

# God's Final Message

## Third Angel's Message – Part 4

*The New King James Version is used, unless otherwise quoted.*

### Third Angel's Message:

**Rev. 14:9-12** - “<sup>9</sup> Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, <sup>10</sup> he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. <sup>11</sup> And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” <sup>12</sup> Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

We will wrap up our understanding on the Third Angel's Message, and put all the puzzle pieces together, based on our previous studies:

- a) **Vs. 9: Loud voice:** Once again this indicates urgency, and a voice loud enough so that all can hear.
- b) **Vs. 9: Beast and his image:** That is, the sea beast (the Papacy), and the end-time union of church and state set up in America (the image of the beast).
- c) **Vs. 9: His mark** (i.e. the mark of the beast): Sunday observance that will be legislated in future.
- d) **Vs. 10: Wine of God's fury** – A reference to the execution of God's wrath (E.g. Job 21:20). The wrath of God begins with the Seven last plagues (Rev. 15:1; 16:1) before Christ's coming. It culminates after the Millennium when the wicked are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14, 15).

**Job 21:20** – “Let his eyes see his destruction, and let him drink of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Rev. 15:1** – “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ is complete.”

**Rev. 20:14, 15** – “<sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. <sup>15</sup> And \_\_\_\_\_ not found written in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_\_\_\_ into the lake of \_\_\_\_\_.”

- e) **Vs. 10: Tormented with burning sulphur... Lamb** – This phrase reminds one of the raining down of fire and brimstone at the destruction of Sodom of Gomorrah (Luke 17:28-30). This is a graphic way of saying that the wicked will experience terrible suffering (*i.e. they are 'tormented'* – see Matt. 8:6 where the same Greek word is used), followed by their complete destruction – the same fate that the inhabitants of those two wicked cities experienced.

- f) **Vs. 11: Smoke of their torment rises forever and ever** – This figurative expression indicates complete destruction. Look at the similarities in the following passage:

**Isa. 34:8-10** – “<sup>8</sup>For it is the day of the Lord’s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion. <sup>9</sup>Its streams shall be turned into pitch, and its dust into brimstone; its land shall become burning pitch. <sup>10</sup>It shall not be \_\_\_\_\_ night or day; its \_\_\_\_\_ shall \_\_\_\_\_. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it forever and ever.”

Notice it says that the smoke from Edom’s destruction will rise *forever*, yet we know that Edom is not burning today. It is worth noting that the words ‘eternal’ and ‘forever’ have different meanings to how we use them today. Biblically ‘forever’ is applied to things that endure for a long, but limited time, OR to an indefinite period of time. The length of time is determined by the nature of the objects to which it is applied. Check out some examples of the limited use of ‘forever’ in the following verses:

**Ex. 21:6** – “Then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him \_\_\_\_\_.”

**1 Sam. 1:22, 28** – “<sup>22</sup> But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, “Not until the child is weaned; then I will take him, that he may appear before the Lord and remain there \_\_\_\_\_.... <sup>28</sup> Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord; \_\_\_\_\_ he shall be lent to the Lord.” So they worshiped the Lord there.”

The Bible is very clear that the wicked do not burn unendingly, but are completely destroyed:

- i. Sinners will be completely destroyed (Mal. 4:1-3). This passage speaks of the complete destruction of the wicked. They will be: stubble (vs. 1); burned up (vs. 1); left neither 'root nor branch' (vs. 1); as ashes (vs. 3).

**Mal. 4:1-3** – “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be \_\_\_\_\_. And the day which is coming shall \_\_\_\_\_,” says the Lord of hosts, “That will leave them \_\_\_\_\_. <sup>2</sup>But to you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. <sup>3</sup>You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be \_\_\_\_\_ under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,” says the Lord of hosts.

- ii. There are 3 Greek words for **hell** in the Bible:

- The first usage is **Hades** (*Hebrew: Sheol*) which is a reference to the grave. See Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27; 1 Cor. 15:55. This means that whenever you read *Hades* or *Sheol* in Scripture you can substitute it for the word ‘grave’, and thus has no reference at all to eternal torment:

**Acts 2:27** – “Because thou wilt not leave my soul in \_\_\_\_\_, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” (KJV)

**Acts 2:27** – “Because you will not abandon me to the \_\_\_\_\_, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” (NIV, a modern translation)

- The second usage is **Gehenna**, which was a reference to the Valley of Hinnom which was a place outside Jerusalem for burning carcasses and rubbish. Jesus used the fires of Hinnom as a *representation or symbol* of the destruction of hellfire (see Matt. 5:22, 29; 18:9). Notice that both *soul and body* can be **destroyed** in Gehenna (Matt 10:28).

**Matt. 5:29** – “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Matt. 10:28** – “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to \_\_\_\_\_ both soul and body in \_\_\_\_\_.”

- The third usage is **Tartarus**, which denotes to a place of darkness, and refers to the place to which the evil angels are restricted until the day of judgment (2 Pet. 2:4). That place is this planet. If they are **reserved** for a future judgement, then hell cannot be taking place now.

