

Forms vs. Spirituality (Part 4)

The Laws of God

John W. Ritenbaugh

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Thus far in this series we have seen that quite a number of the major elements of Christianity which we have tended to understand as monolithic pillars, where in reality actually are anything but that. For instance, we have seen that while all unrighteousness is sin, and that the wages of sin is death, that all sin does not produce death; therefore all sin is not the same.

There are some sins that are more serious than others, and we saw that circumstances make a difference. We saw that God illustrated this by assigning different levels of sacrifice required for breaking some of the laws, making a difference in the areas, as to *who* committed the sin. Remember, the sin of the priest was the most serious, and the attitude in which the sin was committed. I gave you there the city of refuge for example. The people were able to flee to a city of refuge whenever the death they caused was accidental. The circumstance there made a difference, and so there was a sin that *was not unto death* very plainly seen in the Old Testament.

We found out that how much knowledge a person has regarding what is required of him, that the level of responsibility changes, and that makes a difference as well. We also saw that *all law* is not on the same level, that all other biblical laws *hang* upon, or depend upon, or are under the Ten Commandments.

Last week we saw that all holiness, righteousness, and love are not on the same level either. There is a holiness, or a consecration, that comes merely by God's choice and does not necessarily imply any kind of moral or ethical purity. Now we saw about the harlot that Judah came in contact with. This was not God's choice, but nonetheless she is called in the Bible a *holy* woman, and she was anything but moral.

It is also apparent that there are levels of righteousness and love that can be achieved with human efforts of keeping the commandments of God, but also that these fall far short of the holiness and righteousness and love God is able to create in us *if* we choose to follow His way, as guided by His Word.

In I Corinthians 1 Paul said that we are to *pursue* after these. They do not just magically appear after a person accepts Jesus Christ and is converted. I Corinthians was written to converted people, and so we have to pursue after the best gifts. A better way of looking at this and understanding it is that these things, like the righteousness of God, the love of God, are an effect of the creative power of God when combined with our unstable, weak, and inadequate responses. The two of them working together produce what God wants. Before we get into today's message real deeply, I want to turn to two scriptures that will show this major factor, that the love of God especially is an *effect*.

I John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God.

That is where it flows from. We can already begin to see the love that God wants is an effect. It is of God. It is not in us by nature.

I John 4:7 And every one that loves is born [or is begotten] of God, and knows God.

There are two qualifications there in order to have this love.

I John 4:8 He that loves not knows not God.

That is, he is not intimately acquainted with God. It has nothing to do with a person being aware that there is a God who is a Creator, but they do not *know* God. It takes really *knowing God* in the biblical sense to have this love.

I John 4:8-9 For God is love. In this was manifested the love of God.

Now here comes John's illustration.

I John 4:9-10 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation [payment] for our sins.

John is putting layer upon layer of evidence to show that the love of God is an *effect*. It is in us only because God took the initiative, first of all, in providing a sacrifice by which our sins could be forgiven and we would have entrance, acceptance into the very presence of God. It is by that sacrifice our sins are wiped out and we can have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, only after we are cleansed. So here it is love—not that we loved God. You see, He initiates it. It is the effect of His initiation—that is, the fact that we can love—but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

I John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

This gives us another level here that we need to understand. Like I said before, the love of God does not appear in us magically. There is a responsibility on our part to do something in order to manifest this love; otherwise it does not flow through us.

I John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

Now that makes it so clear: cause and effect. The fact that God loved us has the effect of

making us love Him. Let us make this even clearer. The word "Him" in verse 19—"We love Him"—is not actually in the Greek. You can get an interlinear if you want to prove this. It is not actually in there, but the translators have supplied it in the hope that it will clarify. It is not wrong. It is not really needed, but with the introduction I have given, I think in a way it is better that it not be there. It is simply that we love, whether God or fellowman in the *godly* sense. In other words, we love in the godly sense only because He first loved us. "We love because He first loved us." So our love is a response. It is an effect of His love, and there is a great deal of very worthwhile instruction contained within that statement of fact.

