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# Keeping His Commandments

Klaus Bockmuehl

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*Klaus Bockmuehl discusses the extent the spirit of modern antinomianism has penetrated the Church and vitiated Christian discipleship and witness. He argues for the need to reinstate the commandments of God and clarify their function in relation to creation, redemption and the consummation of all things.*

(Editor)

## MODERN ANTINOMIANISM

### 1. Sign of our Times

Whoever today speaks about God's commandments is likely soon to be in hot water. He who thinks to say something positive about the law will be quickly met by contradiction. We live in a time when the tendency is not only towards practical, but also towards theoretical, conscious, intentional lawlessness, i.e., *antinomianism*, enmity to the idea of law as such. We hardly accept any restrictions of our own choosing, and none which come from the outside. Basically, every fence is a challenge to us, and the idea of "authority" is apt to disturb even the most peaceful of minds.

As with every other trend in our time, so also our lawlessness has had its prophets in the nineteenth century. Heinrich Heine, the romantic poet and friend of Karl Marx, wrote with respect to the pursuit of the enjoyments of life and with full theoretical clarity: "In order to do away with the idea of sin we had to abolish the law." As soon as man "became aware of his essential divinity," moral autonomy was the consequence, for, as Heine proudly said: "Every god is a law to himself." At the same time the Russian revolutionary, Michael Bakunin, discovered the political analogy to this program: anarchism, the programmatic destruction of law and order. Another philosopher, Max Stirner, in his

book, *The Only One and His Property*, showed that the atomization of society would be the end result of this whole endeavour.

Since then, we have begun to see the fulfillment of those prophecies. We hold: man has come of age; that permits the abolition of the law. Man is free; that demands unlimited liberation. *Lawlessness*, until recently the name of a nightmare, today seems to be listed among the virtues. We have tried “lawlessness” and anarchism in the arts, and some think that the arts have already arrived at nihilism and meaninglessness. We have hailed the concept of anti-authoritarian [p.86](#) education: our children were to grow up without any rules and, therefore, assumedly without distortion and in happiness. Also, in the field of sexual morality we today witness a comprehensive demolition of existing norms. Most astonishing is the attempt to apply the ideal of lawlessness to legislation itself. Here, at least in some sensitive areas concerning sexuality and abortion, laws have already been abolished. Also, the limitations which the institution of marriage doubtless imposes on the freedom of movement of the individual are to be successively removed. “Law and order” now is a term often quoted only ironically; its advocates run the danger of being called the secret agents of fascism. Perhaps only in the area of motor traffic, the program of deregulation seems to have been unsuccessful; in fact, one notices an increase of rules and regulations. Nonetheless, anarchism, the many-sided application of the ideal of lawlessness, seems to be the sought-for utopia of modern man. And he is not deterred by the fact that in history, strangely enough, anarchism has always prepared the way for dictatorship.

Admittedly, the continuing energy and ecology crises pose serious problems for the establishment of unlimited liberty of man. They meet him in the form of forced restrictions. However, exterior necessities have seldom been able to effect a change of mind and thus self-discipline and solidarity. Therefore, I think that antinomianism—enmity towards the law—is part of the essential signature of our times.

The general trend towards lawlessness has its roots in materialism and sensualism; to put it simply—in the quest for physical enjoyment. Some of the younger generation have no hesitation to proclaim this openly. A 1979 opinion poll taken among young people came up with this result: “Feeling happy is our highest value. For us, the traditional virtues have died.” The older generation in practice does not express a much different attitude. Materialism begets anarchy. Where self-realization and self-enjoyment are basic, law, authority and limitations must necessarily disappear.

## **2. The Tendency Among Christians**

It is no surprise that in a cultural climate of antinomianism the Church also will find itself invited or pressed into an attitude of accommodation or uniformity. We are offered all kinds of arguments that appeal to religious background. Did not Christ fight against the legalism of the Pharisees? Did not the apostle Paul write: “Christ is the end of the law”? Did not the Reformers above all emphasize Christian liberty? Therefore, for some, Christianity is above and beyond [p.87](#) morality-concern, and has nothing to do any more with the law.

It has been said already of the theologians of the nineteenth century that they no longer understood the positive attitude of Paul towards the law and that the idea of Christian liberty was the only thing they picked up from the Reformation. This situation has been aggravated in the twentieth century: antinomianism may now be found in all sectors of theology, across the range of denominations (among liberals, new moralists, but also in early neo-orthodoxy).

It is, however, a recent development that one finds this hostility toward the law and commandments also among evangelicals. There is a little story which demonstrates this.

