

What Do Old Testament Laws Mean for Today?

By David Feddes

What do Old Testament laws mean for today? If you're someone who takes the Bible as God's Word, and you want to take all of God's Word to heart, what do you make of all of those Old Testament laws? According to the count of the rabbis, there are 613 laws, just in the five Books of Moses. What do we do with those laws? And what do they mean for us?

Here's just a sample of some laws from the Book of Leviticus

"You shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock" (Lev 1:2). There are many different laws about what kind of offerings you bring, what kind of animals they should be, how you should slaughter them. Are we supposed to be slaughtering animals still today and following that command from the Bible?

"Everything in the waters that has not fins and scales is detestable to you" (Lev 11:12). Does that mean you're sinning if you eat shrimp, or lobster, or oysters?

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). How does that one apply to us today?

"Anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Lev 20:9). Should we execute children and young people who directly curse a father or a mother?

"You shall dwell in booths for seven days" (Lev 23:42). Every year the ancient Israelites would have a Feast of Tabernacles, where you would make little booths for yourselves out of branches and live in those. Are we supposed to be doing that still today in order to obey God?

That's just a small sample of some of the laws that are in Leviticus. And I could give many similar examples. How do we understand these laws? And how do they apply to us today?

Does Jesus get rid of the Law?

Some people would say, "Oh, just forget those books of Moses, forget the rest of the Old Testament, we live in the New Testament." That is not what Jesus says. "Do not think that I have come to abolish [get rid of] the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17–18).

So in some sense, as long as the universe lasts, the law lasts and must be fulfilled. "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments," says Jesus, "and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19–20). Jesus is very clear that he did not come to just

wipe out the law. And he's very clear that even the least commandment matters a lot. So let's learn more about how God's commandments apply to us today.

Now, if you've read your New Testament, you know that there are many statements in the New Testament teaching that we are not under law. What does that mean? If Jesus says that the law is meant to be fulfilled and not just to be gotten rid of, and that even the least commandment matters, what does it mean to say that we are not under law?

Not under law

- **Declared righteous apart from law:** We are right with God through faith in Jesus, who perfectly obeyed God's law on our behalf.
- **Free from law's covenant curses:** Jesus suffered the curse and canceled our debt.
- **Empowered by Spirit, not law:** The Holy Spirit writes God's law on our heart, giving us the desire and the ability to obey.
- **Old rituals replaced:** Old Covenant signs give way to New Covenant reality of Christ.

In the first place, it means that our standing with God does not depend on our ability to keep the law. We are declared righteous apart from law. We are right with God through faith in Jesus because he perfectly obeyed God's law on our behalf. And because of his perfect obedience, our salvation does not depend on our ability to keep the law perfectly.

It also means that we are free from the law's covenant curses. Jesus suffered God's curse against sin, and in doing so, he canceled the record of debt that stood against us. The Bible says, "God made him a curse, as it's written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13). And because he took the curse, we don't have to.

A third way in which we're not under law is that our power to live for God does not come from the law itself, but from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit writes God's law on our heart and gives us the desire to keep the law and the ability to grow in our obedience to keep God's law. So we don't depend on the law for the power to change our lives. It gives us directions, but the power comes from the Holy Spirit.

Here's a fourth way in which we are not under law: the old rituals of the law are replaced. The old covenant signs, which were pointing to Jesus and to the realities of the coming new covenant, these signs give way to new covenant reality in Jesus Christ.

So those are four senses in which we are not under law: we are right with God through faith in Jesus and not through obedience to the law; we're free from the law's covenant curses against lawbreakers; we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live new lives; and the ritual elements of the old law are replaced by the reality.

We uphold and fulfill the law

Even though we're not under law in those ways, we are still called by God to live according to the moral law that he gives us. We uphold and fulfill the law. The apostle Paul was very clear

that we're not under law in the sense we just talked about, but he also said that we don't overthrow the law by this faith. He says, "We hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. But do we then overthrow the law by this faith? No, by no means! On the contrary, **we uphold the law**" (Romans 3:28, 31).

A little later Paul says that Jesus came "in order that the righteous requirement of **the law might be fulfilled** in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4). It's in Jesus Christ that the law is fulfilled. And as his life takes shape in us by the Spirit, we more and more fulfill that law.

Three kinds of Old Testament laws

- **Ritual:** Signs pointing to Christ or picturing spiritual realities. *Today these practices are discontinued but can still teach us.*
- **Civil:** Case laws for governing old covenant Israel. *Today no country is the holy nation, but we can learn principles of governance.*
- **Moral:** Rules for holy love toward God and neighbor that apply in all times and places. *Today these commands still direct us.*

As we think about how Old Testament laws apply to us and what they mean for us, it's helpful to distinguish between three different kinds of Old Testament laws. This is kind of a rough and ready division, and there are overlaps and complexities at times. Still, these three types of Old Testament law are helpful to distinguish.

First, **ritual laws:** laws about temple, tabernacle, sacrifices, special days, foods you can and can't eat, and so on. These rituals were signs that pointed ahead to Jesus Christ. They were also signs picturing spiritual realities. Today the literal practices are discontinued because the things they pointed to have been fulfilled in Christ. But studying these pictures and these signs can still teach us today about Jesus and still picture some spiritual realities that we do need to live by.

Second, **civil laws:** case laws that were there for governing the nation of old covenant Israel. Today there's no country that is the holy nation in the sense that old covenant Israel was. The church is God's new holy nation, scattered throughout all countries. But we can still learn many things that help us in our life together as church, and we can learn principles of governance from the Old Testament civil laws.

Third, **moral laws:** God's rules for holy love toward God and his rules for holy love toward our neighbor. These apply in all times and in all places. Today, these commands still direct us.