**2 Pet. 2:4** – “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to \_\_\_\_\_ and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”

- iii. Note in Matt. 25:46 that the wicked suffer the effects of eternal punishment. Jesus is here speaking of the **effect** of punishment, viz., that it is eternal. The wicked are consumed but the **effect** lasts forever. The text does not say “**everlasting punishing**.” This will become clearer as we go through more passages below.

**Matt. 25:46** – “And these will go away into \_\_\_\_\_, but the righteous into eternal life.”

- iv. Sodom and Gomorrah are examples of the ‘punishment of eternal fire’ (Jude 7). Once again, this verse is dealing with the effects of a destruction that took place a long time ago. These cities are not burning today but lie in ruins underneath a portion of the Dead Sea. (Similarly in Heb. 9:12 it speaks of Christ who obtained ‘eternal redemption’ for us. This does not refer to an **eternal redeeming process [in other words, Christ is not continually dying for us]**, but to a once-for-all redemption that lasts for eternity, one which has eternal consequences). In 2 Pet. 2:6 we are told that Sodom and Gomorrah were *turned into ashes*, showing us what the Bible means by the punishment of ‘eternal fire’ in Jude 7.

**Jude 7** – “As \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of \_\_\_\_\_.”

**2 Pet. 2:6** – “And turning the cities of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ into \_\_\_\_\_, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly.”

- v. Jeremiah prophesies that Jerusalem would be destroyed by an **unquenchable** fire (Jer. 17:27). This prophecy took place in 586 BC. Jerusalem was then completely destroyed by the Babylonians. Notice that ‘unquenchable fire’ cannot refer to a fire that burns all the time, in which case Jerusalem would still be burning today.

**Jer. 17:27** – “But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall \_\_\_\_\_.”

- vi. Fire comes down from God out of heaven and **devours** the wicked, that is, they are completely destroyed (Rev. 20:9). This is when hell actually takes place. Satan, all his wicked angels, as well as all the unrighteous receive their just punishment then.

**Rev. 20:9** – “They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and \_\_\_\_\_ them.”

- vii. To have the wicked burning forever and ever is a concept that cannot be reconciled with a loving and just God.

Thus the reference to the ‘smoke of their torment rising forever and ever’, is clearly a figurative way of saying that the wicked will experience suffering due to God’s wrath being poured out on them, but this punishment will end in complete destruction. The concept of an eternal burning hell does not square up with the Bible, nor with a God of love and justice. Where there may be confusing texts that seem to give support of an eternal burning hell (like the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus<sup>A</sup> – **see Endnote A**), check out the context, and compare Scripture with Scripture and you will see a consistent pattern throughout.

- g) **Vs. 11: No rest day or night** – That is, there will be no ‘resting’ of God’s punishment before the complete destruction of those who have the mark of the beast.
- h) **Vs. 12: Patience of the saints** – That is, those who steadfastly endure amid the fiercest trials. Remember that Rev. 13:15-17 tells us of some challenging times ahead for God’s saints, just before Jesus comes. There will be persecution, civil penalties and even a death decree for those who ‘refuse to worship the image’. God encourages His saints to ‘patiently endure’, to

trust Him even when heaven appears quiet and there is a delay to His intervention. This 'furnace experience' has a refining influence on them (Job 23:10; Isa. 48:10).

**Job 23:10** – “But He knows the way that I take; when He has \_\_\_\_\_ me, I shall come forth as gold.”

**Isa. 48:10** – “Behold, I have \_\_\_\_\_ you, but not as silver; I have \_\_\_\_\_ you in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.”

i) **Vs. 12: Who keep the commandments of God** – God’s end-time people are characterised as commandment keepers (see also Rev. 12:17) in contrast to those who will receive the mark of the beast. Here are some crucial things that Scripture says about God’s law:

i. The purpose of the law is to give us a knowledge of sin. That knowledge is to drive us to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation.

**Rom. 3:20** – “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the \_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Rom. 7:7** – “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ except through the \_\_\_\_\_.”

ii. God’s law is an agency that leads us to conversion:

**Ps. 19:7** – “The \_\_\_\_\_ of the LORD is perfect, \_\_\_\_\_ the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”

iii. The Bible is crystal clear that no amount of law-keeping will save a person. Salvation comes only and totally through grace.

**Eph. 2:8-9** – “<sup>8</sup>For by \_\_\_\_\_ you have been saved through \_\_\_\_\_, and that not of yourselves; it is the \_\_\_\_\_ of God, <sup>9</sup>not of \_\_\_\_\_, lest anyone should boast.” See also Gal. 2:16.

iv. Yet God desires His children to produce good works, in other words, He wants His children to be obedient and law-abiding:

**2 Cor. 9:8** – “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an \_\_\_\_\_ for every \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Titus 2:13, 14** – “<sup>13</sup>looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup>who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_.”

So, while the Bible is **strongly opposed to legalism** (earning salvation by our good works), it most definitely **supports obedience**.

- v. We are not "under the law" [as a means of salvation] but under grace (Rom. 6:14). Grace however does not kick out law keeping (Rom. 6:15; 3:31):

**Rom. 6:14-15** – “<sup>14</sup>For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under \_\_\_\_\_ but under \_\_\_\_\_. <sup>15</sup> What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? \_\_\_\_\_ !”

