

The New Covenant and the Decalogue, part 2

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In part 1, we saw that Catholic and Reformed theologians (as well as others) divide the Mosaic Law into three parts—civil, ceremonial, and moral. They then assert that, while what they call the civil and ceremonial laws are not binding on Christians, the moral laws are still binding. But the Bible reveals the Mosaic Law as a unified whole that cannot be divided. It is either all still binding—and we should be offering sacrifices, not wearing mixed fabric clothing, putting fringes on our garments, not letting bastards into our assemblies, etc.—or none of it is.

In examining these points, we looked at a few of the punishments connected with transgression of the Mosaic Law. One of the strongest proofs that it is impossible for the Law of Moses to have been carried into the New Covenant is its condemning nature. The punishments for the violation of the Mosaic Law were an intrinsic part of the law, inseparable from it. Paul calls the Mosaic Law, "the service of death" (2 Corinthians 3:7). It was equal to the service of death. It was inseparable from its condemnation. In Galatians 3:10, Paul writes, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who doesn't continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them.'" The reason the law is a curse is because no one can keep it. We are inherently sinners (see the booklet, *Total Depravity*, on this page: http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wohg_010.htm). Therefore, if we are trying to keep the law, we will inevitably come under its curse. Those who try to put us under the law are trying (no doubt, unknowingly) to put us under a curse. Those who read the law over their congregations on Sunday are reading a curse over them (see "What is wrong with the reading of the Ten Commandments each Sunday") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/readtencommandmentsqa.htm>).

Of New Covenant believers who are in Jesus Christ, the Bible says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who don't walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). It is impossible for us to be in Jesus Christ, with no condemnation, and under the Law of Moses with its intrinsic condemnation. The Law of Moses has no place in the New Covenant.

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What Jesus Did Regarding the Law

The Christian does not look for his righteousness in law-keeping, but in Jesus alone. We don't need to keep the law, since Jesus has "redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Galatians 3:13). We don't need to keep the law because Jesus fulfilled it: "Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17; see "In what way did Jesus fulfill the law?) (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/jesusfulfilllawqa1.htm>). We don't need to keep the law because God nailed it to the Cross (Colossians 2:14).

We don't need to keep the law because Jesus has redeemed us, obtaining the forgiveness of our sins: "In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7; see also Colossians 1:14). We don't need to keep the law because God has made Jesus our "righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

We don't need to keep the law because, as Hebrews 9 explains, Jesus became our High Priest, offering Himself for our sins. Notice especially verses 11-12 and 14-15: "But Christ having come as a high priest of the coming good things, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption.... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, since a death has occurred for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, that those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."

We don't need to keep the law because, through Christ's death, we died to the law: "Therefore, my brothers, you also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you would be joined to another, to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit to God" (Romans 7:4). Throughout the Old Testament, God likened going after other gods to adultery and prostitution. This was a shadow of the spiritual unfaithfulness that some people would commit under the New Covenant. When we turn back to the law, it is as if we are turning from our present, living Husband, Jesus Christ, and going

back to our old, dead husband, the law. In this way, like the Israelites turning to idols, we become adulterers (read Romans 7:1-6). For more information on this concept, read, "Dead to the Law" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/deadtothelaw.htm>).

Is the Law of Moses in Any Way Applicable to Christians?

In a word, No. The Law of Moses is in no way applicable to Christians. It never applied to anyone but the Israelites of the Old Testament. And the Bible clearly says that it was only "added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise has been made" (Galatians 3:19). That Seed is Jesus Christ, and He has come. Thus, the Law of Moses has ended *for everyone, including Jews*. The Law of Moses is now defunct. It was never a clear expression of God's standard of righteousness. It was always an imperfect, shadowy law. To use it as an expression of "God's eternal moral law" when we today have the law of Christ under the New Covenant is like digging in the mud to find beauty when, if you would just lift your head, you would see the breathtaking, snowcapped peaks of the Rockies bathed in golden sunlight.

The Law of Moses is a historical document within the Old Testament, which, in itself, is a historical document. The Old Testament is a dark document of shadows. We can think of these shadows as codes, picturing something else. With the New Testament, we can look back on the Old and decode it. We can say, for example, "The sacrifices pictured Christ," and, "Israel pictured the *ekklēsia*," and, "The Law of Moses pictured, in a dim and primitive way, the law of Christ." To look to the Old Testament to understand the New is the completely wrong procedure, and will inevitably lead to error. The prophets had the Old Testament, but Jesus said, "For most certainly I tell you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which you see, and didn't see them; and to hear the things which you hear, and didn't hear them" (Matthew 13:17).

