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Series: Summer Q&A
Message: What About the Old Testament Law?

Transcribed Message
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Matthew 5:17

One of the things that sometimes happens or one of the criticisms that comes our way as Christians from skeptics and critics is that we just pick and choose out of the Bible what it is that we want to believe. And so, we are charged with inconsistency. One of the more common things that is tossed our way is, yeah, you guys like to go to the book of Leviticus and point out that homosexuality is a sin, but what about eating pulled pork barbecue sandwiches? I mean, after all, the law said that was not right either. How do you guys justify the fact that maybe even this morning some of you are wearing two different kinds of fabrics? I mean, the law said we can't do that either. We're not supposed to mix certain fabrics in the clothes that we wear. So, the charge of inconsistency and the charge of just picking and choosing what we want is often tossed our way.

Obviously, the Bible says an unbeliever can't even understand the things of God, neither can they know them because they're spiritually discerned. So, we're not likely going to be able to explain to them in a way that they're going to receive and understand it as to what is the difference between the Old Testament Scriptures and the New. What's the difference between living under the Old Covenant and living under the New? But I would fully hope and expect that as followers of Christ, we would have some understanding of how we do answer that question. Why is it that the charge of inconsistency doesn't hold up? Why is it that we don't simply pick and choose what we want to obey or believe in the Bible? So, that's where we go this morning.

Our big idea is that the law of God is good and it's righteous because it points us to Jesus. We've seen that repeatedly in our study, but the believer lives under the grace of the New Covenant. So, in this summer series, it's not very long, it's been only five Sundays together, but we've been just asking and answering questions, and most of them, all of them have centered around the Word of God. Is it true? Is it trustworthy? How are we

supposed to understand it? How do we know we have the right books? And so, this morning, we're asking the question: what about all these Old Testament laws that we don't seem to really pay any attention to? What are we supposed to do with that? So, our big idea hopefully sets forward where we're going to go.

I want to begin with just a quick review of what we've seen because we've been talking about this book that we hold in our hand. It is an extraordinary book. There isn't another book like it in the world, and that isn't subjective. That's just objectively true because this book is unique in its origin. Forty different authors writing over a period of some 1,500 plus years, three different languages, three different continents. Just an amazing, amazing reality and historically verifiable in that regard.

Secondly, it's extraordinary in its content because it's got this unified theme, even though you've got 40 different authors, 1,500 years from the book of Job and Genesis to the book of Revelation, and yet they all speak with one voice pointing us to Jesus.

And then lastly, it's unique. It's extraordinary in its collection, in its preservation. We talked about this last Sunday that man's part in this, man's role is not approving what books are going to be in the Bible. It's rather they're simply recognizing what it is that God has given to us by means of revelation and inspiration. The church councils, which we didn't talk about last Sunday, didn't sit down and vote and say, yeah, that book is the Bible and that book probably isn't. That's not what they were tasked with doing. They didn't say, here, these are the books that you guys should be reading and studying. Don't pay so much attention to these over here. What they were tasked with doing, what they did was recognize what the church was doing. God gave His Word to His church, and they were acknowledging and recognizing that the books that the church was circulating and reading and studying were Scripture. We saw that, how Peter and Paul, and even in the Old Testament how the writers knew there was something about this book that was unique. It was the Word of God to them. It was God's revelation, God making known what before had been unknown, and He did it by the inspiration of His Spirit. So, the Holy Spirit's fingerprints are all over this process, from the beginning of the revelation and the inspiration to the

preservation and the collection. And are there questions? Of course there are. But we know that God supervised and gave oversight to this whole process.

So, this morning, how does the Old Testament apply to us today? And I want to answer that question with two other questions. And the first one is, why does the Old Testament law even matter? Why does it even matter? And, you know, I guess you could simply start off by saying, well, try this on. About 75% of your Bible is the Old Testament. It'd be pretty crazy, wouldn't it, to think that 75% of our Bible is something we don't really need to pay any attention to. So that on its face just speaks to the fact that that can't possibly be the place we want to be.

The question then is, why does the Old Testament law matter? And who hasn't made their attempt, maybe every year, at reading through the Bible? And who hasn't gotten into Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy and wondered if you were ever going to get out of those books and wondered what those books even mean to you today and how do you even relate to those things. All these laws, all these sacrifices, all these restrictions, all these provisions – what in the world does it have to do with me living in the 21st century?