On the day of his installation, a young evangelical pastor was given, as a gift, a plaque inscribed with the Ten Commandments. In his home, the pastor (however, for reasons different from those of Moses) threw it on the floor so that it broke into pieces. He exclaimed, "Shall I come under the law again? By no means!" He felt that the Ten Commandments belonged to a past period of salvation history. Similarly, one could recently read in a best-selling religious book that the law held as little obligation for Christians as the highway code for birds. They are quite free.

Could it be that this theory helped to pave the way for the practical developments which are usually more visible than the theory behind them? Today, divorce, although it implies the destruction of a marriage and often a family, seems also to be more and more acceptable among evangelicals. Pre-marital relationships seem to be widespread and common-law marriage the coming fashion. The dissolution of family life is another consequence of our opting for lawlessness.

Some young evangelicals welcome the glorious new freedom in every field. Their motive often is a reaction against the strict codes and customs of their tradition—but is reaction the road to an unbiased assessment?

A most peculiar phenomenon is what seems to be the quiet acceptance of today's trends in the evangelistic movement. Successful preachers advise their lesser colleagues not to mention "sin". In evangelistic meetings the young are asked to sign a "decision card" without ever having been instructed in detail about what a Christian conversion implies. "Conversion" then is a change of mood, of opinion, perhaps of the circle of friends, but no profound change in daily life. Or will we call it change when the recently "converted" publisher of a well-known sex magazine declared his journal would carry sex *and* Christ in the future? Evangelicals have to take care lest they make Christ their *maître de plaisir* and the accomplice of their aversion to the law. A gospel with its moral teeth drawn like that will [p. 88](#) never give the strength for the large tasks that are waiting for us in missions and development around the globe, and, perhaps, persecution.

### **3. The Essential Dimension of the Battle**

Modern antinomianism—the tendency towards lawlessness—would be characterized insufficiently if we failed to perceive it against the background of the fundamental struggle between the sovereignty of God and the assumed sovereignty of man, between the Kingdom of God and secularism: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us' " ([Ps. 2:4](#)). That is the larger horizon which we need to see and understand. Man's desire for autonomy—*anarchism*—develops into a rebellion against the Kingdom of God. Certainly this tendency is to be found in all of us, but that does not justify it. We need to call these things by their true name if we are to survive spiritually, and then also, physically.

## **KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS—THE BIBLICAL PROPOSITION**

### **1. The Biblical Material**

If we look through Scripture with this theme in mind, we will be surprised to see how much importance is attached to it. We may perhaps think of the commandments as a mere minimum of Christian morality, but it is truly astonishing to see the broad assent which this word from the last chapter of Scripture, "Blessed are those who do his commandments" ([Rev. 22:14](#)), receives elsewhere in Scripture.

The original context of the Ten Commandments links the love of God and keeping the commandments. In the book of Deuteronomy we read: “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments ...” (7:9). The same emphasis is to be found in the New Testament. Jesus himself thinks in these terms: “I do know the Father and I keep His word” (John 8:55). He also demands this from his disciples: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10). The negative form of the affirmation in John 14:24 underlines the linkage observed: “He who does not love me does not keep my words.” The apostle John identifies communion with God and keeping the commandments: “All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them” (1 John 3:24), and sums up: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his p. 89 commandments” (1 John 5:3). St. Paul, of whom one may not expect it, in a similar fashion parallels the new creation with keeping the commandments (cf. 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; 6:15). The new man excels through a faith which is love in action and thus fulfills the commandments. In the life of the new person where one no longer lives according to the flesh, but in accordance with the Spirit, the requirements of the law are being fulfilled (Rom. 8:4). Here the commandments are being accepted on a level beyond legalism or lawlessness.

## 2. On the Recapitulation of the Ten Commandments in the New Testament

That the importance of God’s commandments also is the view of the New Testament is not an empty assertion. It can be shown in detail by the way the Ten Commandments themselves are recapitulated in the New Testament. There are a number of places where we find not only an individual commandment, but a cluster or group of commandments (see especially Matt. 5:17–32; 15:4–6; 15:19; 19:18; Rom. 13:8–10 and 1 Tim. 1:8–10). It is also pertinent in *which way* the commandments are being resumed. Three of those six passages contain a fundamental affirmation of the continuing validity of the Decalogue: Matthew 5, the radicalization of the commandments right up to the critical question of the attitude of the heart; Matthew 15:4–6, the defence of the commandments against human accretions; Matthew 19, the eschatological relevance of the commandments as standards of the last judgment. The three other passages reveal the following distinct usages of the commandments: 1 Timothy describes them as a fence to deter the potential evil doer; Matthew 15:9 uses the commandments as the means of convicting sinful human nature. Romans 13, in the context of Christian exhortation, determines love as the intention and content of all the commandments: here they have a regulatory function for Christian living.