With those three kinds of law laid out—ritual, civil, and moral—let's consider each one in more detail, look at some examples, and see more about what Old Testament laws mean for us today.

Ritual laws fulfilled

- **Tabernacle/temple:** Jesus tabernacled with us and makes us a temple for his Spirit.
- **Priests:** Sinless Jesus is our only high priest. All believers are priests.

- **Sacrifices:** Jesus the Lamb is the final sacrifice. Our bodies are living sacrifices.
- **Special days:** Sabbath, Passover, Firstfruits, Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Booths/Tabernacles
- **Circumcision:** putting off old self through union with Jesus death and resurrection
- **Symbols of separation:** eating only “clean” animals; no consuming blood; no mixed fabrics, no mixed crops or animal breeding; no yoking different animals for plowing
- **Symbols of purity and wholeness:** laws about yeast, mold and mildew, diseases, discharges, childbirth, dead bodies

First of all, let’s think about some of the ritual laws. The **tabernacle** and the design for it, and the practices connected with it, were given to Moses, later on, there was a **temple** that David collected materials for and that Solomon built; still later, after Solomon's temple was destroyed, another temple was built. All of what the Old Testament says about tabernacle and temple has been fulfilled. Jesus tabernacled with us. “The Word became flesh and tabernacled with us” (John 1:14). In the Old Testament, the tabernacle and the temple were God’s way of making his presence very real among his people. And especially the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies was the focus of God's presence among his people. Now that Jesus has come, Jesus is the focus. Jesus is also called Emmanuel, or “God with us.” He is the temple living among us, and he also makes us a temple for his Holy Spirit, as the Scripture says (Matthew 1:23; 1 Corinthians 3:16). That’s how tabernacle and temple are fulfilled today. Jesus told a Samaritan woman that a time is coming and has come when they're not going to worship God on this mountain or on the mountain in Jerusalem, but people will worship God in spirit and in truth. And that is the way that we are tabernacles and temples of worship to God today (John 4:21–24).

In the tabernacle and ritual system, there were **priests**: the high priest and the other priests who were offering sacrifices. But with the coming of Jesus, he is our only high priest. The book of Hebrews is extremely clear about that—that the old priesthood has given way to the eternal, perfect priesthood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:23–28). At the same time, all believers are priests. The priesthood of all believers is taught in the Bible (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Even Old Testament Israel was chosen to be a holy priesthood, a nation of priests (Exodus 19:6), and the New Testament speaks of us Christians being made “a kingdom of priests.” So, we have just one high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. And then all of us who follow Jesus are to be priests in interceding for the world, in witnessing to others, in offering ourselves to God (Romans 12:1).

The priests offered **sacrifices**, and Jesus offered the sacrifice of himself. Jesus is called in the New Testament the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). It also says, “Jesus, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). So he’s the ultimate sacrifice, and no other sacrifices for sin are necessary. All sacrifices in the Old Testament that were pointing to him are no longer practiced anymore. Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice. Believers are told to “offer your bodies as living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1), to “offer the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that profess his name” (Hebrews 13:15). We still offering sacrifices: not dead animals but living humans, offering ourselves in sacrifice to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament prescribed many **special days**. There’s a long list of them in Leviticus 23, and some of these are explained and defined elsewhere too. The Sabbath: every seven days, a time to rest from all work. The Passover: every year, remembering God's deliverance of the

people of Israel from Egypt. The Feast of Firstfruits: right at the end of the Passover, where they'd offer the very first elements of the harvest to God. The Feast of Weeks (also called Pentecost): came seven weeks or fifty days after Passover. The Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. These were all special days. I can't get into detail on all these, but let me give just a few hints of how they have been fulfilled.

In the New Testament, Hebrews 4 says that we need to enter into God's eternal rest, and Jesus Christ is our Sabbath rest. We must seek to enter that rest by faith in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:9–11). So Jesus is the fulfillment of the Sabbath rest. The New Testament says that we should no longer be requiring Sabbaths of new converts and believers (Colossians 2:16–17).

Jesus is our Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus gave bread and wine to his disciples on the Thursday night of the Passover and said, "This is my body" and "this is my blood" (Luke 22:19–20). In Hebrew reckoning, Thursday night and Friday were the same day—the day starts with Thursday night and then carries over until sundown Friday. Jesus offered the bread and the wine and said, "This is my body" and "this is my blood," and on that day of Passover, he sacrificed himself when his body was nailed to the cross.

The Feast of Firstfruits landed on the first day of the week. On the first day of the week, Jesus rose from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15 says, "Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Later in the same chapter, it says, "Each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him" (1 Corinthians 15:23). We are all going to be raised at his second coming, and his resurrection is the firstfruits of the general resurrection. So Jesus fulfills that Feast of Firstfruits.

What about the Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost? We know from Acts 2 that on the day of Pentecost, the day where the completion of the harvest was to be celebrated, Jesus poured out his Holy Spirit after he had ascended to God's throne. The Holy Spirit came upon the church and into believers in power and in might and in riches and fulfillment (Acts 2:1–4).

I could go on about many other ways in which Jesus Christ has fulfilled these special days and feasts. Obviously, Jesus fulfills the Day of Atonement: he offered himself as "a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood" (Romans 3:25).

At the annual Feast of Booths, the Israelites always had to remember that they had once been traveling from Egypt to the Promised Land. The New Testament tells us that we're still pilgrims and strangers traveling on our way to a better world (Hebrews 11:13–16).

These ritual laws are important because they point to Jesus Christ. They point to spiritual realities that are still here today. But we don't have to—and indeed, we should not—try to carry out all of the literal details of these Old Testament rituals and feasts.