When we think of the law, remember, the law can be the whole of the Old Testament. Sometimes the Bible refers to the law and it's talking about the whole of the Old Testament. Sometimes when we have a reference to the law, it's speaking of only the Pentateuch: the first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Those five books are sometimes just called the law. And then sometimes the law is even so specific as the Ten Commandments or just in general the 613 commands that God has given His people under the Mosaic provision.

I want to give to you seven reasons, because seven's the perfect number, right? I'm going to give you seven reasons why we should love and appreciate the law of God in all its form. And the first one is because the law reveals how to love God. How to love God. Remember in Matthew 22, the young lawyer has been assigned to go trip up Jesus. That's a tough assignment because you're going to fail. He comes to Him and he wants Jesus to tell him what's the greatest of all the commandments. 613 commandments, Jesus, pick one.

What's the most important of all of them? Jesus doesn't bat an eye. He doesn't swat the question away, but He just steps into it and says, well that's simple. It's to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength. That's the first one. When we read the law, we're really reading how is it that we can learn to love God. And that can't be any higher thing for us to consider.

Secondly, because the law reveals how to love others. So, in that same passage, Jesus goes right on, doesn't He? And He says, the greatest command is love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. And the second is like unto it, love your neighbor as yourself. If you keep those two commands, Jesus said, you've fulfilled the whole of the law. When we read the law, we're really reading how to love God and not just how to love God, but how to love each other. How to love others. That's a big deal.

Thirdly, because the law reveals the character of God. It reveals the character of God. In Leviticus, when God wants His people to know something about Himself, what does He say to them? You need to be holy because I am holy. You be holy just as I am holy. That's a revelation of God's character to His people, isn't it? The law is in that sense an extension of the revelation of the very character of God.

Number four, the law reflects the character of humanity. The character of humanity. There would have been no reason for God to have said in the Ten Commandments, don't have any other gods before me, if that wasn't the tendency of our heart to go after other gods. He would have never said to us, don't make anything in your life an idol that's going to take my place if that wasn't a constant constraint of our heart. He wouldn't have said to us, don't take the name of the Lord your God in vain if that wasn't what we at times are tempted to do. He wouldn't have said honor your father and your mother if all your life you were obeying and honoring your father and mother. Just go right on down, right? He wouldn't tell us not to murder. He wouldn't tell us that we shouldn't commit adultery. He wouldn't say don't steal and don't lie and don't covet. But the human heart is bent towards all of that. And so what does the law do? The law reveals the nature of the human heart. We need the law, but here's the problem. We can't keep it. We need it, but we can't keep it.

Number five, because the law points forward to the gospel of Christ. That was a whole lesson that we looked at a couple weeks ago about what the Bible is all about. Well, it's all about Jesus, isn't it? Paul says in Romans 10:4 for Christ is the end of law for righteousness to all who believe. It's the end. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe. So, the law was looking forward, as we're going to see, to something else. And Jesus, of course, made the point that it all points to Him.

Number six, because behind the law there is a personal application. Behind the law there's a personal application. We're not bound by the letter of the law. We're new covenant believers. We live in a different dispensation than the dispensation of the old covenant and the law. We live under grace. But there is behind the law a personal application. We're going to see this as we wrap up this morning.

And then the last one: the law was given with a missional focus. In Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 6, listen to what God said to His people. Keep them (that is the law) and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who when they hear all these statutes will say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. Isn't that fascinating? God says, I gave you the law because you are to be a light to the nations. The nations are to look at you, Israel, and they're to go, wow, these people live differently than we do. In fact, these people live differently than anybody. Nobody lives the way these people do. And they were supposed to see that, and they were supposed to be drawn like a magnet toward this missional opportunity that God had entrusted to His people, and that is exactly why God chose the nation of Israel, to be a light to the world. They were to live and function totally differently than anybody else.

Not surprisingly, we're called to do the same thing. We're called to be the same light, right? We're to be a light in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, Paul says in Philippians 2. So those would be the reasons why we should value, we should love, we should treasure. All you have to do is go to Psalm 19, right? And after you read Psalm 19, then go over to Psalm 119 and read 165 verses that speak of and exalt and glory in the beauty and the wonder of the law of God. So, that's our first question.

The second question is more specific to us. What Old Testament laws are to be followed today? What Old Testament laws are to be followed today? And again, right where we started, this is where we get charged with inconsistency. This is where we get charged with, oh, you guys just pick and choose what you want. Looks like you picked the easy ones, and the ones you don't like and the ones you don't want, you don't follow those anymore.

