

The Law in Israel & the Bible

The Law

- Even though Christians are not required to keep the OT law, it still has value to us
- It functioned in the history of salvation to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:24)
- It helps us understand what it meant for Israel to be God's people
- However, nowhere in the OT does it suggest that anyone was saved by keeping the Law
- When people failed to keep the Law perfectly, God provided them means of forgiveness and atonement

Israel & the Law

- Israel's problem in the OT was NOT in their inability to keep the Law
- It was with their choosing not to do so
 - It was an issue of disobedience
- The story of Israel in the OT is a record of constant flirtation and attraction to the false gods of their neighbors
- Isaiah saw clearly that people became like the gods they worship
 - Israel is described as blind, deaf, and dumb like the idols they worshipped (Isa. 6:9-10)
- Instead of reflecting YHWH's justice, mercy, and love
 - They began looking like the Baals of the Canaanites: full of greed, fickleness and sexual immorality

The Role of the Law

- It is important to understand the role of the Law in Israel as an example of God's own character
- We also understand the need for a new covenant to be accompanied by the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-27; 2 Cor. 3:6)
 - So that God's people could bear His likeness
 - By being conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29)
- Again, the Law was not a means of salvation
- But rather, it functioned as a way of:
 - Setting parameters of relationships
 - Establishing loyalty between God and His people
- Thus, it stands as a model of what loyalty to God looked like

Two Types of Law

Apodictic Law: "Commands that begin with 'do' or 'do not', which are generally applicable and tell the Israelites were supposed to do to fulfill their part of the covenant with God"

- Direct commands
- Usually in the 2nd person imperative

- Obviously not exhaustive
- Ex.) Lev. 19:9-19
 - Since only field crops and grapes are mentioned in Lev. 19:9-10, does that mean that figs and olives were exempt from sharing with the poor and foreigners?
 - No, it acts as a paradigm: “Setting a standard by way of example”
- These laws are more akin to the Constitution than an exhaustive federal or state law codes
 - Setting out in broad sweep and outline the characteristics of justice and freedom in the land
- They are limited in wording, but comprehensive in spirit
- Because of their broad sweep, it would be impossible to keep the spirit of these laws perfectly (Rom. 8:1-11)
- Thus, the reason the Pharisees developed a “to the letter” approach
 - Which often undermines the spirit of the law (Matt. 23:23)
- Hermeneutical observation: Although not its primary intent, the law shows us *how impossible it is to please God by our own means* (Rom. 3:20)
 - This truth should:
 - Leave us humbled to appreciate how unworthy we are to belong to God
 - Move us to praise and thanksgiving that he provided a way for us to be accepted in His sight apart from humanly fulfilling the OT Law

Casuistic Law: “Case-by-case laws whose elements are conditional”

- Usually involve 3rd person descriptions
- Not general, but specific in their scope
- Though there were broader implications
- Even these laws could not be exhaustive
 - But rather act in a paradigmatic way
- Because they are so rooted in ancient Israel’s civil, religious, and ethical life
 - They are limited in their application to Christians
 - And are NOT renewed under the New Covenant
- Ex.) Deut. 15:12-17
 - Servanthood was limited to 6 years
 - Enough money was provided to start a new life
 - It was so favorable that some chose to continue in their role even after their term was up
 - The servant was not “owned” by the master
 - Applications:
 - Provides important background for the NT teaching on redemption
 - Gives a clearer picture of how OT servitude was very different from what most modern people think of as slavery
 - Gives perspective on the love of God that we may not otherwise have had

Summary

- Thus, these legal passages are still God's word for us
 - Though it is not a direct command for us
- And because of its paradigmatic function
 - It gives us insight in how, under the New Covenant, to seek to do God's will