**Rom. 3:31** – “Do we then make void the \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_? \_\_\_\_\_ ! On the contrary, we \_\_\_\_\_ the law.”

- vi. The genuine test of knowing God is obedience to His commandments:

**1 John 2:4-5** – “<sup>4</sup> He who says, “ \_\_\_\_\_,” and does \_\_\_\_\_ keep His \_\_\_\_\_, is a \_\_\_\_\_, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup> But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”

- vii. If we love God we will be obedient to His commandments:

**John 14:15** – “If you \_\_\_\_\_ Me, keep My \_\_\_\_\_.”

- viii. The carnal mind hates God’s law and is unable to keep it (Rom. 8:7, 8) but the converted person loves to obey God's commandments (1 Jhn. 5:3)

**Rom. 8:7, 8** – “<sup>7</sup> Because the \_\_\_\_\_ is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the \_\_\_\_\_ of God, nor indeed can be. <sup>8</sup> So then, those who are in the flesh [i.e. carnally minded] cannot please God.”

**1 John 5:3** – “For this is the \_\_\_\_\_ of God, that we \_\_\_\_\_ His \_\_\_\_\_. And His commandments are not \_\_\_\_\_.”

- ix. God's Holy Spirit leads us to obey His laws. We cannot claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit and at the same time reject God's law.

**Eze. 36:27** – “And I will put my \_\_\_\_\_ in you and move you to follow my \_\_\_\_\_ and be careful to keep my \_\_\_\_\_.” (NIV)

- x. The standard of right and wrong, by which we will be judged is God's Ten Commandments (James 2:12 [see vss. 8-11 for context]).

**James 2:11-12** – “<sup>11</sup> For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak

and so do as those who will be \_\_\_\_\_ by the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.”

- xi. It is important to note that commandment breakers will be outside the City of God and not inherit His kingdom:

**Rev. 22:14, 15** – “<sup>14</sup>Blessed are those who do His \_\_\_\_\_, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may \_\_\_\_\_ through the gates into the \_\_\_\_\_. <sup>15</sup>But \_\_\_\_\_ are dogs [wicked, shameless people] and sorcerers (possibly breaking of 1st comm. & 9th comm.) and sexually immoral (7th comm.) and murderers (6th comm.) and idolaters (1st & 2nd comm.), and whoever loves and practices a lie (9th comm.).”

**1 Cor. 6:9** – “Do you not know that the \_\_\_\_\_ will not \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators (breaking of the 7th comm.), nor idolaters (1st & 2nd comm.), nor adulterers (7th comm.), nor homosexuals (7th comm.), nor sodomites (7th comm.), nor thieves (8<sup>th</sup> comm.), nor covetous (10th comm.), nor drunkards (possibly 1st comm.), nor revilers (9th comm. & possibly 3rd), nor extortioners (8th comm.) will inherit the kingdom of God.” See also Gal. 5:19-21.

So even though we are saved by grace, we can lose salvation through disobedience to God’s commandments.

So as we can see from the above verses, the Bible is very clear that God’s commandments have never been abolished, and that He calls His children into loving obedience to His laws. Law keeping can never save a person (legalism), but a saved person will keep God’s laws. There is however a number of Bible verses which are misunderstood to mean that the law is done away. Carefully review these misquoted verses in the endnotes when you have some time<sup>B</sup> (**see Endnote B**).

- j) **Vs. 12: Faith of Jesus** – The Greek allows for 2 translations: the ‘faith of Jesus’ (His faith) or the ‘faith in Jesus’ (faith in Him). The former is the faith that Jesus had that led Him to trust in His Father even though he felt God-forsaken (Matt. 27:46); while the latter refers to our relationship of trust in- and loyalty to- the Saviour. It is this living faith of the saints that sustains them even through the severest trials and persecution they will be going through at the end of time. Their faith is built on the foundation of Jesus’ power to save us completely based on the Cross. Notice in Rev. 14:12 that there is a perfect balance between a faith relationship in Jesus (faith) and commandment keeping (good works). As mentioned, we are not justified by our good works (see Rom. 4:5-8; Eph. 2:8-9), but the saints produce these good works because of their faith relationship with Jesus (see James 2:14-26).

## Final Notes

- a) One may ask **how the whole world will follow the example of the USA** in enforcing Sunday worship when the USA has such a bad reputation in the world. But when you have economic

collapse, unparalleled natural disasters, unheard of crime, and spectacular communications from the spirit world - then the USA may go into 'survival mode' and do things that are out of character with its standard approach.

- b) One could further ask how USA legislators will proclaim a national Sunday law, when it is really against the constitution of the land? They will do so for the same reason Pilate delivered an innocent man to death, viz., for political expediency and to secure popularity and votes.
- c) Finally, how would this final church and state 'image to the beast' result in the world's major religions like Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, etc., working together? It will be for the very same reason the Sadducees and Pharisees, two avowed enemies in Christ's day, joined forces to eliminate a common enemy, Jesus Christ (see Acts 23:6-10 showing their antagonism, and then in Matt. 16:1-4 how they worked together to trap Jesus, and then again in Matt. 26:59 how the Sanhedrin [composed of Pharisees and Sadducees] plotted together at Jesus' trial). At the end of time, people from different persuasions and religions will work together to eliminate a common enemy, viz., Sabbath keepers who appear to be the source of the problems in society (see 1 Kings 18:17).

