

HOW JESUS
Transforms
THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS

by
EDMUND P. CLOWNEY
with
REBECCA CLOWNEY JONES

R&R
P U B L I S H I N G
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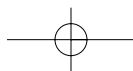
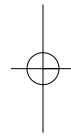
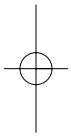
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FOREWORD

This book, like all my father's work, was born of his passion for the church and for Jesus, the Lord of the church. This particular volume began as a series of adult Sunday school lessons at Christ the King Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas, where my father accepted a two-year, full-time position as associate pastor at the age of 82. At the time, he was writing a longer volume on another subject entirely, but the needs of the church took precedence and he began the series on the Ten Commandments. Both projects moved along slowly, and as time took its toll on my father's energy and concentration, it became apparent that he should finish the shorter work before turning his attention to the longer.

In 2002, my parents moved to Charlottesville, Virginia, where my father took up an honorary post as theologian in residence at Trinity Presbyterian Church, a church he had served in a similar position from 1984 to 1990. When I visited my parents, my father and I always discussed his writing projects. His "write tight" style had gotten a little too tight, and he asked me to aerate this text, to smooth out transitions and to add some illustrations. In November 2004, we worked together to flesh out some of the shorter chapters, using the notes from his Sunday school lessons. I took the manuscript back to California, leaving my dad free to work on the longer book. When I finished the changes and additions, I sent it to him for approval. My editorial touch is more present in this book than it was in the one or two others he

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asked me to look over. However, my father read and approved all changes to the manuscript and in early February, 2005, I sent the files to the publisher.

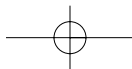
On February 26, while getting up to help my mother with the Saturday vacuuming, my father fell and broke his sacrum. During his consequent hospitalization, complications arose that eventually overwhelmed him. On March 8, the same day I flew from California to be with my parents, I received e-mail confirmation that the manuscript had been accepted for publication. That evening, when I arrived at the University of Virginia hospital, I gave my dad the good news. His face brightened and he gave me a thumbs-up sign. "Dad," I said, "you've got to get well now so you can sign the contract." But it was his wife of 63 years, Jean Clowney, who signed the contract. On Palm Sunday (March 20, 2005, at 6:30 p.m. EST), with his head cradled in my mother's arms and his family praying by his side, my father left us to worship his beloved Christ in heaven, with the angels and that "great cloud of witnesses"—the many faithful Christians already with their Savior. It has thus been my sad honor to complete a few editorial odds and ends and to watch over the process of getting this book to press.

In the last weeks of his life, my dad (never known for his musical talent) made a reputation for himself as a singer. Comforted by the hymns sung by his family and his friends from Trinity Church, he was so eager to sing Christ's praises himself that he sang in the emergency ward, right through his oxygen mask. By the time he was settled into his hospital room, the nurses were whispering, "That's the man who was singing in the emergency ward!" My father's voice did not end with his death. This volume, with the others he

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wrote, will sing on: "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you" (Ps. 22:22).

Rebecca Clowney Jones
Escondido, California
January 2007



PREFACE

Each summer in southwest Philadelphia, where I was raised in a row house before the days of air-conditioning, I attended vacation Bible school at Westminster Presbyterian Church. There, when I was ten years old, I worked hard to memorize the Westminster Shorter Catechism, so that I could receive my Scofield Reference Bible—with a real leather cover! I used it for years, gleaning much from its notes. But as I read and studied that Bible, I came upon a confusing note about the Lord’s Prayer. It told me not to pray the Lord’s Prayer because it was not for the church age. If I used it, I would be praying on “legal ground.” This prayer was given only for the millennial reign of Christ, when Christians would again be back under the law. Only then could we pray to have our sins forgiven on the basis of our righteousness in forgiving our debtors.

