

Conversation with Paul Osborne Tuesday, Dec. 14, 1971

After the end of the lecture this morning Paul Osborne came up to ask me some questions. One of them was, What is moral law? Is it the ten commandments? I told him that no particular act is wrong in itself. You put a knife in someone and you murder him, that is wrong. The surgeon puts the knife in in order to help him and save his life. The same act is right or wrong depending on the circumstances, the purpose and so forth. The moral law is that which is inherently right or wrong. He said, Is the moral law the ten commandments? I said, I do not believe I would quite say it that way. The ten commandments are a presentation of moral law. They are intended to give an idea of what is most vital in moral law to people of the time when they were given and also planned in such a way as to give a reasonable idea of moral law to people living at all future times. To do this means that some matters that would be tremendously important at one time are of far less importance at another time. And the meaning of words changes and so forth. Consequently it is -- the ten commandments are a wonderful statement of moral law as adapted for all periods but not exactly corresponding to what exactly the moral law is. I am not sure whether I made this thought clear but I think it is an important thought.

He asked the question regarding the law of jealousy in Num. 5. What would be done if the man was guilty of adultery instead of the woman? I told him there was no provision for that thing in this law. That as long, till machinery such as we have today was available man had a tremendous advantage over woman on account of his greater physical strength, and in a wicked world the result inevitably was that women were quite generally put in an inferior position. This was definitely wrong, however the Bible does not deal specifically -- did not at that time endeavor to deal specifically with that particular problem. It recognizes facts as they are and gives principles which will remedy evil if they are properly carried out. Thus in the NT there is no condemnation of slavery but rather a command that the slaves should be honest and reliable and give good faithful service. And also a command to the masters to treat them decently and reasonably.