Here are a few more examples. **Circumcision** was a key sign of the old covenant. Scripture says that we "have been circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him through baptism, in which we were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God who raised

him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11–12). So circumcision is no longer required under the new covenant. It's replaced by the bloodless ceremony of baptism, a ceremony which applies to male and female equally. It's a better sign than circumcision, more inclusive and not painful or bloody, thus showing that Jesus' sacrifice is the final shedding of blood. Studying what circumcision meant in the Old Testament can still help us, because it pictures "putting off our old self." It pictures being marked as God's chosen who are called by faith to serve him.

Another kind of Old Testament ritual laws were **symbols of separation**. There were laws of eating only certain animals and then avoiding other animals and not being allowed to eat them. You were not allowed to consume blood because blood was a sign of sacrifice and of atonement, and the life was in the blood. There were laws about no mixed fabrics. Those of us who wear a combo of cotton and polyester today would be violating those laws if we were still bound by Old Testament ritual laws. There were laws against mixing crops together and having two different kinds of crops mixed together in the same field. Laws against breeding certain kinds of animals together that would produce sterile offspring. Laws against yoking together different kinds of animals, an ox and a donkey, to pull a plow at the same time. These laws were symbols of separation. God had called the people of Israel to be different, to be unlike the other nations, and these various laws were given to cultivate this sense of separateness, of being set apart by God for his special purposes. Still today, Christians are to think of themselves as a people set apart, no longer by keeping all of the ritual laws that were required of the people of Israel, but nonetheless, to be a holy nation under God.

There were also **symbols of purity and wholeness**. You had laws about yeast/leaven, and about getting rid of the old leaven every year at the time of Passover. This was a sign of getting rid of sin and starting afresh. There were laws about mold and mildew in your house and how to get rid of it. If you couldn't get rid of it, you had to destroy the entire building. Laws about diseases such as leprosy and cleansing and uncleanness. Laws about various kinds of discharges that made you ceremonially unclean. Laws about what to do after childbirth, which had left you ceremonially unclean. Laws about who touches dead bodies and what that means and how to be cleansed of that. All of these laws were picturing the importance of purity and wholeness, and showing that in a fallen world where we're sinful and become diseased and unhealthy, we don't have the right to just walk right into God's presence, because He's holy. He's separate from that. We can't just go up to God as unholy and broken people.

But the good news of the gospel is, God comes to us. When Jesus comes and touches someone who has leprosy, Jesus does not become unclean; instead, the leper becomes clean. When a woman with a discharge of blood that she's had for years and years and been unable to get rid of, and has been ritually unclean because of it, as well as the health problems associated with it, she touches Jesus' robe. Instead of making Jesus unclean, she's healed, and she becomes clean. When Jesus touches the dead, he doesn't become ceremonially unclean—the dead become alive. And when Jesus mingles with people who are of mixed racial background or sinful, it doesn't corrupt Him, it wins them to the kingdom of God.

These Old Testament pictures of separateness and purity and of our unworthiness to approach God are fulfilled when Jesus comes and approaches us as God among us and brings His life, His

purity, His wholeness into our lives. And so, the Old Testament rituals are no longer required because Jesus has come and has brought a new and better covenant.

Ritual details repealed

When we read the New Testament, we find places where these ritual laws are explicitly repealed. I'm not just making up my own ideas and saying, "We shouldn't practice these rituals anymore." The Bible explicitly says that some of them do not apply anymore. Jesus himself says, "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" (Mark 7:18–19). Jesus says that all foods could now be eaten, because you're not polluted by what you take into your body. Your real problem is your heart, and the food had just been a symbol.

The apostle Peter had a vision of various animals being let down from heaven in a sheet. In that sheet were quite a few animals that were considered unclean, which a Jewish person under the old covenant would not be allowed to eat. Peter was told, "Kill and eat." Peter said, "No, I've never eaten anything that's unclean." And the voice came and said, "What God has made clean, do not call unclean" (Acts 10:9–16). What had previously been unclean was now clean. The vision of those foods was given to Peter in order that he would go and associate with Gentiles and welcome them into the people of God. The time of separation, of clean and unclean, was over. Gentiles were to be welcomed on a large scale into the kingdom of God. And with the welcoming of the Gentiles, God stopped the food requirements both Gentiles and for Jews.

The apostle Paul wrote, "You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain" (Galatians 4:10–11). He is saying, "You don't seem to get it that with Jesus Christ, all of those feasts and seasons have been fulfilled. You should focus on Christ, not on the Old Testament signs and symbols."

Reality replaces ritual shadows

The Scripture speaks of this as the reality replacing ritual shadows. When somebody is walking around the corner of a building, you might see their shadow shortly before you see them. But once they arrive, your focus is on the person, not on the shadow. Or if you look at an ultrasound of a little child, you may see some dim outlines and make out the child, and maybe that's the best picture you can get of the child at that particular point. But when the child is born, your main focus is on the living child, not on the old shadows of the ultrasound.

Hebrews says that the priesthood and the temple and all those other things "serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.... the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities" (Hebrews 8:5, 10:1).

The apostle Paul says, "Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:16–17). These rituals were the shadow. Jesus is the real body of which those other things were just the shadow that showed Christ was approaching.

So there are these varieties of rituals. The literal details are not binding on us anymore. And yet, it's profitable to read them, because they're pointing to Jesus, and it's profitable to read them because they may be pointing to abiding spiritual principles.

Getting hitched

There's the law in Deuteronomy 22:10, "Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together." Now, that literal requirement is no longer in effect. Today, if somebody wanted to plow with an ox and a donkey together, they wouldn't be violating God's commandment.