That advice didn’t sit right with me. After all, I had just memorized all those Shorter Catechism questions about the law of God and the Lord’s Prayer. The catechism assumed that I was still to take seriously God’s commandments: Q. 42: “What is the sum of the Ten Commandments?” Answer: “The sum of the Ten Commandments is: To love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind and our neighbor as ourselves.” The Catechism also recommended the Lord’s Prayer. In relation to forgiving others, the Catechism had taught me: “We pray, That God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enabled

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from the heart to forgive others.”¹ I was left puzzling over the question: What place *do* the Ten Commandments now have in the Christian life?

THE SCOFIELD BIBLE AND ITS INFLUENCE

Until the Scofield Reference Bible was published, most Bible study had been shaped by doctrinal formulations, supported by proof texts. The Scofield Bible, however, paid attention to Bible history and the epochs or periods in God’s revelation. As a ten-year old, I did not understand the differences between Dr. Scofield and the men who prepared the Catechism that I had worked so hard to memorize. The Scofield Bible taught dispensationalism, emphasizing the differences between periods in biblical history. Actually, the idea of periods or eras was not foreign to the Westminster standards, since the Westminster Divines emphasized the periods of salvation history, even using the word “dispensation.” The Westminster Confession distinguishes between the covenant of works, made with Adam in the Garden of Eden, and the covenant of grace “wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ. . . .”

God’s grace runs straight through the Old and New Testaments, as a constant, inexhaustible flow. Yet God administered his covenant of grace differently in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel. The Confession concludes the chapter on God’s covenants by saying, “There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.” The Confession recognized that God *administers* the way of salvation in particular periods, using the word “dispensation” in the sense of “administration.”

On this issue, J. Nelson Darby, a Plymouth Brethren scholar in England, went further than the Westminster Assembly. He

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taught that dispensations differed in *substance*, and that different time periods therefore offered different *means* of salvation. In Darby's view, the Mosaic covenant was one of *works*—keeping the law under this dispensation would earn salvation. The covenant with Abraham, however, was a covenant of *promise*. This is the more radical view of different "ages" that I was discovering as I read my Scofield Bible. According to this approach, the Old Testament writers could not foresee the "church age." Their prophecy clock stopped when the church age began. When the Jews rejected Jesus, a parenthesis began in the history of prophecy. The covenant of law was suspended, and will return only when Jesus comes again in the millennium, at which point salvation will again be by works—in obedience to Christ, who will be reigning on the throne of David.

Such a reading of the Scriptures has been called the "dispensational" view. This view strongly emphasizes the differences between each era. Although it has often been dismissed (for it does have dangers, as we will see), it did serve a purpose for many Christians by giving them a valuable sense that the Bible presented a worldview. To read the Bible correctly, one has to understand its overarching structure. As I matured in my own faith, I came to see that not everyone understood the Bible's structure in the way the Scofield Bible presented it. Many argued forcibly that grace must always be the source of salvation. As time went on, many dispensational teachers began to change their views from those of Darby on that central point.

REFORMED-DISPENSATIONAL DIALOGUE

That subject now seems out of date. Many Christians today do not know what the word "dispensational" means, or what importance it still plays in our thinking about the world. It has had

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great influence, however, on the way Christians think about the law in particular, and also about other aspects of the Christian life. There was a time when dispensationalists and Reformed Christians had little time for each other. Recently, however, they have found more common ground.

Realizing that God's grace must always operate in salvation, many dispensationalists no longer teach that salvation was by works in the Old Testament. This realization has opened dialogue with Reformed seminaries, which had always vigorously opposed dispensationalism on this point. Another factor encouraging dialogue is the growing appreciation for Biblical Theology in Reformed seminaries. Reformed thinkers came to see that the Bible does not have the form of a dictionary. The Bible presents stories, stories that are all bound up in one, over-arching story. So, as dispensationalists affirm that God's grace is the fountain of salvation in both Testaments, and as Reformed thinkers teach about the history of salvation, both camps have come together to appreciate the unfolding riches of God's revelation in Scripture.

