

How Christians Relate to the Old Testament Law

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[0 : 00] So this is a reading from Galatians chapter 3 and it says this, O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? It is before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

So let me ask you a question. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now trying to perfect yourselves by your own flesh?

Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain? Doesn't He, that's God, who supplies the Holy Spirit to you, works miracles amongst you, does He do so by you obeying works of the law or simply by hearing with faith?

Remember, Abraham, he believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. So then know this, it's those who are of faith who are the children of Abraham. Because for all who rely on the works of the law, they actually find themselves there under a curse.

It is written, cursed is everyone who does not obey everything written in the book of the law and do them. Now, it's evident that no one can be justified before God by the law.

[1 : 12] For rather, the righteous will live by faith. But the law, that's not of faith. No, the one who does them must live by them. But Christ has redeemed us, that means saved us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

Remember how it's written, cursed is anyone who's hung on a tree. So, in Christ Jesus, the blessings that were given to Abraham, that promised to him, might come to us, that we might receive the Holy Spirit through faith.

So, the law, is it then contrary to God's promises? No. No. For if a law had been given that could give life, impart life, well then righteousness would indeed come by that law.

But friends, remember the scripture imprisoned everything under sin. So that by the promise, by faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe in him. Now, before faith came, we were held captive.

We were enslaved under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed in Jesus. So the law was like a guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

[2 : 21] But now that faith has come, now that Christ has come, we are no longer under a guardian. For Christ Jesus, we are children of God. And simply through faith. For as many of you who were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.

This is God's word. A couple of scriptures. I don't know if you recognize any of these. Deuteronomy 14 says this. He shall not boil a young goat in his mother's milk.

Or what about Leviticus 19. Don't plant two different types of seed in your field. Or wear clothing made from different types of fabric. Or Numbers 19. Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days.

Or Leviticus. Do not turn to mediums and fortune tellers. Do not seek them out. They will make you unclean. I am the Lord your God. Now, the Old Testament has lots of rules and regulations.

And some of them are pretty unusual, right? I wonder what you think of them. If you are not a Christian with us today, you may think, that is one reason why I never want to become a Christian.

[3 : 29] Look at all these rules. Or maybe you think these Christians are crazy. But, if these rules and these instructions are in the Bible, for those of us that are Christians, or those of us that are on the journey towards faith, what are we to do with them?

How do we make sense of them? Should we obey them? Should we not obey them? And it gets a bit complicated, because that is the question I want to ask. How do Christians think about and handle these laws, these commandments, they find in the Old Testament?

And part of the thing that is confusing, is that the Bible itself seems to not always be clear on that. For instance, Romans 10 says, For Christ is the end of the law for those who believe in Him. It seems like Jesus is saying, Listen, I claim you don't need to worry about any of those rules and laws. But then, in other places, Jesus, Matthew 5 says, Do not think that I have come to do away with the law and the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them. I have come to fulfill them. In fact, if anybody teaches that these aren't important, they'll be least in the kingdom. Not one iota, not one dot is going to be taken away. [4 : 33] And whoever honors them, that's a great person in God's kingdom. So here you have these two sides. On the one hand, the Bible says, they're going to be done away with. On the other hand, it feels like, Jesus says, no, these are important. So which one is it?

How do we handle this? I want us to think about three things. I want us to think about the purpose of the law, the power of the law, and the person's law. So firstly, the purpose.

Let's think about this. In the Old Testament, there are many, many laws, about 600 of them. And they kind of broadly fit into three categories. The categories aren't absolutely crystal clear.

There's a little bit of overlap. You see a blurry line there. The three categories of this. There's the civil laws. The civil laws helped Israel function as a nation. Right? There were laws such as, when someone gets married, what do you do?

If somebody loses their property, what do you do? What do you do if a thief breaks into your house and steals something and you catch it? Laws that are, what happens if somebody unintentionally harms somebody else? What happens if somebody borrows your jacket and they lose it?

[5 : 35] How do you handle these things? These civil laws helped Israel function as a nation.

Right? There's a second category called ceremonial laws. These have to do with the temple, and worship, and sacrifices, and, and bills, and goats, and offerings, and these kinds of things.

And there's lots of laws there. How do you, how many goats do you bring? And, what clothing must Aaron wear? And all these kinds of things. And these have to do with the worship and temple, um, in ancient Israel.