You might say, "I'm doing a great job of keeping that law. I have never plowed with an ox and a donkey yoked together." But that's not the main point of this law or the abiding spiritual point. The apostle Paul says, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). We sometimes speak of marriage as "getting hitched." In marriage you become yoked to another person. Don't be yoked together with an unbeliever. Don't get hitched to someone who does not share your commitment to Christ. Don't enter into a marriage, and don't become bound to a tight business or financial partnership with an unbeliever who may have totally different priorities and totally different standards than you do. These are the ongoing principles that lie behind the command, "Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together" (Deuteronomy 22:10). The literal requirement of an Old Testament ritual law or civil law might no longer be in effect, but that law may symbolically show us a moral principle that still applies today.

Holy temple of God

In the Old Testament, God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16). The New Testament echoes those words: "For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them,' says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me," says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:16–18). So we're to think of ourselves as God's temple. We're to think of ourselves as a people set apart. We are to avoid what is unclean and unholy, not as defined by Old Testament rituals and details anymore, but nonetheless understood as walking in purity before the face of God.

So that's the first kind of Old Testament law—ritual laws—signs pointing to Christ or picturing spiritual realities. And today the literal practices are discontinued. But studying those laws can still teach us much about Christ and about our relationship to him and how to live for him.

Civil case laws

- **Safety laws:** railing around roof, mean bulls
- **Property:** land, gleaning, Jubilee
- **Kingship:** not many horses, no excessive luxury, not many wives, keep and enforce law
- **Damage control:** regulations for war, divorce, slavery, limiting evil in a fallen situation

- **Deciding guilt:** at least two witnesses, procedure for “he said/she said” accusations
- **Penalties:** restitution, exile, execution

A second kind of law is civil case laws for governing old covenant Israel. Today, no country is the holy nation. But we can still learn valuable principles from Old Testament laws that help us in church governance and civil society.

There are **safety laws**. "You shall build a parapet around your roof" (Deuteronomy 22:8). You might say, "I guess I'm violating God's law because I don't have a railing around my roof." Well, back in those days, they had flat roofs in that society. People would spend time on the roof, work up there, or sleep up there, or have little children playing up there. You needed to have a railing around that roof so that somebody didn't take a nosedive off the roof and get hurt.

There were laws about having a mean ox or a mean bull. If an ox gores somebody and it had never done anything like that before, then you handle it one way, and you pay some restitution to the person—the injured or dead person's family (Exodus 21:28–32). But if that bull was known to gore people in the past and then it killed somebody, the owner of that bull was subject to being executed himself, because he should have restrained that bull or killed that bull when the bull had a bad history.

Now, even if you don't have flat roofs or cattle, the principle still applies: we should be watching for the safety of others in the way that we build and in the things that we do. Still today, many societies have various safety laws.

There were **property laws**. How do you divide the land? How's the land given to the various tribes of Israel and the various clans within those tribes? There were laws about gleaning—about leaving a certain amount of the grain behind and not purposely making sure you got everything, or leaving any grapes that fell on the ground so the poor people could come and pick up the leftovers and have a way through their own work to be able to supply their needs (Leviticus 19:9–10; Deuteronomy 24:19–22).

The Year of Jubilee commanded that every fifty years, people who had been slaves because of debt were set free, and the debts were canceled, and their lands were returned to them (Leviticus 25:10). In this way, the huge inequalities in society could be made a bit more equal again.

We don't have laws about gleaning or Jubilee in our societies, but the concerns that lie behind those laws still matter. How do we keep the poor from being totally ground into the dust? How do we keep a few people from gaining more and more till they have almost everything and others have almost nothing? These are abiding issues that we need to pay attention to.

The civil case laws regarding **kingship** say that the king of Israel should not have too many horses. He shouldn't live in excessive luxury and have too much silver and gold. He shouldn't take many wives. He should study God's law, keep it, know that he's not above it, and enforce that law” (Deuteronomy 17:14–20). Some kings such as David had multiple wives. Solomon had way too many wives, too many horses, too much silver and gold. We don't have the exact same

law applying to our rulers, but do we really want rulers who have tons of women, use their position to get rich and hoard property for themselves, and rely too much on military power?

Laws about **damage control** are another kind of civil case law. There are regulations for war. There are regulations for divorce and how to properly document it and how the woman who has been divorced is to be regarded, and so forth (Deuteronomy 24:1–4). There are laws regarding slavery.

Some people read those laws and say, “See, God was in favor of divorce. God was in favor of slavery. Or at least the Old Testament claimed he was. So the Old Testament must not be believable.” You’ve got to understand that these are civil case laws meant for governing a particular society and for limiting evil in a fallen situation. Jesus was asked about that divorce law that first appeared in the law of Moses, “Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.” The Pharisees asked him, “Doesn’t that mean divorce is fine?” Jesus said, “No. Haven’t you read that from the beginning God made them male and female, and brought them together as one flesh? What God has joined together, let no one put asunder.” He said, “Moses gave you that law about divorce because of the hardness of your hearts” (Matthew 19:3–8).

So there were civil laws that were given to hard-hearted people to restrain the worst abuses. The same happened with regard to slavery. Not every law about slavery in the Old Testament is a law about God’s ideal for how human society ought to be. It’s reining in the worst abuses of the institution of slavery. Still today, the purpose of civil government is not to create heaven on earth. Often it’s just to prevent hell on earth and do some damage control and restrain some of our worst impulses and some of our worst institutions.

Another example of civil case laws are those where you’re **deciding guilt**. We’re told there should be at least two witnesses when anybody is accused in court of doing something wrong (Deuteronomy 19:15). Still today, we want to make sure that we don’t sentence innocent people. So there better be strong evidence, and preferably witnesses who saw them in the act.