In Romans 5 will be the second verse showing that this love of God in us is an *effect*.

Romans 5:5 And hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.

We do not have the Holy Spirit at birth. It is a gift of God. It comes upon repentance, after God has initiated contact with us. With the process of repentance, baptism, laying on of hands, receipt of the Holy Spirit, comes also the *love of God*. So those two verses alone, (and there are many more), ought to be able to show us that this love is an *effect*.

This love that Paul wrote of is built upon the keeping of the commandments of God in their spirit, and manifests those attributes that Paul wrote of in I Corinthians 13, and other attributes besides. It is achievable only if one has God's Holy Spirit and is a partaker of the divine nature regardless of how moral one might appear to be.

There are an awful lot of moral people in the world, but that love is not the *love of God*. In order for us to have the love that Paul is talking about, Jesus Christ has to dwell in us. So any love that we have, even of God's love, is in reality a pale reflection of God's love. We will have it only to the degree that we express it, and practice, practice, practice it, sometimes at the expense of very great sacrifice in humbling ourselves whenever the occasion demands.

I have told you in those other sermons on the sacrifices that sacrifice is a very essence of love. Even though we have God's Holy Spirit, it takes much practice for us to begin to manifest or express the love of God in a way that is really giving a good witness of God. This is why the Pharisees, despite all their strenuous efforts toward being righteous, could not be both morally righteous and at the same time love those they were dealing with on a daily basis.

Their basic approach was generally to negatively avoid sin rather than to positively do good. There is a big difference between those two, and they could not do it because it is simply not within the capacity of human nature to accomplish this Godly love. This is why Paul said just a little bit later in Romans 5: 7 "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die." Every once in a while somebody will make that supreme sacrifice for someone they really love, but most of the time they will not do it for somebody they do not love.

You see, Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That is a love that is so far above what human nature is capable of accomplishing that it is, as we would say, "Out of sight." The result in the Pharisees was that their righteousness was rigid, detached, cold, sometimes even harsh, even cruel, and highly selective. They only loved those who loved them, and it was essentially

self-centered.

There are very definitely different levels of love shown in the Bible. Do not let me, by emphasizing Godly love so much, make you think that human love is bad. It is not. Both levels of love are good, but only as far as they go, and the second one—the love of God—is exceedingly greater and so far beyond the other one that there is virtually no comparison.

That was really the end of last week's sermon. Now let us go to Matthew 5 because we are going to go on to another aspect of this same theme of this series of sermons.

Matthew 5:17-18 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

The New Covenant is not contradictory to, nor does it do away with Old Covenant law. One testimony, one witness from the mouth of our God and Savior Jesus Christ ought to be enough to prove that. Unfortunately it is not. This scripture here shows that the New Covenant is rather the ultimate fulfillment of the spiritual intent of Old Covenant law. What had happened was that the Jews had allowed their relationship and their response to God to degenerate into *legalism*. Jesus had to confront that because they were wrong in their application of the law of God.

In Matthew 5, 6, and 7, Jesus takes law beyond its mere outward observance into the spiritual intent of those very same laws of God. You might remember that Jesus, in Matthew 19: 8 made this statement in the midst of a reply concerning marriage and divorce, and remarriage. He said, "From the beginning it was not so." This is a very important principle. In the context of what Jesus was explaining there, the people had perverted the intent of God's laws regarding marriage.

What Jesus did is He took that situation, and then made this statement, saying that from the beginning it was never God's intent that marriage be used in this way. I am leading to something here. What we can learn from this is that the intent of God's law existed in God before specific laws were revealed, and marriage is a good example of this. The intent of marriage existed in God long before God revealed laws regulating marriage.

