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READER QUESTIONS (9)

SELECTED TEXTS

ONCE AGAIN WE TURN TO QUESTIONS OUR READERS have on certain texts of Scripture or specific issues. In this installment of a series that began way back in January of 2008, we address three questions.

Are the Ten Commandments for Today?

Question: I recently watched a short video of [a popular pastor] being asked by an interviewer, “Are we under the Ten Commandments?” His answer was, “No. The Bible says we are not under the Law.” He then said that we don’t serve the Law but serve one another in love. I’ve heard others say that the Ten Commandments are still binding, so I would be interested in your view. (PJ)

Answer: While I certainly understand what he’s saying, I think this brother greatly overstates the matter. Here’s why.

It is a common misconception that there was no grace in the OT and no law in the NT. But law and grace exist in both. As Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8; cf. Ex. 33:12–17; Judg. 6:17; etc.), so “is the work of the law written in [our] hearts” (Rom. 2:15). Now, it is most certainly true that the aspect of the Mosaic system called “the judgments,” which directed the social and civil life of Israel (Ex. 21:1–24:11) and the part called “the ordinances,” which dictated the religious life of Israel (24:12–31:18) all pointed to Christ (Gal. 3:24–25) and ended with His fulfillment (Matt. 5:17). The Moral Law, however (the Ten Commandments), was written on men’s heart from the beginning. As Genesis 26:5 makes clear, long before God gave the Mosaic Law, “Abraham obeyed [God’s] voice, and kept [His] charge . . . commandments . . . statutes, and . . . laws” (cf. Job 23:12).

Puritan Ezekiel Hopkins put it well: “We find the same rules for our actions, the same duties required, the same sins forbidden in the Gospel as in the law.”¹ God’s Moral Law is called such because it reflects His own moral nature and, therefore, touches our entire being. It is precisely because of that, in fact, that the Moral Law is reiterated repeatedly in the NT, as the following list demonstrates:

1. Having no other gods (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7; Matt. 4:10; Acts 5:29; 1 Cor. 8:4–6);
2. Making no idols or images (Ex. 20:4–6; Deut. 5:8–10;

- Acts 17:29–31; 1 Cor. 8:4–6; 10:14; Col. 3:5; 1 Jn. 5:21);
3. Not profaning God’s name (Ex. 20:7; Deut. 5:11; Matt. 5:33–37; Jas. 5:12);
4. Setting aside a day of worship (Ex. 20:8–11; Deut. 5:12–15; Jn. 20:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10);
5. Honoring one’s father and mother (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:1–3; Col. 3:20);
6. Not murdering (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17; Matt. 5:21–22; Rom. 13:9, 10; Jas. 2:11);
7. Not committing adultery (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:19; Matt. 5:27–28; Rom. 13:9,10; 1 Cor. 6:9; Heb. 13:4; Jas. 2:11);
8. Not stealing (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19; Rom. 13:9–10; Eph. 4:28);
9. Not lying (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 5:20; Eph. 4:25, 31; Col. 3:9);
10. Not coveting (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21; Rom. 7:7; 13:9; Eph. 5:3–5; Heb. 13:5; Jas. 4:1–3).

Why have many in our day worked so diligently to remove the Ten Commandments from our courts of law? Simply because they do not want to face God’s perfect religious, moral, and ethical standard, for it condemns them before court is even in session. The Moral Law, therefore, stands forever as the very foundation of right behavior, that which we can never keep perfectly, since we are still in the flesh (Rom. 7), but ever strive to emulate. No one is (or ever has been) saved by keeping *any* law, including the Moral Law (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:11; cf. Matt. 19:16–26), but obedience of God’s Word (Jn. 14:15, 23; 1 Jn. 2:1–5), which includes holiness of life (Eph. 4:24; 1 Thes. 4:3, 4, 7), is proof positive of genuine salvation. In our fallen condition, the Law only *showed us* our sin and need for the Savior (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:19–25), but it now *serves us* by outlining how we are to live. Another Puritan, Samuel Bolton, masterfully summarizes the purpose and value of the Moral Law: “The law sends us to the gospel that we may be justified; and the gospel sends us to the law again to inquire what is our duty as those who are justified. . . . The *law* sends us to the *gospel* for our justification; the *gospel* sends us to the *law* to frame our way of life.”²