These three usages—prevention, conviction and regulation—are identical with the “three uses of the law” formulated by the Reformers, especially John Calvin, as a doctrine fundamental to the teaching of Christian ethics.

It is, then, this collection of New Testament passages, which, in principle and with their different modes of application, emphasize the continuing validity of the law, i.e., the Ten Commandments in the Church, and so reconstitute the keeping of the commandments.

Whoever has become aware of this will no longer be astonished at Paul’s words of encouragement for the church of Thessalonica: “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were p. 90 taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thess. 2:15). He sends a similar exhortation to Timothy, including both the creational and the eschatological perspective: “In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment unrestrained and free from reproach until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:13f.).

## “KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS” IN THE LIGHT OF THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

The passage last quoted with its reference to creation and the Second Coming should call our attention to the fact that, biblically speaking, the law must be seen in the framework and context of the whole history of salvation. We need to recognize its ministry and service in the fields of creation, redemption and consummation, if we are to understand what it is meant to do. Let us, therefore, investigate the purpose of the law in each of these three fields.

### 1. The Purpose of Law in the Context of Creational Life

Keeping the commandments first makes good sense in the realm of our life as creatures. God’s commandments describe the order that serves the sustainment of his creation. They are, as it were, the moral grammar of creation, the grammar of the *social* world and, generally, the created world. In a relevant passage at the end of the repetition of the Ten Commandments ([Deut. 5:33](#)), but in other places too, one can read concerning this: “You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, *that you may live*, and that it may go well with you ...”

The same point is often made by the promise of *blessings* which are to follow the keeping of the commandments. It is for this reason that the Bible emphasizes the great boon that God has given us in the form of the commandments. I would merely quote [Psalm 19:7ff.](#) as an example: “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ... Moreover by them is thy servant warned, in keeping them there is great reward.” One must not take such words as general liturgical phrases which might just as well be replaced by any other eulogy. Rather, these words are to be taken literally, as statements of *experience*. As Martin Luther said, Two pillars carry the world although it assails them both: God’s command and the Christian’s prayer. p. 91

It is with the same palpable and evident reality—and we must not conceal this other side—that transgression of the commandments is followed by God’s curse (cf. [Lev. 26:3–12, 14, 38](#)). The prophet Isaiah has described that inescapable linkage: “The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant” ([24:5](#))—a precise presentation of the sequence of the individual steps of apostasy! The result is: “Therefore a curse devours the earth”, even the vegetation dries up. That ecology does not work any more, at first in the social household of a nation, then also in nature, is seen as a consequence of trespassing the commandments. Social lawlessness finds its answer in a lawlessness of nature that is allowed by God.

So of what use is the law? It is to indicate what is unwholesome and injurious. In this it resembles traffic signs. Granted, there may be some traffic signs which are superfluous or arbitrary, a mere whim of the authorities. However, at a central motorway junction in Switzerland, for example, there are signs which signal a speed reduction to 80kph. In my experience, this exactly matches the objective facts concerning the centrifugal force that one encounters in the curb lane. Those signs represent reality. The Ten Commandments are to be understood similarly: theft, character assassination, adultery, etc. disrupt human society and, in the last analysis, destroy the offender, too.

The curse with which God negatively confirmed his order of creation is still valid today. Jeremiah’s words still count as if uttered for the first time today: “Suddenly will I speak against a nation and against a kingdom to root out and to pull down and to destroy



it. But if that nation against which I have spoken shall repent of their evil, I also will repent of the evil that I thought to do them" ([18:7f](#)).

If these words still carry weight, we must—especially at a time like this which tends towards lawlessness—defend the Ten Commandments as God's good advice for the individual as well as for society, and for our merciful protection against chaos. It is incomprehensible, then, that Christians should lend a hand in the removal of the commandments.

So in the handling of creational life, whether in the encounter with our fellow man or with creation, it is not a matter of our individual opinion or preference. We cannot ignore God's inbuilt order. The secularist rejection of God's commandments fails to see the given structuredness of creation and of human existence. The rejection of the law, where it would occur in Christendom, forgets that according to the judgment of Jesus, God's commandments will stand "till [p. 92](#) heaven and earth pass away" ([Matt. 5:18](#)). God is a God of order. He has wonderfully ordered chaos into *kosmos* (harmonious arrangement), both in the macrocosm of the household of nature and in the microcosm of the human body (a fact emphasized by Calvin).

