

THE LAW

AN INTRODUCTION

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The Law of the Lord is perfect,
converting the soul.

Ps. 19:7

Prepared for Old Testament History, Part One
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THE LAW

an introduction

The Law which we will study is GOD'S LAW. That is the most important statement I will make in this introduction. The Law was not from Moses, nor it was a compilation of the best parts of earlier laws. This Law is not in any part of men. It is, as the Bible consistently maintains, the revelation of God to man.

Wrong Ideas Concerning the Law

At this time in our history, a general assumption concerning the Law is that it was an hopelessly complicated, impossibly detailed document, which no one could obey, even if he tried. This study of the Law in which you are now involved will show that to be in error. God's love for man is demonstrated in the simplicity of the Law of which He gave to Moses. Had the Law been of man, it would doubtless have been vastly more complex and very oppressive.

A particularly pernicious 20th century rumor concerning the Law is that the message of Christ and of the earliest church was that keeping the Law was vain, a useless exercise in self-righteousness. As you will see, that notion could not possibly be more wrong. Because such wrong opinions of the Law are widespread and deeply held as true, it is essential that we deviate from our general policy of using only Old Covenant books in this study. It is essential that you see for yourself that the New Covenant attitude toward Moses's Law is that the Law is a wonderful gift from God.

Many, inexplicably, have assumed that the gospels show that Jesus's enemies kept the Law, while he and his friends did not. Read these passages and discuss what they say concerning righteous people's attitude toward the Law: Lk. 1:5-9; Lk. 2:21-24; Mt. 5:17-20. Many seem to think that when the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, a cynical, sarcastic attitude toward the Law came with it. The truth is, however, that instead of condemning the Law, the Spirit wrote the Law on the hearts and minds of men (Heb. 8:8-10). The church, in reality, became more reverential toward the Law when the Spirit came, not less. Read these scriptures, which indicate the attitude toward the Law which existed in the earliest days of the church: Acts 3:1; 21:17-20; 22:11-13.

The Result of Wrong Ideas Concerning the Law

The tragic result of popular misconceptions concerning the Law is a widespread contempt in the church toward the Law of Moses, which inexorably leads to a contempt toward all law, or government, in the body of Christ, as if requiring a standard of holy living among the saints is contrary to the gospel of Christ. It is an attitude that says, "since Jesus was contemptuous of the Law, then I am righteous to follow his example and

to have contempt for the Law also.” But Jesus wasn't contemptuous of living by God's Law; so, we must not be, if we would rightly understand Jesus and follow him. Listen to Jesus's words concerning the Law: **“Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?”** (Jn. 5:46-47). In order to understand the truth which Jesus teaches, we must first come to know what Moses wrote, and then we must believe it.

Who Was It For?

The second most important statement I will make in this introduction to the Law of Moses is this: **the Law was only for the circumcised nation (Israel)**. I cannot possibly overstate the importance of that truth to your understanding of the New Covenant writings. No one on earth can understand the Apostle Paul's teaching without understanding that the Law was never given to the Gentiles, but only to the Jews. Read these scriptures and discuss their meaning: Gen. 17:10-14; Ex. 12:43-49; Gal. 2:7-9; Gal. 3:7-8; Rom. 3:19; Gal. 5:3.

The Law and the Traditions of the Elders

The holiness of the Law was never an issue in the earliest church: Rom. 7:12; Gal. 3:21. The difference between those who followed Jesus and those who did not was the degree of reverence given to the religious traditions of men. Jesus's heart clearly was not set against keeping the customs of his people (e.g. Jn. 10:22), but were those traditions as holy as the Law? That was the issue. Those who hated Jesus agreed with Jesus that the Law was holy, but they contended that their traditions were equally holy; and in some cases they honored those traditions more than the Law. Read Mt. 15:1-3. It was a *distortion of emphasis* which brought about the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel (cp. Mk. 7:1-9). Please remember this extremely important statement: **Jesus never transgressed the Law of Moses!** If he had done so, he would have been guilty of sin (1Jn. 3:4). There were times when Jesus was forced to choose between keeping the commandments of his Father or keeping the “traditions of the elders”. When confronted with this problem, Jesus *always* chose to obey the will of his Father. The elders of Israel in Jesus's time had come to esteem their traditions to be of equal, and even greater importance than the word of God which was contained in the Law of Moses. They even referred to their traditions as law (Mt. 12:1-2; cp. Dt. 23:24-25).

Who Loved the Law?

THE LAW! Every wise and upright man and woman in history has held it in great esteem. Joshua was commanded to meditate in it day and night, so that he and Israel **“might prosper whithersoever thou goest”** and **“have good success”** (Josh. 1:7-8). Said David, **“O how I love thy Law! It is my meditation all the day”** (Ps. 119:97). And seeing many in Israel fail to walk after the counsels of God contained in the Law, David cried, **“Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy Law”** (Ps. 119:136). It never ceased to touch the hearts of the righteous that God the Creator would condescend to give men this holy Law, and their constant prayer was, and indeed still is among those who understand, **“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy Law”** (Ps. 119:18). This rich, matchless

Law was given to Moses and to Israel by the loving grace of God (cp. Ps. 119:29), and righteous men of old rejoiced in that grace. **“Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy Law is the truth.”** Lest one think that this exaltation of the Law is peculiar to Old Covenant men, let me note that Paul the Apostle extolled the Law as “glorious” (2Cor. 3:7), and honored it as **“our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ”** (Gal. 3:24). To the church at Rome, he wrote that **“the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good”** (Rom. 7:12). Please note in your own reading of the book of Acts that the earliest church studiously kept the Law. Far from inciting a rebellion against the Law of Moses, as some think, the coming of the Spirit magnified the church's zeal for it. By the testimonies of all the godly men and women who went before us, we are compelled to approach the study of the Law with humility, joy, thanksgiving, and reverence.

