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Exodus 21-24

God's Law Part II: How does the Law apply to us?

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I like to play games. Tomorrow night I'm having some friends over to play boardgames. One of my favorites is called *Balderdash*. It's a game where one person looks up an unknown, strange, word in the dictionary, writes down the correct definition, and everyone else makes up a definition for the word as well. Then everyone tries to guess the correct definition.

We actually own an official version of balderdash, which includes five different categories, one of which is "laughable laws." I'm going to give you three examples of the laws.

1. "In Sweden, it is against the law to try and train your... (now you try to think of what the answer might be...) The correct answer is, "In Sweden, it is against the law to try and train your pet seal to do tricks."
2. "In West Virginia, it is unlawful for any clergyman to... tell a joke, while on the pulpit.
3. "In Boston, Massachusetts, it is against the law to put tomatoes... in clam chowder. That's right!

Someone cared enough to get these strange laws passed, but do any of them really apply to us? It's easy to feel the same way about the laws in the Old Testament. Do they really apply to us? We don't have a slave, and if we did, we certainly wouldn't pierce his ear with an awl to signify he is our servant for life (Ex 21:6). We would never put our kids to death if we heard them cursing us (Ex 21:17). And we're not planning on asking our neighbor to store our ox, so we're not too worried about our ox getting stolen (Ex 22:10).

Should we interpret the law as a strict code we need to obey, as general principles, or should we ignore it? Today, I want us to ask... *How does the Law apply to the Israelites, to Christ, and to Christians?*

How did the Law apply to the Israelites?

To answer this question, we need to go back to the original promise God made the Israelite's forefather. God promised Abraham that he would bless the whole world through his descendants (Gen 12:2-3). God gives them the law to help them accomplish that mission (Ex 19:5-6). See, Genesis 12 tells us that God is going to use the nation of Israel to orchestrate his plan of salvation for the whole world. Exodus 19 tells us that each generation's participation in this plan depends on their obedience to the law. I read an article by [The Village Church](#), the church Pastor Matt Chandler serves, in which they broke the law down three ways:¹

1. The Law distinguishes Israel.

The law makes the Israelites stand out from the crowd. They're a special nation, not ruled by a human king, but by God himself. They're a "theocracy", which is "a form of government which God rules through laws interpreted by religious leaders"—like priests, prophets, judges, or elders. Have you ever been to a party where there's that one kid who is dressed up way more than everyone else? He's wearing a three-piece suit

¹ *Christian Responsibility and Mosaic Law*. The Village Church. Geoff Ashley. May 3, 2012. <http://www.thevillagechurch.net/sermon/christian-responsibility-and-mosaic-law/> (accessed 3/16/2017).
All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

and a fedora. He stands out in the crowd, doesn't he? Israel is to stand out, not in an awkward adolescence way, but in a "holy" way. They're God's people. *The law distinguishes Israel.*

2. The Law restrains spiritual and physical evil.

The law teaches the Israelites to not worship God like the foreign cults through idol worship or inhuman practices, thus restraining spiritual evil (Ex 20:25-26). The law also teaches Israel to protect at-risk classes of people, such as slaves, women, and the unborn, thus restraining physical evil (Ex 21:2, 22).

The law restrains evil with consequences. **Exodus 21:23–25** says, "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. (NIV®) Maybe you've heard Ghandi's quote, "An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind." This law is designed to restrain violence, not enflame it. Instead of punishing a crime with an unfair punishment that provokes retaliation, the punishment is to match the crime, doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, male or female, young or old.

When we see a 55mph speed limit, you probably drive somewhere between 60-65mph, right? But you don't drive 95mph for fear of receiving what one of our trustees calls the "excellence in driving award." *The law restrains spiritual and physical evil.*

3. The Law diagnoses hearts.

There are 613 laws in the Old Testament. In Exodus 24, Moses gives the people the commandments and they say, "We'll do everything God wants." (Ex 24:3). Then they sacrifice bulls and Moses throws their blood on the people. **Exodus 24:8** says, "Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." (NIV®) If you obey the law, you'll receive God's **blessing**, but if you disobey, you'll receive God's **curse** (Deut 28).

Growing up in Colorado, I've actually helped butcher several deer and elk. It was gross. The worst time was when my friend thought it would be funny to wipe some meat on my face. I cried. Can you imagine having Moses throw blood on you. You'd remember the threat. "If you disobey, you'll end up like the bull. This will be your blood." The people agree to these terms.

The Israelites don't keep their promise. In just a few chapters they worship the golden calf (Ex 32:6). The law tells them not to, and then they do, which reveals a deeper problem. The law is revealing what Moses calls their "uncircumcised hearts" (Deut 30:6). They have hard-hearts just like Pharaoh king of Egypt who rejected God (Ex 8:15, 9:12). They can't obey God because their hearts won't let them. So what does God do?

God promises a new Law and new hearts.

