

What Does God Really Want? (Part 2)

Keeping the Commandments

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 20-Apr-00; Sermon #443B

We are going to begin this sermon with Psalm 90. I want to bounce off this from the very beginning because it is still central to the message that I am continuing with today. Moses is the author of this.

Psalm 90:10-12 The days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away [we die]. Who knows the power of your anger? Even according to your fear, so is your wrath. So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

On April 11, about eleven o'clock pm, Evelyn and I were already in bed and we received a phone call from our sister-in-law informing us that Evelyn's one remaining brother was dead. His death was not unexpected. He had cancer of the lungs, and we knew for a little bit less than a year that he was terminal. But his death brought forcibly to mind once again the reasons why I prepared my previous sermon which was also built around this verse in Psalm 90.

The thought behind that sermon sprung from the contention over the calendar. So what is it that God really wants? Well, that sermon only provided an introduction to the series. It laid a foundation, and I told you in that sermon that I was motivated by three sudden deaths of fairly young people I either knew personally, or knew of, and that those deaths brought to mind how rapidly time flies by during a busy life, and none of us knows when the time comes when we will no longer be able to prepare ourselves for the Kingdom of God.

Following that came a re-reading of much of Ecclesiastes to and from South Africa, and its theme of "Why were we born?" But that particular perspective comes from what we would call a carnal perspective. Without this

knowledge, which is so graciously given by God, life goes nowhere spiritually.

The third reason was the seemingly unending drive that is continuing in the church to change the doctrines that we have received. This keeps people stirred up and distracted, wondering, doubting, accusing, and drifting spiritually. The three taken together virtually assures that progress in sanctification stops.

I have just gone through a series of six sermons in which the calendar served as a backdrop for the real themes of those sermons—themes that serve us every day of the year by providing us with a right, solid, and true base to properly respond to God. These themes were messages on God's sovereignty, God's providence, God's faithfulness, and His government. I thought once again of the foolishness of letting ourselves get distracted into concerns about a non-issue—a calendar. This whole episode is nothing but a smokescreen to distract our attention to something God has already taken care of. He provided us with a calendar.

Those of you who have been in the church for quite a number of years can probably remember Herbert Armstrong saying, "Why do we yet have to keep going back and reproving things that we've already proved before?" Well, I will tell you why. It is because people keep losing their faith. Faith is not a constant. It can dissipate if it is not refreshed correctly. We have got to get over this concept that knowledge of something means that we automatically have faith. That is not necessarily so.

Consider this: The church is probably in its worst spiritual condition in perhaps centuries of time. The issue before us should be repentance from what caused us to be divided and scattered all over the place. The calendar is not the problem. The church did just fine with that calendar over the past sixty years. The Bible tells us Laodiceanism is the major problem at this time. Our problems are moral, ethical, and attitudinal.

You will recall in that last sermon that I used Genesis 17:1, where Abraham was commanded by God to walk before Him and be perfect, or be blameless, or be complete. That word *perfect* can be translated into any one of those synonyms.

Paul followed the same principle in Hebrews 6:1, saying that we are to "go on to perfection," or maturity. It can even mean usefulness, or completion. So I asked the question: Complete in what way? What is it that God wants?

Some of the messages to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 clearly contain evaluations by Christ, showing that they were off track doctrinally. Such is not the case with Laodicea, which we understand is the dominant attitude at the time just prior to Christ's return. If that evaluation of the Laodicean church is meaningful to us, and is not off the track doctrinally, the problems you see lie elsewhere.

We are as a body a people that God has judged who act, walk, and live our life as though we are already complete. It even says in the letter to Laodicea that "we are rich and increased with goods, and we have need of nothing." If you need nothing, you are a finished product. Stick a fork in him; he is done! You see, God in His evaluation, His assessment, says that we are blind, that we are naked.

Blindness is an image used in the Bible to indicate helplessness. The blind are helpless before the world that is before them. They need someone to give them direction—a seeing person, a sighted person, or even a dog. But they are helpless. It is also used as a symbol of spiritual ignorance. You put these together, and it means that the Laodicean cannot even see the gravity of his problem. He is blind to it.

