

Call to Obedience #328
 PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
www.schultze.org

Righteousness and peace have kissed each other—Psalm 85:10.

The Box Yet Speaketh

By Pastor Reimar A. C. Schultze

There is a distorted relationship between law and grace in contemporary theology. In the **Ark of the Covenant** God has defined the law/grace relationship once and for all. Confusion about this relationship vanishes once we look at the ark and its furniture through the eyes of Hebrew theology, as the Apostle Paul did.

At the heart of Hebrew (and Christian) theology is a little box, the Ark of the Covenant. It is the most important box ever built, designed by God Himself. It was only 3 3/4 feet long, 2 1/4 feet wide and 2 1/2 feet high, but what a mighty little box! God said, if you want to meet Me, meet Me at the box! It is imperative that you understand this box in order to understand God's covenant. Pagans had shrines in the mountains where they worshiped their gods. Many Jews also created high places to worship and sacrifice to God. But once God's box was in place, all the high places were no longer acceptable places for worship; the knowledge of God and of salvation, and the meeting place with God was at the box. Sad to say that many Christians no longer frequent the Lord's sanctuaries on Sundays, but they have replaced that by making Sunday Christian TV programs their high places. Isn't it wonderful that God made a way to meet with man? Hallelujah! Oh! how he loves us. Did you meet with God this morning to offer the incense of prayer and praise to Him?

Exodus 25:10-22 shows us God's design for the box:

And thou shalt make an ark of shittim wood: ... ¹¹And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about. . ¹⁶And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony, which I shall give thee. ¹⁷And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold... ¹⁸And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold... ¹⁹And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end . . . ²⁰And the cherubims shall stretch forth *their* wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces *shall look* one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. ²¹And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. ²²And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which *are* upon the ark of the testimony, of all *things* which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

The ark was called the "*Ark of the Covenant*" (Deu. 10:8). Here God would meet with man - **not unconditionally**, but **conditionally** - on the basis of a covenant, a binding agreement between two parties. In ancient pagan history when a covenant was made between two parties, each person would cut his wrist. And then, as the two parties clasped their bleeding hands, a binding agreement was made that each would be absolutely loyal one to the other. The two parties would become as one man. No one or nothing was ever to come between them. Each would be willing to give his life for the other.

The covenant of the ark is also a "*blood covenant*" (Ex. 24:8). Once a year the blood of a lamb was sprinkled on the mercy seat pointing to the sacrificial blood of the Lamb of God. The mercy seat refers to the cross on which Jesus would die. The blood has three vital functions: to cleanse, to seal the covenant, and to make holy. The ultimate purpose is holiness, that we might be one with God. Herein is the promise, the contract: as God in Christ would give His life for you, you will give your life for Him. Giving up our lives is a requirement for discipleship. Jesus said, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me*" (Luke 9:23). Anything short of this commitment will not bring us into God's covenant. Paul says, "*Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God*" (Rom. 12:1). There was a cross for Jesus; there is a cross for you. God's covenant requires the ultimate sacrifice of both parties.

It is also significant that God placed only **one thing in the box**: "*the words of the covenant*" which were The Ten Commandments written on two tablets of stone (Ex. 34:28). Now hear this: as there can be no covenant without blood, there can be no covenant without law! All covenants are based on fixed terms or "laws". Jesus' covenant with you is based on law. That is why Jesus said, "*If you love me, keep my commandments*" (John 14:15; 15:10). In the ark, God wed the doctrine of grace to the doctrine of law forever. And again: "*He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him*" (1 John 2:4). There is a legal obligation buried in our love relationship with our Lord.

The two essential elements of God meeting with man are **blood and law**! Contemporary Christians understand the blood part, but when it comes to the law as part of the covenant there are misconceptions and confusion. Therefore it is time to talk about law.

1. Logic, politics and history tell us that you cannot have a credible relationship between two parties without law. Everything in the natural, human and spiritual sense is based on law. To think that men can have and keep a relationship with God without law is absurd.

