importation of the tithe, along with other priestly elements, into the Church, where such things were never intended to apply. Less commonly, people have advocated for the use of Mosaic law as a basis for modern civil laws, often under the banner of Theonomy or Reconstructionism.

The solution is not to subdivide the Mosaic law into moral, judicial (or civil), and ceremonial parts. Frankly, the Mosaic laws are never laid out in that fashion, and the divisions are conceptual, not linguistic. The same verse (or any single law) may contain elements of all three divisions, and parsing out the differences is fairly complex. Nor is the solution to adopt some misguided rule of thumb, such as *Repealed Unless Repeated*, or *Mandatory Unless Modified*. Neither of those schemes is actually a legal rule - how can either be used to interpret actual laws?

I suggest there are three basic rules - *legal rules* - that should guide us in understanding the modern applicability of the Mosaic law.

> *First*, the Mosaic law was only ever given to the nation of Israel as a matter of covenant. That covenant never did, and never will, apply to either Gentile nations or to the Church. Nevertheless, the Mosaic law does sometimes verbalize rules that are part of the law of nature. To the extent this occurs, the rules apply to all people everywhere *because* such rules are based in the law of nature, *not* because they are stated in the Mosaic covenant. Merely agreeing with the law of nature on some points does not make the entire covenant binding on anyone other than the Jews.
>
> *Second*, to the extent a particular legal rule is traceable back to the creation account as described in Gen. 1-2, that is how we know it is a part of the law of nature applicable to all people, in all places, at all times.
>
> *Third*, the law of nature, being a non-verbal expression of God's will in the creation, by itself contains neither any specific punishments for violations, nor any express enforcement authority. Therefore, all punishments and enforcement mechanisms contained in the Mosaic law are by definition *not* part of the laws of nature.

The Ten Commandments

In this light, we can look at the Ten Commandments as an example of how to properly understand the Mosaic laws.

No other gods. This commandment is rooted in creation because there is only one Creator of the universe, hence, there is only one God. All gods other than the Creator are false. This being a religious law, like all other religious laws (blasphemy, heresy, idolatry, etc.), enforcement has not been given to any nation that is not a true theocracy. And ancient Israel is the only true theocracy in history. So the offense, while against nature, is moral only, and unenforceable by men.

Idols. God made people, and people make things. Here is the law of nature: nothing can be created

which is either equal to or greater than its creator. Thus, men will never become gods, and all idols made by people are by definition false gods. Another religious offense which is moral only. But still an *offense*. Note: idols are always physical objects in scripture. Objects of desire are not physical objects. So money, fame, power, etc. may be false gods, but are not strictly speaking *idols*.

God's name. The right of naming something belongs to its creator. Since God is uncreated, only He can name Himself. That means His name is holy and all people are to respect that name, to neither profane it nor utter it in vain. God has several names, some revealed to Israel, and some revealed to Gentiles (such as God Most High). All these are worthy of the same respect. The word *God*, however, at least in English, just means *deity*, and is not actually a revealed *name* of God.

Sabbath day. The law of the Sabbath is rooted in the creation of the world in six days, and God's resting on the seventh day. Clearly, the Sabbath was not invented for the first time at Mt. Sinai. The punishment for violating the Sabbath in ancient Israel was severe (Ex. 31:14-15). The New Testament teaches that observing the Sabbath is a matter of individual liberty, not a matter for civil enforcement. However, this does *not* mean the Sabbath has changed days, because *nature* has not changed.

Honor parents. Contemporaneous with man's creation, God commanded man to be fruitful and multiply. Parents have a natural right to command those children which they have procreated. To honor one's parents is merely to honor the family order instituted by the Creator. The dishonoring of parents was punished harshly in ancient Israel (*i.e.*, by death). Ex. 21:15, 17; Deut. 21:18-21. Those obviously do not apply to all nations. So the offense is against nature, but the remedy is left to God.

Murder. The law of murder must have pre-existed the Ten Commandments. Otherwise, Cain would not have been guilty of murdering Abel, and God would not have told Noah to execute future murderers. And according to Gen. 6:11-13, all manner of violence is also a violation of the laws of nature, not merely murder. Certainly, the capital punishments of the Mosaic law are not part of the law of nature. However, the institution of capital punishment in Gen. 9:6 is a universal law for all nations. Therefore, that is the rule as to punishment for acts of violence among Gentiles.

Adultery. God made man male and female, and also instituted the marriage relation at the time of creation. Thus, adultery must have been wrong from the very beginning, as part of the law of nature. But don't stop there! All manner of offenses against marriage are likewise implicated as part of the laws of nature. Including, polygamy and polyandry (multiple wives and husbands), "open marriages," unmarried cohabitation, divorce without proper cause, and the list goes on.

Stealing. The Dominion Mandate, issued contemporaneously with man's creation, includes authority to *subdue the earth*. But God never intended this authority to be exercised communally - rather, He gives to men their own property. Stealing dishonors the dominion God has given to someone else. But again, don't stop there. The historic common law recognized three other basic property offenses: waste, trespass and nuisance. Arguably they are forms of theft - look into it.

False witness. Accusations spoken falsely dishonors a fellow vice-regent of God, whom God has made equal. A false accusation is an attempt to exercise unwarranted dominion over a fellow human being. In the modern world, this is otherwise known as *perjury*. Perjury is a universal law for all nations.

