

The Significance of the Old Testament Mosaic Law for Today

A presentation by Dr. Ron Allen, given to the Relational Concepts' School of Discipleship,
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- *What is the Mosaic Law?*
- *Must we keep the Mosaic Law today?*
- *How do we apply the Mosaic Law today?*

The Law Was a Gift of Grace

The **liberal concept** of the Mosaic Law is that it came from Moses. This is biblically inaccurate. The Old Testament Law came from God. It was only *given through Moses* (John 1:17).

The **typical concept** of the Mosaic Law is like an old scroll bound in handcuffs. In other words, it's viewed as an agent of **limitation**. The Law does give restrictions, but restrictions are not limitations when they point to truth. God is restricted to truth, holiness, consistency, and justice, but such restrictions are not limitations. For example, it's been demonstrated that children let out at recess at school will generally stay very close to the school building. But if there is a fenced-in large area, they will play all the way out to the fence. The restriction of the fence creates freedom. The Bible never presents the Law as limiting. That's only true of the legalistic additions to it made by the Jewish Pharisees (Matthew 23), the Judaizers (Galatians 3), and even the Christian Pharisees (Acts 15:5). For example, the (unknown) Psalmist who wrote Psalm 119 spoke of the Law in every one of the 176 verses and never once saw the Law as limiting. He said, *Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies* (v. 98), *I have more insight than all my teachers* (v. 99), *I understand more than the aged* (v. 100), *How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* (v. 103), *I hate every false way* (v. 104), *Thy word is a lamp to my feet* (v. 105), etc. The Psalmist saw the Law as an agent of freedom, wisdom, and insight, without any idea of limitation. Laws are only limitations when we make them up ourselves (see Matthew 11:28-30; 23:4; 1 John 5:3).

The Law Was Not for Salvation

Salvation has always been by grace through faith in every age. It's always been faith in God [specifically, in the second person of the Trinity, i.e. Yahweh, Who is Jesus Christ [see John 1:18] that saves. There are two great passages to consider:

- **Genesis 15:6** tells us that Abraham became righteous before God by means of his **faith**. This was 500 years or so before the Law was given.
- **Exodus 14:31** tells us that Israel [not every single Israelite but the majority of the people] *believed in the LORD* [the word "LORD" is *Yahweh*]. The Law was not for salvation, since salvation for the Israelites preceded the Law. So none of the Law; neither the Ten Commandments nor the annual sacrifices, nor the civil laws, were for the purpose of salvation. Salvation is, and always has been, by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

The Three Purposes of the Law

The Law can be pictured as a hand pointing a finger in the direction of an abundant life.

1. Relationship

The first purpose for the Law was to establish a relationship between God and His people. Salvation established their position before God but not their relationship with God. Because of man's sin nature, people are prone to wander. So God provided the sacrificial system as a means for them to repent of their sin and return to fellowship with God. Sin no longer needed to permanently separate them from God.

2. Separation

The second purpose for the Mosaic Law was to make Israel distinct from all their neighbors. They were to be separate,

different, and holy. The holiness, or sanctification, was, of course, in the context of the righteous character of God, but its principal meaning is not righteousness but separation. If you lined up an Edomite, Moabite, Syrian, Israelite, and a Phoenician in a row and dressed them all the same, you could not tell them apart. Even many of their languages were similar. What separated the Judeans from all the rest was the Law (the Torah). The Law was given in such a way that the Israelites would not be like any of their neighbors (Exodus 33:16).

3. Evangelism

The third purpose for the Mosaic Law was world evangelism. God's heart for reaching the world did not begin with the New Testament. The Great Commission to go make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20) does not reflect a change in God's heart but a change in strategy. In the Old Testament, the strategy was a centripetal (inward) force. That is, by keeping the Law, Israel would be so different and so blessed that the other nations would see and be attracted to also have a relationship with their God (see Psalm 117). Instead, Israel tried to be like all the other nations (1 Samuel 8:19-20) and brought their gods in and worshipped them.

Application for Today

The same purpose can be seen in the New Testament for the church (1 John 2:1-8; 5:1-4). The commandments of Christ and in the epistles are not exactly the same as those for Israel. Christ's death on the cross ended the Law (Romans 10:4). We are no longer under the Mosaic Law (Galatians 3:23-24). But the New Testament is full of commandments: the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), the anatomy of love (1 Corinthians 13), the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5), as well as specific lists of sins (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), and the commands for the church (1 Timothy 3). But none of these are restrictions in the sense of limitations. That only comes when Christians through the centuries establish traditions which are not part of the New Testament and impose them on people as if they were from God. So the purpose of the New Testament commandments is:

1. To establish and maintain our **relationship** with God, given our proneness to wander (*see* 1 John 1:9).
2. To set us apart as a separate people, **distinct** from the world around us. We are to be different from the world, not as Israel was by forming a nation in Palestine and not by setting up our own traditions which we extrapolate from the Bible. We are to be different from the world morally, ethically, spiritually, and theologically, as prescribed in the New Testament (*see* 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).
3. To allow the church to be a basis for **evangelism**. Our strategy is centrifugal (outward) not centripetal (inward), but our goal is the same--to reach the world with the knowledge of the Kingdom of God.

Love God, then your neighbor is another way to summarize these three purposes of the Law, given both in the Law itself (Deuteronomy 6:1-5, Leviticus 19:18), by Christ (Matthew 22:36-40) and the apostles (1 John 2:3-10). In the Bible, the love of God is never separated from keeping His commandments, and loving one another is one of those commandments (1 John 2:4).

The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20

Since nine of the ten are more or less implied or repeated in the New Testament, we shall say the most about the fourth one, which is not repeated and seems to be ignored by the New Testament church. None of the Ten Commandments are for the church because they are part of the Law, yet all are applicable today, as is every aspect of the Law (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

1. You shall have no other gods before Me: Have nothing more important in your life than God.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol: Don't use Ouija boards or tarot cards, or read horoscopes, or listen to pantheistic religious views.
3. You shall not take the name of God in vain: This is using God's name to manipulate Him to get your way or thoughtlessly using God's name in rote rituals.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: This is (a) Saturday, not Sunday; (b) for Israel, not the church; and (c) for rest, not worship. It should simply be translated, "remember the rest day." We should take time to rest.
5. Honor your father and your mother.

6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet.
 - The first five commandments are all specifically repeated in the New Testament.
 - Because of what we know of Hittite treaty formats, each of the two tablets of stone probably contained all Ten Commandments.

Questions and Answers

Q: *What is the Mosaic Law?*

A: The 613 commandments, statutes, and ordinances given to Israel by God through Moses.

Q: *Is the Law for today?*

A: No. The Law was for Israel and ended when Christ died on the cross (Romans 10:4). It does, however, represent the mind of God and that is applicable for all times (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Q: *How do we apply it today?*

A: By understanding the mind of God expressed in the Law (Matthew 5).