

12. The Law of Christ

Introduction: Inquiring minds want to know ...

What affect did the start of the new covenant have on the old covenant?

Is the new covenant believer obligated to obey the Law of Moses?

Is tithing mandated under the law of Christ?

Should churches have priests, altars and sanctuaries?

Is infant baptism the new covenant equal to circumcision?

There was no separation of church and state in ancient Israel; why not today?

Should we be keeping the Sabbath?

The Law of Moses served to show Jewish people their sins and prepare them to be justified by faith in Jesus the Messiah. We've already seen that the new covenant made the old one obsolete. Those who are in Christ are no longer under the Law of Moses. Yet what did Jesus mean when He said that He came not to abolish the Law and that those who taught others to disregard it would be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven?

1. What is antinomianism? See *Matthew 7:23, 2 Corinthians 6:14, 1 John 3:4*. *Anti* means against and *nomos* means law; it refers to someone who is against God's law. There are laws for the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Lawlessness, in the Bible, is associated with bad things:

NAS **Matthew 7:23** ... then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

NAS **2 Corinthians 6:14** Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness ...?

NAS **1 John 3:4** Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

******How did Paul summarize his relationship to God's law in 1 Corinthians 9:19-21?** Paul said he was under the law of Christ, 9:21.

2. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-20, how did Paul describe the unbelieving Jews, relative to the Law of Moses? He described them as those who were "under" the law (*hupo nomos*; "under law").

What parenthetical remark did Paul make about himself in 1 Corinthians 9:20? Paul said he himself was not under the law as were the Jews. This is a profound statement.

3. What did Paul mean when he said that he himself was not under the law (1 Corinthians 9:20)? Paul meant that he was not under the Law of Moses.

4. How did Paul describe unbelieving Gentiles relative to the Law of Moses (1 Corinthians 9:21)? He described Gentiles as those “outside the law” (*anomos*; “no law”). First century Gentiles were lawless (with respect to Mosaic Law).

5. What parenthetical remark did Paul make about himself in 1 Corinthians 9:21? Paul said he was “under Christ’s law” (*ennomous Christou*, “in-lawed to Christ”).

Summary: In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul described the unbelieving Jews as those “under the law” (*hupo nomos*, 9:20), though Paul himself was “not under the law” (9:20). Paul then described the unbelieving Gentiles as those “not having the law” (*anomos*, 9:21). Significantly, Paul next referred to himself as “under Christ’s law” (*ennomous christou*, 9:21). Thus, the believer is neither “under the law” nor “without the law,” but rather is “in-lawed to Christ.” We are bound by the law of Christ, not the Law of Moses. New Covenant Theology is not antinomian!

The Appendix to the First London Baptist Confession of 1646 says: IX. Though we that believe in Christ, be not under the law, but under grace, Rom.6:14; yet we know that we are not lawless, or left to live without a rule; "not without law to God, but under law to Christ," 1 Cor.9:21. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a law, or commanding rule unto us; whereby, and in obedience whereunto, we are taught to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, Titus 2:11,12; the directions of Christ in His evangelical word guiding us unto, and in this sober, righteous, and godly walking, 1 Tim.1:10,11.

******According to 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, what makes the new covenant more glorious than the old one?**

- a. The old covenant was associated with the man Moses. The new covenant is associated with God’s Holy Spirit, 3:7-8.
- b. The old covenant condemned death, but the new brings righteousness and life, 3:7, 9.
- c. The old glory is no glory in comparison to the surpassing glory of the new, 3:10.
- d. The old was fading away, the new is lasting, 3:11.
- e. The old is by the letter, the new by the Spirit, 3:6.
- f. The law of the old is on stone, the on human hearts, 3:3.

6. What is the answer to the question found in 2 Corinthians 3:7-8?

What glory was on Moses’ face so that the Israelites could not look at him (2 Corinthians 3:7)? See *Exodus 34:29-35*.

7. In what sense did the ministry of the old covenant condemn men (2 Corinthians 3:9)? See *Romans 3:9-20, Galatians 3:19-25*.

Purpose: The purpose of the old covenant Law of Moses was not so that people could be saved by keeping it. Rather, its purpose was to show people their hopeless, sinful condition and thus prepare them for Christ.

Glorious Perspective: The law, even with its ministry of death and condemnation, was glorious (**2 Corinthians 3:7, 9**). Romans 7:12 declares the law to be holy and righteous and good. The purpose of the law was to show sin to be utterly sinful and to show the Jews their own sinfulness. The law helped them to realize that it is impossible to please God through law, thus causing them to look for grace.