What was God's intent for marriage? You see, marriage presents human beings with a *God-plane* relationship that is intended by God to prepare us for the Kingdom of God. Did He ever really intend that there be divorce? No, He did not. You see, the intent of marriage was *in Him*. It was to produce people in His image.

If you think that marriage is not important, just understand that it was the first institution God gave to man after the creation of man. It is the single most important institution that God created to prepare people for His Kingdom. Marriage existed long before the church. That is how important marriage is, that the intent of marriage was *in God*.

The reason this is important to this series is this. We have come on the scene long after the fact, both of the creation of marriage by God *and* the giving of the laws regarding marriage. Which do we learn first? We learn laws first before we learn the intent. So what I am telling you

is we have to approach the intent of marriage in a sense in a backward fashion. We learn the laws first, and then we learn the intent. There is nothing wrong with that. That is the way God planned it, and it is a good way for us to learn, because brethren, the law is elementary compared to the intent.

When you get into the intent, you are getting into deep water because, while the intent is of and by itself broader, it is also more stringent. Now what is my proof on that? The Sermon on the Mount is my proof, because what did Jesus do in the Sermon on the Mount? He illustrated through three different sets of laws three laws: one regarding murder—"You shall not murder." The intent of that law takes you into what? *Anger, lust, hatred*. The intent is much more stringent than the letter of the law is. Then He expounded adultery. Same thing. The intent opens up a much broader field for committing sin and much more stringent in its requirement than the mere letter of the law.

The New Covenant, brethren, as we are going to see as we go along here, is more difficult than the Old Covenant. We are getting into deep water when you get into the New Covenant, but it is interesting to see the way God looks at it. We will see that in just a little bit. That is why Christ said in Matthew 5: 17-18 that these things are not done away. How in the world, brethren, can you do away with the intent of God's laws when they are written in God? God is eternal, and that is what we are to become. You cannot do away with something that ~~is~~ God.

So strong is Christ's intention that we understand this that He said that not one jot or tittle would even be done away. A jot is about the size of an apostrophe in English, and a tittle was nothing more than a little flare at the beginning or end of a Hebrew letter. He said not even those little things are going to be done away with in God's law. Besides that brethren, everything is not fulfilled, so it is not done away. Nothing will pass. As long as we are human we still need the guidance of God's laws in order to guide us to the life of God, to guide us to eternal life—the abundant life—the way God Himself lives.

Because of the way God has made us, and the way that God has patterned out the instruction, we have to learn the elementary things first. We have to learn the law in its letter before we are prepared to go on to the spirit, the intent, the principles of God's law.

Let us add a little bit more to this. We are going to go Acts 21: 20-24. I am going to this chapter because it is following Acts 15 in time sequence, and eventually we are going to get into Acts 15 where that decision was made regarding *circumcision* that people like to refer to as being the decision that did away with the law of God. Here Paul and Barnabas had returned from their preaching/evangelistic campaigns. Paul had a meeting with James and the other leading ministry which was there in Jerusalem.

Acts 21:20-24 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, You see, brother [Paul] how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of you, that you teach all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that you

are come. Do therefore this that we say to you: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify yourself with them. And be at charges with them that they may shave their heads....[showing that the time of the vow is over].

This is part of the Old Covenant ceremonial law. These men who had taken the vow were also Christians. Do you understand that? They were Christians who were under the pastorate of the apostle James, the brother of Christ.

It seems to me that if there would be anybody among all the apostles who would know whether Christ had done away with the law, His own brother James would know, since he was the man who was the pastor at the Jerusalem Church—the headquarters church. Now these men took this *vow* under James' whole knowledge. Did James tell them, "You don't have to do this, that it is done away"? He did no such thing.

Acts 21:24and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed are nothing....

These Jews who were saying that Paul was telling people not to get circumcised and so forth were lying. Paul was not preaching those things.

Acts 21:24but that you yourself also walk orderly, and keep the law.