"Biblical Theology" is the term now used in the special sense of theology that is not only biblical, but is drawn from the history of revelation in the Bible. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* followed the topical method, beginning with the question, "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." The teaching of the Bible is summarized topically: "The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man."

Biblical Theology, in contrast, summarizes the teaching of the Bible by following the history of God's revelation in the periods or epochs of God's work in creation and redemption. Biblical Theology follows the *story* of the Bible rather than the *topics*

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found in the Bible. As a discipline of study, Biblical Theology was brought to this country from Europe, particularly Germany and the Netherlands. At Princeton Seminary, Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) taught the discipline to students who later taught at Princeton Seminary and Westminster Seminary.

THE NEVER-ENDING STORY

From the book of Genesis on, the Bible follows the story of the Seed of the promise—the Son of the woman who must come at last to crush the head of the Serpent. To trace the history of redemption in the Bible story, we must recognize the periods or epochs of that story. Dispensationalism rightly recognized differences between these periods. However, it erred when it allowed the differences to break the continuity of the covenant story.

I have touched on the differences between my Scofield Bible and the Westminster Catechism, but my original question remains. What role *does* the law play in this history of redemption? If the law of Moses cannot offer salvation by works, how does it prepare for the coming of Christ? Why did God demand obedience to his law, if it could never serve to bring us to him?

Jesus showed that the law revealed by God in the Old Testament was itself a kind of prophecy, a part of the history of the covenant. That history, including the law, pointed to what was to come. In this sense, Jesus fulfilled the law not only by keeping it perfectly for us, but also by transforming our understanding of it. Christ not only obeyed the law, but also displayed its true meaning and depth.

Take the Great Commandment, for example: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). Jesus transformed both that commandment and the second like it: “Love your neighbor as

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yourself” (Matt. 22:39). Jesus’ interpretation of this law and his application of it in his own life is radical. He redefines everything from the term neighbor to the meaning of loving God. Jesus’ love for God the Father was so great that he was willing to be accursed by the Father in order to carry out his Father’s plan of salvation for those the Father had given him. Jesus’ love for his neighbor was so great that he gave up his life for those “neighbors” (who hated him). Such a deep and radical notion of the law shows us the true demand of the commandment: to pick up a cross and follow him. As Jesus transforms this greatest of all commandments, he shows us a new level of interpretation for all of God’s law. Without Jesus, we can have no true understanding of the law.

JESUS TRANSFIGURES THE LAW ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

When Peter, James, and John were blinded by Jesus’ glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, they also saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. But neither Moses (the great lawgiver) nor Elijah (the most powerful of the prophets) added any word of explanation for Jesus’ disciples. The Father’s voice from the cloud said it all: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” (Mark 9:7). Jesus did not come to supplement or to explain the law, nor only to live by it. He came to *fulfill* the law, in the deepest sense. To hear the Father’s will, we must hear Jesus. He fulfills and transforms all the law and all the prophets. Indeed, he *is* God’s new law!



THE COVENANT LORD FULFILLS THE LAW

Jesus and the Ten Commandments



In late August and early September of 2003 the national media followed the story of the “Ten Commandments Judge.” Judge Roy Moore, then the chief justice of Alabama, was dismissed from his office because he refused to remove a large stone monument bearing the words of the Ten Commandments from the Alabama state judicial center in Montgomery, Alabama. Judge Moore was ousted in response to a suit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Jay Sekulow of the American Center for Law and Justice had responded to an earlier suit by the American Civil Liberties Union with an ingenious defense. A granite copy of the Ten Commandments had been placed in a park in Elkhardt, Indiana. When the ACLU brought suit, Sekulow did not plead that the Ten Commandments are not the creed of any particular church, but only a general statement of morality that has been part of Western political history from its beginning. Such a plea

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is no longer acceptable in American courts, where the wall between church and state has put each body into its own hermetically sealed chamber. Instead, Sekulow argued that the slab's purpose was not religious, but secular and commercial. It had been installed by Cecil B. DeMille to advertise the Hollywood movie in which Charlton Heston as Moses came down Mount Sinai, saw the idolatry of Israel, and threw down the stone slabs of the Ten Commandments. How ironic that God's commandments, given to be a reflection of the divine character, should be defended in our courts by eviscerating them not only of their religious implications, but even of their moral ones!