Coveting. Coveting concerns a person's heart attitude respecting property and possessions belonging to others. It is the antecedent of murder, adultery and stealing - improperly desiring (or despising) the life, spouse or property God has given to another. Note: there is no remedy, or punishment, for coveting. It is an offense of the heart, judgment of which God gave to no man, but reserves for Himself alone. Note 2: there is no good or positive form of coveting per the law of nature. To *covet a person's prayers* is just nonsense.

Remember, the Ten Commandments are only *illustrative* of the eternal laws of nature reflected in the Mosaic law. They are not the *end all* and *be all* of the moral law. Lev. 18, for example, is a chapter detailing how various laws of immorality apply to the nations *which are not Israel*, and therefore must be based on the laws of nature.

I never said deciphering the Mosaic law was easy. I only say it is achievable, and it does take some skill and practice. But it will only be done if Christians get back in the habit of analyzing the scriptures, reading them carefully, and making and testing arguments for or against a principle.

LOOKING FOR LAW IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

In the preceding pages I have tried to give you a fairly good handle on the commands of Jesus, or the laws of God, that are applicable to all people always. These are the laws that are reasonably within the scope of what Jesus intended His Church to teach in the Great Commission. However, Christians have a long history of looking for God's laws in all the wrong places, some of which I will look at now.

Improper Importation of the Mosaic Law

There are those in the Christian community, primarily dispensationalists (not all, but some), who object to the Great Commission precisely because it *does* command us to teach God's laws. And that's what is wrong with it (in their opinion). But the root of their objection is the belief Jesus intended to refer *not* to God's laws for all people, but only to the laws of the Jews.

According to this argument, the last three verses of Matthew hearken back to (and rely upon) the Mosaic law which Jesus operated under prior to His resurrection and the coming of *grace*. For that reason, the expression of the Great Commission in Matthew should be ignored in favor of a Pauline expression of the Great Commission (such as Eph. 2:8-9). Some commentators even argue the Great Commission in Matthew is actually limited by its terms to the persons present at the time and not specifically directed to future generations.

Let me respond to this last point first. Any statement beginning with *all authority in heaven and on*

earth has been given to me, and ending with *behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*, is not how anyone (much less God) would frame a temporary instruction to a handful of people. The whole verbal framing of the statement screams that it is something huge, for lots of people, forever.

Imagine Jesus saying something like, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go wash your hands before dinner." All that would do is trivialize His authority. The plain fact is no one needs *all authority in heaven and on earth* to say something trivial or temporary. But if the intention was to give instructions to an indefinitely large group of people (most of whom are not yet born) for ages to come, then yes, you would need *all authority*. It's not that hard to match the level of authority with the nature of the command. And Jesus claimed, in essence, an infinite authority. Thus, the command itself must be worthy of that authority.

Now back to the main point. Representative of the dispensational argument is the following:

> As we have seen, Dr. Ironside declared that our commission is to be found in Matthew 28:18-20, but [other commentators] ... realized immediately that this would bind believers hand and foot with the law of Moses, for our Lord distinctly commanded the apostles that in going to "all nations" they should "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," and this would inescapably include obedience to the law of Moses for, not only was our Lord Himself under the law (Gal. 4:4), but He commanded His disciples to "observe and do" whatever the scribes and Pharisees directed them to do because these leaders in Israel occupied "Moses' seat." Pastor Cornelius R. Stam, *Our Great Commission*, 10/3/2006, as published by the Berean Bible Society, www.bereanbiblesociety.org/.

Note what Pastor Stam is saying. First, he recognizes that the core of the Great Commission in Matthew is to teach God's laws. Second, he equates God's laws with the law of Moses given solely to the nation of Israel. Here is the essence of his mistake: there is more to God's laws, and more to the Old Testament, than just the Mosaic law.

Did God know who the Mosaic laws did and did not apply to? Of course. Did Jesus know this, too? Of course, for He is God. OK then, as a starting matter, don't assume Jesus is going to tell a primarily Gentile Church to teach laws Jesus knew darn well were given exclusively to ancient Israel. Give Him a little credit. If Jesus/God is telling us to teach His laws to the world, then by definition He is telling us to teach only those laws that apply to *everyone*.

God would never tell the Church to teach the nations about laws He never gave them for their governance. That would make God the author of confusion, which we know He is not. (1 Cor. 14:33).

Now it is also true Jesus was born under the Mosaic law (Gal. 4:4), He did not come to abolish the Mosaic law (Mat. 5:17-19), and He instructed the disciples to follow the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees (Mat. 23:2-3). He even, at one point, told the disciples to go nowhere near the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to take the gospel solely to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Mat. 10:5-

6). How are all of these to be reconciled with a Great Commission directed to all nations?

I start with the fact that the new program introduced by Christ, that is, the body of Christ also known as the Church, did not cancel, amend or abrogate the Mosaic law in whole or in part. The Church covenant and the Mosaic covenant operate alongside each other in parallel, as it were, neither one affecting the other. The disciples, and the apostle Paul, were both Jewish and members of the body of Christ at the same time. Merely because they believed in Christ did not somehow stop them from being Jewish. And just because Jesus was a new and better sacrifice, did not mean the Jews stopped sacrificing animals as they had been instructed by God.