To go back to the Law of Moses, to set it up as an example, to say we should be following it, to point to it as a model of God's moral law or the standard of His righteousness is a repugnant disgrace to all lovers of grace. That law is not our law. Speaking of the receiving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai, the writer of Hebrews specifically says, "For you have not come to a mountain that might be touched, and that burned with fire, and to blackness, darkness, storm, the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which those who heard it begged that not one more word should be spoken to them.... But you have

come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable multitudes of angels, to the general assembly and assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24).

Hebrews 3:1-6 clearly shows the superiority of Jesus over Moses and the distinction between Moses' house and Jesus' house:

Therefore, holy brothers, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus; who was faithful to him who appointed him, as also was Moses in all his house. For he has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone; but he who built all things is God. Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken, but Christ is faithful as a Son over his house; whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the glorying of our hope firm to the end.

Moses and Jesus are distinct, Moses' house and Jesus' house (*our* house) are distinct, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant are distinct, law and grace are distinct, and must remain so. The writer of an article I was recently sent, who seems to be saying that he believes New Covenant Theology, is undoing a basic tenet of New Covenant Theology when he writes, "...it is possible for someone to hold to the basic tenets of NCT and still believe that the Ten Commandments have an important role to play in Christian teaching and preaching. It is not the basic tenets of New Covenant theology themselves, but rather, wrong inferences drawn from those tenets, which have led some proponents of NCT to deny that the Ten Commandments have any legitimate place in Christian teaching and preaching as an abidingly useful revelation of the moral will of God" (Martin Rizley, "Puritan and New Covenant Baptists: Co-Defenders of the Decalogue") (<http://gracemadison-al.com/TheDecalogue>). He is wrong. It is absolutely fundamental to New Covenant Theology that the Ten Commandments do not abide. They are as dead as Moses on the other side of the Jordan while we believers have entered the Promised Land of God's rest.

What about New Testament References to the Ten Commandments?

An argument that Reformed Theologians often make is that the New Testament makes frequent references to the Ten Commandments. My response is that these references must be understood in context. In Matthew 5:21-30, for example, Jesus' refers to the Sixth and Seventh Commandments merely to point out what His Jewish listeners had been brought up hearing, and then to use that as a way to introduce His new law: "You have heard... But I say to you." I explain this more fully in "The Sermon on the Mount" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/sermononthemount.htm>).

In Matthew 15:4, Jesus cites the Fifth Commandment to point out to the Jews, who were at that time living under the Old Covenant and responsible for keeping the Mosaic Law, that they were breaking the Fifth Commandment to keep their man-devised tradition. In Matthew 19:17-19 (see also Mark 10:19 and Luke 18:20), Jesus tells the rich, young ruler to keep the commandments, and He then lists the Fifth through the Ninth Commandments. Why? To get the man to realize that, even though he believed he had kept all these from his youth, they hadn't saved him (see "Why did Jesus tell the rich, young ruler to keep the commandments to be saved?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/richyoung rulerqa.htm>).

Paul, in Romans 7:7, cites the Tenth Commandment. But he doesn't do this to recommend the commandment. Just before this, he says that we "were made dead to the law through the body of Christ" (verse 4). Then he goes on to say that "when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were through the law, worked in our members to bring forth fruit to death" (verse 5); that is, the law incited sin in our flesh. "But," he says, "now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter" (verse 6). If Paul is telling us that "we have been discharged from the law," he is certainly not telling us we are still under it. In verse 7, Paul then asks and answers a question his readers might have: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! However, I wouldn't have known sin, except through the law. For I wouldn't have known coveting, unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" Paul uses the Tenth Commandment as an example to show how, under the Old Covenant, the law served the purpose of defining sin. Am I taking a liberty in saying, "under the Old Covenant"? No. Because if we were to still be using the law to serve this purpose, Paul could not, in verse 6, have

said, "we have been discharged from the law." Besides, Paul does not say, "I don't know sin...I don't know coveting." He says, "I wouldn't have known sin...I wouldn't have known coveting." Other versions are even clearer: "I did not know sin...I did not know lust." The Greek is in the aorist tense, which is almost always rendered in the simple English past tense. Under the Old Covenant, the law had the holy and just and good use of defining sin. But it brought death.