First, God is going to renovate the law given to Moses at Sinai into a new and better law. The law Jesus is going to give isn't so much a replacement, as it is a fulfillment, a renewed and renovated law. **Jeremiah 31:33** says, "This is the [new] covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." (NIV®) *God promises a new law that will be written on their hearts.*

Second, God is going to replace hard hearts that disobey with soft hearts that obey. **Ezekiel 36:26** says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (NIV®) *God is going take away their hearts that trust the law and give them hearts that*

trust him. God's people are going to be like the birthday kid who receives all the presents in the crowd and all the other kids gather around in envy. The law distinguished them, restrained them, and diagnosed them, but God is going to give them something better, which leads us to our second question.

How does the Law apply to Christ?

Through Jesus, God's people receive a new law and new hearts. He does this by fulfilling the old law, the old covenant. **Matthew 5:17** says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (NIV®) We're looking at two ways Jesus fulfills the law:

1. Christ gives a new Law and new hearts.

Remember how Moses gave the Israelites the law on mount Sinai? Early in Jesus' ministry we see him climb up on a mountain and deliver a new law, which we call the **sermon on the mount**. Jesus' laws are actually deeper than Moses's laws. Jesus doesn't just say, "Don't murder" he says, "Don't be angry, don't hate" (Matt 5:22). Jesus doesn't say, "Don't commit adultery" he says, "Don't lust in your heart after a woman" (Matt 5:28). In our context, Jesus doesn't say "Don't speed", he says, "Don't put your neighbor at risk so you can get ahead." The law Jesus writes is deeper, more challenging, truer.

Do you also remember how Moses threw the blood on the people as part of ratifying the new law? Jesus gives his law at Sinai, but does he threaten to shed their blood if they can't keep it? No. At the Last Supper, the night before his crucifixion, Jesus says he is going to spill his own blood for his people. **Luke 22:20** says, "In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (NIV®) Christ takes the Mosaic law and makes it more challenging and deeper. But he knows we won't keep it, so he says, "I'll take the curse and spill my own blood to pay the penalty for your disobedience." Then he sheds his blood to make this new law a reality.

This new law is not cut on stones, but on hearts through the Holy Spirit. **Romans 2:29a** says, "No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code..." (NIV®) The Holy Spirit writes Jesus' law on our hearts. This is why we have a conscious that convicts us of sins and helps us turn to Jesus for forgiveness. *Christ gives a new law and new hearts.*

After the U.S. civil war, local governments passed Jim Crow laws restricting the access of black communities to good education, housing, jobs, and other opportunities. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court codified this with a law called "separate but equal", which "ruled that racially separate facilities, if equal, did not violate the Constitution." It wasn't until 1954 after 58 years of oppression that the U.S. Supreme court overturned "separate but equal" in *Brown v. Board of Education*. To end segregation in America, two things needed to change: 1) *the law of the land needed to change*, integrating white and black communities, schools, and people and 2) *the hearts of the people needed to change*, so that white didn't see themselves as better than blacks and blacks don't see themselves as inferior to whites. *For Christ to set us free from sin and death, he needs to give us a new law and new hearts.* This is the first way he fulfills the law. The second is...

2. Christ embodies the Law for us.

Remember how Jesus summarized the whole law? When an expert in the law asked him which is the greatest commandment, Jesus said the greatest is to love God and the second is to love neighbor (Matt 22:37-40).

Jesus embodies love for God. The first four of the Ten Commandments are all about loving God. The first commandment says to have no other Gods. Jesus put his father first, submitting to his will to die on the cross

(Mark 14:36). The second commandment says to not bow down to idols. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he said, "If you will bow down and worship me, I will give you all these things" Jesus didn't bow down (Matt 4:9). The third commandment says not to blaspheme God's name. When Jesus was on trial, he was accused of blasphemy but was the only one who actually bore God's name rightfully (Matt 26:65). The fourth commandment says to honor the Sabbath. The Bible tells us Jesus has become our perfect Sabbath rest (Mark 2:27, Heb 4:9). *Jesus embodies love for God.*

Jesus embodies love for neighbor. The fifth commandment says to honor parents. As Jesus was dying on the cross, he told his disciple John to take care of Mary his mother (John 19:27). The sixth commandment says not to murder. Jesus was murdered for us, those who commit murder in our hearts (Matt 5:22). The seventh commandment says not to commit adultery, Jesus never did that, but he also loved the adulterous woman at the well, calling her to repentance (John 4:1-42). The eighth says not to steal, Jesus gave his life for us (Mark 15:37). The ninth says don't bear false testimony, Jesus didn't say a word as he was led to the cross (Isa 53:7). The tenth says don't covet, don't want what your neighbor has. Jesus, who had everything in heaven, gave all of heaven up so we can have all of heaven (Phil 2:7). *Jesus embodies the law for us.*

The *gospel* is the good news that Jesus embodies you and me (2 Cor 5:21). His body is the one that counts. When God considers if I should go to heaven, he remembers my sins are nailed to Jesus and Jesus' love for God and love for neighbor is nailed to me. Jesus gives us the blessing of obeying the law and takes on the curse on himself (Gal 3:13). *Jesus embodies the law for us.* This leads us to our final question.

