

## Appendix F: “Against Thee, Thee Only, Have I Sinned....”

An examination of Psalm 51:4

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**NOTE:** All scripture citation and quotation are King James Version, 1769 Edition. All emphasis is in **Bold Underline** and is the author's unless otherwise noted

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**The Contention: Literal or Figurative?**

I suppose you could say this whole issue is an academic argument and not worth dealing with, particularly in any in-depth manner, simply because if you sin, you sin – that is, if you ‘miss the mark,’ you have missed the mark, and in a certain sense it really doesn’t matter with whom you missed the mark. However, this issue does become crucial when we arrive at the point of needing forgiveness. If we seek forgiveness from the wrong source, or believe that someone can forgive us when they have no real power to absolve us of the responsibility for the transgression, then we have a real problem. That real problem centers around the fact that, if man has no power to forgive (which is to actually absolve of wrongdoing<sup>1</sup>), and we seek forgiveness from man and not the LORD God, we will have missed the mark entirely, and will still be held liable by the LORD God. When we observe the problem in this light, it becomes an issue of importance to everyone, regardless of what any particular individual's beliefs are.

With that understanding, the passage that raises the issue states clearly:

**Against thee, thee only**, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear<sup>2</sup> when thou judgest. (*Psalm 51:4*)

That we should sin against our fellow man, and simultaneously sin against the LORD is a view that is held by many. Hence, I should note that the majority of opinion is that this passage is to be taken figuratively simply because it states “Against thee, thee only” in relation to sin. As a factual matter, this is the predominate view of the above verse in Christianity, as the following two excerpts from different commentaries illustrate clearly. The first is Wesley's and the second is by Mark A. Copeland.<sup>3</sup>

1 Sadly, there are those who argue this point as well, even though the parable is clear in its meaning in Matthew 18:23-35. To forgive is to release from or absolve of, all responsibility and culpability.

2 The word “clear” as it is used here, means to be “cleared” or “overcome” the judgment.

3 It really would not matter much who I picked as all have some variation of the same theme. The point here is to show the general line of thinking about the concept of who we actually sin against.

## Verse 4

[4] Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

**Thee only — Which is not to be, understood absolutely, because he had sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, and many others; but comparatively.** So the sense is, though I have sinned against my own conscience, and against others; yet nothing is more grievous to me, than that I have sinned against thee.

Thy sight — With gross contempt of thee, whom I knew to be a spectator of my most secret actions.

Justified — This will be the fruit of my sin, that whatsoever severities thou shalt use towards me, it will be no blemish to thy righteousness, but thy justice will be glorified by all men.

Speakest — Heb. in thy words, in all thy threatenings denounced against me.

Judgest — When thou dost execute thy sentence upon me.<sup>4</sup>

And from Mark Copeland:

### 3) The Use Of Figurative Expression

The Psalms are filled with figurative expressions, and as such it is important to keep certain principles of interpretation in mind...

a) The figure must be accepted and dealt with as a figure of speech, not as a literal statement

**For example, in Ps 18:31, the Lord is called "a rock." He is like a rock, but not one literally. In Ps 51:4, David says "Against You, You only, have I sinned." Yet he is confessing his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, in which he sinned not only against the Lord, but against his wife, against Uriah, and many others.** David was speaking figuratively for the sake of expressing his deep grief in sinning against God, and we must allow for figurative expressions including hyperbole in poetic writings. **One needs to be careful and not develop doctrinal beliefs upon what may be figurative expressions not intended to be taken literally.**<sup>5</sup>

However, it is evident from Scripture that such interpretation lacks understanding of several principles and commandments. We do know, despite what some argue, that the verse is a valid verse, as the second half is quoted in Romans.

God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, **That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.**<sup>6</sup> (*Romans 3:4*)

What remains to be seen is why all transgressions and sins are against the LORD God and Him only, and not against our fellow man. To arrive at that understanding, it is imperative that we comprehend several principles that bear directly on the issue at hand. Moreover, we must do this prior to addressing the issue itself. Failure to accomplish this will lead to a misunderstanding of how the LORD God sees the issue as compared to our limited perspective of this same subject. Thus, we begin with the principles:

### A Principle in Law: Higher Law

Admittedly, in our modern society, this principle is not well understood. However, it can be briefly apprehended by the following passage where the Lord Jesus Christ expounds the principle while taking the scribes and Pharisees to task for their error:

<sup>4</sup> John Wesley's Explanatory Notes, <http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?b=19&c=51&com=wes>

<sup>5</sup> "THE BOOK OF PSALMS" Introduction to the Psalms [http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec\\_outlines/psa/psa\\_00.htm](http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/psa/psa_00.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Though it seems to say something different in the last phrase from what is stated in Psalm 51:5, it is simply the other side of the same coin, as it were. Both Satan and man have attempted to judge the LORD God and His ways, and they will fail, even as the LORD will be successful and overcome when He judges both Satan and man.

Woe unto you, *ye* blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! **Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?** And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. **Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.** (*Matthew 23:16-22*)

Note what the Lord states: It is the temple, not the gold that is greater. When a gift is brought to the altar, it is the altar, not the gift that is greater. The reason for this is as the Lord Jesus stated: It is the altar which sanctifies the gift, and not the other way around. In fact, were it not for the altar, the gift would have very little significance at all. In short, the Lord explains that there is a preeminence in things pertaining to our existence. One of the more important understandings we must have is the understanding that there exists an order and hierarchy to laws and authorities. In this hierarchy, if you violate the law, the law which comes from the highest authority is the law which is applicable to you.

The Lord further validates this with the apostles on the night He was taken by explaining the reason the world would hate them. He also validated this teaching when he instructed His disciples concerning the ministry they were engaging in:

If the world hate you, **ye know that it hated me before it hated you.** If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, **The servant is not greater than his lord.** If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; **if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.** (*John 15:18-20*)

**The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.** It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household? (*Matthew 10:24-25*)

Though the above passages impact the principle of agency, they are important in establishing clearly and plainly the principle of higher law, and the fact that if you commit an infraction of a law, in which there is another law also applicable to your action from a higher authority, it is held that you broke the higher law and are held accountable under the law given by the higher authority.

This understanding must be comprehended and held in mind as we deal with the rest of this issue.