Those who brought suit were right when they recognized the religious nature of the Ten Commandments. Had the ACLU been able to find a lawyer who knew his Bible, it could easily have proved the commandments' inextricable link to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! (Mr. Sekulow knows that, too, but his defense shows that he knows our courts as well—courts that require public atheism as the meaning of the separation of church and state.)

A TREATY DOCUMENT BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE

The context and the text of the Ten Commandments are unlike any other moral code or legal document. They are written to establish the separate and unique identity of the people with whom God established a covenant agreement. The Ten Commandments are a treaty document, written to define and secure the oath of loyalty that Israel swore to God. Like many treaties, this one concerned a nation, in this case the nation that God had delivered from Egypt to lead to the Promised Land.

Our society observes treaties of various sorts. There are business treaties, treaties between countries, and binding

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legal agreements between individuals—such as the marriage treaty (though it has lost its binding nature in our nation’s thinking). The Ten Commandments are part of a treaty that God made with his people. As scholar Meredith Kline has shown, the Ten Commandments in Exodus (repeated in Deuteronomy) have a literary form common to ancient Near Eastern treaty texts. In a preamble, the suzerain lord gives his name and claims the loyalty of his vassal. He cites the benefits he has bestowed, and states the treaty terms and stipulations. One demand is central. The vassal must be exclusively committed to the suzerain ruler. There may be no dealing with any other king, nor may the terms of the treaty be altered. The gods are summoned as witnesses to the treaty text. Faithfulness to the treaty will bring rewards, but treaty-breaking will bring the wrath of the great king.

This treaty pattern is followed in Exodus 20, and the treaty is renewed in Deuteronomy 5. The Lord, however, does not need to call on the gods of the nations to witness his treaty; the tablets of the law are in themselves his witness. The ark of the covenant is called the Ark of Witness (Ex. 25:16; 40:20 EPC). From the mountain, Sinai, God speaks the words of the law as his testimony, and he writes his treaty on the tablets of stone he provides (Deut. 4:10–14). The law is God’s *Torah*, his covenant manual for life in the land.

In Deuteronomy, Moses tells Israel that when they enter the land, they are to set six of the tribes on Mount Gerizim to declare all the blessings that will follow obedience to the covenant law. The other six tribes are to recite from Mount Ebal the curses that will scatter them among the nations if they are disobedient (Deut. 28). Ultimately, however, in spite of Israel’s unfaithfulness, God’s purposes of mercy will not fail. God’s final blessing will rest on his redeemed people (Deut. 4:30–31; 30:6).

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As the history of Israel unfolded, the prophecies found in the law were realized. There were renewals of the covenant—at Shechem under Joshua (Josh. 24); at the coronation of David (2 Sam. 5); at the dedication of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8); and at the Passover celebrated under Josiah (2 Kings 23). Had Israel remained faithful, such renewals would not have been necessary. But as their faithless rebellion ran its course, they constantly disobeyed, repented, reformed, and fell again into sin.

After Solomon, the kingdom was divided, and Jeroboam, to emphasize the independence of his kingdom, repeated the idolatry of the golden calf at Sinai. The Lord sent prophets, early and often. Elijah led the Lord’s attack on the worship of Baal, calling down fire from heaven, but fleeing in discouragement from the wrath of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab. Jehu’s sword and Elisha’s ministry continued the Lord’s judgment on baalism. At last God used the Assyrians to conquer Samaria and sweep the Israelite idolaters into exile. While God’s people were in exile, the prophet Ezekiel described the adultery of the two sisters: Oholah (Israel) and Oholibah (Judah). Using graphic images of adultery, he condemned the sin of Judah as even worse than the idolatries of Israel (Ezek. 23).