And there's a whole host of these laws that restrict Israel from any practices that resemble the, the pagan nations around them. Right? And the point of these is to create a mental picture in the minds of the people that God is holy, He's distinctive, He's other, and that we are, are, are not the same as God.

And we've got to find a way to be brought into relationship with God. That's the point of these laws. Then there's a third category, which is moral laws. These really have to do with what's right or wrong. Morality.

And think of the Ten Commandments, right? Do not steal, do not lie, honor your mother and father. And these laws have to do with, what does it mean to be a moral agent, a moral being in a moral universe, living under a moral God?

[6 : 48] So, any, each category has its own purpose. Um, now, what do we do with these? Do we obey them all? Well, the first category largely have fallen away, right?

We, we don't need to follow those largely. They had to do with the nation of Israel at that time and that place in Israel. Uh, we don't have a temple. We don't have these nationals. We've got Hong Kong laws. We follow those laws.

We don't need to worry about the laws to ancient Israel. The second category, the ceremonial laws, well, those were really pointing towards a, a truer and better fulfillment.

In other words, they were meant to be a small scale picture that pointed us towards something better, which was Jesus. So, think about this. Jesus is the true temple, the one who brought heaven to earth, the one that God's presence was on earth.

We don't need a temple anymore because we've got Jesus. Jesus is the true high priest who intercedes for people. So, we don't need the high priest. We've got Jesus. Jesus is the true, uh, uh, curtain that was torn in two on the cross.

[7 : 49] So, now we've open access to God. So, the ceremonial laws, they tell us a lot about God, but we don't need to go to the temple. We don't need to follow all those because we've got Jesus. But what about the moral laws?

The laws that are right and wrong? Do we still follow those? Do we still have to obey those? The Bible says that Jesus actually takes all these moral laws, hundreds of them, and brings them down to two things.

Do you remember what he says? He says, love God and love others. He sums up all these moral laws. He says, if you can do these two things, love God above all else and love others more than yourself, that's the point of the law.

Now, I want us to think about it this way. So, so, so they're, they're the laws and, and they have different purposes. Some of the purposes still remain. Some have fallen away. But what does that mean for us today?

How do we live this out? If any of you have read the Old Testament lately, what do you do with these laws? Think about it this way. Think of a mirror, right? What does a mirror do?

[8 : 52] A mirror helps you see that which you can't naturally see. It helps you see that which is out of your natural line of sight. So, one of the things I said this morning was if you, if you go to the hairdresser and they give you a haircut and they say, do you like it at the back?

And you say, oh, I can't see it at the back. So, what do they do? They pull a whole bunch of mirrors up and they help you to see what you can't naturally see, right? Mirrors help you to see what is outside a normal line of sight. The law in the Old Testament, God's rules, God's commands is meant to function like a mirror.

And in two ways, it helps us to see God and His heart. Nobody can naturally see God face to face, but when you look into, when you read God's commands and His statutes, it's meant to help us to see something of God that we couldn't see apart from it.

So, think about this. Think about a law like do not murder, okay? What's wrong with murder? Why should we not murder? Well, one of the things is it tells us a lot about God.

As we look at that and think about that, it tells us it's like looking to mirror that it reflects who God is. How so? Well, it tells us that for God, every single human life is necessary and important and valuable.

[10 : 06] From a life that's a few weeks old in the womb, maybe even the mom doesn't even know it's there, to someone who's rich, someone who's poor, it doesn't matter your socioeconomic status, your ethnicity, every human life is valuable to God.

A law like do not murder tells us something about how God feels about people. Well, think about the law like do not lie. Okay? One of the ten commandments. Do not lie. What's so important about that?

Well, think about what it tells us about God. It tells us that in God, there is no duplicity. God is 100% truthful, honest. What you see is what you get. In God, there's no hidden side, no darkness that you'll discover later on on the journey.

God himself is 100% honest, truthful, transparent, and so his law reflects that. Or think of a law like do not harvest your fields up into the margins, but leave some for the sojourner, the foreigner.

What does that tell us? It tells us about God's care and compassion for the suffering, those that are vulnerable in our city. Or think of a law like do not turn to mediums and fortune tellers. Do not seek them out.