I discuss this matter in very great detail in the essay, *No Part of the Mosaic Covenant Has Ended*. Here is the bottom line: as Jewish believers, the disciples were under both sets of laws - the Mosaic laws, and the new covenant in Christ - at the same time. Just like you, my friend, are under local laws, state laws and national laws, all at the same time. In this there is no inherent or necessary conflict. It is *both/and*, not *either/or*.

And if you look at the spread of the gospel in its historical unfolding, you will see the progressive working out of Jesus' last words at His ascension. "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8). And that's exactly how the gospel was rolled out into the world. First, the disciples ministered only to fellow Jews. Gradually they made their way into Samaria, and when Paul came along years later, the gospel eventually spread to the Gentiles and around the globe.

Jesus knew this was the program. So when He gave the Great Commission, which was spoken very close in time to His ascension, He had to have the whole program in view, not just a part of it. Sure, the disciples would stay close to Jerusalem for most of their lives, but their converts could not all stay there. Sooner or later, those converts had to go everywhere. And the only commission that would suffice is one which gave them the authority to do that. So naturally, as the gospel spread to all nations, the laws of God for all nations would have to be spread as part of the package. And that's exactly what it is - a package deal. A gospel, and laws, suitable for all nations.

Admonitions and Exhortations

> Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Tim. 2:15 (KJV).

Not everything God or Jesus has said is a commandment, or a law. Not everything the patriarchs, prophets and N.T. saints did are examples to us of rules and practices to follow. Not everything God laid out as a pattern for a particular group of people is a pattern for the rest of us. We need to observe the differences between orders, rules and admonitions, and recognize the role of liberty.

For example, when God told Abram to go from his father's house to the land He would show him (Gen. 12:1), that was not a law, but an *order*. Similarly, when Jesus told the disciples to go to Jerusalem and prepare the Passover meal, that was an order. An order is a command to a particular

person to do a particular task.

A law, on the other hand, is a *rule of conduct* that all men must abide by. Sometimes rules can be directed to the people of a particular nation (such as Israel), but of course in fulfilling the Great Commission we want to identify rules applicable to all nations.

Both orders and rules are distinguished from mere *admonitions*. An admonition is generally a word of caution or advice to avoid something, or an urging or reminder to perform a duty. See *dictionary.com*. Examples of biblical admonitions: pray without ceasing, do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, put on the whole armor of God, etc. In other words, none of these examples is a *rule of conduct, i.e., a law*.

Mere admonitions, firstly, are unenforceable. No one can truly tell you how often to pray, no one else can actually know how often you pray, and no one can do anything about it if you aren't praying enough. I would even go so far as to say that failing to *pray without ceasing* is not a sin. Just pray often and make it a regular part of your life, but don't ever feel pressured because you aren't meeting someone else's standards for praying. This is not a matter in which one person can judge another. And God, for His part, is not your mother, saying, "You don't talk to me enough."

Ditto for church attendance and spiritual preparedness (such as, "Read your Bible"). That's right - there are no actual *rules* for prayer, church attendance or Bible reading, or any of a host of other general behaviors. All of these are matters of Christian *liberty*, as the scripture says,

> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ... But the one who looks into the perfect law, the *law of liberty*, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (Jas. 1:22, 25).

When people make up rules for things that are actually a matter of individual choice and liberty, it is called *legalism*. And legalism is always a bad thing to be avoided.

Second, just because we're dealing with God's laws doesn't mean that somehow His laws are intrinsically different from man-made laws. Laws are laws. And all laws originate the same way: they have to come from a *legislature*, or a *lawgiver*. Now we know that God is a lawgiver:

> For the Lord is our judge; *the Lord is our lawgiver*; the Lord is our king; he will save us. (Isa. 33:22).

But when God issues a law, He usually says something to indicate He is acting in a *legislative (i.e., a rule-making) capacity*. That is, He will announce the rule with a statement that, "this shall be a statute for you for all your generations," or something equivalent. Or He will just outright call it a *law*. God doesn't make laws without telling us that it is a law. He never leaves making a law to mere implication or inference. Sometimes laws need to be interpreted, but the fact of whether a divine law *exists* is not a matter of interpretation.

When is God speaking in a legislative capacity? Either when implementing a divine covenant, or when issuing a statute under or pursuant to that covenant. These instances are pretty easy to identify because there aren't that many of them.

Just because the New Testament writers were acting under the *inspiration* of the Holy Spirit, does not mean *anything*, much less everything, they wrote was done legislatively. Inspiration and legislation are not the same thing. The apostles (including Paul) were never vested with legislative or lawmaking authority. The most they could ever do - any of them - was to *report* a command or rule *previously* handed down by the Lord, and then tell us that's what it was.

Paul, in particular, was aware of this distinction. Just look at 1 Cor. 7:6, 25 and 2 Cor. 8:8. In each of these three instances, Paul says, "I say this not as a command." Then compare with 1 Cor. 9:14; 14:37. In these two instances, he says, "this is a command from the Lord." But in neither case is the command *coming from Paul*. Paul is not a lawgiver. His epistles are *not* laying down legal rules for us to follow.

Therefore, the admonitions and exhortations of the New Testament are not the commands of Jesus referred to in the Great Commission. I am *not* saying the admonitions and exhortations of scripture should not be taught ***as*** admonitions and exhortations - they most definitely should. But they should *not* be taught as *rules or commands*. And the actual laws of God (be fruitful and multiply, subdue the earth, eat meat, and execute murderers, etc.) should not be taught as mere suggestions or possible options. They should be taught as *mandatory commands*. Get it straight, people!