This is after Acts 15 when that decision was made. Here we have James' testimony that Paul is still keeping the law. We know from other parts of the book that Paul kept the Days of Unleavened Bread. Paul kept Passover. He wrote on how to keep it. In I Corinthians he talked about getting the leavening out, did he not? Was Paul keeping the Holy Days? Even the Protestants cannot deny that Paul kept the Holy Days, because it is in the Scriptures. Not only did he keep them, but the commentators say they were kept with a new spirit, meaning a *new understanding*.

The apostle Paul gave witness in Acts 20 when he was saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders. He said, "I have not withheld from you the full counsel of God." He gave them the whole shebang. Here we have testimony from James' lips that Paul was still keeping the law, that Paul did certainly not understand the law as being done away in the way that modern Protestants believe.

Let us now go Acts 15:1. Here we enter into what was undoubtedly the most intense internal issue for the first century church.

Acts 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved.

That is a very important statement. That last phrase—"Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses"—is the most important part of that opening verse. Let us drop down to verse 5. After Paul and Barnabas gave their testimony, it says:

Acts 15:5 There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees [within the church] which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

Then Peter interjected things that he felt were pertinent. Verse 9 is probably the most important one.

Acts 15:9-11 And put no difference between us [Jews] and them [the Gentiles], purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt you God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Let us pay attention to several words and a couple of phrases.

Verse 1: *circumcise* and *cannot be saved*

Verse 5: *Pharisees*, and *law of Moses*

Verse 9: *purifying their hearts by faith*

Verse 10: *yoke, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear*

Verse 11 *saved by grace, or grace by which we shall be saved*

Keep those words kind of in your mind because I think they are primary keys to what was going on here.

number 1: Let us understand that the term *circumcision* is very frequently used in the Bible in a collective sense in that it represents or stands for a whole body of religious regulations and a theology built around them. Notice in verse 1 the phrase "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved." The "you cannot be saved" indicates a theology, that circumcision is the formula to receive salvation.

number 2: At other times *circumcision* merely means the act of cutting a small portion of skin in order to show a boy has entered into the Old Covenant with God. That one is well known.

number 3: There is *circumcision of the heart*, which indicates a spiritual repentance and conversion. It is something that truly affects the mind and the character and conduct. *This* circumcision enters into the heart. Indeed it is done to the heart.

I think we are dealing with two primary things in this council in Acts 15. One is the theology surrounding circumcision, and the other is the scruples of the Jews and the Gentiles who are fellowshipping within the church. Remember, this was quite early in the history of the church.

The first Gentiles had just been converted in Acts 10, and this council followed not too long after that occurred. God was adding Gentiles to the church at a very high rate.

Circumcision was one of the Old Covenant's important rites, and this council decided that circumcision—a major Old Covenant rite, or as representing a body of laws and a theology built around them—is not considered necessary to spiritual salvation. That was their decision, which is given in verse 19: "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God."

The key word here is "necessary." What this council decided is that they are not absolute requirements for acceptance before God. If that conclusion is not correct, then that decision would lead away from God rather than toward Him, because the decision was made to not trouble the Gentiles with whatever it is that circumcision represents.

Now those are not John Ritenbaugh's words. That is right out of the scripture. "Let us not trouble those who are turned from among the Gentiles." One thing we have to be careful about here is this decision did *not* say the laws are done away. Please mark that! This decision was not going to go against what Christ said in Matthew 5. It does not say that they were done away, and it does not say that they no longer are of any use and should not be obeyed. Nowhere does it say that. Paul, after this decision, kept right on keeping them. Do we understand that? It is only that they were not absolute requirements for spiritual salvation.

Let me show you a practical example of this. You may not get this fully right away, but the more you think about it, the more you are going to understand, because I am going to give you a scripture that will help you understand it.

Suppose a person was called of God, truly repented, accepted Christ, was baptized, and received the Holy Spirit, and then maybe he lived after that only for a year. Was he lost because he did not get to go through the whole law and keep the whole law? Of course not. I said you would not get this right away, but maybe after you hear this sermon you and read through the book of Galatians, you understand what Paul said about circumcision.