What Was The Law?

God has always had a way for man to live. God's “will” for mankind has always existed. But it has not always existed in the form of a law, written for all to see. This is what the Law was: **the Law is God's will for His people, in written form.** Because there were those who lived according to the will of God before the Law was given, we can certainly see why Paul would teach that the Law was not given for a righteous man. Paul wrote to Timothy, **“We know that the Law is good, if a man use it lawfully, knowing this, that the Law was not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane. . . .”** (1Tim. 1:8-9). Abraham and Joseph, for examples, did not need God's will to be “spelled out in writing”. They loved God enough to live according to his will, without having it written.

For the unrighteous, the Law served at least two profound purposes. First, it served as a guide to righteousness. Speaking of the Law, David rhetorically asked, **“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word (Law)”** (Ps. 119:9). Second, the Law served as a testimony. It was concrete witness against those who were not obeying the will of God. Before it was given, men could quibble over what God's will really was, but not after it was given. When the Law was enforced in Israel, it served as a great protector of the innocent. The Law was the needed standard by which evil people could be condemned and punished. This written standard for judgment and the execution of justice among the saints did not exist before the Law was given. As Paul explained, **“For until the Law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law”** (Rom. 5:13)

The Law, then, was the will of God for His people, written in black and white.

Time Zones

In the Bible, we can easily discern three “time zones” from Creation to the present. They are:

Before the Law	During the Law	After the Law
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(Gen. 1:1 - Ex.19)	(Ex. 19 - Acts 2:4)	(Acts 2:4 - forever)
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Throughout the “time zones” of the Bible (**B**efore, **D**uring, and **A**fter the Law), consider these examples of God's will for His people:

Law	B	D	A
Honoring Parents	Gen. 9:18-27	Lev. 19:3	Eph. 6:1
Hospitality	Gen. 18:1-8	Lev. 19:33-34	Heb. 13:1-2
Rearing Children	Gen. 18:17-19	Dt. 6:6-7	Eph. 6:4
Moral Purity	Gen. 39:7-9	Prov. 6:23-32	1Cor. 6:9-10

Three Kinds Of Laws

The commandments we just studied in the three “time zones” are all examples of **MORAL LAWS**, and the presence of moral commandments from Genesis to Revelation shows conclusively that the will of God concerning moral conduct has changed none at all throughout the three “times zones” of human history. Moral integrity is just as much God's will for man now as it was at creation. Clearly, then, the coming of the gospel of Christ did not "liberate" men from the responsibility to obey the will of God concerning morality.

Moral commandments, however, are only one of three kinds of law found within the Law of Moses. A second kind of law is **CIVIL LAW**. Civil law has to do with the *enforcement* of the Law, the setting up of a system of justice. One example of a civil commandments given to Israel's judges is as follows:

Civil Law	B	D	A
Capital punishment	Gen. 9:6	Ex. 21:12	None (cp. Rom. 13:1-7 & 2Tim. 2:4)

God gave men authority to execute judgment over other men before the Law of Moses came. During the Law, of course, there was a system of government in Israel. But civil laws are not given to the church because civil law has to do with earthly kingdoms and, unlike ancient Israel, the church is not an earthly kingdom. The saints of God now have no authority from God to rule physically over other men, nor do we have a commandment to become embroiled in political partisanship. When Jesus returns, we shall reign over the earth with him; however, until that time, we are to be politically neutral, as ambassadors of a heavenly kingdom.

The third kind of law contained within Moses' Law is **CEREMONIAL LAW**.

Ceremonial commandments have to do with Israel's worship. Most of these laws were directed only to the priests and Levites. The following are some examples of this type of law:

Ceremonial Laws	B	D	A
Sacrifices	Gen. 22:13	Lev. 1-7	Rom. 12:1 Heb. 13:15
Circumcision	Gen. 17:9-10	Josh. 5:2-9	Rom. 2:28-29

Summary

Laws which God required His covenant people to observe:

Type of Law	Before the Law	During the Law	After the Law
Moral	Yes	Yes	Yes
Civil	Yes	Yes	None
Ceremonial	Yes	Yes	Yes, in spirit

Which kind of law is found in the following verses from Exodus:

20:3 _____ 20:12 _____ 21:17 _____
 20:13 _____ 21:12 _____ 20:15 _____
 22:1 _____ 21:22-25 _____ 22:20 _____
 23:14-15 _____ 25:31 _____ 27:1 _____
 28:36 _____ 30:25 _____

Was the commandment to keep the Sabbath day a ceremonial or a moral law?

Was the commandment concerning tithes and offerings a ceremonial or a moral law?

Righteous conduct was understood prior to the giving of the Law of Moses. It was *codified* in the Law, but the standards of righteousness described in the Law were already known.

Righteous Customs	Before the Law	During the Law
The Sabbath	Gen. 2:1	Ex. 20:8
Being "Cut Off"	Gen. 4:12	Lev. 17:10
Clean and Unclean Beasts	Gen. 7:2	Lev. 11
Consuming of Blood Forbidden	Gen. 9:4	Lev. 17:10-14
The Death Penalty	Gen. 9:5-6	Ex. 21:12
The Building of Altars	Gen. 12:7	Ex. 20:14
Tithes	Gen. 14:20; 28:22	Lev. 27:30
Offerings	Gen. 4:3-4	Lev. 1-7
Circumcision the Eighth Day	Gen. 17:10,12	Lev. 12:1-3
Betraying Guilt	Gen. 37:2	Lev. 5:1
Preserving Seed	Gen. 38:9-10	Deut. 25:5-10