### **The Principle of Ownership**

Though it may seem a disjunction to address it this way, we must deal with principle of higher law and the principle of ownership as being two different parameters bearing upon our existence. The reason for this is borne out when it becomes clear that isolating the two parameters allows us to understand more clearly the why of "Against thee, thee only have I sinned..."

Ownership, and the rights pertaining thereto, are virtually absolute. It is only in a society that does not allow personal ownership of property that these rights are not understood. The Scripture puts forth that ownership is near absolute, and the LORD God has regard to that ownership. For our understanding of this, the incident of Ananias and Sapphira is instructive. Please note the wording and the inferences and implications of what is stated by the apostle Peter:

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, **sold a possession, And kept back part of the price,** his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, **why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?** why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. (*Acts 5:1-4*)

If we care to note, Peter did not rebuke Ananias over the issue of keeping part of the proceeds of the sale. Rather, what he rebuked him over was lying about how much they chose to give. Ananias and Sapphira chose to cover up what they did to look better in the eyes of their brethren. They chose to make it appear as if they had sold the land and given the entirety of the proceeds to the church. What they apparently did not grasp was that the LORD was not demanding they sell everything. Rather, if they sold, then they ought to be honest about what they were doing with the proceeds of that sale.

We see this view validated in the language used by Peter when he stated "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" In short, Peter is telling Ananias that he did not have to sell the land, and after it was sold, they did not have to give any of the money. Rather, that was the choice of Ananias and Sapphira. Moreover, all they needed to do was declare exactly what they had done. They were the owners of the land, and of the money after the sale and were under no particular obligation to do anything with it.

However, to understand why they did what they did, the following passage from Acts, Chapter 3 is also instructive. It becomes apparent that Ananias and Sapphira did not want to 'look bad' in front of the brethren, and thus chose to do as they did.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: **for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.** And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. (*Acts 4:32-37*)

Now we know that no one is really concerned about how they look in the eyes of their fellow man, particularly in the eyes of their brethren in the church, right? Not really. How we perceive we are viewed in the eyes of others is an extremely powerful motivator of our behavior. Thus, to appear to be as others in the church, yet 'hedge their bets' as it were, Ananias and Sapphira schemed to sell land, lie about the price, and present it to the LORD and the LORD's agents in the church as being a complete sacrifice. Thus, it is not and was not, an issue of giving up everything, but of being honest about what is being done. So it is, that even in a situation where it would seem that ownership rights would be given up, they are not, and are furthermore not subject to be relinquished.

Thus, we have two of the three principles which bear on this issue of "Against thee, thee only have I sinned..." bringing us to the subject of agency referenced in the Scripture passages which addressed the principle of higher law.

### **The Principle of Agency**

Like so many other principles, this too is poorly understood today. Were it better understood, there might be some comprehension as to what is wrong with how Christians frequently treat their brethren. In fact, as the following passages demonstrate, they are not really mistreating their brethren, but someone else entirely.

**And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.** But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

Now we know, as the Scripture is clear, that Saul had nothing to do with persecuting anyone, and particularly not the Lord Jesus Christ, until the stoning of Stephen. After that, Saul went after the disciples with a vengeance. However, at no time did he even encounter Jesus Christ to persecute Him. Rather, at that time the Lord Jesus was already ascended and in heaven. Even a cursory study of the time line of Saul (who is called Paul) and a

time line of Christ's ministry clearly shows there to be no intersection of the two. Whether Saul was in Jerusalem at the time of Christ's crucifixion or not is not clear. However, since no interaction occurred between the two, it is manifestly impossible for Saul to have persecuted Jesus Christ. Hence, the Lord speaks of Saul's persecution of Him through the persecution of his agents.

This view is further confirmed by other Scripture.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me. (*Matthew 25:31-45*)

He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. (*Matthew 10:40-42*)

By all evidence, in the heart and mind of the LORD God, attacking one of His servants is attacking Him. Moreover, the LORD is displeased whenever any of His children decide to disparage or attack another of His children, as it is tantamount to attacking and disparaging the LORD Himself. Hence, instead of doing harm to their fellow man, the reality is that the LORD God takes any attack upon one of His as an attack upon Him. Thus raising the question:

*Just who does belong to the LORD God?*

### **Who Man Belongs to**

This should not be a contentious issue. However, there are those who will argue with the plain language of the Scripture as they will argue with anything that does not fit their idea of how things ought to be. In this case, it really does not matter what we believe, what we like or don't like, the following is how it is:

Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. (*Ezekiel 18:4*)

No, the above is not a "one of a kind" or isolated statement. Rather, the LORD God insures that we understand this one well:

Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? In whose hand *is* the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. (*Job 12:9-10*)

And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee,

and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: **and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:** Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this *is* the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This *is* the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. (*Daniel 5:22-28*)

The life and breath of all mankind, and indeed, the entirety of every individual, belongs to the LORD God and Him only. Moreover, the LORD Himself chooses how he will deal with man, and does so without any permission from anyone:

If now *thou hast* understanding, hear this: hearken to the voice of my words. Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that is most just? *Is it fit* to say to a king, *Thou art wicked?* and to princes, *Ye are* ungodly? **How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands.** In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away: and the mighty shall be taken away without hand. For his eyes *are* upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. *There is* no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. **For he will not lay upon man more than right; that he should enter into judgment with God. He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and set others in their stead.** Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth *them* in the night, so that they are destroyed. (*Job 34:16-25*)

No matter what we think, whosoever we may be, we do not have the right or power to supplant or usurp the LORD's authority over another. Rather, if we attempt to do so, all we ultimately do is condemn ourselves:

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. **For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.** For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. **For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.** (*Romans 14:7-12*)

The passages are clear, and the following statement is absolute:

*Man, that is, the race of man and thus all men, all individuals belong to the LORD God and Him only. This includes adults, children and babies, born and unborn. There are no exceptions. The LORD God owns us, and He has chosen how He will deal with us – regardless of what anyone thinks about it. There is certainly nothing anyone can do about it.*

## **Two Worlds: Spiritual and Physical**

One of the significant problems which exists in understanding anything pertaining to the teaching and doctrine of the the Scripture is a failure to adequately and effectively distinguish between the physical world and the spiritual world. These two worlds are not the same, and though man inhabits both, there is sparse understanding of these worlds and their differences and distinctions. Man actually knows very little about the physical world that is apparent and seemingly plain to us. We know far, far less about the spiritual world, though we are actually two parts spiritual (soul and spirit) and only one part physical (the body). Without dwelling too much on it, the reason this disparity exists is because man is dominated by what he perceives in the physical, while largely ignoring the spiritual.