**Paraphrase of the Third Angel's Message:** I saw human messengers sharing a third message in a loud, urgent voice: Do not worship the Papacy who claims to be God, or obey the end time church-state alliance it will set up with the USA (known as the 'image to the beast'), in order to enforce Sunday worship (the mark of the Papal beast). Instead keep the commandments of God, including the seventh day Sabbath, which is an outward sign of your faith relationship with, and obedience & loyalty to God. If you choose to disobey God, and go along with this false end-time alliance, your name will not be written in the book of life (Rev 13:8), and you will turn your back on Christ's tremendous sacrifice at Calvary. You will also miss out on the joys of eternity prepared for you. You will sadly receive the same, and unnecessary fate of those who reject God and His law – which initially is the Seven Last Plagues, and then later, complete annihilation. God will indeed have a group that will obey this final warning given to Planet Earth. They will keep the commandments of God and have a faith relationship with Christ. God's counsel to them is: "You will endure the final and most challenging time of earth's history, but patiently endure this severe test. Don't forget that I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Just hold on a bit longer; freedom and eternity are just around the corner."

**Personal Reflection**

- I thank God that He is just and loving, and will not burn sinners forever and ever
- I would like to be part of God's end-time people who keep the commandments and have the faith of Jesus
- I accept Jesus into my life / recommit my life to Jesus

What personally stood out for me in this lesson:

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<sup>A</sup> **Luke 16:19-31 (The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus)**

- This story is actually a parable and not an actual occurrence. It starts in the same way as the two preceding parables: 'A certain man...' (see Luke 15:11; 16:1)
- Because of the figurative nature of parables, they should never be used as a basis for doctrine. This parable therefore cannot be used to prove the immortality of the soul, which the Bible refutes for the following reasons:
  - Life began as follows: Dust of the ground + breath of life = a living soul (Gen. 2:7). Notice that God did not put a soul into man; man himself is a living soul. In fact the word 'soul' is often translated as 'I,' 'me,' 'you,' 'he,' etc. (see Gen. 12:13; Lev. 11:43-44; Josh. 23:11, etc.).
  - At death the opposite happens: The body returns to dust and a person's spirit returns to God (Eccl. 12:7). Notice it is not the soul that returns to God, but the spirit.
  - The word 'spirit' refers to God's breath of life (Job 27:3). Some older translations (like KJV) use the word 'spirit' in this verse. Newer translations (like NKJV, NIV, NASB, etc) use the word 'breath.' So God's breath symbolically returns to Him, since He is the source of Life. The spirit is thus not some conscious entity that goes back to God.
  - When breath returns to God, a person's thoughts / plans perish (Ps. 146:3, 4).
  - Jesus compared death to sleep (Jhn. 11:11-14, Matt. 9:24). There are over 50 such biblical references implying that there is no consciousness in death, and assuring believers that they will be awakened one day.
  - Those asleep in Jesus will be awakened (i.e. rise) at Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:15-16), not immediately upon death. Notice that Mary also understood it that way in Jhn 11:24 – that her brother will rise in the resurrection at the last day, not immediately when he died.
  - We 'seek' for immortality (Rom 2:7). That means we don't have immortality naturally. We seek it. The Bible uses the word soul 1 600 times, but never once uses 'immortal soul.' If we were to die, and our souls went to heaven/hell immediately, then we'd be immortal. Only God has immortality, not humans (1 Tim. 6:16)
  - We receive immortality at the Second Coming (1 Cor. 15:51-54). Once again it is a gift we get at the Second Coming; it is not something we have naturally
  - The dead do not praise God (Ps. 115:17). See Eccl. 9:5. If the dead are in heaven, they should surely be praising God, but the Bible is clear that they don't.
  - David did not ascend to heaven at death, but awaits the coming of Jesus and the first resurrection (Acts 2:29, 34). If the doctrine of receiving one's eternal reward at death were true, surely David, the friend of God, would have ascended to heaven.
  - The dead do not know anything (Eccl. 9:5). See Ps. 6:5
  - A soul can die (Eze. 18:4). This goes against the view that the soul is immortal.
  - The apostle Paul said he'd get his final reward at the coming of the Lord (2 Tim. 4:7-8).
  - When Jesus comes, He will bring His reward of immortality with Him (Rev 22:12). He does not give that reward to His children prior to the Second Coming.
- **Parables teach one fundamental truth** and the details do not necessarily have significance in themselves, except to colour in the picture for the story. In other words, the details must not be pressed into having literal meaning, unless the context intends it that way. Only the fundamental teaching of the parable, as clearly set forth in its context and confirmed by the rest of Scripture, may legitimately be considered a basis for doctrine.
- This parable uses personification, a technique common in Scripture (Gen. 4:10; Judg. 9:7-15; 2 Kings 14:9; Hab. 2:11)
- During the inter-testament period (the 400-year period between the writing of Malachi in the Old Testament and of Matthew in the New), a number of false teachings crept into Israel's theology, which had become part of Judaism at the time of Jesus. One such was the belief in a conscious existence after death. Jesus, the Master Teacher, was aware of this false belief and used this prevailing popular belief to teach a vital lesson – that destiny is decided in this present life by the use made of its privileges and opportunities. He held up before His hearers a mirror wherein they might see themselves in their true relation to God.
- **This parable was directed at the Pharisees (see Luke 16:14) who falsely believed that riches were a sign of God's favour, and that salvation was based on Abrahamic descent rather than on character.** Jesus addresses this false theology through the parable, showing that the reward for the rich man was opposite to what was expected. The poor man (who made God his dependence) is carried to "Abraham's bosom", while the rich man (who didn't) is tormented in "hell".
- This parable, as the rest of the ones in Luke 16, deals with the use of resources.
  - The rich man and Lazarus are at opposite poles financially.
  - The rich man illustrates the teaching of Luke 16:9-13 – if you do not use your resources to bless others, you cannot expect to receive true riches in heaven.