There are also procedures for determining guilt in “he said, she said” cases—like where a husband suspects that his wife might be guilty of adultery but can’t prove it and nobody saw her. The Old Testament says, “Mix up this certain kind of drink, and she has to drink it. If her belly swells, she’s guilty. If her belly doesn’t swell, she’s not guilty” (Numbers 5:11–31). Now you shouldn’t say, “We need to figure out that exact potion, and then every time we get a ‘he said, she said’ court case today, we have the woman drink that and we’ll find out who’s lying.” No, that was a case law given by God in that setting for those people as a procedure for the people of Israel to use, not as the abiding way to always determine guilt in cases of adultery or rape.

Another aspect of civil case law was **penalties**. Here civil law was somewhat tied to ritual and moral law. Sometimes there were punishments for violating ritual and moral laws as well as for violating civil laws of the nation. In some cases, you had to make restitution and make payment. In other cases, you might have to be exiled for certain offenses. And in other cases, you would be executed or killed. So part of the civil law was the penalties that were applied.

The new holy nation

- The holy nation of the old covenant was Israel: one people with one land.
- The holy nation of the new covenant is the church: many peoples living in many lands.
- The church does not govern any particular nation or punish unchurched evildoers.
- The church teaches God's laws to professing Christians and rebukes sin. The church excommunicates (but doesn't execute) blatant sinners who refused to repent.

There is a new holy nation under the new covenant. The holy nation of the old covenant was Israel, one people with one land. But the holy nation of the new covenant is the church—many peoples living in many lands. And the church doesn't govern any particular nation or any particular country. It's not the church's job to punish unchurched evildoers, because the new holy nation is a different thing than the old holy nation was. The church teaches God's laws to professing Christians, and the church rebukes sin. The church excommunicates—kicks out of the church—people who commit blatant and serious sins. The church excommunicates them, but it doesn't execute them. It only excommunicates them if they refuse to repent.

Learning about governance

- Different peoples, cultures, and eras are not bound by details of God's old covenant civil regulations for the Jewish nation in a mainly rural culture during the era before Christ.
- Laws enforced in Israel didn't always express God's created ideal but limited extreme evil.
- Biblical principles inform good government.
- God will judge all nations.
- Judgment begins with the house of God.

As we look at the Old Testament laws that were focused on civil governance, how do we apply those? Under the new covenant, different peoples, different cultures, different eras are not bound by all the details of God's old covenant civil regulations that were meant for the Jewish nation in a mainly rural culture before Christ. The laws enforced in Israel didn't always express God's created ideal, as we've seen, but were there to limit extreme evil. So we shouldn't expect every civil law to be pointing out God's ideal for holy human conduct.

The principles of Old Testament civil laws should be studied, and have been studied in the past by some of the great leaders and statesmen, to inform good government. It would be foolish to completely ignore God's laws that were given as civil laws for governing that society.

God is the one to judge all the nations, but the church must judge its own, at least to some degree, and deal with serious sins that occur among the people of God. Scripture says, "Judgment begins with the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). We have to leave the judgment of some things to God himself, but the church does have to be a disciplined and holy community.

Moral laws

- You shall love the Lord your God. (Deut 6:5)

- Love your neighbor as yourself. (Lev 19:18)
- The Ten Commandments (Sabbath revised)
- You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (Lev 18:22)
- Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out. (Lev 19:31)
- You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves. (Lev 19:28)

We've looked at ritual laws. We've looked at civil laws. Now let's think about moral laws. These are rules for holy love toward God and neighbor that apply in all times and places. Today these commands still direct us.

Here are some of the examples: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." Jesus says that is the greatest commandment in all the law of God (Mark 12:30). The second greatest commandment is "Love your neighbor as yourself." "On these two commands," says Jesus, "depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:40).

The Ten Commandments are moral laws. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol or an image. You shall not misuse or take in vain the name of the Lord your God. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. {This commandment is partly ritual law and has changed somewhat, as I've already mentioned. The abiding principle of the Sabbath command is that we rest from our evil works, that every day we rest in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and also that we don't work ourselves to death, don't work others to death, and gather regularly with the people of God to worship him. Under the new covenant, Christians have typically done that on the first day of the week to celebrate Jesus' resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. At any rate, the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath is the most challenging of the Ten Commandments to understand and apply in its moral sense.) The remaining commandments relate to other people: Honor your father and your mother. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not covet. These are moral laws of God that continue to apply for all peoples in all places.

There are many other laws as well. "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22). How do you know that's not just a ritual law? Well, it occurs in a chapter that contains law after law about sexual immorality. The New Testament states clearly several times that God still opposes homosexual behavior (Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:10).

When in doubt about an Old Testament law, ask this: Does the New Testament repeat it? If the New Testament repeats it and applies it in the same way as the Old Testament, that law is still binding. If the New Testament repeals it, like it repealed the festivals and food laws, then you don't have to live by those laws anymore.

"Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out" (Leviticus 19:31). Don't try to get in touch with the spirits of the dead. Don't go to fortune tellers. That's an abiding moral law. The New Testament is very clear that we shouldn't get into the occult, mess around with spirits of demons, or try to contact the spirits of the dead (Acts 16:16–18; Galatians 5:20; Revelation 21:8).

Sometimes it's hard to know for sure whether something is a moral law that applies in all times or primarily a ritual law that is fulfilled in Christ and no longer required. Here's an example: "You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves" (Leviticus 19:28). This is part of not doing things that the pagans do as part of their worship. Does that mean it would always be wrong to get a tattoo if your intention had nothing to do with paganism? Maybe leave that one to further prayer and thought. But the Bible as a rule doesn't look very fondly on doing stuff to your body that radically changes its appearance or inflicts pain on it, because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Still, this is one of those laws where it's hard to know whether God is giving an abiding command—no tattoos—or whether it's about not doing what the surrounding nations did in their pagan rituals.

Now, the Bible is very clear that we can't just ignore God's morality. "Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). So there are things that characterize people who have no place in God's kingdom, things that are violations of God's moral law. But Christ washes and sanctifies and justifies. And he doesn't do it so that we can keep on wallowing in that stuff. Scripture makes that very clear.

