



Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, **IF** ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, **IF** ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. (Deut 11:26-28)

The little two letter word, IF, provides such a grand hope and promise; but it also carries with it a devastating damnation. It provides a certain response to a given action, thought, or word. It is said that the Persian commander of the armies under Xerxes sent the Spartan King Leonidas a message which said; *If I come down there and defeat your armies, I will waste your cities and take away your wealth*, to which Leonidas simply responded, "**IF!**"

Perhaps the greatest poet of Great Britain in the last century was Rudyard Kipling. He wrote this meaningful poem for his son, John, entitled, "**IF:**"

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

A Choice of Kipling's Verse (1943)

My father used to say, "If grasshoppers could carry a 45 pistol, chickens would not peck at his bottom." Of course, that is a rather large IF that requires the satisfaction of a miraculous condition!

The word 'if' is most often used as a conjunctive part of speech. It joins one condition to another expressed in two separate clauses or phrases. The addition of the word 'if' completely changes the meaning of a statement; i.e. "I will go with you to New York," is a statement fully vested with a promise; but, if we add the qualifying word 'if' at the end, then some condition is required to make the promise happen. "I will go to New York with you if you will buy the tickets." That is what God does in His Holy Word and in the referenced verses above from Deuteronomy.

Knowing that the Old Testament is a Book of the Laws and Prophets, and what the Law means to the sinner, perhaps you may recall the profound meaning of its final word? Hint: the answer may be found in Galatians 3:10 – *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.* (Gal 3:10) So do you now remember the concluding word in the Old Testament? Yes, it is CURSE. "*And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a CURSE.*" (Mal 4:6) Now, since we know that no one can be sinless in those things written in the Book of the Laws, we will also know that no one can be saved through the merits of the Law. So what is needed? GRACE is needed and NECESSARY for us to be accounted righteous through the shed blood of Jesus Christ!

I hate to keep asking these embarrassing questions (to the minimal Bible scholar, for I know many true scholars know the answer by HEART), with what words does the New Testament end? "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*" (Rev 22:21) Is this not profound in meaning? The Old Testament Book of the Laws and Prophets ends with CURSE, and the New Testament presenting the love of Christ ends with GRACE! So how does God's counsel in the opening verses of this devotion apply to us today: *Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, IF ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day; And a curse, IF ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out*

of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. (Deut 11:26-28) Can we keep the Moral Law as revealed in the Ten Commandments of God without fail? No, we cannot in any wise do so! Then are we cursed as the last clause of the quoted text stipulates for not keeping them?

The key to keeping all of the Commandments is found in the very first: *"I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me."* (Ex 20:2-3) This is the Chief Cornerstone upon which the other Nine Commandments are suspended just as surely as those two Commandments Jesus gave to the inquiring lawyer, *"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 12:29-31) This epitomizes the First Commandment. I have heard unknowing minister claim that this is some NEW commandment the Lord has given, but it is as old as the Ten Commandments themselves. See here: *"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."* (Deut 6:4-5) and *"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD."* (Lev 19:18)

What is the qualifier that runs through both of these last commandments the Lord Jesus Christ gave? Is it not L-O-V-E? The shield against the curse of the Law is LOVE! You are kept from turning away to false gods, and from treating your neighbor maliciously if your heart is brim full of that LOVE. Does not your *"cup runneth over?"* If it does not, it cannot contain that love of Christ. See how powerful in eradicating the CURSE is LOVE: *"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD."* (Lev 19:18) *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16) *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15) *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* (John 13:35)

Of course, there are other verses that seal the whole – many other verses – but I quote only two that have moved my heart so much: *"And now abideth faith, hope, love (charity), these three; but the greatest of these is love (charity)."* (1 Cor 13:13) (Note: CHARITY is the Greek word for Agape' LOVE.) And the concluding blessing for the Morning and Evening Prayer Service of the traditional Book of Common Prayer ends with this scriptural text: *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."* (2 Cor 13:14)

The LOVE and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ purchased your salvation. If you love Him, you will avoid the pitfalls of intentional sin and harm to your neighbor....and to God.