- This does not mean that helping others will save us by our works, but that the changed heart, brought about by the gospel, will of necessity show itself in outward deeds of kindness.
- The expression 'Abraham's bosom' is not found in Scripture, but occurs in extra-biblical literature indicating the place of happiness to which the righteous go at death (a concept that does not find support in Scripture).
- The 'great gulf' is the permanent division that death fixes between the good and the bad at the close of earthly probation. While alive one may pass from the state of the condemned (John 3:18) to that of the pardoned. But when death comes, that gulf is forever fixed. There is no second chance.
- **Why does this parable NOT teach that the dead are conscious and receive their reward at death?**
  - As mentioned above, the details in a parable should never be used as a basis for doctrine.
  - Jesus Himself compared death to a sleep from which He awakens people (John 11:11-14; Matt. 9:24)
  - According to the parable the rich man, after he had died, had 'eyes,' a 'tongue,' 'a finger' – that is, real body parts. This is contrary to the concept of an immortal, immaterial soul that leaves the body at death.
  - If this were literal, then heaven and hell are near enough for a conversation to be held between its inhabitants – not a desirable situation for either party. If all the righteous go to Abraham's "bosom" imagine how big his bosom has to be!
  - It would contradict Christ's other teachings that say the righteous and wicked receive their reward at the Second Coming and not at death (Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Luke 11:31, 32; 14:14).
  - According to Scripture, Abraham is not in heaven. In Heb. 11, the faith chapter, Abraham is mentioned (vss. 8-12). Yet vss. 39-40 states that none of those mentioned in chapter 11 received their reward of immortality yet. For only together with the rest of humanity, will they be made perfect, i.e. receive the eternal inheritance of heaven.
- As we can see, this was a parable, and parables are not designed to be taken literally. Jesus used a scenario, which was familiar to His audience in order to illustrate His point that destiny is decided by the way we use privileges, opportunities and resources in the present life. To drive home His point, He lifted the curtain to show where the destinies of these two characters ended up – which was the opposite of what most people expected. As noted, to interpret the parable literally would bring with it a host of problems.

<sup>B</sup> There are many kinds of laws in the Bible:

### 1. **Non-Universal Laws in the Bible**

The non-universal laws were given to the nation of Israel, to be kept by its citizens and the strangers who sojourned with them. These ceremonial and civil laws were not intended to be observed by those who did not form part of God's people:

- a. *Ceremonial laws* – They were regulations that God used to teach the plan of salvation through symbols and cultic practices. They pointed to Christ and served as a shadow or symbol of Christ's sacrifice for sin (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). They came to an end at the Cross when the temple curtain was torn supernaturally from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). Through this act of tearing the curtain, God was saying that the Lamb of God (John 1:29) had died and it was no longer necessary to sacrifice lambs.
- b. *Civil laws* - These were given to the nation of Israel to regulate the national life of the community. They were to be kept by its citizens and the strangers who stayed with them. When Israel ceased to exist as God's elect nation, these no longer applied.

### 2. **Universal Laws**

God's interest in humans is manifested in laws given for and applicable for all persons, valid for all times and in all situations. Examples of these universal laws are natural laws, health and dietary laws, sexual laws, and the moral law of the Ten Commandments. All of these are important in the legal material of the Bible, but in the Ten Commandments we encounter a unique law governing the moral life of all human beings in all times and places.

### **Some Misapplied Texts on God's Law include:**

- **An unbearable yoke (Acts 15:10)** – The context clearly shows that this yoke refers to the ceremonial law, of which circumcision was a part (see Acts 15:1, 5). It is also interesting to note that Jesus called the legalistic attitude to the law "**heavy loads**" that the Pharisees had placed "on men's shoulders" (Matt. 23:4; Luke 11:46) – bringing to mind the words of this verse.
- **Law added that sin might increase (Rom. 5:20)** – The law in this context refers to the Ten Commandments which 'came in' at the time of Moses. It was the clearest revelation of God and sin up to that time. The law revealed the nature and scope of sin. Even though sin was in the world doing its damage, it wasn't as plainly seen or understood until the law defined it. Because God's law speaks against sin, it naturally excites opposition in rebellious hearts and thus becomes the occasion of stirring up sin, and in this sense multiplying transgression.