"Love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandment are summed up in this word: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:8–10).

We have God's moral laws of love and command that apply the particulars of love. God's moral law helps us understand what love involves.

What can God's moral law do for us?

- **Teacher of sin:** God's law can show us our sinfulness and our desperate need of a Savior, driving us toward Jesus.
- **NOT self-salvation:** God's law cannot help us to earn God's favor or change ourselves.
- **Pattern of love:** God's law shows thankful, saved, Spirit-filled believers the pattern of love toward God and people.

One thing God's moral law can do is something that doesn't feel uplifting: it can tell us how rotten we are. God's law is a **teacher of sin**. It can show us our sinfulness and our desperate need of a Savior and drive us toward Jesus. If pastors and evangelists no longer speak of God's law, after a while people who see no need for the gospel. They see no need for Jesus. Why would you go to the doctor if you don't even understand that you're sick? The law is one of the great teachers of sin, to help us understand our great need for God.

The law cannot save us. God's way is **NOT self-salvation**. God's law cannot help us to earn God's favor. Only Jesus can earn God's favor for us. God's law can't help us to change ourselves. If we're told what to do and then left to ourselves, we'll actually become worse in

rebellion against what we know of God's law. Only the Holy Spirit can change us inside and make us want to keep God's law and give us more power to live up to it. So the law does not save. It cannot save. It was never meant by God to save anybody. It is a teacher of sin, first of all.

Then, once we've been saved, God's law is a **pattern of love**. God's law shows thankful, saved, Spirit-filled believers the pattern of love toward God and people. Love is not just a vague feeling. Love is not just some sort of fog bank with no shape or definition. Love has a shape. Love has a pattern. God's laws show us the shape and pattern and boundaries of love. That's a wonderful and valuable purpose of God's law: to show us how God wants us to walk. Many people want to have God's guidance in their lives for this or that important decision. Well, if you want God's guidance in your daily life, one of the most important places to start is just knowing God's commandments in the Scripture and applying them to the way you live day by day.

Demonic lies about laws

- **Legalism:** Law is a ladder to God. Do good deeds to earn salvation.
- **Antinomianism:** Law is bad. Ignore moral laws, and do whatever you like.
- **Ritualism:** Focus on ceremonial details, not on Christ or the Holy Spirit or love.
- **Civil religion:** Your country is God's holy nation. Force fellow citizens to act like Christians, and ignore church problems.

I want to mention a few demonic lies about laws, the kinds of lies that Satan makes up. Some of these you can deduce from what I've already said, but I just want to make them very clear.

One lie of the devil is **legalism**. Legalism is the claim that law is your ladder to God. Just work on obeying the laws, do enough good deeds, and you will earn your salvation. Many religions are built on legalism, but it is deadly. It is a lie of the devil.

A very different kind of lie, but still a lie of the devil, is **antinomianism**. *Anti* means against; *nomos* means law. So antinomianism means being against law. This approach says, "Law is bad. Ignore the moral laws and do whatever you like." In the early centuries of the church, a heretic named Marcion tossed out the whole Old Testament and most of the New Testament and accepted only those passages that he thought were against law. But the mainstream church kept the Old Testament as God's Word and kept the whole New Testament. The faithful church kept all the books of the Bible as God's Word to be listened to, believed, and obeyed, because antinomianism is a lie of the devil.

Ritualism is another lie of the devil, where he leads you to focus on ceremonial details—on smells and bells and candles and robes and incense and all kinds of human rituals—rather than on Christ or the Holy Spirit or love. I'm not saying every ritual is always a bad thing. But if a ritual is drawing attention away from Christ, or if it's being used as a means of judging people or judging other churches, then it's being used in a very demonic way. Jesus dispensed with most of the rituals of the Old Testament after fulfilling them, so we don't have to follow those ritual laws. Why, then, would we invent a whole bunch of new rituals and think that those are going to be a wonderful improvement on the way of Christ revealed in the New Testament? Ritualism,

which focuses on this, that, and the other thing that churches do to keep people busy—or vestments and so on—but detracts from Christ, is a deadly strategy of the devil.

Here's the fourth demonic lie about laws: **civil religion**. Your country is God's holy nation, and so you try to force your fellow citizens to act like Christians even when they're not. Meanwhile, very often, you ignore church problems. There's no church discipline; you never put anybody out of the church, no matter how serious their sin, and yet you're trying to get laws passed to run your nation in a Christian manner. That's a terrible mistake. Some people want to get the Ten Commandments in courthouses and in public places that are sponsored by the government, but they don't even have the Ten Commandments in their own home, or in their church, and not memorized or stored in their own hearts. Sad to say, less than half of evangelical Christians—or people who claim to be evangelical—even know five of the Ten Commandments. They claim to believe that the Bible is the Word of God but don't even know God's moral law. Yet many of those same people might be lamenting the fact that their nation is not as godly as it ought to be. Hey, if the church isn't godly, and if God's people aren't paying attention to his moral laws, don't run around trying to make your nation buy into some version of civil religion.

NT Christians and OT laws: the case of 1 Corinthians 5

We've seen three kinds of Old Testament laws—the ritual, the civil, and the moral laws. Now what I'd like to do is take that distinction and read one particular passage from the New Testament, which shows this in action. This is a case study or an example of how the apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, took Old Testament laws and applied them to a particular situation. I want to look with you at 1 Corinthians 5.

The chapter begins by saying, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. [He is sleeping with his stepmother.] And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). This man is a member of the church who claims to be a Christian. The stepmother probably doesn't claim to be a Christian, and so there's no word about what to do with her. The Old Testament law says, "Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife" (Lev 18:8; see also 20: 11; Deut 22:30,27:20; Gen 35:22, 49:4), and it says this quite a number of times. Paul takes that moral law as still binding. He says even the pagans know better than sleeping with a stepmother. Don't let a Christian get away with violating that moral law.