Is Paul telling us to keep the Ten Commandments in Romans 13:9? Let's look at the context. Paul begins the chapter by telling us to obey the governmental authorities. In line with this, he tells us in verse 7 to give whatever these authorities require, such as taxes. We are not to owe them, we are to pay them. He then uses that thought to slightly transition his focus in verse 8: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." This is what Jesus tells us to do. It is the law of Christ; the law of liberty (James 2:8). Then, in Romans 13:9, Paul says, "For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not give false testimony,' 'You shall not covet,' and whatever other commandments there are, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Paul is writing to a mixed assembly in Rome of Jews and Gentiles. There has been trouble between them. The Jews want to hang onto their old ways. Paul is not telling them to return to the Ten Commandments. He is telling them to obey the law of Christ, which trumps the Ten Commandments. By obeying the law of Christ—love—every law is fulfilled. "Love doesn't harm a neighbor. Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law" (verse 10).

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus fulfilled the law, and so do we whenever we love: "For you, brothers, were called for freedom. Only don't use your freedom for gain to the flesh, but through love be servants to one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'... Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 5:13-14; 6:2).

What, then, about Ephesians 6:1-3? "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with a promise: 'that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth.'" Paul seems here to be bringing the Fifth Commandment into the New Covenant lock, stock, and barrel. But he is not. Paul is giving a New Covenant command with a New Covenant promise. Exodus 20:12 says, "Honor your father and your

mother." Paul says, "obey your parents in the Lord." "In the Lord" can be taken as either meaning that it is in the will of the Lord that children obey their parents, or that children are not obligated to obey their parents when ordered to do something outside the Lord's will (i.e. go steal from our neighbor). Either way, "in the Lord" is not in the Fifth Commandment. Next, Paul also changes the promise. The promise in Exodus 20:12 can only apply to the children of Old Covenant Israel as it refers only to the land God promised to Israel: "that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you." The promise that Paul, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, cites is, "that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth." The New Covenant command promises long life on the earth.

So we see that New Testament references to the Ten Commandments do not authorize us to look to the Decalogue as our law. Far from it, Scripture after Scripture can be cited (and these have been cited on this website many times) that tell us precisely the opposite. Notice, as just a small sampling, Acts 15:5 and 10: "But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses'.... Now therefore why do you tempt God, that you should put a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" Those who were preaching the law had received no commandment to do so (verse 24). The decision was that it was wrong to command anyone to keep the Law of Moses.

After explaining that Jesus is a priest, not after the order of Levi, but after the order of Melchizedek, the writer of Hebrews states, "For the priesthood being changed, there is of necessity a change made also in the law. For there is an annulling of a foregoing commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect)" (Hebrews 7:12, 18-19a).

What Is the Christian's Relationship to Law?

The Gentiles are without law (*anomos*). Old Covenant Jews were "under the law" (*hupo nomos*). What are we Christians? Paul describes himself as "lawful to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21, *Apostolic Bible Polyglot*), and this applies to us, too. Some translations have this as, "under law to Christ," but that is not correct. The Greek word is *ennomos*. Paul used it purposely. It doesn't mean "under the law"; it means "in law." Because of Christ, we stand in the law, lawful, fully justified, righteous. Christ is our righteousness, we are in Him,

therefore, we are lawful. We are not without law, we are not under the law, we are always lawful in Christ. We are not obligated to law. The law of Christ does not bind us. It frees us. The law of Christ is grace. When we are lawful to Christ (as all believers are), Christ's righteousness shelters us from all punishment from and bondage to law. We are then free to do good—to love our brethren (John 13-34-35; 15:12, 17), to love our neighbors (Galatians 5:14), to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44)—as the Spirit leads us without fear of falling short of the standards of a law of works and condemnation. That's why we must never return to the Old Covenant law: "Stand firm therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and don't be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.... You are alienated from Christ, you who desire to be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:1, 4).

We Yield No Ground

Several voices have lately been calling for an understanding between Reformed Baptists and the teachers of New Covenant Theology. They want compromise on the subject of the Law of Moses. In essence, they ask, "Can we not agree that the 'moral laws'—specifically the Ten Commandments—reveal God's moral will and remain relevant for Christian preaching and instruction today?" Outside of teaching and preaching that the Ten Commandments and all of the Law of Moses are fulfilled, ended, and dead, absolutely not! To compromise on this point is to compromise with vital biblical truth. It is to deny one of the essential reasons Christ became incarnate, lived, and died. Thus, it is to stray into the teaching of antichrist (see "Are You Following the Doctrines of Antichrists?") (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/antichrist.htm>). New Covenant Theologians must hold fast to the truth that there can be no compromise with Reformed Theology. There can be no concord between the New Covenant teaching of Christ and the Reformed/Covenant Theology of Reformed Baptists.

But their minds were hardened, for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains, because in Christ it passes away.

2 Corinthians 3:14