Blindness is a symbol of not being able to recognize truth. You can see that in the evaluation. The evaluation of the Laodicean is 180 degrees the opposite of the true evaluation, so they cannot even see the problem.

The plain and simple truth about the calendar issue is that it was settled over fifty years ago when God revealed which calendar He wanted the church to use through the messenger that He sent to raise up and strengthen the end-time church.

Nakedness is an image of not being clothed with the righteousness of God. We need to ask a question. (This is looking at the entire body.) What has happened to our conversion? When I began to understand this verse in the

light as I have just described, I began to see why the calendar has been such a problem. But the condition is not irreversible, because God says we can repent, so that gives us hope.

Because the Laodiceans are "churched," they look good on the outside, as though they need nothing, but in fact they have essentially departed from what they were given, even though they would claim they still believe most of what they were given. We can get rid of the leaven causing blindness and nakedness and come out of our spiritual funk. Again it is not in any way hopeless. If it were hopeless, Christ would not have said "Repent." But He does say "Repent." Therefore it is not hopeless, but we have got to get back to the basics.

What do other apostles say? "To earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered." I will just use that one verse in Jude 3 as an example, but that covers in principle what I am talking about here. We have got to get back to the basics, and that means that God truly is our Sovereign, and that we once again trust God's faithfulness in providing our spiritual needs.

Turn to I Samuel 12:6. I thank Richard for bringing this verse to mind, because as he began reading it, I could see an application to this sermon. He used this verse in his sermon last Sabbath.

I Samuel 12:6 And Samuel said unto the people, It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt.

Remember, this was when the people came to Samuel and demanded a king. Of course Samuel was upset about that, but he took it to God, and God let Samuel know that they had not rejected him but that they had rejected God. So God said to Samuel "Go through with this, and we will give them a king."

Now Samuel is protesting to these people some of the conditions under which this is going to be accepted and operated, and so he is reminding them. Why did they need to be reminded? Because they had forgotten. They had forgotten the basics of their relationship with God, and so he reminded them "It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron. . ."

I Samuel 12:7-8 Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place.

We have been called by God's grace. It was entirely something within God that motivated Him to give us this knowledge that we have. We did not impress Him with what we were. Of His own free will He desired to call us and give us this understanding, and so we can put ourselves into this situation and know that just as surely as Samuel was talking to the Israelites then, he is also talking to you and me today.

I Samuel 12:9 And when they forgot the LORD their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them.

Let us update that. When **WE** forgot the Lord, He sold us into the hand of Satan the Devil, and used Satan as an instrument to break up the church through other men, and we became scattered and divided all over the place. We are learning more and more about why we are in the condition we are in, and what is necessary to come out of that condition.

I Samuel 12:10 And they cried unto the LORD, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve you.

Now God hears the cries of those that He has scattered all over the place, and He will accept us and grant us repentance.

I Samuel 12:11 And the LORD sent Jerubbaal [Gideon], and Bedan [the Bible does not have anything to say about him], and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you dwelled safe.

I Samuel 12:13-15 Now therefore behold the king whom you have chosen, and whom you have desired! And, behold, the LORD has set a king over you. If you will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both you and also the king that reigns over you continue following the LORD your God: But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you as it was against your fathers.

Let us recapitulate just a bit. It was God who sent Moses and Aaron. It was God who sent Herbert Armstrong. The point that Samuel is making is that God wants His people to obey His voice through the messengers that He sent. What did Moses do? He became the instrument that God used, and through him came the law that we now see in Genesis through Deuteronomy. That is the voice of God that these people had to respond to at that time. That is what they rejected. That is how they forgot God, or showed that they had forgotten God. When they quit obeying what came through Moses that was tantamount to forgetting God.

If you can begin to make the connection between this instance here and Laodiceanism, you will begin to understand why we are in this scattered condition. We are in this scattered condition because of immorality—breaking the Ten Commandments. That is the pattern that is shown from the beginning of the Bible to the end. As long as God is obeyed, the system works. It is God who makes it work if we will obey His commandments. It was immorality that drove the church apart. The instrument to drive the church apart was doctrinal change, but at the base of that was immorality. If the immorality had not been there, we would not have been scattered through doctrinal change. I will show that as we go through this.