If we are to proceed further, it is essential that our lack of understanding of the basic differences between the spiritual and the physical are corrected. We also must understand how the LORD God perceives offenses if we are to correctly understand how the LORD holds man guilty of violating only Him and His law. Of all statements in Scripture, the instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ to Nicodemus is most clear and plain in clarifying and distinguishing between the physical and the spiritual:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (*John 3:6*)

Here the Lord Jesus Christ drew for Nicodemus the relationship between the two worlds: that is – they are mutually exclusive. They do not mix, and other than the principles which govern all aspects of creation, what is applicable to one is not necessarily applicable to the other. If one is born of the flesh, that is not spiritual but physical, and will remain physical. That which is born of the spirit is and will remain spiritual, and has no bearing on the physical.<sup>7</sup> No matter what is done in either state, there is no 'crossing over' between the states of existence. Hence:

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (*Romans 7:14*)

**It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.** And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam *was made* a quickening spirit. **Howbeit that *was not first* which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.** (*I Corinthians 15:44-46*)

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. **Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.** (*Matthew 22:23-30*)

Without getting into too much detail, the things which we are concerned with physically are not applicable spiritually, neither in the life to come. The above passages detail the folly of attempting to fulfill and satisfy spiritual law with physical actions. Likewise, as the Sadducees were instructed, it is folly to think of eternity, and our existence in eternity by what we experience on this earth. Briefly comprehended, the differences between our physical existence and what occurs with us spiritually are considerable. Due to this, we should not to judge one by the other, neither should we generally make decisions concerning one using information and experience from the other.

This being understood, the relationship between the two is like a leaf and its shadow. In this case, the spiritual is likened to the leaf and the physical to its shadow. Though the leaf and its shadow share a common outline, and the shadow would not exist but for the leaf, the shadow is not the leaf, and the leaf is far more than its shadow reveals.

Let us bear this in mind and realize that, as a result of these differences, there are also two vastly different perspectives which exist.

### **Two Perspectives**

There are only two perspectives that we need be concerned with as we examine this issue:

1. The perspective of the LORD God.
2. The perspective of man.

Of the two, the LORD God's perspective is accurate and all-encompassing; man's is not. Man's perspective is limited and biased, and is subject to considerable distortion due to the iniquity of our existence. This includes every aspect of our existence: body, soul and spirit. Primarily, the area where man suffers most is the arena of the spiritual. Though we are two parts spiritual, it is the physical which dominates man, severely limiting our perception of the spiritual world. Thus, we experience a considerable disadvantage in perception.

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<sup>7</sup> Physically, other than the end result of salvation being the resurrection of a body like Christ's body, and thus being freed from the corruption of iniquity, there is no effect upon the flesh of the believer. If you have the flu, cancer, heart disease, etc., and are saved with that affliction, then you will still have that affliction after salvation. The salvation of the soul has no direct effect upon the body in this life. It is in the life to come and after the resurrection that these afflictions and infirmities are done away with.

It is the LORD that makes us aware of our deficiency in His statement to Samuel about Eliab, a son of Jesse and brother of David:

And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed *is* before him. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: **for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.** (*I Samuel 16:6-7*)

This deficiency is somewhat rectified in the believer by the new birth and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Yet, this is subject to the believer's desire and willingness to rule over the flesh. Hence, though the following passage is true, spiritual perception can be very limited in the believer:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; **comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.** (*I Corinthians 2:9-15*)

The above passages demonstrate the stark contrast between the perception of the LORD God and that of man. As we are aware from Jeremiah 17, verse 9, man does not accurately perceive his own heart. Therefore it should be no great surprise that man does not perceive the spiritual world in any significant detail either. By all evidence, we must concede that the LORD's perspective is not limited, but man's is. Moreover, that limitation is dependent upon whether any particular individual is born again and how willing they are to allow the spiritual to dominate. If, and it is a big "if," the believer is willing, they can perceive much spiritually, but only because of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Without the Spirit of the LORD, such perception is virtually non-existent.

#### **The limited perspective of man**

It is unfortunate that man does not really understand how limited his perspective actually is. Even in the physical sense, in which we cannot perceive things that are often mere feet away from us (and in some cases, inches), we think we perceive more than we actually do, and believe that our perspective is better than it actually is.

So it is with transgression and sin. As man, we believe that the transgression and sin occur when we see something happen, however, the reality is that the transgression and sin occur before any outward action is ever taken. The reason for this is due to the transgression and sin occurring spiritually before it manifests through the vehicle of the flesh. As a result, we believe that there is no need to ask forgiveness, if we didn't do anything to anyone, but merely considered it and ultimately left it off for whatever reason. We fail to realize that in so doing, we have already sinned against the LORD God – though nothing outward and visible occurred, and neither did any harm occur to the person we thought to injure.

This is also true with respect to who we transgress and sin against. Though we do not readily perceive it, we always transgress the law of God (and thus sin), whenever we transgress against our fellow man. In fact, we may not perceive that we have transgressed against the LORD at all, thinking we have only done something against our fellow man. Thus, we tend to think that we also have the power to forgive when someone transgresses against us. However, as we shall see, we have no power at all to forgive sin and transgression, no matter what was done against us.