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If men's hearts were holy, and there were a disposition to do right, the law would have no such tendency. Remember that the law in and of itself cannot cause us to sin more. Only our sinful natures lead us to sin more (Rom. 7:21-23; 8:2)

- **Died to the law; married to Christ (Rom. 7:1-6)** – This passage deals with two *marriage relationships* to the law, an unhealthy, *fatal* relationship (the old husband) and a healthy, *faithful* one (the new husband). A person must die to the old husband, i.e. the sinful or legalistic relationship to the law (vs. 4) in order to be free to marry Christ (the new husband) and live in a New Covenant relationship with Him. In the latter relationship the law is obeyed out of love, and written in the believer's heart. Notice in this passage that it is *not the law that dies* but the sinner's fatal relationship to it as a means of salvation.
- **Commandments produce evil desires (Rom. 7:7-13)** – In this passage the law of God is clearly vindicated of any charges that it is responsible for the sin and death that reign so universally among mankind (cf. ch. 5:14, 17).

The blame is rightly fixed on sin/sinful nature. And to the extent that people persist in identifying themselves with sin, they share in its guilt and condemnation. These verses also emphasize Paul's doctrine that salvation cannot come by the law. The important function of the law is to unmask sin and convict sinners of the error of their ways, but it cannot weed out a rebellious spirit or pardon transgression. These verses further clarify the relationship between the law and the gospel. It is ever the continuing function of the commandments to reveal the standard of righteousness, to convict of sin, and to show the need of a Saviour. If there were no law to convict of sin, the gospel would be powerless, for unless sinners are convicted of their sin, they would feel no need of repentance and of faith in Christ. Thus, to claim that the gospel has abolished the law is not only to misrepresent the place and importance of the law but also to undermine the very purpose and necessity of the gospel and the plan of salvation. Here is a commentary on the passage to clarify this more:

**Rom 7: 7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin?** [Because Paul stated in Rom. 7:5 that the law arouses sinful passions, this may lead some to the conclusion that the law is sin] **Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not**

**have known sin except through the law** [the law is like a mirror that reveals sin in its true nature]. **For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."** [An illustration from the tenth commandment, which contains the principle that underlies all sin – selfish and sinful desire. Paul would not have known this 'but by the law.'] <sup>8</sup> **But sin** [personified as an aggressor, antagonistic to God's law], **taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire** [Paul is saying that the command not to covet made him covet all the more. Such is the natural reaction of the unregenerate heart to the express will of God. The fact that something has been forbidden often seems to make it appear all the more desirable, and provokes the evil passions of a rebellious heart (see Prov. 9:17)]. **For apart from the law sin was dead** [where there is no law, sin is inactive, but as soon as the law enters with its restrictions, the power of sin is aroused in the rebellious heart] <sup>9</sup> **I was alive once without the law** [Paul in his unconverted state, before he became aware of the real nature and spirituality and extent of the divine law. Although he earlier saw himself as 'blameless' (Phil. 3:6) he had a different opinion of himself when he discerned the spiritual nature of the law. He suddenly realised that he was infected with self-centredness and sinful desire, and not as blameless as he thought he was] **but when the commandment came** [i.e. when the spiritual significance of the commandment, "Thou shalt not covet" (v. 7), was brought home to his mind and conscience], **sin revived** [sin sprang to life in Paul (sin here personified as some evil creature). It had, of course always been there, but in the full light of the commandment, he could recognise its true nature and its fatal consequences – vs. 13] **and I died** [i.e. died to spiritual pride, self-confidence and self-reliance]. <sup>10</sup> **And the commandment** [the tenth commandment as representative of the whole law], **which was to bring life** [Lev. 18:5; Deut. 5:33; Eze. 18:9, 21; 20:11, 13, 21; cf. Matt. 19:17], **I found to bring death** [the very commandments on which Paul was relying for salvation was condemning him to death]. <sup>11</sup> **For sin** [once again personified], **taking occasion by the commandment** [i.e. using the commandment], **deceived me** [sin blinded Paul to the true nature of the law. It also deceived him by saying 'you can become good and earn salvation by keeping the law'], **and by it killed me** [the commandment, though in itself holy and designed to bring life, became the occasion not only of sin but also of death as its consequence]. <sup>12</sup> **Therefore the law is holy** [far from the law being sin (v. 7), it is holy and pure], **and the commandment holy and just and good.** <sup>13</sup> **Has then what is good become death to me?** ['Does the blame for my death lie with the good law?'] **Certainly not!** [For example, if a person is convicted and sentenced for murder, there is no fault in the law or those responsible in upholding it. The fault is in the one who broke the law]. **But sin** [and not the law, which exposes sin], **that it might appear sin** [i.e. that it might be seen in its true light], **was producing death in me through what is good** [The real nature of sin becomes apparent when sin uses that which is good to work evil and death. It takes the law, God's standard of holiness, to increase the sin

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and condemnation of men (vs. 8–11)], **so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful** [so we can see how terrible sin really is].” [A clearer way to express vs. 13 is: “But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God’s good commands for its own evil purposes” – NLT.]