Even more masterfully, however, our Lord took the *Ten* Commandments and reduced them to only *two*: **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great**

commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

The setting of that text is one of many times the religious leaders questioned Jesus with the purpose of trapping Him with His answer. The background of this incident was that over the centuries the rabbis had artificially systemized the Mosaic Law. They first divided it into the 613 commandments (ironically paralleling the 613 Hebrew letters in the Decalogue itself). They further organized these 613 into 248 that were positive (one for every part of the human body) and 365 that were negative (one for each day of the year). Finally, they then endlessly debated which laws were “heavy” (absolutely binding; e.g., Lk. 10:27) and “light” (less binding; e.g., Deut. 22:6). So, assuming Jesus would have His own system, this law-expert asked Him which law He thought was the greatest. But instead of being dragged into a centuries old debate, our Lord went right to the Law itself! **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind** was part of the *Shema* (“hear”), which was recited twice daily (morning and evening) as a creed by devout Jews. That is the first and greatest all-encompassing command. At the very foundation of our relationship to God is our love for Him. If we love Him with our entire being, then the farthest thoughts from our minds will be worshipping false gods, making images of the True God, taking His name in vain, or violating the prescribed day of worship.

The second greatest command encompasses all the relationships we have with others: **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**. If we truly love others, we will honor our parents (and all authority by extension), never murder, commit adultery, steal, lie, or covet. Think of it! While everything hangs on these two commandments, we should be reminded constantly of all ten! None of us has the ability to keep even one of God’s commands, but, thankfully, God has promised: “I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes . . . and do them” (Ezek. 36:27).³

Was King Saul Saved?

Question: Was King Saul saved? First Samuel 10:9-10, for example, says that “God gave him another heart” and that “the Spirit of God came upon him. Could this indicate that he was saved? (PW)

Answer: King Saul’s spiritual status has been long questioned. I was for a time back and forth on the issue but have since come down firmly on the view that he simply was not a regenerated man (regeneration did exist in the OT⁴).

As you indicated, the issue partly hinges on 1 Samuel 10:9-10 but also verses 6 and 15:11. Verse 6 states that he would be “turned into another man,” which obviously indicates a dramatic change. But this phrase in no way implies regeneration. Occurring more than 1,700 times in the OT, “man” is the Hebrew *’iṣ*, which not only indicates the male gender (in contrast to the more general idea of mankind indicated by *’ādām*) but also “certain types of men, such as: a farmer (‘man of the earth’ or ‘husbandman, Gen. 9:20), a hunter (‘man of the field,’ 25:27), an old man (‘man of gray hairs,’ Deut. 32:25), a soldier (‘man of war,’ Josh. 17:1), a ‘man of wealth’ (Ruth 2:1), and a prophet (‘man of God,’ Deut. 33:1;

Josh. 14:6; etc.).”⁵ Applying that here, Saul was a farmer who became “another man,” namely, a king. As Puritan John Trapp put it: “Not into a spiritual man, but a prudent and valiant man. A great change there shall be wrought in thee: howbeit not a *sanctifying* but a *civil* change, or merely mental at utmost, suitable to thy kingly calling.”⁶ Albert Barnes adds:

This is a remarkable expression, and occurs nowhere else. It describes the change in point of mental power and energy which would result from the influx of the Spirit of the Lord (v. 9). In the case of Samson it was a supernatural bodily strength; in the case of Saul a capacity for ruling and leading the people of which before he was destitute, and which the Spirit worked in him (compare Acts 1:8; Is. 11:2-4.)⁷

Some argue, however, that the phrase “God gave him another heart” (v. 9) seems to indicate salvation even more strongly. But again, does it really? “Heart” translates the often used Hebrew word *lēb*, which while it sometimes refers to the physical organ, “most of its some 600 occurrences refer to one’s inner self and nature, including the intellect, emotions, and will, that is, the personality.”⁸ While certainly dramatic and impressive, Saul simply received a new personality for ruling, not a spiritually transformed life. As John Gill wrote:

God gave him another heart; not in a moral or spiritual sense, not a new heart, and a new spirit, as in conversion, but in a civil sense, a right heart, a heart fit for government; filled with wisdom and prudence to rule a people; with courage and magnanimity to protect and defend them against their enemies, and fight for them.⁹

Or, as a note in the Puritans’ *Geneva Bible* (1599) succinctly put it, “He gave him such virtues as were meet for a king.”