God also wanted us to understand that a king was not pushed on Him at all. He *gave* them a king. God is sovereign over His creation, and God does not respond well to people who push Him, because they are showing Him they do not look upon Him as their Sovereign.

Before we move on, I want to reiterate this: as long as they would be obedient to what was given them in the form of commandments through the

one that God sent, things would go well for them. And if they did not, their nation (say "church") would come under attack, and ultimately be scattered and led into captivity.

Let me give you an illustration. This occurred while Evelyn and I were visiting one of the church areas. A couple was there who had driven quite a distance. They heard we were going to be in the area, and they drove this distance to come over and be there while we were there. They wanted to meet us personally, and they did just that.

During a conversation between Evelyn and this man's wife, Evelyn asked "Where are you going to keep the Feast of Tabernacles?" (This was before the Feast of Tabernacles. I believe that it might even have been in the summer, so there were three or four months before the Feast of Tabernacles.) The lady responded that they were going to keep the Feast in a certain area, and even before my wife could ask why, the woman supplied as to why they were going there. The reason they were going there is because they knew, or they had heard, that there were going to be a lot of teenagers there for their two daughters to socialize with. Now that is not wisdom.

You see, here was a people—I am speaking of Laodiceanism here—who were losing their wisdom. I will get to why in just a minute. Here was a family whose values were upside down. Whether they understood it or not, that family was actually being led by the children. They were more concerned about their children's entertainment than they were about the spirituality of the Feast that they were going to go to.

Why are we supposed to go to the Feast? Deuteronomy tells us that we are to go there to learn to fear God, to serve Him, and each other. It is the messages and the spiritual fellowship that counts, not the location, not how many teenagers are going to be there, not what entertainment facilities are going to be all around there; not even the kind of restaurants, or how many restaurants. It is the spirituality that counts. This is just one couple, but I know that this could be multiplied many times over. They had no idea what they were reflecting in this one illustration.

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.

Understanding comes from *doing* the commandments. If we are *doing* His commandments, what is going to happen? Whatever you sow you reap, you see. If we are not doing the commandments, we are going to lose understanding. This is how I know that it is sin that is involved in Laodiceanism.

The Laodiceans do not even know, do not even realize, they do not even understand the condition they are in. They are **blind** to it. They are blind to it because of immorality. It is the breaking of the Ten Commandments that is involved in the blindness, and as we are going to see in a little bit, the nakedness of the Laodicean. And of course that would affect the attitude, because the Laodicean, it seems, is interested in everything but the right thing. So the Laodiceans are blind. They are ignorant of truth, and they are naked. The issue in Laodiceanism is morality.

Do we need to be reminded that what blew the church apart was when the messenger and his message were rejected? What I am referring to are the doctrines that came through Herbert Armstrong that are central to salvation: the Kingdom of God, the return of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ as God and Savior, grace, justification, sanctification, inheriting the Kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit, baptisms, eternal judgment, keeping the commandments, the Sabbath, the holy days, and so forth. The calendar has to be included in this because it is absolutely necessary to the keeping of the Sabbath and the holy days.

I am not talking about the interpretations of prophecy, because whether we understand prophecy or not has no bearing on these other far more important doctrines that have a direct impact on life every day. Exactly who are the 144,000, or where is the place of safety, or whether Herbert Armstrong was the Elijah to come are interesting, but they are not necessary to salvation. It is far more important to recognize Herbert Armstrong as apostle than as Elijah. But if my email is any guide, all too often it is the peripheral issues that receive the bulk of people's interest. These things may have a bearing on our intellectual enthusiasm, but we can be saved without any knowledge of prophecy save that Christ is going to return, and the Kingdom of God will be set up.

In the midst of all the possibility for confusion that now exists in the world of the greater church of God, what is it then that God really, I mean *really*, wants us to pursue? What is it that He wants us to grow into? What is it that is important to Him for us? Will He call us "complete" when we are doctrinally perfect? That might be wonderful, but under the circumstances, God Himself shows that men like David and Abraham were not doctrinally perfect. To be doctrinally perfect is virtually impossible.

