



## ***Biblical Misconceptions: The 10 Commandments***

In recent years controversy and debate has erupted over the presence of the Ten Commandments on the grounds of public buildings. Campaigns have been mounted to remove the “offending” tables citing unfairness in a lack of recognition of other religious persuasions. The argument has been raised that public buildings are secular in nature and therefore represent a failure of the separation of church and state. Bumper stickers and protests, both for and against, have been mild at times and heated at others. Some view the move as a statement that people wish to remove the idea of God from the public psyche thus accommodating a more “open” society. We won’t get into that debate here but the Ten Commandments points us in the direction of the second of our religious misconceptions. Many think that to live a godly life one should believe in God and practice such things as the “golden rule” and observe the principals contained in the Ten Commandments. The commandments that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai (**Ex 20**), while being an integral part of the Law, do not represent this in its entirety. One could consider the Ten Commandments to be a preamble, or introduction to the Law. In addition to these commands there were numerous statutes, regulations and ordinances that were delivered for the people to follow. The book of Leviticus is an instruction manual for the priests and Levites in making decisions, rendering judgments and governing almost every aspect of life for the children of Israel. Throughout the books of Law (**Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy**) there are statements of these Laws and how they were to be applied. The problem for Christians in the first century, as it is for many today, is a failure to grasp the purpose of the Law. Paul states that the Law was a “*schoolmaster*” to bring us to Christ (**Gal 3.24-25**) and when the gospel was revealed there was no more need for a schoolmaster. Paul also reminded Christians that if they desired to be under the Law, they were indebted to keep the entire Law (**Gal 5.3.**), a physical impossibility even for them in the first century. It was necessary

for them to learn that it was not necessary for Gentile Christians to keep the Law. This is stated in **Acts 15** as James sums up the things that the Gentiles needed to abstain from “*pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*” (**Acts 15.20**). Paul also bears this out in his letter to the Colossians, “*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross...*” (**Col 2.14**). The New Testament also tells us that the blood of Christ covered the sins that were committed under the Law as well as those from the establishment of the church to the end of time (**Heb 9.15**). Paul states that holding to the Law rendered the sacrifice of Christ ineffective (**Gal 5.4**). Christ himself stated that he had come to fulfill the Law, and in that fulfillment, the Law was taken out of the way (**Matt 5.17**). The writer of Hebrews indicates that the Law was passing away at that time as the gospel of Christ was taught (**Heb 8.13**). A person who lives by the Ten Commandments will no doubt live a good moral life and will certainly have a belief in God. One will not be saved simply by following these “principles”. The directives found in the Ten Commandments can be found in the gospel with the exception of the fourth commandment. We certainly worship God and avoid idols, we will not commit adultery, and so forth as there are statements in the New Testament that tell us how a Christian is to live. It should also be noted that the Ten Commandments contain some things that we cannot observe, such as the keeping of the Sabbath. Christians meet and worship on the first day of the week, not the seventh day as the Hebrews were commanded. The priesthood of the Law, central to all the commands delivered to Moses, has been replaced by the great high priest, Jesus Christ (**Heb 4.14**), who is sinless and eternal. The New Testament, the gospel of Christ, is our guide today.