Regulative Principle of Worship

Before leaving the topic of *Things in the Bible That Are Not Law*, I'd like to briefly address the Regulative Principle of Worship. The Regulative Principle was a product of the Reformation, and one of its chief proponents was John Calvin - so this idea has been around for a while and is well known.

Essentially, the Regulative Principle holds that God requires His people to use only those elements of worship (especially corporate worship) that are "affirmatively found" in scripture, and anything not so found in scripture is prohibited. *Affirmatively found* elements of worship include both express commands of God and "approved examples" of people, that is, examples of worship in scripture that God accepted.

Now, I willingly concede that many modern churches have gone too far in pandering to a pure entertainment model of worship service, mainly to boost attendance (and church revenues). Yes, greed and lust for fame are alive and well in many churches today. But I attribute that to the fact such churches have little or nothing of any real scriptural value to offer people today. They certainly don't know how or what to teach about God's laws, and some of them have even lost sight of the gospel of Christ. But that has nothing to do with any so-called Regulative Principle.

There are four main problems with the Regulative Principle. *First*, the Old Testament commands

of God relied upon to show us what God requires are almost universally drawn from instructions given to ancient Israel. By definition, those instructions are part of the ceremonial laws given exclusively to the Jews, which have zero application to the Church. And of course, the New Testament admonitions given to the early churches are, by definition, not laws (because the N.T. writers were not acting as legislators). So, in effect, *there are no commands of God regulating worship* of God's people (the elect) in scripture applicable to the Church.

Second, actions of men do not make laws of God. I don't care who the patriarch, prophet, saint or apostle was - no human being by their actions can create a command, rule or law of God. God's laws don't come from men. And the counter-argument - that it's not the actions of people, but God's *approval* that makes something a rule - is bogus. In accepting the worship of so-and-so in scripture, God is not acting *legislatively*. If God was actually making a rule of conduct, He would come out and say it was a law and not leave the matter to implication or interpretation.

Third, the form of worship is an area of Christian liberty. If people have liberty in choosing a form of church government (and they do), then they must also have liberty in choosing a form of corporate worship. How can you have one without the other? And liberty is valid, as long as it does not run afoul of an express prohibition. Jesus said He came to proclaim liberty (Lk. 4:18), not put us in a behavioral straight jacket. Thus, we have our own liberty to exercise as we see fit, and whether our actions are acceptable to God or not will have nothing to do with what someone else may or may not have done.

Fourth, the Regulative Principle inevitably tends to produce a *ceremonial law* for the Church, even while its proponents deny any intention of doing this. I find it very ironic that people who claim the ceremonial law of ancient Israel is obsoleted draw upon that very law in an attempt to extrapolate principles into the Church age. As I said, it is possible to extract principles of universal law from the experience of ancient Israel, but *only to the extent* you can trace those principles to the law of nature. But the proponents of the Regulative Principle *never make this argument*. Instead, they argue that worship elements prescribed for Israel apply to the Church simply *because* they were prescribed for Israel. And that's as wrong-headed as you can get.

MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS

The Evangelistic Perspective

Now let's talk about the *making converts* part of the Great Commission. I mentioned at the beginning of this essay the modern *evangelistic* understanding of making disciples. Namely, that Christians are to gain converts through the process of evangelism (*i.e.*, preaching the good news of the Gospel) to *win souls* or *proselytize*. Then, once people have been converted to Christianity, we are to train them to go out into the world evangelizing others, and this is what the process of *discipleship* mainly consists of.

Thus, the entire thrust of the Great Commission (according to this view) is evangelism, either by evangelizing directly, or evangelizing indirectly by preparing others to do it. The command to

baptize is rolled up into the process of evangelism such that by keeping track of (*i.e.*, counting) baptisms, we know how many people are being saved and *brought into the Church*. It is commonly asserted that all Christians are *called* to spread the Gospel, *i.e.*, evangelize directly or indirectly.

The directive to *teach all that Christ commanded* is reduced to the evangelistic process, as though the only thing Jesus expects His followers to do is evangelize the lost. The only thing usually added to this expectation is that Christians will also lead holy lives that are pleasing to Jesus and by our example will serve to witness to the lost by our behavior. So even the call to *sanctification* (leading a godly life) is co-opted to serve, ultimately, an evangelistic purpose.

How sad. How myopic. And speaking as someone who was raised in that tradition from infancy, *what a bunch of nonsense*. I knew when I was a young teenager the evangelistic view was shallow and couldn't possibly comprehend all that Christ wanted His followers to do. However, it took a number of years for me to find out what the alternative was - the alternative I now present in this essay.

Ask yourself what kind of Church you would get from many decades of the evangelistic view of the Great Commission. Why, exactly the one we have now among churches identifying themselves as *evangelical*. Where people are welcomed in with easy belief-ism, and by all means we don't want to exclude or judge anyone, so nearly all forms of disobedience are accepted. A Church a mile wide and one inch shallow. A Church where everyone is on board but no one knows what they truly believe beyond what the pastor says. A church which, by its behavior and principles, is indistinguishable from the world around it.

Don't blame those pesky parishioners who don't get involved in church programs. Blame the clergy who aren't teaching the laws of God and rail against all things legal, and the seminaries who teach that the ministry of the Church is just to *love* people and not judge them.