Still, some believe the phrase “the Spirit of God came upon him” (v. 10) is the clincher, conclusively proving Saul’s conversion. But once again, does it? John Trapp again writes, “Not that free or princely spirit [Ps. 51:12] that David prayed for, but a common spirit of prophecy and of government.” A contemporary commentator also well says, “The Spirit made the inexperienced and unlettered Saul able to assume kingly responsibilities in much the same way as the judges before him were blessed (Judg. 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).”¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe well summarizes this whole passage:

When Saul turned from Samuel to start his journey home, God gave him “another heart” (10:9, see v. 6). Don’t read New Testament “regeneration” into this statement; it refers primarily to a different attitude and outlook. This young farmer would now think and act like a leader, the king of the nation, a warrior-statesman whose responsibility it was to listen to God and obey His will. The Holy Spirit would further enable him to serve God as long as he walked in obedience to His will (v. 6). Because Saul became proud and independent and rebelled against God, he lost the Spirit’s power, he lost his kingdom, and he eventually lost his life.¹¹

That leads us, in fact, to 15:11, where God says that He was sorry that He had “set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following [Me], and hath not performed [My]

commandments.” Was Saul a truly transformed man, “a new creature”? Was he a man in whom “old things [had] passed away [and] all things [had] become new” (2 Cor. 5:17)? Sadly, no. Fruit is inevitable in the true believer, and where there is no fruit there is no life (Jn. 15:1–6; cf. Matt. 7:16–20). Saul’s legacy is sad, indeed, one of disobedience, jealousy, hatred, and even murder: he broke God’s law by offering a sacrifice that only priests were to offer (13:1–14); disobeyed God by allowing Agag and the best of the flocks and herds to live and even lied about it (15:1–35); was visited by evil spirits on several occasions (16:14; 18:10; 19:9); invested much time and effort attempting to murder David (18:10; 19:10; 23:14); ordered the slaughter of 85 innocent priests and their families (22:18–19); consulted a witch and asked her to conjure Samuel up from the dead (28:1–20), another direct violation of God’s Law; tried to murder even his own son Jonathan (20:33); and finally committed suicide (31:4). I humbly submit that those are hardly the actions of a true believer. Saul is, to be sure, a heartbreaking example of what the author of Hebrews would describe centuries later (Heb. 6:4–6).

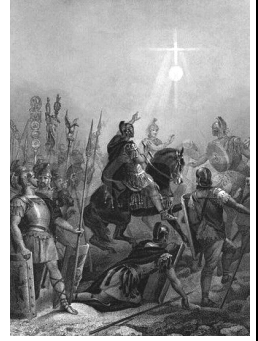
Speaking of centuries later, I could not help but think of another man who well illustrates Saul, this one a Roman Emperor who professed to be a Christian. The illegitimate son of Constantius Chlorus, co-emperor under Diocletian, and his legal concubine Helena, an innkeeper’s daughter, *Constantine* (c. AD 272–337) received only a meager education and became a soldier early, proving himself to Diocletian and later Galerius in the wars against Egypt and Persia.

Constantine joined his father at Boulogne on the coast of France in 305 to aid him in the campaign against Britain. Before his death from illness in Britain (York) in 306, Constantius declared his support for proclaiming Constantine not only *Caesar* (heir to the throne) but also *Augustus* (exalted one, emperor). Out of their loyalty, his troops followed him in this acclamation, and even Britain and Gaul accepted his rule. Upon receiving this news, Galerius was infuriated but too far away to intervene and so reluctantly recognized Constantine only as Caesar.

Meanwhile in Rome, the Praetorian Guard proclaimed Maxentius as emperor. After several years of intrigue and chaos, and upon Galerius’ death in 311, the inevitable showdown finally arrived between Constantine and Maxentius. On October 27th, 312, the opposing forces met at Saxa Rubra (Red Rocks) nine miles north of Rome. By superior tactics, Constantine forced Maxentius to fight with his back to the deep and rapid Tiber River with no possible withdrawal except over the stone arch Milvian Bridge (which still exists today in renovated condition). Constantine won an overwhelming victory, with Maxentius and thousands of his troops perishing in the Tiber, and the undisputed Master of the West being welcomed into Rome.

While all that is militarily glorious, it is here that the doubts begin about Constantine’s supposed conversion to Christianity. It was before the above battle, in fact, as reported by Eusebius, that Constantine saw “with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, Conquer by this”¹² (this was in Greek, *en toutoi nika*, but is “usually handed down by tradition in a Latin form: *In hoc vince* or *In Hoc Signo Vinces*—“in this sign, thou shalt conquer”¹³). As Eusebius goes on to report, Con-

stantine also had a dream in which “the Christ of God appeared to him with the same sign which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens, and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies,” and then describes this symbol.¹⁴ As seen below, this symbol was comprised of the *Chi* (X) traversed by the *Rho* (P), the first two letters of the Greek *Χριστός* (*CHRistos*, Christ). He “obeyed” the next day by going into battle behind this new standard (known from then on as the *labarum*).