2. God placed only the tablets of the covenant into the ark. (For a short time the ark also held Moses' rod, and a pot of manna. But God did not put them there originally and they were not there in the days of Solomon. 2 Chr. 5:10). Remember that I'm bringing things down to their simplest formula, but not beyond that. The blood and the law represent mercy and truth. The blood was sprinkled **on** the mercy seat, which was on top of the box, the tablets of the covenant were **in** the box. Under the mercy seat was the law. There was no conflict between mercy and truth - nor is there any in Pauline

theology. That is why the psalmist proclaimed with exuberance: *"Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other"* (Psa. 85:10). When Israel left Egypt she received an understanding about the blood of the lamb. There every home that was under the blood was saved from the angel of death. But as Israel became a nation under God she had to understand that a covenant is based on law as well. Hence God gave the Law to Israel on Mt. Sinai. Salvation theology which is not based on law leads to spiritual promiscuity. God will not have it. That is why He later wrote these laws into our hearts to make them part of our very moral fiber (He. 2:10). Hallelujah!

3. It is necessary to understand Paul's doctrine of law. First we need to separate Law from law, that is: The ten moral laws **in** the box from the 613 ceremonial laws **outside** the box. The laws inside the ark were permanent, written by God's own finger. The rest of the laws were not written in stone; they were written down by Moses and hence were called the laws of Moses. They would expire when Jesus came. After Jesus came and fulfilled all the law, He did not hold Moses' laws (the ceremonial laws) to be binding for His followers. He kept the Ten Commandments (Laws) as part of the covenant, He **amplified** them in the Sermon on the Mount and He **applied** them in His personal ministry. When the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18ff) asked what he should do to be saved, Jesus confronted him with the Law, *"Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor thy father and mother"*. These laws are for relating to man. Then Jesus questioned him about the laws for relating to God; were there other gods in his life? Jesus showed the ruler that he was in violation of the commandment to have no other gods before the one true God. The ruler left unrepentant. You can't break God's Laws and maintain a relationship with Jesus. By contrast, Jesus saw that the adulterous woman (John 8:3ff), had a broken, penitent heart. She had broken the seventh commandment, but because of her repentance Jesus became the *mercy seat* for her. Then Jesus called her to a covenant relationship with these words: *"go, and sin no more"* (John 8:3ff). We need the law, we need the mercy seat, and we need the covenant: The law first to convict, the mercy seat to pardon and the covenant to keep us on the way of blessings.

After Pentecost, Peter had a vision of a net filled with all kinds of animals. This taught Peter that the laws of Moses were no longer binding (Acts 10:9ff). Later on, Peter told this vision to the Jerusalem Council and there the church separated the moral laws from the ceremonial laws once and for all (Acts 15). The Holy Spirit instructed the apostle Paul that no one could enter the kingdom of God, have fellowship with Jesus, without keeping the covenant Laws (1 Cor. 6:9,10): *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God"*. Five of the Ten Commandments are here.

The backbone of these Ten Laws is the First and Second Commandments - *to love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself*. So the ten laws are not harsh, **they are laws of love wrapped in love!** If you have other gods or if you use

His name in vain, then you do not have love. If you lie, steal, and even kill your neighbor, you do not have love.

Oh, my friend, Martin Luther got the vision of the ark! He saw that mercy and truth are not enemies but brothers kissing each other. He believed and the Reformation began. Yes, THE ARK IS THE GOSPEL. (And the carrying staves of the ark where never to be removed. For this gospel was to be carried to the entire world.)

When Jesus died on the cross we see the beauty of the ark as the blood of our Savior fell upon the mercy seat (the cross). While the cherubims were looking on in stunned wonderment, the law was satisfied, God's holiness was vindicated and the sinner was made just. The box yet speaketh!

Call to Obedience #328
PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
www.schultze.org