- **Christ the end of the law (Rom. 10:4)** – From the context of Rom. 9:30 – 10:5, we see that Paul is speaking about either the misuse of the law or the goal (purpose) of law. In that case Paul is either saying: For those who believe, “Christ is the end of the law as a means of righteousness” or “the purpose of law is to point to the Saviour, i.e. genuine righteousness can only be found in Christ.” Concerning the use of the word ‘end’ to mean ‘goal’ or ‘purpose’, see 1 Tim. 1:5 [“Now the **end** of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart.” (KJV) / “The **goal** of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” (NIV) / “The **purpose** of this command is for people to have love, a love that comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a true faith.” (NCV)]
- **Strength of sin is the law (1 Cor. 15:56-57)** – The law is the strength of sin in two ways: a) The sinful nature will war against God’s law (Rom. 8:6-8) , urging us to break it or observe it legalistically, b) It makes us conscious of sin (and therefore shows us the power of sin in our lives) – Rom. 3:20; 7:7.
- **The ministry that brought death and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:1-4:6)** – In this passage Paul contrasts two ministries, represented by two covenants, and focuses on how they were **received** rather than the **content** of these ministries. These two ministries are that of Moses at Sinai and of Paul at Corinth. Moses’ ministry was met largely with unbelief and a self-reliant spirit (Ex. 19:8; Heb. 8:8), even though there was nothing wrong with the historical old covenant that God had given to them (Acts 7:38). The majority of Israel hardened their hearts and perverted the gospel into a system of righteousness by works. **The problem was not with the law, but where it was written.** When it was only **written externally on stone**, and kept legalistically, it became a ministry of death (vs. 7) and condemnation (vs. 9). God however wanted to **write His laws internally, in their hearts** through His Spirit. Obedience would thus be the fruit of a loving, faith relationship with Jesus. This is the life-giving ministry of the new covenant, and the ministry that Paul conducted among the Corinthians.

Paul’s ministry was not superior to Moses’ but people were apparently responding differently to the gospel at Corinth versus how they had responded to Moses’ ministry.

It is important to note that Paul’s opponents were calling people back to the law **as a means of salvation**. The apostle responded by saying that this externalized religion (called the ‘letter’ – see Rom. 2:29 where the same word is used to refer to outward obedience) actually kills, whereas an internalized heart religion, empowered by the Spirit, gives life (vs. 6). Furthermore, because of Israel’s rejection of Christ, it created a veil of blindness and confusion over their hearts, because the very Person through whom the law could be kept, was rejected by them. This veil could only be removed through conversion (when one turns to the Lord – 2 Cor. 3:16).

- **Through the law I died to the law (Gal. 2:19)** – Here Paul is saying that when he saw the true nature of law (after his conversion) and saw that it required no less than the life and death of Christ, he died to its futile, Pharisaical means of righteousness. He abandoned that system of works altogether. His life was now oriented toward God, as it had formerly been toward the law.
- **Law not based on faith (Gal. 3:12)** – When kept legalistically the law does not require faith on the part of those who practise it (Rom. 9:30-31). Legalism requires *performance*, not faith
- **Redeemed from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13)** – The curse of the law referred to here is the consequences of disobedience, viz., death. This is what God redeemed us from. This curse could not be the law or disobedience to it, because Christ Himself became “a curse for us”; that is, He took upon Himself the divine judgment for sin. The law was intended to protect life; the one who observed it would live (Lev. 18:1–5). Christ liberated those who were under the curse by taking upon Himself the curse of the law. He died in place of the accursed ones. Thus the law itself cannot be this curse, for the Bible refers to it, among other things, as good (Deut. 10:13), perfect (Ps. 19:7), pure (Ps. 19:8), righteous (Ps. 119:172), just (Rom. 7:12), and good (Rom. 7:12).
- **No longer under the supervision of the law (Gal 3:22-25)** –This passage cannot be read from a **historical** perspective (even though there are historical elements mentioned in the prior verses), for if it were, it would mean that only after Christ’s first coming, could people be saved by faith, and released from the prison of sin. This would imply that those living in the Old Testament could not be justified by faith.

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If we however take this passage and read it from an *experiential* perspective, it would make perfect sense as we will shortly see. **Vs. 22:** The Scriptures tell us that every human being is under sin's penalty and condemnation, with the result that what was promised (viz., salvation through the gospel) would be given through faith in Jesus (when a person gets converted). **Vs. 23:** Before conversion, the law acts like a jailor, keeping us imprisoned. This is the first of the three biblical functions of the law, viz., to restrain wickedness in the world, for both believers and unbelievers – until we find a faith relationship with Christ. This the same as the civil function of law in society to maintain order. **Vs. 24:** Here we find the second function of the law in Scripture, viz., as a schoolmaster / tutor / guardian. The law leads us to Christ, as the Holy Spirit uses it to convict us of wrong, and point us to Jesus Christ as our solution. **Vs. 25:** Now that we have entered into a faith relationship with Jesus, and His laws are written in our hearts, we don't need this tutor function of the law to awaken us to our lost condition and our need for Christ at conversion. At this point the third biblical function of the law kicks in, viz., the law as a rule of life, a guide for holy living. This is the function of the law we see in passages like Ps. 1:2 and Ps. 119:97 (where David meditates on it day and night). However, if we step out of relationship with Christ, the guardian function resumes, points out our faults and seeks to lead us back into a faith relationship with Christ.