"For though absent in body, I am present in spirit. And as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:3-5). They are to put him out of the Christian fellowship, out of the protection of the Lord and his angels. Let him know that he's in Satan's realm. Whatever happens to him that is destructive and painful, the hope is that he will become more miserable in his evil, and that he will repent and turn back to the Lord, that his spirit may be saved. That's the purpose of church discipline. That's the purpose of excommunicating somebody, so that they will miss so much what they found among God's people, that they will feel so desolate when Satan's dominion is

again exercised over them, that they'll want to reject their sin and come back among God's people again.

"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6–8). Do you see what Paul is doing here? He's taking Old Testament ritual laws related to the Passover Feast and applying their spiritual realities to new covenant Christians.

No longer are Christians required to slaughter a lamb in a certain way or to splash its blood in a certain place or to roast it and eat it in a certain setting. But that doesn't mean they should say, "There's nothing we can learn from reading about the Passover—let's ignore all that." Christ is our Passover lamb, and he's been sacrificed. In the Passover Feast, they had to get rid of the old leaven. For most of the year, they would keep a lump of the old dough that had already been leavened and had some rise to it, so they could put the leaven into a new lump of dough, so that dough could rise too. But every year at Passover, they were to start over with no leaven in the bread they used for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In the new covenant, people were no longer required as Christians to keep that feast literally, but they were required in a spiritual sense to get rid of the old leaven and be a brand-new lump of bread.

Some Christians today get in a dither over whether there should be yeast and leaven in the bread they eat for communion or not. It doesn't matter. What does matter is the leaven of malice, the leaven of evil. That's the leaven you have to get rid of, and instead have the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. So you see, you're not required to eat a literal lamb. You're not required to clean your whole house to get rid of all yeast and leaven and all of that any longer. But the spiritual principles—of looking to Christ, the Lamb, and of getting rid of the malice and evil that are a terrible leaven—those principles still abide. You see how Paul did that? He took ritual laws from the old covenant and gave them their fuller spiritual meaning for new covenant people. He applied the deeper realities of the old covenant symbols.

Then Paul says, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one" (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). Paul isn't saying, "You should judge the world for all its evils and try to leave the world entirely." You can befriend non-Christian people if your aim is to show them love and to let them know more of Jesus Christ and to win them over to him. But it's dangerous to associate with somebody who calls himself a brother and yet is involved in great and serious evil. Sometimes young people hang around with the wrong crowd who are calling themselves Christians, who go to their same church, but are involved in sexual immorality or are getting drunk every weekend. That's deadly. And it's important to avoid those who call themselves brother Christians or sister Christians and yet are wallowing in things that are dead wrong. So don't band together with those who call themselves Christians but are corrupting and polluting the church.

Paul continues, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. 'Purge the evil person from among you'" (1 Corinthians 5:13). That last sentence is quoting an Old Testament law that is repeated many times: "You shall purge the evil from your midst" (Deut 13:5, 17:7, 17:12, 21:21, 22:21,22,24). Those passages commanded the Israelites to execute those who committed various sins. Do you see how Paul is applying it? He does not say to execute this person. Excommunication from church—the new covenant holy nation—replaces execution in the civil law of Israel, the old covenant holy nation.

As the Christian church, we don't excommunicate or execute or enforce God's commands on those who don't claim to be Christians in the first place, because they don't identify with the holy nation as the people of God. We may still speak God's Word to them and urge them to repent. We may warn that nations that blatantly violate God's laws, that slaughter the unborn, that wallow in sexual immorality, that trample on the poor—such nations are subject to the judgment of God. But we do not have the obligation to decide who gets executed or who gets exiled from the country. As leaders in the church and as fellow members in the church, our obligation is to judge those within the church when they commit really serious and open sins and won't repent. We leave it to God to judge those outside the church.

So you see how in this passage the three kinds of Old Testament laws were all being applied. The **ritual laws** of Passover were signs pointing to Christ, our Passover Lamb, signs that were picturing spiritual realities of getting rid of the leaven of malice and wickedness. Although the literal rituals have been discontinued, they can still teach us. We learn from the **civil laws** of execution, but those laws are applied in a different manner through excommunication and church discipline. We learn from the **moral laws** that you just can't sleep with anybody you want. And there are many other laws too that still apply today—rules for holy love toward God and neighbor that apply in all times and in all places.

So there is enormous benefit in studying God's holy law and laying it to heart. "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (Psalm 119:97). "God's laws are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb" (Psalm 19:10). A true Christian should not spit upon God's laws or ignore them or say they're not worth studying or reading anymore.

The law of Christ

The New Testament says, "For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but **keeping the commandments** of God." (1 Corinthians 7:19). Ritual laws are no longer binding, but God's commandments are still very important, and we want to apply them. we are "not outside the law of God but under **the law of Christ**" (1 Corinthians 9:21). "Bear one another's burdens, and so **fulfill the law of Christ**" (Galatians 6:2). "If you really **fulfill the royal law** according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well" (James 2:8).

Jesus wants us to fulfill the law of Christ—the moral law. As we've seen, this doesn't happen by our own efforts. It's not our way to earn heaven. It is the way that we live as people already saved by Jesus' sacrifice and indwelt by his Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, God promised a new covenant: "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33). The Holy Spirit lives in us, making that law sweet to us and precious to us. Scripture says, "You are a letter from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Jesus says simply, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). "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... For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17–20). We have righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and the old teachers of the law. We have the righteousness of Jesus Christ himself credited to us when we believe in him by faith. We have a transformed heart, which surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, because the Spirit of Jesus comes to live within us. We have the commands of God, which are precious to us, and which we are progressing more and more by God's grace in keeping, so that we may fulfill the commands of Christ.