Are you aware that doctrinal perfection is never mentioned even one time in relation to any hero of faith? The praise is always given in regard to the way they lived their lives by faith, and their attitudes. It has become my opinion, based on what I have to deal with as a minister, that many church members have become more concerned with "knowing" than with "doing." They are more concerned with the way they feel about something than with duty and responsibility, especially in regard to unity.

Please turn to a very familiar scripture. We go over and over this from time to time, but it is central to what God really wants, and it ties into Psalm 90: 10-12. In a way it answers the question at least in a broad generality. What does God really want?

Matthew 6:33 But seek you first the kingdom of God, *and* His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

I do not know how many times I have heard that verse quoted only partially—"Seek you first the kingdom of God." I do not know how many times I have said it that way myself. I am guilty. That is not the way Christ said it. He said, "Seek you first the kingdom of God *and* His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Moses asked God: "Help us to put things in order."—1, 2, 3, 4—"Help us to number our days." "Help us to prioritize." Here we have our Lord and Savior answering back as to what is most important, (broad and general to be sure, but nonetheless)—"Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

This principle is so important that it is not delivered through any representative, but through the Head of the church, through the Chief,

through the Master and Lord—the Boss Himself. "Seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

Psalm 119:172 My tongue shall speak of your word: for all your commandments are righteousness.

"Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." God's righteousness—the right way of doing things—is expressed in His law, in His commandments. At the base of all of those commandments is "The Big Ten." If you will look back in Exodus 19:4, you will see the original contract, the agreement that was made between God and Israel.

Exodus 19:4-5 You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.

"Obey my voice." Many times in this last series of sermons I have gone back to Jeremiah 6 where God says, "In the beginning there, I didn't tell you anything about sacrifices. All I said was 'Obey My voice.'" Now what specifically did He mean—"Obey My voice"? Right in the context of Exodus 19 comes Exodus 20, when He proposes the covenant to them, and it includes the Ten Commandments. "All My commandments are righteousness." It is when the commandments are being persistently broken that the walls come down, the enemy comes in, and God's people are scattered.

Feeding this into Revelation 2 and 3, and especially Revelation 3 and the Laodicean church, we find ourselves scattered. Laodiceanism involves commandment breaking. It is immorality at its very basis. The attitude follows, because the understanding is lost. It is no wonder they are lukewarm, because once the understanding goes, then what reason is there to really pursue righteousness?

I think in a way that we have been chasing the wrong things with Laodiceanism. All the time we have been teaching that it is lukewarmness, and indeed there is lukewarmness, but that is not the basic problem.

Lukewarmness is just a fruit that is being produced by commandment breaking, not doctrinal problems. Commandment breaking produces its own terrible fruit, which we are suffering from now, because the church is scattered.

Let us go to a parable that Jesus gave:

Matthew 21:23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest you these things? And who gave you this authority?

They thought that they had Jesus on the horns of a dilemma here—an unanswerable question.

Matthew 21:24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

Probably what they were referring to when they asked Him that question—"By what authority do you do these things?"—had to do with the cleansing of the Temple. "Who gave you the authority to come in here, turn over all those tables and drive out those animals?" So He asked them this question:

Matthew 21:25-26 The baptism of John, where was it [from]? From heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, from heaven; he will say unto us, Why did you not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men: we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

And now they were on the horns of a dilemma. He just neatly turned the situation back on them.

Matthew 21:27 They answered Jesus and said, We cannot tell. . . .

That was a lie. They knew better, but they were afraid that any answer would condemn them.

Matthew 21:27-32 . . . And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. But what think you? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Which of those two did the will of his father? They said unto him, the first. Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness [commandment keeping], and you believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and you, when you had seen it, repented not afterward, that you might believe him.

If you were to judge these men on the basis of their feelings about what was commanded them, you would have to judge that the one in the parable who did what was commanded did not appear to feel good about the command, but the important thing is that he did it anyway. We are looking at people's feelings here. Remember I said earlier that people are getting concerned about feelings more than duty and responsibility.

This first one said "No," but repented, and then went and did it. His initial answer indicated that he did not feel good about it, but on further thought, duty and respect came to the fore, and then he obeyed even though it appears that he did not feel good about doing it.