So, let's try to answer that question, and I want to do so with two observations, alright? The first observation is this. The Old Testament law was given to Israel in a theocracy. Now a theocracy just simply means God is king. Now that's specific to the Old Testament. You can have a, the country of Iran is, in a sense, a theocracy. They deify a human leader and say he's a God among us, in effect. Well God is saying to his people, Israel, I have chosen you, and you are going to be distinct among the peoples of the world, and one of the distinctions is going to be that you're not going to have a human king. You aren't going to have to go to Washington, D.C. to talk to some politician about what it is that you want done. I am going to be your king, and of course that would be absolutely, totally, completely unique. It didn't work because they wanted to be, unfortunately, like the countries around them, right? But, Israel is a functioning theocracy. That is God's original design to be this distinctive nation and people.

So, with that, the next point I would put before you is Israel was a political entity. God's chosen nation. So, Israel is a political entity, God's chosen, unique again among all the nations of the world. God gave them their law to govern every area of their life. It's very common in theological circles, Bible teaching circles, to take the law and to say we can understand the law of God by dividing it into three parts.

We can talk about the law as being the civil law of God. The civil law of God would cover all the issues related to criminal activity, to how to get along with your neighbor, just regulations, you know, about disputes, all the detail of the law is put into this category of this is the civil part of the law of God. And then the second category that gets put forward is the ceremonial law. And as you think through the Old Testament and you're reading through those books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, these ideas come forward,

don't they? There's a lot of things in there about what your ox does to a neighbor and what if he falls, and all of the details. That's the civil part of the law. Then there's the ceremonial and all the details about sacrifice and all the details about the priesthood and all the things that have to do with the worship of God. There's a lot in there about that, isn't there? And then the third division that gets put forward is the moral part of the law. The moral law of God. Having to do with the character of God and the Ten Commandments, of course, gets slid into that third category.

Well, on some level I understand how that's helpful because you can literally see as you read the law there's civic law here. Yeah, there's ceremonial law here. Yeah, there's the moral aspects of the law of God. The problem with that is what? It's not supported in Scripture. There isn't anything in the Bible that would suggest that in the mind of God, He divided the law up into three parts, the civic and the ceremonial and the moral. If you went up to an Old Testament Israelite and said, hey, I've got a question for you about the law that you live under, and my questions were specific about the civil part of the law. I'm not talking about the ceremonial, and I'm not talking about the moral. I just have some questions about the civil. He or she would have looked at you like you didn't have any idea what you were talking about because they would have never understood the law of God in that way. God never presented it, He never taught it to His people as, okay, here's civic, here's ceremonial, here's moral.

And yet I understand why certain perspectives bring that because of what? They want to say to us today, okay, we're not under the civic part of the law. Oh, and we're not under the ceremonial law, but we're still under the law because we're under the moral law. And that simply is not what the Scriptures teach, even though, as we'll see, there is some help in that regard. But here's what I want you to see.

Israel is a political entity. The church is not a theocracy, and it's not a political entity. It's people from many nations living under different governments. God didn't hand the church the mandate to be a political arm within the context in which He put them. Because the reality is, we have Christians living under all different kinds of governments all over the world. Some of them are like us. They have freedom to worship. Millions upon

millions of people do not. They're still called to live out the life of Christ. They're still called to be the church because the church isn't a political entity. The church is something totally different. It's people who have been called from every nation and people group who find their unity and oneness spiritually in Christ.

It doesn't mean that we don't have a desire for political impact individually or even corporately, but that's not the calling that God has put upon us. And this is where I want to just speak to what is happening today on some level in our own country with what we know of and what we hear of as Christian nationalism or Christian theonomy. Christian theonomy just means under the law. There's a growing sense that the church needs to rise up and needs to impose on American culture and value. Needs to impose, not influence, but impose Judeo-Christian laws and values. A man who's at kind of the forefront of a lot of this thinking is a man named Doug Wilson in, of all places, Moscow, Idaho. Kind of an interesting turn there, but he is a theonomist, Christian theonomist. He will say things like, yeah, I think it'd be good to bring back capital punishment for a whole lot of things. We wouldn't have so many criminals running around and we'd have a lot less problems in our world. Well, that's not what it is that we have been called to do – to live back under the law. That confuses what God has called us to do and be as a church.