What Do Old Testament Laws Mean for Today?

By David Feddes

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Sample of laws in Leviticus

- You shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock. (Lev 1:2)
- Everything in the waters that has not fins and scales is detestable to you. (Lev 11:12)
- You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Lev 19:18)
- Anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. (Lev 20:9)
- You shall dwell in booths for seven days. (Lev 23:42)

Does Jesus get rid of the Law?

“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. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17–18)

Practice and teach commands

¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Not under law

- **Declared righteous apart from law:** We are right with God through faith in Jesus, who perfectly obeyed God’s law on our behalf.
- **Free from law’s covenant curses:** Jesus suffered the curse and canceled our debt.
- **Empowered by Spirit, not law:** The Holy Spirit writes God’s law on our heart, giving us the desire and the ability to obey.
- **Old rituals replaced:** Old Covenant signs give way to New Covenant reality of Christ.

We uphold and fulfill the law

- For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law... Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, **we uphold the law**. (Rom 3:28,31)
- "...in order that the righteous requirement of **the law might be fulfilled** in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:4)

Three kinds of Old Testament laws

- **Ritual:** Signs pointing to Christ or picturing spiritual realities. *Today these practices are discontinued but can still teach us.*
- **Civil:** Case laws for governing old covenant Israel. *Today no country is the holy nation, but we can learn principles of governance.*
- **Moral:** Rules for holy love toward God and neighbor that apply in all times and places. *Today these commands still direct us.*

Ritual laws fulfilled

- **Tabernacle/temple:** Jesus tabernacled with us and makes us a temple for his Spirit.
- **Priests:** Sinless Jesus is our only high priest. All believers are priests.
- **Sacrifices:** Jesus the Lamb is the final sacrifice. Our bodies are living sacrifices.
- **Special days:** Sabbath, Passover, Firstfruits, Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Booths

Ritual laws fulfilled

- **Circumcision:** putting off old self through union with Jesus death and resurrection
- **Symbols of separation:** eating only "clean" animals; no consuming blood; no mixed fabrics, no mixed crops or animal breeding; no yoking different animals for plowing
- **Symbols of purity and wholeness:** laws about yeast, mold and mildew, diseases, discharges, childbirth, dead bodies

Ritual details repealed

- “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. (Mark 7:19)
- What God has made clean, do not call common. (Acts 10:15)
- You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. (Galatians 4:10-11)

Reality replaces ritual shadows

They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.... the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities. (Hebrews 8:5, 10:1)

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (Col 2:16-17)

Getting hitched

- You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. (Deut 22:10)
- Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? (2 Cor 6:14)
- *The literal requirement of an Old Testament ritual law or civil law might no longer be in effect, but that law may symbolically show us a moral principle that still applies today.*

Holy temple of God

For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, ¹⁸ and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor 6:16-18)

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Civil case laws

Safety laws: railing around roof, mean bulls

Property: land, gleaning, Jubilee

Kingship: not many horses, no excessive luxury, not many wives, keep and enforce law

Damage control: regulations for war, divorce, slavery, limiting evil in a fallen situation

Deciding guilt: at least two witnesses, procedure for “he said/she said” accusations

Penalties: restitution, exile, execution

The new holy nation

- The holy nation of the old covenant was Israel: one people with one land.
- The holy nation of the new covenant is the church: many peoples living in many lands.
- The church does not govern any particular nation or punish unchurched evildoers.
- The church teaches God’s laws to professing Christians and rebukes sin. The church excommunicates (but doesn’t execute) blatant sinners who refused to repent.

Learning about governance

- Different peoples, cultures, and eras are not bound by details of God’s old covenant civil regulations for the Jewish nation in a mainly rural culture during the era before Christ.
- Laws enforced in Israel didn’t always express God’s created ideal but limited extreme evil.
- Biblical principles inform good government.
- God will judge all nations.
- Judgment begins with the house of God.

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- Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out. (Lev 19:31)
- You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves. (Lev 19:28)

What gets washed away?

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:9-11)

Fulfilling the law

Love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Rom 13:8-10)

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NT Christians and OT laws:

The case of 1 Corinthians 5

5:1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

- **Moral law:** Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife. (Lev 18:8; see also 20: 11; Deut 22:30,27:20; Gen 35:22, 49:4)

Punishment

1 Cor 5:3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. 4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Passover principles

1 Cor 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

- **Ritual laws:** apply deeper realities of symbols

Avoid unholy “brother”

1 Cor 5:9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

Church judges insiders. God judges outsiders.

1 Cor 5:12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

- You shall purge the evil from your midst. (Deut 13:5, 17:7, 17:12, 21:21, 22:21,22,24)
- Excommunication from church (new covenant holy nation) replaces execution in the civil law of Israel (old covenant holy nation).

Three kinds of Old Testament laws

- **Ritual:** Signs pointing to Christ or picturing spiritual realities. *Today these practices are discontinued but can still teach us.*

- **Civil:** Case laws for governing old covenant Israel. *Today no country is the holy nation, but we can learn principles of governance.*

- **Moral:** Rules for holy love toward God and neighbor that apply in all times and places. *Today these commands still direct us.*

The law of Christ

- For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but **keeping the commandments** of God. (1 Cor 7:19)

- Not being outside the law of God but under **the law of Christ**... (1 Cor 9:21)

- Bear one another's burdens, and so **fulfill the law of Christ**. (Galatians 6:2)

- If you really **fulfill the royal law** according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. (James 2:8)

Spirit-directed, heartfelt obedience to Jesus' rules

- I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33).

- You are a letter from Christ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Cor 3:3).

- If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)