

Y'all remember Tim Tebow? Don't know much about him, but I think I'm a fan. Well, he was known for putting verses on his eyeblick but one time I saw an atheist meme where they changed the verse from John 3:16 to Lev 11:7 which says pigs are unclean. And he was holding a football – pigskin. It was supposed to be a gotcha meme. Was Tebo being a hypocrite? Was he unclean? Its actually a very complicated and debated question.

This is going to be a heavyweight sermon. More instructive than edifying. We are working through the book of Exodus and are about to enter the part of Exodus where God gives us the old covenant law, which begs the question, how do we relate to it. / Jonathan Edwards was a pretty sharp guy. Many say the greatest theologian America has ever produced. He once said, "There is perhaps no part of divinity attended with so much intricacy, and wherein orthodox divines do so much differ, as stating the precise agreement and difference between the two dispensations of Moses and Christ."¹

I had to start prepping for this sermon last Sunday afternoon. Test. By Tuesday morning, I knew this would have to be two sermons, could've been three. The Christian and the Law of Moses part 1. How are we to relate to it?

First, a word about terminology. The Bible normally uses the term "law" to refer to the body of written religious and legal commands of the old covenant, sometimes called the Mosaic covenant or Sinai covenant.²

So, "law" usually means the Law of Moses, the Mosaic Law, the old covenant Law. The Law is a particular body of commandments given to a particular people at a particular time in a particular culture within a particular covenant. Gal 3:17 says the Law came 430 years after Abraham. So when I say Law, I mean old covenant Law, the body of commands given at Sinai.

Now, a popular approach - especially from the Reformed Tradition – those who hold to the WCF or the 2LBC is the three-fold division of the Law into moral, ceremonial, and civil (still bound to moral). It is nice and neat, but it is unbiblical. You won't find it anywhere in Scripture. That's a problem. It was formulated by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th C.³ On the contrary, everywhere in the Bible, the Law is a unit. It is a whole package deal. Gal 5:3: if you accept circumcision, you must keep the whole law. James 2:10: whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it (Heb 7:11-12).⁴ So that route won't work. How, then, do we proceed?

¹ Jonathan Edwards, "On Full Communion" in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New York, 1848), vol. 1, 160. Or: "Inquiry Concerning Qualifications for Communion," in *The Works of President Edwards*, 8th ed. (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1858), 1:160.

² Jason DeRouchie, *Delighting in the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 195.

³ Some say Origen, in seed form.

⁴ Moral Lev 19:18-19, 20:13, 20:9, 25

I have been helped by an Australian scholar named Brian Rosner, but I am going to simplify his categories. I propose that the new covenant believer relates to the Law of Moses in three ways: retire, retool, replace.⁵ We'll cover replace next week.

I. Retire – New Covenant Christians are not under the Law of Moses. As a covenant, it is retired. We are New Testament believers. *Testamentum* is a Latin translation of the Hebrew word *berit*, which means covenant. It would be helpful if we considered that we have an old covenant and a new covenant. We are under the new covenant not the old covenant. With the coming of Jesus, the new covenant replaces the old covenant. Heb 8:13, right after quoting Jer 31: “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

While Scripture does not lay out a three-fold division of the Law, it does teach a three-fold limitation of the Law. Impossible, Impotent Impermanent.⁶ First, keeping the Law is *impossible*. This is not a problem of the Law, but of the Law keepers. There are none! No one can keep the Law. It only condemns. What the Law requires is freedom from the Law! Flip to **Rom 3:19-20** (just keep your finger in Romans): “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” **Rom 8:3**: “For God has done what the law, *weakened by the flesh*, could not do.” Heb 8:7-8: “For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault *with them* when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel.”

People are sinful and can't obey the Law. The Law defines and reveals sin. **Rom 4:15**: “For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.” **Rom 7:7**: “If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.” The Law even increases sin. **Rom 5:20**: “Now the law came in to increase the trespass.” 1 Cor 15:56: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” **Rom 7:10**. Gal 3:19: “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions” (Rom 7:8-11).

Gal 3:11-12: “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’” The Law is impossible to keep.

Second, *impotent*. The Law was impotent. It lacked the power to transform people. JGR batteries. **Rom 8:3**: “For God has done what the law, *weakened by the flesh*, could not do.” The Law couldn't justify, the Law couldn't sanctify, to use the language of Hebrews, the Law couldn't bring perfection. It was an ineffective covenant. God designed it that way. Gal 3:21-22: “For if a

⁵ Brian S. Rosner uses three moves: polemical repudiation, radical replacement, and whole-hearted reappropriation in *Paul and the Law* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 39, 208. David King uses retain, retool, and retire in *Your Old Testament Sermon Needs to Get Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 2021), 99.