#### **Who Can Forgive Sins**

In reality, the whole issue of who we have sinned against rests with who can actually forgive sins. Now, we may think that we have the power to forgive sin, but that power can only rest with the the one who sets forth or issues the law that is transgressed. While it may be convenient and make us feel better to forgive one another, we cannot absolve one another of the fact of having transgressed the law of God with regard to the way we interact one with another. And, while we like to think we determine the parameters of our interactions with those around

us, actually we do not. How we are to deal with everyone we meet is determined by the LORD Himself, and is plainly stated in the second commandment:

Then one of them, *which was a lawyer*, asked *him a question*, tempting him, and saying, Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. **And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** (*Matthew 22:35-39*)

What we see here is an open-ended commandment which is all-encompassing concerning how we relate to our fellow man. There are no qualifiers or limiting statements accompanying "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Because it is stated this way, it raises the question in the mind of a lawyer who was not willing to apply it in its entirety, but rather attempted to limit the scope of it:

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readeest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; **and thy neighbour as thyself.** And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. **But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?** And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*, And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. **Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.** (*Luke 10:25-37*)

Without doing so directly, the Lord Jesus rebukes the lawyer through the telling of the incident of the man who was robbed and beaten. The clear meaning of the story is that everyone we meet is our neighbor. That we are to have compassion and mercy to every man should be understood without the necessity of explanation and justification. The Scriptures are clear that mercy, and the compassion that drives it, are indispensable to our being,<sup>8</sup> and are required of us:

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: **Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?** And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (*Matthew 18:32-35*)

And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash *herself* at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened *it*, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. **And she had compassion on him,** and said, This *is one* of the Hebrews' children. (*Exodus 2:5-6*)

He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: **but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.** (*Proverbs 14:31*)

He that followeth after righteousness **and mercy** findeth life, righteousness, and honour. (*Proverbs 21:21*)

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8 This is more completely addressed in Appendix A, which examines how man is made in the image of God.

It is without question that the Levite and the priest had no compassion and mercy toward the man who was beaten and robbed. As an aside, it really raises the question as to either man's ability to minister to man, and unto the LORD:

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: **Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.** (*Hebrews 5:1-2*)<sup>9</sup>

In returning to the original point, the clear implication from the Lord Jesus Christ is that every person we have anything to do with is our neighbor, and we are to treat them even as we would like to be treated. It is not, as some would claim, that certain are lacking in this area, as all are given the moral imperatives of compassion and mercy. Rather, it is that, like the priest and Levite, we can't be bothered to assist our fellow man in their time of need. Nevertheless, it is clear there is a requirement laid upon us in the Scripture regarding how we treat our fellow man:

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, God:* but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** (*Matthew 19:16-19*)

And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, **and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.** (*Mark 12:32-33*)

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; **and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.** (*Romans 13:8-10*)

Hence, every commandment we have which relates in any way at all to interacting with our fellow man falls under the umbrella of "love thy neighbor as thyself," and is an aspect of that law of God. When we violate the person of another, however small that violation may be, we transgress the above commandment. Moreover, while our neighbor may forgive us that transgression and sin, we did not violate the law of our neighbor who did not issue the law. Rather, that same law is equally applied to them, and they are thus equal to us in the sight of God. What we violated is the law of the LORD God and that only. While it is fine that our neighbor may forgive us, our neighbor cannot speak for the LORD God. The reason for this is evident: LORD does not operate under the command of our neighbor nor under the command of any other person. Instead, it is He that issued the command applicable to all mankind equally. Accordingly, it is also clear that each and every person is equal in standing before the LORD God, and no one has any lawful capacity to command another, saving that which the LORD God delegates for specific purposes.<sup>10</sup> Even those who are raised to leadership among men are still bound by the two commandments, and thus cannot reach the power or authority to forgive transgression and sin.

It being the case that all mankind operates under the command and authority of the LORD God, we must consider that while it is good for our neighbor that he or she forgave us, we are still guilty in the sight of God for the transgression and sin we committed when we acted unlawfully toward our neighbor – regardless of how slight that transgression may have been. However much we would desire that our fellow man release us from culpability, whoever they may be, the authority or power to forgive transgression and sin does not rest in them.

9 Is it really necessary to point out the unbelievable hypocrisy of the priest and Levite? The very word "minister" means "to serve," which is what they deliberately and studiously avoided because it wasn't convenient.

10 It is typical for men to think they have broad leeway in the specific offices the LORD has ordained for the exercise of civil authority. However, they err in so thinking, as any ability to command another still falls under the specific commandment of "Love thy neighbor as thyself." In these cases, only those commands which rulers can lawfully issue, may rulers lawfully forgive. To quote the principle set forth by the Lord Jesus Christ "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's."

This understanding was not lost among the Jews. Though they had “lost” other doctrines and the reasoning for them, they did not lose this understanding, as the following situation plainly illustrates:

And again he entered into Capernaum after *some* days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive *them*, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken *it* up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, **Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?** And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, **Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins,** (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion. (*Mark 2:1-12*)

We cannot know how many there understood what the Lord Jesus was implicitly stating. But, He did declare to those present that He was indeed God come in the flesh by the statement “Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, *Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins,...*”. We should also note that He did not attempt to explain to them how it is that God is able to forgive sins and man is not. Neither did He attempt to explain that, as a man, how it is that He has the power to forgive sins. Rather, He simply declared that it was equally easy for Him to forgive the man's sins as it was for Him to heal that same man. This was not the only time His forgiving of a person's sins raised question:

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little. **And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?** And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. (*Luke 7:47-50*)

As they could not positively discern who He was, it raised legitimate question in the minds of those eating with Christ, as to who he was in that He directly and without hesitation forgave the woman of her sins. For those who care to discern, it was evident at the time and is evident now from the Scriptures, that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. He, being God, has the power to forgive sins. It is not that the Jews were wrong about this power and who could exercise it. Rather, they were wrong in failing to perceive the Person exercising the power. By way of explaining who we sin against, and who can actually absolve us of wrongdoing, the Lord Jesus Christ gave an illustration involving a rather foolish young man and his inheritance:

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth *to me*. And he divided unto them *his* living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, **I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,** And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, **I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight,** and am no more worthy to be called thy son. (*Luke 15:11-21*)

In the midst of the larger point about salvation, the Lord Jesus states who it is that we actually sin against. Here the young man states, not once, but twice "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee," (or, "in thy sight"), which is the clear declaration that, though he had wasted his father's money (though his inheritance, it was his father's labor that earned it), it was not his father he had sinned against, but "heaven," meaning that he had sinned against God. We should consider that the young man did not ask for acceptance from his father, but wanted only to have adequate provision, as he knew his conduct did not warrant acceptance. Moreover, since he did not ask his father to forgive him, but declared his sin to be against heaven, it is clear that his father had no capacity to forgive what he had done.