To pursue *kosmos* instead of chaos, so that life can prosper, was God's commission to man in paradise and it is still so today (see [Psalm 8](#)). But part of the essence of *kosmos* is harmony, regularity and law, which we consequently also regard as beauty. Similarly man, as individual and as society, would need limitation and law, if he is to find culture, the formation of his chaotic nature, instead of intoxication, and in the end, misery.

Finally, part of the creational relevance of the law is its ongoing service to us when we do find ourselves under the material blessings of God, when we are doing well. For just then the danger looms large that we become arrogant. In this case the warning of Scripture applies, "Take heed lest you forget the Lord your God, by not keeping his commandments and his ordinances and his statutes ... lest, when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, ... and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God" ([Deut. 8:11–14](#)). This passage testifies to what was said in the beginning: lawlessness grows out of affluence; antinomianism is a child of opulence.

As against this, one is almost tempted to paradoxically praise the blessings of at least a modicum of material want. Anyway, we are made aware that in the midst of affluence a little self-denial, at least some restraint and abstinence from possessions and enjoyment would be beneficial. We are not meant to succumb to material abundance, but to retain the mastery over ourselves. The commandment will prove a useful and welcome aid to such self-discipline. Moral and material self-limitation go hand in hand, as do opulence and enmity against the law. In our own situation, the biblical commandment of moderation is particularly relevant: in that we refuse to join the continuing progress in our culture towards materialism, antinomianism, and finally, destruction.

If we are unwilling to be stopped in our tracks, the law will turn against us, as the accusation and curse over the trespasses. It uncovers sin. Luther aptly compared the law to water poured on unslaked lime: it makes it boil and so reveals its true nature. Whoever offends against God's commandments will feel the battle come to his bones. When Paul writes, "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life" ([2 Cor. 3:6](#)), we are to understand that this is not a devaluating slight of [p. 93](#) the law, but a statement of fact. The law indeed kills; it is the very task of the law to turn against the offender.

We should note that man even *needs* the condemning judgment passed on his evil deeds if he is to win any interest in the forgiveness of God. One has to feel the pain in order to find going to the doctor meaningful. The abrogation of the law, wherever it is found in today's theology therefore means not only, as it were, the loss of the "user's manual" for

creation, but also the loss of the cue to understanding redemption. It effectively bars the road to forgiveness.

## 2. The Purpose of the Law in the Order of Salvation

We have discussed the essential task of God's law in the order of creation, of natural life. Is there also a role for the law in the order of redemption? The Bible answers this question with "yes". "Keeping the commandments" as a concept returns in the New Testament. But *how* can one still speak of a function of the law after redemption has been effected by Christ? Everything, it is clear, would depend on the right Christian understanding of the law.

What is the law good for in the order of redemption? That question would first have to be answered with the statement: the law does *not* contribute to the redemption and regeneration of a person in Christ. In fact, here the law ceases being active. Rather it is passive; it has something happening to it, because for those who believe in Christ and call upon his name, law is turned into commandment. That is to say, Christ has taken away the curse from the law and borne it himself, so that now only the blessing remains on the keeping of the commandments.

Observation of the law is not in itself the road to salvation. For it merely provides the *theory* of good and evil, but not the *strength* that would be necessary to perform the one and avoid the other. Nevertheless, it remains good in what it teaches. Christ redeemed us not from the law, but from the curse of the law ([Gal. 3:13](#)). Speaking with Calvin: the teaching office of the law, its task to instruct us about what is right, remains in force "till heaven and earth pass away". And it is very much to the point when Luther coins the phrase (in his highly commendable commentary on Galatians, of 1519): With us, it is not the law that is being changed but man: man is turned from an enemy into a friend of the law.

The same is expressed by the New Testament dialectic of law and freedom. We read: "You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" ([Gal. 5:13](#)). Concerning Christian p. 94 freedom, we are today surrounded by a host of toilsome misunderstandings. Theoretically, our liberation from the service of sin and death which Christ has brought about, opens up two ways: on the one hand the road of unlimited self-enjoyment and egotistic arbitrariness, or on the other hand, the path of love for God and neighbour. The former interpretation of freedom is a complete misinterpretation, for—as is made quite clear in one of the key passages of the New Testament, [2 Corinthians 5:15](#), "He (Christ) died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." So—liberation was effected for the purpose of our service of Christ.