As he said in there, that if you are going to trust in circumcision, then you are going to have to do the *whole* law. Verse 20 names four specific prohibitions. This in itself proves that the law is not done away. Now what are those four prohibitions?

That they abstain from pollution of idols. (The first commandment, the second commandment, and the third commandment at the very least.

From fornication (the seventh commandment)

From things strangled

From blood. (This does not touch any commandment. It goes all the way back to the Noahide laws in Genesis 9 to pick that one up: Do not eat any blood. Do not eat an animal that has been strangled, because the blood is still in it.

We are touching on things that are ceremonial in nature. In regard to these four actual

regulations, my study Bible even says they are amazingly comprehensive because they involve the dietary regulations. They involve religious and moral practice. Now there is the first hint you have that laws are not done away under the decision of Acts 15. It is a very fact that they reached back into the Old Testament and picked out these laws, and said, "Gentiles, you had better obey these things." Now why?

First of all, the laws were not done away. The second reason was because of this second issue they were dealing with. The first issue I told you involved the fact of this theology that had been built around what is called *circumcision* here, and that a person had to be saved by keeping the law of Moses. The second issue was sociological in nature. Jews and Gentiles were meeting together in the same congregation and they were getting into fights over their scruples. That issue had to be resolved first so that they could meet together.

So what they did is they picked these things out of the law and told the Gentiles they were to keep these things that touch on food laws, that touch on morality, and that touch on idolatry, because if they did not them, they were going to so offend the Jews in not keeping them, that there would not be any peace in the congregation.

Acts 15:21 For Moses of old time has in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.

Do you see the word "*For*" there? That word indicates a conclusion was being reached, showing why the decision was made in the way that it was made. What does Moses represent? The first five books of the Bible. "For Moses of old time—[for time immemorial]—has in every city [in the Gentile world as well as in the Israelite world] them that preach him, [preach the laws of Moses, as they are called] being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day."

Do you know what even Protestant commentators say about that verse? They say that this is curious. It is curious to them because their mind-set is that the laws are done away, and so they say this can only mean two things. I will give you the second one, because they scratch their heads over it. They say what the apostles decided at this time was that the church was not going to take any steps in regard to teaching the Gentiles at this time, that they were going to instead let them learn the law of God in the local synagogue.

Do you understand what I just said? They were not saying the law was done away. They were saying that they were just deferring teaching the heavier things until the Gentiles were up to speed and could learn those elementary things even in the synagogues. That is all they said. Well, to me that is quite an admission that these Protestant scholars will admit.

I think we understand this from things I said earlier that Paul went right on keeping the law, and went right on teaching it. It was not done away here. I just happened to think of this. I have heard this a number of times. In fact I heard Mr. Armstrong say it. He said to the ministry one time that when new converts come into the congregation, "Please do not dump everything on them at once." That is the principle here. He said "You will so overwhelm them that they will get discouraged that what they are faced with is so big they will never overcome it." It is so simple.

The first decision they made was exceedingly more important, and that was reestablish the fact that salvation is by grace through faith. Salvation is not achieved by the keeping of Old Testament law. The Jews were insisting that salvation would come only through the keeping of Old Testament law, but salvation is by grace through faith. This is why Paul said, "If you are going to approach salvation through the keeping of law, you are going to have to keep the whole thing perfectly." That is in Galatians.

What God has graciously done is that He has opened up salvation to us, and He is giving us time to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ to learn the laws, first in the letter, and begin keeping them in the letter. Then we have opened up to us the really deep stuff when we begin to get into the law—in the *intent* and the *principles* of the law—when we become, as he says in other places, *perfect*, or *complete*, or *grown mature*.