In a way, the modern fascination with evangelism is an impossible dream. Consider Mat. 24, picking up the discussion of "the sign of your coming and of the close of the age" at verse 9, where Jesus is speaking:

> "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." Mat. 24:9-14.

It is clear from the context that the statement concerning preaching the gospel all over the world in verse 14 is a *prediction*. But many in the evangelical movement today consider it to be *a call to action*, which it clearly is not. By Jesus' own words, when the prediction is fulfilled, the Tribulation will already have begun, and Christians will be persecuted, hated and killed worldwide. In other

words, when the prediction is fulfilled, it won't be because there is a healthy and thriving Church that will purposefully be preaching the gospel. Rather, it is the *Tribulation itself* that will propel the gospel around the world.

So while modern ministries spin their wheels trying to bring about the fulfillment of Mat. 24:14, none of that will really have anything to do with its fulfillment. Fulfillment will come about through persecution, not evangelism, and it will come when God decides it is time, not when church leaders decide it is time. Which is why I say, modern evangelistic efforts are chasing an impossible dream.

God has *already told us* how the world will be evangelized - since when does attempting to do the same thing through our own efforts ever become a winning strategy? How did things go for Abraham, when He tried to fulfill God's promise through his own efforts? (He gave birth to the Arab-Israeli conflict that still persists today.)

If you have ever attended an evangelistic church, you've probably heard this logic: The Bible tells us God wants us to bear fruit. Bearing fruit means bringing people to Christ. (Here an analogy is often made to marriage, where bearing fruit means having children, so for Christians bearing fruit must mean something similar, in other words, fruit = people.) That being the case, now get out there and win souls! *Yet, this too is nonsense*.

The general call to bear fruit can be seen in scriptures such as Jn. 15:1-16 and Lk. 6:43-45. But the word *fruit* is not defined in those texts, so we must look elsewhere in scripture for the definition. According to Gal 5:22-23, fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Col. 1:10 indicates fruit is good works and increasing in the knowledge of God. Rom 6:21-22 says fruit is sanctification and eternal life. Perhaps the best summary statements are found in Phlp 1:11 and Heb. 12:11, where fruit is defined as righteousness - not soul-winning - which is entirely compatible with all of the preceding scriptures.

And what is righteousness? According to www.merriam-webster.com, it is "acting in accord with divine or moral law: free from guilt or sin." So we might say, bearing fruit as a Christian means keeping God's law. Not winning souls. Wow. What a concept.

God's Express Plan for Evangelism

The idea that every Christian is called to evangelize the world is not only an impossible dream, it is a lie. The whole manner in which God structured the universal Church (*i.e.*, the body of Christ) mitigates against it.

According to Eph. 4:11, God gave the Church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The KJV expressly states what other Bible versions imply, that "he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Whether the word *some* appears in the text or not, it is clear from the context that not everyone in the Church is an apostle, or a prophet, or a pastor and teacher.

Or an evangelist. No matter how you slice it, the number of people in the Church whom God has appointed to one of these special offices will always be a small minority - the vast majority of Christians will have other tasks. And the mere fact God *appoints* these people - they do not volunteer for the position, they are not elected to these offices, nor do they receive an office because of education, training or experience - means that these are specialized tasks to be carried out by those whom God alone has selected. It is not for men to saddle anyone with the burden of these offices, rather each person must be called by God and convinced of it in their own mind.

Friends, the very fact God gives only *some* in the Church to be evangelists completely negates the argument that *all* believers have a duty to evangelize others.

It is also clear from scripture that God is perfectly capable of bringing people to salvation entirely on His own, apart from any human intervention. Rom. 1:19-20 tells us, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." Col. 1:23 informs us, "the hope of the gospel that you heard ... has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven." And John 1:9 tells us that the true light of Christ "enlightens everyone."

So it isn't just a bare knowledge of the existence of God which is displayed in the creation, nor only a knowledge of God's power and His laws, but the very gospel of Christ itself which God makes known to all people.

Yes, I am fully aware of Rom. 10:14. "But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" But are *you* aware of Rom. 10:18-20, in which Paul continues the discussion? "But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'" That's a quote from Ps. 19:4, talking about the law of nature. Further, "Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.'"

All of which makes moot the argument that all believers have a duty to evangelize others. For God has undertaken this duty for Himself. Thus, to feel guilty or to make others feel guilty for not evangelizing enough is a despicable evil.

I am not arguing that Christ does not want some people to be evangelists. I am simply saying: a) He reserves the right to 'evangelize' people directly without human intervention (as in the case of Paul himself); and b) to the extent Christ wants His Church to evangelize, He specially appoints people He deems most suitable for that task and gives them the responsibility of carrying it out. Evangelism is not a task for which *every believer* is responsible. Or well suited.

What else are we to say? If everyone is called upon to evangelize, then we might as well say all Christians are responsible to teach, to become pastors, to prophesy and to be apostles. You cannot just say, "Well, yes some people have a special calling for evangelism, but the rest of us still have

a duty to be witnesses of the gospel," unless you treat being a pastor and teacher, prophet or apostle the same way. Textual consistency requires us to understand and treat each of the offices God appoints the same as the others.

Would you ever say, "Well, sure some people are specially called to be apostles, but the rest of us all have a duty to act as apostles"? Would you ever say, "Some people are called as pastors and teachers, but we all have a duty to shepherd the flock"? Same analysis for prophets. So in the end, no, you would probably never say those things.