The purpose of the commandments in the order of redemption concerns more precisely the area that is usually described as "sanctification", that is, in the sense of human action and advance which Paul points to when he charges the church, "Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1), or which the letter to the Hebrews enjoins with the admonition "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14).

God has said, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" ([Lev. 11:44](#)). The Christian has been called to live a life of progress in sanctification. We need sanctification not only *functionally*, for the sake of service, e.g., in missions, but also *essentially*, in order to live in a way appropriate to our being God's children. In this area then, and for the Christian, the



commandments continue to be valid—as *indicators*, as general directives for the doing of the good, which is expected of the Christian.

Sanctification and holiness—for past generations of Christians these concepts used to be household words. Things here seem to have changed fundamentally. Are we suffering from a weakness of Christian awareness? Have we forgotten the call to holiness? No doubt, the ruling theology of recent years has left us with a heavy mortgage. Theologians of world stature told us for many years that in practical terms nothing changes when we become Christians. We only begin to see ourselves in a different light; we now understand ourselves as being forgiven. One well-known theologian seems to have taught conversion as being a turn-around of “360 degrees”—full circle. But, could conversion ever not be a palpable experience, solely, as it were, a looping in thought ...? These widely-accepted formulae have a quality ominously similar to those which Marx criticized in his famous Thesis XI against Feuerbach: “Philosophers have always merely interpreted the world in different ways. The point is to p. 95 change it.” Theologians, too, seem only to interpret man differently instead of guiding him to the place where he is actually being changed.

There is in Christendom a whole history of what one might call a *second antinomianism*, i.e., a rejection of the commandments not merely in creation, but also in the Christian life, in the realm of sanctification. Philip Melanchthon, co-reformer with Martin Luther, seems to have faced that heresy four hundred years ago. He commented in 1528: Many today misunderstand the freedom of the Christian person; they speak of forgiveness only, but no longer of repentance. Contrition over one’s sin, however, remains the prerequisite for the understanding of the Gospel, and the Ten Commandments are useful and necessary as guides towards the good works which must follow faith.

During the last decade of his life, Luther himself battled with all his might against those theologians who denied the need for holiness, whom he called “the antinomians”. He assessed them as: “truly beautiful proclaimers of Easter, but shameful preachers of Pentecost.”

That the quest for holiness is not left to our discretion, but that there is a special importance attached to the keeping of the commandments, can finally be read from the fact that Christ links keeping the commandments with our progress in the knowledge of God. He emphasizes the fundamental biblical truth that theory and practice always stand in close relation, even in interaction with each other. Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments ... He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” ([John 14:15, 21](#)). John Stott recently pointed out that these words represent a promise, but a conditional promise: “If you love me ...” To him who loves him and keeps the commandments, Christ promises to make himself manifest. Obviously the road to true knowledge of God is open only to those who love—who obey.

We find the same insight into the linkage between keeping the commandments and knowing God, this time in the form of, so to speak, a control formula. “And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments” ([1 John 2:3](#)). There we have, in simple words, the incorruptible biblical truth which we sometimes find so difficult to grasp and retain. Dependable knowledge of God is to be expected only where people keep the commandments of Jesus—God’s commandments. Everything else will be deceptive. John, often p. 96 conceived of as the mildest and most serene among the apostles, nevertheless remains adamant at this point, concluding, “He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” ([1 John 2:6](#)).

Two aspects concerning the validity of the commandments in the field of holiness still need to be mentioned, so that we would not present the keeping of the commandments in a false light: a look at God’s *Spirit* and *Kingdom*.

One may confidently predict: Whoever has *only* the Ten Commandments will inevitably tend first to a legalistic attitude, and then perhaps later—by way of a sudden shift—to lawlessness. The Spirit, or God’s love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit ([Rom. 5:5](#)), however, not only *moves* us to action; it *teaches* us at the same time what is to be done. That is the distinct character of Christian ethics: it shows how the instruction of the Spirit and the “fantasy of love” go beyond the basic demands of the commandments. Christ’s parable of the Good Samaritan can already serve as an example for this. Who, to the contrary, disregards the counsel of the Spirit in interpreting the commandment for the given situation, must see how far he will get with its interpretation merely from human reason and, whether he will not, in practice, soon demand freedom from the commandment and so, freedom from Scripture.

