

The Question: Law, No Law, Some Law?

Galatians 2:21, 3:21, 5:4, 5:18, Romans 6:14, John 14:21, 1 John 2:3-4, Matthew 5:17-18, 1 Corinthians 9:21, Romans 3:31, Romans 7:21, 7:25, 13:8-9

3 Approaches:

1. Discontinuity

- *The NT alone is normative for the Christian life.
- *The moral teachings of Jesus are for the Church and the moral teachings of Moses for ethnic Israel.
- *Primary defense comes from Romans 6:14-15, 10:4 and Galatians 5:18
- *So there is discontinuity between the law and the Gospel

PROBLEMS:

- *Not the prevailing view in church history
- *If the law is a reflection of God's character, how can it discontinue?
- *Romans 15:4 *"For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction."*
- *Most of 10 commandments are reiterated in the NT

2. Continuity

- *The whole body of OT law is binding on Christians
- *They do hold that the ceremonial laws are not in effect but are fulfilled in Jesus
- *They believe civil laws are still in effect but would say some don't apply because of changes in architecture, sanitation, and technology
- *Teach that modern governments ought to implement OT civil laws to spread the Kingdom
- *Most are postmillennial
- *Support from Romans 3:31 and Galatians 3:21
- *Also refer to 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18 where Paul quotes from Deut. 25:4

PROBLEMS:

- *Civil law has always been understood to be time-bound and cultural
- *Prophets in OT confronted other lands with the transgression of moral law and not civil laws.

3. Semi-continuity

- *Tri-fold division of law of moral, civil, and ceremonial
- *Only moral law is applicable to the NT believer
- *Civil law was localized to theocratic Israel
- *Ceremonial law has been and is being fulfilled in Christ
- *NT teaching about the ceasing of dietary laws
- *Governments in NT are not corrected for not using the civil laws.
- *In support of moral law is Romans 3:31, 7:12, 7:14, 7:22; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Romans 13:8-9; Galatians 3:21; 1 Timothy 1:8
- *If the law is a reflection of God's unchanging character, one would expect the law to be unchanging and true.

- *Decalogue is explicitly cited in the NT in Matthew 5:21, 5:27, 19:17-19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 7:7, 13:9; Ephesians 6:2-3; James 2:11
- *Prevailing view of the Church throughout history
- *There is evidence from the Bible that moral law existed from creation
- *One's view of the law will set the parameters for the material from which one may engage in moral theory. (Jones)
- *The moral law provides the framework for the practice of biblical ethics.

QUESTION:

Are there moral absolutes that conflict?

1. Example: Rahab (Joshua 2:1-14)
2. Example: Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-5)
3. Example: Hebrew Midwives (Exodus 1:15-20)

5 views on resolving conflicting moral absolutes

1. Antinomianism

- *Stresses individual moral responsibility
- *No moral laws, no objective "right" or "wrong"
- *So there are no conflicting absolutes

2. Situationalism

- *One moral absolute – "love"
- *Do the loving thing
- *So there are no conflicting absolutes

3. Conflicting Absolutism

- *There are many moral absolutes
- *Moral norms do sometimes come in conflict
- *When moral norms clash, man must choose sinfully to break one – opting for the lesser of two evils
- *Afterward, man must repent and seek forgiveness
- *Sometimes there is no sin-free option

EXAMPLES:

1. Abraham and Sarah lie before Pharaoh – Genesis 12:10-20; 20:2-18
2. Hebrew Midwives – Exodus 1:15-20
3. Rahab – Joshua 2:1-14
4. Michal – 1 Samuel 19:14
5. David – 1 Samuel 21:2
6. Samuel – 1 Samuel 16:1-5

PROBLEMS:

- *Christ never sinned and yet was tempted in every way just as we are
- *The nature of laws – if the law is a reflection of the moral character of God, how can they conflict?
- *Does this mean that sinning is inevitable?
- *The Bible forbids doing evil that good may result.
- *Romans 3:8, 6:1, 6:15
- *God says He provides a way of escape – 1 Corinthians 10:13

4. Graded Absolutism

- *There are many universal absolutes that can and do conflict
- *All ethical norms can be arranged in a hierarchy of merit
- *You may break a lower norm in order to keep a higher norm
- *When you break a lower norm, no sin has been committed and therefore there is no need for forgiveness

SUPPORT:

Jesus – *“The least of these commandments” – Matthew 5:19*
“The greatest commandment” – Matthew 22:38
“More important matters of the law” – Matthew 23:23
“Who has committed the greater sin” – John 19:11
Paul – *“Greatest of these is love” – 1 Corinthians 13:13*