The parable was given in part to show us what is important to God. Just to say that one believes something does not cut it with God. A person may put on a great outward show, saying how much they desire the unity of the church, and then turn right around and adopt a doctrine and conduct that will guarantee that he will split away. Now which do you think that God prefers? A person who knows it all, but is mean-spirited, hard of heart, crafty, and self-serving, or a person who does not know near so much, but what he does know is practiced in a humble, joyous, serving generosity of spirit?

The tax collectors were despised by the Jewish populace because of greed and extortion. They took advantage of their position in the government, and

they became wealthy off the backs of the poor, and people hated them for it. Now right along with them were the prostitutes. They were despised because of their obvious gross sexual immorality. Now whether you were a tax collector (a publican), or whether you were a harlot, your sins were well known, and they were open before all. Everybody knew that if you were a publican, you were a sinner. If you were a harlot, you were a sinner.

What Jesus is getting at in this parable is that these very obvious sinners initially refused God's command to be morally pure. You see, the command came through John the Baptist, because that is whose ministry is being referenced to here. They initially refused God's command to be morally pure, but they repented, and they began obeying. Now on the contrary, the religious leadership was deemed to be well at home with God's Word, with God's law, and with morality. They outwardly behaved in such a manner as if they were constantly saying, "Yes, Lord," but in reality, they did not.

This parable is not among the best known, but it is almost scarcely imaginable that a parable could have a more important lesson, and that is that obedience to God in order to produce morality is of the first order. It is a subset under Matthew 6:33. We are to repent of our former immorality and do our duty regardless of feelings and past habits.

This has to be applied to our present situation if we are going to come out of our Laodiceanism, and Revelation 3:18-20 shows that we can repent. We have to get rid of our feelings about things, and do our duty regardless. The duty is clear: "Keep My commandments," regardless of feelings. If we obey His voice, things go well. If we obey His voice, understanding returns.

I am going to read three scriptures that cover in principle what I have just said up to this point. Turn to I Samuel 15. Samuel uttered this upon the disobedience of Saul.

I Samuel 15:22 And Samuel said, Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Matthew 7:21 Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Are we going to DO? That is the question.

Matthew 7:22-23 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? And in your name have cast out demons? And in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity.

All the while they were saying, "Lord, Lord," all the while they were saying, "I'm part of the true church," all the while that they were attending on the Sabbath day, there was still immorality in their lives. Iniquity is lawlessness.

Matthew 7:24 Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, [We have to "hear" and "do." "Obey My voice." "Keep My commandments."] I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.

Go now to John 14:15. This should be a memory scripture for every single one of us.

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

I do not see how it could get any clearer in the New Testament. "Obey My voice." "Keep My commandments." Love is expressed by the keeping of law. We are beginning to isolate something else about the Laodicean. If immorality is present, love is absent. It is no wonder we have been scattered.

I have just scratched the surface on this, but it's becoming very clear that what God really wants is obedience to simple-to-understand basic things—"Keep My commandments."

Are you familiar with the Parable of the Talents and the Pounds? At the end of both of those parables, what were those who participated in it judged against? They were judged against what they had done with what they were given.

Luke 12:43-47 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing [that is, being a faithful steward]. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delays his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looks not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware [you see, the understanding is lost, and he is not going to be aware of the times very well], and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

Would you judge from your understanding of the letter to Laodicea that the Laodiceans know God's will? They surely do. They know the basics: "Keep My commandments."

Luke 12:48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Is it possible, brethren, that the Laodiceans, coming at the very end of times when the revelation of God has never been fuller, are going to be held accountable for more knowledge than any other group that preceded them? It is sobering to look forward, and that is why God says to them, "You're going to buy of Me gold tried in the fire." "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

They are in a precarious position, and we are living in this era. This is the time to evaluate ourselves. We can know where we have been failing. I can guarantee you it is going to involve the Ten Commandments somewhere along the line.

I am going to tie three scriptures together. The first is going to be in I Corinthians 7. We will read these three scriptures together, and then we will come back to I Corinthians 7 and go from there.

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

Galatians 5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love.