8. Based on 2 Corinthians 3:10, why is the glory associated with Moses not glorious any longer? It is no longer glorious because of the surpassing glory of the new covenant (Barnett, p. 186).

According to 2 Corinthians 3:10, what glory does the law have now? It has none in comparison to the glory of the new covenant (“no glory at all”).

Illustration: If you lost your keys out in the yard at night, having a flashlight would be a tremendous blessing. But if you were still looking for them after the sun had come up, you would not use the flashlight any longer. In fact, in bright sun light you could not even tell if the flashlight were on!

9. What can we learn about the present-day applicability of the Law of Moses from 2 Corinthians 3:11? Even in Paul’s day it was “fading away.”

- **“brought to an end” (3:11):** From *katargeo* and means to render ineffective, nullify, cancel, destroy, abolish, do away with.

******10. What did Jesus say about a righteous person’s relationship to the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17-20)?** On the surface, it certainly seems as if every true citizen of the kingdom of heaven is obligated to keep all the commandments of Moses, especially since Jesus kept them all. (The reconciliation of Jesus’ words here with Paul’s in 1 & 2 Corinthians is our next order of business.)

Based on Matthew 5:17, why did Jesus not come? Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. That was not His purpose. Abolishing the Law might have been collateral damage, but it was not His purpose.

Abe Lincoln abolished slavery in the United States. **What does “abolish” (Matthew 5:17) mean?** It is from *kataluo*, to “destroy, overthrow” (used with reference to institutions or governmental laws); with reference to travelers, it meant to stop or halt on a journey.¹ It is the same word used of the destruction of the temple (**Mt 24:2, 26:61**) and of the death of the physical body (**2Co 5:1**). The idea is thus to render useless, nullify or to bring to nothing.²

11. Why do you suppose that Jesus felt the need, right here in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, to declare that he had not come to abolish the Law (Matthew 5:17)? See *Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43*. Jesus said this because of what He was about to say in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. He repeatedly used phrase, “you have heard that it was said” (or something similar) followed by a quotation from Moses. Jesus then clarified the true intent of the Law. On the surface it might sound to the casual listener that Jesus was discrediting the Law. On the contrary, He gave its true meaning.

Moral Law: The various Laws of Moses that Jesus dealt with in the Sermon on the Mount are all moral in nature (as opposed to civil or ceremonial): murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, justice, hatred for enemies, etc. That which was moral in the Law of Moses is, of course, still moral in the Law of Christ. Morality never becomes obsolete.

According to Matthew 5:17, why did Jesus come? Jesus came in order to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

What does “fulfill” (Matthew 5:17) mean? It is from *pléroo* (4137), “to make full or to complete”.

12. Based on what we know of Jesus’ life, did He in fact “fulfill” (Matthew 5:17) the Law and the Prophets? See *Luke 24:44*. Yes, and perfectly so. Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law (5:17) and He did not fail in His mission. The law has indeed been fulfilled (accomplished).

ESV **Luke 24:44** These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

In what sense did Jesus fulfill or accomplish the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17-18)? First, Jesus perfectly lived out the righteousness requirements of the Law of Moses, both inwardly and outwardly. Secondly, Jesus fulfilled many of the prophecies concerning the Messiah (at least as regards His first appearing). The Law and the Prophets pointed to Jesus. It is not merely that Jesus fulfilled some prophecies from the Old Testament. Rather, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The Hebrew Scriptures portray Jesus in type; it all points to Him.³

¹ Thayer, *Lexicon*, #2657.

² John MacArthur, “Matthew 1-7”, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 253.

³ MacArthur, *Matthew*, 256.

13. According to Matthew 5:18, when will the Law finally disappear? The Law will disappear when either **1)** The heavens and earth disappear or **2)** Everything in the Law is finally accomplished. Notice that the word “until” is in the sentence twice; this seems to be an either/or condition, not both/and.

What does it mean for something to be “accomplished” (Matthew 5:18)? It is from *ginomai* (#1096), “to come to pass, to happen, to become.”

One could argue that since Jesus actually did fulfill the Law (His purpose in coming), it has now passed away (is no longer in force). He did not come to abolish it; He came to fulfill it. Yet now that it has been fulfilled, it is also abolished.

How does Matthew 5:18 illustrate Jesus’ belief in the reliability of Scripture? Jesus obviously felt Scripture was reliable down to the smallest detail.

To what does the smallest letter refer (Matthew 5:18)? The smallest Hebrew letter is *yod*. It looks like our comma (see the Hebrew letter above **Psalm 119:73**).