- *Degrees of punishment in hell and rewards in heaven

PROBLEMS:

- *There is no working hierarchy in Scripture (It's too open-ended)
- *We would have to know how to place value
- *Conflicts must be proven, there is no mention in Scripture of them conflicting
- *How can it be demonstrated that it is ok to break lower norms?
- *Breaking a lower norm seems to trivialize the “concept” of moral absolutes. (How can it be an absolute?)
- *If you break one law, you break them all. Gal. 3:10, James 2:10

5. Non-Conflicting Absolutism

- *There are many universal and absolute moral norms
- *Conflict between moral norms cannot and does not occur
- *There is never a case where moral norms collide
- *Moral norms may only “appear” to conflict
- *There is either misperception of circumstances or misunderstanding of moral norms, or both.
- *It is important to define moral norms and view them biblically, looking at the whole teaching of Scripture in a given area.
- *If God is absolute and non-contradictory then moral norms reflect the same character

TEST CASE: RAHAB

- *Antinomianism and situationalism do not recognize moral conflict.

Conflicting Absolutism

- *She hides the men, deceives authorities
- *Assists the authorities and facilitates murder, or assists the spies and lie.
- *Could she do either without sinning?
- *There is a legitimate moral conflict
- *Most would view lying as the lesser evil
- *She sinned by lying and fulfilled her moral duty
- *While it doesn't say she repented of lying, she must have at some point
- *She is commended in James 2:25

Graded Absolutism

- *There was a genuine conflict between lying or preserving life
- *She “innocently” deceived the authorities and kept the greater good
- *Telling the truth was trumped by the higher norm of preserving life

*She is never condemned in Scripture for her deceit but is commended (James 2:25)

Non-Conflicting Absolutism

*Rahab did not sin in her deception

*Breaking the truth norm was not sin because she did not really lie

*The sin of false witness is defined as distorting the facts in order to hurt

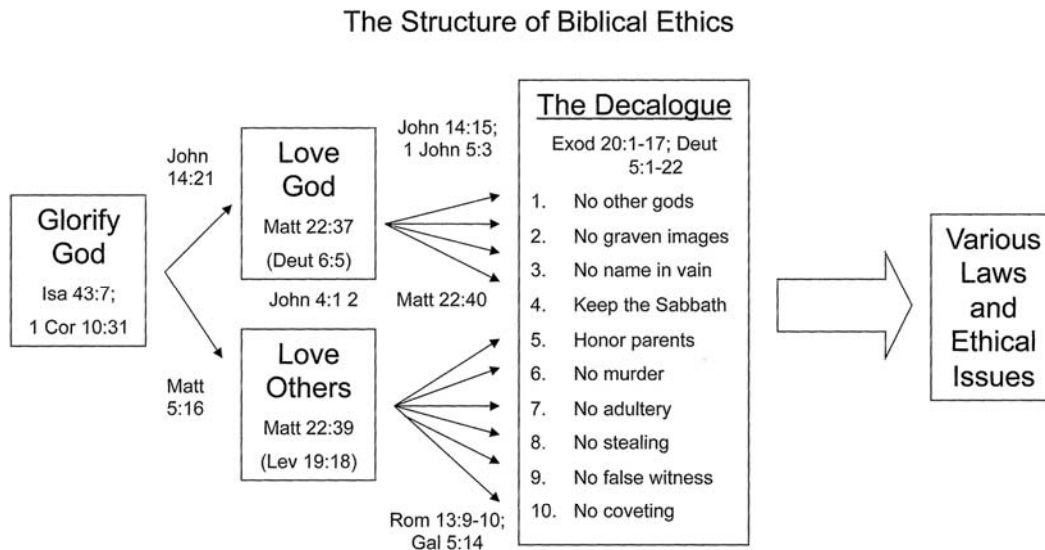
*She did not lie in order to harm the authorities or lie for her own glory

*She is praised for her "act of faith" – Hebrews 11:31

Current Examples:

*Missionaries who are undercover

*Mission trip visas, etc.



3 Questions:

1. What moral norms apply to this situation? (conduct)
2. Am I acting out of love for God and love for neighbor? (character)
3. What path, choice, or answer will bring the most glory to God? (goals)

SOURCES:

An Intro. To Biblical Ethics – David W. Jones

Principle of Conduct – John Murray

Class Notes: Basic Christian Ethics – Mark Liederbach