To just a cursory glance, "circumcision" or "the circumcision statement" appears to nullify any regulation coming under the umbrella of circumcision. But now we have got to think about this a little bit more. I will give you some more proof along this line. The word "circumcision" is much broader than it appears on the surface. In verse 10 it says: "Now therefore why tempt you God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"

We were not there when they were actually talking about this, and God gave us just enough so that we could understand. Whatever circumcision represents, Peter said it was impossible to bear, and that it was a yoke.

First of all, let us dispel the idea that "yoke" immediately gives the impression of something really heavy. Now a yoke was merely an instrument by which animals could be teamed together, guided, and directed. It does not necessarily of and by itself mean anything exceptionally heavy, but in this case it was "a yoke that neither our fathers nor we were able to bear."

Let us go to Matthew 11. Here is a contrast. Jesus said:

Matthew 11:28-30 Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek, and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

He said this to people who were under this yoke that Peter was talking about there in Acts 15:20, that Christ's yoke was lighter than the yoke these people had to bear. Christ's yoke is light. What that means to me is that our God is not one to give us burdens that are too difficult for us to bear. In I Corinthians 10:13 it clearly states that He will never put anything on us that is more difficult for us, that He will always provide a way through the problem, that we will be able to endure it and bear it.

The God who said this is the same God who brought Israel out of Egypt. Now were they not in slavery? That slavery really was a difficult yoke for them to bear. What did He do? Did He take them out of Egypt, put them out into the wilderness, and then put them under an exceedingly heavy yoke of a ceremonial law—one that was too difficult for them to bear? Is it possible that

Peter was talking about something different? If you believe that God took them out of the yoke of slavery and then just put another impossible "yoke to bear" upon them, then you believe something that is unscriptural. God made burdens light. He removes the burdens. That is what it says in Matthew 11. That was spoken to people who were under the burden Peter was talking about. If we come to the place where we believe God gave them, under the Old Covenant, a law that was too difficult for them to bear, that makes God look like a contradicting fool. But He does not contradict Himself.

I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not burdensome.

Keeping the commandments is not a burden. Peter, in Acts 15:10 was not talking about keeping the commandments, but I led us in this way because I want us to think about this. Which is more difficult? The physical or the spiritual? Which is more difficult? Keeping the commandments (which are not burdensome) or doing rituals?

Romans 7:24 gives testimony that the apostle Paul, later in his life, says, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Human nature is a very heavy burden, and keeping the commandments in the face of human nature is not something that somebody—even somebody as spiritual and as full of faith as the apostle Paul was—could throw off. He could not throw it off. And besides that, God says it is not a burden.

Let us ask some more questions. Is it easier to wash your hands because of a purification rite, or to circumcise your heart? Is it easier to sacrifice a turtledove, or face the guilt, the shame, and the embarrassment of repentance? Is it easier to keep your word, to not lose your temper, to resist lust, to get rid of feelings of vengeance and hatred, to sacrifice yourself in service to people who may not care or give you no recognition of your effort, than it is to circumcise a child who is not even aware of what is going on and never will even remember it?

Brethren, do you understand what I am leading at here? God says keeping the commandments under the New Covenant is not a burden, and yet in its own way the New Covenant is exceedingly more difficult than the Old. And yet Peter says that this was a yoke that could not be borne. Now we just read it there in Matthew 11 that the New Covenant is light, easy, freeing.

As far as I am concerned then, there is only one conclusion that can be reached. What is being spoken of in Acts 15 under the term "circumcision" is *not* God's law per se, but rather there are two things being referred to: The first is that it is the entire package of perverted regulations *and* the theology that developed around them that came out of the minds of the Pharisees and was combined with God's law, as though they were both on the same level.

That perversion was not something that suddenly appeared. It gradually grew through the years to the minds of undoubtedly sincere men who did not want to sin. In fact, they were making it impossible to sin, but it drove them to become separated from their fellow Israelite. It destroyed fellowship. It perverted their judgment as to what was truly important so that they actually became separated from righteous judgment and God Himself in the process.