How does the Law apply to Christians?

The law God gave to Moses does not apply to Christians. Why? Because Christ has given the church a new law, a new covenant, which is a fulfillment of the old law. **Galatians 6:2** says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (NIV® c.f. 1 Cor 9:21) Christ's law is both different and a better version of Moses's law. The Mosaic law is like that of a different country.² I love Croatia. I've traveled there. But the laws of Croatia don't apply to me in the U.S.. There are some inherent truths in the laws of Croatia that apply to me, like it being illegal to murder or steal. But there are other laws in Croatia that don't matter to me, one of which according to *Balderdash* is, "In Zagreb, Croatia, it is against the law to teach anyone... the boogie-woogie."

As Christians, we are set free from having to obey the law of Moses, but now Jesus holds us accountable to a much more challenging law, the law of Christ. This law is summarized the same way, loving God, which means loving Jesus, and loving neighbor, which means loving everyone, even when it costs us personally. Now we can begin to obey because Christ gives us new hearts to do so. My big idea is this... *The law of Christ sets us free to obey.* This new law sets us free two ways:

1. The Law reminds us of our need for Christ.

As we look at what Jesus expects, to love God and love our neighbor all the time without ceasing, we realize we're unable. **Matthew 5:48** says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (NIV®) As we encounter Jesus' law, we realize we don't want to obey in our own hearts. That's because we're born with the same hearts as those Israelites. We're born with uncircumcised heart that would rather not obey. The theologian **Lady Gaga** is right. We are "born this way." I know this because in Needham, Massachusetts, it is

² Illustration adapted from *How Does the Old Testament Law Apply to Christians Today?* by Greg Koukl. Published April 28th, 2014. <https://www.str.org/articles/how-does-the-old-testament-law-apply-to-christians-today#.WMq5tBIrKV4> (accessed 3/16/17).
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against the law to shave while driving, and at least a handful of you just imagined yourselves shaving while driving. *We we can't, but Jesus did.* Jesus was perfect like his heavenly father is perfect. Every time we encounter Christ's law, we remember our need for Christ.

Even though we can't obey perfectly, we can begin to obey because Jesus has given us new hearts. **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (NIV®) *Every time we remember our inability to obey, we should at the same moment recall Jesus' perfect ability and thank him for giving us new hearts.* If you don't know Jesus, and you are ever overcome with guilt for not measuring up to the standards of others or even your own standards, Jesus offers a better way. He offers you himself, who always measures up, and he offers you a new heart that will begin to measure up. *The law reminds us of our need for Christ.*

2. The Holy Spirit helps us obey Christ's Law.

Through Christ we receive new hearts, and then the Holy Spirit helps our new hearts begin to obey Jesus's law. The Bible calls it bearing fruit. **Galatians 5:22-23** says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (NIV®) This means we can obey, as the Holy Spirit leads and guides us to do so. The Holy Spirit empowers us like the electricity that heats the house, or like the engine that runs the car. The problem with both those illustrations is that it makes the Holy Spirit seem like he is a force or thing, but he's a person. The Holy Spirit helps us obey Christ's law more like a good friend who can speak truth into our life and when the going get's hard, extends a hand out to help pull us up.

The Holy Spirit helps obey Jesus' version of the Ten Commandments. He helps us put God first, valuing him more than money, relationships, or entertainment. The Holy Spirit helps root out our false idols, those things we crave that won't make us happy. The Holy Spirit convicts our hearts so we not only don't curse Jesus, but represent him well. The Holy Spirit helps us rest not just one day a week, but everyday in the salvation we have in Jesus. The Holy Spirit helps us care for our parents when we don't want to, helps us love those who hurt us instead of hating them, helps us fight the lust in our hearts and value our marriages, helps us not gossip about others, helps us find contentment in our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit helps us love God and love neighbor just like Jesus did. *The Holy Spirit helps us obey Christ's law.*

The Law of Christ sets us free to obey.

When *Brown v. Board of Education* passed, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said this, "For all men of goodwill May 17, 1954, marked a joyous end to the long night of enforced segregation...This decision brought hope to millions of disinherited [black men and women] who had formerly dared only to dream of freedom." When Jesus died and rose again 2,000 years ago, he ended the long night of death under the law of Moses. Jesus' death sets free any who dream of freedom and are willing to trust him.

At the 48th anniversary celebration of *Brown v. Board of Education*, at Topeka's First United Methodist Church, U.S. Rep. John Lewis said, "We live in a different country, a better country, because of what happened here in 1954. And we must never forget it. We must tell the story again, over and over and over." As Christians, we live in a better country under a better law. We must never forget how Jesus shed his blood so that we can have new hearts, new hearts that want to obey. Let's tell this story again, over and over and over. *The law of Christ sets us free to obey.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for Cornerstone Congregational Church. Click here to listen to more sermons or click here to read our story.