Here's what I want you to understand. Whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, sin is sin, right? Whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, sin is sin. But Israel lived in a theocracy. Israel was a political entity under the rule of God, and so there were civil penalties for sin. And if you committed adultery, you were stoned. If you disobeyed and rebelled against your parents, you didn't get screen time taken away. You found yourself under a pile of rocks. What was that? It was an acknowledgment that they were a theocracy living under the rule of law with certain penalties that were enacted for sin.

Well, today we live under the New Covenant. We're not a theocracy. We're not a political entity. Today in the body of Christ, in the family of God, if there's sin among us, as there will be, we don't stone people. We don't encourage people to be stoned. We admonish. We rebuke. We call to repentance. We seek to bring them back into fellowship.

If they choose not to, then we excommunicate them and set them apart from the body. But that's the point that we would need to understand. The church and Israel are very different in their calling and in their makeup as to what it is that God wants to accomplish through us.

Here's the second observation. The Old Testament was looking forward to a better way. Even the Old Testament law was looking forward to a better way. There was something more that was coming. It was better. The psalmist David would say in Psalm 51, sacrifices and offerings, that's not what you want. It isn't. I thought that's what he wanted. I thought that's what the law said. Well, of course, David isn't discounting that, but he's acknowledging the fact that God wants something from the heart. He's not interested in people just going through the motions and doing something as if that fulfills what he wants. No. He wants heart change. Jeremiah 31 speaks to it specifically. Jeremiah says God's going to put within you not a heart of stone, but a heart of flesh. And Jeremiah lays out the new covenant that's going to come and the old that's going to pass away. Jeremiah the prophet looks forward to a better way than living life under the law.

Living life under grace. Jesus said in Matthew 5, 17, he didn't come to abolish the law. He didn't come to do away with it. It's righteous and good. But he did come to fulfill it, to accomplish it, to complete it. So, it is no longer functional. It's no longer necessary. Romans 10:4, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Let me step into three practical examples of what it is that the Old Testament law and the laws of the Old Testament, how they relate to us in a very practical way. So, my first question to you is, do you need a parapet around your roof? And I'm curious this morning how many of you have in fact put a parapet around your roof? And I hope I see a lot of hands. No, I'm kidding. But what's a parapet? Well, let's look. In Deuteronomy chapter 22 and verse 8, the law said this: when you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house if anyone should fall from it. So, a parapet was really important because in the Old Testament when you built a house, you built it with a flat roof. And you would go up to that flat part of your house, the roof, and that would be a gathering. That was a gathering place. That was extra room and

extra space. And so what God said is, when you build your house, you need to put a parapet. You need to put a fence around your border of your home so that when you have folks over and you're socializing, people aren't falling off your roof.

What does that reveal to us? It reveals to us the heart of God for His people, that He loves them, that He's concerned about them. It reveals to us the heart of humanity, that there's going to be a guy that in building his house is going to say, I don't really want to put a fence around the border of my roof. I'm out of money and I'm tired. I'm done building. Well, God put a law in place to speak about His love for people, His concern for people, and about the need to consider your neighbor and those that you love.

Today, we would say it simply like this. If you're going to have a balcony, you need to have a barrier around that balcony. I mean, people have enough heartache when they look at our balcony and our glass wall and they see little kids come bounding down those steps towards them. Just think if we didn't have any boundary there. We'd have a catcher ministry. We'd be catching people as they came out of the balcony. Of course, you wouldn't do that. You would put some kind of protection, don't you?

People build a swimming pool. They have small children. They put a fence around it. What is that? Their concern for themselves, for others, their heart of God for other people. So, we don't operate under law, but we operate under the law of love. We don't need a parapet because we don't have a flat roof most of the time on our homes. But if we did, we would have to put up a parapet. We'd have to put up a fence, a boundary, a border.

How about this one? Are the Ten Commandments still in force today? Are the Ten Commandments still in force today? I would say it this way. Not as part of the law of Moses, they're not. They're not upon us as they would have been for an Old Testament Jew, but they are a part of our life as it relates to the law of Christ. Because here's the point, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament. So, it's not like we're under the law in the sense of the Old Testament alone. No, God saw fit to repeat nine out of the Ten Commandments and put them into the New Testament Scriptures. The only one that He did not give to us was remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.