THE KING’S PROMISE

The history of Israel is, indeed, an indictment of man’s inclination to evil. Yet God had promised that his covenant love would triumph. He would go far beyond the physical signs he gave his people to remind them of his person and character. He would circumcise their hearts and keep his covenant pledge (Deut. 4:20–40; 7:6–9; 8:2–6; 10:12–22). When Solomon dedicated the temple, he blessed God for keeping all his promises to Moses. The time of blessing had been followed by the time

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of judgment, as God's predicted wrath fell on Israel for its sin. But God did not abandon his people to judgment. In his mercy, he promised salvation in the "latter days" (Deut. 4:30 KJV).

Ezekiel's vision saw the people of God in a great valley. The people were not gathered in joyful, worshiping assembly, however. They were all dead. In fact, their bodies had decomposed, and even their skeletons were not intact. All that remained of God's assembled people were their bones, scattered over the valley floor. "Son of man, can these bones live?" the Lord asked his prophet (Ezek. 37:3). Ezekiel was too wise to answer in the negative. He replied, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." On God's command, Ezekiel prophesied, an earthquake shook the valley, and the bones assembled. A well-known spiritual has it: "the head bone connected to the neck bone; the neck bone connected to the backbone—hear the Word of the Lord!"

Nothing short of resurrection life can deliver lost sinners from the wrath their sins deserve. Without it, they are no more able to live than could those heaps of dry and scattered bones. When Nicodemus did not understand the new birth, Jesus expressed surprise. How could this teacher be unaware of Ezekiel's prophecy that God would sprinkle defiled sinners with cleansing water and give them new hearts, and his Spirit (Ezek. 36:24–27)?

God's promise of salvation will include Sodom, Samaria, and the Philistines when God forgives all that his people have done (Ezek. 16). During the dark times of God's judgment, the prophets speak not only of restoration, but of renewal. God will preserve a remnant, and will restore and renew his people. No human king, not even David, could blow a trumpet to raise the dead. In Tolkien's fantasy *The Return of the King*, Aragorn, the rightful king, enters the underworld and summons the dead to follow him into battle. Tolkien's picture brings to mind the army

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that Christ leads from the death valley in his resurrection. Only the Lord himself, the true King, can bring the promised salvation. The situation is too desperate for anyone else to remedy; the promises are too great for any other to fulfill.

THE KING AS PROMISE-KEEPER

As the Lord's redemption unfolds in the writings of the prophets, we are dazzled by the glory of the promised fulfillment. The promises, as always, are too good to be true! "Come, buy wine and milk without money" (Isa. 55:1); "there will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations" (Ezek. 37:22); "I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land" (Jer. 32:41). Hundreds of such promises spill from the pages of the prophets.¹ But the key to their fulfillment is that God himself must come; his coming will bring victory and glory beyond description.

Isaiah gives us the divine names of the Servant of the Lord, and tells us of his saving work and triumph. His work will restore all that has been ruined and destroyed. He will gather and heal his own scattered sheep of Israel, and judge the shepherds that have so cruelly mistreated them (Ezek. 34:11–31). He will end injustice and oppression; as he moves into battle against evil, armed with his breastplate of justice and his helmet of salvation, he will deliver his people by his own saving righteousness (Isa. 59:15–21). Having conquered, he will spread his banquet table and gather not only the scattered of Israel, but also hosts of Gentiles to the feast on his holy hill. Egyptians will go to Assyria to worship the Lord, and Assyrians will go to Egypt. Gentile, enemy nations will be named as God's own people: "Blessed be Egypt my people,

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Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance” (Isa. 19:25). He will bring at last a new heaven and earth (Isa. 66:22).