⁶ Jason C. Meyer, uses anthropology, ontology, and chronology in *The End of the Law* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 153.

law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

Why? It lacked the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit is a gift of the new covenant. The Spirit was operative in the old covenant but usually only temporarily and usually only on select leaders: prophets, priests, and kings. But in the new covenant, all would be permanently indwelt by the Spirit. Sealed for the day of redemption. The old covenant couldn't transform. Hymnist John Berridge (1716-1793) put it this way: “To run and work the law commands, Yet gives me neither feet nor hands; But better news the gospel brings: It bids me fly and gives me wings.”⁷

Third, *impermanent*. God never intended the Law to be eternal. It was temporary by divine design. It was a parentheses in the plan of God. **Rom 6:14 7:4-6 10:4**. Gal 3:17-25: The Law was a parenthesis in redemptive history. It had a definite beginning (430 years after Abraham) and a definite end point (when Jesus came). Nanny.

Gal 4:1-2 Kids need a lot of rules. “Stay in my sight, son.” Okay for a toddler, bad for a teen. Later you internalize the principles. Law of Moses no longer necessary with the Spirit internalizes. Will say more about that next week.⁸ Heb 8:6: “But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.”

God never designed the Mosaic Law to be his eternal moral will. In fact, it couldn't be. We are literally *not able* to obey most of the old covenant law. It was part of a suzerainty-vassal treaty that God made with a particular West Semitic nation living along the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.⁹ A lot of these commandments have to do with avoiding confusion, compromise, and contamination with Canaanite culture and religion. We are not bound to the law covenantally and we are unable to obey most of it culturally.

Let me illustrate with half a dozen or so: Deuteronomy 22:8 commands God's people to build a parapet around your roof. This only makes sense within the world of ancient Israel where there were flat roofs where people socialized. Do we have to obey this command? My roof is quite steep.

Slavery is permitted (Exod 12:44, 21:20-21, 26-27, 32, Lev 25:44-46, Deut 23:15). Importantly, not promoted, but permitted as a fact of life in the ancient world. Exodus 20:10 says God's

⁷ Quoted in Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 2.

⁸ Chester, 164-165.

⁹ David Dorsey, “The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise” *JETS* 34/3 (September 1991), 325. I am dependent upon Dorsey's article in the following paragraph. C.G. Kruse similarly writes, “The law continued to have an educative role for them, but it was no longer the regulatory norm under which they lived. Christians were not bound to the actual demands of the law but had much to learn from the principles and values underlying them,” “Law,” in *NDBT*, 636. Meyer writes, “The law remains as a vibrant demonstration of God's character and wisdom,” *The End of the Law*, 286.

people should make sure their slave takes Saturday off. What is a Christian living in 2026 to do with such a command? Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations – so, Mexico or Canada but you can't own Brits. / Now, the old covenant Law is way better than other ancient law codes on how to treat slaves, but it still falls short of the epitome of God's will.¹⁰

Exodus 20:9 commands the Israelites to work six days but almost every Christian I know works five days, not six. Exodus 29:22 commands them to take the fat of the ram tail. I for one cannot keep this command because I haven't seen any Palestinian fat-tailed sheep running around lately. I can't keep Exodus 22:5 and 29:40 because I don't own a vineyard. There are many commands having to do with cultivating the Mediterranean olive tree and the uses of its fruit. Got no trees.

Exodus 25-29 speaks of the production of the pomegranate, date palm, acacia, almond, cassi, cinnamon, galbanum, frankincense, hyssop, Near Eastern poplar, and bitter herbs. I am not sure if I can find all these at HEB. Maybe Natural Grocer. Leviticus 23:5-20 commands the Israelites to begin harvesting the standing grain seven weeks after Passover in May/June. This command requires a Levantine, Mediterranean, or at least a northern hemispheric geoclimatic setting.

Exod 35:2 says anyone who works on the Sabbath is to be put to death. What if your neighbor mows the grass on the Sabbath? Lev 19:27 commands men not to cut the hair on the sides of their head. Lev 11:10 says eating shellfish is an abomination. Can you have fried shrimp? Lev 11:6-8 says no pork whatsoever. No shrimp. No bacon. No bacon-wrapped shrimp. Lev 19:19 says you can't plant two different kinds of seed in the same field. Do you who have squash and peppers need to repent? You can't wear clothes made of two different kinds of threads. No cotton-polyester blends.

Exod 21:17 says a kid who curses his father is to be put to death. Exod 23:19 you shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk. I think we are good there. / Exod 21:10-11 permits – not promotes but permits polygamy (Deut 21:13-17). Then there's concubines. Won't go there.