Having answered the question of who can forgive sins, and without touching on all the parallels and lessons in the above parable, we now have a subsequent issue arising from the above passages, which is:

*If God only can forgive sins, under what conditions will He forgive them when we violate our fellow man?*

In the Scripture, it is very clear that there exists only one condition in which the LORD God will forgive the sins of an individual:

*The condition of being forgiven in and through the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is Salvation.*

The following two passages are typical and authoritative concerning the forgiveness of transgression and sin. They state specifically and expressly that the Lord Jesus came and died on the cross for the express purpose of effecting the forgiveness of sin for all men everywhere.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. (*Ephesians 1:7-12*)

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. (*Acts 26:15-18*)

It is clear in the totality of Scripture that the only way that sins are actually forgiven is in Christ. Without the Lord Jesus Christ's payment of the debt that each of us owe the LORD God for transgression of His will, there exists no conveyance by which we may be forgiven. If we only look at the single aspect of grace and forgiveness, and ignore the fact that righteousness must be fulfilled (that is, all things must be balanced out or made equal, and that the LORD God will not violate His righteousness), then we miss the point that the forgiveness man receives from the LORD is strictly due to the fact that Jesus Christ paid what man owes, and therefore man can be forgiven in and through Christ. But, lest we think there is another means or conveyance by which this end can be accomplished, we are reminded that the end is not simply the forgiveness of our transgressions and sins. Instead, it is to be made acceptable in the sight of God so that we may have fellowship with our Creator.

There is yet one other condition in which forgiveness is available from the LORD God for man beyond that which occurs at the election of grace. However, that is available within the condition of salvation (which is being in Christ), and not outside of it. This is illustrated in the following passage from I John:

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and

walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. **If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.** (1 John 1:3-10)<sup>11</sup>

It is evident that forgiveness for transgression and sin is available at all times for someone who has salvation in Christ.<sup>12</sup> Without salvation, there is no forgiveness for transgression and sin, as the only means by which one can be forgiven is in and through the salvation offered by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is imperative to remember that being forgiven (or forgiveness) is not an end in itself, but is part of salvation – which is the reconciliation of man to the LORD God. Reconciliation is the end, forgiveness is simply an essential part of that reconciliation.

### The Commandments of God

We now turn to examine the commandments of the LORD God within the confines of the current question. It is necessary to restrict the examination of the commandments to these limits, as we would otherwise end up with a very broad dissertation of the commandments of God and what they are, without adequately focusing on the issue at hand. By all evidence, it is demonstrated that regardless of the transgression, we are transgressing against the LORD God every time we transgress against our fellow man. Nonetheless, the statement of King David is not yet proved true, as the statement uses the word “only” in describing who we transgress and sin against. This wording is very limiting and narrow in scope – to the point of being exclusive. Therefore, if we re-frame King David’s statement into a question, we need to answer that question:

*How is it that we sin against the LORD God and Him only?*

In every previous element, the evidence is clear that we violate the LORD God every time we act unlawfully against our fellow man. Nonetheless, there is no other exclusive statement in Scripture which shows that we transgress against the LORD God, and yet nothing against our fellow man.<sup>13</sup> Hence, we now turn to the commandments of the LORD God to determine if it is indeed possible to transgress against the LORD only, fully excluding our fellow man.

Though many will cite the Ten Commandments as part of the commandments of God that are applicable, this is not accurate. Rather, the Ten Commandments are the covenant with ancient Israel, and are not generally applicable to all men everywhere and at all times.<sup>14</sup> What we require are those commandments which are applicable to all men at all times, everywhere, without question. Thus, the only commandments we can actually point to, which govern our relations with the LORD God and our fellow man, regardless of time and place, are the first two:

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: **And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength:** this *is* the first commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:28-31)

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11 Without getting into a long article about what part of man is born again, and why I John 1:9-10 is not contradictory to I John 3:9, it is imperative to understand that the flesh (or body) is NOT born-again, but the soul is. Ref. Romans 6-7, and John 6:63, et al.

12 Here it is necessary to remember that which is written in Romans 7, I John 1:8-9 and I John 3:9: Though those born again in Christ still sin in the flesh, their soul is held in righteousness, in Christ, being born with the seed of Christ by the Holy Ghost. Hence, the forgiveness is available for sins in the flesh – which will die anyway and be resurrected in righteousness in Christ.

13 There is a rule from Scripture which states that no prophecy, teaching and/or preaching of Scripture is of any private interpretation – and neither is this one. This one is just harder to follow. In this one, the LORD God did not give us a short and quick confirmation of the doctrine. Rather, this is one which tries the heart as to whether we are willing to actually follow the LORD God or to fashion a doctrine more to our preferences.

14 It is easily observed that the content of the Ten Commandments (barring one commandment) fall within the scope of the first and second commandments quite handily. Thus, though the specifics of the Ten Commandments do not apply to men generally (that is, elements which are specific to the Ten Commandments, which are: mode of implementation, scope of application, and blessings and cursings for compliance/non-compliance, etc.), the content of the Ten Commandments does with one exception – the observation of the Sabbath.

That the second commandment is inclusive of all other possible commandments, is explained by the apostle Paul in Romans 13:

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; **and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.** (Romans 13:8-10)

Since to love thy neighbor as thyself fulfills every other conceivable commandment, it is clear that we need only focus on the first two commandments and what they demand of us.

### **The First Commandment**

There should be no question concerning the meaning of the following commandment. Equally, it should be understood that it transcends each and every period of history, and all places wheresoever man may be, as the command is to man generally, and to every individual specifically.

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: (Mark 12:30)

Here we have the Lord Jesus Christ replying to a scribe about the commandments in response to his question concerning the hierarchy of laws as to which is the greatest of all commandments. In His reply, the Lord Jesus makes clear that to love the LORD God is preeminent. In so doing, He quotes the Old Testament:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

So it is that in carrying over the Old Testament commandment into the New, which is not restricted to Israel, the LORD is showing us that this commandment, and the one following are indeed applicable to all men everywhere at all times. By quoting the commandment, the Lord Jesus Christ sets the applicability of the first commandment to all men everywhere at all times. He then immediately follows it with the second, placing no qualifiers or restrictions on it. In so doing, He sets the second commandment as also applicable to all men everywhere, at all times.