Because if you do, the inevitable conclusion is that all Christians have individual responsibility to perform all of the tasks of the Church, regardless of whether God has appointed anyone to a particular office or not. Which effectively assigns to all believers the same responsibilities as each other, nullifying the special appointment of God. What possible difference can it make for God to select some people for special offices, if in fact al believers must carry out the same tasks anyway? It makes God's special appointments of no effect.

Plus, it does great violence to the concept of the body of Christ, which specifically provides that each member of the body is *different*. While they all work together for the benefit of the whole, the function of each member is in fact different from others.

> Having *gifts that differ according to the grace given to us*, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Rom. 12:6-8.
>
> To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, *who apportions to each one individually as he wills*. 1 Cor. 12:8-11.

This is God's plan for the Church, and for evangelism. And it's a good plan. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Gen. 1:31. The last thing anyone needs is a counterfeit plan invented by men. "Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called 'knowledge,' for by professing it some have swerved from the faith." 1 Tim 6:20-21.

I do not deny the *validity* of evangelism, I only deny its *preeminence* in describing the mission of the Church (as something every believer should do). Evangelism is a legitimate function of the Church, but *it has never been the only thing the Church is to do, the main thing, or even the most important thing*. Nor is evangelism a duty to which all believers are called to fulfill.

THE REAL REASON CHURCHES DON'T TEACH GOD'S LAWS

It's not that difficult to understand why churches today no longer teach God's laws. It's because they no longer practice God's laws. If people don't practice them, how can they teach them? But it is more than just a wilful ignorance of God's laws - it is a wilful disobedience of God's laws. Churches today don't *want* to know about God's laws because they don't *want* to follow those rules anymore. Modern churches have joined the sons of disobedience.

Can you imagine a church today teaching that divorce is wrong except in the cases of adultery or abandonment? That a church elder must be a husband of one wife, who demonstrates he is able to manage his household well? That gross immorality (such as adultery, homosexuality or harlotry) is not to be tolerated in the church? Or that a woman should not teach or exercise authority over a man, but is to remain quiet in the church? Don't be absurd. It's laughable. Yet, just as Jesus Himself has not changed over the years (Heb. 13:8), God's laws have not changed with the times either. Nor should they.

I once mentioned to the pastor of a church I attended that I was concerned a number of men, including those on the worship team up on stage, were wearing hats during the entire church service. I referenced 1 Cor. 11:4 ("Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.") I briefly pointed out that the reasoning given by Paul for this admonition was based entirely on the creation account of Gen. 1. As a result, the admonition was not culturally based, limited as to time, place or persons, but was rooted in the creation of humanity, and therefore was part of the eternal moral laws of God that never change.

The whole conversation on that subject took only as long as it took you to read the previous paragraph, just a couple of minutes. I did not elaborate, wax eloquent, or attempt to preach to the preacher. I just said, "Don't you think that's something we might want to consider?" Do I need to say it? My words fell on deaf ears. No questions came back about whether my analysis was good or bad. No effort was made to say, "That's interesting. I'll look it up." Not so much as a, "I'll mention it to the worship leader and see what he says." He just said, "Nice talking to you."

I know some of the rules I have mentioned are controversial (although, they are only controversial because people don't want to follow them). But men wearing hats in church? That's not controversial. If you grew up in the 1970's or earlier (especially in the 60's or earlier, when most men wore hats), the rule was universally understood and accepted in every church of every denominational stripe. But the pastor I spoke to was 20 years younger than me, and he came to Christ in his twenties (not as a kid like I did), so this common practice was completely foreign to him. That's OK - he can't help that - but his reaction (not even a marginal interest or curiosity) was entirely on him.

You might wonder why there is such an adversity to God's laws among God's people. Part of it is due to a false understanding of the whole *law vs. grace* thing already discussed. Part of it is due to the shift towards an evangelistic paradigm, where everything a church is and does is viewed through the lens of evangelism (and therefore nothing else matters). A lot of it is due to a profound

ignorance of God's laws among His people. But the main reason, I believe, is that people simply don't want to be bound by those rules anymore. Christians as a group have become disobedient children flaunting their rebellion.

Please allow me to paraphrase from Jer. 5:1-5:

> Run to and fro through the assemblies of the Church, look and take note! Search to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her. Though people say, "Praise Jesus," they swear falsely. O Lord, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent. Then I said, "These are only the flock; they have no sense; for they do not know the way of the Lord, the justice of their God. I will go to the church leaders and will speak to them, for they know the way of the Lord, the justice of their God." But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had declared themselves free from the laws of God.

Have you noticed? Christians have become very adept at justifying their non-compliance. We want to be inclusive, and not drive people away. We want to minister to the hurting, and not drive them away. We want to make the Gospel appealing, and not drive people away.

Allow me to describe what is really going on here: Christians have decided to sacrifice obedience for the sake of evangelism - that somehow those two things pull against each other. So churches do the one that leads to growth (numerically and financially) and leave behind the one that tends to winnow the flock (and church budgets). Then we clothe our decisions in a false interpretation of the Great Commission to make it look like it was really God's will when it wasn't.

It's pretty pathetic, when you think about it. As if God would saddle His church with a self-defeating task. As if the Church would not prosper if it fulfilled the entirety of the Great Commission. Yet, that's the way people treat it.