[11 : 10] I am the Lord your God. What does that tell us about God? Well, it reflects that God is the one who holds our future. We don't need to control our future. I don't need to go to Guna here and find out, Guna, sorry, Guna.

I've got another friend called Guna that I was talking to this week. I don't need to go to Guna and say, Guna, tell me the future, tell me the future. Actually, my future is held in God's hands, not in his hands.

So when you look at the law, it's like a mirror that reflects something of who God is. But the law is also meant to be a mirror that reflects what God reflects something about us. Think about this, right, when you're having lunch with somebody and someone says, hey, Jeremy, let me pick on Jeremy. Jeremy, you've got something in your teeth, right? And you pull out a mirror to see that which you can't see yourself. And you look and say, oh, okay, I better go sort that out, right? A mirror tells us something about us that we can't see about ourselves.

When we read God's law and commandments, His statutes, sometimes they can feel arbitrary, but they're meant to be a mirror that shows us what's going in our own hearts. So let's again think about those two laws.

[12 : 16] God's law says, do not murder. What does that tell me about me? I'm not sure about any of you. I haven't murdered anybody lately. You'll be pleased to know. But what is that law really saying?

What's it speaking to? It's saying, don't harbor bitterness or anger or resentment in your heart. Sometimes when I read that and I think about it, I think, actually, that's not me.

I am somebody that sometimes harbors bitterness, resentment. Sometimes I get highly frustrated. I don't really want to forgive people. Actually, it reveals there's something wrong in my heart. Well, think of another law like, do not lie.

What does that mean? It doesn't just mean blatant lie. It means, let my life be 100% transparent before other people. In every situation, every circumstance I'm in, to project what's absolutely true. No facade, no projecting an image, not trying to be something I'm not, in social media, in front of my boss, clients, my family, this is who I am. When I read that commandment, it says, do not lie, and I think about that, I think, gee, does that really reflect my life?

[13:20] Is that really who I am? Actually, maybe I'm not the most honest person. It's like a mirror that's shining a light into part of my life and my soul. So, God's law is meant to be like a mirror, the purpose.

Second, think about the power of the law. Now, there's a problem here, and that is, the law, let's go back to the analogy of a mirror. What can a mirror do? A mirror can point something else, but it has no power to change it, right?

So, let's say, let's say I'm having lunch with Bernard, and Bernard looks, I take a big bite of my burger, and Bernard says, hey, kid, have you looked at your teeth lately?

There's something really strange. Your one teeth is going really skew, right? Is that normal? I haven't noticed that before. And I pull up my mirror, and I look and say, oh, my tooth is chipped, or something wrong, right?

The mirror can tell me what's wrong, but it has no power to fix me, no power to heal me. It has no power to change our circumstances. All it does is it tells me what's wrong. But what does the mirror do?

[14:25] It tells me I need to go get it fixed, I need to go get it sorted out. In other words, it's going to drive me to the dentist, right? Or somebody looks and says, hey kid, you've got a big gash on your face, what happens?

Oh, I don't know. I look in the mirror and I see, oh, I'm bleeding. What's it going to do? It's got no power to heal me, but it does have the power to go and drive me to the one that can heal me. When we read the commands in the Bible, sometimes it feels like it's so condemning.

Don't do this, don't do this, this is right, this is wrong. But what's the power? The power is not meant to fix you, it's meant to drive you to the one who can fix you. And that leads us to the third thing, the purpose, the power, and the person.

What is the law? What are God's commands meant to do? They're meant to bring us to Jesus. Jesus is the person that can heal us, that can fix us, that can make things right again.

If you've got a bulletin in front of you, I want you to just look at some scripture. There's a couple of verses I want to point out. The commands, the law, are never meant to solve our problems.

[15:33] They're never going to make us righteous people, but they can point in a direction. What is the direction? It's not moral perfection, it's not religious duty, it's to Jesus, to Christ.

Look at what verse 24 says, 24 is near the bottom. It says, so then the law was like a guardian, a guardian means somebody who shows you the way, somebody who helps you along the way, until Jesus came.

And now that faith in Christ has come, we don't need that guardian anymore. In Christ Jesus, we are all children of God. Friends, these commands are meant to show us, we need Jesus.