### **The Second Commandment**

At the risk of being flippant, it seems this commandment is utterly burdensome to man, in that man's typical response seems to be "Do I have to?" The short answer is "Yes, you do." There is no mistaking this commandment and its clear meaning. Like the first commandment, it does speak for itself:

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (Mark 12:30)

What is not well understood is the reasoning behind it, and the outworking of it. It is fine to read it and say it. But, we must ask:

*Why does it exist, and what does it really mean?*

In answering the first part, we need only look to the creation of man, and the fact that man is made in the image of God.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. **So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.** (Genesis 1:26-27)

But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, **which are made after the similitude of God.** (James 3:8-9)

The meaning of man being created in the image of God is covered elsewhere, and should leave no doubt that the LORD God intentionally elevated man above all creatures on the earth. Of necessity, since man is made in the image of God, and set upon earth to fulfill the LORD's will, to transgress against our fellow man is to also transgress against the LORD God.

This brings us to the second part of the question, having answered why the second commandment exists, which is "what does the second commandment really mean?" This is best answered by the passage in Romans 13:

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; **and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.** (Romans 13:8-10)

In explaining what it means to fulfill the second commandment, the apostle Paul, by the Holy Ghost, states: Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law. Without going into great detail, essentially what this means is that we, individually and collectively, are to respect the rights of our fellow man, that is: the person and all that pertains to that person. In sum, we are commanded to work to the good of everyone we meet, without doing harm to anyone else. We are, by the commandment, not free to perform actions which benefit some at the expense of others. To do so is being partial, and is iniquity and sin as the Scripture illustrates:

My brethren, **have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.** For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: **Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?** (James 2:1-4)

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: **But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.** (James 2:8-9)

Here is a hint: Though we may claim that we love everyone we meet, if we treat one individual any differently from another, we are not fulfilling the commandment. Rather, we are transgressors of the law, and in sin. It is not what we say that matters so much. Instead, it is what we do day in and day out that demonstrates where we are with respect to the commandment.

In all the foregoing passages of Scripture, we should note who is referenced as issuing the commandment in every case: There is no instance of man issuing this commandment, but the LORD God only. Hence, violations of the commandment are violations of the LORD God, His Person and will. Though we experience the effects of that violation, and that seems to be an unfortunate aspect of the situation that exists, we ought to consider our own thinking and behavior toward others and the possible effects of that thinking and subsequent behavior. If we place ourselves above others in our thinking, we will behave accordingly. Thus, we are not fulfilling the second commandment, but are dealing hypocritically with the LORD God and our fellow man.

### **If Ye Cannot Forgive....**

In examining all the above, we come to the point of raising certain questions about why it is that we are required to forgive if doing so has no actual effect of expunging guilt or relieving responsibility for transgression and sin. Moreover, since we are obviously required to forgive our fellow man, what happens if we cannot find it in ourselves to forgive someone who was injurious to us or harmed us?

*Why, if the LORD God only can forgive sins, are we told that we must forgive those who trespass against us? After all, what good are we doing them?*

Like it or not, these are legitimate questions that require answers. Strictly speaking, from the perspective of man only, it makes sense that we should forgive, as we would be releasing the one forgiven from, at a minimum, the burden of guilt. However, it is clear that man's perspective is not the only perspective applicable here. Rather,

the view of the LORD God is preeminent, and man's perspective falls behind the LORD's. That we are instructed to forgive, and informed of the consequences of not forgiving, is clearly laid out in the following passages:

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. **For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.** (Matthew 6:12-15)

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*. **And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.** (Mark 11:24-26)

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: **forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:** Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. (Luke 6:37-38)

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, **I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?** And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (Matthew 18:32-35)

*So, what is this about? Surely the LORD God doesn't require of man nonsensical things?*

No, the LORD God does not require of man silly things. Rather, what the LORD God is accomplishing through the requirement, is the setting forth of an indicator of the condition of the heart of each and every individual. If we recall, Jeremiah 17:9-10 tell us that our hearts are deceitful and wicked, and it is the LORD God only that knows and tries our hearts to allow us to perceive how we actually are. This is done so we can see ourselves for who and what we are, and hopefully begin the process of understanding that which is wrong with us, as it is how we are that condemns us. The desired end of this effort is reconciliation with the LORD God through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. In working toward that end, the LORD God has set forth indicators so that we may know where we stand. One of those indicators can be summed up in one brief question:

*Can you forgive?*

This is not just forgive for the little things and transgressions made by those we are predisposed to forgive anyway, but includes the big things, the egregious things, and transgressions by those we find most difficult to forgive. Whether we forgive or not, it is certainly not going to affect the person who offended us. It does nothing spiritually to absolve them of guilt. Depending upon whether they know or care about it, their emotions may be affected to one degree or another. But that does nothing for their standing before God.

However, forgiving or failing to forgive directly affects us – that is, the individual who is to do the forgiving. Failing to forgive reveals several things about us – to ourselves first of all. And, whether we like it or not, to those around us. What matters is whether we pay heed to what we are being shown and what we choose to do about it. While we may examine both sides of this issue, it is the failure to forgive that has the greater impact, albeit, entirely negative. Thus failing to forgive is the issue that we must examine more closely.

While failing to forgive creates many other issues such as bitterness, we are concerned in this article with only those issues that directly impact our relationship with the LORD God<sup>15</sup>, which are markers of where our heart is. The preeminent concern is what we are implicitly conveying to the LORD God about how we ourselves want to be dealt with. If we will note the following statement by the Lord Jesus Christ:

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. (Luke 6:31)

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15 Although bitterness does impact our relationship with the LORD God, it takes time for the bitterness of unresolved conflict and injury to set in. Long before then, our relationship with the LORD is impacted by our failure to forgive.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. (*Matthew 7:2*)

Here we find the practical outworking of how the LORD God interacts with man, and how we are individually. If we diligently study the Scripture, we realize that the point of the LORD's interaction with man in this way is to bring each of us to the point of understanding how we fall short of righteousness. Through this, we also come to know why we are separated from fellowship with Him. By conveying to us that He is ready to forgive, and does forgive freely, and then giving us an admonition that if we do not forgive others He will not forgive us, He is setting a clear indicator or marker to evaluate, not just our own hearts, but how we want the LORD God to deal with us about how we are. When the LORD then brings out in us our unwillingness to forgive (as that is how our hearts are), He enables us to see that for ourselves and compare, and arrive at some conclusions for ourselves:

1. The understanding that it is utterly hypocritical to ask for forgiveness when you are unwilling to give it.
2. The understanding that our hearts are not even close to the heart of the LORD.
3. The understanding that if we want forgiveness, we had better accord others the same.

