

Christians & The Law

The Law as a Sign of Covenant Faithfulness

- Under the Mosaic/Old Covenant, the Law was the duty of Israel
- However, as NT believers, we are under a New covenant
 - And therefore, we do NOT express our loyalty to God by keeping the OT Law

The Law Today

- We could no longer fulfill the requirements of the Law
 - And neither can modern Jews
- Because there is no Temple to offer sacrifices at
- In fact, to go back to the OT system of sacrificial system would be to deny the finality of Jesus' sacrifice for us (Heb. 9:26)

Jesus & the Law

- So, if Christians are no longer required to live under the Law
 - How do we understand Jesus' statements like Matt. 5:18?
- This is a question of how the OT Law still functions for Christians

Guidelines

- There are 6 initial guidelines for understanding the relationship between the OT Law & Christians

1. The OT Law is a Covenant

- Covenant: "A binding contract between two parties, both of whom have specific obligations"
- In the ANE, a suzerain covenant was between a king and his vassals (weaker party)
 - In extreme cases, the relationship could be altered or suspended by the suzerain (Deut. 4:25-27; 28:20)
- This is the form of the Mosaic Covenant
 - The suzerain = YHWH
 - The vassal = Israel
- In return for YHWH's benefits and protection, Israel was expected to keep the many stipulations contained in the covenantal law (Ex. 20-Deut. 33)
- The OT covenant had 6 parts to it
 - Preamble: Identifies the parties to the agreement (Ex. 20:2a)
 - Prologue: A brief history of how the parties are connected to one another (Ex. 20:2b)
 - Stipulations: The individual laws themselves
 - Witnesses: Those who enforce the covenant
 - The LORD Himself, heaven & earth (Deut. 4:26)
 - Sanctions: The blessings and curses that function as incentives for keeping the covenant (Lev. 26, Deut. 28-33)
 - Document Clause: The provision for the regular review of the covenant so that it won't be forgotten (Deut. 17:18-19; 31:9-13)
- It is essential to understand the Law as covenantal in order to make sense of it and the rest of the OT
 - This is true for the rest of Israel's history & especially the Prophets

- Though we are not expected to 'keep' the Law
 - They are central for us to understand and appreciate God's story in Scripture
 - Including our place in it

2. *The Old Testament is not our Testament*

- So, rather than trying to determine which stipulations from the OT apply to us
- We should assume that none of them apply, unless they are explicitly renewed in the NT
 - Unless an OT law is restated or reinforced in the NT, it is no longer binding on God's people (Rom. 6:14-15)
- The rules have changes because, in Christ, the relationship has changed
- Loyalty is still expected
 - But is shown in different ways

3. *Two kinds of Old Covenant stipulations have clearly not been renewed in the New*

- Israelite's civil laws
 - Those that specify penalties of various crimes for which one might be arrested and tried in Israel
 - These shaped the daily life of Israel as God's people in relationship to one another and their culture
- Israelite's ritual laws
 - Those that told Israel how to carry out the practices of Old Covenant worship
 - Detailing implements of worship, priestly responsibilities, and sacrificial regulations
- These laws do not apply to us just like Canadian law does not apply to Americans
- Jesus came to establish a new covenant (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8-10)
 - And in doing fulfilled the purpose of the old
 - Thus bringing it to an end
 - Jesus called the fulfillment a new command
 - The law of love (John 13:34-35)
- Thus the 2 covenants are different
 - Even though elements of the Old are still seen in the New

4. *Part of the Old Covenant is renewed in the New*

- Some aspects of the OT ethical law are restated in the NT as applicable for Christians
- But, such laws always derive their continued application from the fact that they serve to support the two basic laws of the New Covenant
 - Love God (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27a)
 - Love your neighbor (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27b)
 - On which all the Law and the Prophets depend (Matt. 22:40)

5. *All of the OT Law is still God's word for us today*

- Even though it is not still the command of God for us
- The Bible contains all sorts of commands that God wants us to know about
 - Which are not directed personally toward us

- They reflect on the heart of God and His love for people
 - Ex.) Parapets on houses (Deut. 22:8)
- This fits into understanding the Law as part of Israel's story

6. *Only that which is explicitly renewed from the OT Law can be considered part of the NT 'law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2)*

- This includes the Ten Commandments since they are cited in the NT as binding for Christians (Matt. 5:21-37; John 7:23)
 - But not the Preamble or Prologue (Ex. 20:2)
- As well as the two great commandments carried over
 - Love God and your neighbors
 - Which perfectly display God's character
 - Which is to be reproduced by His children
- No other OT laws can be shown to be binding to Christians