To what does the least stroke of a pen refer (Matthew 5:18)? A “stroke” is the projection of one Hebrew letter that distinguishes it from another letter. The word literally means “little horn.”⁴ It is like a serif in modern typefaces. For instance, compare the letter *daleth* (see above **Ps 119:25**) to *resh* (see above **Psalm 119:153**).

Insight to Inspiration: Jesus taught that even the letters in the Bible are significant and unbreakable! Not only are the big ideas in the Bible inspired, but the exact words and letters that clothe those ideas are also inspired.

14. As relates to Matthew 5:17, why did Jesus say what He did in 5:18 about the reliability of Scripture? It was to show his commitment to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures in the context of teachings that had to have been unsettling to his listeners.

15. In Matthew 5:19, what did Jesus reveal about the fate of anyone who both broke, and taught others to break, even the “least” of God’s commands? He will be least in the kingdom of heaven.

Application: This is a very serious matter. Obviously no true believer is going to want to risk being guilty of this. Without God’s law as our standard, we would soon end up in the position of the Israelites during the time of the Judges when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (**Jdg 21:25**).

What does “relaxes” (Matthew 5:19) mean? It is from *luo*, “to loose.” The NAS has “annuls” and the NIV has “breaks.” The idea here is of loosing ourselves from God’s law.

⁴ MacArthur, *Matthew*, 262.

16. If you really want to be great in God's kingdom, what do you need to do (Matthew 5:19)? You must practice and teach God's commands.

Inquiring Minds Want to Know: *Jesus said that the Law would not disappear until everything in it is accomplished. Since Jesus came to fulfill the Law, is it now abolished?* (Rhetorical question; do not give definitive answer at this point).

17. Taken at face value, Matthew 5:19 (read it) seems absolute. It is critical that we let Scripture interpret Scripture. How does Mark 7:15-19 illustrate that even Jesus began teaching the abolishment of some of the laws of Moses?

ESV Mark 7:15-19 There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him ... Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

Summary: Even though we are not under the Law of Moses, neither are we antinomian. How is that? We are now under the law of Christ. Certain moral aspects of the Law of Moses have been renewed under the New Testament.

The Appendix to the First London Baptist Confession (1446): Though we be not now sent to the law as it was in the hand of Moses, to be commanded thereby, yet Christ in His Gospel teacheth and commandeth us to walk in the same way of righteousness and holiness that God by Moses did command the Israelites to walk in, all the commandments of the Second Table being still delivered unto us by Christ, and all the commandments of the First Table also (as touching the life and spirit of them) in this epitome or brief sum, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, etc.," Matt.22:37,38,39,40; Rom.13:8,9,10.⁵

What can we learn about the Pharisees and teachers of the law from Matthew 5:20? Their names were not written in the will as heirs to the kingdom of heaven.

18. Why is the information in Matthew 5:20 not necessarily a negative statement about the Pharisees and teachers of the law? Some of them (like Saul or Nicodemus) may have outwardly kept the law. The problem is not that all of them were insincere or hypocrites, but rather that the type of righteousness required to enter heaven is much more demanding than merely outwardly keeping the Law of Moses.

This fact was driven home by Jesus in the rest of his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. God's law must be kept internally as well as externally. And, the type of law that Jesus dealt with in Matthew 5 is all moral or ethical; this important to keep in mind as we plough ahead in our study.

⁵ X.

19. Acts 15 is about the Jerusalem council. What dispute did the early church encounter (Acts 15:1-5)? Some taught that keeping the Law was necessary in order to be saved, 15:1, 5.

20. What was Peter's opinion about keeping the Law of Moses (15:6-11)?

21. What was James' opinion about keeping the Law of Moses (15:12-21)?

What reason did James give for asking the Gentiles to keep a few things associated with Moses (15:20-21)? Gentile Christians were asked not to eat blood, or things strangled, so as not to needlessly offend Jewish unbelievers.

22. What decision was reached in Acts 15:22-29 concerning the Gentile believer's relationship to the Law of Moses (15:5)? The decision is clear: Gentile Christians are not obligated to keep the Law of Moses—much less to be circumcised.

23. What words were used in Acts 15:6-29 to describe the Law of Moses? The Law of Moses is referred to as a "yoke" (15:10) that is "difficult" (15:19), "troubling" (15:24) and a "burden" (15:28).

So What?

24. Is the new covenant believer's relationship to the Law of Moses?

**** = ask the class this question before having the text read aloud.

Advance Study Questions. If you send out the study questions in advance, then those exact same questions should be covered when you teach to give the brethren feedback and to encourage them to study the Scriptures at home during the week.