Discerning all this biblically, however, quickly reveals enormous problems. For one, as Eusebius himself admits, this whole story comes from Constantine alone and is wholly anecdotal. Many people have claimed to observe a miracle

through the ages and still do today, but that doesn’t make it real. This does not imply that Constantine lied. It is entirely possible that what he actually saw, as some historians submit, was a perihelion (“sun dog”), a bright spot to the left and/or right of the Sun. Note a dramatic example in the picture below, in which we see not only bright spots on both the left and right of the Sun but also the vertical line called a “sun pillar.” Being under enormous stress and anxiety, and living in a age of myth and superstition, Constantine could have easily read significance into this atmospheric phenomenon.

Now, I do not mean to imply that I do not believe in miracles. God forbid! I most certainly do, but I believe in the miracles of Scripture, not ones that are claimed by man through the ages and today. Regardless of popular teaching, Scripture is unambiguous on the issue of “signs and wonders.” Such things were meant for Jews alone to prove the authority of a prophet. Jesus did thousands of miracles in the presence of thousands of people simply because “the Jews require a sign” (1 Cor. 1:22). People are saved not as the result of a miracle; they are saved by believing what God says about salvation in Christ alone. It is bad theology to insist that Constantine “became a Christian” because he saw this sign in the sky. As we will demonstrate in a moment, in fact, his life hardly reflected true transformation.



Equally troubling is his supposed dream concerning the Chi-Rho symbol. What first sounds compellingly Christian is on closer examination actually pagan in origin. In pre-Christian times it was an abbreviation for the Greek *chrēston* (good, useful, suitable), which was used to mark a particularly valuable or relevant passage in the margin of a page.¹⁵ Also, some coins of Ptolemy III Euergetes (reigned 246–222 BC) included this symbol. The back of the coin had an eagle standing on a winged thunderbolt with the Chi-Rho monogram between its legs. The question immediately arises, therefore: are we to believe that Jesus revealed to Constantine that he should adopt a pagan symbol to represent Him or give the

symbol “new meaning” as is often argued today about old symbols? Further still, we simply cannot accept Constantine’s claim that Jesus Himself appeared to him in his dream.

When we examine Constantine even more closely, more troubling things come to light. There were certainly impressive aspects of his reign. Most notable on the list, of course, was the Edict of Milan in 313, which literally changed the world and was one of the great turning points in history. In it he granted freedom of worship to everyone, authorized the building of churches, returned property to Christians seized by Diocletian, made the Christian Sunday a day of rest on which ordinary work was forbidden and Christian soldiers could attend worship,¹⁶ promoted the elevation of women, and improved the conditions of slaves. In a very real sense, the Church was indeed victorious.

But all was not as it seems. Was Constantine a truly born again believer? Can his conversion be likened to Paul’s vision of Christ on the road to Damascus, as some ancient writers contend (e.g., Eusebius and Theodoret)? Again, one of the most critical texts concerning salvation—one that flies in the face of “easy-believism” and all superficial professions of faith—declares, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17: cf. Rom 6:6; Rom 7:6; Eph 2:10; 4:22–24; Col 3:1–10). Sadly, this was hardly true of Constantine. Like many today in “Christendom” (*professed* Christianity or “Christian in name only”), he reflected virtually no evidence of true Christianity. He never fully repudiated the cult of Apollo, the great youthful, handsome god of the sun, music, poetry, and truth. He also ordered the counsel of soothsayers (reminding us of Saul), “surrounded himself with pagan scholars and philosophers, [and] seldom conformed to ceremonial requirements of Christian worship.”¹⁷

Further still, Constantine’s “suspiciousness and despotism increased with his power,” which resulted in some terrible crimes that “even the spirit of the age and the policy of an absolute monarch cannot excuse.”¹⁸ He ordered the execution of Licinius, his Eastern rival and also brother-in-law, in spite of his oath not to do so. Out of further political suspicion, he executed his eleven year old nephew (also named Licinius). As if that was not horrific enough, he also executed his eldest son, Crispus, whom he again suspected of political conspiracy. Are these the actions of a transformed heart and life? It is both disappointing and disturbing how some historians gloss over or downplay all this and simply state that “Constantine became a Christian,” as if that made it so. It reminds us of our own day, in fact, when “Christian” is defined very loosely.