We must also ask the following:

1. Do we want to be dealt with hypocritically?<sup>16</sup>
2. Do we want to be heard, and/or be close enough to the LORD God to be heard?
3. Do we actually want to be forgiven? Do we even care to be forgiven of our trespasses?

The understanding, and the questions which arise out of it, should make us cognizant that the whole issue of forgiveness is for man's (which is to say, "our") well-being and potential for reconciliation with his Creator. The understanding that man's forgiveness does nothing to absolve guilt and rectify wrong is not new, but has existed from the beginning. This is given witness by Joseph over the issue of being sold into slavery by his brothers:

And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we *be* thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them. (*Genesis 50:15-21*)

By Joseph stating to his brethren "am I in the place of God?" when they desired forgiveness, he informs them that seeking forgiveness from him is in error. To ask such of Joseph is to ask the wrong source – that it is the LORD God to whom they should look for forgiveness. Furthermore, Joseph understood long ago that the LORD God allowed what happened for good. Thus, he himself holds no ill will toward them.

In sum, the requirement the LORD God has for us to forgive others is not about the "wrong" others do to us and our supposed magnanimity in forgiving them. Rather, it is about knowing and understanding where we stand before the LORD. It becomes crystal clear that if we cannot find it in ourselves to forgive our fellow man, we can forget ever coming to Christ for forgiveness of our own transgressions of the commandments of God, and we can forget ever having reconciliation with the LORD through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

**"Even to give every man according to his heart . . ."**

Although **Appendix G: How the LORD God deals with man**, conducts a more in-depth analysis, we examine it here for the purposes of understanding the totality of our violation of the Person and will of the LORD God in the transgressions we commit.

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<sup>16</sup> Mind you, the LORD God will not deal with us in this way directly, but Satan, the fallen angels, and other men will be more than happy to fulfill the judgment and deal with us hypocritically.

In evaluating the second commandment, its implications and ends, it becomes clear that the LORD God chooses to deal with man in a particular way which fulfills some difficult objectives. We must remember the objective of the LORD is to, without violating righteousness and without violating the will of man, bring every individual to reconciliation with Him – if that individual can be brought at all. Since man has fallen and resides in the state of iniquity, and the LORD God remains righteous, to interact with man and maintain righteousness is at best, problematic. Moreover, bringing man to the point of perceiving the way he is, seems to be an insurmountable difficulty. That man has a free will to exercise within the limits of his existence is exceptionally troubling, as man can choose what he will see and acknowledge, and what he will not. Hence, we arrive at an understanding of the wisdom of the method the LORD chose and subsequently declared unto man in His word:

I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, **even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.** (*Jeremiah 17:10*)

Eat thou not the bread of *him that hath* an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: **For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he:** Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart *is* not with thee. (*Proverbs 23:6-7*)

Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? **But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man:** but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. (*Matthew 15:15-20*)

If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; **doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?** (*Proverbs 24:12*)

Here we see that the heart of each and every individual is the focus of the LORD's interaction with man. Moreover, He knows the heart of every individual and gives to that individual according to how their heart is turned. Thus, when we turn to examine the above passages in light of forgiveness, it is clear that our failing to forgive is a direct reflection of what is in our hearts. We cannot blame the other person as we, even as they, are commanded to '*love our neighbor as ourselves*' irrespective of how they behave toward us. In failing to do so, we cannot legitimately use the excuse of '*look how they treated me*' and be justified. Instead, what we are shown by the LORD God is that, in our heart, we have no desire to forgive at all, and will use any excuse that readily comes to hand to justify the failure to forgive. This state of heart and mind is invalidated as the commandment does not state '*love your neighbor as your neighbor loves you.*' Rather, the issue of your neighbor and his or her heart and mind, have no bearing on the what the LORD requires of each of us, individually. The burden placed upon your neighbor is exactly the same burden placed upon you – that is: ***love your neighbor as yourself.*** None of us, not myself, not you, nor your neighbor are free to use the excuse of '*look how they treated me*' and be justified.

**“With what measure ye mete...”**

Here we arrive at the point of understanding consequence for action in relation to our failure to forgive. Naturally, as it is an issue of our relations with our fellow man, it falls under the umbrella of the second commandment. As we are commanded to love our fellow man as ourselves, so also, logically, howsoever we wish to be treated is how we will treat our fellow man. Even so, the LORD declares this to be the case:

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. (*Matthew 7:2*)

And he said unto them, **Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you:** and unto you that hear shall more be given. (*Mark 4:24*)

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. **For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.** (Luke 6:38)

We must be careful here. Whatsoever you or I choose to levy upon another, we also call upon ourselves. It does not take much consideration to determine that the foundation of the above principle is the second commandment:

“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

We should understand that if the commandment states that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, then whatsoever we impose upon our neighbor, we are implicitly declaring we desire to have imposed upon our person. Hence, if we wish a world in which no one is held in account for their wickedness, then be permissive. If we wish to live in a harsh and unyielding society, then behave that way toward our fellow man. If we wish to live in a world of liars and thieves, then lie and steal. Thus, it should not be difficult to perceive that we are the drivers of the type of society we wish to live in. In sum, to paraphrase an old saying 'We make our bed, and we have to lie in it.' This the LORD God will certainly render to us, so that we may see what people we are, and perceive wherein we have erred.

But there is yet another aspect of this we have not considered heretofore:

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not *to take thy* coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again. **And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.** For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: **for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.** (Luke 6:27-36)

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? **Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.** (Matthew 7:9-12)

Here is where man fails to reach consistently: We are barely able to forgive those we claim to love, and the LORD God has set forth a standard that states we will not only forgive those we love, but are to treat those who hate us and are our enemies as we would like to be treated. That this is the case is without doubt, as the statement “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” leaves no room for any other interpretation. The use of the term “*men*” clearly means anyone of the race of man: friend or enemy, rich or poor, small or great. We are to treat everyone as we would like to be treated, utterly without regard to any factor or condition at all.