We're not here this morning because it's the Sabbath. We're not worshiping on the Sabbath. Sunday didn't take the place of Sabbath. Sunday is something totally new in the life of the church. It's Resurrection Day. It signifies something totally different. And so, yes, in that sense, we are to love God and we're to love people. And if we do that, we'll be reflecting the heart of God.

We don't have any other gods before us, and we don't make idols to worship. We don't give ourselves over to language that reflects poorly on the name of our God. We take care to honor our parents. All the way down that list, God repeats it in the New Testament. So, in that sense, we are under the law of Christ.

Well, how about this last one? If I don't tithe, am I robbing God? And like every good preacher, I would say absolutely, positively, no doubt about it, no. Malachi says that, doesn't he? Malachi says, if you do not tithe, you are robbing God. And fair to say, there are still a lot of guys preaching and teaching that if you aren't tithing, you are robbing God. Well, here's my answer to that.

I love the idea of tithing, and many of you have heard me say this. I love the idea of tithing if you're going to tithe according to the Old Testament law. Because the Old Testament law required that you tithe 23 1/3%, and by the way, that was the gross. That wasn't your take-home pay. That was the gross. No, I'm just kidding. They did. They tithed 23 1/3%. We think of a tithe as 10%. Most people don't come close to 10%. But the Old Testament Israelite tithed not 10%, not 15%, not 20%. They tithed 23 1/3%. I guess we all hope the answer to the question, if I don't tithe, am I robbing God, is no.

But here, let me say this. Giving under the law, living under the law of Moses, regarding giving, there were two kinds of giving. There was required giving. That was their tithing. They were supporting their government. Their government was the operational part of the Levitical priesthood and other things that were related to that.

But then there was freewill giving. And under the law, there were opportunities and times where God just called His people to give without any percentage in mind and just give freely, and they did. It was a beautiful thing. Under the New Covenant, under grace, what do we say about giving? Well, guess what? There are two kinds of giving under the

new covenant. There's required giving. It's what you send to the IRS every month. Yeah, that's required giving. That's taxation. We're to do that by command of obeying our government. So yeah, in a sense, when we pay our taxes, we're doing what the Old Testament Jew did in their required giving. We're doing something very similar.

And then there's freewill giving. And it's freewill giving that we operate in as the people of God today. And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, if you just study those three passages, you could write down like 30 different principles for giving. It'd be things like this: give voluntarily, give cheerfully, give generously, give proportionally, give sacrificially, give regularly, give anonymously, give free from pressure. All kinds of beautiful principles that God has put in place to allow us to express our appreciation and our love for and respond to all that He has done and given to us.

So, the law of God is good, and it is righteous because it points us to Jesus. But the believer lives today under the grace of the New Covenant.

What do we take away? All of Scripture, my friend, all of Scripture. Give yourself to all of Scripture. See the beauty and the wonder of all of Scripture, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The law of God and the covenant of grace. They're a treasure of riches. They're a treasure of riches that lead us to know and love God better. So just give yourself to the reading of God's Word. Give yourself to the studying of God's Word. Give yourself to the treasuring of the Word of God and your life will be changed. It will be transformed. Our hearts will be different. Our minds will be different. Our behavior will be different.

Because ultimately what this book will do, it will point us to Jesus, and it will show us the greatness of God's love in the sending of His Son. And it will show us the sinfulness of our heart. And it will say to us, as much as you may want to do whatever it is you think you can do to earn your way to heaven, God says, don't try because you can never be perfect apart from Christ. And that's what God requires. He requires perfection.

Well, we can't accomplish that, but Jesus did. And what He did for us on the cross made a way for God to forgive us and to give us the gift of eternal life. And that's the gift we would extend to anyone here this morning who has never put their trust in Jesus as your Savior.

These people are going to testify in just a moment in baptism to the fact that they have trusted Jesus and they want to make this public declaration. Well, that could be you. If you will but believe that what Jesus did is all that needed to be done, God will give you eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, we are thanking You this morning for this amazing and extraordinary and unique life-giving book. We are thanking You for the revelation of what this book is all about – pointing us to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame. Lord, we are grateful to You for this morning. Father, we ask that even in these closing moments, if there's someone here that's never put their trust in Jesus as their Savior, maybe they've been thinking that just being as good as they can will get them to heaven. Father, help them to understand and to see that that simply is not possible and that Jesus alone and faith alone and grace alone is what it is all about. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.