Here is my point: The old covenant Law is not God's eternal and universal moral law. If so, we'd all be in trouble. God didn't intend it to be. Dorsey summarizes, "The Sinaitic law code was very specifically designed by God to regulate the lives of the West Semitic inhabitants of the southern Levant. Nearly all the regulations of the corpus – over ninety-five percent – are so culturally specific, geographically limited, and so forth that they would be completely inapplicable, and in fact unfulfillable, to Christians living throughout the world today. This fact alone should suggest that the corpus is not legally binding upon Christians and that it cannot possibly represent the marching orders of the Church."¹¹

¹⁰ Charles Leiter, *The Law of Christ* (Hannibal, MO: Granted Ministries Press, 2012), 250.

¹¹ Dorsey, 329.

When Jesus brings a new covenant, the old covenant is abolished. Eph 2:14-15: “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility *by abolishing the law* of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.” / Mark 7:18-19: “And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? 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.)”

You may ask, so does God change his mind? Does he change his character from one testament to the other? No, his character doesn’t change, but pretty clearly what he demands depends on which covenant his people are in. We see that with slavery, polygamy, divorce, the Sabbath, food laws, and circumcision to name just a few. So it is helpful to speak of two wills: Eternal moral will and his covenantally-specific will. Eternal or covenantal. So the Law is one expression of his eternal law that is rooted in God’s unchanging righteousness character. We’ll see that the law of Christ is another expression of his unchanging character.¹²

So, we are not under the Law. We are still bound to obey all of God’s Word, including the Old Testament. 2 Tim 3:16: all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for training in righteousness. Rom 15:4: whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction. We are not bound to the old covenant, but we are bound to the Old Testament as God’s Word, interpreted and applied in light of Christ, which leads to my second point:

II. Retool – The Law is retooled in the New Testament, as a pointer and principle.¹³ The Law pointed forward. It prophesied of the coming King and a new covenant. **Rom 3:21.** Matt 5:17: “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.” Jesus bring the promises to pass. Matthew 11:13: “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.” Heb 10:1: “For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.” The Law points forward, it bears witness, it carries the promises and shadows.

It is a pointer and has abiding principles. The Law is no longer our direct guide or authority, but it can be retooled and retained so we can glean principles from it.¹⁴ Now, after the coming of Christ, the Law doesn’t define God’s will for us but points to it.¹⁵ Those commands must be recalibrated in light of the new covenant.¹⁶

¹² DeRouchie, *Delighting in the Old Testament*, 196.

¹³ Rosner uses prophecy and wisdom. *Paul and the Law*, 135-206.

¹⁴ For article, quote DeRouchie 199.

¹⁵ Chester 166

¹⁶ David Dorsey says that *legally*, none of the 613 commandments of the OC Law are binding upon Christians, while in a revelatory and pedagogical sense all 613 are binding upon us.

To discern principles from the Law, we can ask of any commandment:

1. What kind of situation was the law intended to promote?
2. What change would there be in society if this command was followed?
3. What made it necessary or desirable?
4. What kind of person would benefit from it?
5. Why would God command this (character)?
6. How does this law express love for God and neighbor?
7. How does it show my need?

1 Cor 5:13 (Deut 13), **7:19**, **9:9-11**¹⁷, **10:11**. / The Law is retooled, reframed, recalibrated in light of the new covenant. It now must be interpreted and applied in light of Christ. Jesus is the lens through which we view the whole Old Testament.

The New Testament teaches that the Law is retired as a covenant, can be retooled when interpreted and applied in light of Christ. Next week we'll see how the Law of Moses is replaced by the law of Christ. Bliss: "Once for All": "Free from the law—oh, happy condition! Jesus hath bled, and there is remission; Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall, Christ hath redeemed us once for all. / Once for all—oh, sinner, receive it; Once for all—oh, doubter, believe it; Cling to the cross, the burden will fall, Christ hath redeemed us once for all. / There on the cross your burden upbearing, Thorns on His brow your Savior is wearing; Never again your sin need appall, You have been pardoned once for all. / Now we are free—there's no condemnation; Jesus provides a perfect salvation: "Come unto Me," oh, hear His sweet call, Come, and He saves us once for all. / Children of God—oh, glorious calling, Surely His grace will keep us from falling; Passing from death to life at His call, Blessed salvation once for all."¹⁸

Benediction: Gal 4:4-7.

¹⁷ Exod 21:28-29 don't blame people who have accidents and if you can anticipate an accident, do all you can to keep it from happening. Chester 167.

¹⁸ <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/1001>