It, therefore, seems impossible not to conclude that Constantine’s “conversion” was ultimately little more than political expediency. As previous emperors had *persecuted* Christians for political reasons, Constantine *preferred* them for similar reasons, however sincere he might have been. One writer well says that he was “Christianity’s new corporate sponsor.”¹⁹ This is unmistakably demonstrated, in fact, by how he controlled the bishops. “Throughout his reign he treated the bishops as his political aides,” writes Will Durant; “he summoned them, presided over the councils, and agreed to enforce whatever opinion their majority should formulate. A real believer would have been a Christian first and a statesman afterward; with Constantine it was the reverse.

Christianity to him was a means, not an end.”²⁰ Historian Philip Schaff agrees: “Christianity did not produce in Constantine a thorough moral transformation. He was concerned more to advance the outward social position of the Christian religion, than to further its inward mission.”²¹ As one studies this era and the ones to follow, in fact, he soon discovers this “advancement” had some devastating consequences.²²

What About “Faith Promise” Giving?

Question: I have a question that I thought you might be able to shed some light on. I hope you know that I certainly believe in supporting God’s work in every way. However, “promise giving” for missions seems like making a vow or pledge but not knowing if one can fulfill it. (FG)

Answer: To be honest, while I certainly respect those who disagree, I have always questioned the idea of so-called “Faith Promise” giving. It just seems to me to be artificial and contrived with no biblical precedent. Interestingly, when Paul commanded that we give “upon the first day of the week” (1 Cor. 16:2), the absence of the definite article (“the”) in the Greek demonstrates that giving is not on “*the* week,” such as “Lenten Sunday,” “Faith Promise Sunday,” or other such manufactured event. Giving is to be regular, on every Lord’s Day. Further, I agree with your observation about it being a vow or pledge that we don’t know we can ultimately fulfill. Again, there is no biblical precedent for this in passages on systematic giving (1 Cor. 16:1–2; 2 Cor. 8 & 9).

If I might also add, as I wrote sometime back, I believe we must be very careful what we even call “missions.”²³ The question of whether or not to give (or pledge to give) will often be answered automatically when we examine the biblical validity of the ministry in question.

One of the great joys I have is hearing from TOTT readers. If you have something to share or a question to ask, please drop us a line. God bless you.

Dr. J. D. Watson
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NOTES

- ¹ *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins*, 3 Vols. (Leighton Publications, 1863), Vol. 1, 251.
- ² Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (1645; reprint, Banner of Truth, 1964), 71, 72 (emphasis added).
- ³ This exposition taken from the author’s *Seek Him Early: Daily Devotional Studies on Knowing, Loving, and Serving Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Sola Scriptura Publications, 2017), 201.
- ⁴ See TOTT #43 on our website or chapter 25 in the *TOTT* book.
- ⁵ From the author’s *A Hebrew Word for the Day: Key Words from the Old Testament* (AMG Publishers, 2010), 33.
- ⁶ *John Trapp’s Complete Commentary, OT and NT* (public domain), comment on 1 Sam. 10:6.
- ⁷ *Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible* (public domain), comment on 1 Sam. 10:6.
- ⁸ From the author’s *A Hebrew Word for the Day*, 341.
- ⁹ *John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible* (public domain), comment on 1 Sam. 10:9.
- ¹⁰ Eugene H. Merrill in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Ed. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck), (Cook Communications Ministries), com-

ment on 1 Sam 10:1-8.

11 *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: OT* (David C. Cook, 2007), 508.

12 Eusebius, *The Life Constantine*, 128.

13 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization III: Caesar and Christ* (Simon and Schuster, 1944), 654.

14 Eusebius, *The Life Constantine*, 129-31.

15 Patricia Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine* (Routledge, 2001), 281. Michael Grant, *The Emperor Constantine* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), 142.

16 While we love and respect our "sabbatarian" brethren who insist that it was Constantine who replaced Saturday as the day of worship with Sunday, that is simply historically incorrect. He merely recognized Sunday ("the first day of the week") as the day Christi-

anity had always observed as the NT day of worship (Jn. 20:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). For a deeper study, see Issue #42 on our website or chapter 24 in the *TOTT* book.

17 Durant, III.655-56.

18 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. III, 16.

19 Timothy Paul Jones, *Christian History Made Easy*, 38.

20 Durant, III.656.

21 Schaff, Vol. III, 17.

22 This material taken from a book the author is writing, *Church History In the Light of Scripture*. Please pray for this project.

23 See *TOTT* Issue 101, "What Are Biblical 'Missions'?" (Sep./Oct. 2016).

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If you have a question that perplexes you, please send it along so we might address it either in a full length article or in a "Reader Questions" issue. Other comments are also warmly welcomed, and letters to the editor will be published.

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