You see a familiar phrase there, where circumcision and uncircumcision are compared.

Galatians 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature [or creation].

As you can see, what we have here is a comparison Paul uses three times in order to emphasize what is important in regard to conduct after we are converted. Now he is essentially saying, "This matters not," or "This is inconsequential," or "This is insignificant." Whether a person is circumcised or uncircumcised is insignificant. It does not matter one way or the other. Neither one has any spiritual bearing on the work of the person spiritually. Then comes the contrast: "But this is what really matters. . ."

In the first one, he says circumcision does not matter at all. So in order that the Gentiles would understand, at the starting gate they are no better than the Jews who were circumcised, because he says uncircumcision does not make you any better either, but now what is important is whether you are keeping the commandments.

We might carry it even a step further, and that is circumcision and uncircumcision do not matter at all. *The only thing that really matters is whether you are keeping the commandments*, so he says, "This is nothing." "This is everything." Now remember, this is one of the greatest Christian preachers who ever walked on the face of the earth. This is inspired of God.

What is it that God really wants? He wants what we formerly did not do. What we formerly *did not* do was keep His commandments. That is what got us in the mess. Sin is the transgression of the law. That put us into the condition where we needed grace, where we needed the blood of Jesus Christ. But once those two are accepted—the grace of God and the blood of Jesus Christ, and we are justified—what really matters is *keeping the commandments*.

I think it is really funny in a way. Here is the man, Paul, who is pointed out by most of the world as the man who did away with the law! Ridiculous! Again, let me hasten to add that the law cannot save anybody. The purpose of the law is to guide us in the way that we are supposed to live. If we follow that way that we are supposed to live as outlined by the keeping of the Ten Commandments, then we begin to take on the image of God, because that describes His character.

If we want to be like our Savior, then we will live the way *He* lived. When He lived, He kept the commandments. If we are going to walk in His steps, then we are going to keep the commandments. He ended up His life sinless. We do not end up our life sinless, but we are held to be justified, and therefore sinless, blameless in the eyes of God because of the work of Jesus Christ.

Brethren, am I coming through as to what Laodiceanism is? Laodiceanism at its bottom is iniquity. It is lawlessness. It is immorality, and the fruit is this lukewarm attitude that the Laodicean has.

Let us turn to Galatians 5:6 again, because this is a very interesting progression that Paul goes through. In I Corinthians 7:19 he just laid it out in its broadest generality: "This is unimportant." "Keeping the commandments *is* important." That is a broad generality. It is righteousness. It describes in

broadest terms what righteousness is. Now here in Galatians 5 he expands upon this, and it is very interesting.

Galatians 5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but [here is what is important, what really matters] faith which works by love.

What does he mean by this? What we have here is an instructive progression from the simplest form of comparison to another one that can be exceedingly more complex, especially when it comes to applying the instruction here in practical situations. However, all three point us in the same general direction, and they also teach that the morality that God desires is more than rigidly keeping laws.

These terms, "circumcision" and "uncircumcision," when used in this sense, in this context, represent all the ritual that the Jews might have held to be important in Judaism, and all that a Gentile might have held important in his former paganism.

Are you aware that attending Sabbath services can be reduced to merely a ceremonial ritual? If that occurs, that is no different from how the Jew viewed circumcision, and it would fit into the context of what Paul is saying here.

What was the attitude of that family toward God's Feast of Tabernacles that I spoke of earlier where the children's entertainment was the most important consideration as to where they were going to spend the Feast? I think that it had become a ritual. That is all.

Circumcision done on the outside of the body has little or no effect on the heart, and therefore little or no effect on conduct. However, circumcision of the heart can dramatically affect attitude and conduct. In I Corinthians 7 Paul makes it clear in a general way that what really matters is morality. Now it does not matter whether a person is red, yellow, black, or white, whether they are slave or a free man. What matters is the kind of life that the person lives. If you would read further in that context (I Corinthians 7:18-25) you will see that what I said is true. What matters is the kind of life that one lives. Jesus makes it even clearer. "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

In Galatians 5 he greatly broadens the application by using the term "love." Now we all understand from I John 5:3 that love is the keeping of the commandments. That is the Bible's basic definition of love. But (and this is a big "but"), Paul shows us in I Corinthians 13 that love includes a great deal more than keeping the commandments. I want you to turn there. Remember what I said, that we are going to see that God wants a great deal more than merely rigid obedience to law.