The modern church should take a lesson from Judges 7 and the story of Gideon. When God prepared the people for battle, He whittled down the forces from 32,000 to just 300. There was no intention on God's part to be as inclusive as possible. God did not need or want as many people as possible to feel good about serving Him. There was no motivation for God to make military service appealing to the masses. From God's perspective, He could do more with a very few hard core followers, than He could with a great many marginal followers. If only churches would do the same.

But then, that would require thinking in military terms. Military thinking sees the Christian life as combat, where we fight evil, enemies are destroyed, and victory is marked by conquest. But churches today don't want to do that. The modern church sees the Christian life as an opportunity for ministry, where we help the hurting, tear down walls between people, and success is marked by souls saved. This probably explains why you never hear songs like *I'm In The Lord's Army*, and *Onward Christian Soldiers* in churches anymore - songs that used to be staples in children's Sunday

School. Lord knows, we don't want to raise confrontational children! Or even worse, kids who grow up to be confrontational adults.

Although, maybe it helps explain why I'm so darn confrontational - because I grew up with those songs as a child. It's staggering to realize how far everyday Christianity has fallen, just in my lifetime. Oh look, I see we've gotten to the root of the problem at last! It can't be you, it must be me. Surely God must be pleased with modern churches that are kinder and gentler, shallow and weak, over those nasty and judgmental churches of the past that kept our nation strong and prevented us from going the way of the rest of the world. *There's no apostasy to see here, folks. Move along, move along.*

Learn to Love the Law of God

Sure, there are scriptures that state Jesus came to save the lost and believers are encouraged to share the Gospel with others. However, there are no verses in my Bible that I can find to the effect that when Jesus returns He will measure the Church, praise or reward the Church, or attribute holiness to the Church based upon the number of people saved, converts gained, or the effectiveness of evangelistic outreach. Not one. So I will issue a challenge. If you have such a verse in your Bible, please show it to me. I don't think such a verse exists.

Many Christians believe that when Jesus returns He will ask His Church, "Why didn't you reach more of the lost?" I don't think for one second that is what He will ask. I am absolutely convinced that instead Jesus will ask, "Why didn't you teach and obey my commandments?" But the people can't obey commands they have never heard discussed. And pastors can't teach commands they have never thought about *as commands* (and not merely as a gateway to moralizing, personalizing, allegorizing, Christolizing, and/or evangelizing).

Teach the commands of God *as commandments* and stop viewing them through the lens of something else. We don't need to, and God does not expect us to, baptize God's laws in some religious holy water in order to make them a suitable discussion topic in the Church. God's laws are perfectly good just the way they are and we should teach them without varnish or religious gloss.

> The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
> the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
> the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
> the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
> the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
> the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
> More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
> sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
> Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
> in keeping them there is great reward. Ps 19:7-11.

Consider what else the Psalmist knew that the Church has abandoned:

> Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the *law* of the Lord!
> Blessed are those who keep his *testimonies*, who seek him with their whole heart,
> who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!
> You have commanded your *precepts* to be kept diligently.
> Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your *statutes*!
> Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your *commandments*.
> I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous *rules*.
> I will keep your *statutes*; do not utterly forsake me! (Ps 119:1-8).

Yes, I know Gentiles are not under the Jewish laws. We've already covered that. Remember what I said earlier? *A far as non-Jews are concerned, we are under the laws of nature and nature's God no more or less now than we were before Jesus' First Advent. Gentiles are under the exact same laws of God now (including the divine covenants) as we were in 1000 B.C.* And 1000 B.C. was when David the Psalmist lived.

Look at all the legal terminology in Psalm 119: *law*, *testimonies*, *precepts*, *statutes*, *commandments*, and *rules*. Each of these words is used repeatedly throughout Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible. What could possibly be the reason, I wonder? Is it to give emphasis? Nah, it couldn't be. Since David was a Jew, he couldn't possibly have known anything about God's laws for all people, could he? Well, could he? Or was he divinely ignorant while he was divinely inspired?

I once heard a sermon on Psalm 119 in which the head pastor concluded the psalm was written as an admonition for us to read our Bibles. I went up to him after the service and asked him whether the presence of all the legal terminology in the psalm might suggest that God actually wants us to study his laws, *as laws*. He paused for a second, turned to the woman standing next to me, and said, "And you ma'am - What is your question?" He never spoke to me again, though we had attended that church for several years, and we were actually friends.

Ten years later, when my son was married by another minister in the same church, we visited the church to help prepare for the wedding. My wife and the head pastor's wife quickly fell into conversation to catch up because at one time we had all been quite close. The head pastor sat in a pew on the other side of the aisle from us and glared at me the whole time, never saying a word.

That pretty much sums up the general receptivity of evangelical pastors to the laws of God. And it's a damn shame. It's not the Church's ignorance alone that brings it shame - it's the stubborn unwillingness of Church leaders to study and teach the principles of God's laws, and their reckless disregard of things God has placed squarely in front of them for correction, reproof and instruction. And focusing on traditional evangelism isn't going to solve the problem.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Please don't take anything I've said as being *anti-evangelism*. I know that some of you, having gotten this far in the essay, will conclude I am anti-evangelism and nothing I can say is likely to alter your opinion of me. But at least know it is not my *intention* to be anti-evangelism.