Think about that verse I quoted earlier, Matthew 5, where Jesus says, I have come to fulfill the law. How did Jesus fulfill the law? Well, think about three ways. One way Jesus came to fulfill the law was, he perfectly obeyed it.

every single thing that the rules and the commands and the statutes and the commandments, every single thing it asked for, Jesus perfectly fit the bill. Did Jesus love God above all else?

[16:37] Absolutely. Did Jesus love people more than himself? Absolutely. Did Jesus even love his enemies more than himself? He went to the cross for us. Jesus perfectly obeyed every aspect of the law.

But think about another way that Jesus fulfilled the law. The law had two things. It promised blessings for those who followed it, but it also said those who didn't are going to be under a curse, under judgment, under punishment.

Look at our verse, look at verse 10 in the reading. It says, For it is written, cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by the things written in the law and do them.

That's what the law said. The law said, this is God's statute, but if you don't keep it, there's trouble for you. Verse 13, but Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us in our place.

So in Jesus, the blessings that were promised to Abraham might come to all of us. Friends, Jesus was judged as a sinner so that we can be accepted as holy and righteous.

[17 : 39] Jesus was judged as someone who broke all God's laws, even though he hadn't, so that we can be judged as those who have kept all God's laws, even though we haven't. Jesus went to the cross and was punished in our place.

He was cursed so that we can be set free. That's amazing. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law. But there's one last way that Jesus fulfills the law, and it's this.

He says that if you will trust in him, if you will come to him, if you will put your hope in him rather than yourself, he will actually give you his spirit that will help you to live a life that looks like you're obeying all the commands and the regulations.

Jesus will give you his Holy Spirit to actually change us from the inside. Rather than just giving you a mirror saying, hey, this is what's wrong, fix it, Jesus will take you by the hand and say, come, come with me, I'm going to help you change, I'm going to fix that for you.

Jesus will actually change our hearts so that we become the kind of people who do love God and love others. But the point that Paul makes here is that there's two requirements. It's coming to Jesus, not ourselves.

[18 : 49] It's trusting in the Spirit, not our own efforts. You see what Paul's saying? See, the temptation when you read the law is to say, okay, I guess I've got a lot of work to do, I guess I better get busy and get going.

But the Bible says actually don't do that. Friends, take the law and get rid of it. rather come to Jesus and say, Jesus, I need you. I can't do this on my own.

I can't fix my heart. God, I'm bitter. I'm angry. I find it hard to forgive others. Jesus, won't you come and change my heart? Well, God, I'm not honest.

I'm not transparent. I project an image before people. I want people to see me a certain way. Jesus, come and change my heart. And Jesus says that if you come to him honestly and surrender and trust to him, and ask him to do what you can't do on your own, he will give you his spirit and he will change you from the inside out.

Friends, do you want your life to look something like Jesus? Man, I know I do. I want to love God like Jesus did. I want to love people like Jesus did.

[20 : 00] I really need that. Do you want to love people like Jesus did? The answer is don't look to yourself. Don't beat yourself up and say, I'm going to try to do better this week. I'm going to try harder. The answer is come to him and say, Christ, I need you.

Come and have your way in my life. And he will change you from the inside out and he will make you the person that you want to be. So friends, here's the point. As you read the Bible, there's going to be lots of things that are going to sound strange and obscure and you're going to wonder, what on earth is that law about?

Don't think this is some old archaic law, don't even think about it. Don't think, oh, this is some standard of righteousness, I better obey this to be pleasing to God. Let it, like a mirror, drive you to Jesus to say, God, what I see here tells me something about myself.

I need you. Come and have your way in my life. And if you surrender to him, if you trust him, he'll change you and he'll give you the Holy Spirit so that you can live a holy life, pleasing to him and pleasing to you.

Let's close there. Lord Jesus, the Bible is sometimes hard, sometimes confusing. There are things in there that we don't always understand. But Jesus, we want to trust you.

[21 : 13] God, every one of us in this room are in a different place. Some of us are anxious and worried. Some of us are fearful for the future. God, some of us feel like life is out of control and we're just trying to hold on for dear life.

God, if we're honest, we don't always love you and we don't always love others. But God, we need you. And so we come to you now. Jesus, won't you come and have your way?

Won't you send us your spirit to work in our lives, to write your will and your ways on our heart so that we become the kind of people that you want us to be?

Not by external influence, but internal change of heart. Jesus, I pray, come and have your way.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[22 : 23] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.