The second aspect is the perspective of the Kingdom or the rule of God, i.e., the horizon of the overall aim of history. Jesus, who demanded from his disciples that love which keeps his commandments, at the same time told them: “No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” ([John 15:15](#)). Aims and norms must necessarily go together. Even in the modern process of the corruption of Christian ethics one can still discern first the loss of goals, then the breakdown of norms. Nobody likes to accept a discipline without knowing the reason why. For example, why should I renounce pleasures and comforts, and submit to severe training evening after evening in the sports grounds, if my only purpose is to reach the bus in the morning with a short sprint? A strict training program, however, would be normal and necessary for one who is to participate in championship competitions!

The commandments, then, go together with the horizon of the Kingdom of God, just as lawlessness goes with secularism. The battle for the Kingdom of God demands purposiveness and determination. Where there is to be love, there has to be discipline. All this is summed up in the words of Paul: “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, [p. 97](#) but a spirit of power and love and self-control” ([2 Tim. 1:7](#)). Where this spirit is not working and where one is not aware of the horizon of the Kingdom, then regard for the commandments will necessarily grow cold or fade away.

### 3. Keeping the Commandments with a View to the Consummation of All Things

Since Christ was raised from the dead, all history and the entirety of our lives are under eschatological determination, i.e., related to the coming and eternal realization of the Kingdom of God. One cannot fail to notice how, in the New Testament, keeping the commandments is constantly viewed in the horizon of that day of completion. Jesus stated, “Whoever does these commandments and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” ([Matt. 5:19](#)). He answered the Rich Young Ruler—and we should not rush over his answer too quickly—“If you would enter life, keep the commandments”, mentioning the commandments of the second half of the Decalogue as well as the commandment to love one’s neighbour ([Matt. 19:17](#)).

Paul, too, relates sanctification and the good works of the Christians to Judgment Day, when he prays for his friends “that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” ([Phil. 1:10f.](#)). Conversely, he warns that the transgression of the commandments will exclude one from entrance into God’s kingdom (cf., [1 Cor. 6:9f.](#)). Even the fundamental passage of [Romans 13:8–10](#), which describes love as “the fulfilling of the law”, puts this statement into the context of eschatology. For Paul immediately continues, “You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness

and put on the armour of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desire” ([Rom. 13:11–14](#)). All sanctification stands under the horizon of Christ’s return and judgment.

Keeping the commandments, however, must not only be pursued with a view to the final consummation—it has its own definite place *within* the eschatological situation itself, in the situation of the latter days. For that eschatological situation, according to the teaching of [p. 98](#) the Bible, will be characterized by lawlessness. In a memorable passage Jesus prophesied, “Because lawlessness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold” ([Matt. 24:12](#)). There may be law without love, but there can be no love without keeping the commandments. The New Testament describes the Anti-Christ as “the man of lawlessness” ([2 Thess. 2:3](#)). It is for these reasons that keeping the commandments becomes a direct witness for the reign of God, whereas all lawlessness helps prepare the road for the Anti-Christ. It is therefore also consistent with Christ’s prophecy in [Matthew 24:12](#), when the book of the Revelation even describes keeping the commandment as an eschatological mark of Christ’s Church: Christians are “those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” ([Rev. 12:17](#)) or “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” ([Rev. 14:12](#)).

And so the book of Revelation, after having described, as in the beginning of Scripture, the blessing and the curse which God laid on keeping or rejecting his commandments, concludes:

The time is near. Let the evil doer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done ... Blessed are those who do his commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the (eternal) city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolators, and every one who loves and practices falsehood ([Rev. 22:10–15](#)).

This is what Christ testifies to, and we will be careful not to take away from or add anything to these words. I am convinced that God’s law—his order of creation—is still valid today. Where individual people and nations respect and obey God’s will it will be to their—even material—blessing. Whoever does not listen to God’s commandments, will lose his life spiritually, culturally, socially, and lastly—physically. Therefore, in a situation like ours which is so fundamentally characterized by its trend towards lawlessness, we more than anything else need a return to God’s commandments, a conversion which would set us on the path to search for God’s will. In this perspective, the Church first needs renewal. For the Church is meant to be a signpost to the way of salvation and a guide to conversion. If it is not, it helps drag humanity towards destruction. The Church is meant to—perhaps as a minority, but nevertheless publicly—represent the alternative to today’s claims to superiority by materialism, secularism and lawlessness. It is the Church’s destiny to [p. 99](#) be the leaven and salt in a civilization that has grown weary, and to strive, with all its heart, with all its soul, and with all its strength, that God’s name be hallowed again and that his will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

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[p. 100](#)