Brethren, it was this that was so hard to do. That was the yoke that could not be borne. It was

not the law of God. It was the law of God *combined* with the Pharisees' thousands of regulations—1500 of them just on the Sabbath! You begin to see that he is not even talking about the law of God in Acts 15, but about this perverted combination that was impossible to bear. That is what was "done away," and that is why Paul could say that he kept right on keeping the law of God. And he did.

All they did there was set aside the church directly confronting the sociological problem of Jews and Gentiles meeting together in anger and hatred, and fighting, because one was offending the other by their scruples. So they said, "First let us establish peace, and then from that point we can go on and we will teach the law of God as it applies to Christianity."

Peter spent three and one-half years with Christ, and in Acts 10 he still had not eaten anything unclean. He understood. He even resisted, saying, "Not so Lord. That has never happened with me." He knew what he was doing. Jesus had never done away with it. They are still not done away. They still are in force and effect.

This "impossible to bear" also has a second application, and that refers to the fact that one could not come to spiritual salvation and holiness through it because it has no lasting affect on the mind. The writer of Hebrews said that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to purge the conscience of sin and that a sacrifice of far greater significance had to be supplied to bear the consequences of sin.

The Old Testament ceremonial laws of God were object lessons that produced little or nothing in the people *at that time*, but they are very valuable teaching tools when a person really becomes converted. That means *now* for us; for them, when all Israel is saved. Then those sacrifices and those washings are really going to become meaningful to them.

I will go a little bit on this, and then I will repeat it in the opening of the next sermon. Let us go to I Corinthians 7 and we will in a way lay a foundation for the next sermon.

I Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

This principle is so important that Paul was inspired by God to repeat it three times, and in each case, in each context, he put a different tagline on it as to what is really important. This particular one says *circumcision is nothing*—is of no value, if I can put it that way—and *uncircumcision* is of no value; but what is really important is *keeping the commandments*. Or we might word it this way, as I saw it in one Bible: "Keeping the commandments is *everything!*" And so *everything* is contrasted to *nothing*.

Tuck that back in your mind, and just briefly I will make a little bit of a digression here. Please keep in mind the importance of circumcision to the Old Covenant. The picture is, that without circumcision man had no covenant, and therefore no relationship, with God. Circumcision was the Old Covenant's *sign and seal*, and it represented all Old Covenant laws.

Paul also mentions *uncircumcision*. Uncircumcision stands for just the opposite. It indicates those who claim that there is no transfer at all—no connection, no relationship between the covenant, no ritual, no tradition, no symbolism, no law. I know a group that believed in this.

You are all familiar with the Puritans—those people responsible for settling part of New England—no ritual, no tradition, no symbolism, no law. What Paul says is that both extremes do not have a correct bearing to the spiritual purpose that God is working out of reproducing Himself in us.

We are not going to bother with uncircumcision because it is really of no practical value to us. Circumcision is what bothers us. It was, of and by itself, exceedingly more important than clean and unclean meats, purification rites, quarantine, and a variety of other things of defilement, because without it there was no basis for a relationship with God through a covenant, and thus these other things just named would be of no concern for Israelites any more than they are for Gentiles.

Now under the New Covenant, even something as important as the *rite of circumcision* has absolutely no affect on spiritual holiness, no affect on one's relationship with God. Now why? Let us go back to Mark 7:18. He makes the following statement, I think, in a quite unusual context. It has to do with the ritual of the Pharisees washing their hands and so forth before meals.

Mark 7:18-19 And He said unto them [His disciples], Are you so without understanding also? Do you not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without enters into the man, it cannot defile him. Because it enters not into his heart....

Circumcision, of and by itself, was an external rite. Circumcision is nothing because it enters not into the heart; but *keeping the commandments is everything*.

This is where we will pick up when we begin the next time, expounding this thing about *entering into the heart*, because this is the heart and core of conversion.