Optional Extra Material:

What did Paul write in Romans 7:1-6 about the new covenant believer's relationship to the law?

1. The law has authority over a man only so long as he lives, 7:1 (it is like the Jews were married to it)
2. We died to the law through the body of Christ, 7:4.
3. We now belong to Christ, 7:4.
4. We have been released from the law, 7:6.

ESV **Romans 6:14** ... you are not under law but under grace.

ESV **Romans 6:15** ... we are not under law but under grace ...

Perspective: We died and are freed our marriage to the law and are free to marry Christ. If, as the bride of Christ, we now go back to the law we are in a sense committing spiritual adultery.

******What, in Romans 7:7, shows that the “law” we are not under includes even the moral aspects of the Mosaic Law?** Paul’s example of one Mosaic Law that we are not under is coveting, a moral law! This is not to say that we can now covet, however. The reason we still may not covet is that it is a part of the law of Christ. Certainly what is ethical under Mosaic Law is ethical under the law of Christ. The fact to be observed here is that Christians are not under any of the laws of Moses (civil, ceremonial or moral).

The Law of Moses either stands for falls as a unit. It cannot be divided. Either you are under all of it or none of it. However, certain ethical aspects of the Law of Moses have been renewed under our covenant (the new covenant). In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5), the laws Jesus dealt with were all moral.

Perspective: Many level the charge that this teaching is **antinomian** (against law) and therefore libertine. This is not true. Although believers are not under the Law of Moses, they are under the Law of Christ. Those who insist that believers are in some areas obligated to obey the Law of Moses, such as tithing or Sabbath observance, may be guilty of legalism (**legalism** is requiring a person to keep laws that God does not require).

According to Galatians 3:23-25, what was the purpose of the law for the Jews? The law was given because of the Jewish people’s sinfulness, to hold them as prisoners of sin, thus preparing them for the salvation Christ offered. The purpose of the law was to lead the Jews (“we”)* to Christ, so that they may be justified by faith.

*Galatians 1:1-2 was penned by Paul (“I”) in company with other brothers (“we”). Throughout the letter the words I, we, and you are used. I = Paul, we = the Jews, you = the Galatians. The whole problem of the letter is that false Jewish teachers were trying to get the Galatian Christians to live by the Law of Moses. Paul, himself a Jew, states that the law’s purpose was to lead Jews to Christ, and once in faith, the law’s ministry is finished, even for the Jews.

According to Galatians 3:24, what duty did the law have? The law served as a guardian until Christ came. The Greek here is *paidagomos*, and though often translated as “tutor”, it actually refers to a trustworthy slave who was charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the slave-holders.⁶ It was more of a truant officer than a tutor.

⁶ Thayer, *Lexicon*, #3807.

Based on Galatians 3:25, once a Jewish person came to faith in Jesus, what role did the law play in his life? See Galatians 5:18. Those formerly under the law are no longer under the law.

ESV **Galatians 5:18** ... if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Optional Material:

******Relative to the law, how did Paul describe Jews versus Gentiles in Romans 2:12, 14, 17?** Gentiles are described as those “without the law” (2:12, 14) and Jews categorized as those “under the law” (2:12, 17).

******Based on Romans 3:19-20, what was the purpose of the law? See Romans 7:7.** The whole context leading up to Romans 3:19-20 is the contrast between Jews and Gentiles and how each group is sinful. The Jews sinned under the law and the Gentiles sinned without it. The law was not given so that those under it could gain righteousness by keeping it. Rather, the law speaks to those who are “under it” (i.e., the unbelieving Jews) so that they would be conscious of their sin.

ESV **Romans 7:7** ... if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

******According to Romans 3:21-24, how can a person be made right with God? We are made righteous through faith in Jesus and the redemption he bought for those who believe. It is apart from law.**

In what sense do the Law and the Prophets bear witness to God’s righteousness (Romans 3:21)? The Law sets the standard for right and wrong but cannot make a person righteous (since no one can keep the laws found in the Law). The Prophets predicted the coming of the Righteous One who would take away our sins.

Note: “The Law and the Prophets” (3:21) is a way of referring to the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures.

******What new covenant fulfillment of Exodus 19:5-6 did the apostle Peter proclaim in 1 Peter 2:9-10?** Peter picked up on Exodus 19:5-6 and applied it to the church, which he clearly sees as the new Israel.⁷

Teacher’s Note: These lessons were designed for a 45-minute session.

⁷ Dennis & Grudem, *ESV Study*, 2408.

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