I Corinthians 13:4-8 Charity [or love] suffers long, and is kind; charity envies not; charity vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own [thing in keeping the commandments], is not easily provoked [does not get irritated very easily], thinks no evil; rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. Bears [puts up with] all things, believes all things [has an innocence about it where it is willing to accept people at face value], hopes all things, endures all things. Charity never fails.

Now back to Galatians 5:6. Once you begin to feed I Corinthians 13 into what Paul says here, what really matters is *faith which works by love*. We are beginning to see that God wants commandment keeping that is attractive, that is appealing, that is generous, that is kind, that is charming, that is warm, that is pleasant, that is humble. It is not an "in your face" approach to commandment keeping at all. It is not rigid and hard and cold, but warm and appealing, drawing people to the self so that they can be served and helped, and pouring out itself in benevolence.

What Paul says here in Galatians 5:6 is that what is important is faith working *through* love. It is important to understand this. God does not want merely rigid commandment keeping. He wants faith that works through love in which the person is keeping the basic "Ten," but he is doing it with an attitude of mind that is warm and kind and generous and serving and giving.

The Tyndale translation says of that verse, "Faith, which by love, is mighty in operation." What Paul is attempting to do here in the book of Galatians is to move us away from a mere intellectual assent to putting what we believe into action. This is a faith in which *love* is the moral dynamic. It reaches out to God in love, and it reaches out to men in benevolence to fellowman. What

Paul says what really matters is this kind of faith. This kind of faith *is* faithful. It is consistent with the way Jesus Christ acted.

This kind of faith is not mere intellectual assent, and unfortunately that is the kind of faith that the Laodiceans have. They believe. They believe the basic doctrines of the church of God, but they are immoral, or they would not be in that condition. That is why the Laodiceans are called "wretched, miserable, poor, and blind, and naked."

There was a man named Bengel, who is now dead, but who is very famous in Protestant theological thinking. Of this verse in Galatians 5:6, Bengel says, "In this verse is contained the *whole* of Christianity." What he means is what a Christian is to do with his life. He is to turn his repentance, his gifts from God, his faith in God, into love which has as its base the keeping of the commandments, but goes far beyond that.

In Galatians 6:15 Paul shifts the emphasis from us. In I Corinthians 7:19 the emphasis is on what *we* are to do. In Galatians 5:6 the emphasis is on what *we* are to do. In Galatians 6:15 Paul shifts the emphasis from us to God. But in his shift, it nonetheless coordinates perfectly with the thoughts in the other two, and what Paul says is that circumcision and uncircumcision are inconsequential. They are insignificant. What matters in life is the new creation—being created in Christ Jesus. Who does the creating? God does. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which He has before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

With God working on us, this means that He is going to work toward moving us toward keeping His commandments in the here and now. These are the good works that He has ordained that we should walk in. It is what we were not doing before, and now He wants us to do, so He is going to create us in Christ Jesus to do these things. It is from "the breaking of His commandments" that we broke from when we were "dead" in trespasses and sins. Instead He wants us to be using our faith in operations of love in order that we will be in His image, and therefore in His Kingdom.

So race, gender, slave or free, God says they are all inconsequential and insignificant to Him. What matters is whether one is keeping His commandments. What matters is whether one's faith is exercising itself in

love, which is the keeping of His commandments. What matters is that we are His workmanship, and He is creating us in His character image, which also means that He is working toward us keeping His commandments.

I hope that you all will have a fine remainder of this First Day of Unleavened Bread, and that you will remember this message. Laodiceanism involves at its very base immorality. If they were keeping the commandments, they would *know* what the problem is, but because they are breaking the commandments, they are losing their understanding, and that is why they are blind, and that is why they are naked. The solution is to repent, and go back to the basics and start all over again in the relationship, and that means keeping the commandments. That will "cure," if I can put it that way, what caused us to go into this spiritual funk and be scattered all over the place.