The Lord who restores will also renew. The Servant of the Lord dispenses from the treasure of God’s Word truths both new and old. In Christ the old things take on new life and new meaning. Yet, in him, all that is new is also old. When Jesus arrives to fulfill Old Testament prophecy, he brings a New Covenant, the kingdom of the King. He does not, however, wipe out the old. Rather, his coming brings the dawn that the Old Testament promised. Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For, Amen, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17–18 EPC).² We always put “Amen” at the end of a prayer or doxology. Jesus puts “Amen” at the beginning of his statements, giving his words the solemnity of an oath. No need for red letters! What Jesus taught was new, in contrast to rabbinical teaching from the law: “You have heard that it was said to those of old . . . but I say to you” (Matt. 5:21–22 NKJV).

JESUS: THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

Yet Jesus insists on the continuation of the Old Testament covenant. Jesus says that the very letters of the law will not pass away until all is fulfilled. As long as heaven and earth exist, the law will endure. Jesus does not speak only of endurance, but also of fulfillment. We tend to think of the law as rules to *obey*, but Jesus sees the law as something to *fulfill*. Matthew’s gospel often speaks of a particular Old Testament passage being fulfilled. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, for both the Prophets and the Law prophesied until

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John (Matt. 11:13). John brought the last prophecies pointing to Jesus; with Jesus the fulfillment came.

Jesus fulfills the law by obeying it, but also by revealing its promise. When Jesus comes, the law takes on a different meaning and function. Its role of prophecy ends, for Jesus is the end (the *telos*, the goal) of the law. For this reason, once Jesus has come, God's people will never think of the law in quite the same way. We must not miss this *prophetic* function of the law. As we have seen, God's law is not given as an abstract moral code. Such a code would not be prophetic. God's law is given in the course of his saving work, and the whole of that work is leading us to Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of the law came when Jesus came and will continue until Jesus comes again at the end of this age.

Jesus fulfilled the law, then, not simply by obeying it, but by transforming it. Matthew's gospel shows us how Jesus transformed the law in his teaching. To understand this, let us think of how Jesus transforms the summary of the law.

Jesus makes astounding statements about the law. In interpreting our love for neighbors, he has the audacity to include our enemies in the definition of *neighbor* (Matt. 5:43–48)! What about his definition of our love of God? In Jesus we see how the law of love is transformed, for the perfect love of God is the love in which he gave his one and only Son to die for sinners. It is further defined as the love of the Son for the Father. In love for the Father, Jesus took the cup the Father gave him in Gethsemane, and drank it to the depths as he hung on the cross. It is in love for God that Jesus gave himself, but it is also in love for us. Only as we begin to taste and understand that love can we realize what it means to love without reserve. How profoundly Jesus deepens and transforms the love commandment at the cross!

Jesus and the Ten Commandments

In the pages that follow, we will consider how Jesus Christ transforms each of the Ten Commandments in his fulfillment of them.

STUDY QUESTIONS**Think It Through:**

1. Jesus said that not one jot or tittle (the smallest stroke or the smallest letter) in the law would pass away until all was fulfilled. How did Jesus fulfill the law? How did it point to him?
2. What is the "first and greatest commandment"? How did Jesus fulfill it?
3. What is the "second like it"? How did Jesus fulfill it?
4. How did Jesus deepen the first commandment as he fulfilled it?
5. The climax of Old Testament prophecy is the promise that God himself must come. What made it necessary for the Lord to come?

Take It to Heart:

1. In what ways do you struggle with the place of God's law in your life as a Christian?
2. How has your understanding of the Ten Commandments changed as you have matured in your Christian life?
3. If you have been a Christian for a long time, do you feel as if you are better or worse at keeping God's commandments?
4. Do you feel at times as if the Lord is distant from you? At what times do you most feel his presence?

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5. Is the Lord near you when you are not aware of his presence?
6. What experiences in your life have shown you that the Lord is truly with you?
7. What comfort do you derive in reflecting on Jesus' fulfillment of the Ten Commandments?