- **Get rid of the slave woman, the Sinaitic Covenant (Gal. 4:21-31)** – This passage can only be viewed from an *experiential* perspective. Paul is using **Abraham's relationship with Hagar** as an example of an old covenant *experience* and his relationship with Sarah as a new covenant *experience*. The former **aptly illustrates Abraham's independent human efforts of trying to produce the promised son**, something that only God could do. The patriarch's relationship with Hagar portrays this legalistic response to the gospel and God's law, i.e. using human effort to produce what only God can produce – viz., i.e. obedience, a godly life, and eternal salvation. This legalistic experience always results in spiritual slavery and death.

Contrasted to this is **Abraham's relationship and experience with Sarah**. His trust in God and His promise to produce a child through her **represents a relationship of faith and submission to the control of the Spirit, who has the power to produce what we cannot produce**. This faith experience results in spiritual freedom.

We can clearly see that Paul is not saying that the Sinaitic covenant with its Ten Commandments are enslaving and therefore need to be rejected. There are people who lived under the historical Sinaitic covenant who had a 'new covenant experience' of trust and faith in God (like Samuel, Elijah, Daniel and others). So Paul is looking at two responses to the gospel as illustrated in Abraham's life. If we however see this purely from a historical perspective and see fault with the Sinaitic covenant and its Ten Commandments, it would mean that those who lived under Moses' Sinaitic covenant would have the following challenges according to the passage:

- They would not share the inheritance of the free woman (the saints) – vs. 30. This inheritance includes the new earth, the kingdom and eternal life (see Matt. 5:5; 19:29; 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10)
- They would never experience freedom because they would always be slaves (vs. 24)
- They would be persecutors of the true saints – vs. 29

This clearly cannot be the case. Thus Paul is speaking about two responses to the gospel, viz., a legalistic, effort driven and enslaving response (as represented by Hagar) or a liberating faith response to Jesus (as represented by Sarah).

- **If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law (Gal. 5:18)** - Paul warns the Galatians that the Holy Spirit never leads men to seek salvation by compliance with the requirements of the Jewish ritual system, or for that matter through any system of legalistic righteousness. Conversely, those who submit to a legalistic religion are at war with the Holy Spirit.
- **Law nailed to the cross (Col. 2:13, 14)** – The 'written code with its regulations' (NIV) or 'handwriting of requirements' (NKJV) that were nailed to the cross and 'stood opposed to us' is clearly a reference to the ceremonial law. The word for 'regulations' (*dogma* in Greek) is the same word found in Eph. 2:15 which speaks of circumcision as the regulation that separated Jews from Gentiles. Thus both in Ephesians and Colossians, the word 'regulations' refers to the Jewish ceremonial law. It is critical to note that Christ could not have nailed the Ten Commandments to the Cross. If He did it would mean that since the Cross mankind had been freed from the Law and thus given license to steal, lie, disobey their parents, blaspheme, commit adultery, kill, etc. This runs contrary to all of Scripture.
- **Law for sinners only (1 Tim. 1:8-11)** – Although the law is a transcript of God's character and is holy, righteous and good, it also has a negative side. Anything out of step with His law comes under judgment. In its negative

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expression, the law is a terror to evildoers. So the law was made “for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers” – to put, as people sometimes say – the fear of God in them, to turn them around, to arrest their attention – which appears to be the meaning in this passage.

- **The Law, Only a Shadow of Good Things to Come (Heb. 10:1-4)** – As can be seen in this passage as well as the context of Hebrews 7-10, the law referred to is not the Ten Commandments, but the Levitical law of sacrifices under the historical old covenant. These sacrifices were shadows (an outline of the real thing, but NOT the real thing) that pointed to Christ, anticipating His first arrival in history.

So from all of the above passages, it is very clear that the Bible writes about the Law in both positive and negative terms. The Law is positive in the sense that it was given by God (Ex. 20:1), it makes us aware of sin (Rom. 3:20; 7:7), it guides us along the right paths (Ps. 119:35), it is healing (Ex. 15:26), gives wisdom and insight (Ps. 119:98-99), and bring peace (Ps. 119:165) – among other things. David meditated on God’s laws day and night (Ps. 1:2; 119:97). The law as God intended was to be written in our hearts (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:10), and to kept through a faith relationship with Christ (Gal. 3:23-25), empowered by the Spirit (Eze. 36:27). Such law keeping is a delight (Ps. 40:8; 1 Jhn. 5:3) for we seek to honour and please God, *not in order to be saved*, but because we are already saved.

However, there is a form of law keeping which the Bible and the prophets strongly oppose. That is when the law is kept externally (cf. Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28), is used to foster pride, and is employed a means of salvation and earning righteousness (Gal. 3:1-5; 4:21-31). This salvation by works, known as legalism, is the source of most of Paul’s negative comments about the law – as was explored in the passages above.

Never does Scripture do away with the law, or obedience to the law, for the law is a reflection of God’s character. Remember, law keeping does not save us, but a saved person will be law abiding.

**I trust that God has used this study of the Three Angel’s Messages to motivate you to study the Bible more, to walk in obedience to its teachings, to prepare for our Saviour’s soon return, and to share these messages of warning with as many people as possible.**