What is my intention? To demonstrate that teaching the commands of Jesus, *i.e.*, God's laws, is just as important as evangelism is; and teaching God's laws and evangelism are both important to the body of Christ. Therefore, as much effort, resources and divine imperative we attach to God's laws should be matched or duplicated to the effort, resources and divine imperative we attach to evangelism.

And if we have to choose between *inclusiveness* and *obedience* in describing the overall mission of the Church, it is better to err on the side of obedience. Inclusiveness is a false god.

I don't want to remove evangelism from the mission of the Church, I want to balance it out with the full counsel of God in other areas as God intended. This isn't *my* agenda - it is *God's* agenda. I merely point out we haven't been following His agenda as closely as we thought. Don't change the way you look at the Great Commission for my sake - do it for Christ's sake.

APPENDIX

A Kingdom Parable

Once there was a kingdom which consisted of a continent surrounded by water. The king, who was in fact the king of the world, told his people to watch over his kingdom while he was going away for a while. He said, "It has not been given to you to rule over the entire world yet. Rule over and subdue this continent well, and when I return I will extend my kingdom over the entire earth and you will rule it together with me. If you are faithful over a little; I will set you over much."

And he told his people, "These are my instructions for you to follow while I am gone. Make disciples of all people who come to the kingdom from elsewhere, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you previously. Be my witnesses starting here at the eastern coastline, and then subdue the earth and take dominion as you go inland until you reach the city of the king. Destroy every opinion raised against the knowledge I have given you, and take every thought captive to obey my commands. Be ready to punish every disobedience, when your own obedience is complete."

With these words, the king went away. The people tried to do as the king instructed, but all of their initial efforts became abandoned and the people gradually moved westward around the coastline leaving their task largely undone. At one point the people decided to "get organized," putting into place a bureaucracy the king never told them to have. For a long time, the people argued over who was really in charge. Eventually, a splinter group moved further west than all the others and started to make real progress.

Not only did this group of people welcome newcomers from the lands of unbelief who arrived on their shores, but they made real, substantial progress in conquering and occupying the inland areas

of the kingdom. They knew that to accomplish their task they needed a plan, not a bureaucracy. So they trained people in personal piety and godly living so they would be mature enough to leave the familiarity of the beach.

The plan called for scouts - brave individuals who would mark out the territory by taking every thought captive to the king's commands - to lead the way. They would have to be followed by pioneers, *i.e.*, those who would establish outposts of godly thought and practical living in every area of life and every area equally, making it easier for permanent settlers to follow. Gradually, the people would fill the whole land of the kingdom as each person made progress towards maturity.

Fundamental to the plan was a recognition that the people were composed of many members who work together, but are not all the same. Each member is free to fulfill his own purpose for the good of the whole. *Some* would need to stay near the beach welcoming new people, but most of the people had other gifts and callings that would need to be exercised inland. They knew that in order to fulfill the king's commands, most people would need to leave the beach.

But as the people made their way inland to the point where they could just glimpse the city of the king in the distance, a group of beachcombers, wise in their own estimation, rose to power and started taking over. The beachcombers, wanting to feel important, starting teaching others that everyone needed to stay on the beach and rescue people coming to the land from across the water. They even said that the mission of the people was not what they thought it was - that their real mission was to welcome as many people as possible from the lands of unbelief.

The beachcombers stopped sending scouts, pioneers and settlers to the inland areas, insisting that when he returned, the king would take everyone to the city of the king. Gradually, the central part of the kingdom became a wilderness again, as the people who had settled there passed on and no one replaced them.

Back on the beach, people started setting up permanent settlements and ministry shops. The barkers would call out to passers by, "Step right up, folks. This is your one-stop shop. We've got creeds, confessions and statements of faith. Everything you ever need to know, and all that everyone can agree on. Don't get caught up in worldly pursuits; all that is true to the Gospel is right here."

Pretty soon, the beachcombers convinced people to build fences and barriers to keep anyone from leaving the beach. At a gate in the fence, there is a stop sign declaring, "Rules (for your own protection): Stop. Get permit to leave the beach. No permits today. Same thing tomorrow." Next to the gate is a salvation workers recruiting station, where people are most enthusiastic. "Saving souls is the most important thing anyone can do. Therefore, it is the only thing anyone is allowed to do."

Anyone who wonders aloud what it might be like to leave the beach for the inland areas is told: "There's nothing out there to see, and if you go, you'll be leaving the Gospel. Also, if you leave, don't expect anyone to support you. In fact, you are supposed to support us here at the beach."

Those who venture into the wilderness and attempt to go back to let others know what they found will encounter the gatekeepers. The gatekeepers tell everyone, "What you think you found is just your opinion. Don't tell anyone your opinions - this will just confuse others. Why can't you be a team player? But in truth we get along just fine without you."

Finally, after many years, the king returned. His people anxiously waited for him to say, "Well done, good and faithful servants." But instead, the king said, "You wicked and lazy servants! You should have made the land occupied and prosperous, but you only stayed on the beaches and left the inland areas unconquered." The people protested, "But Lord, look how many people we have brought into your kingdom! See them all on the beaches here."

To which the king replied, "You should have followed my instructions more closely and paid attention to the weightier matters of the law instead of neglecting them. Your works are but wood, hay and straw, and I will burn them up even though you will survive the fire. Instead of being rewarded, you will be called the least in my kingdom."

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