At this point it would seem almost superfluous to add to the above, but the LORD deems it necessary that we understand the full extent of the commandment and its relationship to the issue at hand, which is our relationship with the LORD versus our relationship with our fellow man, and who it is we transgress against. In light of this, we should note who pronounces our judgment for our misdeeds toward our fellow man. The following passage is instructive, as it addresses the issue of the slothful servant and his stewardship with the talent given him by his lord:

**And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee,** *thou* wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore

then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? (*Luke 19:22-23*)

“Love thy neighbor as thyself” and “as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” and “with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” clearly yield “out of thine own mouth will I judge thee...” It is not our fellow man that pronounces what judgment we wish to be judged with, but the LORD God rendering unto us our wishes and desires. The servant, by his actions and justification of those actions, declared to his lord what he would have done to him. The servant knew his lord expected return on investment, and yet the servant deliberately hid and did nothing with the responsibility delivered to him. So as the servant rendered no good to his lord, his lord will render no good to the servant. After all, the servant asked for it.

So that there is no mistake in this, this same principle is repeated to the spiritual leadership of Israel by the Lord Jesus Christ:

But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast *him* out of the vineyard, and slew *him*. **When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out *his* vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.** Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? **Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.** (*Matthew 21:37-43*)

Notice who pronounces the judgment which is rendered: “**They say unto him**, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out *his* vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.” To which the Lord replied: “**Therefore say I unto you**, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” thus confirming that He chooses to deal with man in such a way as to allow we ourselves to become our own judges. If we judge unjustly, we reap the fruits of that back on our own head. Thus, what happens to us is of our own making, even though it seems that this is not the case. However, if we bother to accurately examine the entirety of any situation, we would see that what comes on us is actually how we are. The only reason we cannot see it is our willful blindness to our own heart and motives for the things we think and do.

However complete the above may seem with regard to the issue of who we sin against, the LORD God adds a final point of argument to demonstrate to us where we stand in the matter:

*It is a point of law that the one who suffers the offense is the one who has standing to take action before the court.*

This point has clear support in Scripture, as any examination of the laws and judgments given to Israel show. Moreover, this is easily understandable and logical, and virtually no one has argument with this. To argue this point is to take that which is not rightfully ours and usurp the place of another. However, man being the fallen creature that he is, has difficulty restraining himself to be bound by this principle. In case we doubt, a study of how World War I started suffices. But whether we agree or not, it remains that the LORD God clearly and plainly removes retribution out of our hands. So that we may understand without question, the following verses are express:

**Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me:** I will render to the man according to his work.  
(*Proverbs 24:29*)

**Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves,** but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, **Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.** (*Romans 12:19*)

Here we are plainly admonished that the taking of vengeance is not our place. The reason for this is quite clear: It is not our commandment and law that they violate when you or I are assaulted, but the LORD's commandment of “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Thus, we are given no part or parcel in repaying another for the transgression

they commit against us, as it is not really us they are transgressing against, but the LORD God. For our understanding, the LORD gave the apostle James to deliver the following:

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of *his* brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. **There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy:** who art thou that judgest another? (*James 4:11-12*)

Despite what the above passage seems to say in isolation<sup>17</sup>, we are not precluded from rendering judgment, but from rendering judgment apart from the commandment. In short, we are not to render judgment according to our dictates, but according to the judgments of the LORD God as instructed by the Lord Jesus Christ:

Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? **Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.** (*John 7:22-24*)

And again:

I can of mine own self do nothing: **as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.** (*John 5:30*)

Accordingly, we are admonished of two specific precepts which we must understand and hold:

1. Without exception, there is no other lawgiver than the LORD God.
2. We are never to judge by our own standards and understanding, but wholly look to the LORD God and His word for what judgment ought to be.

To do otherwise is to usurp the position and authority of the LORD God and step out of our place. The clear result of that behavior is nothing less than condemnation.

## Conclusion

In examining the totality of the issue, it is clear that the LORD God preempts man in every way. Though it may seem to be the roundabout way to get there, the statement “There is one lawgiver” must be analyzed and explained so no excuse exists for not understanding that it is the LORD God and Him only that we sin against when we do any ill to our fellow man. Clearly, logically, by the Scripture one cannot transgress where no law exists, and one cannot transgress and sin against another if that other is not an issuer or author of the law.

Essentially, this issue is misunderstood due to two points: First, it does not appear, though plainly written, that the statement by King David is absolute, as Scripture speaks of one man sinning against another. However, that is to ignore the fact that Scripture does contain more than one perspective, and when it speaks of one sinning against another, it is from man's perspective. Second, it is because man primarily focuses on himself and his own issues, almost to the exclusion of any other perspective. Moreover, we are far too willing to grant ourselves a pass and view ourselves as better than what we actually are. So it is that we unduly focus on the wrong done to us, and ignore the wrong we do to others, ignoring our own heart and thoughts, thus exercising selective blindness in the matter.

We ought to understand that the LORD God is dealing with every other person even as He is dealing with us. He has not, despite what it seems, released anyone from responsibility for the thoughts of the heart and mind, and the subsequent actions in the flesh. Rather, as he deals with them he renders to them also, even to their utter condemnation. They will not be able to justify the violation of His commandment, even as you or I are not able to justify the violation of His commandment.

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<sup>17</sup> It is ludicrous to suggest that we not judge. A brief but unbiased study of the Scripture demonstrates that the ability to judge is intrinsic to man and we cannot help but judge.

In this matter, what the LORD did was insure that we add transgression to transgression when we take it upon ourselves to usurp His authority and exercise vengeance or take retribution into our own hands. Rather, we are, if we wish to remain blameless, to do as the Lord Jesus Christ instructed Peter:

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.  
*(Matthew 18:21-22)*

We should ever remember what the LORD God told Moses when Moses asked the LORD to take away his life and take him out of the Book of Life:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.  
*(Exodus 32:33)*

Despite Moses' pity party, the LORD used the incident to instruct Moses and everyone else who reads those words, that with Him and Him alone rests the determination of who ends up where, and what is done with them. The LORD God alone is lawgiver and judge. It is His determination how He will deal with man. It is exclusively His determination by what law and standard He will hold man to account. Nonetheless, He is ever merciful to man in letting him know plainly what that standard is.

*Finis*